

Scientific production on television in communication: a systematic study via Web of Science

La producción científica sobre televisión en comunicación: un estudio sistemático en Web of Science



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Abstract:

This paper analyses the scientific production on television in the field of communication, with the aim of detecting the current state of the matter, trends in the most researched topics and subtopics on television and gender differences in authorship. To this end, a systematic bibliographic search of articles published in scientific journals in the field of communication in the main collection of Web of Science from 2016 to 2020 in Spanish was carried out. The analysis of the sample, composed of a total of 192 articles, allows us to conclude a downward trend in terms of research on television and reveals that concepts such as social audience, audiovisual or news and fiction genres are the most common in publications on television in Spanish.

Keywords:

TV; scientific communication; journals; research; keywords; Web of Science; papers; gender.

Resumen:

El presente trabajo analiza la producción científica sobre televisión en el área de comunicación, con el objetivo de detectar el estado actual de la cuestión, tendencias en los temas y subtemas más investigados sobre televisión y diferencias de género en las autorías. Para ello, se realiza una búsqueda bibliográfica sistemática de los artículos publicados en las revistas científicas del área de Comunicación de la colección principal de Web of Science desde 2016 hasta 2020 en español. El análisis de la muestra, compuesta por un total de 192 artículos, permite concluir una tendencia a la baja en lo que a la investigación sobre televisión se refiere y pone de manifiesto que conceptos como la audiencia social, el audiovisual o los géneros informativos y de ficción son los más habituales en las publicaciones sobre televisión en español.

Palabras clave:

Televisión; comunicación científica; revistas; investigación; palabras clave; Web of Science; artículos; género.

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1. Introduction and state of the issue

Television has undoubtedly been the medium of the 20th century. Despite its late emergence and development compared to other mass media such as the press or radio, the domestic audio-visual medium has been considered by academia to be the ultimate form of media, until the arrival of the Internet. Its domestic and for all-audiences reach turned it, from its very origin, into a window to the outside world, a metaphor on which different authors have focused.

As far as scientific production is concerned, television has been, almost from the beginning of its development, one of the latent subjects of academic research from different perspectives and fields of knowledge. The thinking of the Frankfurt School certainly provided preliminary studies that considered television from a critical perspective within mass culture (Adorno and Revol, 1966). The possibility of projecting itself onto the viewer, as stated by McLuhan (1964), makes television a point of reference for research in the Social Sciences in general and in communication in particular, due to its great capacity to influence and shape the people on whom it is projected. In other words, its own technical and narrative characteristics make television a medium of special interest on which the Social Sciences focus their research.

Television studies have evolved from the general to the particular, following the general trend in communication research. The first theoretical considerations on television as a cultural industry (Adorno and Revol, 1966; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1969), which appeared in the 1960s and part of the 1970s and which have served as a theoretical foundation for subsequent research, gradually evolved into increasingly specific case studies, in an attempt to respond to all the questions that television raises (Bustamante, 1993).

The historical study of television is one of the backbones of scientific production on this matter, as shown in research trajectories such as those of Eco (1986; 1990), Castells (1991), Baget (1993), Ruíz del Olmo (1997), Palacio (1992) or Bustamante and Zallo (1988). However, although the historical study of television is the general line of research on this medium, it could be said that it is from the 1990s, coinciding with the opening of the Spanish television market, the boom in the development of content and the struggle for audiences, that studies on television re-emerged in a consolidated way. Thus, works are beginning to be published from different perspectives, addressing television as a reinvented and evolved cultural industry (Bustamante, 2013; Martín-Barbero, 2015), but there is also an increase of works on content and programmes, semiotic studies on the medium (Vilches, 2017) or television advertising (Degrado, 2005; Torres and Muñoz, 2006) and audience reception (Morley, 1996; Quintas-Froufe and González-Neira, 2014), as well as research on television genres (Wolf, 1984; Martín-Barbero and Muñoz, 1992; Mazziotti, 2001; Soulages, 2005; Tous, 2010), including studies on the convergence of the medium (Scolari, 2009; Jenkins, 2012) or its power to influence the social construction of viewers (Galán, 2007; Lacalle and Hidalgo-Marí, 2016; Hidalgo-Marí, 2017). For their part, case studies and, specifically, research on local television mark a parallel line of work, as can be seen in the work of Marzal and Casero (2008; 2009) and in other case studies that have approached the phenomenon from different perspectives (Prado, 2004; Román, 2005; López-Cantos, 2013). However, the 21st century has seen the emergence of works that have continued to nurture the historical and recent historical study of television, as can be seen in the works of Montero (2018) or the work of Martín-Jiménez on historical programming in Spain (2013).

The interest in television, which makes it possible to place this subject among the recurring topic in communication studies, can also be seen in the number of doctoral theses defended in Spain on this subject. As Repiso, Torres and Delgado (2011, p. 153) state in a study that identifies 404 doctoral theses defended in Spain between 1976 and 2007:

“the evolution in the number of theses in comparison with all those read in the national territory indicates that television research has had a similar rate of growth and maturity to global trends in Spain. This is undoubtedly a relevant fact if we take into account the recent nature of communication studies in Spanish universities”.

In the same work, the authors show figures that clearly place research on television issues in a good position in terms of communication studies, stating that:

“The total number of doctoral theses on television in Spain between 1976/2007 was 404 (...) showing a continuous growth in accordance with the rest of Spanish production. The production of theses on television began at the end of the 1970s and was consolidated in the 1980s. However, it was not until the end of the 1990s that a significant increase took place, with 129 doctoral theses read in the five-year period 1998/2002. The highest level of production was reached in the last period (2003/07) with 142 theses, although now production grew less and seems to have stabilised around these figures” (Repiso, Torres y Delgado, 2011, p. 154).

If we take into account that the production of doctoral theses is the first step towards future scientific publications in journals, we can see that the interest in television by academia has been constant since the consolidation of the medium. However, it is clear that the growth in scientific production, according to the data provided by the authors cited, is concentrated at the time when private television stations were developed in Spain in the 1990s and that it remains constant as the medium’s development progresses. Although a certain link is seen between the advances of television and the increase in scientific production in this respect, other previous works on television production indicate that it is not possible to establish a direct connection between the milestones experienced by television and the scientific production in this respect, as Castillo and Soler (2014, n. p.) state in their work on research in television documentation:

“We cannot relate events to an increase in the number of publications, such as the emergence of regional or private television stations, but we do see an increase in the number of publications related to digitisation. There is more talk about it in 1986 and 2007. The latter year coincides with the dates when the change from analogue to digital took place”.

We cannot relate the subject matter of the publications to the events occurring on the dates of these publications, but rather, the greater or lesser number of articles or conference papers focusing on television documentation tends to correspond to special issues dedicated to it or to the publication of issues of journals specialising in media documentation.

Some studies have delved into the state of scientific research on specific topics, as can be seen in the work of Ortíz, Ruíz and Díaz (2013, p. 138), which addresses research on television and childhood, highlighting some specific projects that have developed the topic in depth:

“The study of the connection between digital natives and screens (García, 2009: 7- 30) through the Socmedia Project, or initiatives for the study of the relationship between minors and television such as the Procotin Project (2008-12), directed by Núñez-Ladeveze, are just some of the initiatives that, for years, have been taking place in Spain”.

More recently, and with the arrival of digital platforms and video on demand in Spain, the role of television has been questioned and reflected upon by academia more vividly than ever. Thus, while social networks and the Internet appear to be the preferred topics among research groups, the truth is that television, as a result of the new technological impact and the advance of technological development, continues to arouse considerable interest among the research community.

Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to carry out a systematic review of Spanish publications on television in the area of communication in order to detect the state of the matter and, in turn, to be able to detect topics and trends, as well as the most prolific currents to be published. By means of a study of the papers published in Web of Science (WOS) and the analysis of their keywords, the aim is to detect which topics and subtopics are generating the greatest interest among the research community, always within the prism of television.

2. Objectives and methodology

The general objective of this paper is to address the phenomenon of scientific production on television in the field of communication. As specific objectives, the following are proposed:

(EO1) Knowing the evolution of television studies published in WOS in the last five years (2016-2020).

(EO2) Identifying and analysing trends in the predominant sub-topics and genres in the scientific production on television in WOS.

(EO3) Detecting the differences between men’s and women’s presence and leadership in television research.

In order to achieve these objectives, we have worked with a quantitative methodology based on a systematic bibliographic search and its subsequent classification. Web of Science, as defined on its own website, is a digital scientific documentation service managed by Clarivate Analytics, which is integrated in the ISI Web of Knowledge (WoK), that allows access to a wide collection of databases in which articles and citations from scientific journals, books and other types of scientific material from all fields of academic knowledge are collected and which also establishes ranking criteria on the quality of scientific publication.

This systematic search was carried out in the Web of Science database, using “television” as a generic concept. After identifying and listing all indexed documents whose title included the keyword “television” in the main collection of Web of Science, only those articles whose original language was Spanish were selected, excluding books, book chapters, reviews and other formats. The search was limited to a five-year period (2016-2020) because 2016 was a key year in the transformation of television, with the arrival in Spain of the large video on demand platforms (VOD), which undoubtedly was a turning point in the recent history of television. We start from the hypothesis that studies on television multiplied considerably due to the production phenomenon and that the interest of the communication research community in television and its new forms of production and consumption has been reflected in academic and scientific production in recent years.

After applying the indicated criteria, WOS presents 195 scientific papers that are submitted for review by the research team in order to detect possible inconsistencies in the search. This manual action detects three works that belong to collective books and that are labelled as articles, therefore they are eliminated by the team. The final sample used in this manuscript is 192 scientific articles in Spanish published in Web of Science (WOS) journals in the field of communication from 2016 to 2020.

Once the sample was obtained, the information was analysed and classified, and the necessary statistical calculations were applied. In order to establish thematic trends, the use of the keywords proposed by the authors was used as a reference. These keywords were subjected to individual classification and then shared in order to detect trends in the most commonly used concepts and tags.

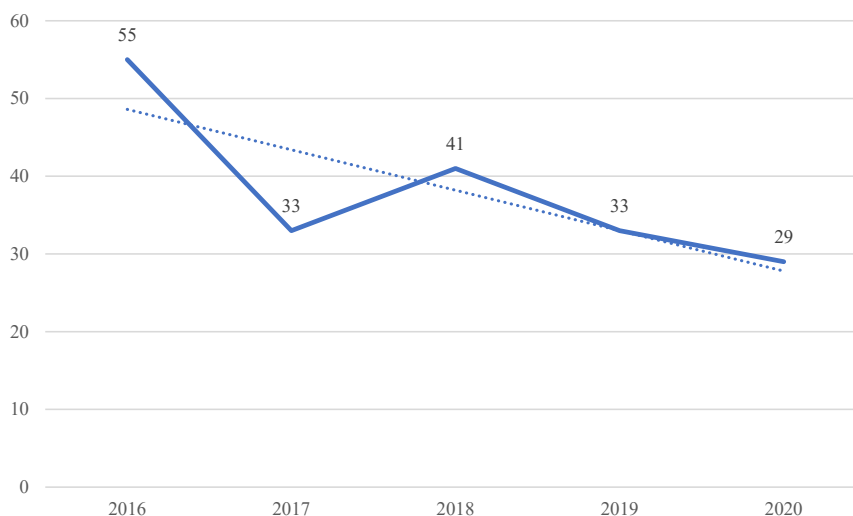
3. Results

The sample we are working on is made up of 192 scientific articles published in Spanish from 2016 to 2020. An analysis of the annual publication of articles on television shows a clear downward trend (see Graph 1) with regard to the year of the beginning of the study, which is at the highest point of publication with 55 articles collected, representing 28.5% of the total number of articles published in the five-year period analysed.

A 60% drop in production from 2016 to 2017 indicates a considerable decline in work on television, which changes in trend in 2018, allowing us to glimpse a certain resurgence in terms of television publications.

However, this one-off increase in the number of papers published represents the turning point from which publications on television decline in subsequent years, to 29 papers in 2020, which is practically half the number of scientific articles on television than in the year in which this research began.

Graph 1: Evolution of publications on television by year



Source: own elaboration

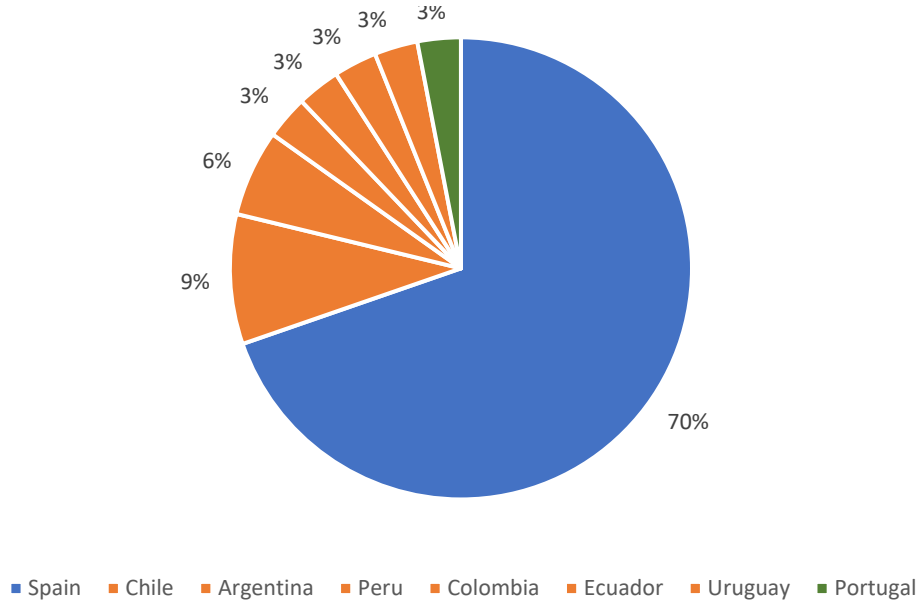
3.1. About publications

The 192 articles are published in 33 different journals, of which 23 (69.7%) are Spanish, 9 (27.3%) Latin American and 1 (3%) Portuguese, which indicates at first sight that Spanish communication journals are favourable to the publication of texts dealing with television communication.

Among the Ibero-American journals, Chilean journals have the largest presence (9% of the total, i.e., 3 journals), namely *Cuadernos.info*, *Comunicación y Medios* and *Perspectivas de la Comunicación*. Argentina has two journals in the sample and the rest of the countries present (Uruguay, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador) only have one journal, as does Portugal (see Graph 2).

However, despite the fact that the volume of Spanish journals significantly exceeds the rest of the journals, an analysis relating the number of publications on television and the origin of the journals shows that 28.64% of the articles in the sample are published by Ibero-American journals, which leads us to believe that even though there are more Spanish journals publishing texts on television, the volume of articles published by Ibero-American journals is relevant. The longevity of some Ibero-American journals could justify this fact, since some of them, such as *Revista Chasqui* (which has been publishing continuously since 1981) or *Palabra Clave* (publishing since 1996), have a much longer trajectory than Spanish journals.

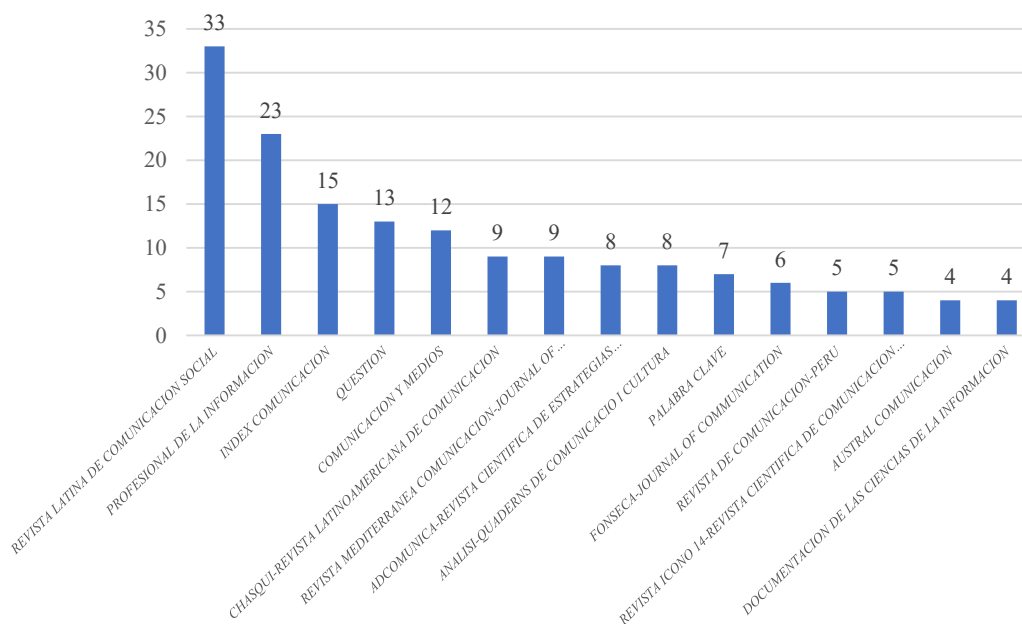
Graph 2: Distribution of scientific journals by country



Source: own elaboration

As can be seen in Graph 3, the journal with the most published articles on television is *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, with 17.27% of the total number of articles, followed by *Profesional de la Información*, with 12%, and *Index. Comunicación*, with 7.85% of the total number of articles. Journals with less than four published articles have been excluded from the graph.

Graph 3: Distribution of articles by scientific journals



Source: own elaboration

3.2. Topic and sub-topics in television research (keywords)

If we analyse the keywords of the 192 articles on television, we find that the most repeated concept is obviously “television”, although other concepts seem to show a certain trend in the studies on this medium. The term “television” appears in 91% of the articles analysed, together with the rest of the concepts (see Graph 4). This significant presence is evident if we bear in mind that we are alluding to the concept that has served as the initial filter for obtaining the sample, so it is worth breaking down in more detail the rest of the concepts that make it possible to code topics and sub-topics present in the selected scientific output.

Graph 4: Most frequent keywords in %



Source: own elaboration

The second most frequent term is the tag “social”, which appears in 25.52% of the articles analysed, followed by the concept “audio-visual”, which appears in 17.70% of the cases. The relevant presence of the word “social” indicates how the transformation of television towards a more interactive, more personalised and, therefore, more social medium is a recurring topic that generates interest among the research community, although the existing link with social issues cannot be ignored, which could explain the phenomenon. The concept of “viewers” also occupies a priority position in television research, appearing in 17.18% of the articles, which shows that studies on the reception of the medium, so relevant in past decades, continue to have an impact on recent television research. Social networks, on the other hand, only appear in 8.3% of the articles analysed, and this concept is usually used together with the term “viewers”. It is curious to note that a topic as evident in these times as social media does not acquire a significant prominence in studies on television.

More outstanding, in qualitative terms, is the relevance of the concept “audio-visual” (present in 17% of the articles analysed) which, although it alludes to a technical characteristic of television, when used as a keyword it addresses a scenario more typical of the narrative study of television and its discourses than of the technical element itself.

The concepts “communication” and “media” allow articles to be indexed not only by subject matter, but also within a specific area of knowledge. However, although they have a significant presence in the entire sample, both concepts are present in 16% of the total number of articles analysed.

The concept of “information” in television studies appears in 10.41% of the sample, and specifically the concept of “news” is used in 8.85% of the total sample. If we combine the two key concepts that can represent the study of news and current affairs, we can come close to 20%, although the dispersion in the indexing terms would not allow us to affirm a greater presence than that of the other concepts aforementioned.

The indexing of the genres of study deserves a separate mention. Around 12% of the articles focus on the study of television fiction (without specifying formats) and 8% of the total do so, specifically, under the concept of “television series” (11.45%), while other television formats such as reality television or live shows (under the tag “show”) barely represent 2.6% and 1.5% of the total sample, respectively.

Another concept that has returned a percentage to comment on is the concept of “audience”. Both linked to public channels and through its connection with public convergence, it appears in around 13% of the articles analysed, followed by the concept of “politics”, which appears in 10.41%, something that shows the importance for the research community of political communication derived from television.

Image 1: Cloud of most used words



Source: own elaboration via nubedepalabras.com

At a second level of appearance are concepts which, despite their relevance, do not appear with a relevant frequency in articles on television. We are referring, for example, to the word “Internet”, which only appears in 4.61% of the total number of articles,

or others such as “*programas*” (programmes), “*digital*” (digital), “*interactividad*” (interactivity) or “*canales*” (channels), which barely exceed a presence of 4%. A detailed study of the keywords with a presence of less than 4% in articles on television reveals aspects worth highlighting, such as the low incidence of articles using the concept of “*convergencia*” (convergence) (2.60%) despite the topicality of the term, or others with a similar presence, such as “*publicidad*” (advertising) (3.60%), “*programas*” (programmes) or “*entretenimiento*” (entertainment), both with a presence of 2.08%. Gender studies applied to television do not have a significant presence either, as they are only found in 2% of the works analysed.

3.3 Authors and genre

The 192 articles analysed are signed by a total of 398 authors from different backgrounds and areas, of which 55.41% are women and 44.59% are men. Although the difference is not significant, there is a greater interest in the television phenomenon on the part of female researchers.

Another relevant fact to bear in mind is that, given the participation of various people in the process of research, writing and publication of the articles, the degree of collaborative participation in the research should be known. In this regard, the average number of co-authors per article is 2.1.

Women are the first signatories in 60% of the published works and in 37% of the cases they appear as second authors, which allows us to glimpse a certain leadership in television research. Moreover, in only 26% of the papers there are no female authors, which confirms the involvement of women in television research.

4. Conclusions

The previous quantitative presentation allows us to affirm, in the first place, that there is a downward trend in the publication of articles on television in Spanish. At the beginning of this work, it was hypothesised that the current boom in digital television would be synonymous with a greater interest in academic research, something that is refuted after the results have been presented.

A more qualitative reflection on the subject leads one to think that the motive may derive from the authors’ quest for internationalisation and the demands of the system for publication in languages other than Spanish (mainly English), although the information obtained by this research only allows us to reformulate a new hypothesis in this respect.

The fact that the publication of texts in Spanish about television has fallen significantly (more than 50% less from 2016 to 2020) is worrying, to say the least, if we take into account the changes that television is undergoing and, with it, the changes in the way of consuming, producing and creating industry around television and digital platforms.

As far as research trends and subrends are concerned, it can be affirmed that the studies that arouse the greatest interest of the research community and the journals that publish them are mostly concentrated on social television and audiences, two concepts that, when combined, allow us to detect the importance that academia is giving to the new forms of audio-visual reception and consumption.

Specific studies on television genres seem to focus on information and, within this, on news programmes and the treatment of news, highlighting the importance of the journalistic genre within television. Alongside information, research on fiction products and, specifically, on television series stands out as the most fertile formats in research on television, leaving aside cinema, documentaries and entertainment programmes. The boom in interest in television fiction seems to coincide with the boom in the production of fiction series both in Spain and in other countries, which is monopolising the supply of content on conventional television and on digital platforms.

As far as the representation of authorship by gender is concerned, it has been detected that there is a real commitment by the female academic community in television research, despite the fact that the percentage of women is slightly higher, so that the interest of the male community in television research cannot be ruled out.

It is also concluded that the data analysed indicate that studies on television in Spanish have declined considerably in the last five years, although it is true that this decline could be explained by the trance experienced by television itself. Despite the evidence of this work, the need to extend the study in terms of time period is detected, in order to be able to respond to new hypotheses that confirm a declining trend in television research in the area of communication, as well as a comparison between related disciplines that would allow us to assess whether research on television has migrated to other fields or, on the contrary, the downward trend in this subject is common to the rest of the areas.

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