



The state of public relations research addressing Latin America: Analysis of published articles in the region's official languages between 1980 and 2020

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the scientific production on public relations addressing Latin America through a quantitative content and bibliometric analysis of articles and special issues published between 1980 and 2020, written in the official languages of the region: Spanish and Portuguese. The results of 123 articles confirm a substantial increase of studies since 2011, and some limitations of scientific dissemination. Although almost half of the authors were based in Brazil (40%), 17 base countries were counted. This work complements the latest studies on the object of study in English (Thelen, 2021) and provides the scientific community with recognition and access to native production.

1. Introduction

Public relations has carried with it a contextual characterisation since its inception. Authors such as Sriramesh and Vercic (2012) already explained a decade ago that the role of public relations is an element that is determined by the environment, history and development of this field of knowledge in a given area. According to Thelen (2021), contextualised research improves understanding of public relations practice in different cultures and places with diverse social, political and economic realities. While the number of publications globally on public relations has increased in recent years, researchers in the field have identified the need to increase documentation in underrepresented regions of the world, such as Latin America (Molleda, Moreno & Navarro, 2017). This is why there are many authors who appeal to the need for research in this field of knowledge addressing Latin America (Ferrari, 2011).

A report by the *Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura* (OEI) and the *Real Instituto Elcano* warns that Spanish and Portuguese only account for 15.8% of scientific publications worldwide (*Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos*, 2022). The OEI and the *Real Instituto Elcano* observed in the first results of the study *Challenges for a science in Spanish and Portuguese* that, in 2020, 84% of researchers in the region chose to publish their work in English, to the

detriment of their vernacular languages (*Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos*, 2021). Reducing the analysis of scientific production on Latin America to texts published in English therefore implies a basic ethnocentric bias.

Patrick D. Thelen's recent study *The State of Public Relations Research Addressing Latin America: A Content Analysis of Articles from 1980 to 2020*, published in 2021, compiles the main scientific production on public relations addressing Latin America collected in Anglo-Saxon reference databases.

However, one of its suggestions for future research is to collect and analyse all the scientific production in this area in official languages. Currently, 19 Latin American countries have Spanish as an official language (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela and the Puerto Rico territory), while Brazil is a Portuguese-speaking country. This paper aims to achieve this goal in order to complement Thelen's work.

The content of full-length, peer-reviewed articles in Spanish and Portuguese on public relations research addressing Latin America, published between 1980 and 2020, was analysed. In addition, the impact of the publications and the productivity of their authors were studied. Both this paper and the one published by Thelen (2021) aim to help public relations researchers identify directions for future studies

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aimed at increasing knowledge of public relations addressing Latin America.

2. Literature review

2.1. Anglicisation of Latin American public relations

The origins of the public relations profession can be traced back to the United States at the end of the 19th century. In Latin America, public relations was imported mainly by the United States in the 20th century (Becerra Pajuelo, 1983). This discipline was not born out of a social demand, but rather the companies, generally American, that were established around the 1950s in the area included a public relations department (Krohling, 2006).

As various authors in the region, such as Molleda (2002) and Krohling (2006) have shown, the discipline has also been approached from a US perspective. The abundant research on public relations in general contrasts with the scarce theoretical and empirical work that exists addressing Latin America (Mellado, 2010). For Sadi (2019), the creation of the most relevant academic content in the discipline has historically been disseminated in British and North American scientific journals and publishing houses.

As a result, by frequently resorting to these references, public relations in other countries lacked research, creation and production of their own. In the words of Teixeira (2002, p.110):

We are a people with a personality, whose reference structure is made up of values that we inherited from the diversity of races. Perhaps that is why, until today, we have not been able to define ourselves professionally, because we have kept our focus on the pragmatic North American model of public relations.

However, this grounding in the North American model has triggered a social misperception of the term "public relations" and the multiple connotations of its functions. Firstly, the Anglo-Saxon term "public relations", whose meaning refers to "relations with the public", has not been correctly translated into Spanish and Portuguese (Castillo-Esparcia, 2010). Secondly, the spread of multiple denominations for the profession such as "strategic communication" or "corporate communication", terms that have also entered to the scientific usage. As a result, the terminological landscape in academia is quite heterogeneous. In order to counteract this phenomenon, Latin American region has recently generated a look towards the integration of the terms (Ferrari, 2011). This unified vision is extremely necessary, as it is far removed from the past situation in which the discipline of public relations was based on definitions that were alien to its reality, and that did not correspond to local characteristics and needs (Yang & Taylor, 2013).

Nowadays, academics and researchers in the area are encouraging an emergent current, called the Latin American School of Public Relations, that is born facing a remarkable challenge. Ayala Soliz (2011) states that as long as there is not enough research to facilitate knowledge of the reality and identity of the Latin American region, there will be no development of a teaching corpus of its own to support this type of schools or currents based on local contextual elements.

2.2. Public relations research in the region

Public relations studies in the Latin America offer findings related to the situation of professionals (e.g. Ferrari, 2012; Molleda & Suárez Monsalve, 2003), analysis of the conceptual terms and theoretical currents applied to the development of the discipline (e.g. Molleda, 2002) or the approach to public relations teaching methodologies (e.g. Navarro & Moreno, 2018; Rhoden & Rhoden, 2017; Sadi & Kapusta, 2015).

The *Latin American Communicator Monitor* (LCM) emerges as the search for a systematised and longitudinal scientific knowledge of the public relations profession addressing Latin America (Moreno, Molleda, Athaydes & Suárez Monsalve, 2015; Moreno, Suárez Monsalve, Molleda, Athaydes, Herrera & Álvarez Nobell, 2017; Moreno, Molleda, Álvarez

Nobell, Herrera, Athaydes & Suárez Monsalve, 2019; Moreno, Molleda, Álvarez Nobell, Herrera, Athaydes & Suárez Monsalve, 2021). This project seeks to contribute to the disciplinary and professional development of public relations, assessing the trends and changes occurring in Latin American countries. Since 2014, it has become the largest study of the profession in the region, increasing each year its participation and relevance as a source in international scientific forums in Ibero-America (Moreno et al., 2019). Such is the scope of this study that it can be considered, as Thelen (2021, p. 2) states, "the most representative study of the perceptions held by communication professionals in the region".

LCM has discovered in recent years that, in general, there is a decline in trust towards organisations and institutions (Moreno et al., 2019; Moreno et al., 2021), which is present in the national cultures of countries in the region (Ferrari, 2012). The role of public relations practitioners is, in fact, to "demystifying the organisation and its practices and transforming it into a more democratic institution, both for its internal and external public" (Molleda & Suárez Monsalve, 2003, p. 92). At the beginning of the millennium, some researchers already observed the existence and evolution of the social roles of public relations practitioners in Latin America, replicating the original Brazilian study (Molleda & Ferguson, 2004) in other countries such as Colombia (Molleda & Suárez Monsalve, 2003). Specifically, they studied the functions of advice, planning, implementation and evaluation of social actions, in four structures: (1) "Ethics and Social Responsibility", (2) "Employee Welfare", (3) "Community Welfare" and (4) "Harmony with the Government".

Sadi and Kapusta (2015) noted this need for professional recognition that goes beyond corporate boundaries and further reaches a societal perspective. The authors also warned about the excessive focus on the field of everyday practice, which leads to losing sight of the fact that research, theoretical production and its subsequent teaching in the classroom are prior steps to achieving the professionalism and scientism that should characterise the profession.

Trend studies evaluate research and scientific production in a given discipline over a period of time. Internationally, as highlighted by Ye and Ki (2012), such studies present a general review of the entire literature, a detailed description of a specific research area or a citation analysis. In addition, they often analyse the choice and evolution of the theoretical frameworks, methods and research topics, as well as the impact, citations and academic profile of the authors (Thelen, 2021).

Review in the Latin American region by researchers is limited and Thelen's (2021) paper sought to fill this gap by examining articles on Latin American public relations written in English. In order to complete this study with scientific production in official languages, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1. : What is the trend of public relations articles written in Spanish and Portuguese addressing Latin America in peer-reviewed journals?

RQ2. : What are (a) the main authors and institutions, (b) the researchers' countries, (c) the topics of study, (d) the theoretical frameworks and (e) the methodologies and data samples that appear in these articles?

3. Method

3.1. Sample

This study analysed the content of full-length, peer-reviewed public relations research articles and journals written in Spanish and Portuguese that refer to Latin America and that were published between 1980 and 2020. At the same time, the impact of these publications and the productivity of their authors were studied through a bibliometric analysis. As in Thelen's (2021, p. 2) research, journal articles, editorials, bibliographies and book reviews were excluded from the sample.

The selection of the sample was done in two steps. First, the main specialised journals were considered. The resulting list was reviewed

and completed by a group of six expert researchers from Latin America, Spain and Portugal. The initials of these researchers are AC, AAN, AA, GG, AS and JM. The researchers generated two rounds of review.

Secondly, a search was carried out through two sites for the dissemination of Ibero-American scientific production: *Dialnet* and *Lat-index*. Both have a similar objective; to disseminate, make accessible and raise the quality of scientific publications in their regions (Alonso Lifante, 2009). Finally, the journals where the articles analysed in this research were published were: *593 Editorial Digital CEIT (1)*, *AdComunica (2)*, *Ámbitos (3)*, *Anagramas (4)*, *ComHumanitas (5)*, *Communication Papers (6)*, *Comunicação e Educação (7)*, *Comunicação e Sociedade (8)*, *Comunicación (9)*, *Correspondencias y Análisis (10)*, *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación Ensayos (11)*, *Cuadernos. info (12)*, *Debate Universitario CAEE-UAI (13)*, *Dominio de las Ciencias (14)*, *Historia y Comunicación Social (15)*, *Hologramática (16)*, *Icono 14 (17)*, *Inmediaciones (18)*, *OBS (19)*, *Organicom (20)*, *Palabra Clave (21)*, *Pangea (22)* *Perspectivas de la Comunicación (23)*, *Razón y Palabra (24)*, *Revista Comunicação Pública (25)*, *Revista Comunicación y Medios (26)*, *Revista Comunicando (REVCOM) (27)*, *Revista de Comunicación de la SEEI (28)*, *Revista Eniac Pesquisa (29)*, *Revista Estudios Institucionales (30)*, *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas (31)*, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social (32)*, *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias de la Comunicación (33)*, *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación (34)*, *Rihumso (35)*, *Signo y Pensamiento (36)* and *Trípodos (37)*.

The descriptors mentioned by Thelen (2021, p. 2) were located in each of the journals: "public relations, Latin America, South America, Central America, and the name of each Latin American country". To make the selection more rigorous, keywords were searched for in the title, subtitle, abstract and text. The final search identified a total of 123 articles, published in 37 journals between 1980 and 2020.

3.2. Measurements

Each selected article was coded on the basis of the eight categories used by Thelen (2021) in his study: (a) general information, (b) country of study, (c) research topic, (d) theoretical framework, (e) research method, (f) type of sample, (g) statistics and (h) citation analysis.

3.2.1. General information

Researchers coded the name of the journal in which each article was published, the title, the year of publication and the authors' names, their institutional affiliations and their professional/academic rank. The number of authors, the origin of the authors and authorship mix were also coded.

To categorise the rank of the authors, it was necessary to establish an analogy between the Anglo-Saxon academic and professional categories used by Thelen (2021, p. 5) and the Latin American ones.

3.2.2. Country of study

In this measurement, Thelen (2021) refers in his article to country and region, although in the results he only refers to countries. Therefore, only the country will be taken as indicative.

3.2.3. Research topic

Each article was coded by research topic. This initial division, based on the detailed themes obtained inductively, was then grouped into more general clusters (Thelen, 2021, p. 3). However, researchers distinguished multiple articles dealing with public relations education, so it was deemed necessary to add this new category to see if there was indeed a trend of academic research in this area. Fifteen categories emerged: (1) mass media influence/media relations, (2) internal communication/leadership communication, (3) crisis communication/issues management, (4) relationship management, (5) websites and social media, (6) branding, (7) culture/civil society, (8) public relations history, (9) economy, (10) state of public relations research, (11) the profession/public relations roles, (12) government communication, (13)

ethics/corporate social responsibility, (14) public relations education, and (15) other.

It is possible for an article to belong to more than one category.

3.2.4. Theoretical framework

Coding focused on explicit reference to a theory. Furthermore, articles were coded according to the existence of hypotheses and research questions in four categories: research questions (RQ), hypotheses (H), RQ and H, neither RQ nor H.

3.2.5. Research method

The research method was classified into four categories. The first three categories were established by Thelen (2021): (1) quantitative research methods, such as experiments, surveys and descriptive studies; (2) qualitative research methods, such as discourse analysis, context analysis, focus groups, and in-depth interviews; or (3) mixed method. The (4) commentary, which Thelen only mentions in the summary table and not in this section, was added later. In the commentary category, a conceptualisation or critical analysis was found, mainly of theory.

3.2.6. Type of sample

The type of sample was coded according to whether the content came from traditional media, documents, websites/social media, surveys (citizens, employees, practitioners, etc.), third-party research or mixed samples.

3.2.7. Statistics

The following categories of statistical tests were identified for quantitative articles: descriptive analysis, correlation, ANOVA, chi-square, t-test, MANOVA, factor analysis (e.g. EFA, CFA), Kendall's τ coefficient, Cramér's V, cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling (MDS).

3.2.8. Citation analysis

The impact of each article was assessed using Google Scholar (Thelen, 2021). In those articles where more than one citation source was found, mismatched citations were added together to arrive at the total result. This only occurred in 3 articles: Gurgel Campos and Jacob (2011), Márquez-López, García-Meza and Mejía-Ruperti (2017) and Castillo-Esparcia (2009).

3.2.9. Intercoder reliability

The final sample consisted of 123 articles. Two coders analysed 13 randomly selected articles, approximately 10% of the total number of articles, for the intercoder reliability test. The intercoder reliability coefficient was calculated using Scott's pi formula (Scott, 1955), for consistency with Thelen's (2021) analysis, as follows: 0.96 for general information, 1.0 for country/region of study, 0.96 for research topic, 1.0 for theoretical framework, 1.0 for research method, 0.92 for data source, 1.0 for sampling method, 0.92 for statistics and 1.0 for citation analysis.

4. Results

Analyses of public relations papers addressing Latin America were conducted by looking at general trends, authorship, institution, country, research topic, theoretical framework, method and type of sample.

4.1. Trend of published articles

Of the 123 articles, 35 were published in the *International Journal of Public Relations* (28%) and 19 in *Organicom* (15%). In third place is *Anagramas*, with 9 articles (7%) published, followed by *ComHumanitas* with 8 (7%) articles and *Razón y Palabra* which published 5 articles (4%). (See Table 1).

The number of public relations publications dealing with Latin America has increased over time (see Fig. 1). It is characteristic that

Table 1
Articles and journals on public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Journal name	Frequency	Percent (%)
Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas	35	28%
Organicom	19	15%
Anagramas	9	7%
ComHumanitas	8	7%
Razón y Palabra	5	4%
Ámbitos	2	2%
Comunicação y Sociedade	2	2%
Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación	2	2%
Cuadernos.info	2	2%
Inmediaciones	2	2%
Palabra Clave	2	2%
Revista Comunicando (REVCOM)	2	2%
Revista de Comunicación de la SEECI	2	2%
Revista Latina de Comunicación Social	2	2%
Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias de la Comunicación	2	2%
Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación	2	2%
Trípodos	2	2%
593 Digital Publisher Ceit	1	1%
Ad Comunica	1	1%
Communication Papers	1	1%
Comunicação y Educação	1	1%
Comunicação	1	1%
Correspondencias y Análisis	1	1%
Debate Universitario Cae-uai	1	1%
Dominio de las Ciencias	1	1%
El Profesional de la Información	1	1%
Historia y Comunicación Social	1	1%
Hologramática	1	1%
Icono 14	1	1%
Obra Digital	1	1%
Obs*	1	1%
Pangea	1	1%
Perspectivas de la Comunicación	1	1%
Revista Comunicação Pública	1	1%
Revista Comunicación y Medios	1	1%
Revista de Comunicación	1	1%
Revista Eniac Pesquisa	1	1%
Revista Estudios Institucionales	1	1%
Rihumso	1	1%
Signo y Pensamiento	1	1%
Total	123	100%

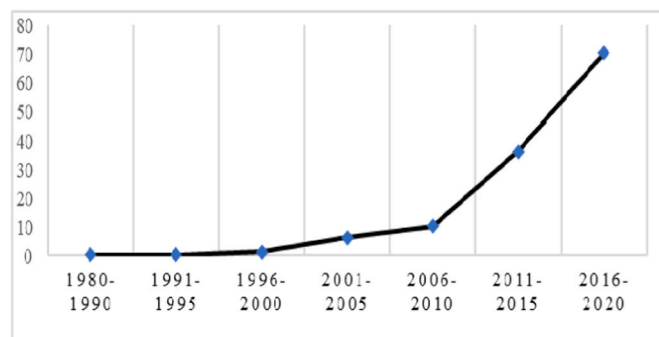


Fig. 1. Trends in public relations research addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

prior to the year 2000 only one article from 1999 has been located. Almost all articles, 122, have been produced since that date. Approximately 5% of the articles were published between 2001 and 2005; 8% between 2006 and 2010; and 29% between 2011 and 2015. The period between 2016 and 2020 stands out, where the increase in publications is almost double that of the previous period, 57%, with the following breakdown by year: 2016 (9 articles), 2017 (11 articles), 2018 (19 articles), 2019 (10 articles) and 2020 (21 articles).

4.2. Authorship, country of study, themes, theoretical framework and methodological trends

4.2.1. Authorship and institution

Based on Thelen (2021), the cumulative article credit method of Pasadeos, Renfro and Hanily (1999) has been used. Each article is assigned a maximum credit of 1.0. Articles with more than one author receive partial credit. That is, an article whose authorship depends on two persons, each author, as well as his or her institution, will be assigned a credit of 0.5.

The analysis found 165 authors in the 123 articles. The most frequent author was Claudia Nociolini Rebecchi (7 credits), followed by María Aparecida Ferrari (5.32 credits) and Ana María Suárez (5.08 credits). The institution with the most publications is the University of São Paulo, Brazil (14.14 credits), followed by the University of Medellín, Colombia (6.39 credits) and the State University of Londrina, Brazil (5 credits) (see Table 2).

The authors are firstly in the category of Senior Lecturer (n = 69,29%), Doctoral Student-Candidate (n = 38, 16%), Postdoctoral Fellow (n = 28,12%) and Associate Lecturer (n = 27,12%). (See Fig. 2). The majority of the articles were co-authored (n = 70, 57%), compared to 43% (n = 53) by a single author. The most prominent category of authorship combination is that of the individual lecturer (n = 48, 39%) and the lecturer team (n = 43, 35%). Other significantly less represented categories are lecturer in collaboration with student (both Master and Bachelor) (n = 14, 11%), Professional/consultant with lecturer (n = 6, 5%) and professional/consultant in individual authorship (n = 5, 4%).

4.2.2. Country of study

Brazil had the highest number of articles studying a single country (n = 49, 40%), followed by Colombia (n = 11, 9%), Ecuador (n = 8, 7%) and Argentine (n = 5, 4%). Among those articles that mention several countries, those that investigate the entire Latin American area stand out (n = 13; 10%). Finally, the articles referring to the collaboration between Latin American countries and others include Brazil and France (n = 3;2). (See Table 3).

Table 2

Most published authors and institutions of articles in the field of public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Author	Credits
Claudia Nociolini Rebecchi	7,00
María Aparecida Ferrari	5,32
Ana María Suárez	5,08
Margarida M. Krohling Kunsch	3,00
Paulo Nassar	2,53
Juan Carlos Molleda Medina	2,49
Antonio Castillo Esparcia	2,16
Carmen del Rocío Fernández Camacho	2,00
José Luis Meza	2,00
Luz María Flores Cabello	2,00
Mónica Arzuaga Williams	2,00
Andréia Athaydes	1,94
Gabriel Sadi	1,83
Ana María Durán	1,70
Fábia Pereira Lima	1,50
Alejandro Álvarez Nobell	1,49
Angeles Moreno	1,41
Gustavo Eugênio Hasse Becker	1,33
Juliana Lima Moreira Rhoden	1,33
Valmor Rhoden	1,33
Institution	Credits
Universidade de São Paulo, Brasil	14,14
Universidad de Medellín, Colombia	6,39
Universidad Estadual de Londrina, Brasil	5,00
Universidad de San Martín de Porres, Perú	4,16
Universidad de Chile	3,00
Universidad Luterana do Brasil	2,65
Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais	2,50

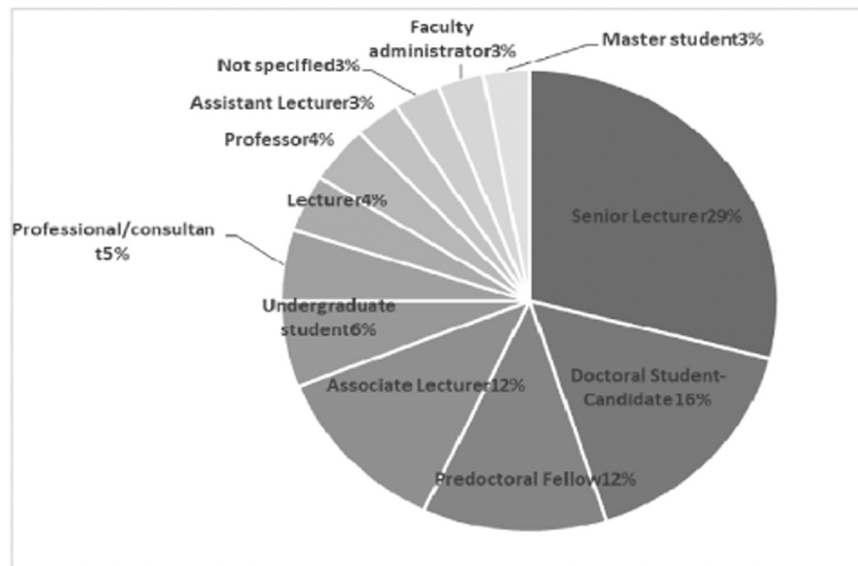


Fig. 2. Academic and professional category of authors of public relations articles addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Table 3

Country of study in the field of public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Articles on a single country		
Country	Number of articles	Percent (%)
Brazil	49	40%
Colombia	11	9%
Ecuador	8	7%
Argentine	5	4%
Chile	4	3%
Mexico	4	3%
Peru	4	3%
Costa Rica	3	2%
Iberoamerica	2	2%
Cuba	1	1%
Guatemala	1	1%
Uruguay	1	1%
Articles on two or more Latin American countries		
Entire Latin American area	13	10%
Brazil and Ecuador	2	2%
Chile and Brazil	1	1%
Articles on Latin American and other countries		
Brazil and France	3	2%
Chile and Spain	2	2%
Mexico and Spain	2	2%
Brazil and Spain	1	1%
Brazil and Portugal	1	1%
Guatemala and USA	1	1%
Argentine and Spain	1	1%
Latin America and Spain	1	1%
Mexico, Chile, United Kingdom and Spain	1	1%
Colombia, Peru, USA and Canada	1	1%
Total	123	100%

4.2.3. Research topic

It was noted that among the most researched topics were the public relations profession/roles (n = 31,17%), followed by the history of public relations (n = 26, 14%), online communication and social media (n = 21,12%) and public relation education and research status (n = 19, 10%). (See Table 4).

Within the category of the public relations profession/ roles, multiple articles analysed the profession in Latin America based on the *Latin American Communication Monitor* (LCM), a seminal open report in the dissemination and research of public relations in Latin America (e.g. Athaydes & Suárez Monsalve, 2019; Suárez Monsalve, Moreno &

Molleda, 2016; Suárez Monsalve & Álvarez Nobell, 2018). Other articles focused on the primarily social role of the public relations practitioner in Latin America (e.g. Molleda & Suárez Monsalve, 2003; Suárez Monsalve, 2017). In addition, several articles have been identified that explicitly address gender within the profession (e.g. Athaydes, Becker & Echeveste, 2016; Khalil, Fuentes- Lara & Verhoeven, 2018).

The second most prevalent theme was the history of public relations, both in theory and practice. Several articles refer to the North American approach (e.g. Ferrari, 2011; Molleda, 2002). Another approach within this category is the diachronic analysis of this area (e.g. Fagundes & Peixoto de Moura, 2020; Liedtke & Curtinovi, 2016). Articles on the evolution of the term "public relations", its use and new terminology were also found (e.g. Pereira da Silva, Guaraldo, Porém & Santos, 2020).

The topic websites and social media was in third place. All articles assigned to this theme were produced in the period between 2011 and 2020. Several of the articles came from the special issue of the journal *ComHumanitas*, volume 9, number 2 *ComHumanitas*, (2018): *La influencia de las tecnologías en el ejercicio profesional de las relaciones públicas en Latinoamérica*.

The category introduced by this research, education, was positioned in fourth place, with a total of 19 articles. Reviews and critiques of the perceived training of public relations students (e.g. Flores Mayorga & Castillo-Esparcia, 2018; Sadi & Kapusta, 2015) and the reorientation of teaching and institutions in the field of higher education (e.g. Rhoden & Rhoden, 2017) were found.

4.2.4. Theoretical framework

As the analysis showed, 20% (n = 25) of articles structured their research by referencing an explicit theoretical framework. However, sometimes they referred to an entire disciplinary corpus, such as communication theories or organisational communication theories; sometimes to specific theoretical contributions to these fields, such as the two-step communication theory (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1948) and other occasions to theories of well-known public relations authors. Situational theory of publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), theory of excellence in public relations (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995) or the dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002) stood out (see Table 7). (See Table 5).

Among the 123 articles analysed, 65% (n = 80) did not include research questions or hypotheses within them. 20% (n = 25) had research questions, while 10% (n = 12) posed hypotheses. Finally, a total of 6 articles (5%) had both hypotheses and research questions.

Table 4
Research topics in public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Topics	1980–2000		2001–2010		2011–2020		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The profession / roles and value of public relations	1	50%	5	23%	25	16%	31	17%
History of public relations	0	0%	6	27%	20	13%	26	14%
Websites and social media	0	0%	0	0%	21	13%	21	12%
Public relations Education	0	0%	0	0%	19	12%	19	10%
State of public relations research	1	50%	1	5%	13	8%	15	8%
Institutional communication	0	0%	4	18%	11	7%	15	8%
Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility	0	0%	0	0%	14	9%	14	8%
Culture / civil society	0	0%	3	14%	9	6%	12	7%
Relationship management and corporate communication	0	0%	1	5%	9	6%	10	5%
Crisis communication / issues management	0	0%	0	0%	5	3%	5	3%
Influence of the media / Media relations	0	0%	1	5%	3	2%	4	2%
Branding	0	0%	0	0%	4	3%	4	2%
Internal communication	0	0%	0	0%	3	2%	3	2%
Economy	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%
Others	0	0%	1	5%	0	0%	1	1%
	2	100%	22	100%	158	100%	182	100%

Table 5
Explicit theoretical framework used in public relations studies addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Theoretical framework	Frequency number
Communication theory	3
Public relations models	3
Organisational communication theory	2
Dialogic theory of public relations	2
Theory of excellence	2
Corporate Social Responsibility theory (CSR/Ethical theories)	2
General theory of public relations	2
Theory of communicative action	2
Branding architecture theory	1
Public communication theory	1
Two step flow communication theory	1
Image theory	1
Theory of international public relations	1
Transnational crisis theory	1
Discourse theories	1
Total	25

4.2.5. Research methods and sample type

As Table 6 shows, quantitative research methods were the most used (n = 37, 30%). Qualitative methods (n = 31, 25%) and mixed methods (n = 30, 25%) were evenly balanced. In addition, research oriented towards conceptualisation or critical analysis, mainly commentary, was represented by 20% (n = 25).

The analysis revealed that, among the data collection techniques, surveys were the most used (n = 39, 21%), followed by qualitative content analysis (n = 37, 20%), interviews (n = 34, 18%) and quantitative content analysis (n = 31, 17%), as can be seen in Table 7.

With regard to the types of sample, the most frequently used source was the respondents (n = 39, 32%), followed by documents (n = 38, 31%) and mixed samples (n = 35, 28%) (see Table 8). Of note is the existence of a category called "research of others" (Thelen, 2021, p. 7). Several articles were found that used data from previous research

Table 6
Research methods used in the field of public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in the Spanish and Portuguese.

Research method	1980–2000		2001–2010		2011–2020		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Quantitative	0	0	5	31%	32	30%	37	30%
Qualitative	0	0	1	6%	30	28%	31	25%
Mixed methods	0	0	2	13%	28	26%	30	25%
Critical analysis	1	100%	8	50%	16	15%	25	20%
	1	100%	16	100%	106	100%	123	100%

Table 7
Data collection techniques used in the field of public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Data collection techniques	Frequency	Percent (%)
Survey	39	21%
Qualitative content analysis	37	20%
Interviews	34	18%
Quantitative content analysis	31	17%
Critique/essay	14	7%
Case study	13	7%
Focus group	6	3%
Observation	6	3%
Experiment	3	2%
Critical discourse analysis	2	1%
Participatory action research	1	1%
Diachronic analysis	1	1%
	187	100%

Table 8
Type of sample employed in the field of public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Type of sample	Frequency	Percent (%)
Respondents (citizens, employees, practitioners)	39	32%
Mixed samples	35	28%
Websites/social media	9	7%
Documents	38	31%
Traditional media	2	2%
Total	123	100%

(Ferrari, 2011; Nociolini Rebecchi, 2012; Suárez Monsalve et al., 2016), but these were analysed by the authors themselves, so they were not considered as "research of others".

4.3. Statistics

The most commonly used statistics were descriptive analysis (n = 56, 57%), ANOVA (n = 8, 8%), correlation analysis (n = 7, 7%), chi-square (n = 7, 7%), Kendall's τ coefficient (n = 5, 5%) and factor analysis, such as exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (n = 4, 4%). As can be seen in Table 9, the use of statistical methods changed during the period, growing overall and progressively until 2020.

4.4. Citation analysis

The number of times each article was cited by other authors in their

Table 9
Application of public relations statistics addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

Statistics	1980–2000		2001–2010		2011–2020		Total	
Descriptive analysis	0	0%	4	36%	52	59%	56	57%
ANOVA	0	0%	2	18%	6	7%	8	8%
Correlation	0	0%	1	9%	6	7%	7	7%
Chi-square test	0	0%	0	0%	8	9%	8	8%
Kendall's τ coefficient	0	0%	0	0%	5	6%	5	5%
Factor analysis (e.g. EFA, CFA)	0	0%	3	27%	1	1%	4	4%
T-test	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	3	3%
Cluster analysis	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	3	3%
Cramér's V	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	2	2%
Multidimensional scaling (MDS)	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	2	2%
MANOVA	0	0%	1	9%	0	0%	1	1%
Total	0	100%	11	100%	88	100%	99	100%

own articles was counted. The mean number of citations received among the 123 articles analysed was 4.2 and its median was 1. The text that received the highest number of citations was: *La comunicación integral, un factor determinante en la gestión de la empresa ecuatoriana*, written by Fanny Yolanda Paladines Galarza, Karina Paola Valarezo González and Jenny Jovita Yaguache Quichimbo (2013), in the journal *Signo y Pensamiento*. Their article was cited a total of 49 times. The second highest number of citations was perceived by Antonio Castillo-Esparcia (2009), entitled *Relaciones públicas y Think Tanks en América Latina. Estudio sobre su implantación y acción*, published in *Razón y Palabra*. This article was mentioned in 43 times. The third most cited article with 38 mentions, and the first in Portuguese, is *Subsídios para o estudo do conceito de relações públicas no Brasil*, written by Fábio França (2003) and published in the journal *Comunicação e Sociedade*.

Articles that have not been cited were 49 (39,8%). The number of articles cited only once amounted to 21 (17%) and those cited twice to 17 (approximately 14%), as shown in the Fig. 3.

A downward trend is evident. In general, the greater the number of articles, the lower the number of citations obtained. This means that only a select number of articles have achieved a higher impact. Therefore, articles cited between zero and twice account for 70% of the sample.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Implications

This study examined research trends addressing Latin America's public relations between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese in order to complement Thelen's (2021) research based on publications in English, providing a novel and autochthonous view of the reality of public relations in the region.

The results have shown that there is an increasing trend in the

number of articles and journals publishing on the central theme of the research. While only 1% of the articles were published between 1980 and 2000, the remaining 99% were published between 2001 and 2020. In line with Thelen's (2021, p. 7) findings, this substantial increase suggests that Latin American studies are consolidating through significant effort. However, with the exception of the *International Journal of Public Relations*, there is a wide dispersion of scientific production in a large number of journals that do not specialise in public relations. The journal that has published the most articles is the *International Journal of Public Relations*, followed by *Organicom* and *Anagramas*. All of them are characterised by open access, making scientific knowledge available to the general public and favouring a greater democratisation of knowledge. This is an important difference compared to Thelen's research (2021, p. 7), where the journals with the most publications are all limited access.

Slightly more than half of the articles were written by several authors (57%), which is slightly more than those published by a single author (43%). This trend can be considered balanced, in contrast with the results obtained by Thelen (2021, p. 7), where a large majority of articles were written by several researchers (70%). The countries with the highest number of publications were Brazil (40%), followed by the Latin American region as a whole (10%) and Colombia (9%).

The most prominent authors, in this case female authors, were Claudia Nociolini Rebecchi (7.00 credits), María Aparecida Ferrari (5.32 credits) and Ana María Suárez (5.08 credits). This suggests an increase in female scientific productivity, which could lead to the beginning of the consolidation of the gender perspective in the academic discipline.

The three researchers with the highest scores are PhDs and form part of a university academic staff, based in Latin America, specifically in Brazil and Colombia. Likewise, the institutions with the highest number of productions were the University of São Paulo (Brazil), the University of Medellín (Colombia) and the State University of Londrina (Brazil). The countries in which the largest number of studies have been carried out coincide with the location of the institutions that have carried out the largest dissemination.

Despite these data, in general, educators/researchers and practitioners who produce native articles in Spanish and Portuguese are at an earlier stage of their academic career, compared to those who publish in English. Many are predoctoral students, predoctoral fellows and there are even 6% undergraduates and 3% master's students. Few of them are in academic staff positions. In contrast, in the results obtained by Thelen (2021), the most observed figures were full professor (29%), assistant professor -lecturer- (20%) and associate professor -senior lecturer- (15%). This could be a solid reason for the low scientific output in native languages.

In both studies, the most studied topic was the profession/role and value of public relations (n = 31, 17%). Following Thelen's (2021) guidelines, each article has been assigned to all categories to which it corresponds. This action could lead to a distortion of the results if the purpose was to investigate the most prominent themes, as the assignment does not discriminate between main and secondary themes. On the

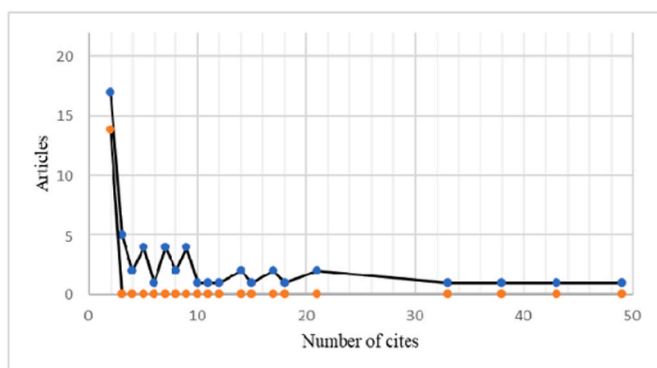


Fig. 3. Scatterplot of citations received in public relations addressing Latin America between 1980 and 2020 in Spanish and Portuguese.

other hand, the absence of education as a thematic category in Thelen's paper is very striking. This category has been included, but only 10% of the studies were found to address the role of education in professionally orienting the discipline of Latin American public relations.

In terms of theoretical frameworks, the most frequently mentioned were communication theory (12%) and public relations models (12%). Quantification and systematisation are relevant in this discipline. Quantitative research methods were the most used (n = 37, 30%), followed by qualitative (n = 31, 25%). These results are similar to, but lower than, those of Thelen (2021, p. 8), where quantitative research methods accounted for 38.5% and qualitative 34.9%.

The most negative outcome of this research was the impact of articles published in Spanish and Portuguese, which proved to be significantly lower than in English. The average number of citations received by articles in Spanish and Portuguese is 4.2 and their median is 1, compared to an average of 43.2 and a median of 21 in English.

The management of the journals in which these articles have been published means that they are generally excluded from the predominant indexes such as SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) or Journal Citations Reports (JCR), which limits their dissemination and quality checks. It should not be forgotten that these standards are a guide to successful research efforts. It is suggested that there is a need to improve the effort to set higher standards for these journals. Starting with the university system, it should be constructed in a way that facilitates the achievement of results in Latin American public relations research. If the academic structure were strengthened from the outset, it would be fully focused on preparing students for research work.

Also, Google Scholar often has an incorrect citation count due to self-citations and duplicates, so these errors must be taken into account when displaying the results.

The problem here is that the impact of publications in these languages does not correspond to their global position, both at native-speaker level and by institutions dedicated to higher education. There are currently 460 million Spanish speakers and 221 million Portuguese speakers, making Spanish the second most widely spoken official language in the world and Portuguese the seventh (Fernández, 2022). There are also some 3918 universities in the Latin American region (Webometrics, January, 2023).

In response, academic initiatives are beginning to emerge that are committed to promoting scientific dissemination policies in Spanish and Portuguese. Among these initiatives is the collaboration between the *Real Instituto Elcano* and the *Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura* (OEI) whose objective is to "cooperate in the configuration of networks and platforms of knowledge and exchange for the dissemination and impact of publications in Spanish and Portuguese" (Real Instituto Elcano, 2020). However, this research highlighted the low impact data obtained by the articles of the period, and two questions arise: how could these Ibero-American scientific dissemination platforms further facilitate the measurement of a real impact? And, how could the visibility of publications written in official languages really be increased?

In the same line of focus on visibility is the *Latin American Communication Monitor* (LCM), already mentioned in the literature review. This type of longitudinal studies are fundamental in the dissemination of basic knowledge, as has been observed in the results of this research, where on numerous occasions the articles analysed were structured on the data provided by this study.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although the number of published articles on the research approach has increased, the present study confirms Thelen's (2021) findings on the paucity of Latin American public relations literature. This review contributes to research on Latin America as the first study to systematically compile the state of the academic literature written in official languages on public relations in the region. However, the limitations of

this work may open up new opportunities for further study.

The selection process of the articles faced two difficulties: on the one hand, the dispersion of scientific production in non-specialised journals and, on the other hand, the wide range of terms used to refer to the public relations profession.

Firstly, although it is possible in the Latin American context to publish in multiple journals, these are usually of a generalist nature within the field of communication, so there are not many publications specialising in public relations. However, in Ibero-America, specialised academics make a great effort to disseminate results through conferences, books and reports, such as the *Latin American Communication Monitor* (Moreno et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2017; Moreno et al., 2019; Moreno et al., 2021). The list to be analysed could be considerably delimited with the inclusion of reports, conference proceedings, books and manuals on public relations, book chapters and reviews, and articles from non-academic or popularised journals.

Another element to take into account for future research is to broaden the criteria for the inclusion of keywords, which in this case has been "public relations", in addition to the name of each country. These keywords have been applied to allow comparison of results with Thelen's (2021) publication. Although this term "public relations" is the one that refers to the scientific discipline, there are many research studies in which other terms imported from the professional field were used, such as "corporate communication", "organisational communication", "communication management" or "strategic communication". It is proposed to broaden these criteria for inclusion in future research on the object of study.

Finally, the result of this study is based exclusively on a quantitative content and bibliometric analysis. To overcome the limitations of a purely content-based approach, a qualitative analysis should be conducted by interviewing or surveying public relations practitioners and academics based in or researching Latin America. This would provide a deeper and more complete understanding of the present and future of public relations research in the region and the challenges they face in disseminating their work globally.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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