

How is (im)migration researched from a communication perspective? Trends in Web of Science articles

¿Cómo se investiga la (in)migración desde una perspectiva comunicacional?

Tendencias en los artículos de Web of Science

Como se investiga a (im)migração sob uma perspectiva comunicacional?

Tendências nos artigos da Web of Science

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Research on migratory phenomena from a communication perspective has gained increasing academic attention. The present study analyzes this landscape through two approaches: 1) a bibliometric analysis of 2 844 articles indexed in Web of Science (2004-2023), and 2) a content analysis of 340 cases. Findings show a steady rise in publications, though impact declines. Anglo-Saxon journals and institutions lead the field, with women often listed first. Content and discourse analysis prevail, reflecting the message's centrality from framing theory.

KEYWORDS: Migratory phenomena, communication, articles, Web of Science, meta-research.

La investigación sobre fenómenos migratorios desde una perspectiva comunicacional ha ganado una creciente atención académica. El presente estudio analiza este panorama mediante dos enfoques: 1) un análisis bibliométrico de 2 844 artículos indexados en Web of Science (2004-2023), y 2) un análisis de contenido de 340 casos. Los hallazgos muestran un aumento constante en las publicaciones, aunque su impacto disminuye. Las revistas e instituciones anglosajonas lideran el campo, y las mujeres suelen ocupar el primer lugar en las autorías. Predominan el análisis de contenido y del discurso, lo que refleja la centralidad del mensaje desde la teoría del framing.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fenómenos migratorios, comunicación, artículos, Web of Science, meta-investigación.

A pesquisa sobre fenômenos migratórios sob uma perspectiva comunicacional tem ganhado cada vez mais atenção acadêmica. O presente estudo analisa esse panorama por meio de duas abordagens: 1) uma análise bibliométrica de 2.844 artigos indexados no Web of Science (2004-2023) e 2) uma análise de conteúdo de 340 casos. Os resultados mostram um aumento constante nas publicações, embora seu impacto diminua. As revistas e instituições anglo-saxônicas lideram o campo, e as mulheres costumam ocupar o primeiro lugar entre os autores. Predominam a análise de conteúdo e a análise do discurso, o que reflète a centralidade da mensagem a partir da teoria do framing.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fenómenos migratórios, comunicação, artigos, Web of Science, meta-pesquisa.

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INTRODUCTION

Backed by the unquestionable central role of communication in human societies, academic research assigned to this field has grown considerably over the last few years. Relatively recent events such as the rise of social media, harmful effects of fake news on public opinion, abundant supply of media content available on video-on-demand (VOD) platforms or uncertainty among citizens regarding artificial intelligence have contributed to this fertile field of study. Parallel to the expansion of the discipline is the need for the academic world itself to identify its limits. Thus, a self-referential and introspective tendency has been flowing strongly for several decades now (e. g. Bryant & Miron, 2004; Kamhawi & Weaver, 2003; Riffe & Freitag, 1997), which aims to map trends that characterize this field, namely, meta-research (Ioannidis, 2018).

In order to structure knowledge generated in the field of communication and mitigate possible shortcomings, various initiatives analyze the instrumentalization of theories (Carrasco-Campos & Saperas, 2022) and the use of research methodologies (Lovejoy et al., 2014); they detect the presence of certain topics (Montero-Díaz et al., 2018) to the detriment of others or examine patterns in this output in terms of authorship (Demeter, Pelle et al., 2022b), citation (Hu et al., 2023) or journal behavior (Demeter, Goyanes et al., 2022a). Meta-research is therefore a kind of self-diagnosis offering an X-ray of the what, who, how, when, why and purpose of research.

Based on this approach, this paper aims to build a bridge between communication research and migratory phenomena. More specifically, the overall goal is to shed light on production indexed in Web of Science (WOS) on this subject and published in the 20-year period from 2004 to 2023. The focus will be on articles, the preferred form of disseminating scientific findings. However, before addressing the empirical procedures used, we must review the state of the art for contextualization.

META-RESEARCH ON (IM)MIGRATION: STATE OF THE ART

Multiple disciplines have studied migratory phenomena due to their cross-cutting nature. In the context of communication sciences,

although (im)migration is a frequent research topic –as will be verified later with empirical data–, few studies have addressed the subject from meta-research.

One is the recent bibliometric analysis by Collado-Alonso et al. (2024), in which a sample of 426 articles –indexed in Scopus from 2001 to 2024– are examined. Their data reveal significant growth in academic output led by a small group of countries (United Kingdom, United States, and Spain), as well as a low propensity for co-authorship and considerable thematic diversity.

Similarly, the systematic review by Gonçalves and David (2022) applies PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) to a sample of 47 articles published in English and Portuguese between 2001 and 2020. The articles come from the WOS, Scopus and B-on databases and share a common theme: how immigrants and refugees are represented in the media in the United Kingdom and Brazil. Among other findings, the authors affirm that the media underrepresents these groups and uses stereotyped discourses in both countries. At the methodological level, they determine that studies from the United Kingdom predominantly use quantitative techniques (67%), notably context analysis (39%), while in Brazil they are eminently qualitative (94%). As for the object of study, in both cases the press is the main protagonist.

Parallel to the paper by Gonçalves and David (2022), Seo and Kavakli (2022) also compile 119 articles indexed in the EBSCO Communication & Mass Media Complete database from 2011 and 2021, published in English only and dealing with the media representation of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Their analysis found a rising trend in the number of studies published in journals such as *Discourse & Society* or the *International Journal of Communication*. In terms of the methods, 61.3% use qualitative techniques, mainly discourse analysis (43.7%), while researchers once again focus on the press.

Along similar lines, Eberl et al. (2018) detect increasing output in Europe from 2005 to 2018, also present in EBSCOhost. Of the 89 articles selected, they identify a greater proportion of papers analyzing media coverage and representation of immigration than the effects of how they are received, being content analysis and framing theory the pillars. These researchers also argue that most initiatives do not ana-

lyze a specific group of immigrants but the phenomenon as a whole. Other notable conclusions are the underrepresentation of the group and its association with economic, cultural or criminal threats. Negative media coverage also impacts stereotyping and public opinion.

In Hispanic production indexed in Scopus, immigration is also frequently associated with framing theory, which is in turn linked to content analysis of journalistic information (Piñeiro-Naval & Mangana, 2019). The findings of Cortés-Martínez et al. (2024) reinforce the previous statement. After examining 196 works published between 2011 and 2021 in 37 journals –most of them in Spanish–, they conclude that media products are the main object of study, while framing theory and content analysis are the primary theoretical-methodological tools.

Based on the prior evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Scientific output on im(migration) and communication will continue an upward trend from 2004 to 2023.
- H2: Articles will be empirical and will especially address the study of journalistic messages.
- H3: Framing will be the fundamental theoretical concept of this production.
- H4: Content analysis at quantitative level and discourse analysis at qualitative level will stand out as the most common methods.

On the other hand, research questions related to production context should be answered in view of the data. These are:

- RQ1: As a global phenomenon, will there be any international collaboration for its study?
- RQ2: As a topic with social implications, will there be gender parity in authorship?
- RQ3: As migration affects the economies of both countries of origin and recipient, will research be funded?

Two closely related studies were carried out to meet the main objective and respond to both hypotheses and research questions: 1) a bibliometric analysis of articles indexed in WOS; and 2) a content analysis of a probabilistic sample of randomly selected cases.

STUDY 1

Method: bibliometric analysis

All references for the bibliometric analysis ($N = 2\,844$) were extracted from WOS, searching for the terms “immigrant*”, “immigration”, “migrant*” and “migration” in document titles, abstracts and keywords, limiting results to the “Communication” category in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) and within the 2004-2023 timeframe, both inclusive.²

In accordance with Donthu et al. (2021), bibliometric analysis involves two approaches: performance analysis and science mapping. Thus, bibliographic information was used here to extract descriptive data on general productivity, and to create co-word and co-citation networks using VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). These networks show when two keywords (Figure 3) or two bibliographic references (Figure 4) appear in the same document. Co-word networks reflect the thematic structure of a field (which aspects are researched), while co-citation networks map the intellectual structure of that field (in other words, from which theoretical perspectives the topics are addressed). These networks were analyzed and then viewed with Pajek (Batagelj & Mrvar, 1998). Keywords were manually harmonized to standardize homogeneous terms (from 7 000 to 6 832).

Representativeness was the criterion followed for easier visualization of the networks and only relationships between elements (nodes) with a minimum threshold frequency are reflected, detailed at the bottom of each figure. Node colors correspond to clusters or communities (sets of vertices that tend to connect) identified using the Louvain algorithm (multi-level thickening, simple refinement, parameter resolution = 1, number of random restarts = 1, maximum number of levels in each

² Data on the 2 844 articles, downloaded on 25 April 2024, were obtained with this search algorithm: (Topic = “immigrant*” OR “immigration” OR “migrant*” OR “migration”) AND (Web of Science Categories = “Communication”) AND (Document Type = “Article”) AND (Year Published = “2004-2023”) AND (Web of Science Index = “SSCI” OR “ESCI”). Information at: <https://tinyurl.com/3ykdh24p>

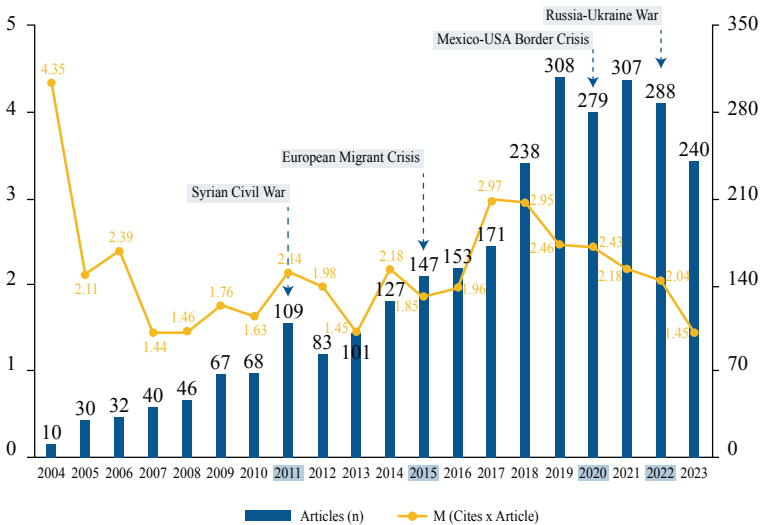
iteration = 20, maximum number of repetitions in each level = 50). The number in each node is the frequency with which each term or reference is used in the articles, while the number next to arcs connecting each vertex indicates the frequency with which these two descriptors or references were used together.

Performance analysis results

Firstly, a timeline (Figure 1) shows the evolution of the number of articles published each year and their average impact in number of citations.

In view of Figure 1, the evolution of the annual number of articles is ascending, with a sharp rise as of 2011 (outbreak of the Syrian Civil War) and, above all, 2015 (peak of the migration crisis in Europe). On the

FIGURE 1
 TIMELINE WITH ANNUAL EVOLUTION OF ARTICLES AND
 AVERAGE IMPACT (IN NUMBER OF CITATIONS), INDICATING THE START
 OF SOME HISTORICAL EVENTS



Source: The authors with WOS data.

contrary, impact is decreasing. The average number of annual citations of the 2 844 articles is: $M_{\text{Annual Citations per Article}} = 2.12$ ($SD = 3.75$). However, this annual impact varies significantly over the time series observed [$F(20, 2843) = 2.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .021$] so that 2004 is the year with the highest average citations ($M = 4.35, SD = 3.68$), while the lowest is 2007 ($M = 1.44, SD = 2.02$). In any case, the total average impact of this output is quite high: $M_{\text{Total Citations per Article}} = 14.06$ ($SD = 27.88$).

Percentage distribution of the population according to how it is indexed in WOS is: 64.4% in SSCI ($n = 1\ 832$) and 35.6% in ESCI ($n = 1\ 012$). It is important to note that the ESCI ranking was created in 2015. Thus, and even though it includes more journals as it is less restrictive than SSCI (Segado-Boj et al., 2023), the difference in years is key to understanding this imbalance.

As for the journals that have published on the topic of im(migration) more frequently, Table 1 shows the most active according to the ranking where they are indexed. The top 10 SSCI journals accumulate 34.2% of output in this ranking, while the 16 ESCI journals (some tied in number of articles) combine 39.8%. Academic output is therefore notably concentrated, although the ESCI is much more plural in terms of geographic origin of the titles.

In terms of article authorship, Table 2 includes a list of the most prolific researchers in this field. The researcher with the most contributions is Leen d'Haenens (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium), closely followed by Juan-José Igartua (University of Salamanca, Spain). Table 3 shows the most productive universities affiliated with the authors.

The universities hosting the most authors researching the migratory phenomena from a communication perspective are concentrated in very few countries, with the United States at the top of the ranking and Europe in second place (Netherlands, United Kingdom, Belgium, Spain and Austria). The map below (Figure 2) shows where the most proactive universities are located.

In view of the data in Figure 2, the United States is clearly at the forefront of output ($n = 927$), followed at a great distance by Spain ($n = 292$) and the United Kingdom ($n = 229$). We must also highlight that the countries leading the study on this topic from a communication

TABLE 1
JOURNALS CONTRIBUTING MOST TO THE UNIVERSE

Position	SSCI			ESCI		
	Journal	Country	<i>n</i>	Journal	Country	<i>n</i>
1	<i>International Journal of Communication</i>	United States	121	Journal of International and Intercultural Communication	United States	49
2	<i>Discourse & Society</i>	United Kingdom	78	Howard Journal of Communications	United Kingdom	34
3	<i>New Media & Society</i>	United Kingdom	73	Journal of Asian Pacific Communication Journal of Multicultural Discourses Question	Netherlands United Kingdom Argentina	31
4	<i>Continuum. Journal of Media Cultural Studies</i>	United Kingdom	65	Chasqui. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación	Ecuador	29
5	<i>Media, Culture & Society</i>	United Kingdom	57	Frontiers in Communication	Switzerland	27
6	<i>Language Communication</i>	United Kingdom	52	Revista Latina de Comunicación Social	Spain	25
7	<i>Information, Communication & Society</i>	United Kingdom	48	Communication & Society	Spain	23

Position	SSCI			ESCI		
	Journal	Country	<i>n</i>	Journal	Country	<i>n</i>
8	<i>International Journal of Public Opinion Research</i>	United Kingdom	47	Journal of Communication Inquiry Popular Communication	United States United Kingdom	21
9	<i>Social Media + Society</i>	United Kingdom	44	Global Media Journal Canadian Edition	Canada	17
10	<i>Media and Communication</i>	Portugal	42	Global Media and Communication International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics Pacific Journalism Review Palabra Clave	United Kingdom United Kingdom New Zealand Colombia	16
		Total	627		Total	403

Source: The authors with WOS data.

TABLE 2
MOST PROLIFIC AUTHORS

Position	Author	Articles	Position	Author	Articles
1	d'Haenens, Leen	20	8	De Coninck, David	10
2	Igartua, Juan-José	19		Leurs, Koen	
3	Kam, Jennifer	17	9	Mastro, Dana	9
4	Boomgaarden, Hajo G.	16		Figenschou, Tine Ustad	
5	Chib, Arul	14		Matthes, Jörg	
6	Croucher, Stephen	12	10	Cornejo, Mónica	8
7	Wojcieszak, Magdalena	11		Kaur, Satveer	
8	Georgiou, Myria	10		Dutta, Mohan J.	
	Hameleers, Michael			Méndez Murillo, Roselia	

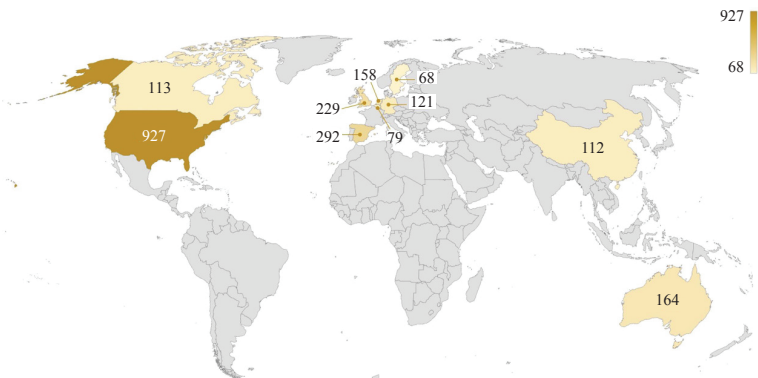
Source: The authors with WOS data.

TABLE 3
MOST PRODUCTIVE UNIVERSITIES

Position	University	Country	Articles
1	University of California System	United States	70
2	University of Amsterdam	Netherlands	66
	University of London	United Kingdom	
3	University of Texas System	United States	49
4	University System of Ohio	United States	41
5	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	Belgium	39
6	California State University System	United States	37
	Universidad de Salamanca	Spain	
7	University of Vienna	Austria	36
8	Pennsylvania Commonwealth System of Higher Education	United States	35
	University of Texas at Austin		
9	State University System of Florida	United States	34
10	University of Wisconsin System	United States	31

Source: The authors with WOS data.

FIGURE 2
COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST PROACTIVE UNIVERSITIES (N ARTICLES)



Source: The authors with WOS data.

perspective are developed nations and, therefore, recipients of immigrants.

Regarding publication languages, and consistent with the above data, 88.75% are written in English ($n = 2\,524$), 8.5% in Spanish ($n = 241$) and 2.75% in other languages ($n = 79$), notably Portuguese ($n = 29$). Therefore, although not all from Anglo-Saxon countries, this output is disseminated in the preferred language of science: English.

Science Mapping: co-word and co-citation networks

The most common keywords in the articles are listed in Table 4. As for the co-word network (Figure 3), the most frequent co-occurrences are between conceptually similar terms such as “migration” and “refugees” (46) or “refugees” and “immigration” (25). Beyond this proximity between semantically similar terms, a high frequency of co-words is found between “immigration” and two concepts related with message analysis: “frames” (22) and “content analysis” (24). Meanwhile, “migration” is closely linked with “identities” (22) and “social media” (28). Other descriptors show weaker connections. In fact, most keywords are only related to the core concepts –those that delimit the universe of study– and their connections are occasional and infrequent. This could indicate dispersion in the objects of study.

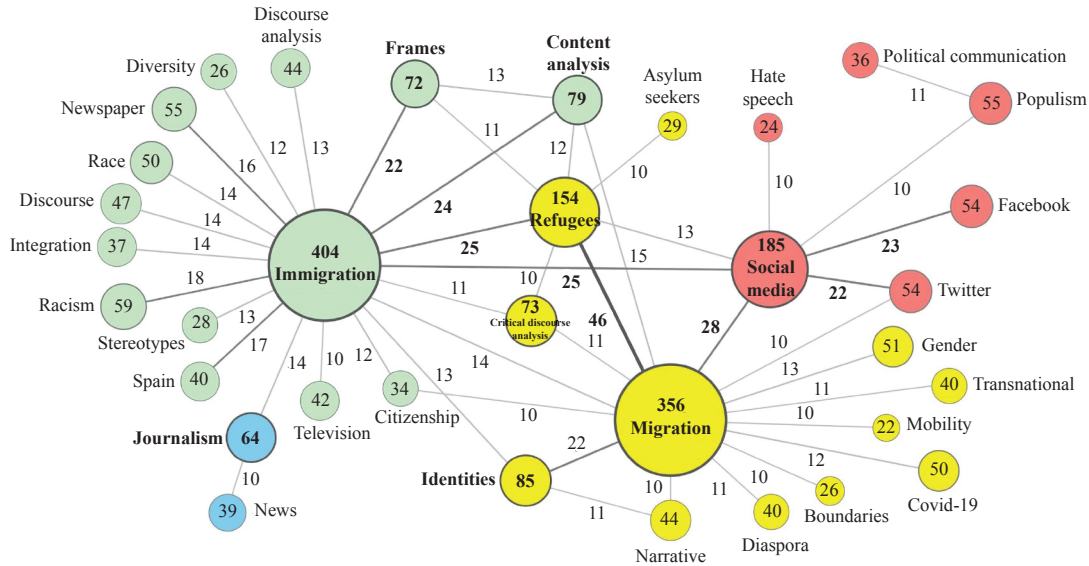
Regarding the co-citation network (see Figure 4), the largest component is divided into two communities. The first (in green) is organized around the theoretical concept of framing, with the seminal work of Entman (1993) at the center. Around it are other general references on this term (De Vreese, 2005; Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), as well as its use in media coverage of different issues (Iyengar, 1994; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) and on the specific topic of immigration (Benson, 2013; Kim et al., 2011). The second cluster in this group (in red) almost exclusively includes empirical papers on the representation of immigration in the media, whether by means of framing (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Van Gorp, 2005) or discourse analysis (Baker et al., 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Khosravinick, 2009, 2010). The theoretical basis for analyzing media representation of immigration is therefore the concept of framing and, more peripherally, the tradition of critical discourse analysis.

TABLE 4
MOST FREQUENT KEYWORDS

Position	Keywords	Occurrences	Position	Keywords	Occurrences
1	Immigration	404	11	Newspaper Populism	55
2	Migration	356	12	Facebook Twitter	54
3	Social media	185	13	Gender	51
4	Refugees	154	14	Covid-19 Race	50
5	Identities	85	15	Discourse	47
6	Content analysis	79	16	Discourse analysis Narrative	44
7	Critical discourse analysis	73	17	Television	42
8	Frames	72	18	Diaspora Spain Transnational	40
9	Journalism	64	19	News	39
10	Racism	59	20	Integration	37

Source: The authors with WOS data.

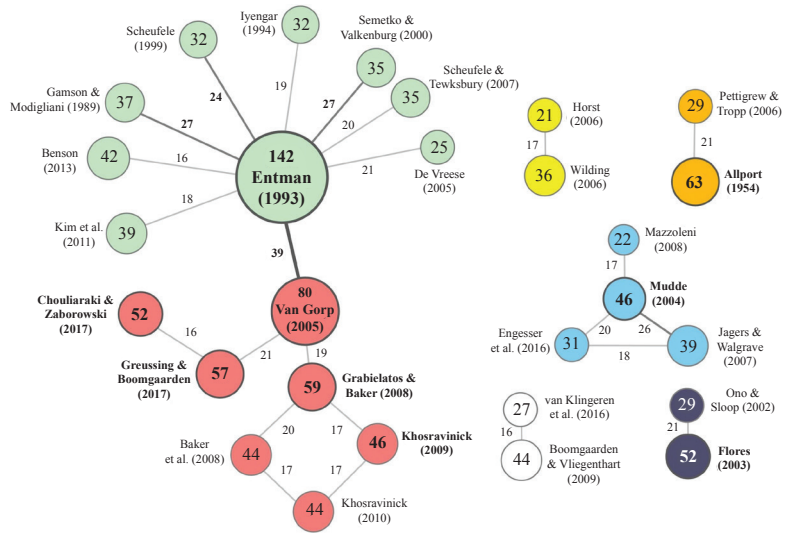
FIGURE 3
CO-WORD NETWORK



Note: Relationships with a frequency ≥ 10 are indicated.

Source: The authors with WOS data.

FIGURE 4
CO-CITATION NETWORK*



Note: relationships with a frequency ≥ 16 are indicated.
 * Complete references to the papers included in Figure 4 can be found at <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/YKXSJ>
 Source: The authors with WOS data.

The next largest community (in blue) comprises references to populism organized around Mudde (2004), with a gradient directed toward the presence of populist traits in political communication (Engesser et al., 2016; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) and their reflection in the media (Mazzoleni, 2008). The other components are dyads of isolated articles addressing matters such as rhetorical aspects of political and media discourse on immigration (Flores, 2003; Ono & Sloop, 2002); how media discourse affects attitudes to immigration (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; van Klingeren et al., 2015); communication dynamics in transnational contexts (Horst, 2006; Wilding, 2006); and psychological factors of inter-group communication (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

STUDY 2

Method: content analysis

The second study –closely linked with the first– was a systematic, objective and quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuen-dorf, 2017; Riffe et al., 2024), which began by extracting a probabilistic (95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error) and simple random sample of the population of study 1 ($N = 2\,844$). A total of $n = 340$ articles were compiled for in-depth observation. The selection of cases was coded equally ($n = 170$) by two authors of this paper, applying a codebook inspired by similar previous studies (Piñeiro-Naval et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Benito et al., 2023; Walter et al., 2018, among others). The instrument contains 16 variables (Table 5).

Data on the number of citations of each article, the language it is written in and indexing ranking of the journals were extracted directly from WOS, a strategy that enabled triangulation with manually inferred items. The 340 manuscripts were coded in May 2024. To measure intercoder reliability, a subsample of 34 cases (10%) was once again selected and observed by both judges. This was the only way to calculate Krippendorff's Alpha for each variable by using the KALPHA macro for SPSS (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). After the relevant calculations, average reliability for the nine variables requiring manual inference (five output context and four instrumentals, listed in Table 5 along with their specific reliability) amounted to: $M(\alpha_i) = .87$ ($SD = .13$).

TABLE 5
CODEBOOK SUMMARY*

Sections	Analysis variables	M (α_k)
General identification	1. Article number: 1-340	Not required
	2. Coder code: 1 = coder A, 2 = coder B	
	3. Year of publication: 2004-2023	
	4. Journal featuring the article (data retrieved from WOS)	
	5. WOS indexing ranking: 1 = SSCI, 2 = ESCI	
Output context	6. Article citations (data retrieved from WOS)	.90
	7. Number of authors ($\alpha_k = 1$, CI: 1, 1)	
	8. Gender of the first author ($\alpha_k = .77$, CI: .55, .94)	
	9. Affiliation of the first author ($\alpha_k = 1$, CI: 1, 1)	
	10. Article language (data retrieved from WOS)	
	11. Type of collaboration ($\alpha_k = .73$, CI: .51, .94)	
	12. Article funding ($\alpha_k = 1$, CI: 1, 1)	
Instrumental approximation	13. Work modality ($\alpha_k = 1$, CI: 1, 1)	.84
	14. Object of study ($\alpha_k = .82$, CI: .64, .95)	
	15. Main theory ($\alpha_k = .67$, CI: .47, .88)	
	16. Methodological technique ($\alpha_k = .89$, CI: .75, 1)	

Note: CI = Confidence Interval 95%, bootstrap = 10 000.

* The complete codebook, along with the original database extracted from WOS, SPSS matrices –main and intercoder reliability–, syntax and results files are available at <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/YKXSJ>

Source: The authors.

Content analysis results

According to the universe ($N = 2\,844$), the section on bibliometric analysis results already reported descriptive data on general variables (annual evolution of articles, journals, indexing rankings, etc.). Therefore, this section analyzes the output context and theoretical-methodological instrumentation of the sample ($n = 340$).

In terms of authorship, the average number of authors is $M = 2.06$ ($SD = 1.53$), with a range of 1-12 and a modal value of $Mo = 1$ (45.3%), followed by 2 (28.8%), 3 (16.2%) and 4 authors (4.4%). Only 3.2% are signed by 5 or more authors. There is no correlation between article impact and number of authors [$r(338) = .012, p = .828$]. What's more, most first authors are women (57.1%) versus men (42.4%), while the author's gender could not be determined in two cases (.6%). Most generally belong to universities (90%) and, to a lesser extent, public bodies (2.4%); no affiliation is specified in 7.6% of cases.

Given that the modal value of authors is 1, there is no collaboration in 45.3% of the articles. Where there is collaboration, inter-institutional (universities in the same country, 25%) is predominant, followed by intra-institutional (same institution, 22.4%) and, finally, international (universities in different countries, 7.4%). To complete the univariate report of output context items, just 22.9% of papers have additional funding, compared to 77.1% with no type of resources. At bivariate level, there are no statistically significant associations between the gender of the first author and article funding [$\chi^2(1, n = 338) = .34, p = .56$], or between type of collaboration and extra economic resources [$\chi^2(3, n = 340) = 3.654, p = .301$].

At instrumental level, the predominant paper type is empirical (90.3%), far ahead of theory-essay (9.4%) and methodological (0.3%). The most common object of study is message (47.4%), followed by audiences (25.3%), structure (11.5%), source (8.8%) and various objects (7.1%).

The theoretical background of output on immigration from communication is varied. According to data from study 2, cultural studies are most frequent (21.2%), then concepts related with the Internet and social media (14.7%), like big data or engagement, and thirdly, framing theory (6.5%). Theory triangulation (6.8%), gender studies (4.4%) and media literacy (2.4%) also stand out.

Finally, quantitative studies (43.5%) outnumber qualitative (26.2%) and method triangulation (8.5%). The remaining 21.8% are either theory-essay papers or the method used did not fit in any of the previously defined categories. Individually, content analysis

(30%) and survey (9.7%) are the favored quantitative techniques; interviews (10.3%) and discourse analysis (9.1%) for the qualitative.

Comparisons according to indexing and impact

A dual comparative strategy will be adopted to observe relationships between variables: according to article indexing first and then according to impact.

The number of authors does not vary significantly [$t(338) = 1.18$, $p = .12$] when published in SSCI ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.54$) or ESCI ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.5$). As could be expected, on the contrary, there are statistically significant differences in terms of impact [$t(338) = 4.68$, $p < .001$, $d = .603$], with articles indexed in SSCI ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 3.99$) having much more citations than those indexed in ESCI ($M = .78$, $SD = 1.15$). Table 6 shows a series of comparisons according to other codebook nominal variables.

In view of Table 6 and sorted by statistical significance and size, ranking differences can be observed by language, object of study, work modality and funding; there is no difference in terms of gender or methodological technique used.

Article impact is used for new comparisons in order to complete the report on the results of study 2. The first is the gender of the first author [$t(336) = 1.83$, $p = .034$, $d = .192$], where papers signed first by men ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 4.6$) are cited more than those signed by women ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 2.13$). However, there is no difference in impact at funding level [$t(338) = .016$, $p = .494$] between studies with support ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.92$) and those without ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 3.74$). Table 7 shows three more comparisons.

According to Table 7, impact only differs depending on language. Pairwise, articles in English clearly outperform their immediate followers in Spanish [$t(329) = 3.29$, $p < .001$, $d = .762$]. Finally, and as the sample only has one methodological article, the Student's t-test was run to compare the impact of empirical ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 3.54$) and theory-essay work ($M = .79$, $SD = 1.32$), with significant differences between them [$t(337) = 2.03$, $p = .021$, $d = .479$].

TABLE 6
COMPARISONS ACCORDING TO ARTICLE INDEXING RANKING (COLUMN %)

Gender of first author	Total %	Ranking		Pearson's χ^2
		SSCI	ESCI	
Male	42.6	43.8	40.4	$\chi^2 (1, n = 338) = .357, p = .55, v = .032$
Female	57.4	56.3	59.6	
<i>n</i>	338	224	114	
Paper funding				
No funding	77.1	72.3–	86.2+	$\chi^2 (1, n = 340) = 8.33, p = .004, v = .157$
Funding	22.9	27.7+	13.8–	
Language of publication				
English	86.6	97.8+	64.7–	$\chi^2 (3, n = 340) = 72.02, p < .001, v = .46$
Spanish	10.9	1.8–	28.4+	
Portuguese	1.2	0–	3.4+	
Others	1.5	.4–	3.4+	
Work modality				
Empirical	90.3	94.6+	81.9–	$\chi^2 (2, n = 340) = 14.77, p < .001, v = .208$
Theory-essay	9.4	5.4–	17.2+	
Methodological	.3	0	.9	

	Total%	Ranking		Pearson's χ^2
		SSCI	ESCI	
Object of study				
Source	8.8	10.3	6	$\chi^2 (4, n = 340) = 16.21, p = .003, v = .218$
Message	47.4	46	50	
Audience	25.3	28.6+	19-	
Structure	11.5	7.1-	19.8+	
Various	7.1	8	5.2	
<i>n</i>	340	224	116	
Methodological technique				
Quantitative	55.6	58.2	50	$\chi^2 (2, n = 266) = 2.18, p = .337, v = .09$
Qualitative	33.5	32.4	35.7	
Triangulation	10.9	9.3	14.3	
<i>n</i>	266	182	84	

- Statistically lower value (corrected standardized residual analysis)

+ Statistically higher value (corrected standardized residual analysis)

Source: The authors.

TABLE 7
COMPARISONS ACCORDING TO ANNUAL AVERAGE IMPACT IN NUMBER OF CITATIONS (ANOVA)

Comparative variables	Average annual impact			ANOVA
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
Language				
English	2.22	3.59	294	$F(3, 336) = 4.64, p = .003, \eta^2 = .04$
Spanish	.27	.47	37	
Portuguese	0	0	4	
Others	.15	.19	5	
Object of study				
Source	1.68	2.03	30	$F(4, 335) = 1.38, p = .24, \eta^2 = .016$
Message	1.99	2.83	161	
Audience	2.26	5.08	86	
Structure	.88	1.23	39	
Various	2.54	3.14	24	
Total	1.95	3.41	340	
Methodological technique				
Quantitative	2.44	4.49	148	$F(2, 263) = 2.31, p = .101, \eta^2 = .017$
Qualitative	1.41	1.95	89	
Triangulation	1.88	2.31	29	
Total	2.03	3.64	266	

Source: The authors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section summarizes and discusses the main findings to fulfil the general goal: to characterize the production indexed in the “Communication” category of WOS dealing with migratory phenomena between 2004 and 2023.

First, Figure 1 shows a growing trend in the number of articles published each year (H1), as previously indicated by Eberl et al. (2018), Seo and Kavakli (2022) and Collado-Alonso et al. (2024). However, some historical events have marked clear turning points, such as the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War (2011), the peak of the migratory crisis in Europe (2015) and border tensions between the United States and Mexico, aggravated since late 2020. Following this logic, the Russia-Ukraine (2022), Israel-Hamas (2023) and United States-Iran (2026) wars will foreseeably garner attention from researchers in the coming years as migratory and refugee flows will increase drastically in the respective areas of conflict.

Average annual impact of this output, however, follows a downward line, although articles indexed in SSCI have greater impact than those in ESCI. The most proactive journals in SSCI are Anglo-Saxon, while in ESCI (fewer) there is a wider variety of geographic origins. Papers are therefore predominantly written in English although Spanish scrapes a perceptible position in ESCI. This Anglo-Saxon predominance is also observed in author university affiliation; the United States is the most represented and the United Kingdom third, with Spain sitting in between. All these findings are consistent with the logic of academic output on this issue given that Anglo-Saxon tradition has been the forerunner in this research (Collado-Alonso et al., 2024).

The most common descriptors after “immigration” and “migration” are “social media” and “refugees”. “Facebook” and “Twitter” are also present, which allows us to infer that studies on social media have a similar relevance to studies on the press (H2). The notion of “immigration” is often linked to the content analysis of news frames (Figure 3), a finding in line with the core role played in the co-citation network (Figure 4) by such outstanding authors in the field as Entman (1993) or Van Gorp (2005).

On the other hand, while the average number of authors is 2, modal practice is just one author. This means that international collaboration

is rather sporadic (RQ1). With Leen d'Haenens as the flagship scholar, women usually sign articles first, perhaps due to the social implications (RQ2). However, papers led by women have significantly less impact than those by men. Funding is generally quite scarce (RQ3), although more frequent in SSCI than ESCI.

At an instrumental level, studies are mainly empirical, as clearly seen in SSCI, while theory-essay papers also have a certain presence in ESCI. In addition to its interest and scientific notoriety, indexing is one reason to explain the greater average impact of the former (SSCI) compared to the latter (ESCI). As for object of study, message is favored (H2), followed by audiences in SSCI and structure in ESCI. With message as the main element of observation, the most widely used methods are content and discourse analysis (H4), while the most common theoretical frameworks are the paradigm of cultural studies, followed by concepts linked with social media (engagement, big data, etc.) and framing theory (H3), as previously detected by Eberl et al. (2018), Gonçalves and David (2022) and Cortés-Martínez et al. (2024).

Based on these numerous findings, the parameters of a classic SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) can be used to summarize the primary conclusions of this paper.

The main strengths include a growing trend in research focusing on this issue, which testifies to the increasing value given to migratory phenomena in the field of communication. Likewise, response to the various historical events during the timeframe studied—with a substantial increase in number of articles—is highly significant; in other words, the academic world reacts to events almost instantly. It is also important to highlight that there are no gender gaps in paper leadership; in fact, women dominate research on (im)migration from a communication perspective even though their impact is lower than men, as already pointed out by Goyanes et al. (2023). In this regard, Torrado-Morales et al. (2025) point out that, although the visibility of women researchers in Ibero-America has improved, the so-called “Matilda effect” (Ros-siter, 1993) persists, as they are not cited in the same proportion as male authors. Therefore, there is a need to continue monitoring this academic output to determine whether, in the coming years, its impact will reach parity.

Two other aspects can be highlighted as weaknesses. The first is related to the hegemonic vision of developed countries (Demeter, Goyanes et al., 2022a), where the origin of the main journals and affiliation universities of the most prolific authors are concentrated. These nations receive immigration so it would be essential to hear the perspective of researchers from other latitudes, such as Latin America (Ganter & Ortega, 2019) or Africa (Fengler et al., 2022), which are emigrating regions. Geopolitics and neoliberalism in the production of knowledge generate asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South, which become clear in databases such as WOS and Scopus (Carrasco-Campos & Saperas, 2021), where English and positivism assert their hegemony over other languages and traditions.

The second weakness stems from the lack of experimental studies. In view of the results, the predominance of the observational paradigm is evident as messages garner the attention of most researchers, who continue to opt for classic techniques such as content or discourse analysis, and for theoretical frameworks as well-established as framing. This reality is indicative of both the standardization and the instrumentalization of research processes, which result in an investigation that is less epistemologically diverse (Sierra-Gutiérrez, 2016) and, at the end, determined by the logic of “publish or perish”.

In connection with the above paragraph, opportunities include balancing the analysis of media representation with studying how this communication is received and its impact, which would enhance the measurement of media effects, as already advocated more a decade ago by Valkenburg and Peter (2013). Greater international collaboration between authors would also encourage more comparative works and help to better understand a phenomenon that has no concept of borders.

Finally, the main threats split in two directions. Regarding funding, the few additional resources available to researchers limit scope and sophistication; while in epistemological terms, the residual space occupied by theory-essay reflection and the proposal of new research methodologies means these papers have a lower impact, fundamental for the advancement of the field as a complement to empirical studies.

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