

# 25 years of research in online organizational communication. Review article

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## Abstract

25 years ago, organizations consolidated their digital communication and researchers began their study. The article analyzes and evaluates the trends, findings and main future challenges of the discipline from the thematic and methodological point of view. All the articles published on the subject in the main journals included in the *Journal Citation Reports (JCR)* are studied through an analysis sheet designed for this research and a qualitative study of the topics and hermeneutics. The results indicate a continued increase in interest in the object of study from a largely deterministic and descriptive perspective that offers an overview of the evolution of communication in organizations linked to technological innovations. Emerging issues and challenges include hybrid communication, communication through instant web messaging and robotization and their growing influence on society, especially in political elections and referendums.

## Keywords

Organizational communication; Corporate communication; Digital communication; Academic research; Research methods; Literature review; Social networks; Big data; Review article.

## 1. Introduction: from communication 1.0 to automation

Come 2020, 25 years will have passed since the scientific community began researching online organizational communication. From the 1990s, a decade in which media outlets dumped content designed and developed from an off-line perspective onto their omnipresent and mostly static websites, to present-day monitoring of consumers' habits through big data and the automated production and dissemination of information, media departments have undergone significant changes.

The arrival of digital organizational communication is a watershed in the history of organizational communication with repercussions in the field of communication and the surrounding systems. Following a phase of homogeneous strategies

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and similar pathways, organizations began to rely upon new technology and tactics suited to their strategic situation. Communication managers began to focus on new publics, emphasize storytelling, develop new languages and narratives such as crossmedia, transmedia and 360°, and leverage social networks as well as mobile and automated communications.

At the same time, researchers and academics developed a system to understand these changes, theorize, and signal new challenges and opportunities in the now 25-year-old field. Developments over the past quarter century have been significant enough so as to call for a serious review of trends in new technology and the challenges that will arise from it. To that end, we propose a systematic review of the articles published in the most influential journals over the last 25 years. Analysing these studies will allow us to understand the field's depiction of online organizational communication, the assumed concepts, functions and theoretical frameworks, and what emerging nuances are neither identified nor considered. Indeed, it is an apt time to review and evaluate trends and findings and identify future challenges in terms of research in the field's subject matter and methodology.

## 2. Methodology

Our methodology follows in the footsteps of previous reviews (**Boerman; Kruikemeier; Zuiderveen, 2017; Wiencierz; Röttger, 2017**), the ones that justify each of the sections below). We set out to analyse trends in academic research on online organizational communication from its onset to the present. Our primary goal is to examine the current state of research and establish a framework that suggests starting points for future studies. We will analyse emerging approaches, the major premises, methods and subjects of the research, as well as strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, we will answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How frequently do topics related to organizational communication appear in communication journals published from 1995 to 2019?

RQ2. In which countries are these articles published?

RQ3. What are the major methods, subjects and goals of this research?

RQ4: How is the reality of organizational communication depicted in the research?

RQ5: What have been the most significant changes over the last 25 years?

RQ6: What challenges does the field face in the near future?

### 2.1. Sample selection and size

We've included articles that deal with organizational communication, though sometimes under different names or broader subject matter. Our meta-research is based on exhaustive reviews of primary academic sources by **Lipsey and Wilson** in 2001 and **Barranquero and Ángel** in 2015. Following a qualitative exploration of scientific research in the field, we performed a convenience sampling of the most renowned journals so as to analyse the frequency and significance of online organizational communication within the over-arching field of communication itself. We also chose two specific, influential journals to include more articles and perform an in-depth qualitative analysis on the foundations of our research topic. The sample consists of the top ten journals ranked by *Journal Citation Reports* (2017) in the communication category and two specifically related to the topic of our research, to wit, *Public relations review* (39<sup>th</sup> place) and *Journal of public relations research* (41<sup>st</sup> place). We reviewed the journals' digital archives and determined that the first article found therein with the requisite characteristics was published in 1995 and the most recent in 2019, thus the 25-year period analysed in this study. This period is in keeping with that of previous research by **Ye and Ki** in 2012 in which the author chose 1992 because it marked the first calendar year after the public debut of the World Wide Web on August 6, 1991. Lastly, we've made no distinction between articles allowing access free of charge and those requiring payment.

The final sample size, 161 articles, is similar to that of other recent reviews by **Ye and Ki** in 2012 (115 articles); **Morehouse and Saffer** in 2018 (157 articles); and **Wirtz and Zimbres** in 2018 (79 articles and chapters).

### 2.2. Unit of analysis

We've chosen articles as the unit of analysis so as to avoid the redundancy in the data that could arise due to the fact that many documents and conferences are subsequently published within articles. Moreover, although the inclusion of unpublished manuscripts as part of a meta-analysis can be bias-limiting tool, **Kosenko, Luurs and Binder** (2017) reference **Ferguson and Brannick's** (2012 cited in **Kosenko, Luurs; Binder, 2017**), study which showed that this practice can have the opposite effect. To be part of the sample, we required that articles reference at least one of the concepts historically associated with organizational communication, regardless of the authors' stated adherence or lack thereof to this tradition (**Barranquero, Ángel, 2015**).

### 2.3. Codifying the literature

The data categories (see below) were designed using inductive reasoning, and despite being tailored to this study, they are based on previous research (**Ye; Ki, 2012; Caers et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014; Barranquero; Ángel, 2015; Kosenko; Luurs; Binder, 2017; Trillo-Domínguez; Alberich-Pascual, 2017**).

1. The article's general characteristics: name of journal in which it appears, year of publication, number of authors, authors' location;
2. Information on the article's dissemination: total number of citations, citations in the past five years;
3. The journal's general characteristics;
4. Research approaches (empirical versus non-empirical and quantitative vs qualitative vs mixed);
5. Research methods. Qualitative (such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies, qualitative content analysis, etc.), quantitative (such as quantitative content analysis, surveys, experiments, etc.) or a combination of the two;
6. Sample. We measured the sample size and determined the sampling method (probability or non-probability). Probability sampling was broken down into simple random, stratified random, systematic, random, cluster and multistage sampling. Nonprobability sampling was divided into convenience, intentional, quota and snowball sampling;
7. Number of units of analysis in each study;
8. Period analysed. We determined whether the studies examine specific topics in specific moments or whether they deal with a longer period;
9. Country in which the study was conducted;
10. Research topics. In keeping with articles on online communication by **Tomasello** (2001) and **Ye, Ki** (2012), we've developed the following categories for this study: The Internet in general, narratives, organizational communication in general, journalists, audience relations, artificial intelligence, mobile communication, crisis communication, the web, dialogism, democracy, e-mail, blogs, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, social networks, the legal system.
11. Empirical or theoretical approach.
12. Fields of research
13. Statistical analysis made explicit in the article: frequency, correlation, SD, M, regression, T-Test, Chi-squared, reliability and factorial analysis.
14. Multidisciplinary. Per **Locker** (1994), a study is considered multidisciplinary when it is based on theories from more than one discipline or field and employs multiple data collection and analysis methods.
15. Innovation and forward thinking. We note whether the article directly advocates for significant changes in the theory or methodology employed in communication research and the profession itself or lays out future challenges in a novel way.

In our analysis we use two descriptive statistics, to wit, frequency and mode.

### 3. Data analysis

In this section we perform a three-pronged analysis of research in online organizational communication:

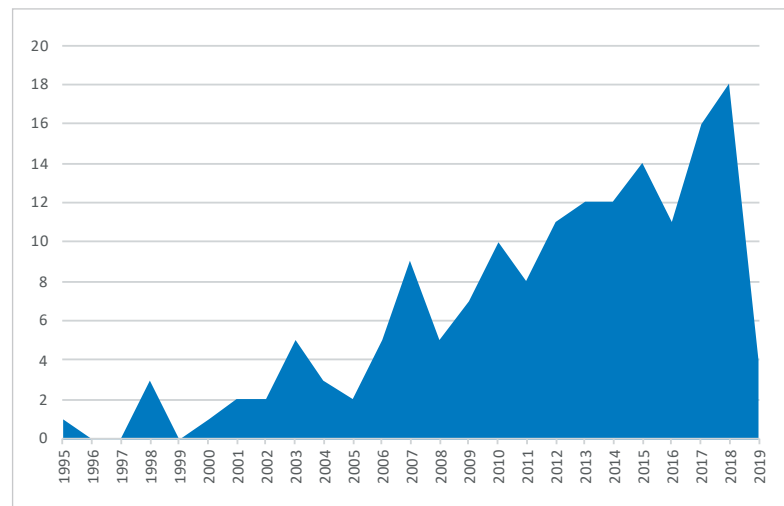
- First, we consider elements of paradiscourse that condition the perspective and portrayal of the research subject.
- Second, we analyse the intradiscursive elements that influence the narrative through the methodology employed and the selection of the research topic (how the research is conducted).
- Lastly, we take into account interdiscursive elements, that is, the characteristics of the narrative that allow us to determine the contents of the research (we elaborate in section 4).

In terms of paradiscourse, what most stands out is the numerical, spatial and temporal mapping of research in the field. At first we detected 455 articles that could be linked to online organizational communication, but after a closer look, we determined that only 161 of them met our criteria (Table 1). Those articles that failed to deal specifically with organizational communication were excluded.

Table 1. Distribution of articles by journal

Journal	Number of articles	Percentage (%)	Rank in JCR
1. <i>Journal of computer-mediated communication</i>	8	4.96	1
2. <i>Journal of communication</i>	3	1.86	2
3. <i>Communication research</i>	5	3.10	3
4. <i>New media &amp; society</i>	1	0.62	4
5. <i>Information, communication &amp; society</i>	0	0	5
6. <i>Journal of advertising</i>	0	0	6
7. <i>Comunicar</i>	0	0	7
8. <i>Political communication</i>	1	0.62	8
9. <i>Communication theory</i>	0	0	9
10. <i>Media psychology</i>	0	0	10
11. <i>Journal of public relations research</i>	18	11.18	39
12. <i>Public relations review</i>	125	77.63	41

Descriptive research of online organizational communication, in lieu of more analytical or approaches involving theorizing, began to take shape alongside the emergence of the profession itself, evidenced in that the oldest article in our sample dates back to 1995. Ever since, the literature has grown steadily and at an especially significant rate since 2010, as evidenced in that 60.39% of the articles in the sample were written in the last seven years (Figure 1). The research comes predominantly from the United States, with 66.45% of the articles authored by researchers at universities in said country.



Graph 1. Articles published per year

In terms of discourse, the transversal vision underlying most of the research tends to be practical and aims to describe organizational communication in different sectors and, above all, identify future challenges and goals. From this perspective, the vast majority of researchers carry out empirical studies (100% of the articles in the *Journal of public relations research*, *Communication research*, *New media & society* and *Political communication*; 96.8% in *Public relations review*; and 33.33% in the *Journal of communication*).

The articles fall into four major categories.

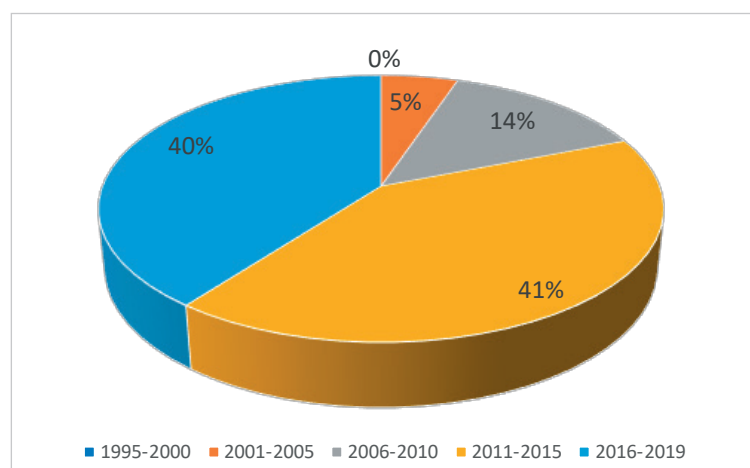
- First are the articles that fundamentally describe how new technology is being used to generate communication, which tend to focus on websites and social networks, primarily *Twitter*, and to a lesser extent, *Facebook* and *Instagram*. This type of research has two peaks but is steady throughout the period studied.
- Theoretical research is also present throughout the period, though it is uncommon, appears randomly and shows a lack of cohesion in its evolution, while focusing on the influence and future of new technology.
- In studies that largely took place between 2003 and 2014, the same pattern arises in analyses of how various groups, such as communication directors, journalists and digital publics, perceive organizational communication.
- Comprehensive case studies (9.31% of the sample), mostly on organizational communication surrounding a single event, election cycle or media outlet, have only been conducted over the last 10 years. More than half of the articles analysed focus on social networks and webpages.

Statistics are used sparingly, and frequency is the one measure used by every empirical study that directly deals with statistics (n=154, 95.65%). As seen in Figure 2, the use of this statistic is on the rise, and 86.76% of the articles that use it were published in the last six years (n=21). After frequency, the most used statistics are standard deviation, mean and reliability, with each coming in at 3.24% of the articles using statistics (n=5), followed by (n=3, 2.59%), regression and Anova (n=2, 1.29%), and finally T-Test, Chi-square and factorial analysis, each at 0.64%.

Studies employing qualitative methods make up 17.39% of the total, with 82.14% of them published in the last nine years, obviously due to the increase in articles published in this time frame. The most used qualitative method was the in-depth interview (46.2%), followed by literature review as the sole qualitative method employed in articles (25%), qualitative content analysis (17.85%), and focus groups, netnographic observation and Delphi each at 3.57%.

In terms of quantitative methods, content analysis (n=65, 63.72%), surveys (n=25, 24.05%) and experiments (n=12, 11.74%) round out the top three. We were unable to determine a correlation between their usage and the article's publication date.

The sampling method is probabilistic (simple random) half of the time and non-probabilistic the other half (7.6% snowball, 10.25% discretionary, 28.20% convenience sampling and 2.56% stratified). The sample sizes vary a great deal even in similar studies conducted by the same journal or magazine, such as



Graph 2. Percentage of articles that make use of statistics

those by *Fortune 500*. In most cases, there is no justification for the selected sample nor for the so-called valid sample size. The units of analysis are largely:

- creators of organizational communication (communication directors, 23.8%);
- targets of organizational communication (20.23%);
- posts on social networks (21.42%);
- websites and blogs;
- news stories (1.19%);
- internal organizational communications (1.19%); and
- other experts (1.19%).

The time frames analysed tend to be static, which makes it hard to make generalizations about the data.

#### 4. From websites to hybrid communication

Research in online organizational communication has adopted a largely empirical perspective with the specific goal of describing the field's evolution through practical cases whose findings would ideally allow researchers to propose solutions to problems in the application of new technologies. Knowledge on the topic was to revolve around three major axes:

- websites,
- social networks, and
- hybrid communication.

These axes are complemented by three overarching concerns:

- dialogue,
- crisis communication, and
- organizations' commitment to corporate social responsibility.

We evaluate research on each of these axes based by analysing the studies in our data sample as they pertain to each axis, in addition to secondary issues and emerging subjects of study.

##### 4.1. Innovation in technology

Since the end of the 1990s, organizations have aimed to establish their online presence translating off-line space-time concepts to the Internet vis à vis websites. Researchers, using already established methodology and with descriptive results, have tried to shed light on the dynamics created in this two decades old process. In one of the field's most influential studies (with 753 citations as of March 2019), **Esrock y Leichty** described in 1998 the significance of the Internet through a random sampling study of *Fortune 500* companies, of which 90% already had websites. Two years later, the authors established one of the first typologies of corporate websites based on a random sample of *Fortune 500* companies and laid out a line of research that would be solidified by more researchers in the decades to come, as evidenced by the latter paper's 440 citations as of March 2019.

Initial websites were static and lacked press rooms (**Callison, 2003; Kirat, 2007**), operated as document repositories, used mostly traditional means of communication such as press releases and bios about company directors, and feature little interactivity (**Reber; Kim, 2006; Kang; Norton, 2004; 2006; Ayish, 2005; Greer; Moreland, 2007; Connolly-Ahern; Broadway, 2007; Searson; Johnson, 2010**), all the while the research community defended the importance of the dialogical function, (**Lee; Park, 2013; Duke, 2002**) which comprises a separate line of research in our analysis.

In addition to dialogue, researchers focused a great deal of attention on organizational hyperlink networks, as these networks influence which entities and results are most visible on search engines and are themselves influenced by various factors (**Fu; Shumate, 2016; Shumate, 2012**).

Comparative research among different countries also reveals that most entities have corporate websites, but they lack reliability, updates and efficiency (**González-Herrero; Ruiz-De-Valbuena, 2006**). Moreover, online PR/communication departments share few features in common (**Moss et al., 2017**). Indeed, each organization sets up its department based on its individual circumstances, leading to different findings in case studies (**Hallahan, 2001; Greer; Moreland, 2003; Callahan, 2005; Vorvoreanu, 2006; Woo; An; Cho, 2008; Sommerfeldt, 2013; Atakan-Duman; Ozdora-Aksak, 2014**, among others).

One defining characteristic of research in organizational communication is a constant comparison of emerging and existing technology. Revolving around this first axis, we see studies that highlight the convenience of using blogs instead of traditional websites, as they lead to increased trust, satisfaction and commitment to interactivity (**Seltzer; Mitrook, 2007; Porter et al., 2007; Xifra; Huertas, 2008; Yang; Lim, 2009; Kelleher; Miller, 2006**). In their 2013 study, **Aström y Karlsson** criticise reigning technological determinism and point out how ideology shapes the use of blogs in election campaigns.

The second axis around which researchers have described organizational communication is, again, that of technological innovation. Ever since social network pages such as *MySpace* and *Facebook* began allowing corporations to create profi-

les, the latter have incorporated this space into their communication management. Researchers, much like communication directors who avail themselves of networks (**Moreno et al.**, 2015) and the public (**Sung; Kim**, 2014), embraced the arrival of social networks almost without criticism.

Again, researchers conducted studies from a technological perspective, analysing the use of a single social network in a reduced space-time period. **Choy** (2018) provides an exception in his 2018 analysis of *Facebook* in Hong Kong, offering a cultural discourse perspective through which the author analyses sociocultural aspects in comments on posts.

Across the contexts in which it was studied, researchers highlighted the platform's potential in terms of bidirectionality, interactivity, dialogue and engagement (**Utz; Schultz; Glocka**, 2013; **Vesnic-Alujevic**, 2012; **Abitbol; Lee**, 2017; **Ji et al.**, 2018; **Gálvez-Rodríguez; Caba-Pérez; López-Godoy**, 2014; **Painter**, 2015; **Guidry et al.**, 2017), but according to **Carim** and **Warwichk's** 2013 study on UK companies and **Maiorescu's** 2018 study on *IBM* and unionism, the totality of the platform's interactive potential is not leveraged. Despite *Facebook's* and other social media's potential, some researchers have pointed out the inherent risk in using social networks during crises (**Ott; Theunissen**, 2015) and questioned the relationship between what researchers term the *potential* of social media and its actual effectiveness (**Taylor; Kent**, 2010).

In their 2009 study, one of our sample's most cited (1,254 citations as of March 2019), **Waters et al.** point out that in the case of nonprofits, although having a profile does not itself increase awareness nor lead to increased engagement, solid planning and research can improve communication management. Other studies indicate the need for an appropriate (**Bashir; Aldaihani**, 2017; **Sievert; Scholz**, 2017) and situation-specific strategy, as put by **Adjei, Ammor-Frempong** and **Bosompem**, who in 2016 pointed out that NGOs in Ghana use networks differently depending on which sector they operate in. Digital publics, moreover, perceive communication based on sources, topics and strategy (**Formentin; Bortree; Fraustino**, 2017). In 2015, **Lovari & Parisi** typify Italian digital publics based on their engagement with Italian municipalities' *Facebook* pages, and per **Johns's** 2014 study, one can begin to see the need for an integrated social media strategy.

*Twitter* warrants special mention among social networks for being the most analysed, particularly in the field of political organizational communication (**LaMarre; Suzuki-Lambrecht**, 2013; **Adams; McCorkindale**, 2013; **Peng et al.**, 2016; **Dodd; Collins**, 2017; **Gálvez-Rodríguez et al.**, 2018) but also in sports (**Brown; Billings**, 2013) and the corporate world (**Rybalko; Seltzer**, 2010). The platform enjoys a positive perception, given that using it increases credibility, conversation, affective communication, and mitigation of blame in crises (**Hwang**, 2013; **Xiong; Cho; Boatwright**, 2019; **Liu; Lai; Xu**, 2018). To that end, in 2015 **Brummette** and **Sisco** spoke to its capacity to measure public sentiment, which is linked to another concept we will address, to wit, big data.

Researchers also point out a high potential for interactivity but little leverage of this feature (**Waters; Jamal**, 2011; **Lovejoy; Waters; Saxton**, 2012) and hint at the need for hybridization (**Watkins**, 2017).

The last —and still nascent— axis in research is hybrid communication. Researchers such as **Chadwick** in 2013 and **Hamilton** in 2016 have begun shining a light on hybrid communication in those organizations who meld online and offline actions. This line of study may have begun through those studies on the digital ecosystem that overcome the limitations of single-channel studies (**Freberg; Palenchar; Veil**, 2007; **Hon**, 2015; **Muralidharan; Dillistone; Shin**, 2011; **Kleinnijenhuis et al.**, 2015), and may continue vis à vis the search for new concepts and methodologies. In 2017, **Penney** compared the structure and content of several organizational networks to improve the hybrid online campaign ecosystem found in the 2016 US presidential elections. In 2015, **Taiminen, Luoma-aho** and **Tolvanen** (2015) introduced the concept of *transparent communicative organizations* to analyse the creation of hybrid content and suggested four hybrid ways to engage the public in support of such communicative organizations:

- identify the source to generate trust;
- practice bidirectional transparency to invite user feedback;
- create spaces focused on the interested parties to generate engagement; and
- publish content on the organization's track record to build long-term engagement.

#### 4.2. Dialogue as a fundamental premise and emerging subjects

Alongside the three major axes, researchers focused on three transversal points:

- dialogue (from 1995 to the present),
- crisis communication (the last 10 years) and
- organizational involvement linked to corporate social responsibility (the last 10 years).

Regarding dialogue, **Kent** and **Taylor's** theoretical framework stands out (1,256 citations as of March 2019 since its publication in 1998), which provides five strategies for communication professionals to create dialogue-based relationships with the public and which was applied in different case studies (**Sommerfeldt; Kent; Taylor**, 2012; **Madichie; Hinson**, 2014; **Gordon; Berhow**, 2009) with large acceptance and few alterations or alternative models (such as **Rafaelli's** interactivity model from 1988, applied by **Avidar** in the latter's 2013 study). The literature highlights the importance of dialogism (**Yang; Kang; Johnson**, 2010;

“ Researchers are beginning to study communication in the organization from a systemic and hybrid point of view ”

Sisson, 2017a; Aula, 2011; Du-Plessis, 2018; Heath, 1998; McAllister; Taylor, 2007; Bortree; Seltzer, 2009) and the lack of interactivity (Lee, 2012; Capriotti; Pardo-Kuklinski, 2012) in spite of websites having the requisite technology and design (Taylor; Kent; White, 2001). In addition to corroborating both premises, Tsai and Men's 2018 study seeks to propose new theories for network dialogue and establishes categories for dialogic principles.

Theunissen and Noordin (2012) critically analyse the philosophical foundations and the tenets of dialogue from a multi-disciplinary perspective and point out how it has hereto been deemed one in the same —without any serious criticism— to bidirectional communication.

Over the last 10 years, a significant number of studies have analysed online communication from the lens of crises, and have attempted to identify the key elements of its success through case studies (Tan; Pang; Kang, 2019; Jiang; Luo; Kulemeka, 2016). Other authors, in addition to pointing out the significance of crisis communication, have called attention to the risks it poses to an organization's reputation and legitimacy (Madden; Janoske; Briones, 2016), the likelihood that it may increase uncertainty and the possible decrease in source reliability regardless of the technology used (Van-Zoonen; Van-der-Meer, 2015; Ha; Riffe, 2015).

Corporate social responsibility has also been the subject of study among the articles in our sample, primarily over the last 10 years. Among the major challenges faced by researchers is that of how to conceptualize a company's commitment.

Most organizations have a plan for corporate social responsibility, but with low levels of interactivity (Gómez; Chalmeta, 2011). The link between these two concepts is not clearly defined in the literature's findings. While some studies suggest a significant influence (Guillory; Sundar, 2014; Men; Tsai, 2014; Sisson, 2017b; Devin; Lane, 2014), others, such as Hopp and Tiffany's 2016 study, sever the direct link between interaction on social media and commitment in favour of a scale.

Some less-studied subjects include:

- the characteristics of communication directors (Matilla; Cuenca-Fontbona; Compte-Pujol, 2007; Molleda; Moreno; Navarro, 2017; Moreno *et al.*, 2010);
- online security and hacking (Erickson; Howard, 2007; Hallahan, 2004);
- e-mail signatures (Rains; Young, 2006);
- efforts to hide front groups (Pfau *et al.*, 2007);
- evaluations of international and non-governmental organizations (O'Neil, 2013);
- databases (Thomsen, 1995) and
- influence on journalists' and public perception (Ryan, 2003; Kitchen; Panopoulos, 2010; Distaso; McCorkindale; Wright, 2011; Obermaier; Koch; Riesmeyer, 2018).

Lastly, some topics may be widely studied in the following years (Figure 1). We break them down into four categories.

1) Big data, activists and monitoring. Woods (2019) explains how activist organizations can co-opt existing narratives to build legitimacy for their issues and arguments. The latest stage is the application of artificial intelligence, and in this regard Galloway and Swiatek (2018) underscore the importance not in communication directors becoming experts in technology, but rather in recognizing their potential in organizational communication.

2) New narratives and languages. This line of research is just beginning with studies by Brubaker *et al.* (2018) and Fraustino *et al.* (2018).

3) Cell phones. Although there is interaction through smart phones between organizations and publics (Galloway, 2005), it is rare (McCorkindale; Morgoch, 2013) and inferior to that on other channels. Furthermore, users perceive this engagement as primarily beneficial for the organizations, and less so for themselves, in contrast with findings on user opinions of other communication channels (Avidar *et al.*, 2015).

4) Mobile-based social messengers. This subject could be particularly relative in political communication, where it may even decide an election. Tsai and Men pointed out in their 2018 study that messengers such as *WeChat* may be more effective than social media networks because users consider them an integral part of their lives and within their private realm.

## 5. Conclusions

This article analyses the literature on online organizational communication published over the last 25 years. Our findings reveal a growing area of study, particularly over the last seven years, in which scientific studies have focused primarily on describing and analysing the introduction of new technologies by organizational communication directors and their effects on digital publics. Conservative in terms of hermeneutics and their methodologies, researchers' depiction of online organizational communication focuses on the tools big tech companies (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, etc.) offer and which communication departments take up often without question. Conducted from a descriptive and primarily deterministic vantage point (Aström; Karlsson, 2013), researchers have primarily aimed to describe how organizational communication has used these tools and the consequences thereof.

The analytical model sticks out for failing to set limits and due to technological innovations as demonstrated in related fields of study. There are some exceptions, as seen in the articles that theorize about dialogism or reflect on democracy

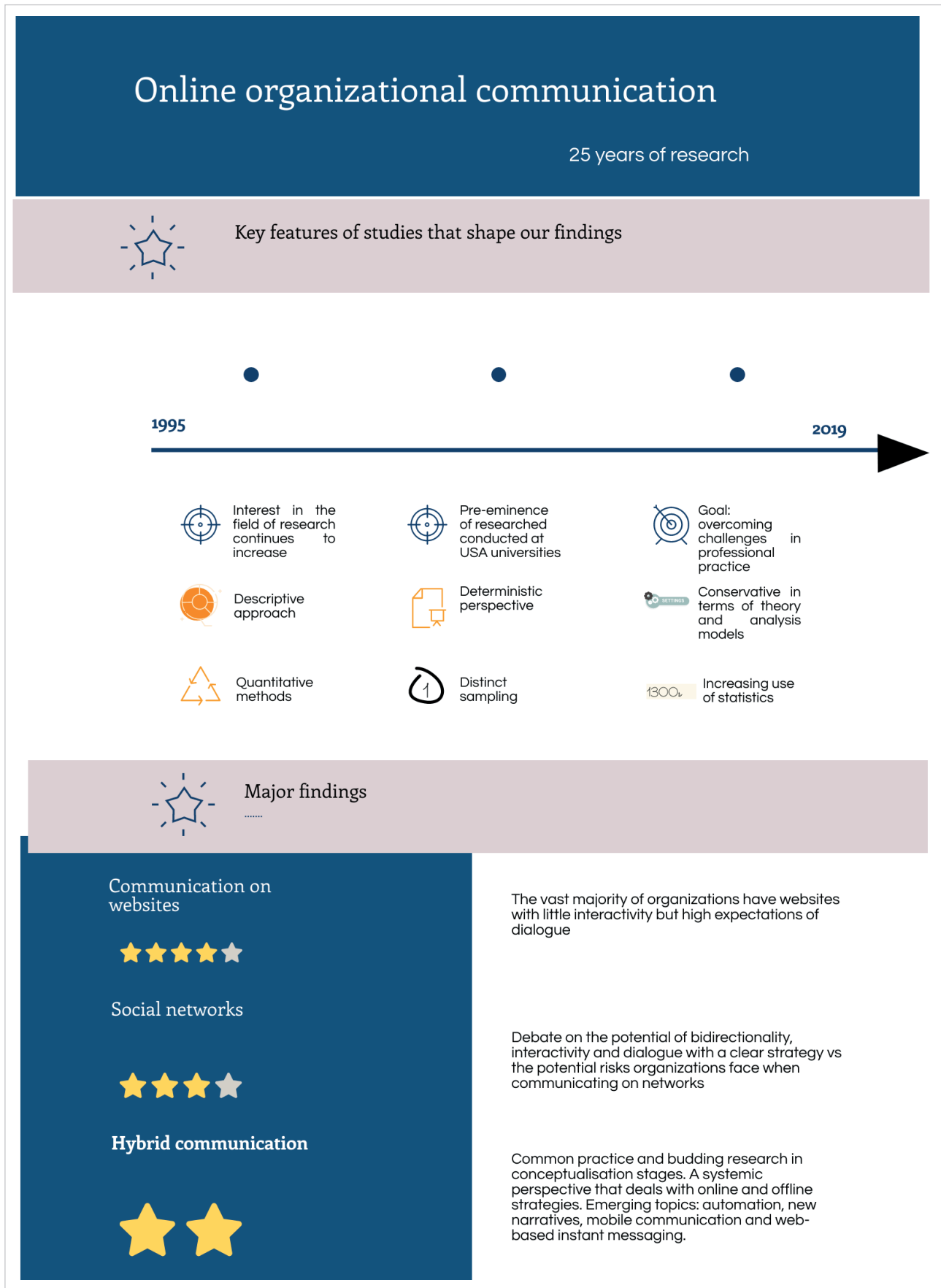


Figure 1. Online organizational communication. Made using Piktochart



from the perspective of organizational communication (Davis, 2010; Edwards, 2015), though they also fall within the conceptual framework of technological innovation, essentially websites and social networks.

Rarely have researchers changed their model or used an analytics model version 2.0, with which to study not only the messages created *by* an organization (from the perspectives of production by said organization and reception by media publics), but, above all, those created by and *about* the organization outside the online spaces it identifies as its own.

The framing of the research subject is narrow and limited to praxis in one location, one platform and sometimes specific tools, with barely any interrelations between the digital and analogue spheres. Though this practice comprises part of an overall strategy used by communication directors, research focuses separately on each element instead of analysing the system as a whole.

Contrary to previous findings on related fields such as public relations (Huang; Wu; Huang, 2017), we have been unable to detect a paradigm shift or identify any general theorizing on online communication and its influence on society, due to, among other factors, a lack of multidisciplinary studies which would make it possible to establish correlation and provide contextualised explanations of causes and effects. Indeed, most of the articles we've analysed are case studies circumscribed to single organizations and specific periods that do not allow us to reach generalized findings.

The future bodes well for the field, in light of a significant increase in the attention researchers pay to online organizational communication and an already relatively extensive body of literature on the topic. Still pending is the task of adapting the methodology to the online world, one of systematic, comparative studies which allows us to understand the reality of organizational communication in society.

It is time to adapt the methodology to the digital world, of carrying out systematic, comparative studies that allow us to understand the reality of organizational communication within a society

We propose several concrete challenges for the upcoming years:

- Solidifying specific analytical models and methodologies and conducting multidisciplinary studies.
- Studies that provide generalized results at a broader scale, beyond just one entity or country.
- Multidisciplinary theorizing and determination of the origins and evolution of concepts, going beyond the mere collection of studies and reports on online organizational communication, which impedes generalization and theorizing.
- Going beyond descriptive perspectives.
- Applying systematic perspectives for contextualising the use of technology.
- Studying automation and big data.
- The relevance of positive and negative audience segmentation in organizational communication is not reflected in the research in this field (the focus is almost entirely on universal audiences).

Overcoming these challenges would allow us to perform a comprehensive analysis of organizational communication, rather than analyses that focus on specific outlets, sectors or the use of technology, and to understand its increasingly important role in society and its myriad processes, including those as significant as elections (Filer; Fredheim, 2015; Bessi; Ferrara, 2016; Sanovich, 2017; Hedman *et al.*, 2018) or Brexit (Howard; Kollanyi, 2016).

The robotization of the production and circulation of information is one of the challenges for the coming years

## 6. Limitations

Our research focuses on highly-renowned indexed journals, though it would be worthwhile to consider the vision of professionals in the field as they publish on their own channels. Moreover, the focus of the research should be expanded to include a wider range of subjects and journals with smaller circulations.

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