





The prevalence and impact of special issues in communications journals 2015–2019

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Abstract

This article analyses special issues, also referred to as thematic issues, monographic issues, or supplements, a mode of scientific journal publishing that has rarely been studied. It presents a bibliometric analysis of the production of journals in the field of communication in the period 2015–2019 and studies the impact of the publication of special issues in this field. The sample analysed includes 21,458 articles and reviews, 524 special issues, 418 publishers, and 94 journals. The study considers the presence of special issues in communication journals and the distribution and number of papers published in them and compares the impact of papers published in this mode with papers published in regular issues. The results reveal that 19% of articles and reviews published in the period studied appeared in special issues, which generally contain the same number of articles as regular issues. Moreover, 75% of journals achieved a higher average impact factor with articles published in special issues than they did with articles in regular issues. It is concluded that the publication of special issues appears to offer the potential benefits of attracting submissions, increasing profits, and improving impact, although it also has disadvantages. A reflection is offered on the strengths and weaknesses of this publishing practice.

INTRODUCTION

Special issues in scientific journals, also referred to as thematic issues, monographic issues, or even supplements, usually serve the purpose of delving more deeply into a specific topic, to which end a call for papers is issued previously (Morris et al., 2012, p. 83). This type of publication is generally coordinated by one or more editors who specialize in the topic, external to the journal, who either assist or stand in for the journal's editor-in-chief.

Although they are commonplace in scientific communication, they have rarely been the subject of research. However, numerous definitions of special issues can be found in the instructions offered to authors by the publishers of scientific journals or in guidelines on scientific publication. Of these, *Journal Publishing* by Gillian Page, Robert Campbell & Jack Meadow (2008) is probably the one that deals with the question in the greatest depth, although information on them can also be found in *The Handbook of Journal Publishing* (Morris et al., 2012) and the more recent *Manual Scimago de Revistas Científicas* (Baiget, 2020).

In the field of biomedicine, a debate arose in the 1990s over supplements being financed by pharmaceutical companies and

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published by important journals. The problem was that the evaluative processes for submissions to these supplements were not the same as those applied to regular articles (Lurie et al., 1993), but were laxer or even non-existent, resulting in the publication of articles of demonstrably lower quality (Rochon et al., 1994), and yet, they received a similar number of consultations and citations (Citrome, 2010). The results of this study have limitations that do not allow it to be applied to other areas. Firstly, it studies the most prestigious journals in the field of communication, which is not representative of the total group of communication journals, and even less so of other related fields. Moreover, it was carried out over a limited period of time. On the other hand, it does not delve into aspects such as the types of monographs or the characteristics of the people who edit them, which represents an opportunity for future research.

A special issue is usually added to the journal's normal production as an extra publication, or otherwise it may replace one of the regular issues. In some cases, when the number of articles published in the issue is small, it is inserted as a special section inside a regular issue. According to Delgado et al., when special issues are supplements containing unpublished papers (for example, conference proceedings) the editorial management is handled very differently from that of regular issues; the review process is also different (in some cases, non-existent), and thus the use of a different ISSN is generally recommended (Delgado López-Cózar et al., 2006). Sometimes, some congresses agree to pay for the publication of papers in a journal that deliberately hides the origin of the papers, which are 'laundered' in journal articles. One example of this was the case of the journal *Estudios Sobre el Mensaje Periodístico* which published 152 articles in 2012, of which 94 were from a conference; that same year the journal was dropped from the Web of Science's *Journal Citation Reports* and the following year it ended up publishing the rest of the papers from the same conference.

A special issue usually arises out of an external proposal by an academic or a group of academics who believe that within the field of a general journal there is a subtopic that should be explored in more detail, or there may be some other reason for creating a separate issue, such as an anniversary or a conference. In some cases, it may be suggested by the journal's editorial board and directed by a board member who specializes in the subject proposed (Rousseau et al., 2018). Many publishers, such as Emerald, require the applicant and candidate for guest editor to submit a dossier with a description of the subject, how it fits with the remit of the journal, arguments that support the demand for a publication on the subject, and a planning schedule (Emerald, n.d.). The journal also usually confirms the suitability (expertise and background) of the candidates for editor, their specialization in the area, or their authority in the scientific community. For example, the journal *El Profesional de la Información* requires editors to have an h-index of at least 15 (Hirsch, 2005).

The role of guest editors varies from publication to publication. Usually, they are subordinate to the journal's editor and take part in the journal's evaluation processes, but in some cases they

Key points

- Nineteen percent of articles in the field of communication are published in special issues; it is an increasingly widespread phenomenon with slight variations.
- Although special or thematic issues are not predominant in communication journals, some journals publish more than 50% of their articles in this form.
- Special issues in communications journals are usually small (5–8 articles) but three quarters of them receive more citations than regular articles.
- Only 18 journals (19%) included in the Web of Science category of Communication did not publish special issues between 2015–2019.
- Well-chosen special issues can improve a journal's impact, but they impose research topics and may saturate subject areas.

may stand in for the editor-in-chief for the special issue and have autonomy and control over the evaluation process, that is, appointing reviewers and deciding on which papers are published and which are rejected. Of course, there are many reasons why a guest editor would propose or participate in a special issue, ranging from a sense of community service to self-promotion, and including objectives like having control over publications on a particular subject, etc.

The reasons for publishing special issues can also vary widely, although they are usually in response to an opportunity and are initiated by various actors: the journal's editorial board, external researchers, the organization that owns the journal, etc. A list of the main reasons is offered below:

- **Positioning.** The primordial reason for publishing a special issue is so that the journal can position itself as an authoritative voice on a specific subject, with the aim of having a scientific impact. In other words, the journal seeks to position itself as a benchmark in a particular area, and also hopes that the special issue will receive an above-average response in terms of citations so that the special publication is worth the extra effort. Attracting recognized authors is also related to positioning.
- **Compilation and Continuity of Proceedings Papers.** It was also common for journals to compile the most significant papers delivered at a conference and improve them, ensuring their continuity and visibility, and in some cases publishing them for their presentation at the conference. This is due to the fact that the printed proceedings of a conference often ended up forgotten, although this problem has lost its relevance in recent years. There are also cases of journals publishing the full proceedings of a conference as articles, conflating

conference papers with scientific articles despite their obvious differences. Such behaviour causes confusion in the scientific community because of the disruption to the management of the journal's regular content and the blurring of boundaries between different types of scientific documents that it entails.

- Tributes. Issues dedicated to a deceased individual (in most cases an academic) and his or her contribution to the area.
- Need for submissions. The creation of special issues can help a journal receive more submissions (Rodrigues et al., 2015), in many cases increasing the journal's usual target for a subject area or geographical region. This is especially useful when the journal is in its fledgling stages and is not yet receiving enough submissions to maintain the desired publication frequency.
- Sale of copies. The creation of a special issue can result in additional sales to libraries and researchers (Page et al., 1997), although this possibility is reduced in a digital environment.
- Compilation of papers. A special issue may be a retrospective compilation of previously published articles on a given topic (Scopus, 2014, p. 10). This was especially common in print publishing, generally with the aim of selling individual issues.
- Funding and sponsorship. In some areas, such as biomedicine, the creation of special issues is often the product of sponsorship by third parties, for example, pharmaceutical companies (Morris et al., 2012), which in return receive publicity and copies for distribution. Obviously, the subject of the special issue has to align with the interests of the sponsor. As noted above, there have also been controversies where special issues have published papers aligned with the interests of the sponsoring companies with questionable review processes.
- Funding and submissions. Many journals with a funding model based on article processing charges (APCs) use special issues as a key growth strategy. In such cases, the editors of special issues act as sales agents for the publisher with a commitment to attract submissions.
- Imposed obligation. It cannot be ruled out that the publication of a special issue may be an external imposition on the journal by the organization that owns it, such as a scientific association that requires the publication of the proceedings of its annual conference in the journal.

Wiley's guide to publishing special issues (Wiley, 2020) points out that special issues are generally read and cited more than regular issues. In a critical study on how to improve impact factors, Smeyers and Burbules identified various elements, particularly thematic and methodological considerations, that could be specifically targeted in the scope and objectives of a special issue (Smeyers & Burbules, 2011). In their top 10 manipulations used to enhance journal impact, Falagas and Alexiou list number 10 as 'publishing mainly popular science articles that deal with hot topics' (Falagas & Alexiou, 2008), which is one of the usual objectives of special issues, although the authors do not actually explain why it is a manipulation and not a legitimate ambition of any publisher. A special issue can thus obviously be an instrument to enhance impact if the right topic is chosen at the right time,

and it manages to attract submissions of higher quality and impact than those published in regular issues. Otherwise, a special issue could end up being a dead weight that will drag a journal's average impact factor down, delay publishing processes for regular articles and undermine readership interest.

Wiley's guide also points out that publishing too many special issues can lead to backlogs in the publication of other articles because it interrupts the normal publishing flow, making it a practice that should not be overused. This is perhaps the key to understanding the suitability of a special issue. The success of a special issue can be assessed on three different levels:

- Scientific impact. If the articles published in a special issue have a bigger impact than any other articles published that same year by the same scientific journal.
- Volume of submissions. If the number of submissions received is as high or higher than the number received for a regular issue of the same journal, and the rejection rates are therefore the same or higher.
- Profitability. If the amount it earns from sales, advertising or APC payments is higher than the cost of its evaluative and publishing processes. However, this success would be debatable if the impact or quality of the journal has been compromised in order to obtain greater profits.

A special issue nevertheless constitutes a disruption in the journal's offer of articles to create a specific demand. If the topic of the special issue is appropriate and it anticipates a future demand in the scientific community, and there are therefore enough researchers exploring that topic, the special issue has a good chance of success. But this shift from supply to demand has consequences. The first of these is that it consumes journal resources and delays the publication of regular issues (Page et al., 1997, p. 42). Another problem is that it attracts a lot of non-specialist authors who put their own research topics aside in order to write articles that fit with the topic of the issue, thinking that they will have a better chance of getting published, when in reality special issues often receive more submissions or have a bigger demand, and getting published in them is therefore harder than getting accepted in a regular issue.

If a special issue is successful, receiving a wealth of submissions and effectively publishing the best articles received, it creates a second wave that negatively affects other journals. Authors who have been rejected attempt to find a place for their work in other journals in the field, which are thus inundated with submissions on a specific topic. Writing articles based on the calls for papers of special issues is therefore not a good strategy for authors, because the chances of publication in the special issues of high-impact journals may be much lower (in the journal *Comunicar*, for example, the rejection rates are higher for their thematic issues), and if rejected it will be much harder to find a place for the article in a 'market' of journals already saturated with submissions on the same topic. The dynamic of special issues is an intervention that can benefit a

specific journal, but that could undermine research freedom if it becomes widespread practice, as argued in the recent Bonn Declaration (Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, 2020), as it would be journals and publishers that would set the policies on research topics.

The main objective of this study is to present a theoretical description of the phenomenon of special issues, given that there is no study that deals with the question in depth. Based on this main objective and focusing on the area of communication, this article attempts to answer two questions: What is the impact of this phenomenon in communication journals? And is the publication of special issues a good strategy for increasing a journal's impact? The specific objectives of the study are:

- SO1. To explain the phenomenon of special issues.
- SO2. To analyse the impact of this phenomenon in the area of communication for the period 2015–2019.
- SO3. To study the relationship between article impact and the publication of special issues in the area of communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a bibliometric analysis of the presence and distribution of special issues in journals in the Web of Science category of Communication (Social Science Citation Index) for the period 2015–2019. The aim is to examine the distribution of special issues for each journal and the distribution of articles for each special issue, and to study the difference between the impact of articles published in special issues and that of articles in regular issues, for each journal and in general. Supplements not indexed in Web of Science are excluded from the study, although in any case none were identified in the search.

The communication category is used often in bibliometric studies (Leydesdorff & Probst, 2009; Repiso et al., 2019) due to its connection with the area of Social Sciences, amongst other reasons. In this category there is a diverse range of publications, including medicine, science and engineering journals (health communication, science communication, and other fields), but at the same time, there are also journals with a marked Humanities focus. However, the vast majority clearly belong to the Social Sciences. This is what makes it an especially interesting area to study. It is a domain that is of interest not solely to its members.

The data collection process began with the identification of the phenomenon in the area of communication. All articles and reviews published in the selected time period (2015–2019) were identified, differentiating between articles published in regular issues and articles in special issues, and identifying the guest editors of their special issues. Usually, in the digital archive of the journals, special issues are marked with their thematic name. We can also identify special issues by the presence of subject editors and editorial letters written by people from outside the journal in an issue. The most complex cases have been identified by an excess of articles on a highly specific theme. To detect these thematic and issue irregularities, all the issues published in each journal studied were

TABLE 1 Journals in the social science category of communication that did not publish special issues (2015–2019).

| Journals | JCR quartile 2019 |
|---|-------------------|
| <i>Human Communication Research</i> | Q1 |
| <i>Journal of Communication</i> | Q1 |
| <i>Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication</i> | Q1 |
| <i>Social Media + Society</i> | Q1 |
| <i>International Journal of Public Opinion Research</i> | Q2 |
| <i>Journal of Advertising Research</i> | Q2 |
| <i>Journal of African Media Studies</i> | Q2 |
| <i>Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media</i> | Q2 |
| <i>Journal of Children and Media</i> | Q2 |
| <i>International Journal of Mobile Communications</i> | Q3 |
| <i>Personal Relationships</i> | Q3 |
| <i>Communication and Critical-Cultural Studies</i> | Q4 |
| <i>IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication</i> | Q4 |
| <i>Interaction Studies</i> | Q4 |
| <i>Journal of Media Economics</i> | Q4 |
| <i>Narrative Inquiry</i> | Q4 |
| <i>Technical Communication</i> | Q4 |
| <i>Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap</i> | Q4 |

Abbreviation: JCR, 2020

reviewed. Confirmation that it is a special issue is achieved when we identify the title of the monographic issue.

To this end, each article was assigned to the special issue it belongs to, as Web of Science does not record this information. The identification of a special issue is straightforward because it is generally reflected in the title of the issue; however, some journals do not include this element in the digital version, making it necessary to explore the issue to identify them (articles on the same topic, presence of an editorial, etc.). The Category Normalized Citation Impact (CNCI) was also obtained for each article. This metric, which forms part of the InCites package, considers the citations received by an article in relation to its subject area and year of publication. A CNCI of 1 means that the article has the average number of citations for articles of its category. A score of 0.5 would mean that it is half of the average, and a score of 2 would mean that the article has received double the average number of citations for articles of its type, subject area and year of publication (Torres-Salinas et al., 2016).

After identifying the articles published in special issues, the following indicators were analysed:

- Identification of journals that published special issues. In addition, journals that did not publish special issues were identified

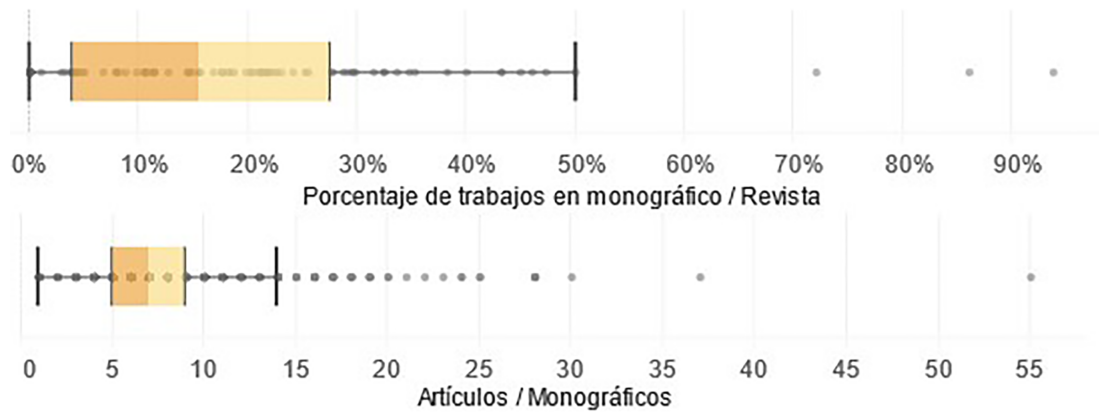


FIGURE 1 Number of articles in each special issue and percentage of articles published in special issues, by journal (Communication SSCI 2015–2019).

and the characteristics of topics, specialization and impact in the area were analysed by exclusion (Table 1).

- Distribution of the number of articles published in special issues per journal (Fig. 1).
- Distribution of the number of articles per special issue (Fig. 1).
- Comparison between the impact of articles in regular issues and special issues per journal (Fig. 2). The average CNCI was calculated for the articles published in special issues and those published in regular issues. To visualize this relationship, the Tableau platform was used (Murray & Chabot, 2013). The proportion of the top 10% most cited articles and reviews belonging to each of the two groups was also determined.
- Distribution of impact of each article in the area (Fig. 3). A treemap was generated in Tableau, showing the 21,458 articles studied, with their individual volume representing the CNCI they received. The articles were also separated into two basic groups: articles published in ordinary issues and articles published in special issues, and within the latter the articles were grouped into each of the special issues analysed.

In total, this study analysed:

- 1 Social Science Citation Index subject category (communication).
- 5 years (2015–2019).
- 94 journals.
- 524 special issues.
- 418 publishers.
- 21,458 articles and reviews.

RESULTS

A total of 19% (4,161) of all articles published in journals in the Web of Science category of Communication in the period 2015–

2019 were published in a special issue, although there is an uneven distribution across journals (Fig. 1). There is hardly any variation in the percentage of articles from one year to the next. Although more were articles published in special issues each year, the number of articles published in regular issues also increased so that the proportion remained at around 19% with only very minor variations. Special issues do not represent the predominant form of publication in communication, although there are three journals that publish more than half of their articles in this format: *Media and Communication* (93.79%), *Profesional de la Información* (86.09%), and *Communication Research* (72.06%). At the midway point is the journal *Comunicar*, which publishes exactly half of its articles this way, as in each issue half of the articles are published in a Miscellaneous section whilst the other half appear in a special thematic section.

The number of articles included in each special issue is generally from around five to eight (Fig. 1), with eight being the average. However, there are a few special issues that feature more than 20 articles, with the extreme case being the special issue of *Journalism* titled 'The Challenges Facing Journalism Today', which contained 55 articles in celebration of the journal's 20th anniversary.

There are 18 journals (19%) in the communication area that did not publish any special issues (Table 1) in the period studied (2015–2019). This group is quite diverse, including journals specific to the area and journals that also belong to other categories, general communication journals and highly specialized publications. In terms of impact, there is no special distribution between quartiles.

With respect to editors, there are a few researchers who are notable for having edited multiple special issues in this period; these are Christina Haas and Jason Whalley, with four special issues each, and Susanna Priest and Hannu Nieminen, each with three. However, editing a special issue in the area of communication appears to be a one-off experience for most editors.

In general terms, more than 75% of journals obtain a higher average impact factor for their articles published in special issues

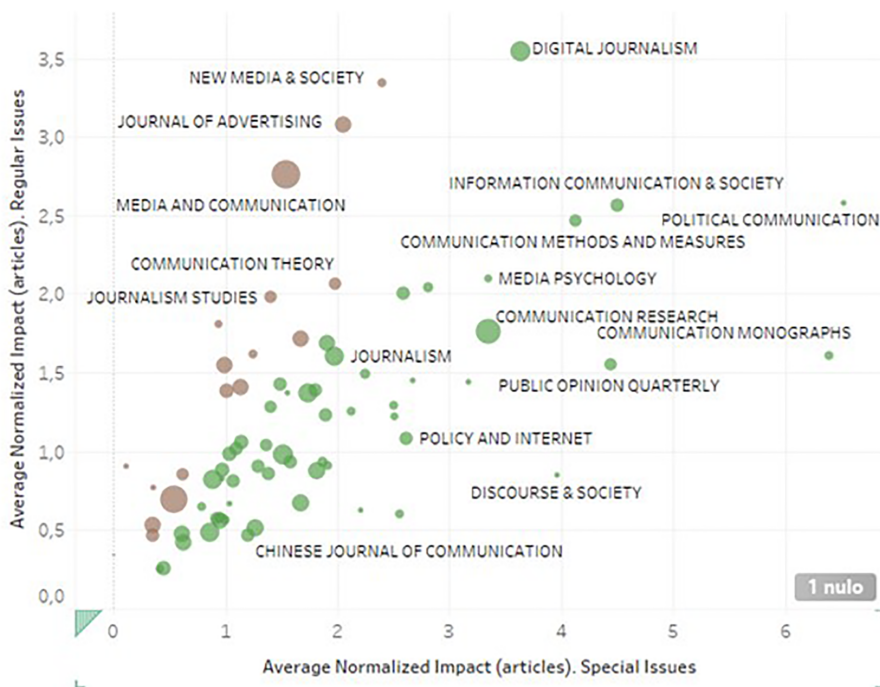


FIGURE 2 Distribution of journals according to average normalized impact of articles published in special issues and articles published in regular issues.

than for regular issue articles. Perhaps the most striking finding is that the journal that published the most articles under the special issue umbrella, *Media and Communication*, has a lower average normalized impact factor for its articles published in special issues. The journals with comparatively the worst results for special issue articles are *New Media & Society*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Media and Communication*, and *Journalism Studies*. Conversely, the journals whose special issues performed the best in terms of citations were *Political Communication*, *Communication Monographs*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Discourse & Society*.

There does not appear to be a significant relationship between the percentage of articles published in special issues

and impact. The two journals that published the most articles in special issues are *Media and Communication* and *Profesional de la Información*, which obtained lower impact factors than their regular issue articles did, but these are followed by *Communication Research* and *Digital Journalism*, where the opposite was true. However, special issues represent only a small percentage of articles published by the journals that obtained the biggest impact from them: *Political Communication*, *Communication Monographs*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Discourse & Society*.

As noted above, the impact of articles published in special issues tends to be higher on average than that of articles published in regular issues. The Treemap graph (Fig. 3) shows each of

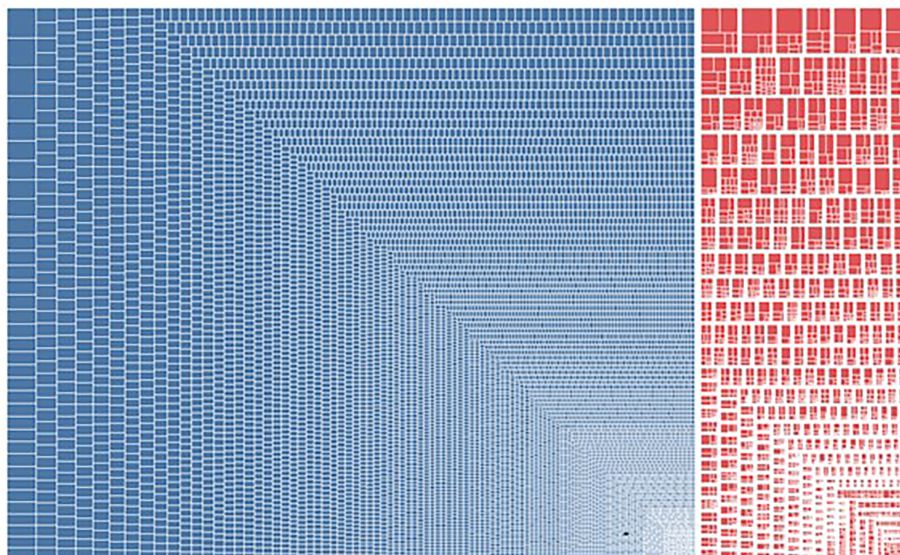


FIGURE 3 Normalized impact of articles in the Web of Science Communication category (2015–2019), comparing articles in special issues and regular issues.

the articles studied; those shown in blue are articles published in regular issues and in red those published in monographs. The size of each rectangle (articles) represents the normalized impact of each one. Similarly, we can see how the red articles are grouped in each of the identified monographs and that, in relation to the volume they occupy (the sum of the volume of the articles), each monograph has had a different impact. Whilst articles published in special issues represented slightly less than one fifth of all articles, this figure shows how their higher impact increases their share of the total impact to a quarter. Out of the 524 special issues studied, 86 occupy half of the red zone. In the top row, seven special issues stand out for one or even two articles with an exceptionally huge impact. These articles are 'The Social Power of Algorithms' (CNCI 14.45; *Information, Communication & Society*), 'Trust, Credibility, Fake News' (CNCI 14.28; *Digital Journalism*), 'Party Polarization' (CNCI 10.72; *Public Opinion Quarterly*), 'Advances in Methods and Statistics' (CNCI 10.71; *Communication Monographs*), 'Big Data from the South' (CNCI 10.52; *Television & New Media*), 'Journalism in an Era of Big Data: Cases, Concepts, and Critiques' (CNCI 14.49.97; *Digital Journalism*), and 'Communication and Information Technologies Section (ASA)' (CNCI 9.023; *Information Communication & Society*). Of the articles and reviews published in special issues, 14.4% (616) appear in the top decile of most cited papers, whilst only 11.7% (2020) of articles published in regular issues appear in this decile.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Of the 94 journals studied, 76 (80% of the total) published special issues in the communication category in the period 2015–2019. None of the variables considered—subject area, location and impact—appear to determine whether a journal will publish special issues. In the area of communication, special issues are indeed special, in the sense that they are unusual. On average, their content is about 10% of the articles published in a journal. In more than half of the special issues studied, these represent between 4% and 27% of a journal's production, although in a few cases (four) they represent half or more of their publications. They are also special because on average in the communication area their articles tend to have a greater impact in terms of citations than articles published in regular issues.

In the area of communication, special issues usually have the same structure, size, and composition as regular issues, and they are normally integrated into the journal's publication schedule. It is rare for a special issue to include many more articles than a regular issue, although there have been cases, such as the special anniversary issue of the journal *Journalism*, which featured no fewer than 55 articles. The percentage of articles published in special issues in the area did not change over the 5 years studied, remaining at around 19% with slight variations, even though each year more articles were published in the category in general.

Publishing special issues has proven advantageous in terms of impact for 76% of the journals studied. Articles published in

special issues appear in a slightly greater proportion in the first decile of the most cited articles. However, it seems that an excess of special issues is not advisable, as the two journals that published the most articles in this kind of issue obtain lower citation rates than they do for their regular articles. Conversely, the four journals that benefited the most from publishing special issues are journals that published most of their articles in regular issues. This suggests that publishing a special issue will not necessarily attract articles with a big impact, as there are other factors that may affect that impact, such as the topic of the issue, frequency of publication, and the identity of the guest editors.

In short, the publication of special issues appears to offer the potential benefits of attracting submissions, increasing profits, and improving impact. The attraction of submissions would not be necessary for the sample studied because the journals indexed in the Social Science Citation Index are consolidated, benchmark publications that tend to receive large numbers of submissions and have high rejection rates. The importance of increasing profits in communication would depend on the financial policy of each journal, which has not been studied here, but which raises a number of open questions. Impact, which has been studied here, is clearly relevant, as articles in 58 of the 76 journals that published special issues (76%) have a higher impact factor on average than articles published in regular issues. On the other hand, special issue publications in 18 journals (24 Regular publications appear in blue; articles published in special issues appear in red. %) have not attained a bigger scientific impact than articles published in regular issues.

Special issues nevertheless involve a divergence by the journal into topics where its specialist audience has a triple profile of reader, author, and reviewer. This is a thematic imposition which often causes backlogs in the publication of other submissions. According to Tomás Baiget, editor of the journal *El Profesional de la Información*, the editor needs to be attentive to informational needs in an area and assess whether it is advisable to disrupt the rhythm of publications with the production of a special issue (Baiget, 2020, p. 74). In other words, disrupting the natural process of supply and demand needs to be properly justified. If a special issue anticipates research on a topic and is led by an expert on the subject who is able to attract, evaluate, improve and disseminate the resulting research, the special issue will be successful. Conversely, if the topic chosen is of no interest to the community, it will only serve to waste resources, hold up the publication of other articles and, of course, reduce the impact of the journal. Constant publication of special issues is a risk because it alters the topics of publications for an extended period, benefiting a few researchers at the expense of the majority, who are left with fewer places to submit their articles, especially if they deal with very specific topics.

It is important to recognize that special issues reduce the scope of a journal, as they limit publications to a particular topic within the specific area that the journal deals with, which in itself is a risk. Therefore, before planning a special issue the journal should ensure that there is interest both in publishing research

on the topic and in reading the articles. There are also certain types of special issues that limit publication in the journal even more, such as closed issues, that is, issues for which no call for papers is published as they operate by invitation to authors or even by limiting the author profile, such as the special issue Vol. 191, No. 776 [2015] on El Greco published by the journal *Arbor*, edited by Spain's Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), which restricted participation to researchers associated with the CSIC.

Another way of reducing the scope of a journal in the publication of special issues is by publishing conference proceedings, as on the one hand they facilitate the receipt of submissions, but on the other they exclude anyone who has not participated in the conference from contributing to the special issue. In such cases, in view of the evaluation processes, it would be advisable to differentiate these issues from the rest by assigning them a different ISSN (Delgado López-Cózar et al., 2006), as both the evaluation process and the difficulty of getting published in these issues would probably differ. In this way, the journal can ensure that a series of articles that will probably have less impact are not indexed in the major databases that perform impact studies (Scopus, Web of Science, etc.) and thus reduce the risk of being penalized. Studying the metric at the level of the special issue constitutes an intermediate space between the metric for journals, like the impact factor, and the metric at the article level.

The results of this study have limitations that do not allow it to be applied to other areas. Firstly, it studies the most prestigious journals in the field of communication, which is not representative of the total group of communication journals, and even less so of other related fields. Moreover, it was carried out over a limited period of time. On the other hand, it does not delve into aspects such as the types of monographs or the characteristics of the people who edit them, which represents an opportunity for future research.

This study raises new questions in relation to special issues that point to the need to continue the analysis of the characteristics and consequences of this style of publishing. Future research could examine the thematic and scientific profiles of special issue editors and analyse whether there is some kind of relationship with the production of such issues, in order to answer a basic question that has been researched previously in relation to editors-in-chief: what is the scientific profile of editors of special issues? It would also be interesting to explore whether there is a relationship between the individual scientific impact of the editors and the scientific impact of special issues published under their direction.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Design, load and control of data loads. Data analysis and visualization. Drafting.

Author 2: Data upload. General Review. Management and quality control of the English translation.

Author 3: Data upload. General Review. Adaptation for submission. Journal correspondence.

Author 4: Data upload. Design review, results review, writing review. General Review.

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