

# CEO communicators: bibliometric analysis on the role of chief executive officers in institutional communication of organizations in the last 30 years (1993-2022)

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## Abstract

This bibliometric analysis examines the scientific production on the role of the chief executive officers (CEOs) as institutional communicators in organizations. This is the first quantitative bibliometric study on the topic about the CEOs as key communicators. A total of 156 scientific articles published in Scopus and Web of Science during the last 30 years (1993-2022) were analyzed. Articles, authors, journals and contents were the four aspects studied about the role of CEO communicators. Results show that there is a significant number of scholars interested in the subject, but most of the articles are published in specialized communication and business

journals. CEOs are studied with large samples, and executives from the USA are the most researched. Twitter is the most analyzed social network, and, in non-digital communication, studies focus on the oral and written rhetoric of CEOs. The most researched communication content topics are those of external communication and crisis. The findings show a relevant increase of publications about this topic due to factors such as the public exposure of CEOs, the emergence of the internet and the dialogic potential of social networks. Thus, three major waves of CEO digital communicators are identified: e-CEOs, CEO Bloggers and Social CEOs.

Keywords: CEO, CEO communicator, chief executive officer, institutional communication, bibliometric analysis, literature review.

## Resumo

Esta análise bibliométrica examina a produção científica sobre o papel dos diretores executivos (CEO) como comunicadores institucionais nas organizações. Trata-se do primeiro estudo bibliométrico quantitativo sobre o tema dos CEO como comunicadores-chave. Foram analisados 156 artigos científicos publicados nas bases de dados Scopus e Web of Science nos últimos 30 anos (1993-2022). Os quatro aspetos estudados sobre o papel dos comunicadores dos CEOs foram artigos, autores, revistas e conteúdos. Os resultados mostram que há um número significativo de estudiosos interessados no assunto, mas a maioria dos artigos é publicada em revistas especializadas em comunicação e negócios. Os CEOs

são estudados a partir de grandes amostras e os CEO dos EUA são os mais pesquisados. A rede social mais analisada é o Twitter e, na comunicação não digital, os estudos centram-se na retórica oral e escrita dos CEOs. Os temas de comunicação mais pesquisados são os de comunicação externa e de crise. Os resultados mostram um aumento relevante de publicações sobre este tema devido a fatores como a exposição pública dos CEOs, o surgimento da internet e o potencial dialógico das redes sociais. Assim, identificam-se três grandes grupos de CEOs comunicadores digitais: e-CEOs, CEOs Bloggers e CEOs Sociais.

Palavras-Chave: CEO, CEO comunicador, chief executive officer, comunicação institucional, análise bibliométrica, revisão da literatura.

Data de submissão: 2023-11-12. Data de aprovação: 2024-11-24.

Revista Estudos em Comunicação é financiada por Fundos FEDER através do Programa Operacional Factores de Competitividade – COMPETE e por Fundos Nacionais através da FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia no âmbito do projeto *LabCom – Comunicação e Artes*, UIDB/00661/2020.

## Introduction

The role of chief executive officers (CEOs) as an essential communicator in organizations is a valuable and relevant research topic to analyze and comprehend. The CEO has one of the most vital and influential roles in the organization since it is in a unique position to widely observe the organizational opportunities from a broad perspective (de Fatima Oliveira & Murphy, 2009; Edersheim, 2007; Glick, 2011).

One aspect to consider is the emergence of CEOs as a public “face” of organizations has grown substantially (Górska, 2021; Kitchen & Laurence, 2003; Men, 2012), especially nowadays where there is a polarized world that reflects growing distrust and high levels of government discredit (Edelman, 2023; Mathias et al., 2023). Because of that, the actions of the CEOs display an increasing impact within and outside companies (de Salva, 2020; Yeo & Youssef, 2010). Indeed, companies are seen by the public as the only competent, ethical and trustworthy institutions (Edelman, 2023; McDonald et al., 2023).

On the other hand, their public persona influences the quality of the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders (Men & Tsai, 2016), the study of the role of the CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations is a relevant topic in the academic and professional literature (Berger, 2005; Jin & Yeo, 2011; Raywood et al., 2021; Troester, 1991; Warburton & Troester, 1997; Zeffass et al., 2016). This interest, value, and relevance of CEOs in institutional communication has drawn attention of scholars as a result, there has been an increase in scientific production on this matter. Although there is a lack of literature review articles documenting the current state of research, scientific production is increasing every year and bibliometric studies are a way of showing the progress of science (Ki & Shin, 2006).

Given the information stated above, the main objective of this bibliometric analysis is to study the situation of scientific production about the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations. The current work is based on the study of articles, authors, journals and contents of publications related to the topic in Web of Science and Scopus.

The starting point of this research work is 1993, when the internet emerged as a key tool for communication and its influence on public relations studies (Hill & White, 2000; Verčič et al., 2015; White & Raman, 1999). Since its emergence, the World Wide Web offered CEOs a new environment for building interpersonal relationships based on dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). However, research agrees that the fulfillment of the dialogic promise is a task that needs to be implemented by organizations and their leaders. The main reasons are the misuse of organizational tools such as websites and the use of unidirectional strategies in blogs and social media (Gonçalves, 2020; McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Men, Tsai, et al., 2018; Wirtz & Zimbres, 2018).

Thus, taking into account the role played by the internet in influencing the institutional communication in organizations and that of their leaders (Ye & Ki, 2012), a first quantitative analysis was developed.

## Theoretical framework

### The “CEO communicator” of organizations

Top management, particularly CEOs should be involved in institutional communication as official spokespersons (Grant & Taylor, 2015; Tsymbalenko et al., 2020). CEOs are visible faces of firms (Denner et al., 2021) which contributes to managing and shaping the reputation of organizations (Love et al., 2017; Men, 2012).

CEOs have been considered as a “diffuser” (Mintzberg, 1973), a “narrator” (Gaines-Ross, 2000) or “storyteller” (Glick, 2011; Zeitoun et al., 2020), a “top communicator” (Pincus et al., 1991), a “chief communicator” or “key communicator” (Kitchen & Laurence, 2003), and a “spokesperson” (Mintzberg, 1973; Troester, 1991).

For customers, CEOs are “brand ambassadors” (Fetscherin, 2015), “brand owners” (Free, 1999) or “endorsers” (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2019) because they embody the corporate brand. Thus, they influence purchasing behavior and brand trust (Furukawa, 2022b, 2022a; Kerin & Barry, 1981).

For investors, top leaders are in charge of defining the image of the company (Yeo et al., 2011), building credibility and earning investors’ trust (Yeo & Youssef, 2010).

For media, CEOs are not only the focus of their attention (Denner et al., 2018) but they are also the authoritative journalistic sources (Park & Berger, 2004; Westphal et al., 2012; Westphal & Deephouse, 2011).

Internally, CEOs convey information to the employees (Men, 2014, 2015), articulate the vision and mission (Bromley, 2001; de Fatima Oliveira, 2008) and reinforce the corporate culture (Men, Chen, et al., 2018; Tsui et al., 2006; Wright, 1995).

Therefore, the CEO is a key communicator, both inside and outside of the organization (O’Leary, 2021; Rode & Vallaster, 2005).

### ***The CEO digital communicator: a social media influencer***

The internet has become an important tool in order to build dialogic relationships between organizations and their public (Bunting & Lipski, 2001; Gorry & Westbrook, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 1998). The emergence of the Web 1.0 presented an opportunity for business leaders’ communication (Schreiber, 2002); moreover, it became an “alternative channel” to listen to online conversations about both the companies and especially their CEOs (Gaines-Ross, 2000, 2002).

During the early 2000s, first studies on the role of the chief executive officers in digital institutional communication were developed. One particular study addressed issues such as the effectiveness of CEOs’ letters to their shareholders via websites (Segars & Kohut, 2001) or how they presented themselves on their corporate home pages (Lee & Know Lee, 2002).

The dialogic potential of the internet was reinforced with corporate blogs (Navaro & Humanes, 2012; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). They were used by expressing their own voice and by personifying companies (Lee, 2006). CEOs blogs were a public space to start projecting their credibility on Web 2.0. Besides, it contributed to building a community through the exchange of comments with their followers (Evans et al., 2008; Vidgen et al., 2013).

The emergence of social networks revolutionized the rules of social communication, and the way organizations should interact with their public (Capriotti et al., 2021; Van Zyl, 2009). Theoretical and empirical studies have been interested in establishing the fundamentals of CEOs-public relationships. These studies have focus on the CEOs role as engagement officers in developing interpersonal interactions and relationships. They have also analyzed the effects CEOs have on helping to improve public’ trust, satisfaction and advocacy with organizations in social networks (Heavey et al., 2020; Porter et al., 2015; Tsai & Men, 2017).

Studies of the role of the top executives on social media are wide and varied. They examine the presence and activity on Facebook (Men, Tsai, et al., 2018; Pakura & Rudeloff, 2020; Wang & Huang, 2018), Instagram (Kim & Sung, 2021; Md Saad & Yaacob, 2021), YouTube (Manika et al., 2015; Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018) and also LinkedIn (Conte et al., 2017; Molina-Cañabate & Suau-Gomila, 2021).

However, the studies mainly focus on Twitter. A pioneering study about the journey of the role of CEOs in Twitter discussed the benefits for the development of corporate leaders' personal public relations (Hwang, 2012).

### ***Trends in bibliometric studies in institutional communication and CEOs***

The analysis of scientific production is based on bibliometric studies. These are understood as statistical and mathematical methods applied to scientific literature where the main aim is to study and analyze the activity of studies (Castillo & Carretón, 2010; Compte-Pujol et al., 2018). Through indicators such as production, visibility, circulation, use, dispersion, collaboration and impact, data can be gathered (Castillo & Carretón, 2010).

Through those indicators, advances, contextual and methodological gaps, their magnitude, rigor and trends in the history of a field can be understood and valued (Avery et al., 2010; Castillo & Carretón, 2010; Cho & Khang, 2006; Elgueta-Ruiz & Martínez-Ortiz, 2022; Ki & Shin, 2006; Page & Capizzo, 2021; Ye & Ki, 2012).

Bibliometrics on institutional communication and digital communication provide a range of methods and measures to assess the evolution of academic production on the subject (Borgman & Furner, 2005; Mourão et al., 2016).

Bibliometric studies have made it possible to identify that public relations and corporate communication are a mature and dynamic discipline within the social sciences (Cornelissen, 2000; Ki et al., 2019; Pasadeos et al., 1999, 2010; Pasadeos & Renfro, 1989, 1992).

In the last 30 years, scientific production related to institutional digital communication has increased significantly. This has led to deepening in increasingly specific bibliographical analyzes (Duhé, 2015; Elgueta-Ruiz & Martínez-Ortiz, 2022; Huang et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2022; Verčič et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021).

Bibliometric methods have been applied to the analysis of the World Wide Web (Borgman & Furner, 2005; Elgueta-Ruiz & Martínez-Ortiz, 2022; Ki & Shin, 2006; Ye & Ki, 2012) and to social networks which is one of the areas with the greatest growing research. As a result, it has had a great impact on the field (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014; Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022).

Bibliometric review studies are usually structured around four main axes: articles, authors, journals, and content (Oliveira et al., 2022; Zeler et al., 2023).

Regarding the article category, the evolution of scientific production, the number of publications, the main languages of publication, citations and co-citations, typology, among others are examined (Cho & Khang, 2006; Morehouse & Saffer, 2018; Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022; Ye & Ki, 2012). Therefore, the following question is asked:

**RQ1:** What articles are published about the role of CEOs in institutional communication of organizations?

When it comes to analyzing authors, research seeks to know the number of researchers, the number of authors per article, co-authorship, their institutional affiliation, research networks, countries of origin and geographic areas, citation, co-citation levels, gender, among others (Cho & Khang, 2006; Elgueta-Ruiz & Martínez-Ortiz, 2022; Ki & Shin, 2006; Morehouse & Saffer, 2018; Page & Capizzo, 2021; Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022; Ye & Ki, 2012). Thus, a second question is asked:

**RQ2:** What authors publish on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations?

In reference to the journals, the number of journals, the specialization categories, citation levels, the most cited journals, the co-citation of the journals, the languages of publication, among others are analyzed (Cho & Khang, 2006; Ki & Shin, 2006; Ye & Ki, 2012). The third proposed research question is:

**RQ3:** What journals publish articles on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations?

Regarding the contents, the bibliometric studies incorporate the samples, instruments, applied theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, themes, keywords and specific categories according to the analysis of the object of study (Atarama-Rojas et al., 2022; Avery et al., 2010; Cho & Khang, 2006; Morehouse & Saffer, 2018; Mut Camacho & Miquel Segarra, 2019; Ye & Ki, 2012). Therefore, a final question is asked about content:

**RQ4:** What key aspects are included in the articles on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations?

Despite the fact that the scientific production on institutional communication has increased significantly over time, there are no relevant studies on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations.

There are few bibliometric analyses that have related executive directors to institutional communication. Heavy et al. (2020) made a first approximation to the conceptual framework on the participation of CEOs in social networks and its implications for strategic management and executive work.

Researchers have also evaluated the current state of the field on CEO activism: Rumstadt & Kanbach (2022) presented a systematic review of the literature on the topic, to understand its importance, stakeholder reactions, moderators, and effects of perception. Cycyota (2022) reviewed the bibliography of activism at a conceptual level and proposed a theoretical framework on typologies of internal and external influences on CEOs and the organization.

However, previous research does not address the study of CEOs as part of the institutional communication of organizations in a global perspective and over a long period of time, nor the digital communication of executive directors.

## Methodology

The analyzes carried out previously are related to the communication of CEOs, but they do not have the scope of the current study, whose general objective is the quantitative analysis of the scientific production on the role of CEO communicators in organizations since the appearance of the internet.

## Research questions

The aspects to be analyzed from the sample were based on the key areas of revision in bibliometric studies on institutional communication and public relations. Four aspects of analysis and their corresponding research questions (RQ) were proposed.

**RQ1:** What articles are published about the role of CEOs in institutional communication of organizations? (Articles)

1a: number and date of articles

1b: language of articles

1c: citations per article

**RQ2:** What authors publish on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations? (Authors)

2a: number of authors

2b: citations per author

**RQ3:** What journals publish articles on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations? (Journals)

3a: number of journals

3b: journal category

3c: citations per journal

**RQ4:** What key aspects are included in the articles on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations? (Contents)

4a: CEO characteristics

number of CEOs  
 region of origin of CEOs  
 4b: communication tools  
 types of communication tools  
 non-digital communication tools  
 digital communication tools  
 social networking sites  
 4c: content topics and focuses  
 institutional communication content topics  
 institutional communication focuses  
 4d: theories and methods  
 theoretical frameworks  
 methodological approaches

### ***Sample selection***

A systematic review of the literature aims to reduce the risks of subjectivity in the choice of sample articles regarding the subject. For this article, a bibliometric analysis was conducted through applying a quantitative methodology on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations. The selection of the sample was done in January 2023 in databases Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus. These databases are considered the reference databases in the academic field (Branca et al., 2023; Guallar et al., 2020; Novera et al., 2022; Page & Capizzo, 2021; Pires dos Santos & Monteiro de Barros, 2023).

The articles collected were from the period 1993-2022 (30 years). This time frame displayed a broad and panoramic perspective on the subject, which allows us to understand its main aspects and analyze its evolution over time.

The process of collecting articles was carried out in four steps: (1) setting research criteria, (2) conducting a preliminary search, (3) filtering the results obtained through comparison and deduplication, and (4) manual reviewing of articles.

(1) To select the articles, advanced research was conducted in WOS and Scopus. There were three dimensions considered and their corresponding keywords: (#1) CEO, (#2) Non-digital Communication, (#3) Digital Communication (Appendix 1). The research was based on the criteria “title” (TI= WOS and TITTLE= Scopus) and “keywords” (AK= WOS and AUTHKEY= Scopus). It focused on articles in English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

(2) After the first individual search on dimensions and databases, a total of 641,772 articles were obtained (Table 1). Besides, three combined research filters were considered in order to obtain the most relevant contributions: (#1 AND #2), (#1 AND #3), (#1 AND #2 AND #3). The first outcome of this research resulted in 989 articles (WOS= 256 and Scopus= 733) (Table 2).

**Table 1. No. of articles according to search criteria for sample extraction in Scopus and Web of Science databases**

Databases	CEO (#1)	Non-digital Communication (#2)	Digital Communication (#3)
Scopus	9,881	46,358	477,926
Web of Science	3,201	19,997	84,409

(3) Then, deduplication was done. Duplicated articles found in the results were manually eliminated. A total of 770 articles were obtained (Table 2).

**Table 2. No. of articles according to the crossing of the dimensions and associated keywords in Scopus and Web of Science databases**

Process	#1 AND #2	#1 AND #3	#1 AND #2 AND #3	Total
Scopus	224	474	35	733
Web of Science	102	136	18	256
Subtotal	326	610	53	989
Articles after deduplication	234	501	35	770

(4) Finally, the abstracts and full articles were revised to reject those that did not correspond specifically to the study of the role of CEOs in institutional communication. The 156 remaining articles were the final sample for the bibliometric review.

### Analysis categories

Each article was coded according to four broad categories aiming to answer the research questions.

#### (a) Articles (RQ1)

*Number and date of articles:* the articles were classified by year from 1993 to 2022 to identify its number and evolution.

*Language of articles:* the articles were classified in six main languages: English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish.

*Citations per article:* the number of citations per article was identified and 8 options were established: more than 200; 101-200; 51-100; 31-50; 11-30; 2-10; 1; 0.

**(b) Authors (RQ2)**

*Number of authors:* the number of authors per article was considered and the authors with the highest scientific production were identified. Six options were established according to the number of articles per author: more than 5; 5; 4; 3; 2; 1.

*Citations per author:* the number of citations per author was identified. Nine options were established: more than 400; 201-400; 101-200; 51-100; 31-50; 11-30; 2-10; 1; 0.

**(c) Journals (RQ3)**

*Number of journals:* journals that publish articles were recognized and the journals with the highest number of publications. They were grouped according to five intervals: more than 20; 11-20; 6-10; 2-5; 1.

*Journal category:* journal categories were established according to the area of specialization. Five branches per field were proposed: Business & Economics; Communication; Information Science & Library Science; Science & Technology; Others.

*Citations per journal:* the number of citations per journal on the subject and those with the highest citation level were analyzed. They were classified in eight options: more than 400; 201-400; 101-200; 51-100; 11-50; 2-10; 1; 0.

**(d) Contents (RQ4)****CEO characteristics**

The *number of CEOs* studied in the articles was identified. Six intervals were established: More than 100; 51-100; 21-50; 11-20; 6-10; 1-5; Not applicable.

CEOs were classified according to the main *regions of origin*. There were nine options: Asia Pacific (APAC); Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA); Latin America (LATAM); United States (USA); Global; Multi-region; Not applicable.

**Communication tools**

The *type of communication tools* involved in the articles were studied. Four options were considered: Digital, Non-digital, Mixed; Not applicable.

The main *non-digital communication tools* included in the articles were reflected. Five options were proposed: CEO letter, Corporate speech, Corporate photograph, Others; Not applicable.

The main *digital communication tools* identified in the articles was evidenced. Nine typologies were proposed: Blog, Corporate Website, Email, Instant Messaging, Intranet, Social Networking Sites, Telephone, Others; Not applicable.

The main *social networking sites* included were presented. The options were eight: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, Other; Not Applicable.

**Content topics and focus**

The main *institutional communication content topics* that were addressed in the articles. Six options were proposed: Communication Management, Corporate Reputation, Corporate Social Responsibility, Crisis Communication, External Communication and Internal Communication.

The *institutional communication focus* in the articles were identified. Two options were established: Non-digital communication and Digital communication.

**Theories and methods**

The *theoretical framework* that was used by the authors to write the articles. Three options were defined: Communication, Management and Marketing.



The main *methodological approach* used. Four options were proposed: Theoretical, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed.

## Results

### *Articles (RQ1)*

Over the last 30 years, scientific production on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations has shown an exponential increase in publications (Table 3). Three major time periods were established which aimed for a more accurate analysis: 1993-2002; 2003-2012; 2013-2022. This growth is mainly evident in the last decennium which reflects a number of articles of almost five times more compared to the first period of analysis (D3:97=62,2% > D2:39=25,0% > D1:20=12,8%).

**Table 3. Number and date of articles published**

Period	Total		Non-digital Communication		Digital Communication	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1993-2002 (D1)	20	12,8	18	90,0	2	10,0
2003-2012 (D2)	39	25,0	33	84,6	6	15,4
2013-2022 (D3)	97	62,2	53	54,6	44	45,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>66,7</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>33,3</b>

Source: own elaboration.

The predominance of publications focused on non-digital communication has been evidenced during these 30 years. However, in the third period, the production of articles about digital communication (45,4%) is remarkably close. In the first decennium, only two articles were published on digital communication, as a consequence of the appearance and emergence of the internet. In contrast, during the second (15,4%) and third decennium (45,4%), publications on digital issues increased almost three times.

The main language of publication is English (96,8%). A smaller percentage of publications were in Spanish (3,2%). No articles were found written in French, German, Italian and Portuguese.

The articles analyzed do not present a high number of citations. Less than 30% of research work have more than 30 citations. There are approximately 8% of publications that exceed 100 citations. More than 60% of the articles reflect two to 30 citations and approximately 12% are articles with one or zero citations.

### *Authors (RQ2)*

The analysis of the authors who publish on the role of the CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations is atomized. There were 309 authors identified, around 90% of them have written only one article. One author stands out reflecting an extensive scientific production by publishing 14 articles (Linjuan Rita Men), two authors have published five articles ( Nora Denner and Thomas Koch) and five authors have worked on four articles ( Zifei Fay Chen; Yi Grace Ji; Robert R. Ulmer; Cen April Yue and Ansgar Zerfass). Regarding co-authorship of publications, the average is 2 authors per article (309 authors and 156 articles).

The data analysis shows that the citation level of authors is high but dispersed. Very few authors have been cited more than 100 times (less than 10%) and one is reaching 538 citations. Most authors

(more than two thirds of the total) have been cited from two to 50 times. Only 36 authors have received from 0 to 1 citation for their articles (11.6%). The three most cited authors are Robert R. Ulmer (538), Linjuan Rita Men (491) and Mathew L. A. Hayward (407).

### **Journal (RQ3)**

The analysis of the journals that publish on the role of the CEOs in institutional communication in organizations is widely dispersed, because the 156 articles have been published in 76 different journals. *Public Relations Review* (26), the journal with the most published articles, has 50% more articles than *Journal of Public Relations Research* (13), the second one in the list. It continues with *Corporate Communications*, *Corporate Reputation Review* and *Journal of Communication Management* which have published nine articles each.

On the other hand, more than 90% of journals publish less than five articles and 77.6% publish only one article. Less than 10% publish more than six articles.

The journals are concentrated in those that focus on communication. Almost two thirds of the total number of articles have been published in journals in the field of communication (60,3%). A category with almost a third of the total number of publications is Business and Economics (30,1%), since CEOs are some of the most representative and studied figures in the business world. An insignificant number (less than 10%) are collected in journals of categories such as Information Science & Library Science, Science & Technology and Others, which includes journals on Social Sciences, Environment, among others.

The citation of the journals is high but presents concentration. Almost 60% of citations (3021 out of 5184) are centralized in communication journals, especially those in the field of public relations. *Public Relations Review* (949) and *Journal of Public Relations Research* (471) are the top two journals in the current bibliometric analysis and together they concentrate almost 30% of the citations.

Almost 60% of journals have between 2 and 50 citations; while 20% have more than 100 citations. Five percent of the journals have only one citation, while about 10% of the journals have zero citations.

### **Contents (RQ4)**

#### **CEO characteristics**

The number of CEOs [1] analyzed in the publications depended on the focus of the analysis. More than 50% of studies analyze a large sample of CEOs. To illustrate, research on the subject with samples of more than 100 CEOs (22.5%) generally corresponds to international rankings such as those of América Economía, Forbes or Fortune. On the other hand, studies which analyze 21-50 CEOs (20.6%) take stock market indexes such as the DAX 30 or the IBEX 35 as the basis for their analysis (figure 1).

Almost a quarter of the cases use small samples (27.5%) to investigate particular cases or executives from a specific business sector (figure 1).

The analysis of the region of origin [2] of the CEOs analyzed shows concentration. There is a notorious relevance for the research of corporate leaders from the United States of America (42,2%). Although in smaller numbers, there is also interest in analyzing the communicational role of CEOs from EMEA (20,6%) and APAC (15,7%). It should be noted that only a single study is presented with CEOs from LATAM (1,0%). This situation is due to the fact that some of the research includes this region as part of Global (14,7%) or Multi-region (5,9%) studies (figure 1).

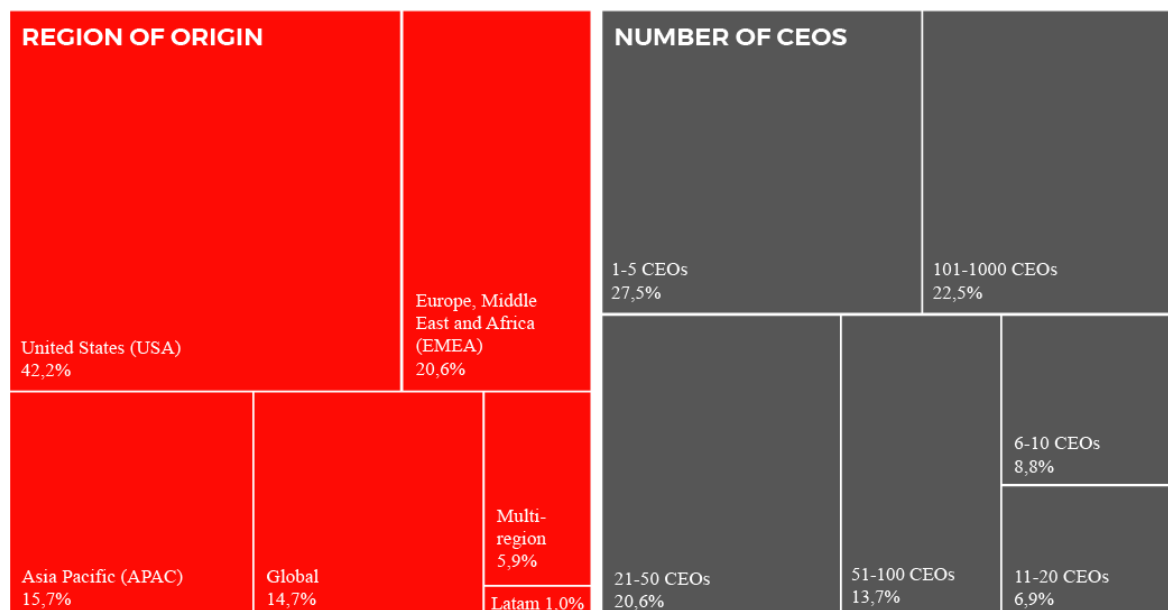


Figure 1. CEO characteristics  
Source: own elaboration.

### Communication tools

The types of communication tools [3] analyzed show a marked difference. The most studied are digital tools (61,5%), ahead of non-digital tools (32,1%). There is a residual number that covers both types of communication tools (6,4%).

The range of non-digital communication tools [4] is concentrated. Almost 60% of the studies have focused on analyzing rhetoric tools. In this subgroup of tools, the studies focus mainly on CEO letters in annual reports (38.9%), on speeches or other types of corporate statements offered by CEOs in public spaces (19.4%). In a lower percentage, photographs of CEOs (11.1%) are studied as public “faces” of companies and the way it affects institutional communication or corporate advertising is also evaluated. The remaining tools (30.6%) are diverse and include institutional billboards, organization of events, memos, press releases, dossiers, newsletters and others (Figure 2).

The analysis of digital communication tools [5] is extensive. Almost 50% of the cases focus on the study of social networks. The study of the communicative role of CEOs in blogs and corporate websites is addressed in 21% of the situations, while the use of e-mail, instant messaging, intranet and telephone as internal communication tools in organizations is investigated in almost 20% of the cases. Other digital communication tools are marginally represented (9.9%), such as forums, digital photography, virtual press rooms, among others (Figure 2).

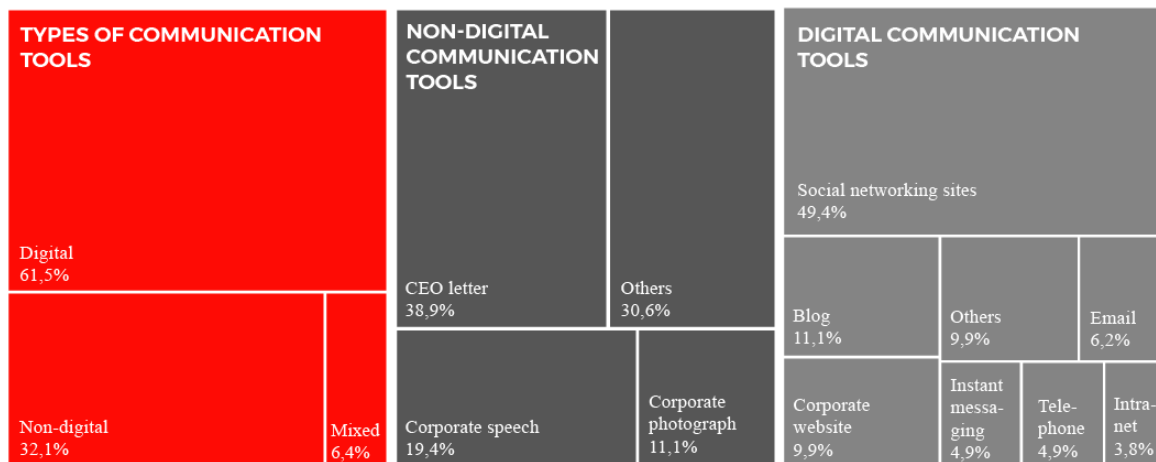


Figure 2. Communication tools  
Source: own elaboration.

The CEO's communicational role is analyzed in most of the social networks [6], although it is mainly concentrated in one of them. There is a clear predominance of studies on Twitter (42,9%). As for the rest of the social networks, the number of cases studied shows a similar amount which is rarely significant. There are articles about Facebook (14,3%), YouTube (12,7%), LinkedIn (11,1%); in addition, about Instagram and other social networks (9,5% each). CEOs on TikTok have not yet been analyzed (Figure 3).

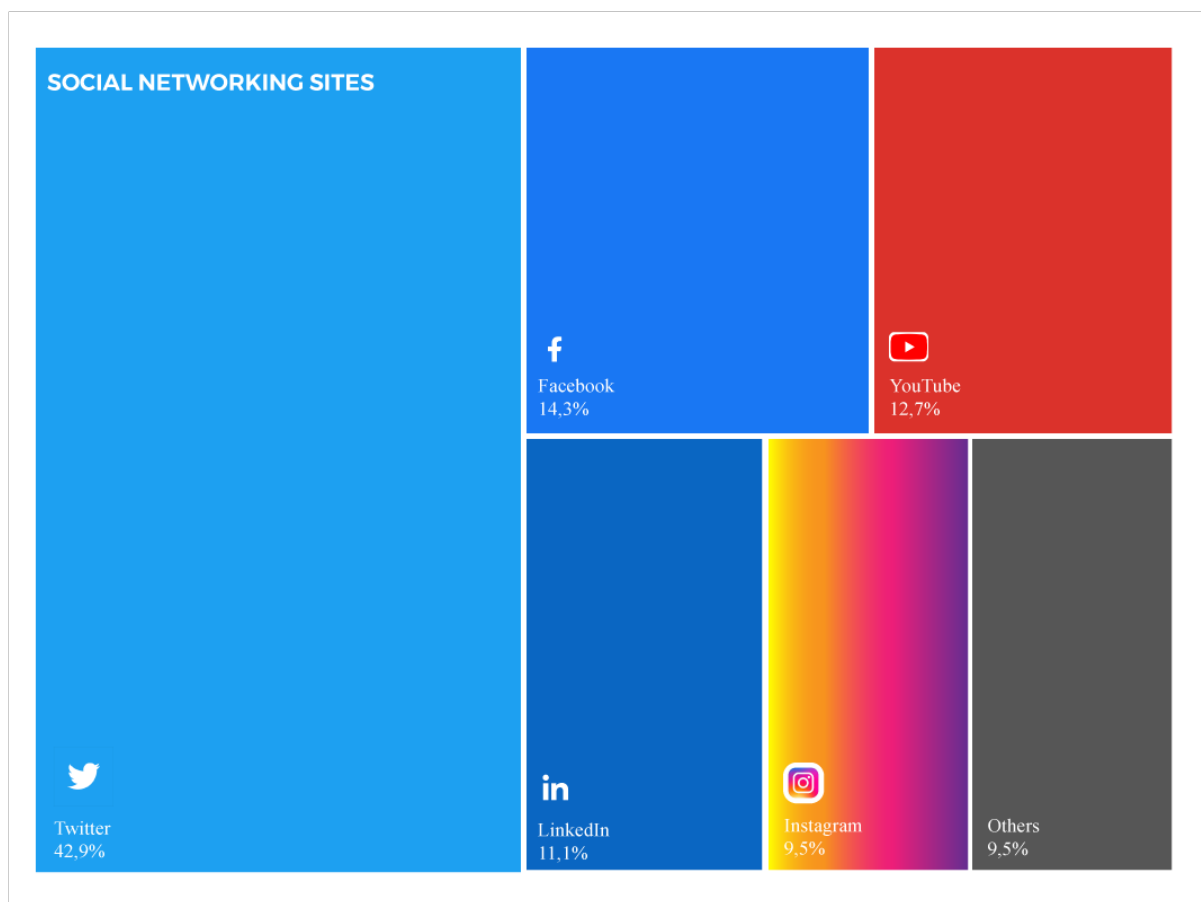


Figure 3. Social networking sites  
Source: own elaboration.

### Content topics and focus

CEOs are involved in a variety of institutional communication content topics. Due to its breadth of tools and publics, external communication stands out with one third of the studies (33,7%). It is important to note that the studies also highlight the participation of CEOs in crisis communication (20,7%) and corporate reputation (17,1%), considering their role as the main spokesperson and responsible for the image of the company in the eyes of the public. Research is not indifferent to addressing internal communication issues and the leadership role of CEOs in employee relations (10,9%). There is a significant increase in studies of the role of CEOs in communicating corporate social responsibility (10,4%). There is a smaller proportion of articles that seek to understand the relationship between CEOs and public relations and corporate communication practitioners (7,3%) (Figure 4).

The communication focus of the articles shows a marked difference. More than two thirds (66.7%) of the studies on the role of CEOs are studied from a general perspective of non-digital communication. The rest of the studies concentrate on an approach from digital communication (Figure 4).

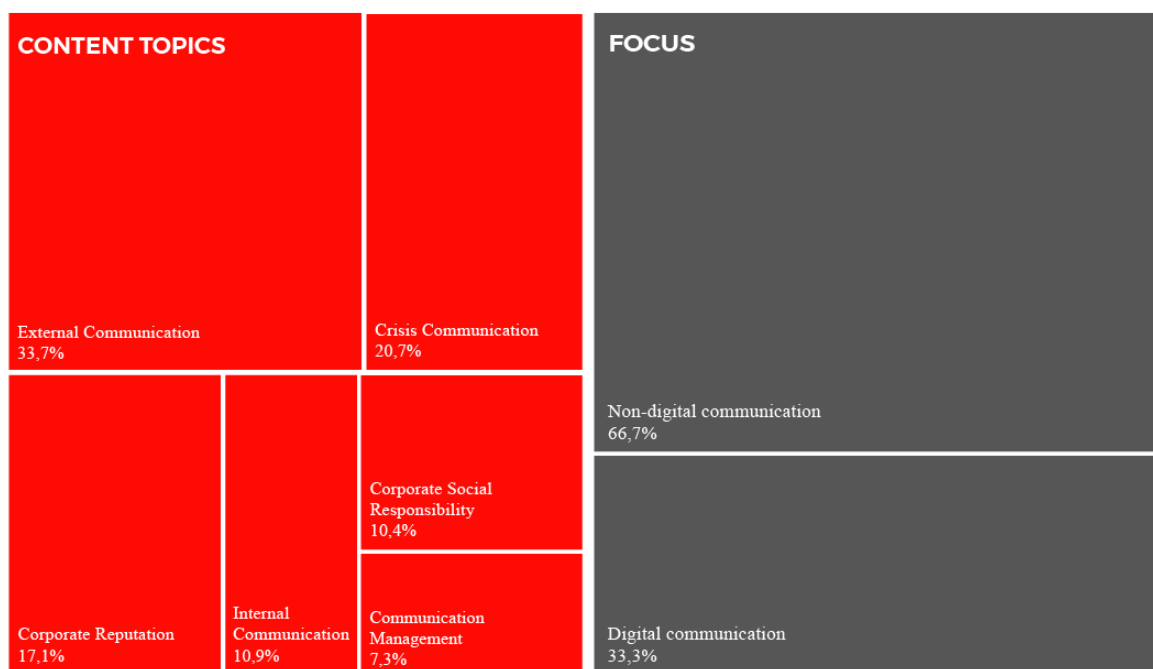


Figure 4. Content topics and focus

Source: own elaboration.

### Theories and methods

There are three types of theories in the construction of the theoretical frameworks of the articles. Almost 70% of the research is based on a Communication framework and 21.8% on Management theory. With a residual percentage (9.6%) is the Marketing perspective (Figure 5).

For the analysis of methodological approach, a preference for empirical studies over theoretical ones was identified. Almost 90% of the articles use quantitative, qualitative or mixed techniques. Within the empirical studies, the quantitative methodological approach marks a clear difference with 53.8% of the articles. A total of 11.5% are focused on articles with theoretical proposals on the role of CEOs in the institutional communication of organizations (Figure 5).

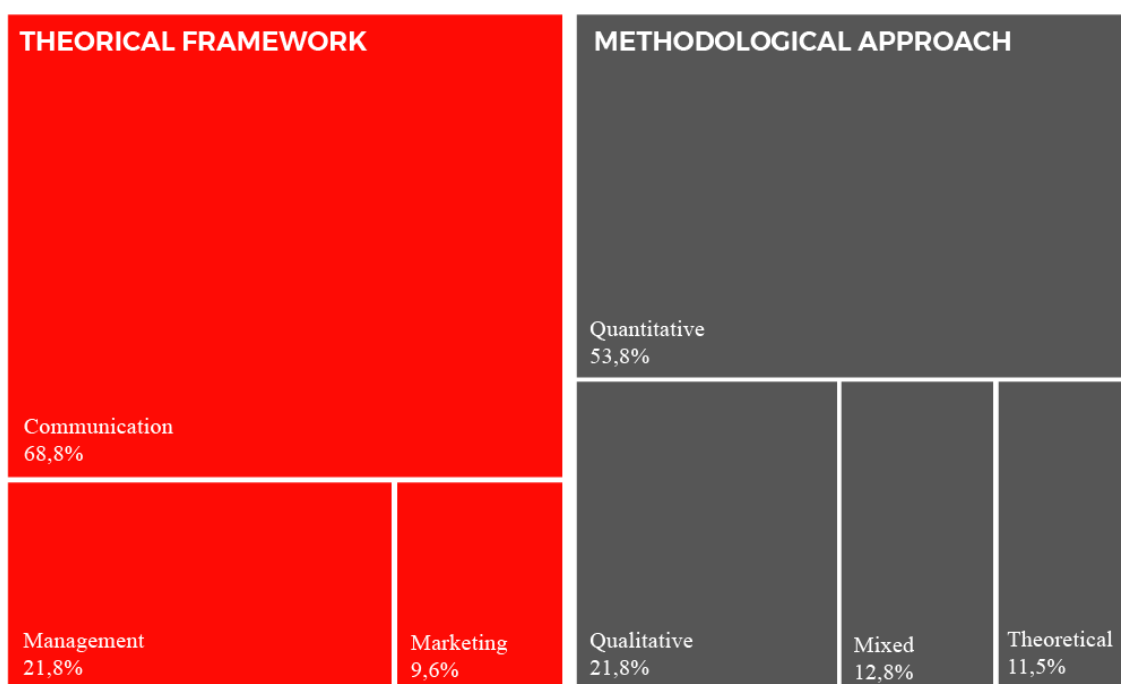


Figure 5. Theories and methods  
Source: own elaboration.

## Discussion

A starting point for understanding the CEO-institutional communication duality is that the institutionalization of strategic communication in companies is an indisputable fact. The relevance of it is determined by the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations held by executive directors about the way communication contributes to the objectives of the organization (Cutlip et al., 2006; Sebastião, 2021; Simic Brønn, 2014; Verhoeven, 2014; Zerfass et al., 2014; Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015; Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). In that sense, there are important reflections that merit discussion according to the research questions posed in this study.

Regarding articles, the increase in scientific production in a specific field such as the role of CEOs in institutional communication corresponds to the ongoing progress in the study of public relations and corporate communication in the digital field. Indeed, the digital field is one of the areas with the highest practical and academic impact. The more the professionalization of public relations advances, the more research in this field of study is done (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014; Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022; Ye & Ki, 2012).

Most publications done on highly cited journals on the field of public relations and corporate communication reflect the consolidation of the discipline (Pasadeos et al., 1999, 2010; Pasadeos & Renfro, 1992).

Regarding content, in the analysis of characteristics of CEO, it was found that most of the studies refer to executives in the United States. One of the reasons that explains this preference is that many social networks were developed in this country and they were later adapted to realities in other regions (Korzynski, 2015). This research validates the fact that Latin America remains the least analyzed region

in the world (Jain et al., 2014; Thelen, 2021). Therefore, it will be valuable to expand the studies on the dynamics and communication role of Latin American CEOs as an independent phenomenon and not only as part of global or multi-region analysis samples.

The analysis of communication tools shows that although non-digital communication studies have a greater number of articles, it is evident that digital communication analyzes are on the increase.

Non-digital communication tools are focused on the oral and written rhetoric of CEOs. This interest in investigating CEO discourse could be due to the fact that senior managers are responsible for managing corporate reputation (Geppert & Lawrence, 2008), establishing corporate communication policies (Schreiber, 2002) and set the style and tone of behavior of their companies (Dévai, 2022; Free, 1999). That is to say, CEOs are the main guarantors of creating coherence and cohesion to the being, saying and doing of organization (Cutlip et al., 2006; Mora-García-de-Lomas, 2015).

Regarding the analysis of digital tools, the study of the communication of CEOs in blogs and corporate websites showed an increase (from 2 to 16 cases between the first and the second decennium), but above all the analysis of the social networks had a remarkable interest (from one to 39 articles between the second and third decennium). The first study of CEOs and social networks was conducted in 2012. It examined the benefits of Twitter for the CEOs public relations. Studies on this platform have been on the rise and they position Twitter as the most researched social network to deal with the issues of the role of executives in institutional communication. This bibliometric analysis assures that public relations are increasingly about digital relations (Mathias et al., 2023).

It is striking that LinkedIn is a minimally studied social network, despite its characteristics for portraying the personal and work identity of executives. One of the reasons for the scant analysis of CEOs in this network could be the difficulties in collecting data based on platforms and technologies. It requires advanced technical skills typical of academics in areas such as information systems and computer science (Bruns & Liang, 2012; Heavey et al., 2020). Besides, fewer tools are studied, such as e-mail, instant messaging, intranet or the use of the telephone, mainly grouped under the umbrella of internal communication.

Researchers must be aware of the possible interaction of CEOs on emerging social networks such as TikTok, a platform that has increased its use and downloads since the pandemic hit. The first to explore communication opportunities on TikTok to connect especially with young audiences have been political parties and their leaders (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Kryshtanovskaya & Lavrov, 2022) and health institutions and their physicians (Eghtesadi & Florea, 2020). At the organizational level, TikTok is a valuable platform to identify changes in attitudes of millennial and centennial workers regarding new trends in the workplace (Peart, 2023) or to advertise and promote businesses (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). Given the characteristics for the marketing of products and services, the first to take advantage of the accessibility of this platform would be startups and their founders (Drobitko, 2023), who are sometimes the CEOs of their companies. It is a matter of time before the CEOs of other organizations land on this social network and, consequently, academics explore from a broader vision the effects of the communication of tiktokers CEOs on corporate reputation.

The breadth of communication tools allows CEOs to get involved in different areas of institutional communication. However, the dilemma between the technical or strategic value that CEOs grant to institutional communication is also analyzed (Berger, 2005; Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Hon, 1997, 1998; Luo & Jiang, 2014; Petersen & Martin, 1996; Rode & Vallaster, 2005; Simcic Brønn, 2014; Sissons, 2015; Zerfass et al., 2014, 2016; Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015).

The studies mainly focus on analyzing external communication with consumers or clients (Dean, 2019; Furukawa, 2022b, 2022a; Gorn et al., 2008; Kim & Sung, 2021) and the media (Denner et al., 2018; Górska & Mazurek, 2021; Jin & Yeo, 2011; Shields & Harvey, 2010; Terek et al., 2015).

Research agrees that CEOs have assumed reputation management as personal matter, considering that their personal performance could provide a competitive advantage or disadvantage in the reputation



of the companies they lead (Ferns et al., 2008; Murray & White, 2005; Ranft et al., 2006). Therefore, companies and corporate leaders are able to build public trust which as a result favor corporate reputation (Ingenhoff & Sommer, 2010; Kim & Ji, 2021; Kim & Sung, 2021).

During crisis situations, CEOs fulfill the role of “chief crisis officer” (Liu et al., 2022) which allow companies to personify their responses in unstable times through their CEOs (Barkley, 2020; Denner et al., 2018, 2019, 2021; Denner & Schneider, 2022; Koch et al., 2022; Mehra & Ahuja, 2022).

Studies of the role of CEOs on the internal communication of organizations focus mainly on CEOs communication styles and their effects on employee relationships. Most of the research states that direct face-to-face communication is essential and irreplaceable (Korzynski, 2014; Men, 2015; Men, Chen, et al., 2018; Preciado-Hoyos & Etayo-Pérez, 2014), but the research also points out the necessity of studying the importance of CEO interaction in online environments within organizations (Huang et al., 2013). The research offers an overview of how CEO rhetoric influences relationships where motivational language is used (Men, Chen, et al., 2021). It also reflects on the way responsiveness, assertive and authentic forms of communication influence CEO-employee relations (Men, 2021). By the same token, the studies analyzed mention the way the communication of charismatic executive leadership in times of change favors organizational trust and employee engagement (Men et al., 2020; Men, Qin, et al., 2021) what’s more it minimizes turnover intention (Yue, 2021).

Other studies cover the communication of social responsibility by CEOs. Research focuses on studying rhetoric through company reports (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012; Domenec, 2012; Ferns et al., 2008; Khan & Sulaiman, 2021; Rajandran & Taib, 2014), speeches in the media (Marais, 2012) or on social media (Fröhlich & Knobloch, 2021; Grover et al., 2019; Jacobson et al., 2014; Suárez-Rico et al., 2018; Toppinen et al., 2015; R. Wang & Huang, 2018; Yadav et al., 2022).

In the last years, their role as communicators of business sustainability has been studied, but interest has also increased in analyzing their exercise of political activism in response to the demands of their public and the business environment (Fröhlich & Knobloch, 2021; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Although the risk of speaking is greater than silence, top executives have decided to speak in public and for their public about gender equality, race, religion, LGBTQ+ rights, among other issues (Olkonen & Morsing, 2022). It is increasingly common in the media (Hon, 1998), the internet (Blood, 2001) or social networks sites (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019) to hear corporate leaders speak out on social or environmental policy issues that are not directly related to the business core of the company (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019).

However, in order to know the interaction and commitment of CEOs with their audiences, researchers and professionals could find an opportunity in the processes of social listening. It is one of the most valuable intangible resources that senior management must know the demands, motivations and expectations of their public (Claro, 2019; Gutiérrez-García, 2010; Place, 2019). It should be evaluated if the executives carry out a genuine digital dialogue based on the I-Thou relationship and not only a persuasive communication based on an I-It dynamic (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018).

What is important is not only that CEOs are present in all communication spaces, but that they advocate organizational listening that recognizes in the public the same right of reciprocal dialogue based not only on architecture of speaking but mostly on architecture of listening (Charan, 2012; Macnamara, 2016, 2018b, 2018a). It should not be forgotten that publics can also raise their voices without asking permission, make themselves heard and promote activism to get the attention of their executive leaders (Weber Shandwick & KRC Research, 2019).

## Conclusions

This bibliometric analysis offers a relevant contribution to understanding the evolution of the role of CEOs in the management of institutional communication in organizations. A matter that is not separated from the CEOs personal and professional agenda therefore, it creates a research interest.

This study demonstrates the evident interest in investigating the communication role of what in this research we call the “CEO communicator”.

In the last decennium, the number of articles on CEO institutional communication issues has significantly increased (RQ1), due to factors such as the public exposure of CEOs, the development of the World Wide Web, but above all due to the opportunity of Web 2.0 platforms. These platforms such as web, blogs and social networks reinforce the dialogic communication between the visible faces of the institutions and their public of interest.

The evolution of the communicational role of digital CEOs allows us to identify three major waves that frame their role as institutional communicators. The first wave marks the beginning of the transition from “CEO to e-CEO”, where executives are introduced to the internet for listening to the conversations of their organizations and themselves. The second wave is characterized by the emergence of “CEO Bloggers,” in which executives post their first communications on blogs and explore the potential for projecting credibility in Web 2.0 communities. CEOs issue their first dialogic babblings. Finally, the third wave represents the era of the “Social CEOs”, in which managers exploit dialogic principles of participation in social networks. This emergence of CEOs in digital spaces is defined as social presence.

A significant number of authors are interested in investigating the role of leaders in institutional communication (RQ2). The high number of authors working in the scientific production of CEO communication reflects the progress in public relations, highlighting its impact in practical and academic fields. The number of authors is substantial, and the citation level is high; however, few receive more than 100 citations. It is important to note that the author Linjuan Rita Men has a constant and high scientific production during the period of analysis and mainly over the last decennium. In addition to being one of the most cited researchers, in almost 80% of her research she participates as the sole or first author, in articles that focus mainly on the role of CEOs in internal communication and their relations with employees in large companies, startups and NGOs.

The number of journals published on the subject (RQ3) is scattered. Most of the articles are published in specialized communication journals and, therefore, they concentrate the highest levels of citation. *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* are the journals with the highest numbers of articles and citation levels on the research topic. Besides, researchers also publish in business and economic journals, since their work environment is the organizations. The tendency of authors to publish in journals dedicated to the field of public relations and that these have the highest citation levels are evidence of the strengthening of this discipline, which increasingly depends on the academic sources of communication and especially those of public relations, and no longer on other fields of the social sciences.

Regarding the contents (RQ4), it is observed that the executive directors are studied with big samples and the CEOs of the United States of America are the most investigated, while the Latin American executive directors arouse little interest. Digital institutional communication tools are predominant in the analysis especially social networks and within them the most relevant is Twitter. Non-digital communication tools are mainly focused on analyzing the oral and written rhetoric of CEOs, through documents such as letters shared on their own media or public speeches. In addition, the body of the articles is built mainly on communication theoretical frameworks and a large number of empirical studies are proposed, especially quantitative research. The most researched communication issues are those of external communication and crisis. The constant emergence of new tools, channels and domains in com-

munication imposes a challenge for CEOs. Therefore, in an environment where audiences evolve faster than the vision of organizations and their leaders, it is necessary to be one step ahead in the strategic management of institutional communication.

### Limitations, gaps and future research lines

Finally, this research contributes significantly to have a first holistic and transversal vision of the CEO's research as an institutional communicator. However, the analysis sample only included articles from two databases, Scopus and Web of Science. Other existing databases, other types of publications such as books or book chapters, conference proceedings and other types of academic text were not considered for the matter of the current study. Nevertheless, the data obtained will allow a more complete analysis on the linking of authors, co-citation and research networks for further analysis.

The authors found a gap in theoretical studies, as these are incipient and little explored. Therefore, it is necessary to raise the fundamentals of CEO communication to enhance empirical studies and help in the training and decision making of professionals who advise top management on institutional communication issues.

Filling an academic gap in studies of CEO communication on LinkedIn, the business and professional social network par excellence, deserves attention. Also, researchers should be on the lookout for opportunities to study CEOs in emerging social networks such as TikTok.

### Notes

[1] There are 156 articles in total, 102 were analyzed and 54 were discarded because the variable was not applicable.

[2] There are 156 articles in total, 102 were analyzed and 54 were discarded because the variable was not applicable

[3] There are 156 articles in total, 78 were analyzed and 78 were discarded because the variable was not applicable.

[4] There are 156 articles in total, 30 were analyzed and 126 were discarded because the variable was not applicable.

[5] There are 156 articles in total, 53 were analyzed and 103 were discarded because the variable was not applicable.

[6] There are 156 articles in total, 39 were analyzed and 117 were discarded because the variable was not applicable.

**Funding.** This research is funded by a grant from the Martí i Franquès programme (2022PMF-PIPF-3) of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili. In addition, it is linked to the competitive R&D&I project “La Comunicación Institucional Digital 2.0 de las Universidades” (PID2019-106053GB-I00), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and it is carried out within the framework of the Doctorate programme in Anthropology and Communication of Universitat Rovira i Virgili.

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### Appendix 1. Dimensions and keywords for bibliometric search in Scopus and Web of Sciences

Dimensions	Keywords
CEO	("ceo" OR "ceos" OR "chief executive officer*" OR "chairperson*" OR "general manager*" OR "president" OR "presidents" OR "owner manager*" OR "general director*" OR "female ceo*" OR "female chief executive officer*" OR "female chairperson*" OR "female general manager*" OR "female president*" OR "female owner manager*" OR "female general director*" OR "corporate ceo*" OR "corporate chief executive officer*" OR "corporate chairperson*" OR "corporate general manager*" OR "corporate president*" OR "corporate owner manager*" OR "corporate general director*" OR "executive chairperson*" OR "executive general manager*" OR "executive president*" OR "executive owner manager*" OR "executive general director*")
Non-digital communication	("Public Relations" OR "Dialogic Communication*" OR "Corporat* Communication*" OR "Institutional Communication*" OR "Organizational Communication*" OR "Strategic Communication" OR "Communication Management" OR "Organisational Communication*" OR "Integrated Marketing Communication*" OR "Marketing Communication*" OR "Communication Strategy" OR "Corporat* Publicity" OR "Brand*" OR "Dialogic Brand*" OR "Corporat* Brand*" OR "Institutional Brand*" OR "Organizational Brand*" OR "Strateg* Brand*" OR "Brand* Management" OR "Organisational Brand*" OR "Marketing Brand*" OR "Brand* Activis*" OR "ceo* activis*" OR "Corporat* Activis*" OR "Institutional Activis*" OR "corporat* social activis*" OR "ceo* reputation" OR "corporat* advoc*" OR "corporat* image" OR "institutional image" OR "organizational image" OR "organisational image" OR "communication corporat* image" OR "communication institutional image" OR "communication organizational image" OR "communication organisational image" OR "leadership communication" OR "reputation" OR "dialogic reputation" OR "corporat* reputation" OR "brand* reputation" OR "institutional reputation" OR "organizational reputation" OR "organisational reputation" OR "reputation strateg*")

Digital communication	("Digital" OR "Interactive" OR "Internet" OR "Interactivity" OR "Online" OR "On-line" OR "Mobile" OR "Digital Communication" OR "Digital Technolog*" OR "Digital Information" OR "Digital System*" OR "Internet Communication*" OR "Internet Information" OR "Internet Technolog*" OR "Internet System*" OR "Interactive Communication*" OR "Interactive Information" OR "Interactive Technolog*" OR "Interactive System*" OR "Mobile Information" OR "Mobile Communication" OR "Mobile Technolog*" OR "Mobile System*" OR "Online Communication*" OR "Online Information" OR "Online System*" OR "Online Technolog*" OR "On-line System*" OR "On-line communication" OR "On-line Information" OR "On-line Technolog*" OR "Digitalization" OR "Information and Communication Technolog*" OR "Human Computer Interaction" OR "Human-Computer Interaction" OR "Computer-mediated Communication" OR "Computer mediated Communication" OR "Communication Technolog*" OR "Communication System*" OR "Information System*" OR "Information Technolog*" OR "Digital Communication System*" OR "Digital Communication Technolog*" OR "Digital Marketing" OR "Internet Marketing" OR "Interactive marketing" OR "Online marketing" OR "Digital Communication Channel*" OR "Digital Channel*" OR "Digital Media" OR "Web 2.0" OR "Computer Networks" OR "Digital platform*" OR "New Media" OR "Social Web" OR "Digital network*" OR "On-line Social Network*" OR "Social Network*" OR "Social Network Sites" OR "Social Networking Sites" OR "Social Media" OR "Social Media Platform*" OR "Social Media Marketing" OR "Social Media Presence" OR "Social Media Interaction*" OR "Facebook" OR "Twitter" OR "LinkedIn" OR "Instagram" OR "YouTube" OR "Youtube" OR "TikTok" OR "Tik Tok" OR "Snapchat" OR "Pinterest" OR "World Wide Web" OR "Website*" OR "Weblog*" OR "Web*" OR "Web Page*" OR "www" OR "Blog*" OR "Forum*" OR "micro-blogging" OR "microblogging" OR "blogger*" OR "community" OR "Digital Brand*" OR "Brand* Technolog*" OR "Internet Brand*" OR "Internet Brand* Technolog*" OR "Interactive Brand*" OR "Mobile Brand*" OR "Online Brand*" OR "On-line Brand*" OR "Brand* On-line communication" OR "Brand* On-line Information" OR "Digital Brand* Technolog*" OR "Brand* Marketing" OR "Brand* Internet Marketing" OR "Brand* Interactive marketing" OR "Brand* Online marketing" OR "Brand* Social Media" OR "Brand* Social Media Marketing" OR "Brand* Social Media Presence" OR "Brand* Social Media Interact*" OR "digital reputation" OR "digital activis*")
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