

Research in Public Relations in Spain Through the State Research Plans 2013–2020

Tania Blanco Sánchez

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4212-7061>

University of Extremadura, Spain

Ana Castillo Díaz

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3650-2964>

University of Málaga, Spain

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter offers a longitudinal study on the financing of public relations projects through the State Plans for Scientific and Technical Research and of Innovation between the years 2013 and 2020. This is a descriptive paper, whose main object is to analyze the research evolution executed in the discipline of public relations via the latest State Plans for Scientific and Technical Research and of Innovation. The conclusions of the chapter reveal that in the last year the granting of research aid has increased substantially. Within the set of communication, public relations are still the most relevant topic receiving priority attention in research.

INTRODUCTION

This paper offers a longitudinal study on the financing of public relations projects through the State Plans for Scientific and Technical Research and of Innovation between the years 2013 and 2020. This study is intended to inform researchers in the field of Communication, and more specifically in public relations, in the subject of possible lines of research that can be financed by the aforementioned plan through the State Programs R+D+i of Generation of Knowledge and Oriented to the Challenges of the Society.

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novation. The analysis describes the field of research in which the projects are developed, the representativeness and evolution in relation to other thematic areas and subareas, and the institutions that lead the research financed in public relations.

The conclusions of the paper reveal that in the last year the granting of research aid has increased substantially. The area of social sciences has presented a medium level of participation in terms of the amount of aid received, placing the subarea of communication in second position after sociology, with numbers similar to geography and higher than those of political science. Within the set of communication, public relations are still the most relevant topic receiving priority attention in research.

It must be taken into account that public relations present a relatively recent autonomous theoretical development. Initially they were considered a part of journalism and related, mainly, to the protocol and organization of events. Notwithstanding this theoretical youth of public relations, research constitutes a fundamental tool for the advancement of this subject, whose birth and initial evolution are linked to a purely professional field. Considering this background, the research allows this discipline to find an area of clear and identifiable recognition by communication professionals (Olea & Román, 2011).

Nevertheless, in Spain one of the main sources of funding for scientific research is articulated through scientific research plans, the aforementioned plans are the denominated State Plans for Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation.

Finally, it is considered that this research can be a reference to delve into the thematic areas and subareas in which a greater quantity of research projects are being awarded, as well as to determine the existing trends in the communication subarea and in the field of public relations in R+D+i in Spain in recent years

BACKGROUND

Research in Communication and Research in Public Relations in Spain

Within the panorama of communication research in Spain, through a longitudinal study (1990-2014), Martínez, Saperas & Carrasco (2019) point to a diversification of the objects of study, a pre-eminence of papers on media content and a gradual improvement in methodological quality, as well as a growing predominance of quantitative research, particularly content analysis conducted on documents of media origin. Furthermore, in their analysis they register a growing neglect of the institutional dimension of the communicative system (companies, professionals, markets, public policies, etc.), as well as a decrease in purely theoretical research.

Notwithstanding this diversification of the objects of study, journalism continues to be the predominant field in communication research in Spain. With a considerable difference, the field of audiovisual communication is the next in terms of research attention in Spain. Subsequently, public relations and advertising come next with irregular patterns over time, albeit the area of public relations seems to be prominent over advertising in the papers published in the 21st century.

Indubitably, research is an essential tool for all sciences and fields, including public relations. Public relations are an applied social science (Grunig & Hunt, 2000; Grunig 1983) and, therefore, it is necessary to investigate before planning public relations programs, as Black (1994) cites. Along the same lines, Rossi and Freeman (1989) state that such research is a political and managerial activity, from which decisions emanate to devise the programs.

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