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Research on ethics education for journalists in Spain. Bibliometric analysis and applied educational terms (2005-2015)

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Abstract

Introduction. The article presents a bibliometric study of the research work published in Spanish indexed scientific journals about education on journalism ethics and deontology with the objective of reflecting on the status of research, identifying strengths and potential analytical deficiencies, and establishing principles in a time of communicative transformation. **Methodology.** It uses a mixed methodology supported by qualitative and quantitative techniques of document review and content analysis applied to the 52 journals of Communication of the database DICE in the period 2005-2015 analyzing three categories: source, content and formative prescriptions. **Results.** The study identifies little interest from Spanish researchers and universities, with the concrete result of eight research articles about teaching in ten years of formative and technological changes, in a moment of special relevance for the ethical challenges of the new communicative environment. The experts analyzed prescribe a teaching of ethics based on applied philosophy from case studies. **Discussion.** The research gaps detected around the new ethical dilemmas highlight the need to intensify the academic debate about the importance that the subject must have in the curricula and the adaptation of the subject to the digital environment.

Keywords

Ethics; Deontology; Journalism; Education; EEES; Scientific journals.

Contents

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Traslate by **Marcos Astorga**

1. Introduction

Professional ethics determines the moral obligations implied in a profession, understanding that there are “fundamental duties, behaviors, practices, attitudes and aptitudes for the positive development of a specific profession” (Wanjiru, 1995: 99). That is why it becomes especially necessary in the journalistic domain, where the informer works with a high degree of freedom and where decisions are made daily, by applying just the personal criterion, that entail consequences that affect the common good.

Besides, journalism ethics derives from the responsibility that informers acquire as “providers of an essential public service: providing accurate information to citizens so that they can decide on public affairs” (Rodríguez Borges and Aznar, 2014: 177), thus acting as guarantors for a reflective civic participation, fundamental within the democratic life. Rodrigo Alsina materializes this compromise on a “socially and historically defined trust agreement” that would legitimize the function of journalists as transmitters of the “social reality of public importance” (1989: 53).

The relevance of ethics is such that professionalism in journalism identifies with the compliance with a set of deontological principles: commitment with the truth, independence, comparing sources, surveillance from the institutions, separation between information and opinion, style adapted to the facts, among others, that differentiate the true journalist from the mere unqualified information transmitter. This premise assumes that, to understand the complex reality and transfer it accurately to the recipients, a technical training is not enough, but rather a moral reasoning that regulates decision-making.

The concern on informative ethics is strongly attached in the professional and academic field (Merrill, 1997; McQuail, 1998; Aznar, 1999; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2003). Actually, various resources and deontological autoregulation initiatives have been developed, whose most successful application are the ethical codes that gather the set of principles that must inspire the journalists’ behavior (Aznar, 1999). In the same line, a number of independent bodies has been generated, in charge of supervising those regulations are met: press or information councils, arbitration committees, and recipient supporters.

That same concern has been transferred to the reflection on the journalist’s education, secured to an ethical and deontological basis (Christians and Covert, 1980; Payne, 1992; Richardson, 1994; Callahan and Bok, 1980; Desantes, 1993; Díaz del Campo, 2013, Jiménez Gómez, 2015). Joseph Pulitzer, founder of the School of Journalism at Columbia University, already stated in his defense

for a solid ethics education in a broader sense of commitment with the audience and the quality of information:

“The piece of news is relevant; it is the lifeblood of a newspaper. But what is life without morality? What is the life of a country or an individual without honor, heart and soul? Beyond knowledge, news and intelligence, the lifeblood of a newspaper lies on its moral sense, its courage, its integrity, its humanity, its regard for the oppressed, its independence, its devotion towards public wellbeing, its yearning to provide a public service” (2011: 80).

Since its establishment, the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) has been working on counseling for the education of journalists under the premise that an ethical journalism “is the one best placed to promote democracy, dialog and development” (UNESCO, 1948). The UN Conference on Freedom of Information held in Geneva in 1948 included among its recommendations that journalism schools should “inculcate the mood of future journalists with the sharp sense of moral and social responsibility of their profession, making them aware of the inconvenience of the commercialization, sensationalism and racial and religious discrimination” (1948: 80). In the same line, the *World-wide Survey on the Training of Personnel for the Mass Media* (UNESCO, 1958) acknowledged ethics as a necessary discipline and encouraged for the stimulation of the debate in the classroom on deontological questions while suggesting the exposition of “moral problems in practical duties” (1958: 60).

In the 21st century, the first World Journalism Education Congress (UNESCO, 2007) proposed five core educational modules, establishing journalism ethics as one of them. Actually, the educational program that came out of this congress included the course of Ethics on the degree plans of three and four years, and on the Master’s degree plans. For the authors of this teaching project, this course would support the reflection on “the best practices in journalism” (UNESCO, 2007: 6) and would allow the student to “be able to hold themselves accountable for both the product and the agreement process with ethical standards” (2007: 46).

The configuration of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has enlivened the debate on the education of journalists and has intensified research on the education of journalism in Degrees (Alsina and Lazcano, 2014; Rosique, 2013; Humanes and Roses, 2014; Rodrigo-Alsina and Lazcano, 2014; Sánchez-García, 2016). The deliberation has been often oriented towards determining what knowledge a professional must have about information, and thus, what type of contents the university must provide, establishing the courses that have to be included in the study plans. However, the question is far from being settled: “discrepancies about what can or can’t be taught in the Journalism degree are still unresolved and reemerge in certain times in our history, as a kind of a wrongly healed cold, or rather as a somatic response to the bottom and identity problems of journalism in the Spanish university” (Jiménez Gómez, 2015: 162).

The adaptation of Spain to the EHEA has been marked by the implementation of digital technology in newsrooms that has sparked a general reflection on the knowledge that assures an adequate practice of the profession in a current context. The necessary educational adjustment to technology and digital journalism has caused an indisputable interest among Spanish academicians in the past fifteen years (Salaverría, 2000; Tejedor, 2006; Díaz-Noci, 2007; Masip and Micó, 2009; Biondi, Miró y Zapata, 2010; Balandrón, 2010; Sierra and Cabezuelo, 2010; Sánchez-García and Marinho, 2016). The demand for a higher technical education suggests a need for replacing theoretical courses

traditionally included in study plans for other courses with a higher technological base that train students in the management of ICTs.

That is the current state of journalism education: a double educational and technological convergence that still needs reviewing of its educational programs. Along this path, the guide that Spanish universities have been using is the *White Book of Bachelor Degrees in Communications* by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA, 2004) whose purpose was to create a proposal that would enable these bachelor degrees the adaptation to the parameters of this convergence. The text holds the idea that one of the fundamental objectives of the degree in Journalism must be the acquisition of the following knowledge:

“[...] professional ethics education and civic commitment through an understanding of the legal code and regulations that affect our sphere, and the possibilities and limits set on freedom of speech, as well as the social responsibility that must dominate the professional practice of the informer, promoting the egalitarian conscience among people and peoples, and the respect for the international human rights” (ANECA, 2005: 310).

In most cases, the studies that have covered the presence of ethics and deontology during the education of the journalist have the common view of considering it an essential course (Brajnovic, 1979; Christians and Covert, 1980; Sinova, 1997; Videla, 2002), a professional ethics that must provide students with the necessary knowledge about the existing autoregulation documents and tools but that also must serve to the reflection on the moral dilemmas that future journalists will have to face for a successful performance of their activity. An education that for some authors can back up against the pressure that is often put onto the informer: “It is easier for professionals to rebel against the most serious violations when they have acquired a solid and realistic education in moral habits that leverage the internal ends of the informative profession” (Linde, 2009: 43).

There is less unanimity in how to transfer this information to the curriculum, a contemplation that arises from the peculiarity of ethics where there is a junction between “a body of knowledge, methods and key concepts” but that also comprises deeply personal aspects, “matters related with values, moral character or good behavior” (Díaz del Campo, 2013: 114).

From this theoretical context, the aim of this work is to analyze the research made on journalism ethics education during the past decade of educational and technological change in Spain. The research aims to compile the different studies published on the importance that deontology must have in the latest study plans, the changes established in their content, the different methodologies for their realization of the new approaches of the course in a digital environment. The study appeals to a bibliometric review that implies “making balance over a specific field and, at the same time, indicating those works liable to being reused and appropriated by the scientific community” (María-Sáez y Ceballos-Castro, 2015: 202).

2. Methodology

This research uses a combined methodology supported by qualitative and quantitative techniques for documentary and bibliographic review and content analysis, which have been considered the most adequate method for the achievement of the objective, carrying out a bibliometric study of those articles published in indexed scientific journals, especially focused on an analysis of the qualitative

discourse that allows realizing a systematic and objective study enabling the measurement of certain variables (Kerlinger, 1986). Besides, it facilitates the “interpretation of communicational products that, based on measurement methods, sometimes quantitative (statistics based on unit recount) and others qualitative (logics based on the combination of categories), aim at elaborating and processing relevant data from the analyzed communicative texts” (Piñuel, 2013: 2).

2.1. Scope of analysis

The scope of study of the current research is limited to the Spanish scientific journals specialized on Communications whose publications have passed a screening process during the 2005-2015 period. The selected temporary framework allows for the observation of two fundamental aspects of the subject of study related with the educational and technological convergence: first, 2005 was agreed on based on the consideration that it is enough time to find research works that make reference to the potential changes in ethics education within the Journalism degree before the adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) implemented in Spain in 2010, but whose theoretical observations stem from the years prior to that date [01]. Second, the process ends in 2015 after considering that this is an adequate time to prove whether the technological change underwent by the Communications area has sparked any academic debate around the influence or potential new paradigms in journalism ethics and deontology.

Once the analysis period is delimited, we proceed to the selection of publications from the DICE database (Dissemination and Editorial Quality of Spanish Journals of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law) [02], which has been deemed the most comprehensive collection in the Communications field in Spain, covering an initial universe of 52 specialized publications.

Two search filters were made from the selection of scientific journals in those publications that included automatic search engines, or manually in those that do not have that option –using the index. The first filtering was for those articles focusing on journalism ethics education considering their title, keywords [03] and abstract, and selecting those articles that made explicit reference to ethics and education in general. This resulted in 39 articles with the following keywords: *ética*, *deontología*, *formación*, *enseñanza*, *EEES* and *docencia*.

The second filtering consisted in a textual analysis of the articles that sparked doubts about their direct relationship with the subject of study being exclusively focused on ethics education and journalistic training. It resulted in eight articles that made explicit reference to the debate about ethics in journalistic training or some of its edges during the past ten years.

The final population that constitutes the scope of analysis is certainly limited, for the surprise of the researchers, after a thorough search of the 52 aforementioned journals during a ten-year period. However, far from being considered a limitation in results, the selection of the scope of study has been understood as a significant indicator of the relative interest that ethics education raises among academics that are carrying out researches on Communications and specialized journals. Thus it has been deemed interesting to indicate the possible lacks of the subject of study, as well as to gather the educational prescriptions that the cited scholars are taking towards an improved applied ethics education.

Once the scope of study has been delimited, an analysis (Table 1) has been applied. In that table, there are quantitative variables applied to the articles that adapt to the subject of study, along with a qualitative analysis of the discourse that allows extracting those prescriptions around ethics education that Spanish experts established while being interested in journalism ethics in a time of communicative transformation.

2.2. Table of analysis and categories of the study

The quantitative content analysis and discourse analysis of the research articles for the present research broadly aims to get to know seven specific aspects of ethics education during the training of journalists.

- How many articles on ethics education have been published during the past decade and in which journals.
- Which researchers, universities, research groups have been the most prolific in the study.
- What topics have been covered in Spain with the deepest insight on ethics education during the training of journalists.
- How this research is being made, this is, what methodologies are applied in its analysis.
- What is the main focus, whether it is about teaching methods or general ethical principles.
- In what way is the technological transformation of communications being included in academic debates about ethics education.
- Whether a prescriptive value can be found in said research works that allows for the establishment of a number of parameters to follow during the journalist's ethical education.

These elements are the main thematic tracks that will guide this research, but in order to guarantee the systematic analysis of the content, we need a detailed extent of the categories applied to the observation. In this way, a potential distortion of the results would be avoided due to the application of a judgment on the value that the unit of analysis adopts (López & Vicente, 2011). For that matter, a table of analysis is shown below (Table 1), which allows collecting and analyzing quantitative data from the bibliometric study along with the most interpretative data from the discourse analysis of the analyzed publications.

With the purpose of facilitating the collection and presentation of results, we have opted for the different categories to be grouped into three sections (Table 1): A. Article fact sheet (with information about the journal, the author and the team or funded project), B. Methodological analysis of the article (meaning the research methods used), and C. Discourse analysis focused on the content related with ethics education.

Table 1. Analysis sheet for the bibliometric study

A. Article fact sheet
Facts from journal and author
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Year of publication – Issue number – Monograph or similar (indicate monographic subject) – Authorship – Professional category – Courses she/he is responsible of – University or Center name – Public or private nature – There is a journalistic ethics course in the study plans of that university. Yes/No – Year it is included in
Scientific collaboration and research projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Authors from different universities – University name – They belong to a Research Group. Name of group – The article comes from a funded research Project – Name of project and funding entity – Project scope: international, national, regional, other
B. Methodological analysis of the article
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Article title – Article keywords – Geographic area of research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local or regional National Multinational (name countries) Global Not specified or implied – Theoretical-Methodological approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical-conceptual Methodological Empirical (without systematic methods) Empirical (with quantitative methods) Empirical (with qualitative methods) Empirical (with qualitative and quantitative methods) Not classifiable – Research method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bibliometric analysis Survey Interview (specify) Content analysis Comments from participant

Triangulation (name used methods)
C. Discourse analysis on ethics education
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focused on ethics education, or is it a secondary matter- Theoretical approach- Main topic- Importance of the course within the education of the journalist- Contents of the course- Teaching methodology- ICT approach (specify)- Other (specify)- Secondary topics- Importance of the course within the education- Contents of the course- Teaching methodology- Other (specify)- Bibliographical references- Terms in journalistic ethics education

Source: based on Alsina and Lazcano (2014).

3. Results of the research

3.1. Lack of interest for research on ethics education

The first palpable result of the study is the reduced publication of academic research papers focused on ethics education in journalism, in a time of educational and technological convergence. From reviewing the 52 journals that make up the DICE database in the Communications area, just seven of them (13.4%) published a number of articles on the subject matter of the analysis, and just one of them, *Historia y Comunicación Social*, published two articles (Table 2). From the eight articles that constitute the sample, four of them appeared in special issues aiming either at the education of journalists -as is the case with the special issue from *Historia y Comunicación Social* (n° 18), titled “Communications in today’s profession and university”, and with *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico* (n° 19), titled “Teaching Communications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)”- or with ethics in communications, as the special issue from *Periodística* (n° 13), titled “New challenges for ethics and deontology”.

The bibliometric and quantitative result must be contextualized within the studied period (2005-2015) that, as it was shown in the theoretical section above, covers the changes in the universities’ educational programs with the EHEA, and the technological change in the Communications sector. Two aspects that bring to light the reduced number of research works on ethics education in a time of pedagogical and programmatic transformation and the modification in professional practices.

Table 2. Articles about ethics education in journalism published in Spain (2005-2015)

JOURNAL (year)	AUTHOR	UNIVERSITY
<i>Comunicación y Sociedad</i> (2009)	Antonio Linde Navas	Universidad de Málaga
<i>Doxa</i> (2014)	Mónica Codina	Universidad de Navarra
<i>Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico</i> (2013).	Carlos Maciá Barber	Universidad Carlos III
<i>Historia y Comunicación Social</i> (2013)	Jesús Díaz del Campo	Universidad de La Rioja
<i>Historia y Comunicación Social</i> (2013)	M ^a Ángeles Galván Arias	Universidad CEU San Pablo
<i>Periodística</i> (2011)	Salvador Alsius	Universidad Pompeu Fabra
<i>Vivat Academia</i> (2012)	Jesús Díaz del Campo	Universidad de La Rioja
<i>Zer</i> (2014)	Jesús Díaz del Campo	Universidad de La Rioja

Source: Authors of the present research.

The limitations of the result forces us to provide a broader and more generic approach of those articles that were excluded in the first filtering which allowed to notice that, when we look for topics related with journalism education in universities, the most important block of articles makes reference to general questions about how to adapt the degrees to the Bologna Declaration in Spain but without getting into the contents or specific courses. Elena Real's work (2005) makes a good example of this: "*Algunos interrogantes en torno a los estudios de Periodismo ante el nuevo Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior*," or the study by Meneses and González (2010), "*Los estudios de Comunicación en el EEES y los desafíos profesionales emergentes*"

The collection of data that belongs to the categories included in section A of the analysis sheet also shows that in the articles that were grouped from keywords there is a profuse presence of those matters related with ethics in the professional praxis both with normative or general approaches and with specific casuistry. Examples are Rivas de Roca on the ethical nature of the photojournalism products arisen after the Charlie Hebdo attack (2015), or Díaz Arias, González Conde and Aparicio on the Observatory for the Quality of Information on Television (2015).

Adding to the low attention the subject receives in the regular issues of the journals specialized in Communications, there is an unequal distribution over time. It is worth noting the only published article about ethics education between the period from 2005 and 2010, compared to the seven articles during the following five years. This is an aspect that corresponds with the results from Alsina and Lazcano's study (2014) about the adaptation process of the education on Communications to the EHEA, which proved that the majority of articles published about the subject matter (65.1%) came to light in 2012 and 2013. The researchers argue that those years "correspond to one phase of the adaptation process of the courses to the Bologna Declaration in which we can already count on experiences to analyze, study and evaluate" (2014: 227).

Concerning the authorship of the articles, there is just one researcher, Jesús Díaz del Campo from the International University of La Rioja, who signs several of the analyzed articles: three works in total

[3], which is why the result comes to six authors from six different universities: Carlos III, CEU San Pablo, International University of La Rioja, University of Málaga, University of Navarra and University of Pompeu Fabra. All of them except for one are teaching the ethics course, although the lack of homogeneity of the study plans in the Spanish university causes the discipline to receive different names from one center to another: Ethics and Deontology in Communications at the International University of La Rioja, Journalistic Deontology at the University of Navarra and University of Pompeu Fabra, or Deontology of Communications at the University of Málaga.

Concerning their qualification, five of six authors are doctors and the majority are tenured professors or accredited for tenure that hold a position that is inferior to their competences, and therefore experienced professors in the course they teach.

Apart from the lack of research papers, there is also the circumstance in which the target period has no scientific collaboration whatsoever between professors and universities concerning the promotion of ethics education. All authors sign their own individual articles and only two of their research works are within the framework of a project developed between different centers; these are the National Plan “Ethics and informative excellence. Journalistic deontology against the citizens’ expectations (2006-2010)” and “Deontology and informative excellence. Implementation and consolidation of ethical practices in the journalism company (2011-2013)”.

There is a substantially higher presence of articles pertaining to private universities (five articles) than public universities (three), an interesting fact given that the number of public centers that offer the degree in Journalism in Spain (56.7%) is slightly higher than the number of private centers (43.2%). The nature of this fact could lie in the tradition of incorporating ethics courses in private universities, as the study by Vázquez Fernández (2002) confirms, concluding that 100% of private universities included Ethics in the Journalism degree programs, while in public universities this inclusion was less visible (73%). Besides, the importance given to this course was also higher in private centers, as it was mandatory 92% of the times against 72% in public centers (Vázquez, 2002, Jiménez, 2015), a fact that could be explained with the traditional relationship between ethics and religious morality, and the fact that most private universities come from the catholic tradition.

As for the research’s geographical scope, only Díaz del Campo’s work, presented over his three articles, has multinational character –within Europe–, other two research works are national and the rest does not show any defined geographical scope as they mostly are theoretical reflections on the course, and not empirical research works.

3.2. Predominant research methods

The categories analyzed in section B of the analysis sheet focus on the method that researchers have used in their studies on ethics. In this case, the categorization designed by Martínez Nicolás and Saperas (2011) has been used to classify the different methods. It has also been used in subsequent bibliometric analyses for Communications studies such as the one by Alsina and Lazcano (2014). This categorization demarcates theoretical-conceptual and empirical works, indicating the different research methods used in the empirical works: quantitative, qualitative, a combination of both, empirical research but without systematic methods and other methodologies that do not fit in the previous categories. This generic separation comes with the detail of the used research method,

where the broad range of predominant research methods in the research on Communications has been included: bibliometric analysis, survey, interview, content analysis, participant observation. Besides, it is specified that there is a methodological triangulation by using different methods for one subject of study.

In this respect, in the case of this research, most articles –six– are empirical works. The other two articles do not show or develop the research method and merely present a theoretical-conceptual reflection around the elements that apply to the course.

Through the empirical texts it is deduced that all of them use one research method. The most frequent method is the quantitative and qualitative survey, although it is necessary to clarify that there is an element that distorts the results, as it is the method applied by Díaz del Campo in his three articles (2012, 2013, 2014). It is followed by the content analysis with two research works and the bibliometric analysis with one research work.

We could not find any example of triangulation, not even using two research methods even though it would have been a useful mechanism for the enrichment of the methodological design, as it facilitates the contrast between methods allowing the “comparison and completion of results in each of them on a common subject of study, with the purpose of improving the validity and reliability of the work as a whole” (Vicente-Mariño, 2009: 5).

3.3. Contents of the course, main argument for reflection

Section C includes a discourse analysis that allows collecting, with a more qualitative and interpretative approach, the contents and prescriptions of the articles that make up the scope of study. The main results show that the articles raise a number of topics, the one that was marked most often –with six texts– being the category “Contents of the course on journalism ethics.” Thus, we find research works on the necessity of improving the philosophical approaches and case studies (Codina, 2014; Linde, 2009), suggesting a thesaurus for the study of ethics (Alsius, 2011), the analysis of the main pedagogical objectives that the course must achieve (Díaz del Campo, 2012), the existing risk of indoctrination (Díaz del Campo, 2013) or the need to cover violence and conflict in the course (Galván, 2013). The rest of works are in the category “Others,” including a research paper about the education of the teachers of the course in Europe (Díaz del Campo, 2014) and a paper that aims to determine whether the research about journalism ethics has a practical effect on the training process of students and in the business sector (Maciá Barber, 2013).

Results shown in the contents category also let us bring up the issues that are missing in them. During the target period, there is not an article that covers the relevance that the course must have in the study plan in spite of the traditional existing discrepancy on this matter, with two confronted approaches: the predominant, which advocates that it must be considered a course just like the others within the curriculum, and the other, which considers it a cross-cutting matter that must be brought up in different courses during the degree (Díaz del Campo, 2013). It is also worth noting the research void on the relationship between the education in journalism ethics and the new digital communicative environment that is witnessing new moral dilemmas in the professional activity that must be covered in the classrooms if we want the students to effectively acquire the knowledge and competences that they will need to develop during their career.

3.4. Prescriptive nature. The application of research to teaching

Lastly, the discourse analysis allows delving into the prescriptive nature of the research considering its capacity to suggest education models that influence and guide the teaching of journalism ethics. In this sense, the covered research works provide specific suggestions of practices of education of ethics in Journalism and of fundamental targets for reflection and academic debate.

Most research works have the common need for promoting an applied education. Then there comes the initiative of orienting the E&D&I on journalism ethics so that it responds to the issues or companies and serves to the education in universities (Marciá-Barber, 2013). As for more pedagogy-oriented recommendations, there are plans to pursue the development of ethical reflection from theoretical parameters as a fundamental educational objective of the course, thus sparking the necessary moral reasoning to guide students towards decision-making (Díaz del Campo, 2012; Codina, 2014). In this sense, and from the application of principles and methods of moral philosophy, we consider the convenience of introducing analyses from real cases that appear during the journalistic activity, and using the method of discussion groups to work on the resolution of the implicit ethical dilemmas (Linde, 2009), useful methods, besides, to avoid indoctrination that is perceived as one of the risks in the course (Díaz del Campo, 2013). Some approaches set out the need for improving during the educational period of future journalists the ethical education, using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a framework (Codina 2014), as well as incorporating on a cross-cutting basis the moral discussion that affects the new situations and problems that the information professional faces, such as the speed in the propagation of information that the internet facilitates, cultural diversity or globalization.

On a strictly conceptual level, there is the importance of basing the theoretical study of ethics in the analysis of deontological codes that emerge from autoregulation as the “clearest way to infer a general ethics of communications” (Alsius, 2011: 31).

Concerning the analysis of the ethics professor, we observed the pertinence that teachers of this course have an education on Philosophy and Communications, given the interdisciplinary nature of the course (Díaz del Campo, 2014). Besides, we considered the necessary coordination between the faculty of the *Grado* (Degree) for a successful transference to the students of an approach of Journalism as a public service with the respect to human dignity at its core (Codina, 2014).

These specific prescriptions show that the direction for the academic debate about ethics education in future educational programs in the faculties or schools with Journalism degrees could be in the reflection on the balance that must exist between the knowledge about ethics with a philosophical foundation (Codina, 2014) and a more practical education focused on the analysis of cases. In the end, academics who have led research on this matter during the past ten years in Spain underline the timeliness of promoting ethics applied to moral education, on a philosophical basis, through moral dilemmas (Linde, 2009) that allows students to search for specific solutions to the ethical conflicts they find during their career.

4. Conclusions and prospects

The bibliometric study about the research on ethics teaching during the educational period of journalists in Spain shows conclusions that can be interesting to address the design of future educational programs and narrow the academic debate on this matter.

The limited number of publications found on Spanish scientific journals of Communications during the past ten years, far from being considered a limitation itself, is interpreted here as a necessary call to action against the poor research production and the analytical gaps in such a relevant field for the education of journalists. Besides, results obtained around such a specific subject of study allow for a better definition of the need for broadening the academic discussion on ethics education in Journalism through prescriptions from researchers that advocate for an applied education.

Building on this generic statement, we can confidently confirm from this research three main aspects that lead us to further research in the scientific debate and to mark future lines of study.

Firstly, we detected that researchers and journals show limited academic interest for addressing the potential changes and educational challenges in the education of journalism ethics during a key period (2005-2015) of educational convergence, with the adaptation to the EHEA, and media convergence with the challenges presented by the new communicative and technological environment, which modifies relevant aspects related with the professional responsibility.

Secondly, published research works on the matter show a lacking relationship between researchers from different universities, and share a common interest: focusing their concerns rather on the educational content than on the teaching methods of the professional praxis of the journalist.

However, in spite of this less methodological content, the body of publications analyzed during this research also shares the same nature in their prescriptions as a kind of roadmap for the reflection facing future educational changes. Then, as third conclusion, the study confirms that academics worried about this issue are clearly focusing on five proposals in the education of professional ethics:

1°.- The need of promoting an applied education. This means, guiding the R&D&I on journalistic ethics so that it responds to the companies' situations and contributes to education in universities.

2°.- Searching for new pedagogical methods directed towards the development of ethical reflection from a number of theoretical criteria, sparking in students the moral reasoning that leads to decision-making.

3°.- Using applied ethics introducing actual cases in the ethical education of the journalist along with the analysis of actual cases that emerge during the journalistic activity, organizing discussion groups to work towards the resolution of implied ethical dilemmas.

4°.- There is the suggestion that ethical education should be based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but with a cross-cutting perspective including the moral

discussion that affects the new situations and problems that the information professional faces, such as: fast dissemination of information, cultural diversity or globalization.

5°.- Intensify the cross-cutting idea of Journalism as a public service, focusing on the respect of human dignity, and achieve a successful transmission of this idea to the student.

The conclusions of the research also help broaden the academic debate on this matter and address the limitations that can be solved in future lines of research. It seems necessary to give priority to the debate on the role of ethics in Journalism degrees, including its role in future study plans. If we take for granted the importance of deontology in the educational sphere of Journalism, academics must put an eye on how –in a possible second phase of modification of the study degrees in Journalism (the so-called “3+2 Degrees”)– those courses that apply to Humanities with a rather theoretical basis may undergo a progressive cutback in programs as it has been observed during the past decades (Real, 2004; Sánchez-García, 2016), so that studies like ethics run the risk of disappearing and being replaced with the transmission of cross-cutting knowledge that depend on the whims of each professor.

Similarly, a wide debate should be held on the teaching methods of ethics that, not losing their moral and philosophical base, reinforce an applied and comprehensive education. an issue that is even more necessary today with the objective that future journalists can develop their digital competences and multipurpose profile with a high capacity for resolution of new ethical dilemmas that emerge in the new communicative environment such as the contrast of new sources of information, their relationship with a prosumer audience, the ethical criteria in the development of the changing digital media agenda of the distribution and informative treatment of media through social networks. Issues that are raised here as future lines of study to mitigate the research gap and contribute to extending scientific knowledge that allows facing emerging professional challenges in Journalism with an adequate ethical education.

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5. Footnotes

[1] The Organic Law 4/2007 written over the Organic Law 6/2001 of Universities made a profound change and established the new structure for Degrees, Master’s degrees and PhD according to the EHEA.

[2] DICE is the database for Dissemination and Editorial Quality of Spanish Journals on Humanities, Social Sciences and Law. Participants are the CESIC and ANECA. Available on:
http://dice.cindoc.csic.es/resultados.php?tit=&at=COMUNICACI%D3N&ac=&criterios_latindex=n&issn=&bbdd=&submit=+Buscar+ (accessed on March 3, 2016).

[3] One gives the circumstance of which three Díaz's articles of the Field (2012, 2013 and 2014) correspond to the only investigation that consisted of polling teachers of ethics of 14 countries of the European Union concerning a diversity of questions.

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