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## Are the spin doctors a figure of priority interest for public relations?

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### Abstract

This research has a twofold goal: on the one hand, it describes, from a theoretical point of view, the importance of the figure and role of the spin doctors, also known as communication political advisers, from the perspective of public relations; and by another, the article analyses quantitatively and qualitatively, the presence and treatment of the figure of the spin doctor in the main academic journals included in the Journal Citation Reports in the fields of communication, public relations and political communication from the point of view of public relations discipline. The results of the research confirm the notable influence of public relations in the origin, definition and professional activity of spin doctors. By contrast, this study shows the low presence of the spin doctor concept in the academic literature, although the articles analysed confirm the importance of this figure from the point of view of public relations.

### Keywords

Political communication; public relations; spin doctors.

# 1. Introduction

What are we talking about when we speak about a spin doctor? Applied to politics, a spin doctor is the Anglo-Saxon term used to refer to communication strategists and advisers of professionals of the res publica and their electoral and party activity. This denomination began to become popular between 1850 and 1900 and was used to refer to the press aides of those years and their goal was to generate publicity. To spin means reverse or change direction and, when applied to sport, a dramatic effect or manipulation.

The press aide acted in special situations at the service of their clients –those coming from politics and the world of sport and show business– and it was done in a very aggressive way with the intention of increasing their notoriety (Xifra, 2001). Lilleker (2006) in a synthetic and rightly manner points to this concept:

«The term spin is used to denote media management techniques that hinder journalists from reporting news objectively and from accessing all the information. The spin-doctor is an individual who attempts to use spin to influence public opinion by presenting favourably biased information, usually via the media».

Some studies have focused their sights on the role of these political actors under famous administrations (Kurtz, 1998) and some have even predicted its end (Pitcher, 2002), although there is ample evidence to show that it is still in good health. The spin doctors should dedicate their time to the relationship of the leader or political representative (and his/her party or institution) with the publics with which they interact. «Managing people's expectations about potential gains or losses from government actions or about a candidate's performance in an upcoming election is one of the goals of spin doctoring» (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011). To achieve it in a hypermediatic context like those of contemporary Western societies, that are very marked by rhythm, by language and by the weight of the media (multimedia, multi-platform), the spin doctors often turn to the mass media. Authors like Muñoz-Alonso and Rospir (1995, 1999) and advisors like Thierry Saussez (1985, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1999) have provided concepts, such as 'media democracy' or 'cathodical democracy', which highlight the importance of the media -and especially the television- in our society. This reality has become an increasing influence in politics, although all too often it transcends or is projected that politicians turn particularly to communication and public relations professionals, precisely when they want to give an appropriate explanation when faced with a political crisis or trust which generates communication problems. In fact, the Achilles heel of many political organisations has precisely been to opt for discrediting the techniques of political communication and the spin doctors when results have not been favourable for them. However, for instance, all the parties have an increasing number of pseudo-events in order to attract media attention. The spin doctors seek that the media project the image and the message that they want to convey to the public opinion, thus trying to set the media agenda, and in consequence, the public from the political one. The techniques of the spin doctors, -which mostly come from the field of public relations- are not, by themselves, a guarantee for success. However, it is obvious that their weight is becoming more decisive each day, given that "there is currently a greater role for the media, parallel to a progressive personalization of politics and a rethinking of many ideological references (Martin Salgado, 2002). And here we find one of the main objectives to be observed in our work: this reality is each day more present in political parties. Is this reflected in a relevant way in academic journals in the field of communication and public relations? Can we consider public relations a key player in the scrutiny of politics from a communicative perspective?

## 2. Theory and context

The model of activity of the spin doctors; asymmetric, focused almost exclusively on relations with the media, is characteristic of the beginnings of public relations. The spin doctors seek to annex the maximum visibility for the "client" -in this case, the political leader or representative-, giving priority to the image factor; the "how" over the "what" (Zamora Medina, 2009). And from here, the almost absolute protagonist of the media in this process.

Two decades ago, authors like Ewen (1996) and Tye (1998) studied the figure of the spin doctors in the American field from an academic point of view and especially from a critical one: Ewen mentioned them when drawing a social background of public relations, and Tye approached public relations in interaction with political journalism. Jones (1992, 1995, 1997), meanwhile, shows how contemporary British studies also focused on

the spin doctors as an element worthy of analysis, and was critical in most of the cases. For example, in the nineties of the past century, the New Labour led by Tony Blair created a special media attention about his spin machine and, just as with the media coverage of politics, and in recent years, this interest has increased. This evolution is global, both in the field of public relations applied to political communication and in the conception of current politics. Its crescendo occurs in parallel to the decrease of the traditional party structures and institutional representation.

The complexity of the policies that must be adopted in the modern state reduces the possibilities of citizens to participate in public debate knowingly and also in the internal life of parties. For example, the use of referendums as a way to legitimize political action -institutional or partisan- can backfire if it is used indiscriminately. Furthermore, the reducing of public opinion to expressing itself through voting from time to time is a significant disregard for the ability of citizens to influence public power. That is why mediators are sought among politicians and voters who are effective in transmitting messages to each other and, at the same time, who are able to reflect the different states of opinion. In the mass society, the main mediator is the whole set of media, which, consequently, becomes one of the main manifestations of public opinion.

In this context, the media are protagonists. We are seeing a reduction in issues of public debate, a general retreat from politics by the majority of the public, and the replacement of party debate by the exaltation of the candidates, which involves hyper-leaders. Politics lays much of its efforts and resources on public relations, marketing strategies and advertising to "sell" its "product", thus minimizing the level of public debate as far as possible. And this process of the mutation of politics as it was understood -and, above all, practiced- a few decades ago, has got to be placed in an ever changing social context in which the actors involved, for example, the relationship between politics and citizenship live in permanent campaign and redefinition (Blumenthal, 1980).

## 2.1. Roles and functions of the spin doctors: the Spanish case

In the current context, changes have got to happen, for example, regarding the roles and functions of professionals involved in the management of the public representation of the political leader. Do the spin doctors operate effectively with the same instruments that they have used for decades? Are public relations professionals that are currently in the field of politics as effective as they have historically been serving the attribution of credibility in the public projection of the political leader?

In the Spanish context, in recent years, there is an adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon form of the spin doctors, given that communication and strategy advisors move, like all the political body, towards a higher degree of professionalism. The figure of the spin doctor must necessarily go through the filter and for the adaptation of professionals that are counterparts in a political, cultural and sociological context with their own characteristics. Does Lilleker's definition (2006) of the spin doctor for a non-Anglo-Saxon context work in the same terms like that of the Spanish one? The figure of the spin doctor does not currently have an exact model in Spain due to the distinct political, media and social context. So the definition of Lilleker cannot be applicable in Spain? No, not at all. The roles and professional profiles attached to power are still living in a kind of magma that, through action, involves that clearly defined professional profiles -and in most cases with occupational counterparts in the Anglo-Saxon world- take on shared functions or which in principle would be of a specific professional., when this cannot officially exist directly, in rank or with these specific competencies but rather with others.

Governing in media democracy does not involve either the same process or needs exactly the same roles, but they increasingly have counterparts across the globe, that are always trying to adapt to the context. A great spin doctor of the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Alastair Campbell, stated that «we know that communication is not a matter left to the end but that's part of what you do. We decided to incorporate this to the government». (Gaber, 2000).

Aira (2011) identifies the roles and professional profiles which in the Spanish context act in the same way as the Anglo-Saxon spin doctors do. What are the main figures of the political and institutional leader's entourage, in terms of strategy and communication? Professional profiles that may exist in Spanish parties and public institutions as well as their intersections, means that in many cases, the functions of some are taken on

by others either in a shared or exclusive manner, thus dispensing with some structures of a specific official profile, without its own label, without a professional that is strictly attached to that role. In the vast majority of cases, this will depend on the will of the public representative. Hereafter, we will outline the main profiles and professional roles that Aira identified regarding political strategists or spin doctors operating in Spain: the chief of staff, the communications director, the press secretary, the public opinion research expert, the professional responsible for protocol, the spokesperson, the speechwriter, the image consultant, the manager of virtual communities and the political expert.

The chief of staff in Spain (also head of cabinet or head of the office of the president, vice president, minister, advisor, etc.) is the counterpart figure in many aspects of its functions, but not all, to the Anglo-Saxon Chief of Staff. The director of communication (aka dircom) is a professional of journalism or advertising or public relations, which should not necessarily be, as it has always been, of journalism. The Press Secretary or whoever is related with the media), and in this case it is just as in the Anglo-Saxon context, the ideal profile to take on that of a journalist or public relations expert. The opinion research expert is mainly specialized in the reading and interpretation of polls and surveys. The head of protocol is a profile that is one hundred per cent from the field of public relations that is in charge of coordinating the team that make up the department depending on the institution they provide service to. The spokesperson should bring coherence to the newsmaking of the institution or party which it represents; in the United States, for example, this figure at the White House is usually taken on by a journalist, but this is not the only professional profile that can be related to the role of spokesperson; in Spain this role is usually undertaken by a prominent political officer of the institution; such is the case of the central or regional governments, in Vice-Presidency or the Ministry of the Presidency; However, the role of spokesperson always requires, among others, clear communication skills -verbal and non-verbal- techniques of public relations professionals. In the Spanish context, we find the speechwriter as a specific figure, especially in large institutions and also tends to be associated with professionals of journalism and public relations. The image consultant, although some tend to identify all the spin doctors with this profile, in Spain this is generally taken on board by professionals of the institution or other roles assigned to communication; in the cases of large parties or institutions, it has an external advisory service of specialized consultants; its relationship with nonverbal communication links with image professionals and also of a more specialized area of public relations. The community manager is an emerging and increasingly important figure in the political sphere, parallel to the popularity and success of social networks in our contemporary societies; in politics journalism professionals and/or those of public relations also tend to play this role. Finally, the expert specialist in a thematic field or a specific professional is an analyst specialized in reference data that provide content and substance to the programmatic material -in the case of the parties- or the government; it is a must figure to build discourse as well as its justification in public.

## 2.2. Spin doctors and Public Relations: strategy, techniques and current perception

As has been stated earlier, the vast majority of the profiles and roles of spin doctors are, in one way or another, related to techniques and tactics -written, oral and visual (Wilcox, Cameron and Xifra, 2006)- traditionally associated with the leadership and management of public relations (Grunig and Hunt, 2003; Baines, Egan and Jeffkins, 2004; Xifra, 2007). Furthermore, in the current context, a specific technique of corporate public relations appears, with an increasing incidence in the political arena: issues management, the technique that identifies potential or emerging issues that may influence the organization and, therefore, acts in a reactive way to try to "turn round" this possible future scenario in positive self-interest (Xifra, 2005). "Turn round", in the sense of the etymological root of the term spin doctor.

Issues management addresses how organizations can manage proactively its possible crises or potential conflicts. Which life cycle and what level of intensity will these potential conflicts have today? Nowadays, the reality is more timely and hence the importance of professionals in its management, and this goes for politics too. Indeed, in the middle of this tumultuous context, to care about the narration of political leaders, of their parties and institutions, the *res publica* increasingly thrives on professionals of communication, political strategy, advertising and public relations. Their goal is to ensure as far as possible the control of the public performance

of the leader and control the effects of potential crises generated in the public arena. Knowledge of how the institutional and political machinery works is key to identifying its potentialities and its impediments (Rawnsley, 2001), and also the problems that tarnish the whole body of political activity and its social perception.

At this point, retaking the overall perspective, we must ask ourselves: from the scope of the study of public relations, have the spin doctors been sufficiently recognised in contexts like that of the Anglo-Saxon, in which they excelled decades ago? Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) understand that «while political public relations as a practice is widespread and important, and studied from many different perspectives and through different theoretical lenses, it is seldom properly defined, and there is very little theory and research on political public relations that integrates theory and research from public relations, political communication, political science, and other relevant fields. There are some exceptions but these do not change the overall picture». In the Spanish context, even from a practical standpoint, leaders and political parties have traditionally been less inclined to accept or to make this part of politics too explicit, however, this should not be an obstacle to notice it, precisely because of the underrepresentation that it has in the media control of power (Castells, 2010).

As we have noted, politics has coexisted with the spin doctors for a long time (Craig, 2003). Through the hegemony of politics conditioned by marketing techniques, it went on the offensive to promote itself (Moloney, 2001). Gradually the systematic application of these techniques was imposed, as well as public relations and the knowledge of the needs of the media, up to the point that this scenario became a caricature of itself. The fall of New Labour and the decline in the appraisal of the George W. Bush Administration in his last mandate is attributed partly to the fall of the reign of spinning that in its most extreme form, we can state that it died because of its own success. The spin doctors have not ceased to exist, but in the Anglo-Saxon world, its prominence now seeks a lower profile.

In the United States and Britain, for example, with more representative and participatory political and electoral systems, and with a democratic tradition with more years of uninterrupted shooting, the "spinning industry" works from decades at cruising speed and is performing well. Analysts with decades of monitoring political activity behind them have left it in writing. Paul Routledge, columnist for the Daily Mirror, formerly of The Times and The Observer, stated that «the number of spin doctors with exclusive dedication to politics has risen sharply». (Routledge, 2007).

Politicians and their activity are exposed to a "new visibility" (Thompson, 1995), which makes them more vulnerable. And, on top of that, more scrutable. Is it the same for spin doctors and their counterparts in non-Anglo political systems? This could be because the financial returns for politics can be positive or quite the contrary. The spin doctors are a source of new ways of doing politics and projecting it, and this can be either positive or negative but they have got to be aware of it. In this sense, Leighton Andrews (2006) has coined the term spincidents to refer to incidents, crises or political controversy generated specifically from the field of political advisers or political representative. Are the spincidents symptom of a disease that there is still time to deal with it in the field of assessment of political and strategic communication? Is this possible, in no small part, thanks to the many cases in the international arena which has led the so-called Anglo-Saxon spinning industry to the point of reinvention (Beas, 2011) in which it is today?

Kevin Moloney warned of the need to rethink the scope of the Anglo-Saxon spin doctors, too widely identified, internally and caricatured in the media, by betting on the form before the substance. Too stigmatized for, supposedly, highlighting the less substantial and decisive part of politics (Moloney, 2000). It is a recurring criticism, resulting from the public identification – fuelled by the profession itself - of the scope of communication advisors and strategists of leaders, political parties and institutions with the tactics and confusion of the media agenda with the public, so that the priorities and the attention of political professionals are inverted.

After analysing the relevance and profile of the spin doctors in the current socio-political context and its direct relationship – from a professional point of view - with the discipline of public relations, we ask ourselves: has the importance of the figure of the spin doctors been proportionally reflected in research published in leading academic journals in the field of communication and public relations?

### 3. Methodology

After addressing the evolution of the figure of the spin doctors and their direct relationship with the scope of public relations, this study combines a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the presence of the term "spin doctor/s" in academic journals with an impact factor in the field of communication and public relations. To do this, we consult the database of the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) of Social Sciences, 2015 edition, and selected the categories of communication, public relations and political communication in the most representative journals for the purpose of this research.

According to the objectives of the study, of the 79 journals that comprise the category of communication JCR Social Science, 2015 edition, a selection was made of the journals directly related to our field of study, PR: Public Relations Review and Journal of Public Relations Research. To these, the major general journals in the field of communication: Journal of Communication, Communication Research and European Journal of Communication) were added, and given their transversal nature, it was estimated that they could contain contributions related to our object of study. Finally, the selection was completed with just one publication from the specific field of political communication in JCR: Political Communication.

Table 1 lists the six selected journals, with a corresponding journal impact factor and the country of origin of the editor of the publication; an analysis of the presence and extent of the figure of the spin doctors has been undertaken in them.

**Table 1: Details of the journals which are object of this research**

Title of the journal	Discipline	Impact Factor	Country of origin
<b>PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW (PUB RELAT REV)</b>	Public Relations	1.249	United States
<b>JOURNAL OF PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH (J PUBLIC RELAT ANIMAL)</b>	Public Relations	0.979	United States
<b>COMMUNICATION RESEARCH (COMMUN ANIMAL)</b>	Communication	1.976	United States
<b>JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION (J COMMUN)</b>	Communication	2.895	United States
<b>EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION (EUR J COMMUN)</b>	Communication	1.095	England
<b>POLITICAL COMMUNICATION (POLIT COMMUN)</b>	Communication	1.508	England

Source: JCR 2015

In order to quantify the presence of the figure of the spin doctor in selected journals, we followed the research strategy described below. Firstly, a search was made for the keywords "spin doctor/s" in the six journals mentioned by accessing different databases that allowed us to consult the full text of the articles (65) containing the term. Secondly, a new advanced keyword search "spin doctor/s" in the full text of selected articles was carried out in order to identify and assess their location in the same place. Then, in order to work with a representative sample and consistent with the objectives of the study, we excluded items from the selected articles that only compiled lists of publications (6), book reviews (5) and articles that only gathered up the term in the bibliography (6). Finally, the content of all the selected articles was analysed that included the term "spin doctor/s" in the title, abstract or keyword of the article and also those in which the term "spin doctor/s" appeared in the main text. Accordingly, the full text of the articles was used as data to carry out a content analysis with the codebook set out in Table 2.

**Figure 2 Coding table**

Categories of study
1. Journals
2. Number of articles with presence of "spin doctor/s" by journal
3. Article title
4. Year of publication
5. Author/s
6. Institution of author/s
7. "Spin Doctor/s" in the title of article (yes/no)
8. "Spin Doctor/s" in the summary of the article (yes/no)
9. "Spin Doctor/s" in the keyword of the article (yes/no)
10. "Spin Doctor/s" in the body of the text of the article (yes/no - number of appearances - typology: CV author/s / acknowledgements)
11. "Spin Doctor/s" in bibliography (yes/no)
12. Discipline of the communication that addresses the concept Public relations / Journalism / Political Communication / Political Science

Source: Own elaboration

## 4. Results

The results show a total of 48 articles in which the term "spin doctor/s", appears in a more or less relevant way, in its content. The articles under analysis were distributed as follows in journals under research: Public Relations Review (28), European Journal of Communication Research (12), Journal of Communication (4), Political Communication (2), Journal of Public Relations Research (1) and Communication Research (1).

In order to ensure the relevance of the analysis, of these 45 articles, the ones which contained the word "spin" in the title and/or summary and/or keyword were selected - in the case the publications that have them (8). It should be noted that the presence of the term "spin doctor/s" in the main text of the remaining 40 items was low, with a greater incidence of a single quote in the articles (22) and a maximum of five mentions in two articles: one dedicated to the perception of public relations activity among students and the other to the views of members of the public relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA), which shows that the content of both articles clearly departs from our object of study.

Table 3 lists the most important variables of the eight articles that, after analysis, were considered most relevant for the research.

**Table 3: Results of analysis**

Journals	Title	Author/s	Institution	Year	
PUB RELAT REV	The Spin Doctor: An Alternative Model of Public Relations	Randy Sumpter James W Tankard, Jr	University of Texas	1994	PR
	Commentary: new technologies, public relations, and democracy	Ray And. Hiebert	University of Mariland	2005	PR Politics
	Spin doctors in the spotlight: Effects of strategic press and publicity coverage on perceptions of political PR	Claes H Of Vreese Maatthijs Elenbaas	University of Amsterdam	2009	PR Political
J PUBLIC RELAT ANIMAL	Hacks, Flacks, and Spin Doctors Meet the Half: An Examination of the Congressional Press Secretary ace to (Potential) Public Relations Professional	Edward J. Downes	Boston University	1998	PR
EUR J COMMUN	Spin Doctoring in British and German Election Campaigns: How the Press is Being Confronted with to New Quality of Political PR	Frank Esser Carsten Reneimann David Fan	University of Mainz (Germany) University of Minessota	2000	PR Political
	Suspicious minds: Explaining political cynicism among political journalists in Europe	Arjen Go Dalen Erik Albaek Claes Of Vreese	University of Southern Denmark	2001	Journalism
POLIT COMMUN	Trading Arms for Hostages? How the Government and Print Half "Spin" Portrayals of the United States' Policy Toward Iran	William J. Brown Richard C. Vincent	Regent University University of Hawaii	1995	Journalism
	New Frontiers in Political Professionalism	Paolo Mancini	University of Perugia	1999	Journalism

Source: Own elaboration

The results of the quantitative analysis show a limited presence of the term "spin doctor/s" in articles in journals included in JCR 2015 in the field of communication, public relations and political communication. In the six journals analysed, we found that only 65 articles mention the term, and only eight of them have proved to be relevant following the analysis of the content.

The analysis notes that the figure of the spin doctor is mainly addressed from the discipline of public relations and, in its absence, also from the journalistic discipline, and in a clear relationship with the analysis of the specific activity of the spin doctors as those responsible for press and relations with the mass media of the political parties and the governments.

In the vast majority of the studies (Brown & Vincent, 1995; Downes, 1998; Mancini, 1999; Hiebert, 2004; De Vreese and Elenbaas, 2009; Van Dalen, Albaek and De Vreese, 2001), the authors clearly identify the figure of the spin doctors with the activity of public relations and make a negative approach of their activity, linking it to cynical, manipulative and rather unethical activities.

For the object of our research, the work of Tankard and Sumpter (1994) and Esser, Reinemann and Fan (2000) were especially relevant. Sumpter and Tankard were the first authors to identify public relations in academic journals almost twenty years ago, of the potential of the then still emerging figure of the spin doctor in the following terms: «The term "spin doctor" does appear to be more than a catch phrase –there is evidence that it refers to a genuinely new communication role. The role differs from that of the traditional public relations practitioner by putting greater stress on personal contacts with the media, by attempting to intervene earlier in the newsmaking process, by using new technology to greater advantage, and in other ways. (...) The field of public relations also needs to come to terms with the spin doctor phenomenon. A cursory review of some public relations textbooks suggest little discussion of the role and, indeed, some rather drastic differences between spin doctoring and standard public relations activities. Do public relations practitioners want to

distance themselves from the spin doctor phenomenon, as Bernays appears to be recommending? Do they want to claim the spin doctors as part of their fold? Or do they want to select what is effective from the spin doctor repertoire and incorporate it into the traditional public relations model, while ignoring the rest? The spin doctor conception of truth, and the ethics of spin doctors, would also seem to be topics worthy of further discussion». (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994).

For their part, the work of Esser, Reinemann and Fan (2000) analyzes the profile and functions of spin doctors by comparing their activity in general elections in two countries with different traditions in the field of political communication; Britain (1997) and Germany (1998). In their paper, the authors stress the vital importance of spin doctors, as a new profile of the public relations professional, and trace the origins and the different meanings of the term in both countries and distinguish between the activities of the spin doctors that are related with the media and those that are not. The authors conclude that in elections in Britain and Germany, two profiles of distinct spin doctors were identified. The activities of the British spin doctors, of a high-profile, covered intensively by the British media, match those identified by Aira (2011), and include consulting on communication skills in public speaking, the use of surveys and focus groups, the relationship with the media, etc. By contrast, in the case of the German spin doctors, deemed low-key; these are involved with more traditional activities such as strategic consulting, electoral advertising, press conferences, criticism of the adversary, etc.

We analysed other studies dealing with specific issues related to the perception of the activity of spin doctors and the interaction between politics and the media in different contexts: the Reagan administration and its management called Irangate (Brown, 1995); Figure analysis of the so-called American 'congressional press secretaries' (Downes, 1998); defending the preservation of the role of public relations as a two-way communication, thanks to new technologies, as opposed to one-way communication and propaganda spins (Hiebert, 2005); analysis of the effects that the management of the press and publicity has on the perception of public relations specialised in the field of politics (De Vreese and Elenbaas, 2009) and, finally, Van Dalen, Albaek and De Vreese (2011 ) focus on the relationship between journalists in politics and politicians to explain the recurrent political cynicism among political reporters from four European countries: United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany and Spain. It so happens that this study shows that, compared to their European counterparts, Spanish journalists are those with a more cynical view of their politicians, because they have a negative view of the role of spin doctors.

Finally, Mancini (1999) discusses how technological advances combined with accelerated processes of social change have altered the character and activity of political parties and governments. He concluded, in 1999, that the results of the processes of global change have converted political parties in "communication machines" designed to manipulate voters, to develop political strategies from communication strategies and convert politicians in a new profile of professional politician. Mancini does not explicitly use the term spin doctors in his work and chooses to refer to the figure of political advisers to describe the same functions.

## 5. Conclusions

After defining the profile of spin doctors and their connection with the activity of public relations from a theoretical point of view, we have analysed in this study the extent of their presence in academic journals with an impact factor (JCR) within the scope of communications and public relations.

From the research results, we can conclude that despite its direct link with the origin of public relations activity, the study of the figure of the spin doctors has a limited presence in this kind of publications. In the articles that address the figure, the authors tend to reduce the scope of the spin doctors to their relationship with the media and, mainly, associate their activity to goals regarding the manipulation of public opinion.

It is relevant to note that, in relation to their authorship, there is a certain balance between the contributions made by US and European researchers and, among the latter ones, we note the absence of research whose authorship comes from the Anglo-Saxon context, despite its significant influence in the development and expansion of the professional activity of spin doctors.

Regarding the type of published research work, few authors analyse the professional profile of the spin doctor and provide a comprehensive view of its sphere of activity beyond the specific role of its relationship with the media. Also of relevant absence, with the exception of the study of Esser, Reinemann and Fan (2000), is the

analysis of case studies for evaluating the scope of the activity and its evolution in the social-political context specific to different countries. The impact of new technologies in the activity of the spin doctors is evidently essential for the development of the activity but it is paradoxical that this is only addressed in papers published in the last decade of the twentieth century.

In light of these findings, future research resulting from this work shall be to: address in depth the defining of the professional profile of the spin doctor from the point of view of public relations; analyse the evolution of its performance and relevance in the age of globalization and permanent political campaigns and evaluate how the spin doctors have incorporated the possibilities offered by new communication technologies on the whole, and social networks, in particular to its strategy in what could be an opportunity to redefine its role and endow its model of communication with a long-awaited bidirectional nature.

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