

# RESEARCH ARTICLE ABSTRACTS AS A TOOL FOR DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE IN ONLINE LEGAL PUBLICATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – In the course of the last few decades web-based communication has facilitated the dissemination of scientific knowledge and has contributed to making material which was primarily targeted to the expert community also available to the wider public. For such a mass of information to be effectively comprehended, some changes became necessary in order to facilitate web-searches and locate relevant material when browsing online archives. In the light of the above, the genre of research article (RA) abstracts in online academic publications seems to be particularly interesting, since its distinctive generic function is to both attract the readers’ attention and synthetically anticipate the content of the ensuing RA. This paper compares abstracts in print issues and those available in electronic format of the *Washington Law Review* to see whether and to what extent the concern for piquing readers’ curiosity to continue reading the associated RA has affected abstract writing. The focus will be placed particularly on knowledge dissemination (KD) resources such as the labels used to refer to the associated RA, the verbs employed to describe the type of scientific activity performed by the RA and, finally, the metadiscursive markers (namely frame and endophoric markers) used to provide interpretive guidance to readers.

**Keywords:** abstracts; academic discourse; knowledge dissemination; legal discourse; metadiscourse.

## 1. Introduction

This paper investigates the language of legal research article abstracts (LRAAs) in online specialized journals from a diachronic perspective. More specifically, our analysis focusses on the different ways in which abstracts textualize references to the associated RA by comparing and contrasting LRAAs published before and after the *Washington Law Review*’s digital shift,

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that is to say, the moment the journal went fully online. The study of abstracts in such contexts appears to be particularly relevant for two related reasons, namely, the purpose of abstract as a research genre (Bhatia 1993; Hyland 2004; Lorés Sanz, Bondi 2014), on the one hand, and the circulation of informative material made available by the electronic medium (Duszak 1997; Gotti 2003; Salvi, Bowker 2015), on the other.

Abstracts are in fact those texts which – while self-standing and autonomous with respect to the associated RA (Hyland 2004) – are primarily meant to point to, synthesize, topicalize and indexicalize its content in a concise, orderly and schematic way (Trawinski 1989; Swales, Feak 2009; Hyland, Bondi 2006). This allows them to be easily read and understood independently from the ensuing RA, once they are cohesive and internally coherent (Salager-Meyer 1990; Ventola 1997). However, RAAs also have an intrinsic promotional function, in that they are typically aimed to elicit the readers' interest towards the content of the associated RA and encourage them to read in full its informative content (Yakhontova 2002; Bordet 2014; Bondi, Lorés Sanz 2014). More precisely, the abstract does not only provide the gist of the RA, but it “selectively sets out the stall, highlighting important information and framing the article that it precedes [...] in such a way as to encourage further examination and draw the reader into the more detailed exposition” (Hyland 2004, p. 64).

Promotion owes its (potential) effectiveness not only to the rhetorical strategies employed to codify meanings, but also, and blatantly, to the type of circulation, availability and accessibility of promotional material (Corner 2007; Aronczyk, Powers 2010; Maci 2016). To put it simply, people may become interested in given knowledge objects or reality objects simply because they are exposed to texts promoting or advertising them. Conversely, without access to such promotional materials, one may not even be aware of the existence of such objects, thus possibly never developing any interest or curiosity for them.

In the light of the above, the digital medium appears to be the perfect match for the abstract's promotional function, in that this channel seems to offer plenty of possibilities for the wider circulation of information (Tognini-Bonelli, Del Lungo Camiciotti 2005; Hyland 2009; Campagna *et al.* 2012). As a matter of fact, by exploiting extended web-based archives, it facilitates web-searches and the retrieval of very specific material. As a consequence of this, “knowledge can no longer be hemmed in by neatly-packed and restricted communicative products [since] today's globalized and digital environment has increasingly deconstructed the élitarian fence of knowledge communication” (Bondi 2015, p. 7).

Given the function of abstracts and the assets of web communication, this analysis seeks to see whether, to what extent and in what ways the

textualization of abstracts has changed with the spread of digital communication for this genre to better fit and fully exploit the resources made available by the new channel.

The hypothesis guiding this analysis is that online archives and digital technologies have become important tools for knowledge dissemination (Calsamiglia 2003; Salvi, Bowker 2015) not just for external audiences of laypersons, but also, and in particular, within the scientific community, for the circulation of specialized knowledge among experts (Shinn, Whitley 1985; Abbott 1995; Bucchi 1998; Bondi 2015). If this is the case, this new perspective is likely to have influenced discursive practices and, possibly, also aspects of the epistemology at the basis of specialized communication in the legal domain.

## 2. Material and methodology

The object of this case study is the *Washington Law Review*, a nationally ranked law review established in 1919, which publishes four issues per year (with an average of 8 RAs per issue) available through open-access databases. More specifically, yearly volumes (containing four issues each) from 1919 to 2007 can be downloaded from a host website<sup>2</sup> as PDF files reproducing the original print version; whereas, from the year 2012 onwards, each single contribution (i.e. abstract and RA) can be accessed separately via a link on the journal homepage.<sup>3</sup> There is a four-year gap in the availability of such material (namely, the issues published in the time span 2008-2011). This gap has been used as a criterion for the distinction of our corpus into two sub-corpora. On the one hand, we have collected the more recent material, covering the six-year span 2012-17 and, by analogy, material from the six year period before the gap, namely the span 2002-2007, has also been selected.

These two sub-corpora appear to be significantly different even at a very superficial level. Material for the 2002-2007 sub-corpus comes from PDF files reproducing the exact text found in the print issues, and each file contains the whole yearly volume (four issues, for a total of about 32 articles per year). For our analysis, each abstract had to be selected and isolated from its context and this sub-corpus amounts to a total of 135 LRAAs (30,037 words, corresponding to an average of 222.5 words per abstract). In these files, abstracts are always placed between the title and the full body of the RA, and in such contexts the abstract can be considered as a part-genre “given the fact that it [is] included within the document and that it could only be read as part of the whole document” (Bordet 2014, p. 132). This is significant from a

<sup>2</sup> At <http://digital.law.washington.edu/dspace-law/handle/1773.1/9> (02.04.2018).

<sup>3</sup> At <https://www.law.uw.edu/wlr> (02.04.2018).

cognitive perspective; in fact, since readers can access the full article together with the abstract, the abstract functions as a sort of concise introduction (Swales, Feak 2009) to the ensuing text rather than a ‘teaser’ pointing to an associated text which is to be found in a separate section. This factor may explain the fact that in this sub-corpus some abstracts are missing (39 cases), indicating that in this context abstracts, while indeed useful and important, are not necessary

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#### THE END OF TECHNOLOGY: A POLEMIC

Louis E. Wolcher\*

*Abstract:* This essay is a philosophical polemic against the essence of modern technology. The piece does not advance a Luddite's agenda, however, since it describes modern technology's essence as technological thinking, rather than as the manifold of technical instruments and processes. Technological thinking is not just careful planning towards well thought-out ends. Rather, it is an entire orientation to life, and as such it is a monstrosity: it relentlessly and heartlessly transforms the world's beings, including human beings, into measurable units of production and consumption that are constantly being judged for their contributions to "productivity." Nature is thus made into a vast warehouse, and humanity into a standing reserve of "human resources." Absent from technological thinking is any reflection on technology's end, in the sense of its ultimate purpose. A synthesis of the thinking of Heidegger, Marcuse, Weber, and Sorel, this essay claims that the ultimate end of technology as such is, and ought to be, *freedom for responsibility*, and that freedom from necessity is both a condition and a consequence of this. It argues that there is a desperate need for thought and speech to break with technological thinking, and to begin bringing the means of modern technology into contact with its ultimate end.

"The sadness of nature makes her mute."—Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

#### I. THE END OF TECHNOLOGY: ASKING THE QUESTION

What is the end of technology? Although this question does not mean to ask *when* technology will end, in the sense of ceasing to exist, it nonetheless remains ambiguous in an interesting and productive way. Consider the "end of technology" understood as technology's limit. On this reading, the question asks for a determination of the *logical* endpoint of technology: the limit, or boundary, that circumscribes technology as a concept and allows it to stand forth in thought and speech as a comprehensible whole. Since it is impossible to comprehend a phenomenon like technology in this way without paying attention to its social context, this means that technology's logical end is inextricably linked to its end in another sense: purpose. When we notice a thing we tend to notice it *as* something. We notice a telephone as equipment for

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1. WALTER BENJAMIN, *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, in REFLECTIONS: ESSAYS, APOLOGUES, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS 314, 329 (Edmond Jephcott trans., 1978).

Figure 1  
Example of RAA in the 2002-2007 sub-corpus.

The second sub-corpus, instead, contains abstracts that can be accessed directly from the journal homepage via a link, that is, separately from the associated RA, which, in its turn, is retrievable via a different link (namely, the hyperlink consisting of the RA title, see figure below).

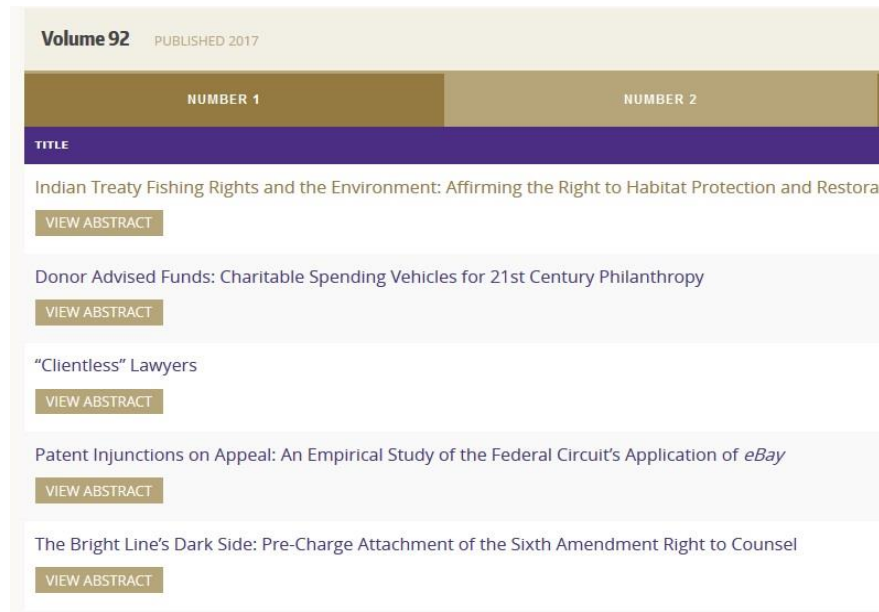


Figure 2  
Example of RAAs in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus.

A total of 191 abstracts have been collected for the 2012-2017 sub-corpus (totalling 45,648 words, with an average of 239 words per abstract). In this case, as well, 23 abstracts are missing but, due to the constraints of the medium – namely, the link labelled ‘View Abstracts’ (see Figure 2) – they have been replaced by ‘Excerpts’, that is, citations taken verbatim from the related RA (see Figure 3, where the substituting text is introduced by the terms ‘Excerpt’ in parentheses).

**DUN & BRADSTREET REVISITED - A COMMENT ON LEVI**

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Scott L. Nelson

(Excerpt) Lee Levine and Stephen Wermiel's account of the internal history of the Supreme Cou convincingly demonstrates the utility of the papers of retired Justices in facilitating a painstaking clerked for Justice Byron White in the October 1984 and 1985 Terms and was thus present duri & Bradstreet, I will not comment on the accuracy of the particular details the Article reports or . would be both improper and impossible. Improper because a law clerk has a duty of confident institution; and impossible because, not having worked on the case myself, I have only fuzzy re describes, and certainly none that match the wealth of detail the authors have gleaned from th within the broader context of the issues before the Court during the 1984 Term, which may giv whether the story of Dun & Bradstreet is that of a doctrinal perfect storm or a tempest in a tea comment on the usefulness of the sources relied on by the authors in creating an accurate pict observations on the issues in Dun & Bradstreet, the problems it posed for the Court, and the d libel jurisprudence.

VIEW ARTICLE

Figure 3  
Example of ‘excerpt’ replacing RAAs in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus.

By comparing the textualizations found in the two sub-corpora (Figure 1 and Figure 2) a noticeable difference can be seen between them: the print version (or, more properly, the digital version replicating the print version, in the 2002-

2007 sub-corpus) allows for more structural freedom (namely, for the possible absence of abstracts), whereas the digital format in the 2012-17 sub-corpus, due to its organizational structure, is much more fixed, requiring some ‘texts’ to correspond to the link ‘View Abstract’, be it an actual abstract or a text replacing or filling in for it.

As to the quantitative and qualitative analysis of these materials, the focus has been placed on three different aspects which may indicate possible changes or trends of variation in the way abstracts conceptualize, anticipate and picture the associated RA and the type of discussion to be found there. Such differences, in fact, are likely to affect expectations on the part of the readers and the way they will approach and process the content of the associated text. The parameters considered here are:

- the labels which are employed to refer to the associated RA;
- the verbs used to describe the scientific activity carried out by the RA, that is, how the information is going to be presented;
- the use of frame and endophoric markers meant to anticipate the structural and textual organization of the associated text, thus functioning as cognitive facilitators or interpretive frameworks.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Labels

The terms used to introduce the associated text are very relevant in that the act of classifying, identifying or associating a given RA with respect to recognizable research genres necessarily anticipates some information, not just about the content, but possibly also as to how the content is going to be dealt with, both in textual, cognitive and argumentative terms, hence presupposing the type of competence that might be required to fully comprehend the ensuing text, and the interpretive stance and approach to be adopted for the processing of the meaning. In total, six different terms have been found in LRAAs to refer to the associated RAs, namely: *article*, *comment*, *essay*, *note*, *paper* and *response*. Even though some of these terms are quasi-synonymic, a major distinction between two macro-groups can easily be introduced, which is relevant in terms of presupposition about the type of content and the way it is going to be dealt with in the RA. On the one hand, we found the labels *article*, *essay* and *paper*, on the other, *comment*, *note*, and *response*.

Terms like *article*, *essay* and *paper* refer to genres which are self-standing and self-sufficient in terms of content and informative structure, in that everything that is needed to understand the discussion (data, premises, procedures, principles and parameters for interpretation) is expected to be

provided and clearly worded out. Therefore, these labels seem to point to or presuppose texts which are possibly – and at the same time – textually articulated and interpretively demanding (i.e. relatively long, informatively dense, etc.), on the one hand, but also cognitively manageable and non-problematic to follow and understand, in that interpretation and evaluation is expected to be prepared by the exposition and explanation of the data to be interpreted and of the principles by which to evaluate them. Some examples of such uses can be seen in the extracts below:

- 1) [This] paper briefly addresses how management agencies might be encouraged to adopt such an approach. (07/17)
- 2) [This] Essay concludes that a “democratic competence” approach might provide a more coherent theoretical underpinning for according constitutional protection to newsgathering. (12/15)

The labels *comment*, *note* and *response*, instead, presuppose some form of thematic interdependence between the text at stake and (pieces of) existing knowledge. Hence, texts being referred to through these labels are represented as not being fully self-standing, but as hinging on some form of interdiscursivity, ‘dialogicality’ or intertextuality (Salvi 2015), since they imply the interaction of different ‘voices’ (namely, the voice of the writer and the one of the scholar being commented upon or responded to, cf. Bakhtin 1981). In other terms, these labels embody a responsive act rather than an act initiating an informative offer. For this reason, they seem to point to an ensuing text which is expected to be little articulated or cognitively demanding but, at the same time, which is likely to require some threshold competence about the knowledge object being commented upon. They appear to presuppose expert readers, and, more specifically, readers who have some understanding about the informative gap which is going to be filled by the associated RA. Therefore, these labels emphasize collegiality, group-membership and, for the very same reason, they may be face-threatening for non-expert readers, thus possibly functioning as gate-keeping resources, as can be observed in the following examples

- 3) The Comment then reviews the psychological and social science research. (17/09)
- 4) This brief response to the work of Professors Omri Ben-Shahr and Carl Schneider on mandated disclosure regimes investigates the normative criteria underlying their claim that those regimes are failures. (13/14)

The distribution of the two groups of labels is organized in the following Table, and is expressed both in absolute terms and in terms of percentage. More specifically, these results do not express the total occurrence of a given label

in each RA, since this quantitative piece of evidence would not be relevant for this analysis, but rather count the RAs in which a given label has been found.

	2002-2007	%	2012-2017	%
article	35/135	27	89/191	47
essay	1/135	1	3/191	2
paper	1/135	1	2/191	1
<b>subtotal</b>		<b>29</b>		<b>50</b>
comment	58/135	42	60/191	31
note	14/135	10	3/191	2
response	-	-	1/191	0.5
<b>subtotal</b>		<b>52</b>		<b>34</b>

Table 1  
Distribution of labels to refer to RAs in the two sub-corpora.

As we can see, abstracts in the 2002-2007 sub-corpus clearly privilege label indicating interdiscursivity, and implying collegiality and group membership, by labelling the associated RAs as *comments*, *notes* or *responses* (52%), whereas the 2012-2017 sub-corpus reverses this tendency by resorting to labels emphasizing the semantic autonomy of the associated texts. Even at this early stage of the investigation, a major difference appears to characterize the two sub-corpora, both in terms of expectations and approach towards the content of the RA: while print abstracts rhetorically presuppose readers with discipline-related expertise for them to comprehend the ensuing text, digital abstracts discursively imply the possibility for readers to find in the associated text anything that is needed to process it, that is, the discursive framework by which to approach its content, and the main interpretive guidelines by which to navigate through its textualization.

### 3.2. The verbal expressions

The second step in our analysis consists in examining the verbs used in collocates with the labels discussed above and meant to anticipate the type of act or scientific activity performed by the associated RAs. Verbs in such clusters can be grouped into three macro-categories with respect to their lexical meaning, and the presuppositions that such markers activate.

The first of such groupings is represented by those verbs pointing to the type of analysis carried out in the associated text. This set is mainly made up of *research* verbs and those verbal forms indicating how the presentation is organized, how the material is dealt with, how the investigation is carried out and how it is sequenced, thus evidencing procedural and systematic aspects of the discussion, through verbs like *address*, *analyse*, *discuss*, *explain*, *focus*, etc., as in the following cases:



- 5) This Article analyzes the benefits of using “stories” to teach law. (13/24)
- 6) This Comment presents newly produced data sets. (17/09)

The second group consists of verbs indicating the *purpose* of the discussion found in the associated text, emphasizing its argumentative nature and presupposing that its content is not just the objective and unbiased representation of informative material but rather its interpretation according to specific parameters. These readings are codified by verbs such as *argue*, *contend*, *conclude*, *challenge*, *demonstrate*, *evaluate*, etc. By the use of these markers, the RA is presented as being explicitly meant to persuade the readers rather than inform them, to convince them rather than just provide evidence for readers to measure, evaluate, and interpret. In such cases, of course, informativeness is not missing or marginalized, but is rather the epiphenomenon of argumentation. Examples of these verbal formulations can be found in the following extracts:

- 7) This Article contends that section 2 influences the scope of congressional authority. (14/15)
- 8) This Comment argues that courts should award damages to tribes. (04/35)

The third group includes verbs which, although pertaining to the lexical category of research verbs, do not just refer to representational, organizational or textual aspects of the discussion at stake, but specifically point to the *type of contribution* the RA is intended to bring to existing knowledge, thus rhetorically anticipating to what extent and through which resources the associate RA is going to expand, extend, or update the community knowledge. Instances of these markers are verbs like *contribute*, *develop*, *fill [gaps]*, *offer*, *reveal*, etc., that can also be seen in the extracts below:

- 9) [This] Article provides a comprehensive survey of state whistleblowing laws and suggests changes to federal and state law to fill the gaps that remain after Sarbanes–Oxley. (04/32)
- 10) This Article is the first to comprehensively consider the intersection of procurement and local surveillance policy making. (16/31)

The main functions of the three groups outlined above can be synthesized as follows: verbs in the first group are meant to express an act of *speculation*; those in the second, an act designed to both *prove a specific point* and *persuade* about its validity; those in the third group are meant to indicate and stress the *originality*, *novelty* and *usefulness of the contribution* with respect to existing knowledge. Frequencies and distributions of these resources are organized in

the following Tables, expressed in normalized figures (calculated per 10,000 words).

RESEARCH	2002-2007		2012-2017	
	article / essay / paper	comment / note / response	article / essay / paper	comment / note / response
address	0.6	0.3	1.3	1.1
analyse	0.6	0.6	1.1	1.1
assess			0.9	
consider	0.3		1.3	
describe	0.3		0.4	0.2
discuss	0.6		1.1	0.4
draw			0.9	
examine		0.6	3.5	0.9
explain	0.3		0.6	0.2
explore	0.6	0.3	2.1	1.7
focus	0.3		0.4	0.4
identify	0.3		1.5	0.2
present			0.9	0.6
propose	2.0	3.3	2.4	0.4
review	0.3		0.6	0.6
show	0.3		1.1	
suggest	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.6
<i>subtotal</i>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>8.8</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15.6</b>		<b>30.5</b>	

Table 2  
Frequencies and distribution of *research* verbs.

ARGUMENTATION	2002-2007		2012-2017	
	article / essay / paper	comment / note / response	article / essay / paper	comment / note / response
argue	2.6	21.3	5.2	8.9
challenge			0.9	
conclude	2.0	0.6	2.8	0.4
contend	0.3		0.4	0.2
demonstrate			0.9	
expose	0.3		0.4	0.2
evaluate	0.6		0.2	0.2
recommend	0.9			0.4
<i>subtotal</i>	7.0	21.9	11.0	10.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28.9</b>		<b>30.4</b>	

Table 3  
Frequencies and distribution of *argumentation* verbs.

CONTRIBUTION	2002-2007		2012-2017	
	article / essay / paper	comment / note / response	article / essay / paper	comment / note / response
contribute	0.3		0.4	
develop	0.6		0.6	
fill [gaps]			0.6	
offer	0.9		1.1	0.2
provide	0.6		1.3	0.2
reveal	0.3		1.3	
* is the first to			2.8	
<i>subtotal</i>	<b>2.9</b>		<b>8.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.9</b>		<b>8.7</b>	

Table 4  
Frequencies and distribution of '*contribution*' verbs.

In order to facilitate synoptical comparison between the three categories, the frequencies of these verbs can be observed in Table 5.

	2002-2007	2012-2017	TOTAL
research m.	15.6	30.5	<b>46.1</b>
argumentation m.	28.9	30.4	<b>59.3</b>
contribution m.	2.9	8.7	<b>11.6</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47.4</b>	<b>69.6</b>	

Table 5  
Frequencies and distribution of *research*, *argumentation* and '*contribution*' verbs.

By observing the total frequencies, that is, the last line at the bottom of Table 5, it is possible to see a noticeable increase in the use of these resources over time, as if in digital communication displaying these verbs with the function of metatextual markers meant to anticipate and explicitate the type of activity performed by the RA were an effective way of promoting it and eliciting the reader's interest.

If we then observe the second line and compare occurrences in the two sub-corpora, we notice that argumentation markers are a constant feature over time. Argumentation appears to be the preferred and conventional way of presenting domain-specific meanings, and this seems to be in line with the epistemology at the heart of the discipline, in that legal studies focus on the interpretation of practical cases in the light of abstract principles, and argumentation is an effective way of codifying interpretation (Toulmin 1958; van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004). However, what varies considerably between print and digital abstracts is the occurrence of research and contribution markers (which are respectively two and three times more frequent in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus). By resorting to such resources, digital abstracts indeed attribute another dimension to the associated text: they represent the RA as a fully-fledged research genre carrying out a recognizable

form of scientific activity. If only from a purely discursive point of view, this contributes to extending the pragmatic function of RA as a communicative tool for knowledge dissemination, and also extending the range of discursive practices available to the disciplinary community (i.e. introducing research-based acts besides traditional argumentation-based ones) for the transmission of domain-specific contents.

### 3.3. *Frame and endophoric markers*

The last stage of this analysis focusses on frame and endophoric markers, that is, those resources which are used to “signal text boundaries or [...] to sequence, label, predict and shift arguments, making the discourse clear to readers” (Hyland 2005, p. 51). In other words, these resources are exploited as cognitive facilitators to signal how the associated RA is going to be structured and to mark textual cohesion and coherence, thus helping the reader ‘visualize’ the stages, the steps and the sections to be found in the associated texts, and how they are combined in order to make a point. For this purpose, we have analysed collocates with the terms discussed in section 3.1. above, namely, the labels *article*, *essay*, *paper*, *comment*, *note*, and *response*. After examining all occurrences, we have observed that the terms which are associated to such labels can be distinguished according to their metadiscursive function into two categories, namely, markers of *formal articulation* and markers of *content articulation*. Formal articulation is expressed by either *ordering markers* (i.e. *first*, *second*, *third*, etc.) or *sequencing markers*, anticipating textual structure and sequencing between the various parts of the RA (i.e. *next*, *then*, *finally*, etc.), as the examples below show:

- 11) This Comment first identifies and explains the different meanings attached to loss of chance. (14/21)
- 12) [This] Article then scrutinizes the background legal doctrine framing this debate. (05/22)

Content articulation markers are formulations expressing addition (like *also* and *further*) or contrast (such as *instead*), as can be seen in the following extracts:

- 13) Furthermore, the proposals in this Article provide a blueprint for advocates (15/27)
- 14) This Article instead suggests an analysis of ADA hostile environment actions (02/11)

The frequency and distribution of these markers is indicated in normalized terms in the table below:

	2002-2007	2012-2017
<i>Formal art. markers:</i>		
<i>ordering</i>		
first / firstly	0.9	4.1
second / secondly	2.0	3.2
third / thirdly	0.6	1.1
<i>subtotal</i>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<i>Formal art. markers:</i>		
<i>sequencing</i>		
finally	1.3	4.3
next	0.6	0.6
then	1.3	4.6
ultimately		0.4
<i>subtotal</i>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>10.0</b>
<i>Content art. markers</i>		
also	1.3	3.0
further	2.0	1.1
instead	0.3	0.9
<i>subtotal</i>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>23.6</b>

Table 6  
Distribution of text articulation markers.

If we consider the frequencies in the 2002-2007 sub-corpus, we notice that the use of the three types of resource is quite balanced (3.6 occurrences for ordering markers, 3.3 for sequencing markers and 3.6 for content articulation markers). In print LRAAs, these indications seem to share the same level of rhetorical relevance and there does not seem to be any preferred or more conventional way to mark text articulation. Even a cursory glance at frequencies in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus, instead, reveals that these strategies are noticeably more used in digital abstracts (8.5 occurrences for ordering markers, 10.0 for sequencing markers and 5.0 for content articulation markers). Metadiscursively anticipating elements of text articulation – i.e. combining ideational contents and structural or organizational indications – seems thus to be an effective way of representing the associated RA in electronic abstract writing, whereby to attract readers' interest by also providing, if in a very schematic way, an interpretive framework for the processing of the text. A more detailed analysis of the occurrences in the digital sub-corpus indicates a marked preference for formal articulation markers (of both ordering and sequencing) over content articulation markers, the frequency of the former pair almost doubling that of the latter. This suggests that in digital LRAAs representing the scaffolding, the main tenets and cognitive hinges of the ensuing discussion (*first, next, then, etc.*) may attract readers more effectively than simply indicating general content-based and additive relations between pieces of information (i.e. *also, instead, etc.*). In other words, structural indications are (presented as being) more appealing to digital audiences than stacks or chunks of informative material.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The *Washington Law Review* in its electronic format, if accessible also to laypersons, remains a specialized text primarily targeted to experts, as is the case of plenty of other specialized publications that have undergone a similar process of digital democratization, since this operation does not necessarily coincide with a top-down process of simplification (Bondi 2015, p. 8). As a matter of fact, the electronic version of the journal would not qualify as a form of popularization in that, if cognitively transparent and potentially manageable, it does not contain attractors or facilitators to capture the layperson's curiosity – like visuals, simplified language, explanations or exemplification, as is instead the case, for instance, of popularized science journals (cf. Calsamiglia 2003; Gotti 2013). In this respect, it is possible to claim that the digital resources are here employed as tools of knowledge dissemination primarily for the expert community – in order to spread as extensively, comprehensively and readily as possible pieces of specialized knowledge among legal scholars and practitioners, so as “to reach a vast number of colleagues rapidly by sending them ‘coded messages’ without having to conform to the times and constraints of specialist communication” (Bucchi 1998, p. 12).

In this sense, the changes that have been observed in the previous sections are particularly interesting. Since they cannot merely be viewed as an attempt at updating the language of LRAAs to current standards of web communication, these trends seem to indicate a gradual shift in the epistemology of web-based communication of legal matters, at least concerning how legal RAs and their way of presenting contents are to be considered.

As a matter of fact, abstracts in the print version of the *Washington Law Review* picture RAs in ways by which it is possible to recognize them as typical, highly-conventionalized, authoritative and reliable argumentative texts about legal topics, reflecting the main functions and requirements of legal RAs as a genre. This genre has a clear argumentative character, a gate-keeping quality and an emphasized interpersonal dimension which is meant to foster persuasiveness by means of modalization, evaluation and interactional marking (Goodrich 1987; Fish 1989; Gotti, Williams 2010; Breeze *et al.* 2014).

Legal studies are argumentative in nature since they interpret contextual situations with respect to general paradigms or precedents, and argumentation (rather than exposition of objective data, measuring or experimental evidence, hypothesis testing, etc.) is the most appropriate mode for this type of activity. This attitude is clearly reflected in the print abstracts collected in the 2002-2007 sub-corpus, where argumentation markers can be found both in the verbs which are employed to point to the type of activity performed by the associated RAs – that is represented as the outcome of the act of arguing, contending, challenging, etc. – and also in the type of text-articulation connectors exploited to signal

content organization – stressing meaning relations (i.e. *instead, also*), rather than signalling stages (*first, then, next, etc.*), thus positing an argumentative, content-based framework in order to favour specific interpretations.

As regards gate-keeping, the *Washington Law Review* discusses issues which are mainly relevant or applicable to Anglo-American contexts, therefore based on the Common Law system, which is based on the doctrine of precedent; hence some forms of interdiscursivity are implicit in the disciplinary discourse. More precisely, this discursive interconnectedness is part of the epistemology of the domain and is reflected in its conventional discursive practices.

Print LRAAs in the 2002-2007 sub-corpus – aligning, as we have seen, with traditional and conventional discursive requirements and constraints – expressly codify and mark such intertextuality and interdiscursivity by labelling the associated RAs as *comment, note* or *response*, thus highlighting their being turns in a dialogistic continuum, represented by the (dominant) views of the community, rather than as self-contained and independent informative offers. By representing RAs in these terms, print abstracts presuppose both group membership and gate-keeping, since discursive interconnectedness hinges on in-group conventions which can only be appreciated by expert users.

The particularities and peculiarities that have been observed in the textualization of digital LRAAs in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus, instead, may be indicative of a gradual change in the epistemology of legal studies. In fact, while maintaining the prosody which typifies print abstracts, digital abstracts tend to introduce the associated RA in a significantly different way, noticeably by minimizing and concealing gate-keeping. Prosodic continuity with traditional abstract writing is testified by the fact that the occurrences of rhetorical and metadiscursive resources in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus (namely verbs and endophoric/frame markers) never decrease if compared to the 2002-2007 sub-corpus. The only element of variation is to be found in the varying degree of their increment (as can be seen especially in Tables 5 and 6). In this respect, an interesting piece of evidence is the fact that, among such markers, those whose increase is comparatively more contained are precisely those which are instead more frequent and emphasized in print LRAAs, namely those pointing to interdiscursivity and argumentation. As a consequence, while print abstracts represent RAs as produced by expert arguers negotiating their point of view with a competent audience, digital LRAAs introduced RAs as the product of expert researchers contributing to extending disciplinary knowledge with a solid and articulated piece of research which, if primarily targeted to a specialized audience, can be potentially accessible also to lay readers having some interest in the topics being discussed.

As a matter of fact, digital abstracts tend to codify references to the associated RA as a semantically autonomous text, lexicalizing it through labels (*article, essay, paper*) which point to its internal coherence as if to limit as much

as possible any gate-keeping potential. Secondly, the RAs keep being represented as argumentative texts but in the 2012-2107 sub-corpus there is a more marked metatextual emphasis on research-related acts (through verbs like *study, analysis, explore, investigate, etc.*) and on the novelty and originality of the contribution (through verbs such as *contribute, develop, offer, is the first to, etc.*). The promotion of legal RAs, and consequently the dissemination of their contents, appears to benefit from linguistically introducing them as solid pieces of scientific research, whose validity can be appreciated even outside the community of reference, in that they produce results which are (anticipated as being) relevant, innovative and original and, therefore, which are bound to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

From another angle, the trends observed in this study indicate that in the 2012-2017 sub-corpus the promotional function of LRAAs towards RAs is also performed at the level of cognitive accessibility or manageability. This is reflected in a progressive movement towards limiting and circumscribing traditional or conventionalized traits (i.e. emphasis on argumentation and interdiscursivity). Discursive conventions are indeed strategic short-cuts toward understanding, but they are only effective to experts. More precisely, they require a threshold level of disciplinary competence or, notably, they presuppose RAs being assessed through a very specialized perspective and stance, and this way of approaching the interpretation of a text may be cognitively demanding (Bucchi 1998; Hyland 2004). On this basis, the discursive democratization observed in this context does not seem to be primarily necessitated by the need to attract lay audiences, but rather to make specialized contexts appealing and easy to process for legal experts. As a matter of fact, given the growing amount of specialized material retrievable from electronic sources (Jaime Sisó 2009) and the mass of informative material to choose from, digital abstracts are aimed at facilitating the operation of scanning-reading, of locating keywords (labels and verbs) revealing the type of scientific activity to be found in the text, as well as the main tenets and various stages through which the discussion of a given content is organized (*first, second, then, etc.*).

As a consequence, digital LRAA writing – hence, also the representation of legal contents and of the genres designed for their discussion – seems to have adjusted to the possibilities of the electronic medium, on the one hand, and, on the other, also to new audiences of expert readers, who resort to web-searches with specific expectations and needs, which are different from those activated when processing traditional genres and conventionalized disciplinary discourses.



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