



RESEARCH

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DIAGNOSIS OF THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN MEXICO

*Diagnóstico de la construcción teórica de investigaciones
en Comunicación en México*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to know the current state of theoretical construction of communication research in Mexico, through identification and analysis of objects of study and theories that are handled in 90 theses of the *Programa de Posgrado en Ciencias*

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Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

Políticas y Sociales, UNAM, which were elaborated from the year 2012 to the date and were published in TESIUNAM system. This is a quantitative study that develops an analysis based on 16 reagents, to establish the incidences of lines of research and topics; elements of research design; theoretical frameworks, authors and reference works; methodological approaches and techniques; types of results and degree of original theoretical construction. Data obtained emphasize the dispersion of themes, the preference for qualitative approaches and for certain authors and reference works; as well as the low level of criticism or original theoretical construction, even in PhD theses.

KEY WORDS: theoretical frameworks - objects of study - methodology - objectives - hypotheses - techniques - communication research - UNAM - thesis.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es conocer el estado actual que guarda la construcción teórica de investigaciones en comunicación en México, mediante la identificación y análisis de objetos de estudio y teorías que se manejan en 90 tesis del Programa de Posgrado en Ciencias Políticas y Sociales de la UNAM, con orientación en Comunicación, elaboradas desde el año 2012 a la fecha y publicadas en el sistema TESIUNAM. Se trata de un estudio cuantitativo que desarrolla un análisis a partir de 16 reactivos, para establecer las incidencias de líneas de investigación y temas; elementos del diseño de investigación; marcos teóricos, autores y obras de referencia; enfoques metodológicos y técnicas; tipos de resultados y grado de construcción teórica original. Los datos obtenidos enfatizan la dispersión de temas, la preferencia por los enfoques cualitativos en dos de cada tres tesis realizadas y por determinados autores y obras de referencia; así como el bajo nivel de crítica o construcción teórica original, aun en las tesis de nivel doctorado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: marcos teóricos - objetos de estudio - metodología - objetivos - hipótesis - Técnicas - investigación en comunicación - UNAM - tesis.

DIAGNÓSTICO DA CONSTRUÇÃO TEÓRICA DE INVESTIGAÇÕES EM COMUNICAÇÃO NO MÉXICO

RESUME

O proposito deste artigo é conhecer o estado atual que guarda a construção teórica de investigações em comunicação no México, mediante a identificação e analises de objetos de estudo e teorias que se manejam em 90 teses do programa de Pós-graduação em Ciências Políticas e Sociais da UNAM, com orientação em Comunicação elaboradas desde 2012 ao dia de hoje e publicadas no sistema TESIUNAM. Se trata de um estudo quantitativo que desenvolve uma analises a partir de 16 reativos, para estabelecer as

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

incidências de linhas de investigação e temas; elementos de desenho de investigação; referencias teóricas, autores e obras de referência; enfoques metodológicos e técnicas; tipos de resultados e grau de construção teórica original. Os dados obtidos enfatizam a dispersão de temas, a preferência pelos enfoques qualitativos em dois de cada três teses realizadas e por determinados autores e obras de referência; assim como o baixo nível de crítica ou construção teórica original, ainda nas teses de nível de doutorado.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: referencias teóricas – objetos de estudos – metodologia- objetivos – hipóteses – técnicas – investigação em comunicação – UNAM – teses.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication, as a field of knowledge, has been accompanied by theoretical knowledge from other disciplines, which have allowed researchers to build complex objects of study, whose meanings, explanations and reflections merit interdisciplinary work. Within this knowledge, it is possible to appreciate an interesting range of postulates that range from the original theories of effects to the theories of hypermediation, through the study of symbolic forms, discourse studies, social representations, semiotics, critical theories, theories of social organization, among others, that have been adopted to enrich the science of communication, from sociology, linguistics, psychology, political theory, etc.

A century after inaugurating communication as a discipline (due to the fascination with the media), the objects of study have also diversified and, in recent times, interpersonal and group communication processes, as well as cultural guidelines and productions, are also considered research objects and focuses of communication research.

The copious research on communication has managed to consolidate a discipline, dispersed in objects of study, theories, methodologies and techniques, which respond - from interdisciplinarity- to building knowledge about communication processes. However, it is a constant pronouncement in works that manifest efforts to create communication theories, or in forums where researchers from that area concur, the need

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

to unify the field, promote a dialogue between researchers and promote a theoretical basis that is assumed as being proper to that discipline.

Within research, once a study problem has been constructed, the need to use a theoretical current establishes a first intellectual dilemma that researchers must solve: choosing a theoretical option that makes it possible to illuminate the essential aspect of the research problem and the way in which the researched phenomenon must be visualized. As a consequence, in communication research, dispersion and theoretical borrowing are required, although not harmful to scientific progress.

In addition to this, contextual conditions, of course, are essential to define this theoretical reception, since the object of study will always be influenced by an environment anchored to specific spatial-temporal coordinates. Therefore, when talking about contemporary theories of communication, it is necessary to recognize that a change in contextual conditions makes the emergence, adaptation and adoption of certain theories more or less favorable. And that the elaboration of a theoretical map of communication today will surely show differences with respect to an elaborated map, for example, in the mid-twentieth century.

2. OBJECTIVES

It is precisely that idea of generating a theoretical map of communication, specific to the case of Mexico, what encourages the piece of research that follows. Indicating trends in objects of study, theories, authors and methods in communication research can help recognize the concerns and strategies of attention to communicative problems, systematize the knowledge that has been acquired in the field and provide elements for unification of the knowledge of that discipline.

3. STATE OF THE ART

According to Raúl Fuentes Navarro (2011, p. 214), it is in the mid-1970s that scientific and systematic research activities in communication began to be registered in Mexico. This speaks of a young and fertile field that has been institutionalized with great efforts from the national academic entities (Fuentes 2014, p. 43), which since then have proposed different ways of studying communication. However, in the words of Tanius Karam (2009, p. 71):

The academic field of communication is very broad and diverse; on the other hand, it is also characterized by its disarticulation between teaching and research, between research and professional fields, between them and the former. Tensions between professional and academic fields are acute.

The above is due, on the one hand, to the short time of existence of that field in the national panorama and, on the other hand, to a marked timing of the theoretical-methodological approaches from which the phenomena in that discipline have been

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

explored. As Campos (2009) mentions, at first the communication studies were nourished by American contributions in the study of the media, such as radio and television.

In a second moment, in the 1970s, the arrival in Mexico of the European perspective is recorded with theoretical proposals such as critical theory and semiotics. According to Karam (2009), it is at this time when communication schools are committed to giving greater theoretical weight to plans and syllabi, surpassing the training of technical personnel, but preventing “graduates from being able to perform diagnoses and evaluate concrete situations, much less from planning in communication” (Karam, 2009, p. 75).

Today, as González (2015) mentions, in communication research “a greater theoretical and methodological scope is established”, which obliges field researchers to look at themselves and to recount what has been explored, in order to create maps that indicate the paths walked and those that remain virgin and are established as opportunities. Thus, according to AMIC (cited by Campos, 2009) 16 lines of research can be seen in the Mexican territory, of which the following are established as lines of tradition: Political Communication, Political Economy of Communication and Culture: Media Reception; Journalism Studies; Communication and Education; Semiotics, speech and language; Gender and Communication; Communication Policies; Media Studies (radio, cinema and television). More recently explored are the Information Society lines; the Internet, Cyberculture and Telecommunications; Integral Communication in Organizations; History of Communication; Intercultural Communication; Civil society, Participation and Communication; Youth and Communication Studies; and Intersubjective Communication.

In this sense, Fuentes Navarro (2014, p. 44), with his extensive and deep knowledge about the evolution of that field and his research, considers that:

It is increasingly difficult to identify communication studies with media research (...) although structural and short-term work on industries is still being done, there is much greater specificity than before as regards aspects considered political, economic, ideological, labor-related, technological and a more concrete link between these aspects and contextual factors.

This author considers that this same phenomenon is also notable in cultural research, which has yielded to “strong tendencies to economize, politicize and technologize it, that is, to diversify and deepen more specifically the sociocultural dimensions of generic objects” (Fuentes, 2014, p. 44). This phenomenon can be explained, according to the author's findings, thanks to the fact that more and more researchers incorporate empirical content in their work, which requires them to focus the studies.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, communication research has been institutionalized thanks to the efforts of universities with their undergraduate and graduate programs; In this regard, Fuentes Navarro (2014, p. 44) states that, between 1986 and 1994, 20% of the theses presented addressed the issue of media and the vast

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

majority of the works of this period “are rather works of research on social sciences or on education than on communication”.

In the specific case of the studies on research generated within the graduate programs in Communication, the effort of María Susana González Reyna (2015) stands out, who points out that, during the period 2000-2015, the most worked research field in UNAM is that of Communication and Culture, which brings together 58% of the theses and whose main line of research is “Communication, art, language and society”. The second most explored field is Political Communication and Public Opinion with 21.5% of the degree projects and whose main line of research is “Communication, public opinion and political culture”. Finally, the field with less production of degree papers is that of Communication and Technological Innovations with 20.5% of the degree papers and whose main line is “Technological innovations and society”.

According to the author (González, 2015 p. 3152), these research papers give rise to “new theoretical reflections that coin concepts; also, quantitative and qualitative classical research methods and techniques are applied from new perspectives”.

In summary, the field of communication, with the youth that characterizes it, harbors within itself the study of diverse themes and approaches. The possibility of reaching its maturity seems to depend on the ability of researchers to understand and put into perspective this multiplicity of exploration paths. In this sense, Karam (2009, p. 421) affirms that one of the challenges to be achieved is that of the “systematization of information and establishment of databases that allow the realization of more effective states of the art”, so that papers such as this one are one more grain of sand to reach this goal.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Conceptual framework

An essential point of this piece of research was to develop a minimum theoretical framework that would help to understand the role of theory in communication research. This refers to wondering about the meaning of theory, scientific knowledge and disciplinary epistemology. In other words, why is it important to develop theoretical frameworks? And, fundamentally, why is theory important for scientific advancement? The purpose of this is to find the relevant support to understand what theory is and to identify it in the research corpus.

In that sense, it is understood that research is a creative and reflective practice, which is based on the ability of human beings to ask questions about themselves and about reality, from a specific perspective and in a search to obtain answers that allow them to face the world and join it (Juárez, 1997, p. 23).

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

Thus the first human beings survived in a world in which they were at a disadvantage as compared to other species and to the inclemency of their habitat. Reflective practice also allowed the cosmogony and social structures of the first great civilizations to be configured. Investigating was a fundamentally ontological and axiological activity, concerned about who and for what.

However, the world became increasingly complex and therefore the questions and their explanations required a more structured heuristic activity, required to settle on a perfectly structured path with theoretical support. Science appeared as a set of rational knowledge, certain or probable, obtained methodically and verified in its contrast with reality (Ander Egg, 2004).

Investigating became an activity with essentially scientific status; any valid answer or explanation could no longer be only ontological and axiological, but rigorously methodological and epistemological. Theory, then, took a leading role.

Frequently, those who begin doing research do not realize the importance of a theory. The lack of explicitness of it makes the investigation process lose effectiveness and coherence; from the methodological design to the interpretation of data and, finally, the statement of conclusions.

In the context of scientific research, a theory is a system of ideas, a framework of interpretation that the scientist creates or uses to explain facts, data or phenomena. It implies a series of judgments, arguments or interpretative propositions from which reality is viewed and problematized (Schlanger, 1983).

Like any human interpretation or creation, a theory is hypothetical or supposed, and finally it can be true or false. However, according to Einstein (1981, p. 44):

Sensory experiences represent the given. But the theory that will have to interpret them is man-made. It is the result of an extremely arduous adaptation process: hypothetical, never definitive, always subject to criticism and doubt.

The scientific way of forming concepts differs from the one we use in everyday life not substantially, but only in the greater precision of the definitions of the concepts and conclusions; a more careful and systematic choice of experimental material; a greater logical economy. The latter means the effort to reduce all logically independent basic concepts and axioms.

In this sense, Popper (1994) shows that a theory as a construction of a hypothetical interpretation of reality: a) admits the existence of problems because there are contradictions, between ideas or between ideas and reality; b) involves discerning or explaining these contradictions through a logical and systematic method; and c) the

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

creation of an idea or system of ideas, with varying degrees of abstraction or generality, with which contradictions are explained or excluded.

Finally, every theory will be more solid insofar as it has a rigorous construction basis and can meet the following criteria:

1. Be a system of ideas or a series of propositions that are arranged logically, with coherence and without contradictions, starting from the most abstract or general ones.
2. Be broad or fruitful. Its conclusions should explain all known problem cases in a scientific field, and suggest new explanations, beyond what has been observed or explained so far.
3. Be simple. The theory that, with less assumptions, explains more consequences is better than the one that requires more assumptions to explain the same.
4. Be communicable This element is proposed by Mario Bunge (1993, p. 14-15), who says that communicability is possible thanks to precision; and it is in turn a necessary condition for the verification of empirical data and hypotheses. The communication of the results and techniques of science not only improves general education but also multiplies the possibilities of its confirmation or refutation.

4.2. Conformation of the corpus

The corpus of this piece of research was made up of degree theses (master's and doctorate), prepared by students of the Graduate Program in Political and Social Sciences of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The theses not only constitute a mechanism to achieve an official degree or certification for the professional performance of an individual but also oblige the authors to enter the discipline in which they are trained and address problems related to their field through scientific research (basic or applied). It is based on the idea that a thesis paper is an investigation that contributes to disciplinary knowledge, and that it must observe methodological rigor and provide original knowledge. The thesis implies a greater level of deepening in the discipline, since they must be covered with specialized and no longer generic knowledge in the field (undergraduate level); They also form the basis of a possible academic work that researchers carry out to enter - as specialists - in a specific line. They have greater possibilities of dissemination in disciplinary forums and also greater possibilities of monitoring and deepening by their authors.

The selection of this textual collection is due not only to the accessibility allowed by the databases and networks of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, through TESIUNAM, but also to UNAM and, in particular, the Graduate Program in Political and Social Sciences continue to be a benchmark in the training of scientists and technologists and a prominent hotbed of communication professionals.

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

The selected theses met the following criteria:

1. Be a product of research work in the area of Communication.
2. Have been done for the purpose of obtaining the academic master's or doctorate degrees.
3. Have been prepared (published) from 2012 to March 2017. The above to grant the status of "current" to the theoretical construction of their objects of study.

A total of 92 theses were registered in the system: 66 master's and 26 doctoral theses; however, two of these papers are not available for online consultation, which resulted in a sample of 90 theses: 65 master's and 25 doctorate.

4.3. Design of the analysis instrument

The analysis instrument was designed from 16 reagents explained below:

1. Research line. Multiple choice reagent that included in response the 20 lines defined by UNAM to carry out postgraduate research in the area of Communication, grouped into three fields: Communication and Technological Innovations, Political Communication and Communication and Culture.
2. Subject. This is a selection reagent from a list, which was intended to specify the topics addressed, to identify and detail in a specific way the orientation of research.

This reagent offered the following response options: Social representations; Media and copyright legislation; Speech analysis; Media ethics; Message analysis; Cultural consumption; Journalistic ethics; Professional training in communication; Semiotic analysis; Theories and methodologies of communication; Political communication; Literature; Social mediations; Organizational communication; Reconfiguration of the multimedia structure; ICTs and social groups; Multiculturalism, interculturality; Reading; Content analysis; Social networks and new media; Communication for development; Journalism; Media groups and digital convergence; Communication and society; Communication, public opinion and politics; Digital culture; Communicative practices and social uses of media.

The proposal made by José Antonio Meyer Rodríguez and María Belén Fernández Fuentes (2012, p. 32) was used for the classification of topics. Unlike the research line, this reagent was proposed to make specifications of the subjects, by virtue of approaching the objects of study built in each thesis.

3. Object of study. Multiple choice reagent that included the following concepts in response: Actors, Instruments, Expressions (messages), Representations and Others. For the classification of the objects of study, the typology described by Manuel Martín Serrano (1982) was selected.

4. Spatial location of the object of study. Multiple choice reagent that included the following response options: International Macrosocial, National Macrosocial, International Microsocial and National Microsocial.

The purpose of this reagent was to determine the extent in terms of the size of the community studied (micro or macro social) and the spatial scope (national or international) of research.

5. Temporary location of the object of study. Multiple choice reagent that offers the following response options: 21st century, 20th century, 19th century and earlier.

The objective of this section was to identify the specific time or periods in which the researched object of study is located.

6. Objectives. It is a binary question that gives the answer options Yes or No. The purpose of this reagent was to identify the explicit inclusion in the theses of the research objective(s).

The importance of this reagent lies in the fact that, as indicated by the APA standards (American Psychological Association, nd): the objectives of a degree paper are an aspiration of what is expected to be achieved or demonstrated; They offer a succinct description of the orientation and direction of the work, therefore, they are research guides or steps that have been elucidated as indicated to study the research problem and guarantee the intellectual position of the thesis author.

7. Hypothesis. It is a binary-type reagent that gives Yes or No. options. With this reagent the presence or absence of the hypothesis statement was investigated in the theses.

The presence of hypotheses in the theses is transcendental because, according to APA standards (American Psychological Association, nd), they are assumptions or predictions made about the results of research. They are considered guides that allow us to orient the work towards the achievement of a specific objective or conclusion.

8. Theoretical framework. It is an open reagent that seeks to identify which or what are the previously established theories that the author uses to develop his research.

9. Conceptual framework. Open reagent that seeks to identify which or what are the concepts that the author develops as the basis of his dissertation.

10. Authors for theoretical construction. Open reagent that seeks to identify which or which are the authors to whom the author of the thesis uses for the modeling of the object of study of research.

11. Works for the theoretical construction of the object of study. Open reagent that seeks to identify which or what are the works to which the author of the thesis uses for modeling the object of study of research.

12. Type of methodology. Multiple choice reagent that offers the following response options: qualitative, quantitative and mixed. Qualitative methodology is

understood to be the one that uses the analysis of the characteristics and qualities of the object of study, unlike the quantitative one that uses numerical analysis of data related to the same object. A mixed methodology is understood to be the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

13. Type of research. It is a binary type reagent that offers as basic and applied response options. It is considered basic research to which its results contribute to the understanding of a phenomenon or object of study, as well as some theoretical contribution. On the other hand, research is considered applied when it results in a particular product as a guide, procedure, teaching material or of
14. Techniques employed. This is a selection reagent from a list that refers to the research techniques used in the thesis papers and offers the following response options: documentary analysis (commentary to diverse bibliography), discourse analysis, content analysis, semiotic analysis, message analysis (different from discursive, content or semiotic), interview, in-depth interview, survey, discussion groups, focus groups, projective techniques, participant observation, non-participant observation, sociometric techniques, prospective analysis, life stories, logbook or field diary and others.
15. Results. It is a binary question that offers quantitative and qualitative answer possibilities. Quantitative results are understood to be those that are of a numerical nature based on the statistical analysis of data and qualitative ones that are of a descriptive nature based on the analysis of the characteristics and qualities of the object of study.
16. Theoretical construction in the conclusions. It is a binary question that gives yes or no options. It refers to whether the author of the piece of research integrates theoretical contributions into the conclusions of the piece of research, either to elaborate criticisms of his theoretical bases or original theoretical approaches.

5. RESULTS

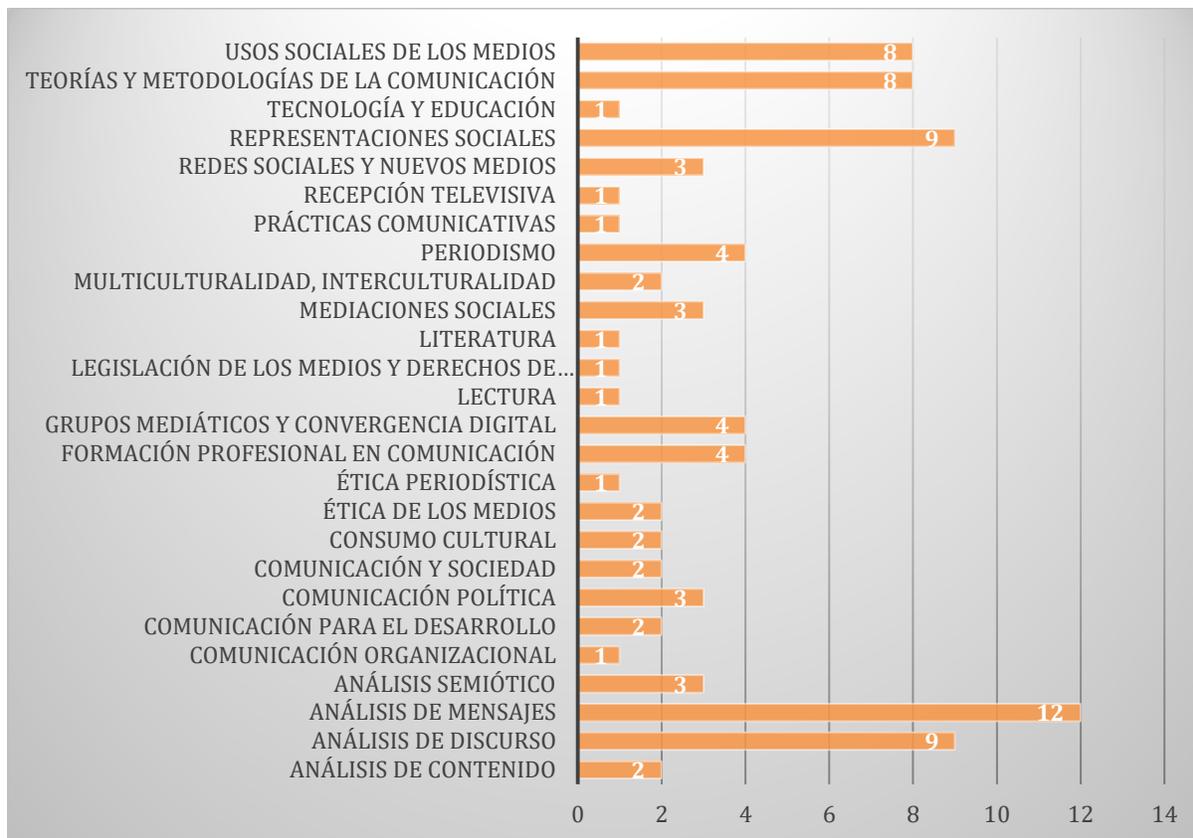
5.1. Research line

The three research lines that group the largest amount of research in the postgraduate course are: a) Communication and society; b) Film studies; and c) Journalism studies. If we group these data according to the three fields offered by the Postgraduate Program in Political and Social Sciences, we agree with the results obtained by González (2015), in that the field of Communication and Culture is the one that gathers more papers with 65.5% of the theses carried out in the last five years. 18.8% of the theses correspond to the field of Political Communication; and 13.3% to Communication and technological innovations.

It should be noted that a research line was added, which was named "Communication epistemology" and which refers to papers that make criticisms or

theoretical proposals regarding communication. In this line, two papers were identified (both at the doctoral level), which corresponds to 2.2% of the total corpus.

5.2. Topic



Graph 1. Frequency of topics.

Source: self made.

Graph 1 shows an important dispersion of the topics addressed in the degree research in communication. Message analysis, discourse analysis, social representations, social uses of the media and communication theories and methodologies constitute the specific topics of more than half of the theses (51.1%). The remaining issues, individually, do not reach 5% representativeness.

5.3. Objects of study

For this reagent, a typology was established that simplified the versatility of objects of study that can be used by a communication researcher. When defining the elements of communication, according to the dialogic model of Martín Serrano (1982), this author establishes four fundamental elements: the actors, the instruments, the expressions and the representations.

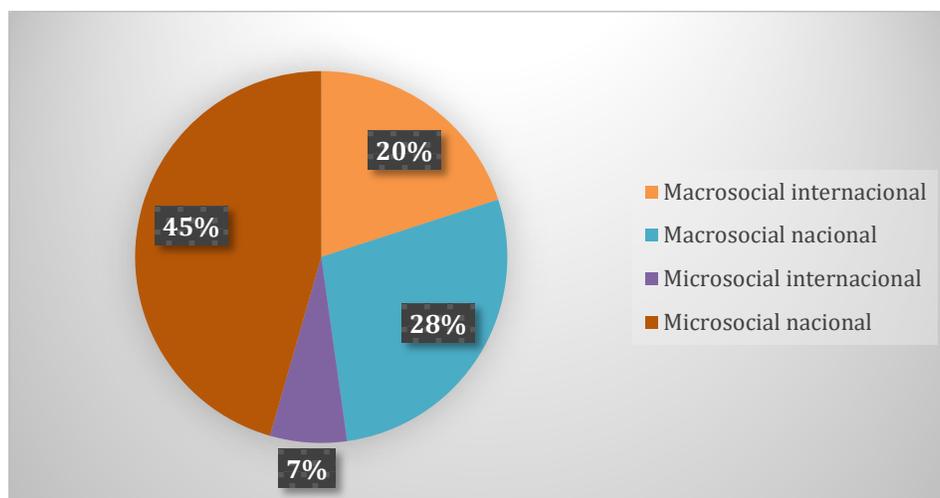
Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

Returning to this typology, the object of study most used by researchers is the expressions, that is, the messages of communication. Additionally, if Graph 1 on the thematic classification is retrieved, it will be observed that, in effect, the priority concern of communication research at UNAM shows a pronounced accent towards the study of the content of messages in communicative processes.

Of the four elements defined by Martín Serrano, actors constitute the object of study in only 11.1% of the thesis papers. While the instruments (fundamentally understood as the means of communication) and the representations (within which we find meanings, opinions and other ideal objects) each one is studied in 16.6% of the pieces of research. Also, in 14 theses (15.5%), different combinations of the aforementioned items appeared.

5.4. Spatial location



Graph 2. Spatial location.

Source: self made.

The communication research carried out in the Postgraduate Program of the UNAM is mostly local. The national microsocial scope tells us about the study of specific populations, of territorially focused communities, perhaps population universes at the sectoral or municipal level. If we combine the percentages of micro- and macro-social at the national level, we will find that 73% of communication research is based on the study of Mexican problems, and that only 27% turn our attention to the international context.

5.5. Temporal location

The majority of communication research places its objects of study in time in the present 21st century (88%). Although the twentieth century still has a presence in the theses we analyzed, the percentage of appearance amounts to only 11%. While only one thesis places its object of study in the nineteenth century. This speaks of the construction of current, valid study problems and, if combined with the results of graph (d), we are

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

faced with research that shows an important degree of spatial-temporal proximity of the objects of study.

5.6. Objectives

The explicit indication of the research objectives is present in 84% of the theses we analyzed. However, the fact that 16% of them do not appear could indicate weaknesses in the research design.

5.7. Hypothesis

A different case to that of the objectives is that of the enunciation of the research hypotheses. Although they appear in the majority of theses (64%), the fact that almost 4 out of 10 theses do not make the hypotheses explicit speaks of a lack of orientation of the expected results in the design stage of the project.

5.8. Theoretical frameworks



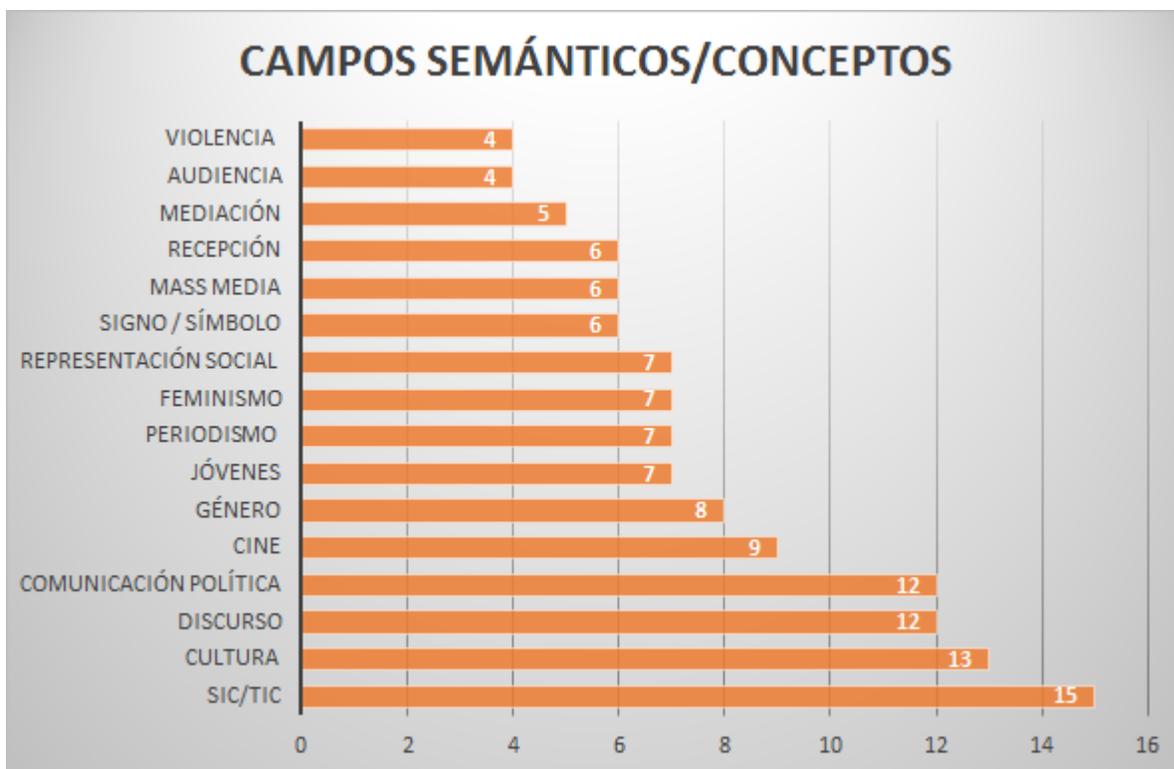
Graph 3. Theories used.

Source: self made.

The theories most helped by researchers in communication underline the importance of the field of communication and culture. The priority accent is found in discourse theories, along with hermeneutics, cultural studies and the political economy of communication. Other outstanding theoretical approaches are those that correspond to social representations, semiotics and feminist theory, as the basis for a significant number of the research carried out in the postgraduate course.

It is important to note that if we make a review of the theoretical postulates that nurture research at UNAM, we will find a strong attachment to the consolidated traditions in the Postgraduate Program and to the knowledge of communication in its future as a scientific discipline. That is, it is mostly theories that come from other disciplinary fields that are adopted for the study of communication and nurture the interdisciplinary exercise in this area.

5.9. Conceptual frameworks



Graph 4. Semantic fields / more developed concepts.

Source: self made.

In the case of this reagent, all the concepts that researchers define as the basis of the theoretical construction of their objects of study were recovered. Given the number of

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

these concepts, a second classification exercise by semantic fields was carried out. Palmer (1978), Ullmann (1991) and Lyons (1997) agree that the theory of semantic fields is a creation of Trier, who proposed the category of semantic or conceptual field, it being understood as a field or a sector composed of a series of lexical elements with reciprocal relations, in which each element contributes to delimiting the meaning of its neighbors and, at the same time, it is delimited by them. In short, semantic fields allow a more or less rigorous and illustrative organization of the networks of meaning that are constructed around meaningful linguistic units.

As can be seen in graph 4, the most defined concepts in the theses we analyzed are those that correspond to the semantic fields of ICTs, culture, discourse and political communication.

5.10. Authors for the theoretical construction of the object of study

Reviewing the most used authors for the theoretical construction of the object of study, we see again the emergence of consolidated authors in the field of communication in Mexico. It is not always about authors who recognize themselves to be communication specialists, on the contrary, on the list of authors that amounts to more than 260 (only for the theoretical construction of the objects of study) philosophers, anthropologists, political scientists appear linguists or historians equally. The legacy of these authors has been adopted by the psychologists to establish the theoretical basis of their discipline, again in an interdisciplinary manner.

The following stand out as authors: Manuel Castells, Jürgen Habermas, Gilberto Giménez, Guillermo Orozco and John B. Thompson with the highest percentages of appearance in the pieces of research. Other authors such as Roland Barthes, Clifford Geertz, Michel Foucault, Charles Sanders Peirce, Armand Mattelart, Michel Pecheux, Julia Kristeva, Gerard Genette or Edgar Morin, also cited several times in the corpus.

The scarce appearance of Latin American authors is also symptomatic and even contradictory with respect to the construction of the objects of study.

5.11. Works for the theoretical construction of the object of study

Manuel Castells and Jürgen Habermas keep being the most cited authors with two different works each. From the authorship of Castells, *Communication and Power* and *The Information Age* appear in their three volumes; whereas, of Habermas, the theses frequently quote *History and Criticism of Public Opinion* and *Theory of Communicative Action*. *The Captivities of Women* of Marcela Lagarde also enter the list, to support gender and communication studies; *From the Media to the Mediations* of Jesús Martín Barbero; *The Political Economy of Communication*, of Vincent Mosco; *Television and Audiences* of

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

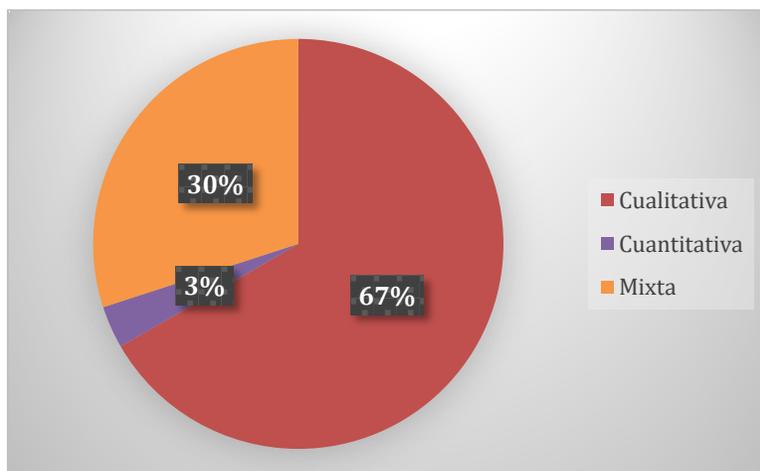
Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

Guillermo Orozco; *General Linguistics Course* of Ferdinand de Saussure; and *Ideology and Modern Culture* authored by John B. Thompson. All of them being mandatory reference works for communication scholars in Mexico.

5.12. Type of research

Regarding the type of research, a significant percentage (87%) corresponds to basic-type research, understood here as research that aims to generate knowledge for the understanding of an aspect of reality. Meanwhile, only 13% of the pieces of research have an applied turn; that is to say, the development of the thesis aimed at the generation of products (models, programs, manuals, etc.) that allow action against a specific problem, for its attention or solution.

5.13. Methodology

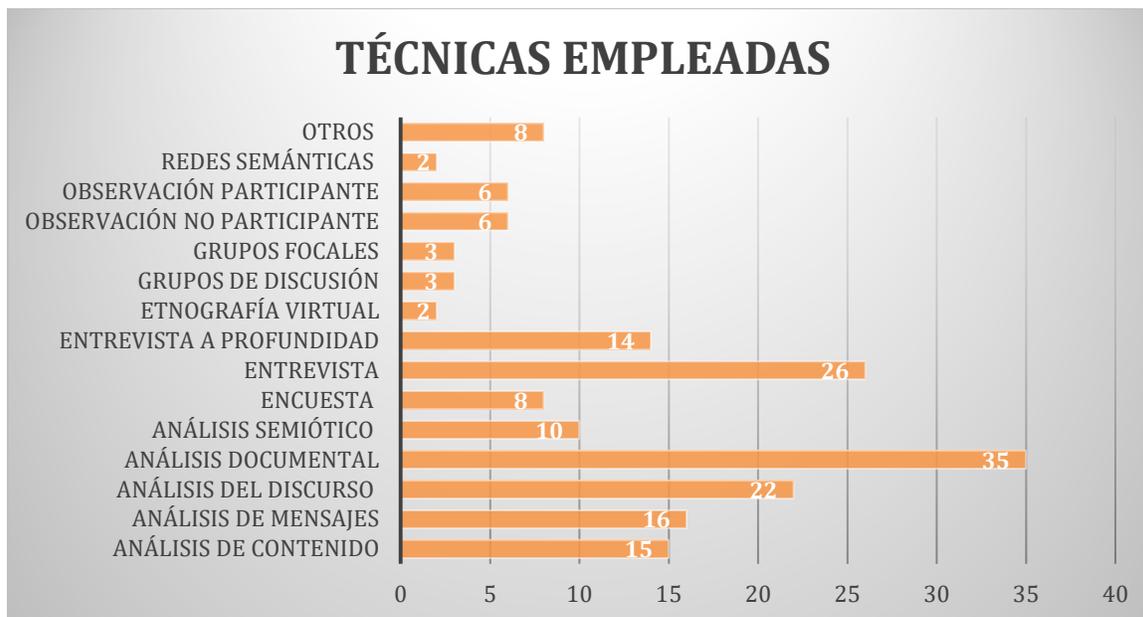


Graph 5. Type of methodology.

Source: self made.

The qualitative approach appears in almost 7 out of 10 analyzed theses. This marks the congruence between communication studies as a social discipline, more interested in processes and meanings attributable to social subjects, than to numerical data and their statistical treatment. 30% of the pieces of research use mixed methodology, and only 3% use a purely quantitative perspective.

5.14. Techniques



Graph 5. Most used techniques.

Source: self made.

Documentary analysis, interview and discourse analysis appear as the most commonly used research techniques for communication research. Researchers also resort to content analysis, semiotic analysis, observation, survey and discussion groups and focus groups. In the heading 'Others' the following techniques appear with some mention: crossphoric analysis, SWOT, kinesic analysis, ethnography, reduced hypertext, oral history, representation analysis and hermeneutical analysis.

5.15. Results

In accordance with the type of methodology used, qualitative results appear in 69% of the analyzed theses; while 28% combine quantitative and qualitative results and only 3% present purely numerical data.

5.16. Theoretical construction in the conclusions

Only three out of 10 theses elaborate a critique of the theories used for the construction of the objects of study, or they propose lines, postulates or parameters for a possible novel theoretical categorization of objects of study of communication. This tells us about a lack of theoretical autonomy in graduate students, lack of deepening in theoretical systems or even a certain disdain to collaborate in the theoretical

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

consolidation of the field from systematic research referred to the current Mexican context.

6. DISCUSSION

Although the general objective of the master's degree in communication at UNAM is “to provide students with broad and solid training in a field of knowledge, initiate them in research, train them for teaching and/or develop in them a high capacity for professional exercise” and the general objective of the doctoral studies is “to provide students with solid training to develop research that produces original knowledge and to offer rigorous training for the academic and/or professional exercise”, it is noteworthy that the data point to two important theoretical-methodological weaknesses: lack of an explanation of the hypotheses in almost 4 out of 10 theses and lack of theoretical criticism in just over 70% of papers.

Lack of hypotheses or minimum premises of research, as mentioned above, prevents a visualization of the project design and the orientation that the results obtained will take. While the scarce theoretical criticism could suppose a non-existent intellectual autonomy that, at the studied levels, is suggested necessary for the production of original knowledge and for solid incursion in the scientific work.

Another interesting aspect that illuminates the results is that graduate theses dedicated to communication cover a wide variety of topics and research lines, which tells us about the vastness and flexibility of the discipline itself. However, the objects of study seem to set aside the actors as a central point of analysis and continue to concentrate mostly on messages / expressions. In the same sense, it is also observed that perspectives focused on the study of representations and instruments become relevant.

It is worth asking why the lack of relevance of the actors as a central point in the postgraduate theses, even when talking about audiences, are studied as recipients and not from their role as social actors. Perhaps the metaphor of the impact of the media and the messages continues to deprive. As for the emphasis on the study of messages, there is a certain inclination in the postgraduate course to train language specialists.

A strong presence of North American and European literature is observed, in comparison with Latin American authors and literature. This data could indicate a certain inconsistency in the theoretical formulation of research problems, given that, if the objects of study are fundamentally located in the Mexican national context, the national reality may not conform to theoretical reflections that obey external contexts. This in no way means that theories have nationality, but it is symptomatic of lack of consolidation of theoretical work in Mexican authors and / or of theoretical dialogue among nationals.

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

Regarding the methodological aspect, the communication papers in the Graduate Course in Political and Social Sciences have preference for qualitative approaches, in which classic techniques such as interview, discourse analysis and observation are distinguished; while purely quantitative papers seem to lose ground. They continue to appear as part of mixed methodologies, which with 30.3% begin to gain visibility.

The low percentage of quantitative research could suggest the preference of certain theoretical / conceptual frameworks or the view that communication as an object of study is linked to complex processes of reality construction and a marked influence of human subjectivity, the same processes that demand a qualitative approach to understand them. Another possible explanation could be the scarce use of quantitative techniques due to their degree of rigor and mathematical treatment.

On the recurrence of certain authors and papers, it is explained by the need to justify research based on the intellectual authority of consolidated authors in the field of social sciences (particularly from the sociological discipline), of communication, and specifically, in the Graduate Course in Political and Social Sciences at UNAM.

Crossing variables, it was found that the correlations between the reagents, in all cases, were weak and imperfect (from 0.3 to 0.1 and from -0.3 to -0.1). This can be statistically explained from the very pronounced dispersion of lines, topics, authors and papers, with the axis of communication and culture being the group of major thematic lines and a strong emphasis on qualitative research.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Communication as a discipline has gone, since its origins, from the study of mass media research to an interdisciplinary knowledge that, from communicative processes, is able to explain social, economic, political, educational or cultural phenomena with absolute scientific rigor.

Nowadays, communication research in Mexico shows an important range of topics, objects of study, methodologies and techniques that, far from being assumed as a factor of dispersion or fragmentation of communicative knowledge, must be valued in their capacity for disciplinary integration to understand and address complex issues, such as those currently emerging in the national and international context.

This piece of research shows that a theoretical map of communication studies should consider an important accent in the transition from media content analysis to the study of speeches made in all social fields, and in the emergence of issues of global relevance such as the political economy of the communication industry, gender studies, political communication, the significance of cultural phenomena, interpersonal and

Gutiérrez Morales, I. M.; Aguilar Ramírez, L. A.; González Chaparro, I. L.; Pérez Lima, A. M.; Sandoval Pantoja, M. G. & Suárez Bedolla, B. I.

Diagnosis of the theoretical construction of Communication research in Mexico

organizational communicative processes and technological innovations, from a sociocultural perspective rather than a technical one.

This piece of research also suggests that, despite the vastness of inputs, the theoretical autonomy of communication researchers in Mexico is an area of opportunity. Creating models or communicative theory is a task that must be addressed based on the impulse and consolidation of research work, theoretical dialogue among peers and the formation of scientific communities.

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