Dossier Editorial

Methodological discussions in digital communication studies

Discusiones metodológicas en los estudios de comunicación digital

Discussões metodológicas em estudos de comunicação digital

Dorismilda Flores-Márquez, Universidad La Salle Bajío, México
(dfloresm@lasallebajio.edu.mx)

Rodrigo González-Reyes, Universidad de Guadalajara, México
(rodrigo@suv.udg.mx)

Digitalization has reconfigured the ways of doing and understanding communication, from our daily practices to the questions we ask ourselves when researching communication and digital culture (Gómez Cruz, 2022; Jensen, 2021; Waisbord, 2019). Different authors have pointed out the relevance of the digital for researching communication for decades, in light of understanding the constant transformations as opportunities to rethink the contributions of the field in relation to other areas (Fuentes Navarro, 2001; Jensen, 2021; Livingstone, 2009; Scolari, 2009). These discussions intersect with others related to communication research from the South, especially from Latin America. On the one hand, these discussions emphasize the Latin American communicational thought (Marques de Melo, 2011), and elements of their own are articulated, based on social and historical conditions, native peoples, and popular cultures, as well as the appropriations of elements of Marxism, French semiology, and British cultural studies (Suzina, 2021b; Suzina & Sartoretto, 2021; Waisbord, 2019). On the other hand, there is a wake-up call to the need for theorization and methodological development (Fuentes Navarro, 2011; Gómez Cruz & Siles, 2020; Scolari, 2008; Siles, 2009; Trejo Delarbre, 2013), socially and culturally situated in response to the specific realities in which communication research takes place in Latin America.

In this dossier of issue 54 we seek to contribute to these discussions from the field of methodology. As we stated in the call for papers, the purpose was to capture and problematize the methodologies to study communication and digital culture for three reasons.

First, methodology is a key element in scientific research, translating epistemological and theoretical frameworks into specific data production and analysis practices (Jensen, 2021; Orozco & González, 2011). The permanent transformations in practices, technologies, and contexts require questioning and updating our methods and the way in which we approach the study of communication, as well as maintaining a continuous task of mapping the debates that allow us to account for the retractions, delays, pitfalls, couplings, extensions, and reformulations that occur in the research work. Secondly, although it is imperative to make the methodology explicit in scientific publications, there is not always sufficient depth in the justification, problematization and/or reflection on its implications and possibilities (Carter & Little, 2007). Sadly, sometimes only techniques are mentioned –for example, digital ethnography was done, millions of tweets were retrieved to do a sentiment analysis– without making explicit the motivations and methodological decisions, as well as the ways in which the data was produced and analyzed. In this context, we consider necessary a permanent discussion around methodology that allows us to make transparent the ways in which we investigate and, at the same time, develop creativity and methodological imagination (Flores-Márquez & González-Reyes, 2021; Kubitschko & Kaun, 2016).

The third reason is that we identified a gap in the specialized literature on methodology, both in communication studies and, in a broader sense, in the Social Sciences and Humanities. This is more acute in Latin America, where the literature in English, the most widespread, historically encounters substantial problems of reception and contextualization (Ortiz, 2009; Suzina, 2021a) in considerably dissimilar social spaces and practices. In addition to the above, for various historical reasons (Ford, 2005), these countries have been marginalized from the production of global science, specifically in relation to what is executed and disseminated from the global North, which becomes one more reason to enable discussions of this nature.

There are recent works that provide methodological discussions from the region, such as the books *La imaginación metodológica: Coordenadas, rutas y apuestas para el estudio de la cultura digital* (The methodological imagination. Coordenates, routes and bets for the study of digital culture) (Flores-Márquez & González-Reyes, 2021) and *Hipermétodos: Repertorios de la investigación social en entornos digitales* (Hypermethods. Repertoires of social research in digital environments)

(Rodríguez Cano, 2022), the special issue *Métodos computacionales y Big Data en la investigación en comunicación* (Special Issue Computational Methods and Big Data in Communication Research), coordinated by Carlos Arcila Calderón and colleagues (2021) in *Cuadernos.Info*, as well as *Innovación metodológica para el estudio de la plataformización* (Methodological innovation for the study of platformization), coordinated by Gabriela Sued and Nohemí Lugo (2022) in *Virtualis*.

In this line, this current special issue included in number 54 of *Cuadernos.Info* contributes to sustain a permanent discussion on methodology from Ibero-America. As guest editors, we are grateful for the generous response we had from authors and reviewers from different countries, with 59 submissions. In the context of a highly competitive call for papers, we faced the challenge of selecting only eight, according with the purpose of *Cuadernos.Info*, that represented contemporary discussions and methodological innovations in the field, while reflecting geographic and gender diversity, as well as collaborative work.

In the article *Multidimensional analysis of DID sustainability in the physical-virtual context*, Gonzalo Andrés, Patricia San Martín, and Guillermo Luján propose a multidimensional analysis model to evaluate what they call the sustainability of dynamic intermediary devices (DID). This formulation allows the articulation of micro and macro-social processes in the study of the sustainability of technologies in current physical-virtual environments and, at the same time, to incorporate an analysis model for these environments.

In the article *Technopolitical cartographies: a proposal for collaborative mapping through participatory action research*, Dafne Calvo and José Mena present a novel approach to digital cartographies, methodological devices from the tradition of digital activism, to show them as powerful research tools when they are extrapolated to the context of participatory research and the mapping of technopolitical communities.

In *Methodology for studying digital public spaces produced by institutions*, by Salvador de León Vázquez, a methodological proposal is presented for approaching institutional websites when they operate as public horizons. Coming from studies on public communication, Internet, and citizenship, the work transcends the analysis of these spaces as mere public portals to account for the study of the interactions between public institutions and citizens generated there, so this type of spaces requires their own analytical tools.

Julio César Valente Ferreita, Thiago Ribeiro Furtado, Rafael Dirques David Regis, Gabriela Rodrigues Diniz, Paula Gonçalves, and Vitor Pedro da Silva Castelo Tavares present the text *Anime clustering for automatic classification and configuration*

of demographics. In it, they provide an interesting work on cultural production of anime and its fan communities, from Robot Process Automation (RPA) techniques and cluster analysis. Applying algorithms of classification, recommendation, and manipulation of massive data, they offer an analytical model that will allow, potentially, its application to the study of the activity of cultural industries, fan communities, and the production of digital content in their flow scenarios.

In the article entitled *How I became a BookTuber: digital (auto)ethnography, literary prosumption, and sociality on YouTube,* José M. Tomasena exposes a valuable bet, in the digital ethnographic tradition, focused on the auto-ethnography that he made in his YouTube channel, with the aim of analyzing the practices of BookTubers in Spanish. The result is a methodological reflection that highlights the implications of performing digital ethnography and auto-ethnography, as well as the researcher's positioning and challenges.

Lucía Cantamutto and Cristina Vela Delfa, in their article *Corpus of digital interactions: systematization of techniques to collect data on WhatsApp,* approach an uncommon empirical space, micromessaging, in WhatsApp. Starting from the complexity of researching from data in the context of these increasingly present and dominant interactive technologies, the authors share a review of different techniques for collecting data from WhatsApp users, in terms of resources, possibilities, and ways to overcome the difficulties.

In her article *Designing for people with autism: digital culture, ethnography, situated research* , Nohemí Lugo addresses the convergence of ethnography and design, based on two cases of empirical research whose goal has been to provide elements to design social environments for children with autism and their mothers. The author reflects on the challenges of the researcher when he/she belongs to the group with whom and for whom research is conducted. Thus, based on the foundations of participatory action research and situated research, the resulting proposal aims to promote inclusive ethnographic research that recognizes and actively involves historically excluded communities.

Finally, in the text *Decolonizing methods to study digital culture: a proposal from Latin America,* Edgar Gómez Cruz, Paola Ricaurte, and Ignacio Siles propose a methodological reflection to study digital culture from a decolonial perspective situated in Latin America. Their methodological proposal points to the need to understand methods, as ways of knowing, as performativities subject to the contexts of exclusion and epistemic divergence, in which the geopolitics of knowledge has had its consequences.

Along the way there were other valuable works that we would have loved to include. We understand scientific production as a series of practices sustained by collaboration and dialogue, so as an academic community we have different spaces for exchange that we can take advantage of. In fact, this dossier is one of them. We hope that you will find these contributions interesting, inspiring, and even provocative and challenging, so that we can continue to meet in this important common work.

DORISMILDA FLORES-MÁRQUEZ

RODRIGO GONZÁLEZ-REYES

Guest editors / Special Issue
Cuadernos.info

REFERENCES

Arcila Calderón, C., Van Atteveldt, W., & Trilling, D. (2021). Dossier Métodos Computacionales y Big Data en la Investigación en Comunicación (Special Issue Computational Methods and Big Data in Communication Research). *Cuadernos.Info*, (49), I-IV. https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.49.35333

Carter, S. M. & Little, M. (2007). Justifying Knowledge, Justifying Method, Taking Action: Epistemologies, Methodologies, and Methods in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(10), 1316-1328. https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.49.35333

Flores-Márquez, D. & González Reyes, R. (2021). En busca de coordenadas metodológicas para estudiar la cultura digital (In search of methodological coordinates to study digital culture). In Flores-Márquez, D. & González Reyes, R. (Coords), *La imaginación metodológica. Coordenadas, rutas y apuestas para el estudio de la cultura digital* (The methodological imagination. Coordenates, routes and bets for the study of digital culture) (pp. 15-23). Tintable.

Ford, A. (2005). *Resto del mundo: nuevas mediaciones de las agendas críticas internacionales* (Rest of world: new mediations of international critical agendas). Norma.

Fuentes Navarro, R. (2001). Exploraciones teórico-metodológicas para la investigación sociocultural de los usos de la Internet (Theoretical and methodological explorations for sociocultural research on the uses of the Internet). In M. I. Vassallo de Lopes & R. Fuentes Navarro (Coords.), *Comunicación, campo y objeto de estudio. Perspectivas reflexivas latinoamericanas* (Communication, field, and object of study. Latin American reflective perspectives) (pp. 229-245). ITESO.

Fuentes Navarro, R. (2011). Pensamiento comunicacional latinoamericano y convergencia digital. Retos epistemológicos y académicos (Latin American communicational ideas and digital convergence. Epistemological and academic challenges). In C. Del Valle, F. Moreno, & F. Sierra (Coords), *Cultura latina y revoluación digital. Matrices para pensar el espacio iberoamericano de comunicación* (Latin culture and digital revolution. Matrixes to think the Ibero-American communication space) (pp. 41-68). Gedisa.

Gómez-Cruz, E. (2022). *Tecnologías vitales. Pensar las culturas digitales desde Latinomérica* (Vital technologies. Thinking digital cultures from Latin America). Puertabierta Editores.

Gómez-Cruz, E. & Siles, I. (2020). Digital Cultures in the Americas. In W. Raussert, G. Anatol, S. Thies, S. Corona, & J. L. Lozano (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook to the Cultures and Media of the Americas* (pp. 319-329). Routledge.

Jensen, K. B. (2021). *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research* (3rd edition). Routledge.

Kubitschko, S. & Kaun, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Innovative Methods in Media and Communication Research*. Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40700-5

Livingstone, S. (2009). On the Mediation of Everything: ICA Presidential Address 2008. *Journal of Communication, 59*(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01401.x

Marques de Melo, J. (2011). Los derechos humanos como pilares éticos en el legado comunicacional de Paulo Freire y Luiz Beltrão (Human rights as ethical pillars in Paulo's Freire's and Luiz Beltrao's communicational heritage). *Punto Cero, 16*(23), 9-17.

Orozco, G. & González, R. (2011). *Una coartada metodológica. Abordajes cualitativos en la investigación en comunicación, medios y audiencias* (A methodological alibi. Qualitative approaches in communication, media and audience research). Tintable.

Ortiz, R. (2009). *La supremacía del inglés en las ciencias sociales* (English supremacy in the social sciences). Siglo XXI.

Rodríguez Cano, C. A. (2022). *Hipermétodos. Repertorios de la investigación social en entornos digitales* (Hypermethods. Repertoires of social research in digital environments). UAM Cuajimalpa. https://doi.org/10.24275/9786072824812

Scolari, C. A. (2009). Mapping conversations about new media: the theoretical field of digital communication. *New Media & Society, 11*(6), 943-964. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809336513

Siles González, I. (2008). A la conquista del mundo en línea: internet como objeto de estudio (1990-2007) (Conquering the online world: the Internet as an object of study (1990-2007).). *Comunicación y Sociedad,* (10), 55-79.

Sued, G. & Lugo, N. (2022). Innovación metodológica para el estudio de la plataformización (Methodological innovation for the study of platformization). *Virtualis, 13*(24), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.46530/virtualis.v13i24.407

Suzina, A. C. (2021a). English as *lingua franca*. On the sterilisation of scientific work. *Media, Culture & Society, 43*(1), 171-179. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0163443720957906

Suzina, A. C. (2021b). *The Evolution of Popular Communication in Latin America*. Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62557-3

Suzina, A. C. & Sartoretto, P. M. (2021). Dossiê Pensamento comunicacional latino-americano: desafios e perspectivas da des-ocidentalização no Sul Global (Dossier Latin American Communicational Thinking: challenges and perspectives of de-westernization of the Global South). *Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo, 18*(51), 6-12. https://revistacmc.espm.br/revistacmc/article/view/6/pdf_2

Trejo Delarbre, R. (2013). The Study of the Internet in Latin America: achievements, challenges, futures. In A. Valdivia (Ed), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies* (pp. 1-29). Blackwell.

Waisbord, S. (2019). *Communication. A post-discipline*. Polity.