

# Studying audiences in Spain: theoretical and methodological considerations in scholarly current research practices

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# Structure

- Departing theoretical reflections
- MapCom
  - Research Outcomes of the first year
  - Next steps to be taken
- Focus on Audience Research



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# Sociology and History of Science

- Critical reflexivity as...
  - A path for consolidating scientific disciplines and fields of research
  - A sign of intellectual maturity
  - A way to understand where we are coming from and where we may be going
- Meta-Communication Studies
  - From Communication Research to Audience Studies



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# Open research questions

- Is audience research a well identified field of research in Media/Communication Studies?
- Is it also present in other scientific fields?
- Are there differences between countries regarding the way audiences are being investigated? Can we identify national or regional traditions?



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# Open research questions

- Is there any Audience Research department in our higher education institutions?
  - Why one can easily find an Audience Research department in plenty of media companies, whereas it is not that easy within academia?
- Are there any specialized programmes (MA, PhD...) in Audience Research?
- Am I an Audience Researcher?



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# MapCom: basic data

- MapCom is the acronym of the project:  
**The Spanish research system about social practices of Communication. Map of Projects, Groups, Lines, Objects of Study and Methods**
  - Funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (Ref.: CSO2013-47933-C4)
  - Supported by the Spanish Association of Communication Research ([www.ae-ic.org](http://www.ae-ic.org))



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# MapCom: justification

- Fast growth of Communication Studies
- There is a need to understand how our field is being developed and established
- Mapping exercises as a resource to strengthen the disciplinary position and to internally consolidate the community of researchers



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# MapCom: objectives of the project

- ✓ Produce an open-access database of the Spanish production of Communication Research projects and dissertations
  - ✓ <http://www.mapcom.es/bases-de-datos>
- ✓ Identify main trends in research projects and PhD theses (Content Analysis)
- 3. Explore and cross discourses of researchers (Phillips 66 – September 2016)



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# MapCom: objectives of the project

4. Apply a survey to Communication researchers based in Spain (to be conducted in 2017)
5. Integrate the outcomes in a wider effort of AE-IC to contribute to better evaluation procedures



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# MapCom: first general outcomes

- Data collection: lack of transparency and diverse processes to access the information
- Clean the database under two criteria:
  - Institutional adscription: only universities offering Communication studies were considered (56)
  - Object of study: social practices of Communication, excluding technological, linguistic and other parallel approaches.



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# MapCom: first general outcomes

- Final data size
  - 979 doctoral theses
  - 143 research projects
  - TOTAL: 1122 scientific documents
- Coding book
  - 27 categories
  - 9 post-coding categories



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# MapCom: first general outcomes

- Prevalence of Mass Communication
  - Around 1/3 of the total; Trend: diminishing
- Organizational Communication
  - About 1/5 of the total
- Interpersonal Communication
  - About 1/10 of the total



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# MapCom: first general outcomes

- Territorial imbalance
  - Regional processes of research concentration
    - Madrid: 35'7%
    - Catalonia: 17'85%
    - Andalucía: 11'3%
    - Valencia: 10'13%



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# MapCom: first general outcomes

- General objectives of research
  - Descriptive: 55'66%
  - Explanatory: 30'07%
  - Evaluation/Validation: 10'41%
  - Intervention: 3'86%



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# MapCom: first general outcomes

- Predominant field of research
  - Documents: 52'05%
  - Experimental: 29'09%
  - Natural context of observation: 13'33%
  - Participation/Action Research: 4'69%



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# Audience research in Spain: MapCom data

- ✓ 14 out of 143 research projects mention “audience” in either their title and/or their keywords
  - ✓ 20 out of 979 doctoral theses mention “audience” in either their title and/or their keywords
  - ✓ Other semantically close concepts, such as reception, public or participation are also scarce
- ☹ **Audience Studies are not a dominant field within Communication Research in Spain yet**



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# Audience research in Spain: MapCom data

- ✓ Media Studies in Spanish academia is privileging the study of content and discourses towards reception and meaning-making processes conducted by the audience
- ✓ Lack of experimental approaches
  - ☹ **The human factor is still missing in Spanish Media and Communication Research, as it tends to be built upon a MEDIA-CENTRIC APPROACH**



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# Audience research in Spain: MapCom data

- ✓ Mass communication is also dominant in those works dealing with audiences, so research interests are more oriented towards the audience behaviour (macro level) of main media companies and, mainly, news-oriented outlets
- ☹ Insufficient attention paid to everyday life as a field for audience research



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# Audience research in Spain: MapCom data

- ✓ Online worlds are slowly gaining access to doctoral dissertations and research projects, even they are not at the forefront of the Spanish production yet
- ☹ **Research methods have not started their transition towards online processes in Spain**



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**Thanks for your attention!**  
**Gracias por vuestra atención!**

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