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
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
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?
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?
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)
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
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](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)
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
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.
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
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
MapCom: first general outcomes

• Territorial imbalance
  – Regional processes of research concentration
    • Madrid: 35’7%
    • Catalonia: 17’85%
    • Andalucía: 11’3%
    • Valencia: 10’13%
MapCom: first general outcomes

• General objectives of research
  – Descriptive: 55’66%
  – Explanatory: 30’07%
  – Evaluation/Validation: 10’41%
  – Intervention: 3’86%
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%
Audience research in Spain: MapCom data

✓ 14 out 143 research projects mention “audience” in either their title and/or their keywords
✓ 20 out 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
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
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

㊲ Insufficient attention paid to everyday life as a field for audience research
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
Thanks for your attention!
Gracias por vuestra atención!

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