



## **Communication Research: Views from Latin America**

### **Latin America: A Diversity of Approaches to Explore, Share and Discuss**

#### ***Editorial Introduction***

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The UC-ICA Regional Conference 2012 held in Santiago, Chile,<sup>1</sup> offered a unique opportunity to take the pulse of communication research in Latin America. Rather than seeking to establish a comprehensive overview of the major issues in communication scholarship in the region, the conference was planned as a space of exchange, where researchers from different traditions, disciplines, generations, and contexts of inquiry met and dialogued.

With this special section of the *International Journal of Communication*, we want to expand that experience and make available a selection of 10 articles from among 154 participating contributions from 77 universities.

From the wide diversity of avenues of inquiry and origins of the researches, we give voice here to scholars from Latin America. Stressing this diversity is important for the development of the field in the region, where, in our view, there is not a single Latin American paradigm, but a heterogeneity of avenues to be considered. The selected works span various fields and spheres of research. These 10 articles are authored by local scholars, but their work is in dialogue with colleagues from other latitudes. We all need to rethink communication research according to the dynamics of change in a discipline in continuous development and interconnection.

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<sup>1</sup> The UC-ICA Latin American conference Trends in International and Latin American Communication Research was organized by the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile's School of Communications (<http://comunicaciones.uc.cl/>), with the International Communication Association, and took place October 18-20, 2012, in Santiago, Chile.

As in other regions, in Latin America communication processes have acquired a central position in society and a key role in daily life. In fact, it is almost impossible to understand the philosophical, social, and technological processes occurring in societies without addressing the questions, problems, and viewpoints concerning the systematic study of communication. In this context, researchers face a double challenge. On the one hand, in light of a whole range of changes, they need to rethink the paradigms from which communication-related phenomena have been studied in the past as well as in parts of the world different from Latin America. On the other hand, it is necessary to examine the way in which this academic community is working, communicating, and developing research networks.

In this diverse region, we are witnessing a wide spectrum of research problems arising from the communication processes—for instance, the ways in which media content is delivered, the switch to digital broadcast, the development of new platforms on the Internet, and the growth of mobile communication and social networks. These innovations are changing our understanding of the world as well as interpersonal and mediated communication and participation in public life; their causes and effects at local and regional levels deserve to be analyzed. Advances in digital technologies, media ownership concentration, communicational infrastructure, privatization, and regulatory expansion in intellectual property are some of the many phenomena challenging Latin America today. Additionally, communication research here is seeking to provide responses to the role of recent technological developments and their impact on interpersonal communication, on a more communicative and participative society.

Two scholars marked the regional conference as keynote speakers, supplying inputs from their experiences studying communications in Latin America, one from the North and the other from the South.

Henry Jenkins, from the University of Southern California, stressing the value of participation as a main characteristic of contemporary digital communication, described his experience in Brazil, where he observed the fusion of popular traditions and the new digital media. "The mass media in America were in theory displacing popular culture, while in Latin America women were dancing and also used cell phones, connected to their networks. So samba school was there also a 'virtual environment,'" explained Jenkins, thereby describing the originality of a Brazilian trend related to new media. Because of the importance of the phenomenon of integration of communication technologies to traditional cultural practices in the region, two of the articles in this section address the indigenous people's use of digital media in two countries.

Chilean epistemologist and winner of the 1994 National Science Award Humberto Maturana, emphasized in his opening speech the origin of language and the art of communication. This art, he said, is a way of coexistence that allows society to evolve consistently:

I think that our true concern as humanity now, is to choose what we really want, even when it comes to communication. What kind of world do we want to create? Are we able and willing to talk about it? And chances are that if we are willing to talk we will find that the fundamental things that we want are generally the same and we will discover that those which divide us, in general, are theories, explanatory conventions that have to do with certain preferences and tastes. We will realize that if we talk we will only see that

we want to live together in mutual respect, collaboration, we want a world that is desirable for all.

These aspirations underlie the questions and issues of the research included in this publication. The scholars' works seek to investigate topics that are defining how communication processes in Latin American are contributing—or not—to this conversation that could advance the development of our societies.

Of the two articles in this section that refer to indigenous communities, Karina García-Ruano, Alejandro Pacheco, and Dessiree Suazo's article, "The Use of Digital Media for Social Mobilization in Marginalized Communities: The Case of a Mayan Socioenvironmental Movement in Guatemala," informs a case study on how indigenous communities use information technology and the media to organize and raise their voice in the context of mining. The case is representative of other experiences occurring in the region. Eliete da Silva Pereira's essay, entitled "Indians on the Network: Notes About Brazilian Indigenous Cyberactivism," investigates the current access and ability of indigenous peoples to connect creatively through the Internet. In Brazil, many nongovernmental organizations help indigenous peoples use the Web, mobile phones, or cameras to document and defend their lands and their culture. These types of works have created a set of communication studies that reformulate the traditional idea of isolation and ease of disappearance of indigenous cultures. In a country as diverse as Brazil, where traditional indigenous communities coexist with modernism and postmodernism, research on urban culture offers complementary information to understand another facet of this gigantic country, as contained in Éverly Pegoraro's article "Steampunk in Brazil: Visuality and Sociability in an Urban Retro-Futuristic Culture." Steampunk is not just a literary movement but a cultural one, and its followers in Brazil have organized several popular cultural events, such as 24-hour-long conventions and festivals around the country. This type of study debunks the myth that the literature and the past are outmoded due to the age of convergence, especially in the case of youth cultures. This article analyzes how this group elaborates a specific visuality and, thus, how steampunk proposes a peculiar critical worldview.

Two articles discuss communication processes linked to topics strongly associated with Latin America: the macho culture and guerrilla. "Discourses as Control Devices in the Mining Culture: Tensions in the Integration of Women in Chilean Mining," by Paulina Salinas, is one of only a few studies on women and communication in Latin America addressing the inclusion of women in labor contexts traditionally reserved for men. This relevant topic shows a changing culture in predominantly male spaces, as in the case of miners in Chile. For many years, Peru has been associated with the rebel group Shining Path and its accompanying concept of guerrilla. The article by Úrsula Freundt-Thurne, Marco Méndez Campos, Gloria Tovar Gil, and Carla Atencio Vergara, "Construction of the Figure of 'Artemio' and the Shining Path in the Journalistic Discourse of the Peruvian Newspapers *El Comercio* and *La República*," analyzes how two mainstream media in Peru presented an issue related to terrorism and drugs that marked a turning point in the actions of the terrorist group.

The process of adjustment of journalism to quality standards motivated two studies focused on Chile included here. In "Melodramatic Profiles of Chilean Newscasts: The Case of Emotionalization," Constanza Mujica and Ingrid Bachmann measure how television journalism balances information with

emotions related to the facts covered in newscasts. Prime-time television news still has particular importance for citizenship in Latin America. The exacerbation of emotions, through the use of TV drama resources traditionally associated with other genres, such as fiction and soap operas, has proven a successful strategy to achieve high ratings. Therefore, this study of the use—or abuse—of emotions and TV drama resources in television news coverage is a relevant issue of study for the continent.

Devastating natural disasters are also relevant objects of communications research. Soledad Puente, Silvia Pellegrini, and Daniela Grassau's work, "How to Measure Professional Journalistic Standards in Television News Coverage of Disasters? 27-F Earthquake in Chile" offers a tool to adequately manage the media coverage of disasters. Natural or manmade, coverage that treats this kind of news as a show might explain the many complaints to regulatory agencies and journalistic ethics boards in Chile, especially regarding television. This is common not only in Chile but in Latin America as a whole, because emotions are strongly exposed in the media yet also criticized because of the invasion of people's privacy and grief. A study on how to effectively treat disasters in the media is a welcome investigation to improve journalism practice.

The digital divide deeply affects the development of communication in Latin America, and digitalization and networking are becoming increasingly frequent research topics. The investigation by Mariano Ure and Martín Parselis on "Argentine Media and Journalists Enhancing and Polluting of Communication on Twitter" addresses a global phenomenon from a regional perspective and experience. It studies the impact of one of the latest trends in journalism, the use of Twitter, and how this practice affects innovation in journalism and public participation in Argentina, a country with well-educated audiences who actively contribute to public debate. Disparities in access to the Internet are presented in light of the Colombian experience in Alcides Velásquez's article on "Digital Divide in Colombia: The Role of Motivational and Material Access in the Use and Types of Use of ICTs." An important difference between the North and the South when speaking about digitalization and convergence it is the digital divide, especially for youth. In Latin America access to computer hardware and software is a relevant issue that influences whether people can and are willing to use technology. Although the study is limited to an analysis of access to technology, this research deals with a topic that is relevant for the region.

A final article reports on the advertising industry, an area that has been relatively ignored in communications studies in Latin America despite the fact that many of people's daily decisions on consumption relate to advertising. The phenomenon of the transnational advertising industry and its arrival to different countries of the continent deserves the development of more research in this area. The article by Luis López-Preciado, "Account Planning in the Mexican Advertising Industry: A Snapshot of a Discipline in Growth," includes interviews with account planners in México, one of the main countries that are developing the advertising industry in the region today.