A systematic review on communication for social change (2015-2021)

Una revisión sistemática de la comunicación para el cambio social (2015-2021)

Uma revisão sistemática da comunicação para a mudança social (2015-2021)

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ABSTRACT | This article aims to analyze the scope of research in Communication for Social Change, from a participatory approach to communication, through a systematic review of the literature on the production of scientific articles in the area of social sciences published in three databases (Scopus, WOS and Latindex) between 2015 and 2021. The relevance of the study is based on the need to identify the challenges to advance in the democratization of communication from plural approaches. The PRISMA Declaration guidelines are used as a methodological basis for the search criteria and selection of scientific articles. The results show a growing interest in a research production that articulates communication for social change with issues of content production, political incidence, community participation, and citizen empowerment. Conceptual approaches refer to communication for development and social change, participation, governance and citizenship, dialogue, empowerment, listening, culture, and power. Methodologically, hermeneutic methods prevailed with the use of techniques such as interviews and focus groups. It is inferred that communication for social change follows a slow path of epistemological expansion in the social sciences, but requires a greater effort to produce knowledge that articulates new areas and problems.

KEYWORDS: Communication and social change; participation; media production; empowerment; communicative democracy; systematic review.

RESUMEN | *Este artículo busca analizar los alcances de la investigación en comunicación para el cambio social, desde el paradigma participativo de la comunicación, mediante una revisión sistemática de la literatura sobre la producción de artículos científicos en el área de las ciencias sociales publicados en tres bases de datos (Scopus, WOS y Latindex) entre 2015 y 2021. La pertinencia del estudio se sustenta en la necesidad de identificar los desafíos para avanzar en la democratización de la comunicación desde enfoques plurales. Se toma como base metodológica la guía de la Declaración PRISMA para los criterios de búsqueda y selección de los artículos científicos. Los resultados permiten observar un creciente interés en una producción investigativa que articula la comunicación para el cambio social con problemáticas de producción de contenidos, incidencia política, participación comunitaria y empoderamiento ciudadano. Los enfoques conceptuales aluden a la comunicación para el desarrollo y el cambio social, participación, gobernabilidad y ciudadanía, diálogo, empoderamiento, escucha, cultura y poder. Metodológicamente prevalecen los métodos hermenéuticos con el uso de técnicas como la entrevista y el grupo focal. Se infiere que la comunicación para el cambio social sigue un lento camino de expansión epistemológico en las ciencias sociales, pero requiere de un mayor esfuerzo para producir conocimientos que articulen nuevos ámbitos y problemáticas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *comunicación y cambio social; participación; producción mediática; empoderamiento; democracia comunicativa; revisión sistemática.*

RESUMO | Este artigo visa analisar o escopo da pesquisa em comunicação para mudança social, a partir de uma abordagem participativa da comunicação, por meio de uma revisão sistemática da literatura sobre a produção de artigos científicos na área de ciências sociais publicados em três bases de dados (Scopus, WOS e Latindex) entre 2015 e 2021. A relevância do estudo se baseia na necessidade de identificar os desafios de avançar na democratização da comunicação a partir de abordagens plurais. As diretrizes da Declaração PRISMA são usadas como base metodológica para os critérios de busca e seleção de artigos científicos. Os resultados mostram um interesse crescente em uma produção de pesquisa que articula a comunicação para a mudança social com problemas de produção de conteúdo, incidência política, participação comunitária e empoderamento do cidadão. As abordagens conceituais aludem à comunicação para desenvolvimento e mudança social, participação, governabilidade e cidadania, diálogo, empoderamento, escuta, cultura e poder. Na metodologia, prevalecem os métodos hermenêuticos com o uso de técnicas de entrevista e de grupo focal. Conclui-se que a comunicação para a mudança social segue um lento caminho de expansão epistemológica nas ciências sociais, mas requer um maior esforço para produzir conhecimento que articule novos campos e questões.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: comunicação e mudança social; participação; produção midiática; empoderamento; democracia comunicativa; revisão sistemática.

INTRODUCTION

The field of communication for social change has been shaped as a scenario of theoretical and empirical production of great contribution to strengthen local and regional democratic initiatives. Scholars do not agree on a common denomination. Some call it communication for development and social change (CDSC). Wilkins (2009) bases the terms' implications on an exercise of transition from communication for development to communication for social change, and affirms that "the gradual shift in terms is not linear. Rather, the use of terms involves a dialogic process of negotiation, as groups with interests at times competing and other times intersecting assert their agendas through their rhetoric and practice" (p. 4). We adopt the latter because of its distancing from and critique of the economistic notion of development and, from a broader vision of communication, regarding political, cultural, social and environmental dimensions in global and interdisciplinary contexts. Hereinafter we refer to it as CSC. This approach has as background, on the one hand, in initiatives driven from communication for development, after World War II, based on a developmentalist and diffusionist model and, on the other, in epistemological approaches and experiences of popular, alternative, and community communication (Navarro Nicoletti & Rodríguez Marino, 2018). In this context, there was a transition from a modernizing paradigm to a participatory one (Barranquero Carretero & Ángel Botero, 2015; Beltrán, 2011; Servaes & Malikhao, 2007), the latter with critical contributions promoted by Latin American researchers such as Antonio Pasquali, Paulo Freire, Frank Gerace, Juan Díaz Bordenave, Francisco Gutiérrez, María Cristina Matta, and Joao Bosco Pinto, among others.

Gumucio (2019) states that the conceptual formulation of communication for social change began to take shape in 1997 when a group of communication and social participation specialists in Bellagio (Italy) began to work together. Since then, it was conceived as a "...process of dialogue and debate, based on tolerance, respect, equity, social justice and active participation of all" (Communication for Social Change Consortium, 2003, par. 1).

According to Enghel (2017), CSC has been adopted and reinterpreted by various stakeholders such as international development agencies to visibilize their intervention projects, transnational corporations through social marketing or social responsibility actions, and local and national governments to legitimize citizen participation in the management of public policies. In a broader perspective, Wilkins (2009) assumes that it should be seen as socially beneficial, with a relational approach between the global and the local, interdisciplinary, with multiple conditions, and focused on issues of power and control over the communication production. In line with the above, Enghel (2017) proposes a conceptualization as

a field of study, practice and project within the governability field. In synthesis, the axis articulating these views shares the idea that CSC retrieves its deep meaning in communication as a process that involves relationship, exchange (Pasquali, 1990), debate, negotiation, acceptance or rejection (Wolton, 2009), horizontal dialogue, and participatory exchange (Beltrán, 2006), which transcends the mere dissemination of information.

Regarding the state of the academic and scientific production on CSC, it is worth highlighting the study by Padilla de la Torre and Medina Mayagoitia (2018), who analyze the interventions of information and communication technologies for development and social change in young people. The discussions' emphasis is oriented to the concept of development, the work on vulnerable communities, and the need to direct this line of work on users and situated problematics. Del Valle Rojas (2007), starting from an academic review in Latin America on participatory communication, communication for social change and communication for development, and from a corpus of critical analysis, points out the scarce participation of communities in the communicative processes; although he evidences a collective awareness of their need, he emphasizes the criticism of the prevailing media models in the idea of rethinking the democracy model. Barranquero Carretero and Ángel Botero (2015) analyze the state of scientific production in communication for development and social change in Latin America between 2009 and 2013, highlighting topics, approaches, and methods of articles appearing in the best positioned journals in the Google Scholar H Index. Their results point to limited empirical research, little use of participatory methodologies, and highlight the emergence of new topics and approaches in the field. Although they recognize the contributions of researchers in the idea of building knowledge from practice, they point out the importance of strengthening participatory methodologies of systematization and case studies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communication for social change has become an interdisciplinary field of social intervention made up of academic and empirical knowledge. It is linked to interrelated concepts such as community participation, citizen empowerment, dialogic interaction, media appropriation, active reception, local content production and investigative journalism. They all converge in the purpose of democratizing communication (Uranga, 2021) by placing the necessary means and resources within the reach of social groups and citizens so that they can access accurate and timely information, public scenarios for dialogue and debate, and decision-making on problems and issues of collective interest. This is known as the normative

approach to participatory communication (Dutta, 2011; Melkote, 2002; Servaes & Malikhao, 2007; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009; Waisbord, 2014; Wilkins, 2000), from which this study is addressed.

The participatory approach to communication embraces epistemological and practical foundations from the crossroads of popular, alternative and community communication, as well as from its diverse analytical perspectives (Navarro Nicoletti & Rodríguez Marino, 2018). In this context, participation implies a communicational dispute that summons a greater number of views and actors in the construction of knowledge and interactions aimed at overcoming inequalities (Martínez Puga & Olivari Condenanza, 2022), and requires the formation of "critical citizenship and a culture of participation" (Aranguren et al., 2019, p. 184) that allows the appropriation of media and languages to produce content on problems and issues of interest to communities. This means recognizing people in a dual role, as both producers and consumers of information and knowledge (Sandoya Valdiviezo, 2020). Accordingly, it generates a dynamic of communicative empowerment expressed in a feeling of self-efficacy, technological appropriation, critical reading of the media and reflexivity, dialogic and participatory skills and the ability to collaboratively create and develop communicative actions with an impact on social imaginaries (Buraschi & Aguilar-Idáñez, 2019). As a complement to the participatory approach to communication, it is necessary to have a complex and multidimensional understanding that accounts for communicational territories from three interrelated spheres: the institutional, the media, and the geographic territorial (Martínez Puga & Olivari Condenanza, 2022). In the realm of digital democracy, the use of technologies in participatory and deliberative models that enable citizen empowerment (Conejero & Segura, 2021) and the understanding of cyberactivism experiences (Sierra-Caballero, 2018) is still precarious. Other recent CSC approaches have promoted lines of work that relate communication with peace studies, conflict resolution, and investigative journalism (Arévalo Salinas & Farné, 2016; Nos Aldás & Farné, 2019), the latter oriented to an independent, plural, and responsible informative exercise that contributes to solve structural problems of communities. Gumucio Dagron (2011) proposes five conditions that define CSC: 1) social participation and appropriation, 2) language and cultural belonging, 3) generation and local content, 4) use of appropriate technology, and 5) convergence and networks. According to this author, *community participation and appropriation*, which implies empowering the expressive and communicative capacities of a social group to make its problems visible, and the *generation of local content*, which links the realities of the communities through messages in public media and scenarios, are determining conditions for citizen empowerment, the promotion of dialogue, debate, and negotiation within the theoretical perspective of

participatory communication. A systematic review from this perspective allows us to observe how the production of knowledge advances in the direction of democratic processes, social justice and equity from the protagonism of communities and citizen collectives. The aim of this article is to analyze the scope of research in communication for social change from a participatory approach to communication, through a systematic literature review of the production of scientific articles in the area of social sciences published in three databases (Scopus, WOS and Latindex) between 2015 and 2021. In this context, we are interested in observing the academic and scientific positioning of topics, conceptual approaches (authors) and methodological approaches.

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

We based the review on the guidelines of the PRISMA Declaration (Page et al., 2021), following a methodological design that included a search, selection, synthesis and analysis of articles on communication for social change from a participatory approach. We developed a protocol with methodological guidelines and a bibliographic record for the registration and content analysis of each article. The protocol and the code sheet were submitted for validation by two experts selected from the database of the Information Service of Recognized Peer Evaluators of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation of Colombia. To select them, their recognition, background and research training in the field of CSC were considered. Five were contacted by e-mail, but only two responded favorably.

The search was conducted on scientific articles published between 2015 and 2021 in English, Spanish, and Portuguese in three databases (WOS, Scopus, and Latindex). The search in WOS and Scopus was done between March 17 and April 19, 2022 in the area of Social Sciences, and in Latindex, initially on journals, between March 9 and 20, 2023 with the following search path: directory, topic: Social Sciences, subtopic: Communication Sciences, language: English, region: Ibero-America, natPub: scientific research journal, status: current, support: online, refereed: yes, open access: yes.

For a first review, the following search terms were defined: communication and social change as a macro-theme and, within this, communication and participation, communication and local content, communication and dialogue, communication and interaction, and communication and empowerment, derived from the concepts of community participation and appropriation and generation of local content. From the initial search (reviewed titles and keywords), a total of 4793 articles were obtained. In Latindex, 49 journals were initially identified and 26 whose articles were not related to the search terms were discarded.

In the second abstract review, the inclusion/exclusion criteria were defined as 1) having been the result of communication research, 2) involving or affecting a community or social group, 3) including in the text any of the search terms, 4) without geographic limitation. From this second screening, 117 articles were pre-selected.

To obtain the final sample, we conducted a comprehensive review of the articles searching for cases in which communities or citizen groups acted as protagonists in the content production, interacted in communicative processes, or actively participated as recipients. The final selection yielded 59 articles (https://figshare.com/ndownloader/files/40181203) with the following distribution: 13 contributed by WOS, 4 by Scopus and 42 by Latindex (figure 1).

To record the information in the literature code sheets, the 59 articles were distributed equally among the three researchers. Each one, according to his or her profile and expertise, consolidated the information in three analysis matrices.
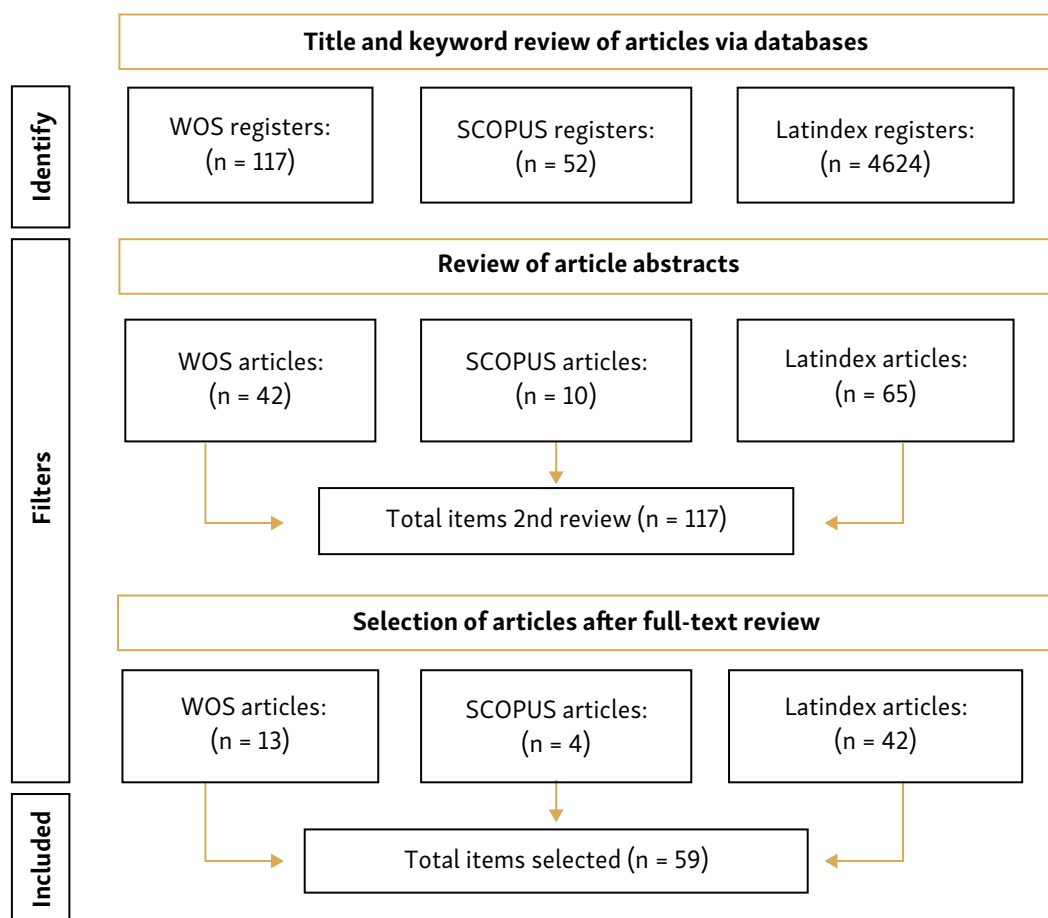
Title and keyword review of articles via databases

Identify	WOS registers: (n = 117)	SCOPUS registers: (n = 52)	Latindex registers: (n = 4624)

Review of article abstracts

WOS articles: (n = 42)　SCOPUS articles: (n = 10)　Latindex articles: (n = 65)

Total items 2nd review (n = 117)

Selection of articles after full-text review

WOS articles: (n = 13)　SCOPUS articles: (n = 4)　Latindex articles: (n = 42)

Total items selected (n = 59)

Figure 1. Flowchart of the review process

Source: Own elaboration.

The first recorded the thematic approaches; the second, the concepts and authors, and the third, the methodological approaches. In team meetings, the information in the matrices was discussed, the findings were regrouped and interpreted, and their scope was estimated.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Thematic approaches

Based on the participatory approach to communication, the research team initially defined three thematic units (content production, participation and advocacy, and citizen empowerment), but at the end of the review process, the participation category was adjusted because some articles related it to advocacy. It was also noted that other articles focused on other topics and it was decided to group them into three new units (social marketing, environment, and health). Subsequently, through an inductive review of the articles, they were grouped by associated topics (Table 1). Counting and classification were done with the support of an analysis matrix with single-choice drop-down lists. Forty articles were classified into two associated topics.

The thematic unit of content production, which groups the largest number of articles (45), is understood as the agency, exchange, and learning of knowledge through dialogue under equitable conditions (Gumucio Dagron, 2011), of community groups and citizens on issues of common interest. The associated topics of digital tools and community radio share the greatest interest trend for researchers. This means that information and communication technologies, through the Internet and social networks, have become an object of growing interest in the field of CSC, especially on the use and participation of young people. Community radio continues to contribute to community empowerment (Sandoya Valdiviezo, 2020), to democratize the voice to make society more democratic (López Vigil, 1997), and establishes links and commitments between subjects (Kaplún, 1978; Cerbino 2018) through expression and participation in situated projects. Co-creation, as a way of articulating collaborative, innovative and creative efforts among social actors to define public policies (Bason, 2018) appears in few studies and as a participation strategy and a concept more linked to management and public administration.

In this line, the subject of studies is associated with an investigative and citizen journalism that, with the support of digital resources, is open to the collaboration and participation of its recipients (Parra Valcarce, 2017).

Political participation and advocacy, understood as collaborating or being part of a collective decision to achieve consensus (Aparici & Osuna-Acedo, 2013) on a political issue of public interest, is the second thematic unit with the highest number of articles.

Thematic unit	Related topics	Articles
Content production (45)	Community radio	10
	Digital tools	16
	Ethnic and community content	11
	Co-creation	3
	Journalism	5
Participation and advocacy (22)	Digital democracy	5
	Right to communication	1
	Decision-making	5
	Institutional advocacy	6
	Digital activism	5
Citizen empowerment (22)	Youth participation	12
	Media appropriation and management	4
	Women empowerment	3
	Elderly people	1
	Migrants	1
	Disabled	1
Social marketing (4)	Product brand	1
	Place branding	2
	Mass media interaction	1
Environment (3)	Climate change	2
	Irrigation management	1
Health (3)	Prevention communication	2
	Self-care and healthy practices	1

Table 1. Articles by thematic unit and related topics

Source: Own elaboration.

Linked to it are institutional agency, decision-making, cyberdemocracy (Lévy, 2004), and digital activism, driven by social and citizen movements (Azuela & Tapia Álvarez, 2013). Paradoxically, there is only one article that refers to the right to communication that was once claimed in the McBride report.

Connected with the previous one, the thematic unit of citizen empowerment, understood as the set of strengths, competencies and resources that lead to significant changes from a citizen or community agency (Zimmerman, 2000; Rappaport, 1981), groups together a third block of articles. The interest in investigating the protagonism of young people, women, and the demand for equal rights stands out. Community media management, a topic linked to alternative and popular communication, continues to be of interest to Latin American researchers (Cerbino & Belotti, 2016).

The thematic unit of social marketing, understood as strategic and planned communication actions aimed at inducing the acceptance of ideas or behavioral changes in a social group (Pérez Romero, 2004), includes participation in topics such as product branding, place branding and interaction in mass media and health communication (Choque-Larrauri, 2005; Ríos Hernández, 2011). With little recognition by researchers, these works do not achieve effective empowerment from the community level. The thematic units of environment and health grouped a few articles associated with issues on climate change and environmental risk prevention (Rosas Rodríguez & Barrios Puga, 2017; García Lirios et al., 2015), prevention, self-care, and healthy practices.

Conceptual approaches

The terms present in the title, keywords and abstract were extracted from each article, as well as the main categories of the document's body. The three main authors, cited individually, who support the conceptual approach of each manuscript were selected, noting their nationality (table 2).

The most referenced authors, with more than 10 citations distributed in different articles, were: Alfonso Gumucio Dagron (21), Manuel Castells Olivan (16), Henry Jenkins (14), Luis Ramiro Beltrán (13), Thomas Tufte (12), Jesús Martín-Barbero (12), Nico Carpentier (11) and Mario Kaplún (10). The most cited text was *Comunicación y poder* (Communication and Power), by Manuel Castells.

The second most referenced group, in a range between two and nine citations distributed in different articles were: Clemencia Rodríguez (9), Alejandro Barranquero Carretero (6), Rosa María Alfaro (5), Juan Díaz Bordenave (4), Pierre Bourdieu (4), Paolo Mefalopolopolus (3), Victor Marí Sáenz (3), Washington Uranga (3), Guillermo Sunkel (3), Stuart Hall (3), Jan Servaes (3), Claudia Magallanes Blanco (2), Nancy Fraser (2), Gonzalo Ceballos Castro (2), John B Thompson (2), Raymond Williams (2) and Néstor García- Canclini (2). The rest of the authors had one citation.

Grouped by continental region, authors from Latin American countries received the highest number of citations (82), followed by Europe (75), and the United States (50). The countries contributing the highest number of citations through their authors are the United States (50), Spain (41), Bolivia (34), and the United Kingdom (26). The case of Spain, which shares some co-authorships with researchers from Latin American countries, stands out. These data indicate a growing positioning of the proposals of authors from Latin American countries, but also from the United States and Europe, who in recent years have contributed from different theoretical perspectives to the debates on the participatory paradigm of communication. The convergence of classic and contemporary authors in the articles is significant, demonstrating an openness to both tradition and new contributions.

Concepts	Authors	Nationality
Communication for development and social change	Alfonso Gumucio Dagron	Bolivia
	Luis Ramiro Beltrán	Bolivia
	Thomas Tufte	England
	Paola Mefalopolus	Greece
	Barranquero Carretero	Spain
	Rosa María Alfaro	Peru
	Jan Servaes	Belgium
	Juan Díaz Bordenave	Paraguay
	Claudia Magallanes Blanco	Mexico
	María Soledad Segura	Argentina
	Salvatore Scifo	Turkey
	Víctor Manuel Marí Sáez	Spain
	Washington Uranga	Argentina
	Clemencia Rodríguez	Colombia
	Jair Vega	Colombia
	Amparo Cadavid	Colombia
	Ramón Zallo Elguezabal	Spain
	Gonzalo Ceballos Castro	Spain
	Nico Carpentier	Czech Republic
Participation, governance, and citizenship	Alexis de Tocqueville	France
	Jack M. McLeod	United States
	Sandra Ball-Rokeach	United States
	J. Ignacio Criado	Spain
	Henry Jenkins	United States
	María Cristina Matta	Argentina
	Gene Rowe	United Kingdom
	Lynn J. Frewer	United Kingdom
	Paulo Freire	Brazil
Dialogue	Chun-Ju Flora Hung-Baesecke	China
	Yi-Ru Regina Chen	China
	Michael L. Kent	Australia
	Maureen Taylor	Australia
	Erich J. Sommerfeldt	United States
	Anne Lane	United States
	Jurgen Habermas	Germany
Empowerment	Srinivas Melkote	United States
	Leslie Steeves	United States
	Rogers Evereth	United States
	Manuel Castells Olivan	Spain

Social, mutual, and political listening	Cate Thill	Australia
	Mohan J. Dutta	New Zealand
	Tanja Dreher	Australia
	Jim Macnamara	Australia
Culture and power	Jhon B. Thompson	United States
	Guillermo Sunkel	England
	Stuart Hall	England
	Pierre Bourdieu	England
Communication and culture	Jesús Martín-Barbero	Colombia-Spain
	García- Canclini Néstor	Mexico
	Raymond Williams	England
Community radio	Colin Fraser	Italy
	Girard Bruce	United States
	Mario Kaplún	Argentina
Content selection	Michael Gurevitch	United States
	Arvind Diddi	United States
	Nilda Jacks	Brazil
Participatory research	Chen Sí-Wen	Taiwan
	Jennifer Sandoval	Mexico
	Aline Gubrium	United States
Communication and ICTs	Pierre Levy	France
	John Downig	United States
	Paul T. Jaeger	United States
Hyperlocal and independent media	Emily T. Metzgar	United States
	John Pavlik	United States
	Damián Radcliffe	United States
Transparency and democratic policies	Vicente Giménez-Chornet	Spain
	Nancy Fraser	England
Development journalism	José Marquez de Melo	Brazil
	Miguel J. Abramowitz	United States
Social movements	Jean L. Cohen	United States
	Sidney Tarrow	United States
	Charles Tilly	United States
Environmental communication	Phaedra C.Pezzullo	United States
	Robert Cox	United States
	Tema Milstein	Australia
Risk communication	Regina E. Lundgren	United States
	Andrea H. McMakin	United States
Emotionality in the media	Karen Wahl Jorgensen	United Kingdom

Table 2. Conceptual approaches, authors, and nationality

Source: Own elaboration.

The conceptual approach with the highest number of authors was communication for development and social change (15), followed by participation, governance and citizenship (9), and dialogue (7). This trend could be due to an expansive positioning of CSC in academia in recent years (Arévalo Salinas & Farné, 2016), but also because of a political interest, by governments and international cooperation agencies, in legitimizing citizen participation in their development programs (Enghel, 2017). The approaches empowerment, social, mutual, and political listening, and culture and power group four authors each. Paradoxically, they emerge as marginal studies that address the analysis of power relations in communicative processes, as rightly pointed out by Castells (2009).

Methodological approaches

In this review, the qualitative approach is the most used (35), followed by the quantitative (13), and the mixed (11). In figure 3, the data indicate that the qualitative approach and the hermeneutic method, which allows understanding the meaning of actions, scenarios and sociocultural behaviors (Villarreal Valera et al., 2018), represent the most relevant for researchers. A second trend of methods is made up of case (10) and ethnographic (6) studies that, altogether, prioritize fieldwork and direct contact with communities, which is consistent for situated research. Statistical methods (14) maintain a significant level for studies in contexts of greater population and geographic coverage. Although it retains a moderate acceptance, the participatory action research method increases compared to the results of the study by Barranquero Carretero and Ángel Botero (2015). The preference for the qualitative approach and the combined use of hermeneutic, ethnographic, case study, and participatory methods denotes a tendency to continue building knowledge from the experiences, problems, and practices of the communities. Also significant is the openness to quantitative and mixed approaches to observe dimensions in macro territorial contexts and digital environments.

The most commonly used techniques were the interview, focus group, documentary review, content analysis and online survey; mixed methods used a combination of these techniques. The least used were life histories, expert panel and discourse analysis. Geographically, in European, Asian, North American, and Australian countries researchers tend to prioritize quantitative studies, while in Latin American countries they opt for qualitative and mixed studies. This is explained by the positioning of the scientific method in the Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon positivist tradition, as opposed to the socio-critical, hermeneutic and participatory methods established in the Latin American research tradition. The latter is indicative of the precarious institutional, political and economic conditions to encourage and support research in the field in some universities, specifically in Latin American countries, as enunciated in the study by González-Samé and colleagues (2017).
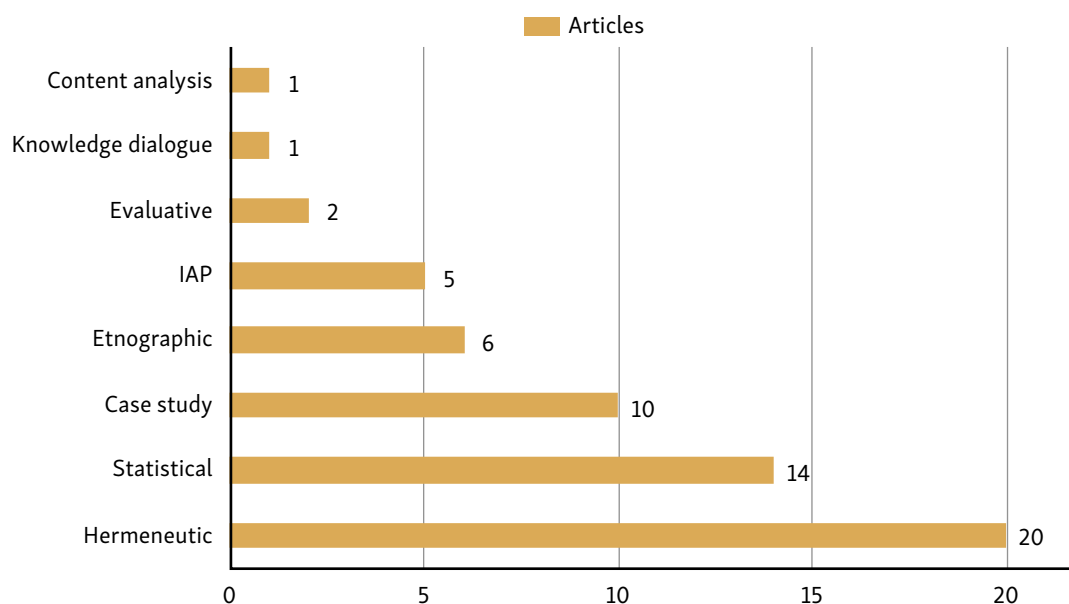
Figure 2. Methods identified in the articles reviewed

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION

The articles reviewed highlight the interest in observing the potential of digital platforms and the diversity of devices for content creation due to their easy access and multiple uses in collective dynamics, which makes them scenarios for the empowerment of excluded organizations, individuals or social groups. This trend is consistent with the results of Barranquero Carretero and Ángel Botero (2015) on the thematic approaches of the CDSC. The scarce production of articles on projects and experiences that relate CSC to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is focused on the study of environmental risk problems that impact a population, as in the case of the paper by Ratriyana and colleagues on renewable energies with young people in Indonesia, and that of Rodríguez Wong and collaborators on health prevention with Cuban adolescents. These studies include participation and empowerment as key concepts in their research.

Two relevant aspects of the CSC are observed in the articles reviewed; on the one hand, the involvement of citizen groups in the production of radio, journalistic, and digital content and, on the other, the management of dialogue and participation to address issues of common interest. These issues respond to old political demands of popular communication related to its contradictions, ambiguities, resistances, and complicities, which are stimulated by the recognition of popular cultures (Gonzaga Motta, 1983), of alternative communication as a scenario of struggles and tensions between the hegemonic and subaltern, and of community communication as a place of experiences situated in local contexts

(Navarro Nicoletti & Rodríguez Marino, 2018). The validity of the theoretical legacy of Latin American communication thinkers is reflected in the numerous citations and bibliographical references in the articles reviewed. Many articles continue to use Paulo Freire, Mario Kaplún, Luis Ramiro Beltrán, and Jesús Martín Barbero as references. Likewise, contributions from Spanish researchers who, in recent years, have adopted a critical and geopolitical perspective (Marí-Sáez, 2021) and one of citizen empowerment (Aranguren et al., 2019) stand out.

Although most articles show an interest in pluralizing voices in communication scenarios from citizen sectors (Alonso et al., 2015), very few delve into the role of governments and the private sector in public communication policies and CSC projects. A few inquire about listening, as a communicative possibility in community media, and potentially in digital media (Dreher, 2017), or as a political decision from otherness (Rufer, 2012), and for the generation of mutual trust in public debate through dialogue and interaction for better governance (Pineda de Alcázar, 2007). It also shows a renewed conceptualization of the community and the citizen, relocating them in a complex and diverse scenario of population segments that strive to become visible in local media and digital technologies (García del Dujo et al., 2015). Conversely, there are few articles that relate CSC to the population with disabilities and vulnerable populations, which is consistent with the findings of Alvarado López and colleagues (2017) on the limited importance of social inclusion in the ideology of communication for development and social change. On the contrary, few theoretical advances are observed on the notion of participation from communication, but there is an openness to what Aparici and Osuna-Acedo (2013) call a culture of participation in situated experiences of communication. Some articles refer to the notion of interactivity as a substitute for the concept of expanded dialogue in multiple directions and exchanges between and from different enunciators in a multimodal and networked society scenario (Castells, 2009).

Regarding methodological approaches, although it seems that researchers in the field are overcoming the epistemological limits that separated the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, there is still little tendency to research while retaining the use of methods and techniques traditionally linked to these paradigms. It can be seen that the researchers venture to innovate in a combination of collaborative techniques such as the dialogue of knowledge, social cartographies, photography as a tool for re-signification and the memory workshop. They also make use of traditional techniques such as focus groups, discussions, collective interviews, and documentary review. This implies advancing on a promising path of communication for social change as a field of knowledge to the extent that it contributes to deepen the renewal of its concepts, methods, and objects of study.

Regarding other studies, this review shares the meaning of some concepts such as participation in communication, citizenship, construction of subjectivities, and dialogue of knowledge, addressed in the study by Pinto and Jiménez García (2016) and, in this regard, recognizes the contributions of a tradition of Latin American researchers, as pointed out in the study by Ortiz Cueto (2021). Unlike these authors, this study transcends the Latin American geographic bias and broadens the gaze to include research in the United States, Europe, and Oceania.

The study by Barranquero Carretero and Ángel Botero (2015) on the state of scientific production in communication, development, and social change in Latin America between 2009 and 2013 highlights the absence of studies that evaluate the impact of the projects, a situation that improves minimally in this review; it coincides, with a moderate increase, in the scarce presence of participatory methodologies typical of CSC. In contrast to the study by these authors, this review highlights the use of case studies and statistical methods.

Finally, the systematic review conducted by Padilla de la Torre and Medina Mayagoitia (2018), which relates CSC to the use of ICTs by young people, focuses its analysis on the notion of development and concludes that this area has become an object of study of multiple disciplines, as well as of international organizations and public policies, which is ratified in the results of this review.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, CSC research has shifted from a homogeneous political interest in community and local participation to a heterogeneity of broad and plural possibilities that demand the involvement of social groups and citizens (children, youth, peasants, women, migrants, vulnerable populations, among others) through communication processes in traditional, digital and non-media channels[1]. The findings show, on the one hand, that there are still research perspectives interested in observing the empowerment of sectors of society excluded and marginalized from decision-making in information and media systems. On the other hand, from governmental projects, there are some initiatives that investigate participatory communication from a collaborative and co-creation perspective in a convergence of different sectors of society (governments, companies, academics, NGOs, organized communities, etc.).

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1. Non-media are defined as spaces for assemblies, public meetings, encounters, and dialogues developed in a community or citizen context.

It is deduced that CSC is transcending the traditional notion of community linked to physical-territorial variables, identity roots and long temporalities, which is deterritorialized to configure emerging communities that promote communicative processes from a diversity of places, in multiple temporalities and with weak and contingent identity agency. The studies reviewed presage a promising path for the CSC in its complex relations with digital media and social networks, where new communities of meaning emerge that struggle for a place in the communicative ecosystem and their participation in global issues. An important challenge for researchers in this field is to increase studies related to the SDGs. It is necessary to clarify old and new concepts on CSC to consolidate a broad and inclusive epistemological and methodological tradition led by a global scientific community that overcomes language, cultural and geopolitical barriers.

Finally, it can be stated that more and more researchers from North American, European, and Asian universities see in the participatory paradigm of communication for social change an option to produce relevant knowledge to face global problems, social crises, and the challenges that technological and digital ecosystems demand of us. This is a viable scenario as long as it involves active participation and community empowerment in actions articulated with other actors, policies, and agencies. In other words, CSC research has to assume this limitation, and understand that achieving real social changes implies a commitment and joint effort with other instances.

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