

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Communication Research in Argentina (2001–2015): Between Expansion and Intellectual Intervention

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This article outlines the current landscape of research studies on communication and culture in Argentina. Rather than offering an exhaustive and conclusive map of specialists and their theoretical contributions, it is intended to draw relationships between a series of recent socio-cultural processes, and the state of communication research and its main lines of approach in the country. Six approaches are being used: semiotics, cultural and media history, communication economy and policy, popular cultures, communication, gender and sexualities, and alternative, popular and community communication (APCC). Drawing on Raymond Williams, the article links a movement comprising intellectual traditions, institutions and cultural formations to the activity of scholars who create specialized knowledge on communication and culture.

Keywords: Communication, Research, Theories, Political-cultural Processes, Argentina.

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Introduction

In *The Sociology of Culture*, Raymond Williams states:

(...) “ideas” and “concepts” (...) are created and re-created across the social and cultural fabric; sometimes directly in the form of Ideas and concepts but also, in a broader sense, in the form of institutions that configure them, of signified social relations, social and religious events, ways of work and execution: in truth, in the entire signifying system and in the system that it itself signifies.” ([1981] 1994, p. 202–203)¹

The Marxist critic encourages us to regard the set of social practices as producers of knowledge and, more specifically, to consider the configured processes based on the relative, historical, and socially produced distance that unites and separates an intellectual or academic field (in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms that Williams himself quotes) of the

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social space in a broader sense.² In implicit dialog with Williams' position, [Jorge Rivera \(1987\)](#) proposed the first systematic history of communication research in Argentina. The perspective introduced by Rivera is decisive in that he avoids an imminent approach focussed exclusively on the theoretical aspects and epistemic unfolding, and endeavors to frame the history of this discipline in a wider cultural fabric, with regard to the flow of Ideas and the intellectual disputes deployed between the 1960s and the 1980s.³

Along these lines, this article proposes a characterization of the studies about communication and culture⁴ in Argentina in recent years.⁵ We will interrogate the relationships between the main mutations and shifts—themes, methodology, and disciplinary relevance—and a set of socio-cultural and institutional transformations that took place in the country between 2001 and 2015. Then we proceed to inquire about the political nature and implications of Argentine research on communication and culture today, which partly revisits the sense of political intervention that had marked the emergence of the field in the 1960s and 1970s. This work also attempts to fill an existing gap, given the paucity of academic studies on current research in communication and culture in South America published in English.

It is appropriate to mention certain caveats in terms of the mapping discussed here. First, the reconstruction of the dialogues and exchanges that studies on communication and culture have established with their counterparts in other latitudes—as regards research agendas and theoretical-methodological perspectives—would deserve a more thorough elaboration. Due to the complexities involved in any effort to make a synthesis in an article of such magnitude, the decision has been made to give priority to the analysis of local coordinates. It has been, nonetheless, a methodological option: we understand that this *demarkation within the national boundaries* would enable an improved calibration, without entailing an abstraction of the specific social processes that facilitate the production of knowledge about social phenomena, and the dynamics of exchanges between local and transnational, which are also determining and configuring factors. Second, this article does not intend to provide a map of subjects—authors, researchers—but of problems, objects of study, perspectives, and outstanding lines of research during the last 15 years. The selection of references is not guided by an exhaustiveness criterion but by their paradigmatic character; where we name authors, it is for the reader to identify an area of inquiry or a line of work which in practice is conducted by broader bodies of researchers than those mentioned here.

The article comprises three major analytical sections: the first section briefly reconstructs the process of conformation and institutionalization of the field of communication and culture studies in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s, giving an account of the *disciplinary and intellectual traditions* forged in the process of emergence and consolidation of this specific area of inquiry within the social sciences.

The second section underscores the relations existing across three dimensions: the persistence of said *traditions* forged in the 1960s and 1970s; the *morphological transformation of the scientific and post-graduate university system* in the country over the past 15 years, which impacted research conditions and found in communication studies

one of its more dynamic components; and finally, the *social relevance* that the communication/media/culture issue gained in public debate in the 2001–2015 period, during which communication was as much a relevant topic of deliberation.

The third and last section examines the characterization of contemporary lines of research, focussing on those areas of the culture and communication research field that are significant to illustrate the vision of the Communication Studies field in Argentina at the beginning of the 21st century proposed herein: semiotics, cultural and media history, communication economy and policy, popular cultures, communication, gender and sexualities, and alternative, popular and community communication (APCC). This sequence aims at exposing the relationships between the *intellectual traditions* coined when the discipline emerged, and the movement of *cultural institutions and formations*, currently linked to the development of specialized knowledge on communication and culture.

From the field's origins to its present: *traditions* in communication and culture

Since Jorge Rivera's pioneering history of the Argentinean field was published (1987), there has been consensus among the discipline's historians regarding the periodization model he proposed (see also Zarowsky, 2017): specialized discourse or wisdom on communication and culture *emerged* in Argentina in the late 1960s and became a discipline in the early 1970s. A series of magazines and journals enabled research developed by emerging Argentinian scholars to spearhead the so-called *Latin American movement of communication critics* (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1987, p. 81), semiologist Eliseo Verón, founder and director of *LENGUAajes* magazine (1974–1980); Héctor Schmucler, founder and co-director, jointly with Armand Mattelart from Chile and Hugo Assman from Brazil, of the Gramscian journal *Comunicación y cultura*; Heriberto Muraro, who in those same years introduced in *Crisis* journal (1973–1976), a series of essays that led to what was to be known as “the political economy of communication and culture”; and Jorge Rivera, Eduardo Romano and Aníbal Ford, who studied the manifestations of literature, popular culture and history of cultural industries, and whose first works were published for dissemination purposes by *Centro Editor de América Latina* (CEAL) in the late 1970s. A number of topics marked the emergence of this new specialized knowledge area: the critique to the elitist vision of culture, restricted to the study of literature and the “fine arts”; the question of the relationships among symbolic power, economy, culture and communication; the question of the epistemic and methodological foundations that allowed the study of these relationships; the concern as to the linkage between research and social demand or, better still, with the processes of socio-political transformation. Thus, these productions contributed to lay the foundation for *intellectual traditions* that gained prominence in academia and which—in the context of the political radicalization that shook the continent in the 1960s and 1970s—transcended the academic sphere and impregnated the political and cultural

arena. These traditions served as a mainstay for the process of consolidation and institutionalization that the discipline would undergo in the 1980s.

Indeed, with the downfall of the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983), the field witnessed a notable bourgeoning and institutionalization. The process had been interrupted in the previous decade because of the country's social turmoil, which affected academic and institutional life, and—more concretely—because of the internal or external exile of its main figures.⁶ During the transition to democracy, one milestone in the process of institutionalization was the creation of the Degree Program in Communication Sciences at University of Buenos Aires (UBA), the country's largest and most prestigious university in 1985.

Said degree program became part of the School of Social Sciences, established in 1987. The appearance and expansion of new technologies (video-cassette, cable TV, and later, the Internet), coupled with the social fascination caused by an audiovisual field transformed after the privatization of the media system, caused a wide-ranging cultural reorganization, which unfolded simultaneously with state policies that tended to de-finance the scientific system and to restructure public universities based on market-oriented criteria.

The communication boom (2001–2015)

In a field that is defined by the study of social production of meaning and its articulation with technological and mass media support, the orientation and evolution adopted by the main lines of research during the period under review were marked by the socio-cultural context prevailing in Argentina since the start of the 21st century. It was a complex and contradictory process: Argentina was no exception to the global trend towards *concentration* and *convergence* of the companies that produced information and communication contents and provided technological support for their distribution. This trend, as demonstrated extensively by [Becerra \(2015\)](#), has a tendency to limit the plurality and diversity of information and cultural production, and has turned the sector into not only an actor of remarkable economic weight but also a key player of the political game. In the period under review, this process overlapped with a groundbreaking extension of the public debate on the license of communication media. Faced with the myths of *news transparency* and *social neutrality* of the media, different social actors (universities, civil organizations, political parties, labor unions, community and alternative media as well as state and commercial media) laid stress on and elicited public debate about the existence of the political and economic fabric that conditions the production of information, and aimed at giving visibility to the *procedures* of its construction in the plane of discourse. Two milestones illustrate this movement. First, the enactment of the “audiovisual communication services law” in 2009 (Law No. 26522), which caused a confrontation between the main media conglomerates in the country and the government as it enabled—among other issues—changing a media ownership concentration structure that had been maintained by successive democratic administrations.⁷ Second, the proliferation of

a number of TV programs with high ratings, which set out to *making a theme out of the media*, problematizing the social function of the media and making visible their information and opinion building procedures at the discourse level (Alabarces & Oliván, 2010; Somma Neto & Covalesky Dias, 2016). Thus, it may be claimed that the knowledge, problems, and objects that were the subject matter of discussion inside the scientific and university field transcended to the public scene and configured a deliberative state on the topic of communication, which was simultaneously projected to legislative spaces, the media, and popular debate. Those principles and objectives that had guided the emergence of communication and culture studies and had been included in academic structures as subjects of production of critical knowledge appeared in this period at the core of the dispute on the social area. In this way, to mention one example, the role of mass media as a political player—a platitude for students and researchers—became explicit in the statements of one of the chief editors of newspaper *Clarín* (the most influential in the country), who publicly stated that the newspaper had practiced “war journalism” *against* the 2003–2015 administration (Blanck, 2016). Likewise, certain expressions that became popular during the period, such as “Clarín lies” (“*Clarín Miente*”) with regard to the political opposition that the newspaper displayed strongly after 2008, and or the “K Narrative”—an expression used by the opposition to refer to the construction of a narrative favorable to the Cristina Kirchner administration—underscored the relevance of the culture and communication dimension in the political dispute of the period.

Between 2001 and 2015 the field of communication studies in Argentina went through a series of deep transformations. There was a considerable institutional expansion that improved the material conditions for the professionalization of academic research, contributed to strengthen its legitimacy faced with other disciplines, consolidated existing lines of work, and enabled the multiplication and diversification of their orientations. Reference is made, in the first place, to the creation of graduate offerings that amplified the possibilities of academic insertion of graduates, who until then had been largely compelled to take graduate studies abroad if they wished to specialize in communication research.⁸ Coupled with this process, the appearance or consolidation of a set of specialized academic journals is noteworthy: *Trampas de la comunicación y la cultura* (UNLP), *La Trama de la Comunicación* (UNR), *Question* (UNLP), *Zigurat* (UBA), *Avatares de la comunicación y la cultura* (UBA), *Intersecciones en comunicación* (UNICEN), and *El Cactus* (UNC). In this connection, even though UBA did not lose its traditional leadership, other institutions also played a key role in the education of graduates and researchers.

Furthermore, the discipline was recognized as such for the first time in 2012/2013 in the experts’ commissions that evaluated admission to both doctoral scholarships and the researcher program of the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (*Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas* [CONICET]), Argentina’s main scientific promotion agency. This acknowledgment entailed a qualitative leap, as it modified the possibilities of this discipline to compete for the distribution of income, the financing of research lines, and the addition of scholars and

researchers to the ranks and files of scientific endeavor.⁹ These innovations were part of an effort to encourage scientific promotion policy: starting in 2003, the conditions and criteria that guided the work of CONICET were modified, and in 2007, the Ministry of Science and Technology was established. These changes resulted in a remarkable expansion of the number of doctoral and post-doctoral scholars at the agency, and a significant increase in staff researchers, bringing a generational change as well as broadening and revitalizing the agency's perspectives.¹⁰

Contemporary lines of research: between *residual* and *emergent*

This section focusses on the mapping of contemporary communication and culture studies in Argentina. To that end, six key areas of research within this discipline have been subject to scrutiny because of their role in the foundation of the field and because they evidence a renewal or re-appreciation of their research problems and practices: semiotics, cultural and media history, communication economy and policy, popular cultures, and APCC. We have also included studies on communication, gender and sexualities (SCGS) as an emerging area that has made progress in its consolidation during the period as a field of specific production and development. For each area, we propose a brief review of its conformation and recent development, and map the contemporary trends and their articulation with the socio-cultural processes described in the foregoing section.

Semiotics

Semiotic studies represent one of the *intellectual traditions* of mainstream communication sciences, an area that has achieved a remarkable institutionalization in the country. Since the foundation of the Argentine Association of Semiotics in 1970, chaired by Eliseo Verón, and the publication of *LENGUAjes* journal, the field of semiotic studies has experienced uninterrupted development in the activity of its key proponents and the deployment of their theoretical and analytical proposals. Since the 1970s, the concern with the theoretical development and institutional organization of the discipline have characterized the consolidation of semiotics in the country. In *LENGUAjes*—whose caption was *Linguistics and Semiology Journal*—one can identify (paradoxically with regard to its name) a strong concern with delimiting the specific field, differentiated from linguistics, for the study of the discourses conveyed by the media. The three hallmarks mentioned here—*theoretical-epistemological concern, international relationship, and institutionalizing imprint*—go a long way to explain the development and “success” reached by this discipline in our academic field.

This institutionalization builds on the strong international connections rooted in the foundational moment: the cosmopolitan background of Eliseo Verón was the pivot for building the bridges that positioned Argentine production in a space of transnational dialog, particularly based on his French connection.¹¹ The continuity of the Argentine Association of Semiotics today is noteworthy. It has nurtured links with the

Latin American Federation of Semiotics and the International Association for Semiotic Studies, coupled with an intense bibliographic production in this discipline and a fluent international circulation of its proponents, including those who research and work in the country and those who have pursued their careers abroad, some of them in the main specialized academic centers of the world, including Carlos Scolari (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) or Lucrecia Escudero Chauvel (University of Lille, France).

With university life going back to normal in 1984 (following the end of the last dictatorship) and the publication of a series of key books, this field reached the ripe conditions for its takeoff. The impact and circulation of *La semiosis social* (1987) are noticeable. It is a remarkable theoretical and epistemological text in which Verón proposes the fundamentals of a theory of social discourses integrating the contributions of Charles Sanders Peirce (his triadic notion of the sign) and pragmatics (from linguistics to the Palo Alto school) to make either more moderate or more complex the Marxist and structuralist positions of the 1970s which have not been given up completely. This book, written by Verón in the first instance to earn his PhD in France, contributed to build an organic identity for Argentine semiotics thinking by revisiting the structural semiology of the Saussurean matrix (which had marked the first generation of semiologists in the country in the 1960s and 1970s), proposing a social theory of the production of meaning that addresses both the conditions of production and reception of the speeches, which are understood as social practices, producers of the real. The theoretical and analytical contributions during the period also include the analysis of *diverse materialities* of media—that is, of the way in which different types of media leave an imprint on the production of specific messages and languages and on the relationship with recipients, and the social classifications of discourse (*genres, styles*) (see [Traversa, 1984](#); [Steimberg, 1993](#)).

In recent years, this first generation of Argentine semiologists has kept very active: Eliseo Verón published *La semiosis social 2* (2013), a book that goes back to theoretical systematizations and the analysis of classical objects (political communication, photographic image, television, public spaces). [Oscar Steimberg \(2013a, 2013b\)](#) and [Oscar Traversa \(2014\)](#), for their part, contributed further conceptualizations. Steimberg elaborates on the notion of *transposition* as a key aspect of the transition of a work through different languages or media from the point of view of its discourse transformations, while Traversa reflects on the notion of *device*, which contributes to study the process of mediatization of social phenomena by integrating to the analysis the constraints that the technical means effects on the discursive gender and, therefore, on the production of signification.

It may be rightly claimed that there is an *Argentine semiotics school* with its particular traits and an international projection. Unlike other traditions in communication studies, Argentine semiotics has developed a lasting constellation of theoretical frameworks, notions, and specific analytical works. Its strong tendency towards articulation between theory and empirical analysis—i.e., the presentation of case studies—expresses one of its characteristics.

Another trait of the Argentine semiotics school, largely derived from its strong aspiration to theoretical formalization, is the continuity of its theoretical and research lines. Today, a second generation of semiologists work with a new set of notions and problems: [José Luis Fernández \(2013\)](#)¹² and [Mario Carlón \(2016\)](#), among others, have developed original research about the connections between mass media and new digital environments and social networks, the transformation and decline of television vis-à-vis new devices and narratives (studies on transmedia narratives are worthy of mention), and the new forms of (hyper)-mediatization of social life. It is important to note that for this second generation of researchers and their teams, the notion of *mediatization* became mainstream, and has given rise to specific studies on this matter following Verón's definition of mediatized societies as those in which "the functioning of institutions, practices, conflicts and culture starts to structure in direct relation to the existence of the media" ([Verón, 2001](#), p. 15). This view has not only modified the approach of traditional media but also enabled the development of studies on the so-called "new mediatizations" relating to more pervasive processes of connectivity, mobility, and sociability on the network. In 2011, the National University of Rosario established its Mediatization Research Center (*Centro de Investigación en Mediatizaciones* [CIM]), directed by Sandra Valdetaro.

Popular and mass culture

This area of research is one of the foundational traditions of the field of communication and culture studies in the country. In the 1960s and 1970s, its main advocates, Aníbal Ford, Jorge Rivera, and Eduardo Romano, placed a concern with the popular cultures at the center of their research, and framed their work in a Gramscian reading of Argentine culture. Communication and culture research, in a context in which mass media had already become central and took a vital role for the understanding of social processes, found the recognition that the notions of popular and grassroots could not be separated from each other but should be identified and understood in their "traffics and accidents" in popular studies ([Ford, 1994](#)).

This pioneering work outlined the orientation of research in a definitive manner: the area of inquiry addressed peripheral, non-canonical—and oftentimes non-legitimate—cultural practices, consumptions and textualities. The field comprised research of *gaucho* culture, soap opera, tango and popular music, popular press, and the production of marginal authors and intellectuals. Furthermore, the work of Rivera, Romano, and especially Ford anticipated a shift that would become the paradigm of Latin American studies on popular culture: the separation of the manipulative hypothesis on mass media and its "effects" on the practices, consumptions, and political action of popular classes. This shift was fostered by the re-reading of Antonio Gramsci and the contributions of British Cultural Studies, in particular, the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall. To briefly clarify the singularity of the Argentine tradition in relation with other national research traditions in Communication and Culture, it can be said that the orientation of early American

empirical sociology was rejected by the widely developed local Marxist sociology of the 1960s. At the level of mass communication studies, [Eliseo Verón \(1968\)](#) led the way in outlining the fundamentals of this critique. The reception of Raymond Williams' work, and of all other referents of British cultural studies, was operated towards the end of the 1970s by a number of local referents (mainly Beatriz Sarlo and Carlos Altamirano) as a way to revisit and renew the prevailing cultural critique, based on the "French tradition": Althusser's Marxism and Roland Barthes' structural semiology. The early institutionalization of this field of study in syllabuses and in the research funding system contributed to the stabilization of research teams such as those directed by [Pablo Alabarces \(2002, 2012\)](#), [Pablo Semán \(2006\)](#) and [María Graciela Rodríguez \(2015\)](#), focussing on objects, practices and consumptions linked to popular culture and mass culture.

The mapping of popular culture is made up of inquiries around sport, music, best-selling literature, popular press, TV entertainment, studies about fans, and religiousness, among other topics.¹³ Two common traits can be identified, with different emphasis, in the lines of research proposed by these teams: an interest in the perspective of the actors and the choice of ethnography as a method, and the relevance of the analysis of mass-popular texts as cultural indicators of social and contemporary affairs.¹⁴ Along the same lines but more leaning on cultural anthropology and an ethnographic approach we find the work of Gustavo Blázquez and his team at the National University of Córdoba ([2008, 2014](#)).

In the mid-2000s there was a special interest in observing and understanding the cultural practices and consumptions as well as the identity constructions and media representations of the social movements enacting in the context of the political-economic crisis ([Alabarces & Rodríguez, 2008](#); [Álvarez Broz, 2010](#); [Justo von Lurzer, 2011](#); [Miguez & Semán, 2006](#); [Rodríguez, 2015](#); [Vázquez, 2010](#); among others). In the process of economic restructuring first, and of social restructuring second, the objects and questions of inquiry once again diversified and multiplied compared to the more classic lines of work mentioned above.

The decade addressed here was thus marked by the revitalization of the studies on popular issues with two-fold emphasis: the recovery of the popular-mass articulation as a pair of analysis, and the interest in theorization on a series of key notions—*popular*, *people*, *populism*—for the understanding of the expansion of popular-based governments in Latin America in the first 15 years of the 21st century.

History of media, cultural, and intellectual history

Over recent years, an area of specialization has consolidated in Argentina around the history of the media and mass communication. It is a current with a broad development since the late 1970s—based on the work of Jorge Rivera, Eduardo Romano, and Aníbal Ford—which during the past decade has seen a remarkable drive and expansion. While in traditional approaches the chronological reconstruction of technical mutations prevailed—the so-called "internal history" of media and communication

apparatuses—now the history of media is framed in the epistemic mutations that the *cultural turnaround* has infused in historical and social studies, kindled by developments of cultural history (from Roger Chartier to Peter Burke), British cultural studies, and Raymond Williams' materialistic sociology. These perspectives take a common denominator as the starting point: positioning the cultural dimension as a decisive factor of the instauration of the social and technical broadcasting media as a central vector of the organization of the social link and its representations. Thus, this zone of research is developed in the country by scholars who, with a background in communication studies, have appropriated the tools of historiography and cultural sociology, as well as those who, coming from other disciplines (history, sociology, arts, literature), have turned to the history of the media as a privileged way of understanding historical phenomena. This current was consolidated in recent years as a productive window for research on social, political, and cultural processes and, particularly strongly, on the studies of *memory and recent history*, *intellectual history* and *history of intellectuals*. This *extended definition* applies to recent publications on the history of Argentine and Latin American political cinema (Mestman, 2016); the history of Argentine television (Varela, 2005) and of popular representations in cinema and TV (Mestman & Varela, 2013); the history of cartoons (Vázquez, 2010) and graphic humor in Argentine weeklies and periodicals (Burkart, 2017; Levin, 2013); the history of photography and photojournalism (Fortuny, 2014; Gamarnik, 2015); artistic avant-gardes and their relationship to communication media in the 1960s and 1970s (Longoni, 2014); the sociocultural role of images in print media (Malosetti Costa & Gené, 2009, 2013); and the history of the press and some of its key contemporary companies (Sivak, 2013), to name but a few. A great deal of the studies focus on the role of images—in various supports—in the configuration of representations, identities, and social memories.

The growth and institutional consolidation of this field of study in recent years was reflected on an increased portfolio of undergraduate and graduate specific courses and seminars and the creation of a series of networks and spaces for the promotion and dissemination of the developments of this sub-discipline. Of note is the creation of the Media History Network (*Red de Historia de los Medios*) in 2010, at the Research Institute of the School of Social Sciences at UBA. The Network issues the journal *REHIME. Cuadernos de la Red de Historia de los Medios* (four issues from 2011 to 2016), which has become a reference for studies in this area. Likewise, there has been a considerable effort to reconstruct, systematize, and disseminate in print or digital format documentary sources, audiovisual files, and historical publications, which have multiplied in the country in recent years, kindled by the promotion of university and state agencies and research teams. This work was made available to pundits and laymen alike as part of the cultural heritage.

At the crossroads of the history of the media and the history of the culture, and supporting the process of disciplinary consolidation and academic institutionalization, a series of studies emerged in recent years in Argentina dealing with the *intellectual history of communication studies* and the track records of its intellectuals. This line of

work interfaces with the historical perspectives mentioned earlier in this article (Diviani, 2013; Rivera, 1987; Zarowsky, 2017).

Communication economy and policy

Communication economy and policy studies recover and update a tradition that had a strong presence in the 1970s, fostered by studies on the ownership of the media systems, the forms of cultural imperialism, and the debate on National Communication Policies and the New World Order of Information and Communication. By aligning with this tradition, its current advocates have left aside the *denunciation* attributes of their predecessors and have taken steps to formalize analytical matrices and empiric research. Another noteworthy aspect in this current is its commitment to building bridges between specialized knowledge, collective debates, and the design of public policies for the area. In the framework of the abovementioned processes, the referents in this field have shared in different ways their knowledge in the public space: they have joined organizations of civil society in the drafting of the Audiovisual Communication Services Law or they have taken part in different roles—with speeches in Congress, advice to legislators and government officials in the area, intervention in communication media- in the debates around the enactment or implementation of said law.

Studies in communication and culture economy and policy represent one of the aspects of this disciplinary field that has increased its reach over the past 15 years in Argentina. This area cuts across the economy of media and cultural industries, the study of policy and normative frameworks regulating the activity, the research on information and communication technologies, and the implications of their transformations in terms of economy and regulations. This aspect is perceived in the country not so much for its theoretical profile as for its strong analytic and empirical imprint, and its contribution to knowledge of the structures and dynamics that regulate the media system and the changes that radically altered it in recent years. Its outstanding proponents in Argentina are Martín Becerra, Guillermo Mastrini, and Damián Loreti, the latter specializing in law and legislation of information and communication. This perspective has experienced a notable expansion in recent years, in terms of both research papers and publications (including, but not limited to Becerra, 2015; Becerra, Mastrini, & Marino, 2013; Loreti, 2006; Loreti & Lozano, 2014; Mastrini & Becerra, 2009; Monje, 2013) and institutional consolidation, with the creation of specialized research programs and graduate degrees.¹⁵ Conversely, it is worth noting that the three abovementioned researchers have completed their doctoral studies in information and communication sciences in foreign countries in the decade of 2000 (Loreti and Mastrini in Universidad Complutense de Madrid; Becerra in Universidad de Barcelona). This partially explains the strong trend towards the internationalization of this current of thought and the participation of its proponents in transnational research networks, which places it at the heart of progress and of the global debates in this field of studies.¹⁶ The development of studies in economy and policy of communication in recent years indicates a process of re-appreciation of this tradition,

considering the prevalence that culturalistic and semiotic currents had in the 1980s and 1990s, leaving an imprint on the agendas of communication and culture research in the country.

It may be claimed that the process of discussion of the new law and the communication policies—including, but not limited to, the introduction of Digital TV—carried out by local administrations between 2003 and 2015 opened a door of opportunity to place the old concerns of communication economy and policy against the backdrop of concrete intervention contexts. In fact, communication industries continue to be a privileged object of attention of the administration that came to power in December 2015 and which has since then significantly changed its regulation, an issue that has been profusely discussed by the local experts in this field of study.

Alternative, popular, and community communication

In recent years, the Argentinian academic scene has witnessed a renewed push for research about the phenomena of APCC. This area of work recovers an intellectual tradition that left an imprint in the identity of communication studies in Latin America and has drawn a line of continuity with it. In the wake of the pioneering journal *Comunicación y cultura*, this area of reflection and exploration has maintained its presence in our milieu in the 1990s and in the 2000–2010 decade, when its themes had been left out of the academic agendas, and above all, the communication practices that served as a foundation for its themes had weakened. Nonetheless, certain APCC experiences implemented at that time in articulation with popular organizations mobilized by the social crisis of 2001¹⁷ served as an opportunity to bring researchers and communicators closer together.

Many of those who went to school in the field of APCC and have been or still are college professors were pioneers in the development of what today is a federal structure of alternative, popular, and community media. They have become not only trainers and replicators of pioneering experiences, including FM radio stations *En Tránsito* and *La Tribu*, among others, but also political referents of communication organizations and networks at national and international level (*Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos*, *Foro Argentino de Radios Comunitarias*, the Argentine branch of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters) in public administration, as part of the agencies for the implementation of communication policies. In this regard, in the period reviewed in this article, APCC has witnessed a revitalization and maximization of its practices and has been able to reconstruct a communication and cultural fabric that is the subject for further study. While for communication economy and policy we have pointed to the emphasis laid in empirical research and intervention in public debate, for APCC, the emphasis has been on transfer and outreach, based on “research, action, and participation” modes, anchored in the territories more than in the institutionalization at academic think tanks.

As regards recent research, it may be claimed that a series of works (Kejval, 2009; Segura, 2016; Segura & Waisbord, 2016; Vinelli, 2014) have come at the forefront of

this thriving though peripheral area of the academic field. This recent research address the challenges that technological convergence and the new digital environment pose for the APCC, the reconstruction of historical experiences of alternative communication, the revision of some of the theoretical frameworks, and notions that have guided it: *counter-information*, *participation*, and *access* among others.

Also to be noted is the work of María Soledad Segura, a researcher at the National University of Córdoba and the CONICET, at the interface of communication economy and policy and studies on alternative communication. Her research explores the relations between civil society initiatives and State policy in the field (Segura, 2016; Segura & Waisbord, 2016). Larisa Kejval (2009), for her part, rebuilt from a sociohistorical perspective the political-cultural projects of so-called alternative, popular and community radio stations, which spread across the country particularly in the 1980s and 1990s (Kejval, 2009).

Communication, gender and sexualities

One of the areas of inquiry that has been rapidly growing and consolidating in the field of communication and culture over the last decade is that of SCGS. This articulation first appeared in other latitudes when feminist researchers identified an inevitable field of research to understand the conformation and functioning of an unequal social structure in sexual and gender terms in cultural processes and in communication media. The process of institutionalization of women's studies, and later on gender and socio-sexual studies, involved a progressive stabilization of an area of study on communication and gender in the United States after 1960 and the ensuing development of a strong current within British Cultural Studies, but it was not until the 1990s that a significant body of work could be identified at local level. Unlike other fields of communication and culture, SCGS has introduced a new space of reflection on the gender and sexual dimension of the social production of meaning. Instead of being founded on a supporting local tradition, they have founded a tradition of local studies.

It is important to note the particular way in which we have developed this overview of SCGS in Argentina, which is in line with the goal of “women” and/or “sexual diversity” studies, which intended to break away from the initial “ghettoization” mechanisms of institutionalization processes. This translated into a cross-discipline effort implying more diffuse outlines or multiple imprints for the construction of knowledge on gender and sexualities. Therefore, in Argentina one can identify, well ahead of the consolidation of an area that recognizes itself as a driving force for SCGS, a set of works that addressed the representation of women in women's journals or sentimental literature, the press, and feminist cultural magazines, the pioneering work on audiovisual genres (melodrama, soap opera, commercial movies, feminist cinema, and pornography, among others). This research could—and in many cases did—fit either in the area of traditional communication (semiotics, history of media, and cultural history), or in gender studies with no specific connection with the field of communication

and culture. It is precisely that *connection* and its institutionalization that emerges in the period addressed by this article.

This steady and progressive expansion of research on gender and sexualities in national universities and research centers occurred based on proposals driven by researchers who were feminists and advocates of sexual diversity, who started to include these issues in the syllabus of their courses, and later on, to offer optional seminars and collective training and research instances. In the specific case of Communication Programs in National Universities, we can mention groundbreaking work by [Silvia Delfino \(1999\)](#), [Judy Cháneton \(2007\)](#), [María Alicia Gutierrez \(2011\)](#), [Mabel Campagnoli \(2015\)](#) and, later on, [Silvia Elizalde \(2009, 2015\)](#) at UBA, [Claudia Laudano \(1998, 2010\)](#) and [Flavia Delmas \(2016\)](#) at the National University of La Plata, [Valeria Fernandez Hasan](#) at Mendoza (2014), and [Florencia Rovetto \(2010\)](#) at Rosario, among others. It may be claimed that these budding networks of research teams with fluent dialog—that has developed since the mid-1990s in the spaces of production on communication and culture—were the basis for the subsequent institutionalization of SCGS as such. These work groups also started to find specific spaces in scientific events; gender and sexuality topics became an unavoidable part of communication gatherings. In parallel, studies on communication and culture gained their own status in feminist and gender congresses and seminars.¹⁸

The transformations in terms of sexual and gender rights experienced in Argentina over recent years,¹⁹ and the advances—now in suspension—in the regulation of audiovisual communication services (see note 6), have rekindled public debate around certain SCGS that became dominant in the research and intervention perspectives, such as media violence, sexism and objectifying of women, among others. Likewise, the expansion of the scientific system, through the increase of scholarships and the admission of young researchers to the scientific system, implied a multiplication of theses and projects in the field, and the creation of graduate courses and specialized programs for teaching and research. Perhaps the most significant degree of consolidation of research on gender and sexualities (and particularly of SCGS) is the assertion of feminist epistemology as a framework of production of knowledge ([Maffía, 2007](#)) on social and feminist cultural critique. This area of research questions and denaturalizes the symbolic organization of social structures and especially genderization and sexualization devices, and involves the development of modes of critique based on expressive and aesthetic work ([Richard, 2009](#)).

As regards the objects of study, the analysis of media representations—which we could categorize in line with the first studies of “women images” in the United States—has a predominant position. The calling into question of the social role of communication media already referred to as a structuring theme of the decade reviewed here, involved the proliferation of studies focussing on the processes of discrimination and stigmatization that were channeled by cultural industries and the materialization of that concern in the new regulations. Among other initiatives we find the inclusion of media violence as a type of gender violence in law 26485/09, which prevents and punishes any kind of violence against women, and the protection against all forms of

discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation in the Audiovisual Communication Services Law. This also gave rise to the creation of media observatories specifically devoted to monitor the handling of gender and sexuality issues in different universities as well as a keener focus on those dimensions in other observatories and government agencies (the Observatory of Discriminatory Practices in Radio and TV, and the Public Defense Board of Audiovisual Communication Services).

More recent studies have also included some dimensions of analysis at the heart of the tradition of British cultural studies—the pleasure of reception, sexual and gender pedagogies, the professional routines in cultural enterprises or the dissident, or queer feminist cultural and artistic production (Liska, 2016; Rovetto, 2010; Spataro, 2011, among others). Recent research also includes a concern with contemporary femininities—socio-affective relations, erotic practices, modes of religiousness and women's circles—embedding an analysis of the ways of political action and agency in social networks, and the appropriation of new technologies (Elizalde & Felitti, 2015; Laudano, 2016; among others).

Conclusion

We have mapped the current research in communication and culture in Argentina with the aim to link its contemporary state to the broader political-cultural fabric that frames it. We have situated production in this field vis-à-vis major *intellectual and disciplinary traditions* which, created in the past but undergoing a continuous renewal, delimit today epistemic and specialty frameworks. Thus, we have observed certain continuities across theoretical-epistemological lines and institutional spaces forged in the past—the so-called *traditions*—in productions and assemblies of the present: we have referred to semiotics, cultural and media history, communication economy and policy, popular cultures, communication, gender and sexualities, and APCC. Intellectual traditions serve as a frame or horizon of possibilities that bridge the present and the past and guide the work of subjects in the context of a network of cultural, constructs and academic institutions in continuous flux. Along these lines, we have emphasized the dynamics that connect these traditions with emerging zones of social, cultural and academic practice. We have referred to the studies that deal with the intellectual history of the discipline as an area of research connecting epistemological inquiry with cultural history and sociology. Likewise, the studies that address the articulation of such issues as communication, gender and sexualities also cut across established traditions and emerging practices.

This study is intended to indicate that shifts in the field over the last decade and the recovery or update of some of its intellectual traditions have linked in a range of ways to the broader movements of the world of culture and the vicissitudes of public debate over recent years. A review of its intersections has allowed us to give an account of the political nature and implications assumed today by different areas of research in communication and culture in the country. The recent expansion and diversification, deployed in the framework of social transformation processes and political-cultural

conflictivity, gave way to a revisiting of the meaning of political intervention that characterized the formation of the field in Argentina. A thorough analysis of the transformations that the scientific-university system has gone through and their implications for research remains to be done. This article has presented an overview, some hypotheses, and lines of exploration. In summary, this way of addressing the field of research in communication and culture in Argentina highlights the epistemic productivity of the liaisons between the social space and the academic space.

Notes

- 1 Emphasis added.
- 2 About the notions of *traditions*, *institutions* and *formations*, see Williams, 2009 [1977].
- 3 Recent research by Mariano Zarowsky (2017) and Ricardo Diviani (2013) in turn proposes a history of communication studies at the intersection between *intellectual history* and *cultural sociology*.
- 4 On the syntagm “communication/culture” as a singular mode that acquires the denomination of this field of studies in Latin America see Schmucler (1984).
- 5 Fully updating Rivera’s history of communication research in Argentina, thus including the 1990s as well as the early 21st century, is beyond the possibilities of this article.
- 6 This does not imply that research was not produced in the field during the dictatorial period or that researchers did not assemble in associations or magazines. Rather, we emphasize the rupture of the emerging process of institutional organization whose points of reference had been the aforementioned figures, particularly those related to the University of Buenos Aires. These figures entered university life in the 1980s, and resumed the research and perspectives produced in previous decades, but reviewing them on the basis of the reformulations carried out in exile or in the country during the years of dictatorship. The history of Argentine research on communication and culture during the dictatorship is a pending matter in the historiography of the discipline.
- 7 Law No. 26,522/09 superseded Law No. 22,285/81, which had been enacted during the last military dictatorship. Without providing a detailed analysis, it should be noted that said law included in its rationale a series of principles that had been drafted by various civil organizations (grouped in the “Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting”). The drafting process included public hearings with the participation of specialists and civil-society organizations, whose proposals were included in the final wording. The law encountered several obstacles in its implementation—such as deficiencies in the regulatory authority (AFSCA), and charges of unconstitutionality by media conglomerates—and was partially repealed in December 2015, one month after the inauguration of the new administration by political party Alianza Cambiemos.
- 8 The following graduate programs were introduced: PhD in Social Sciences (1999) and Master in Communication and Culture, School of Social Sciences, Universidad de Buenos Aires (2000); PhD in Communication, Universidad Nacional de La Plata (2002); PhD in Social Communication (2003) and Master in Cultural Studies (2010), Universidad Nacional de Rosario; Master in Cultural Industries, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes (2008); Master in Communication and Contemporary Culture (1999) and PhD in Social Communication, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (2011). This list is non-exclusive and mentions, by way of example, only some of the public universities of the main cities in the country.

- 9 Applicants for communication and culture research had to submit their applications to the “sociology and demographics” commission, a body that changed its name to “sociology, demographics, and communication.”
- 10 Between 2002 and 2013, the number of doctoral education scholarships increased four-fold (from 400 to 1,300 per year), going from slightly over 200 PhD graduates per year with CONICET support to almost 900. The number of staff researchers multiplied with the admission of 500 to 600 positions on average per year, compared to the 160 positions created in 2001. Additionally, the agency’s programs that funded postdoctoral residencies for researchers and scholars abroad reopened (CONICET, 2013; Fariás, 2009).
- 11 The milestones of his track record *between* Argentina and France include the studies by Verón with Lévi-Strauss in the 1960s (back in the country, the Argentine thinker played a prominent part in the translation and dissemination of the anthropologist’s work) and his role as local editor of the prestigious journal *Communications* at publishing house Tiempo Contemporáneo in the early 1970s. Verón continued his career in France, where he wrote countless papers and his doctoral thesis for University of Paris (1985), which was published in Spanish with the title *La semiosis social* (1987).
- 12 José Luis Fernández also directs one of the leading semiotic journals of Argentina, *LIS, Letra. Imagen y sonido. Ciudad mediatizada*, which published 16 issues between 2008 and 2016.
- 13 On these topics, see, among others, the doctoral theses of José Garriga Zucal (2007), Verónica Moreira (2010), Malvina Silba (2011), Libertad Borda (2012), Carolina Spataro (2011), and Mercedes Moglia (2011).
- 14 The micro-history work of an Italian tradition has played a key role here and has been an influence not yet mentioned (Ginzburg, 1981, 1989).
- 15 Among others, see the creation of the Master in Cultural Industries and the Program “Cultural Industries and Public Space: Communication and Policy in Argentina,” both in National University of Quilmes.
- 16 Among other examples stands out the transnational volume published by Bolaño, Mastrini and Sierra (2005) and the more recent *Global Media Giants* published in 2016, and the organization in Buenos Aires of the Eighth International Congress of ULEPICC (*Unión Latina de Investigadores en Economía Política de la Información, la Comunicación y la Cultura*), Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, July 2013.
- 17 In December 2001, the crisis of a model of accumulation supported by unrestricted free trade access, the peso–dollar exchange parity sustained in an artificial way, the privatization of public services, and foreign debt became visible. This macroeconomic framework caused high levels of unemployment and job precariousness. As a result of the debt crisis that burst at that time, the bank deposits of individuals were confiscated, triggering a popular protest that forced the resignation of the then president, Fernando de la Rúa, and of other succeeding presidents. The climate of political instability started to clear in 2003, with the victory at the polls of Néstor Kirchner, who took office in May 2003.
- 18 In 2011, the First Meeting on Communication, Gender and Sexualities was held at Universidad Nacional de La Plata.
- 19 In the period under review, several programs and public policies were introduced for the protection and expansion of gender and sexual rights created, and many of them crystalized into fundamental laws, such as the laws on *Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation* (2002), *Integrated Sexual Education* (2006), *Integrated Protection for Preventing, Sanctioning*

and *Eradicating Violence against Women* (2009), *Same-sex Marriage* (2010), *Gender Identity* (2012), *Assisted Reproduction* (2012), *Prevention and Punishment of Human Trafficking and Assistance to “Victims”* (2008, amended in 2012), among others.

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