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# JOURNALISM STUDIES IN ARGENTINA:

## background and questions

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Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo

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**ABSTRACT** - This article summarizes the background of empirical journalism studies in Argentina. In recent publications, researchers have consistently underscored the lack of data on the profession and the scarce development of theoretical frameworks related to journalism studies. The local investigations have prioritized approaches and methods that do not give the whole picture of the population of journalists. Most of the research tends to equate media analysis and media messages with journalism study and keeps on failing to provide data that allows for learning about the working conditions and the professional profile of the Argentinean journalists.

**Keywords:** Journalism. Research. Observatories. Journalism models.

### ESTUDOS SOBRE JORNALISMO NA ARGENTINA: antecedentes e questionamentos

**RESUMO** - Este artigo é um resumo das pesquisas sobre jornalismo na Argentina. Nas recentes publicações os pesquisadores concordam na falta de dados sobre a profissão e o escasso desenvolvimento de marcos teóricos próprios dos estudos de jornalismo. A investigação local deu prioridade a enfoques e métodos que não estudam a profissão jornalística. Há confusão entre a análise da mídia e suas mensagens com o estudo do jornalismo e ainda não temos dados das condições de trabalho e perfil profissional dos jornalistas argentinos.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo. Pesquisa. Observatórios. Modelos de jornalismo.

### ESTUDIOS DE PERIODISMO EN ARGENTINA: antecedentes e interrogantes

**RESUMEN** - Este artículo presenta de forma resumida una revisión de antecedentes de los estudios empíricos de periodismo en Argentina. En las publicaciones de los últimos años los investigadores coincidían en señalar falta de datos de la profesión y el escaso desarrollo de los marcos teóricos afines a los estudios de periodismo. La investigación local priorizó abordajes y métodos que no se ocupan del conjunto de los periodistas. Antes bien, buena parte de la investigación confunde análisis de los medios y los mensajes con el estudio del periodismo y sigue sin brindar datos que permitan conocer las condiciones de trabajo y el perfil profesional de los periodistas argentinos.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo. Investigación. Observatorios. Modelos de periodismo.

## INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF JOURNALISM STUDIES IN ARGENTINA

The current paper is the result of a bibliographic review of information in the journalism studies in Argentina, an initial stage in a research on journalistic culture which called for the design of a sample of journalists (HANITZSCH & MELLADO, 2011). The first obstacle which the research team encountered was the lack of a reliable database with the number of media and of journalists at work in the country. The most recent publications all agree in their identification of gaps and lack of statistical data for the field (AMADO, 2012; ARRUETA, 2010; MARTINI & LUCHESSI, 2004), which, from the very beginning, have been present in the development of journalism studies and investigations. The lack of systematic, reliable statistics on the media system is a common problem in the information and communication industries in Latin America (ALBORNOZ, 2006, P. 80). This obstacle has not been overcome in Argentina, not even in the audiovisual sector which, since 2009, has been under a new regulation that demands that the authorities carry out a census of broadcasting media / TV and radio stations. Besides that, there is the lack of information of the journalists currently at work which has not been addressed by the few surveys available on their working conditions.

Taking into account the studies in the Americas as a whole, a meta-analysis of publications, papers and doctoral theses between 1960 and 2007 identified 191 scientific studies and 231 publications that deal with journalism, journalists' qualification and their working conditions (MELLADO, 2010, P. 131). According to that work, Brazil contributes the most with 34% of the publications, followed by Mexico (21%) and the United States (11%). Venezuela, Chile, Spain and Colombia come next with less than 8%. Argentina is among the countries with less than 3% of the studies, together with Costa Rica and Peru, barely above the group that presents no publication whatsoever made up of Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador, Cuba and Honduras. Since most of these works have been published after the year 2000, it is still unclear what kind of research schools of journalism in the continent have been carrying out in the past century.

According to professor César Arrueta, researchers in Argentina have focused on the cultural approach to media rather than going deeper into the study of the production of news contents, which he describes

as a typical tendency in the exploratory stage and epistemological perspective that the local research is conducted in (cited in AMADO, 2012, p. 118). In the case of Argentina, that meager percentage of papers is due to the late interest evinced by the local academia in the sociology of news production. For the last few decades, the academic production has focused on “the cultural effects of the messages” (ARRUETA, 2006) rather than on the production of these messages.

The preference for the conceptual frames of the critical theory and cultural studies has oriented the research towards the media and the audience, concentrating the efforts on the political economy of the cultural industries and the critical analysis of the discourse (AMADO, 2011, p. 131). One of the few comparative investigations on the conditions of journalism in Latin America attributed the lack of background to the fact that “The media are traditionally analyzed in the perspective of their social meaning and effects, that is to say, the media contents rather than their production (IPYS INSTITUTO PRENSA Y SOCIEDAD, 2004, p. 6)

Martini and Luchessi (2004) also conclude that Argentinean studies of the last three decades of the past century engaged in news and its discursive and ideological analysis, using methodologies based on journalists’ testimonies, history of particular media, enquiries into professionals’ opinions, interviews (literary-anthropological, journalistic) and essays on journalism and its political dimension.

Local academic research on journalism prioritizes qualitative approaches using techniques such as case studies and discourse analysis, which, due to their epistemological scope, only produce partial conclusions. In a context where quantitative studies on journalism have been few and far between (MELLADO, MOREIRA, LAGOS, & HERNÁNDEZ, 2012), there has been no need to ask about dimensioning the profession. Without the demand for sample studies, there was no question about statistical data covering the media and journalistic fields.

At the end of the twentieth century, when the journalistic production in Latin America was still scarce, news studies had been going for many decades in the world at large (MORAGÁS, 2011; WOLF, 1987). In the case of Argentina, Arrueta identifies the turn of the century as the moment in which the discussion on newsmaking theories in the scientific forums began in that country, thereby constituting a paradox: the journalist was object of intense public discussion without any empirical knowledge of the journalists’ working conditions or the newsmaking processes (AMADO, 2012, p. 117)

Except for a few initiatives in journalism quality studies (DE LA

TORRE & TÉRAMO, 2004), there are practically no works that combine content analysis and descriptive data of the journalistic routines which would be necessary to describe journalistic work articulated in the routines and practices of the social system (HALLIN & MANCINI, 2004; HALLIN & PAPATHANASSOPOULOS, 2002; WAISBORD, 2012, 2013a)

Ownership is not the only variable that determines the content of the communication media. Likewise, it is fair to say that it is not possible to study journalism relying only on the analysis of the messages it produces, or the opinion of the journalist about his work. In every case, interviews and content analysis should be analyzed in triangulation with variables that describe the journalism practices and newsroom culture effectively. As a rule, discursive analysis either merely characterizes the editorial line of a particular media, or describes news framing, regardless of the fact that these observations can be related to the different journalistic models (HALLIN & MANCINI, 2004; MELLADO & VAN DALEN, 2013; WAISBORD, 2013a; WEAVER & WILLNAT, 2012)

Given that scenario, the research team systematized empirical studies in the search for data about Argentinean journalism and its working conditions. The main objective was to track the sources that these studies used rather than the results thereof, since the team was not concerned with conclusions of the studies but with the starting point of such investigations, mainly the statistics on which they are based. The initial question was how many journalists there are in Argentina, aiming to design a representative sample. Due to the lack of statistical data, the documentary tracking of the main texts of the last twenty years raised the question of how journalism had been surveyed.

## **1 METHODOLOGY: DOCUMENTARY AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESEARCHES ON JOURNALISM**

This article summarizes the background of the empirical journalism studies in Argentina. As a starting point to determine the local sample of a Worlds of Journalism survey, the team searched earlier polls in order to track the data that those studies had used to measure the population of journalists in Argentina, where official statistics do not exist. This sampling option left out case studies and discourse analysis of the news inasmuch as they present their results as particular to the media analyzed and not representative of the journalistic profession as a whole.

For that purpose, the team carried out Bibliographic revision of national publications, which was guided by the counsel of experts and researchers. Thus a list was elaborated of research which directly took the journalists opinion on specific questions regarding their profession based on some kind of sample survey (AMADO, 2012). The specialists - consulted all agreed on the scarcity of works in that field, even though many of them mentioned the initiative of the media observatories recently started by a group of state universities to analyze media and journalism practices. As a second step, the research carried out within the observatories project was reviewed in order to determine its range and check if it offered any investigation into Argentinean journalism.

Below is a summary of the main contributions of those works to the understanding of Argentinean journalism from the methodological point of view. The evaluating the findings that each of them contributes is not considered at this stage because it exceeds the aim of the exploratory quest that the Project proposed and that this article means to show.

### **1.1 Surveys on Journalism**

From the Bibliographic review, ten investigations on journalistic culture were identified, based on representative methodology (AMADO, 2012). We considered only surveys of journalism practices, which is the reason why some non-sampling researches were not included, e.g. those that dealt with specific questions such as the impact of the technologies in the newsrooms (BOCZKOWSKI, 2010; ROST & LIUZZI, 2012)

The earliest survey that is referred to in journalism bibliography was published in 1996 and is presented as an exploratory survey titled "Self-perception of journalism in Argentina". This had the objective of comparing the interviewed journalists' opinions with those of leaders and the public at large (FRAGA, 1997)

The following year, the Sofres-Ibope consultants and the School of Information Sciences of the Austral University carried out a study of the professional culture of Argentinean journalism (BELIZ & ZULETA PUCEIRO, 1998). Through a structured questionnaire, the investigation asked questions on newsworthiness values, influence factors and credibility of journalism, competitors, institutional image, the use of sources, ethics, working conditions and professional performance.

Around the same time there appeared a piece of research conducted by journalists Luis Majul and Viviana Gorbato, coordinated

by Lila Luchessi, the aim of which was to probe into journalists' opinions (MAJUL & GORBATO, 1999). Journalists in high positions in the main media were polled about press power, journalism identity and ethics.

In 2000, Professors at the School of Communication of the Austral University researched the relationship of the press with the National Congress officers, identifying influence factors and journalists' practices (RUIZ, ALVAREZ TEIJEIRO, ELIZALDE, FERNÁNDEZ PEDEMONTE, & ALCONADA, 2001). In this study different methodologies were applied to a non-probabilistic sample, with techniques that combined quantitative and qualitative aspects: interviews, workshops, self-administered questionnaires, content analysis and participant observation.

In 2003 three journalist surveys appeared using different methodologies and scopes. The study on "Journalism and access to public information" does not strictly fall in the category of a representative methodology, but it does contribute some data on the context and the production of information (SCHMIDT-LIERMANN, ROVERE, & LAVALLE COBO, 2003). A more comprehensive study is that of Peru's Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (Press and Society Institute), focused on newsmaking and journalists' skills in Latin America, based on interviews with main media workers in metropolitan districts. (IPYS INSTITUTO PRENSA Y SOCIEDAD, 2004). Even if the value of this study is the possibility to make a comparison of the working conditions in different countries, the Argentinean sample represented only 40 journalists in a total of 182. The same year, a work based on the participant observation and interviews with 45 journalists of media of Buenos Aires was carried out with the objective of examining journalism access and perceptions of their practices (MARTINI & LUCHESSI, 2004). In 2008 the School of Communications of Austral University, together with a consultant replicated a survey of journalists and press officers conducted in Spain (PIZARRO, MULLER, GHELFI, & MITIDIERI, 2008), with a sample of 174 professionals of the main cities in Argentina.

Among initiatives from the civil society, there are two surveys developed by the Foro de Periodismo Argentino (Fopea, Argentinean Journalism Forum), aiming to determine some parameters pertaining to professional practice in Argentina. The first one was meant to find out journalism influences, ethical principles and education (FORO DE PERIODISMO ARGENTINO & GIACOBBE Y ASOC., 2005). In 2011, there was a second edition of the survey with additional questions like professional motivations, freedom of expression and newsroom conditions (FORO DE

PERIODISMO ARGENTINO & CIO ARGENTINA, 2011). This survey involved 943 individuals, almost three times the number in the first edition, and took up some questions of the previous study, which makes these two surveys the only ones with continuity over time.

These are the main studies developed with a methodology that allows, to some extent, to draw conclusions that might be descriptive of the situation of Argentinean journalists at the moment they were carried out. The survey does not include industry reports and graduation papers that refer to particular cases of media and newsrooms, most of which are unpublished.

The revision of these ten investigations proves that only half of the studies could be considered strictly representative surveys, since the other half takes a minimal sample. Most of the reports are presented as exploratory studies, limiting their conclusions to the case under analysis. This is the reason why they do not make it feasible to draw conclusions about the composition of the journalist population. Only three surveys have considered the media outlets of the entire country, since the great majority included only the media from the capital district, that is to say, the biggest and with the largest circulation. Nevertheless, and for the same obvious reasons, main media journalism in the capital is not comparable to that of the media from small towns.

The list of publications shows an even participation in the studies of academia and the civil society and an equivalent production in the 1990s and the current century. Out of the ten titles, two are presented as publications of a School of Communication (BELIZ & ZULETA PUCEIRO, 1998; PIZARRO ET AL., 2008); and three as works made with the assistance of students (BELIZ & ZULETA PUCEIRO, 1998; MAJUL & GORBATO, 1999; MARTINI & LUCHESSI, 2004). Four were supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and two by Fopea, which attributes most of the contributions to civil society. Most of them were conducted by consultants (BELIZ & ZULETA PUCEIRO, 1998; FORO DE PERIODISMO ARGENTINO & CIO ARGENTINA, 2011; FORO DE PERIODISMO ARGENTINO & GIACOBBE Y ASOC., 2005; FRAGA, 1997; PIZARRO ET AL., 2008; SCHMIDT-LIERMANN ET AL., 2003). These results confirm the initial assumption that in Argentina, the initiative for newsmaking studies did not come from academia, but “has been mainly fostered by companies and civil organizations with an increasing interest in getting to know the internal logics of the media and in establishing contact points with that complex nature of the construction of reality” (ARRUETA, 2006).

## 1.2 Media Observatories

The lack of data about journalism co-exists with a vast production of news analyses, especially the main newspapers, which is singled out as a dominant trend by the local journalism researchers (ARRUETA, BRUNET, & GUZMÁN, 2010; ARRUETA, 2010; MARTINI & LUCHESSI, 2004). Many scholars present these news analyses as equivalent to journalism studies and that is the reason why some specialists may refer to the initiative by a group of state universities as “Red de Observatorios Universitarios de Medios” (Network of University Observatories of Argentinean Media). In keeping with the recommendation and considering that one unit of the network bore the name of “journalism observatory”, their investigations were reviewed to see if they could be included as part of Argentinean journalism studies.

The observatories webpages were revised during April 2013. The published reports are based on the news analysis of a few newspapers, with a *sui generis* methodology which focuses on the editorial perspective of the media. This approach is stated as the objective of the network formed by 2006 as an investigation party of the “behavior of the communication media on a particular issue, in a particular period of time”. The network was made up of five observatories located in state universities, which referred to themselves on the webpage as the suitable space for such an endeavor:

- “Observatorio de Jóvenes, Comunicación y Medios” (Youth, Communication and Media Observatory) of the School of Journalism and Social Communications at the National University of La Plata;
- “Observatorio Universitario de Medios” (University Media Observatory) of the School of Information Sciences of the National University of Córdoba;
- “Observatorio de Periodismo y Derechos Humanos” (Journalism and Human Rights Observatory) of the School of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Cuyo;
- “Observatorio de Medios” (Media Observatory) of the School of Communication Sciences at the National University of Salta;
- “Observatorio de Medios” (Media Observatory) of the School of Social Sciences at the National University of Lomas de Zamora.



These units proposed “joining forces to provide the citizens with tools of information, reflexion and analysis of Argentinean media”. By 2011, they stopped publishing research and the network webpage was inactive by July 2013, as well as the e-mail address associated to it. The blog “Observatorio de Medios de Argentina” (Argentina Media Observatory) makes reference to the works of the network in publications between June 2008 and November 2011. Since mid-2013, the links to complete reports have not been working.

The main production of the network is around a series of twelve reports of the “Presidential Elections 2011 Chapter”, which aimed to “contribute tools of information, reflexion and analysis of Argentinean media”. The summaries available present the research as tracking of news with fortnightly cuts that go from May to October 2011. In each of the periods, different newspapers of capital cities are included, without regularity or justification of the particular sample chosen in each period. The concept “newspapers of media corporativism” appears as a selection criterion, but the category is not defined in such a way that one could conclusively establish what media are included. Neither do they explain the operationalization of variables mentioned such as “discourse of the hegemonic press”, “editorial strategy against the national government”, “corporate media groups oppose the national government and create conditions of social manipulation”. In all the cases, the focus is on the message, without analyzing the journalist role or the newsroom conditions.

From the information available, one can infer that this is all about communication studies in a very broad sense. For instance, the Observatory belonging to the National University of La Plata focuses its work on youth. Out of eleven investigations they refer to, they mention only one investigation as concluded. From the summary of those investigations, it follows that only three of them mention mass media explicitly.

The “Observatorio de Medios y Derechos Humanos” (Journalism and Human Rights Observatory) at the National University of Cuyo presents an objective oriented to the analysis of what they call “the construction of news agendas and the signs of editorial positioning”. This observatory can be accessed through a blog called “Observatory Project”, whose last post dates back to December 13, 2010. The five published investigations deal with analyzing the newspaper coverage of topics related to government policies on Human Rights.

In the case of the “Observatorio Universitario de Medios” (University Media Observatory) at the National University of Córdoba, the last published article dates back to November 11, 2011. On the

webpage of the School of Information Sciences, the “Observatorio de Medios” (Media Observatory) introduces itself as a “product of the new scenario in the Law of Audiovisual Communication Services”. In order to achieve this, it carries out studies which aim to “do, through systematized, responsible analysis, permanent tracking in regional and local mass media”, thus “providing analyses and processed information around the topic and its relation with the communication media”. By July 2013, there was only one report on the coverage of the law analyzed by a state newspaper for less than a month.

The “Observatorio de Medios” (Media Observatory) of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Lomas de Zamora, constituted in the year 2010, does not have a webpage or a separate blog. The Institutional webpage of the School of Social Sciences does not make any mention of it. Only two investigations were found, namely: a report by a student of the School and a publication in a blog of “Proyecto Nacional” (National Project) entitled “The President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, according to Clarín, La Nación and Página 12 newspapers” from October 28 and November 20, 2010, which aimed to determine “the coverage of the presidential figure”. The case of the “Observatorio de Medios” (Media Observatory) at the University of Salta is mentioned within the “Red de Observatorios Universitarios de Medios” (Network of University Observatories of Argentinean Media), it was incorporated into the group in 2010, but it only appears cited in some of the digital spaces that the rest of the observatories share. It does not have an institutional website and no publications of its own have been found.

According to the mentions, there seem to be thirty two studies carried out by the observatories, even though, at the time of the present study, only summaries on the webpages were available. In all the cases, they are studies focused on the messages of fourteen newspapers concerning events which involve the national government exclusively and which take unsystematic periods and samples. The sampling on the “dominant newspapers” is a methodological decision that leaves alternative media aside. As regards the methodology, they mention “a theoretical-methodological model of the editorial intention”, through which “an analysis of the intention and common sense” is intended. In some of the publications, this is presented as “a model for the production and analysis of journalistic contents and processes, from a perspective which is counter-hegemonic and is founded upon categories like Propaganda, Power and Dominance”. The conclusions are analytical-argumentative, without any empirical basis, data on journalists or description of the particular production conditions of the news that is analyzed.

## CONCLUSIONS ON NEWSMAKING STUDIES IN ARGENTINA

These records make up the setting of investigations about journalists in the Argentinean academic context. In many cases, the academic production only approaches journalism tangentially since it prioritizes observation of the media contents over the inquiry of the conditions in which they are produced, without expanding theoretically on the link between these two stages of the process. The scarce studies of empirical basis chose non-probabilistic methods or ethnographic methodologies, far from the scientific rigor inherent to the participant observation suggested by paradigmatic studies in this perspective (GANS, 1979; TUCHMAN, 1978).

In terms of knowledge advances, local researchers have not produced any data that might allow for dimensioning the journalistic population nor have they inquired about the profile of the journalists at work in the country at any given historical moment. The surveys concentrate either on opinions and role perceptions or ethical aspects (AMADO, 2012, pp. 125–135). Several of the abovementioned studies recurrently highlight the lack of data about journalists. At the end of the century Professor Luchessi pointed out that “As in many other fields, there are no surveys of the number of professionals at work in the country” (MAJUL & GORBATO, 1999, p. 199). A decade later, Andrés D’Alessandro, director of the only journalists association in the country, in charge of two of the surveys available, stated that the number of journalists in the provinces is not known accurately. The lack of data in the journalistic field has not probed into this deficiency of information deeply enough. There are not even any demographic data from national censuses, or records of labor conditions, education and income.

In the case of Argentina, there is no record of journalists, be it through licenses, professional associations or unions, which renders it impossible to get to know the number of professionals or the media in which they work. In such conditions, it is not easy to establish a technical basis for reliable field studies. The works surveyed agree in stating that the Argentinean journalism studies are characterized by disinterest in quantitative methodologies, poor development of newsmaking theory, the lack of empirical data and the impossibility to make comprehensive inferences regarding Argentinean journalism. On the other hand, the media observatories pay no attention to journalists since they focus on the content and the editorial line of the newspapers. Their perspective focus does not contribute conclusions about newsmaking process or

the journalistic culture either, since the stress is on the media owners. It is needless to say that journalists and owners are different actors in the news production, and therefore, the conclusions of the former are not necessarily applicable to the latter.

The reporters' performance goes beyond the media frame since they play a role in the chain of production that starts long before in the newsroom, in the sources and in the news agencies and public relations officers. Very little of this has been investigated in the country. The lack of data of the population of journalists in Argentina and the deficient studies of newsroom conditions (SHOEMAKER & REESE, 1996) turn out to be a limitation for other studies, such as the ones that involve the action of public relations or political communication (WAISBORD, 2012). It also hinders the definition of whether it is a profession or a craft (WAISBORD, 2013a)

The complexity of current journalism studies calls for research that articulates scientific methods based on consolidated models. Considering the challenges that journalism research presents, it is irrelevant to continue the debate about qualitative versus quantitative methodologies, in which many Argentinean scholars persist. But it is possible to suppose that disinterest in quantitative research is one of the reasons why we do not, to date, have precise information about local journalism. Likewise, the scarcity of these data implies that we cannot speak about a journalism profile in Argentina but only about partial diagnoses, since very few studies show continuity with the ones that preceded them. All this added to the fact that the basic rules of scientific knowledge, this is, being empirical, verifiable, cumulative and public, are broken. (IGARTUA & HUMANES, 2004, p. 70)

Argentinean journalism has been the core of strong public debates in the last few years, in which categories such as militant journalists as opposed to professional journalists become blurred. The category "dominant journalism", for instance, presents the journalist in an "essentialist way", copying the premise of structuralist and neomarxist approaches which assume "the absolute symmetry between journalism, media and interests" (WAISBORD, 2013b, p. 40). In any case, there persists the confusion between journalism studies with mass media studies or discourse analysis.

On the other hand, there is minimum consensus that this is a profession in constant transformation, highly permeable to factors and actors of the context and less and less clearly comprehensive of the professional performance. Very little has been shown, though, about the way these components interact. What with journalists working as

freelancers, or for several media at a time, or journalism working outside the media, it is more and more difficult to speak about journalism as if it were only one kind, regardless of the plurality of ways. Moonlighting is a factor which, by itself, invalidates any conclusion that is derived from the studies which take the media as the only variable to define journalism. In the meantime, in Argentina, the academic investigation still neglects the question about data that thereby impeding the acquisition of real knowledge of the scope and functions of journalistic work.

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