

FROM JOURNALISM STUDIES TO JOURNALISM THEORIES

Three assumptions to consolidate
journalism as a field of knowledge

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ABSTRACT This paper comprises three parts – 1) recognition of professional practice as a legitimate object of research; 2) development of methodologies that are adjusted to the particularities of the area; and 3) funding of multidisciplinary experiments on applied research. My intention here is to build on the mapping of existing studies to discuss some assumptions and to consolidate journalism as a field of knowledge, based on the distinction between journalism studies and journalism theories.

KEY-WORDS Journalism research, methodologies, multidisciplinary theories.

1 ■ LEGITIMATION OF THE PROFESSION AS AN OBJECT OF INQUIRY

Up till the mid-20th century, an epistemological confusion prevented academic research in the field from being legitimated: describing journalism as an ordinary profession that could exist without either specialized university education or the production of systematic knowledge.

Delegated to the arena of practice, Journalism maintained a marginal status in universities, at least until the end of the 20th century unlike older professions such as Law. First, this was due to its late inclusion in the roll of university programs. Secondly, because it remained as an arena where techniques were taught, which failed to acknowledge a need for the production of new knowledge as a prerequisite for the education of future journalists.

In reality, in order to undo this confusion, which is found in a considerable number of epistemological discussions in the field of communication, we must admit that journalism, like all other professions, plays three distinct roles, depending on the perspective one uses: 1) a

profession; 2) a scientific object of inquiry and 3) a specialized field of education.

As a profession, it should be evident that the practice of journalism requires one to possess specific techniques and knowledge, and that professional journalists must abide by a set of accepted deontological rules both among their peers and the various segments of society.

As a specialized field of education, it should be evident that learning journalism is a systematic activity that goes far beyond the knowledge learned by osmosis in news rooms and depends on the development of specialized methodologies that make it possible for professors to pass on new theories and for future professionals to have a solid technical background.

As a scientific object with a status of its own, it should be clear that journalism makes possible the establishment of a specialized field of knowledge which while having in the journalistic profession a legitimate object, requires the development of its own, specific methodologies in order to be fully understood.

Up to the present moment, research in journalism, whether in Brazil or abroad, has undergone three phases: 1) a historic phase led by individual practitioners from other areas; 2) a phase led by individual professionals from the field of journalism and other areas and 3) networks of researchers conducting multidisciplinary activities, whether with professionals from the field of journalism or from other areas. Over the course of the past 100 years, research in journalism has undergone very different phases.

From the late 19th century, long before one was required to attend a university course in order to enter the profession, to the 1970s, when the first postgraduate programs in communication studies was created, research was dependent on isolated initiatives from talented researchers, without clear concerted action at national level. From the 1970s until the early 1990s, a systematic development period was registered in postgraduate programs, especially in São Paulo, at the University of São Paulo - USP's School of Communication and Arts Studies (ECA), in Rio, at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro - UFRJ's School of Communication Studies - ECO. >From the mid-1990s to the present time, there has been a dissemination of Journalism researchers with post graduate degrees either from a Brazilian university or from a foreign one, in various states in Brazil, many of whom have been absorbed by the new postgraduate programs in communication studies outside the Rio-São Paulo area.

The main research areas developed over the course of time are: *History of Journalism, Theories of Journalism, Discourse Analysis, News Making,*

Reception, Specialized Journalism, Digital Journalism, and Narrative Theories. It should be pointed out that these areas of research in most cases are sub-areas of broader areas of research within the postgraduate programs in communication studies. As formal fields of research, the ones focusing on journalism exist only within two postgraduate programs in communication studies (USP) and at the University of Brasilia (UnB). The sole purpose of the following brief and generic summary is to illustrate our arguments on these fields of research:

1) *History of Journalism*: this is the oldest area of research in Brazil, with isolated pioneering studies by Alfredo de Carvalho, Hélio Vianna and Néelson Werneck Sodré. Core groups at USP, UERJ, Federal Fluminense University - UFF, and the Methodist University of Sao Paulo - UMESP; 2) *Theories of Journalism*: with pioneering works by Barbosa Lima Sobrinho, Carlos Rizzini, Antonio Olinto, Alceu de Amoroso Lima, Danton Jobim, and Luiz Beltrão. At the second stage, special mention should be made about researchers from postgraduate programs such as José Marques de Melo, Muniz Sodré, Nilson Lage, Ciro Marcondes Filho, Cremilda Medina, and Adelmo Genro Filho. Today, the most consistent studies on the *Theories of Journalism* are associated with researchers at USP, the Federal University of Bahia - UFBA, UnB, and the Federal University of Santa Catarina - UFSC; 3) *Discourse analysis*: Pioneering works by Antônio Fausto Neto, first at UnB, then at UFRJ, and currently at the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos - Unisinos. The most significant research work is led by groups at Unisinos, UFRJ, the Catholic University of São Paulo - PUC-SP, the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul - UFRGS, and UFBA; 4) *News Making*: pioneering works can be found at the Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul - PUC-RS; PUC-SP, UFF, UnB, and USP. Today, the main researchers are at PUC-SP, USP, the Federal University of Pernambuco - UFPE, UnB, and UFF; 5) *Reception*: pioneering works at USP and UFRJ. The most substantial groups are at USP, UFRJ, at Unisinos, UFRGS, and at UFBA; 6) *Digital Journalism*: pioneering works by researchers from UFBA and ECA. The most significant groups are currently at UFBA, ECA and UnB; 6) *Narrative Theories*: this research work is becoming increasingly important in the postgraduate programs of UnB and USP, and finally 7) *Specialized Journalism*: pioneering works at ECA and at the Methodist University. The main research groups, especially in scientific and business journalism are at USP, UMESP and PUC-RS. Core research groups can be found at UnB, UFPE and the University of Campinas - Unicamp.

At international level, the main areas of research in journalism are *Theories of Journalism*, with notable researchers in countries such

as Germany, United States, France, Portugal, Spain, England, Italy, Switzerland, and Australia; *News Making*: United States, Canada, England, France, Spain, Portugal, Australia, and Sweden; *History of Journalism*: United States, England, Spain; Italy, France; *Ethics in Journalism*: Germany, United States, Spain, Mexico, the Netherlands, and France; *Discourse Analysis*: United States, the Netherlands, England, Spain, and France; *Narrative Theories*: United States, Spain, and France. *Digital journalism*: United States, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Mexico, and Canada. *Reception*: Denmark, the Netherlands, United States, England, and France. *Sociology of Journalism*: Germany, Canada, United States, England, France, and Italy. *Applied Research*: This is a fledgling area. With core groups in the USA, at the Universities of Kent, with Roger Fidler, of Rutgers, with John Pavlik, who was previously working with the University of Columbia, and the Newsplex Project in South Carolina.

2 ■ DEVELOPMENT OF METHODOLOGIES THAT ARE SUITABLE TO THE AREA

Increased scientific production on journalism is a relevant fact that deserves appreciation from all researchers in this field. It brings a need to identify the specificities of the knowledge derived from these studies. As one can infer from the areas of research described in this paper, most researchers still have an instrumental relationship with the object of inquiry, which is used to test methodologies of other fields of knowledge, without the need to understand the specific nature of the practice of journalism, and interested in answering questions that arise from distinct fields of knowledge.

Under the current status of research activities, researchers in journalism should be aware that, once journalism has been legitimized as a scientific object with a status of its own, the challenge ahead is, as we shall see under this topic, that of encouraging the development of methodologies that are consistent with the perception of journalism as a profession, as a scientific object, or as a specialized field of education. While a researcher from another field investigating journalism can be content with using methodologies from their own disciplines because their inquiries are of a different nature, a researcher desiring to discover the particularities of journalism, whether as a profession or as a specialized field of education, should be primarily concerned with ways to make possible the creation of research or teaching methodologies adapted to the characteristics of journalism.

Once again the lack of academic tradition ends up discouraging any projects of a methodological nature, thus making researchers devoted to journalism consistently dependent on methodologies devised to elucidate very distinct objects with purposes that are very different from those postulated by researchers in journalism. Once and for all, it should be clear that the most consistent theoretical experiences derive somehow from research works, with substantial inputs as methodological models with an approach to journalism as a scientific object with a status of its own.

As a quick stock-taking session, once can mention, among other, the works of Danna, 1895; Park, 1904; 1921; 1954; Lippman, 1920, 1923; Angell, 1922; Barbosa Lima Sobrinho, 1923; Otto Groth, 1928-30, 1948; 1960; Rosten, 1937; Hughes, 1940; Carlos Rizzini, 1945; Breed, 1954; Luiz Beltrão, 1960; Jobim, 1960; Lage, 1979; Marques de Melo, 1972, 1985; Genro Filho, 1987; Marcondes Filho, 1986, 2001; Medina, 1986; Mathien, 1987, 1998; Gomis, 1974, 1991; Meditsch, 1992; 1999; Machado, 1992, 2000, 2003; Cornu, 1994; Bechelloni, 1995; Sorrentino, 1996; Karam, 1997, 2004; Fidler, 1997; Senra, 1998; Chillón, 1999; Pavlik, 2001. The merit of these papers is in the fact that the common purpose of all of them is to unveil the nuances behind each stage in the making of journalistic products. Many papers, like those by Danna, Park, Lippmann, Barbosa Lima Sobrinho, Angell, Rizzini, and Luiz Beltrão are essays in nature. Other papers, like those by Park, Otto Groth, Rosten, Hughes, Breed, Lage, Marques de Melo, Genro Filho, Marcondes Filho, Medina, Mathien, Gomis, Meditsch, Machado, Cornu, Bechelloni, and Karam are the culmination of meticulous research conducted with a view to obtaining academic degrees. The rest of the papers are original contributions of researchers who have a specific degree in the field or are strongly associated to journalism as a profession.

At the present time—based on the different types of research conducted — we argue for a distinction between the so-called journalism studies and journalism theories. Our intention is to make out methodological motivation evident, a motivation that is free from any corporatist prejudices of which we might be accused. In the case of journalism studies, when products and methods are investigated, any researcher, even if they do not master the concepts of the field, can carry out quality research. Many cases illustrate this, including Schudson, 1980; Tuchman, 1978; Van Dijk, 1980; and Gunter, 2002. As a result, knowledge of the particularities of journalism, from the viewpoint of internal demands to improve the profession — a concern that by definition is restricted to

professionals working in the field or holding a specialized degree —, is outside the scope of these works.

More concerned about understanding the historic circumstances of the development of journalism in the United States (Schudson, 1978), the procedures in the news making process (Tuchman, 1978), journalistic discourse (Van Dijk, 1982), and the implications of using digital technology in journalism (Gunter, 2002), none of these examples draws on a type of methodology that could help shed light on the journalistic profession from the viewpoint of professionals working in the field. Schudson uses inputs both from history and sociology; Tuchman borrows procedures both from sociology of knowledge and ethno methodology. Being one of the main supporters of this area of research, Van Dijk works with discourse analysis and, finally, Gunter conducts a compared study of journalism in telematic networks.

All of these papers are of excellent quality and they should be read by any researcher in the field of journalism, but — by a methodological definition and with few exceptions — they can hardly provide any relevant contributions to help elucidate specific aspects of the journalistic profession. Notable researchers — both on the historical reconstruction of the emergence of journalism in the United States and on the comprehension of the production processes in journalism —, Schudson and Tuchman, for instance, fail to provide more plausible answers regarding the functions of objectivity in journalism. From an external perspective, which does not take into consideration the ontological and deontological *raison d'être* of objectivity, Schudson puts it down to the prevailing scientism at that time, while Tuchman considers it as a strategic ritual used by journalists as a self-protection mechanism for potential accusations from sources, providing pseudo-arguments for those who dismiss objectivity as a relevant principle underpinning the journalistic profession, as evidenced in research conducted by Schiller (1980), Machado (1992), Cornu (1994), and Guerra (1998, 2003.).

Dependency on studies based on methodologies associated to other fields of knowledge stimulates unrestrained replication of very similar studies where journalism is considered as an object without, in turn, creating substantive theories to be taught in undergraduate programs in journalism. In the case of Brazil, even if more than one hundred researchers with a degree in journalism were available, except for *Journalism Theories* and *History of Journalism*, a huge shortage of degrees in areas such as *Teaching Methodologies in Journalism*; *Research Methodologies in Journalism*; *Narrative Theories in Journalism*, and *Applied Research in*

Journalism still lingers.

The mapping of particularities of research in the field of journalism with a distinction between journalism studies carried out using methodologies originally from other fields of knowledge and theories of journalism, responsible for the methodological experimentation within this field, represents, from my point of view, the first step in a qualitative leap in journalism research through which journalism can be certified as a scientific object with its own status. Thus achieved, we would be in a position to establish it as a subject with specific objectives and methodologies, a multidisciplinary network for journalism research, as we shall see in the following topic.

3 ■ MULTIDISCIPLINARY EXPERIENCES WITH APPLIED RESEARCH

As all objects of study, the journalistic phenomenon can be subject to inquiries from a wide range of fields of knowledge. The multifaceted nature of these phenomena makes it possible for a single object of study – in this case, journalism as a social practice – to be looked at from different perspectives. What should be clear is that when a researcher sets out to work they wish to understand certain vague aspects which – in the light of specialized education – they find relevant and transcendental in a given time.

By starting from several points, with very distinct questions and using different tools, each researcher will obviously find answers that are different from their peers'. Since no field can fully comprehend a specific object, and individually achieved results are often complimentary, it is strongly recommended that – for the sake of saving time and resources, and in order to accelerate achievement of results – research work be assigned to multidisciplinary teams, who have more motivations in complex as well as contemporary societies.

Multidisciplinary work, as per its own definition, is the result of activities jointly undertaken by experts in several different disciplines. As a field of knowledge in the realm of Applied Social Sciences, one would expect that, with widespread dissemination of digital technologies, journalism were in the forefront of multidisciplinary, cutting-edge experiences for the development of, for instance, remote learning methodologies, multimedia narratives, or decentralized information flow models.

So far considering the nature of journalism research both in Brazil and abroad, we will come to the conclusion that either journalism is inaccurately ranked by the funding agencies, and we should therefore reconsider the epistemological framework used to map areas of knowledge, or the ranking is correct but — as argued in this paper — since it resists from defining its own research methodologies, journalism neither is a field of knowledge nor is it able to generate knowledge that is relevant for the establishment of partnerships with researchers from other fields who wish to understand the same object.

Researchers in journalism have relinquished applied research to a large extent because of an educational tradition that associated a journalist-to-be's education to that of an intellectual belletrist, who specialized in the art of writing, without ever being required to account for the generation of new technologies that made possible the profession possible every historic cycle. A relinquishment that takes such a heavy toll when professions are improved, which are very poorly alluded to in field researches. Educated according to the traditional school of essays, whether the German or the French school, standard researchers in journalism still find it difficult to focus on their own field as they are fascinated by concepts extracted from other realities whose application is often misplaced. And, even more serious than the choice made by individual researchers, journalism, as a scientific field, relinquishes its role as a provider of elements that allow for the comprehension of journalism as an object of research, and fails to contribute to the betterment of journalism as a social practice.

Leaving behind this model that emphasizes imported methodologies does not at any moment imply ignoring the fact that journalism studies are fundamental for making a comprehensive scan of this field. Our intention in this article is to make crystal-clear that overcoming this quandary requires contributions by scholars from those other disciplines. For the dialogue to be fruitful, however, researchers in journalism must be aware that without specific methodologies journalism is highly unlikely to have theories of its own. And, without their own theories, researchers in journalism have the unpleasant task of measuring their own territory with someone else's yardstick.

As a result, at best, they continue to develop studies that, even though not focused on the nature of the profession, are assigned high intellectual value. And, at worst, they neither make it possible to improve the profession nor manage to rescue the discipline from the quagmire into which it finds itself. A feasible solution is the reformulation of both the journalism research and the journalism teaching models, which are by

large the culprits for this schizophrenic model that coexists on one hand with an educational approach that does without systematic research and on the other hand, with research activities that relinquish the creation of methodological matrices.

While one century ago it was acceptable for scientific research in emerging fields to result in isolated actions by individual researchers working alone, as mentioned earlier, today, as science becomes a professionalized arena, academic work calls for the establishment of multidisciplinary networks to study shared objects. The creation of networks brings countless advantages: 1) streamlined human resources processes and infrastructure; 2) synergy among researchers from different backgrounds; and 3) Increases on the results achievement scale

In a multidisciplinary research network focusing on *History of Journalism*, for instance, instead of a broad study such as Schudson's (1978), where the technological matrix ends up being relevant for establishing a narrative model of the inverted pyramid, it would certainly be necessary to ask whether, in addition to this external reason, there are any internal reasons supporting the narrative model used. Without a matching internal component driven by an approach that seeks to elucidate the ultimate motivations of the profession, such as is the case today, because it is not cognizant of the object's internal rationales, a significant portion of the knowledge produced remains in a limbo, and it only answers external questions. Multidisciplinary research allows, in turn, that a diversified and complimentary array of inquiries be made on a single object, and an advantage is that it builds more complex methodological models that are able to cover concerns from the various disciplines.

Encouragement for the creation of multidisciplinary research networks should take into account a healthy reorientation of journalism towards Applied Social Sciences, thus overcoming total dependency on Social and Human Sciences. So far, journalism studies have hardly interacted with the profession because, it must be said, the methodologies imported from related disciplines are not suitable for this purpose. Whether a researcher analyzes products or processes, it is apparent that the purposes of these analyses are external to the field.

As a result, even being situated within the realm of Applied Social Sciences, research in journalism has paradoxically and consistently turned its back on applied experimental research. In an area where the profession is a source of initiatives, whether research or educational initiatives, the consequences are extremely serious. Laboratories in

postgraduate courses or programs, which should act as centers for research of new languages, processes, methodologies, technologies, and applications, when they exist at all, are mere supporting facilities for the work of researchers or professors.

Once multidisciplinary journalism research networks have been created, it would be apt to have researchers from different backgrounds, thus fostering a more systematic interaction with the engineering sciences, which are increasingly closer to journalism. If our objective is going beyond a mere analysis of products and processes, a recurring practice in journalism research, we must consider partnering with researchers in technological areas as something inevitable. In order to achieve cutting-edge results, research in journalism would need to be conducted by multidisciplinary teams in multipurpose laboratories that are able to act as arenas for the invention of methodological matrices both for research and education, and the development of languages, processes, technologies, and applications.

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