Epistemological approach to communication research: meanings of communication, disciplinarity and criteria for building a discipline

Aproximación epistemológica a la investigación en comunicación: significados de comunicación, disciplinariedad y criterios para construir una disciplina

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ABSTRACT
Introduction: In "Ferment in the Field" (1983), 37 years ago, Katz stated that the best thing that had happened to communication research was to stop looking for evidence of the media's ability to change opinions, attitudes and actions in the short term to analyze its role in the configuration of our images of reality. Mattelart (1983) encouraged scholars to study the interaction between audience and media from a noncommercial perspective and Ewen (1983) proposed using oral histories or literary sources. Four decades later, the short-term effects of media continue to be studied, predominating the analysis of their content (Martínez Nicolás and Saperas, 2011, 2016), the type of analysis on which, as it happened thirty years ago (Cáceres and Caffarel, 1992; p. 12), the field seems to support its specificity, suffering the lack of an intellectual institutionalization (Peters, 1986; Lacasa, 2017) which can be filled through a meta-research of ideas that distills perspectives, concepts and methods used in communication research. **Method:** Through the analysis of three reference volumes in meta-research, the volumes of the *Journal of Communication* "Ferment in the Field" (1983) and "The Future of the Field. Between fragmentation and cohesion" (1993), and the volume 1 of *Rethinking Communication* (1989) "Paradigm Issues". **Results:** We will be bringing perspectives regarding the meanings of communication, the disciplinary character of the field of communication research and regarding the requirements needed for turning this field into a discipline. The perspectives and proposals emerge, mainly, from two ways of understanding communication: as product or result and as a relationship.

KEYWORDS: communication theories; communication theory; epistemology; "Ferment in the field"; history of communication research, meta-research in communication; methodology; "The Future of the Field. Between fragmentation and cohesion"; "Paradigm Issues"; research methods.

RESUMEN
Introducción: En "Ferment in the Field" (1983), hace 37 años, Katz planteaba que lo mejor que le había sucedido a la investigación en comunicación era dejar de buscar evidencias de la capacidad de los medios para cambiar opiniones, actitudes y acciones a corto plazo; para analizar su función en la configuración de nuestras imágenes de la realidad. Mattelart (1983) animaba a estudiar la interacción entre audiencias y medios desde una perspectiva no comercial y Ewen (1983) proponía utilizar historias orales o fuentes literarias. Cuatro décadas después, siguen estudiándose los efectos a corto plazo de los medios, predominando el análisis de sus contenidos (Martínez Nicolás y Saperas, 2011, 2016), análisis este, el de los contenidos de los medios, sobre el que, como sucedía hace treinta años (Cáceres y Caffarel, 1992; p. 12), el campo parece sustentar su especificidad, adoleciendo de una institucionalización intelectual (Peters, 1986; Lacasa, 2017) que puede ser colmada mediante una metainvestigación de las ideas que destile perspectivas, conceptos y métodos que se han venido utilizando en la investigación en comunicación. **Método:** Tras analizar tres volúmenes referentes en metainvestigación, los volúmenes del *Journal of Communication* "Ferment in the Field" (1983) y "The Future of the Field. Between fragmentation and cohesion" (1993) y el volumen 1 de *Rethinking Communication* (1989), "Paradigm Issues". **Resultados:** Se aportan perspectivas respecto de maneras de entender la comunicación, respecto del carácter disciplinar del campo y en lo que se refiere a los requisitos necesarios para convertir el campo en disciplina. Las perspectivas y propuestas emergen, principalmente, de dos maneras de entender la comunicación: como producto o resultado y como relación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: epistemología; "*Ferment in the field";* historia de la investigación en comunicación; metainvestigación en comunicación; métodos de investigación; "*Paradigm Issues"*; Teoría de la comunicación; "*The Future of the Field. Between fragmentation and cohesion"*

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1.   **Introduction**
In the practice of social science, it is now possible to use online environments and devices that provide a diversity and a myriad of data but sometimes the importance and usefulness of these data is being omitted, producing a type of scientific literature that can be already generated by robots (Gunkel, 2015). Additionally, in social research, and specifically, in communication research, the use of platforms such as Qualtrics or Mechanical Turk is becoming more frequent. These platforms intend bringing researchers closer to social actors who, on the other side of the screen, react to closed questions and stimuli, participating in experiments intended to demonstrate a phenomenon instead of working as "surprise generators" (Hoagland, 1990), or as "machines to build the future" (Jacob, 1987), in Rheinberger (2011, p. 312).
        While social research is using formulas to approach society by keeping distances (physical, intellectual and emotional) with social actors, thus hindering what Mills (1987, p. 32) considers to be the main political and intellectual task of social scientists, that is, "to clarify the elements of

contemporary disaffection and indifference"; unemployment[1] and inequality rates continue to rise, being multiplied due to the Covid-19.

Communication research can be helpful to society and humanity at different levels as other disciplines are but it seems necessary to critically examine the social implications of our discourse and our vocabulary (Krippendorff, 2017, p. 98) to redefine and/or to further its meaning by broadening its focus, methods and functions.

Meta-research is a line of inquiry devoted to different objectives that is used within different disciplines, being common in sociology, philosophy, psychology, political science or history (Ritzer, 2009, p. 5). Danzinger, in the field of psychology, has been conducting a meta-research aimed at identifying perspectives, ideas and concepts upon which that scientific field has been constructed. This researcher (2003, p. 23) highlights the importance of "psychological objects", concepts that have been shaping the field of psychology, and he points out the need of identifying the ways in which these objects are used and have evolved in the scientific practice if it is the case, as it happened, according to Danzinger, with the concept of "behavior". This type of analysis is labeled by the researcher as "biography of scientific objects".

Concepts are also fundamental in the field of communication research (Gómez-Diago, 2017). In this sense, Corner (1979) stated the need of maintaining the concept of "mass communication", Hackett (1984) warned of using concepts such as "objectivity", Newcomb (1986) highlighted that concepts such as "sender", "message" or "receivers" barely allowed scratching the surface of the changes experienced in society, and Krippendorff (2017) suggests abandon "message content", "power" and "framing" concepts, highlighting that even when there are popular concepts in daily conversations about communication, using them without thinking, limits our ability to recognize what they do, unintentionally imposing restrictions on research questions, and replicating or potentially serving oppressive social institutions.

Being aware of the importance of the concepts (and of their meanings) used in the field of communication research, Hall (1989, p. 47) expresses that the transition from the dominant paradigm to the critical paradigm is motivated by opposite ways of approaching communication. Thus, Hall (1989) asserts that the idea that a particular content could be separated in terms of behavior and that its effects can be measured, must be replaced by a perspective that takes into account the cultural aspects of each element, as well as its semiotic and discursive nature, a perspective that recognizes that media function in and through meaning, understanding that there is no "message" that already exists in reality, a message that a language or other means carry to empty minds and consciences, since the message it is polysemic and is closely linked to context.

In a context in which the need for intellectual institutionalization in the field of communication research is demanded (Peters, 1986; Lacasa 2017), it seems fundamental to deep into how communication is understood. By attaining a clearer definition of "communication" it would be possible to conduct research within this field more independently, without being influenced by other disciplines (Peters, 1986, p. 549). Half a century ago, Nordenstreng (1968, p. 208), referring both to communication research that he had known in his trips to United States and to communication research that he began to notice in Europe, pointed out the existence of a hyper-scientism in the field, a hyper-scientism characterized by a lot of "physical growth" and a plenty of "games to play", but little intellectual growth and few problems to think about, activity that of thinking, that, according to

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[1] According to Eurostat (2019), Spain is the second country in the European Union with the highest unemployment rate (14.1%), with Greece holding the first place (17.3%). This percentage is less than the real one since for its calculation it is used the definition recommended by the International Labor Organization, which recognizes as unemployed those people ranging from 15 to 74 years old who have no job, who are available for working in the next two weeks and who have been actively looking for a job at any time during the past four weeks. Outside the definition of "unemployed" remain therefore persons who, at age fifty or more, stop looking for a job for a month or more, and also those citizens who have given up due to the added difficulty of being replaced with young people who work as fellows without salary, even after graduation.

Nordenstreng (1968) was poorly represented while sophisticated measures were implemented, being the field of communication research focused on using technical means correctly at the cost of losing its conceptual level.

This situation detected by Nordenstreng (1968) half a century ago has been accelerated, being necessary more than ever, to stop and identify perspectives and concepts that have been shaping communication research, to know the scaffolding of past academic discourse for recognizing and redefining possible foundations from which the scientific field of communication research can evolve.

2.   Objectives

It is necessary to construct and/or update the intellectual dimension of communication research in order to generate a perspective that can have greater impact on society. In order to build and shape that intellectual dimension that communication research lacks (Peters, 1986; Lacasa, 2017), it is important to share perspectives and ideas at least about three fundamental issues: 1) the meanings that have been given to communication and that have been motivating communication research; 2) the scientific nature of the field of communication research and 3) the requirements that can turn communication research into a discipline.

This work, situated at the confluence of two lines of inquiry, meta-research in communication and history of communication research, aims at contributing to build, to discuss and to generate around these three fundamental issues within the field of communication.

3.   Methodology and sample

We applied a method designed and used in the context of a broader investigation (Gómez-Diago, 2016), a method based on close reading and distilling volumes specialized in metaresearch in communication, a method that follows the defining processes[2] of the grounded theory practice (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987, in Charmaz, 2006, pp. 5-6), preventing the main problem that, according to Krippendorff (2017) entails using content analysis, that is, carrying what we want to find (categories) to that place where we want to find them.

The strategy used is aimed at conducting a meta-research of ideas that have been giving utterance to communication research. This time we focus on three issues: 1) the meanings of communication; 2) the disciplinary nature (or not) of the field of communication research, and 3) the requirements that the field of communication research should have in order to become a science.

Based on a qualitative content analysis of three reference volumes in the field, specialized in meta-research in communication, the special issues of the *Journal of Communication* "Ferment in the Field" (1983) and "The Future of the Field: Between fragmentation and cohesion" (1993) and the volume 1 of *Rethinking Communication* (1989), "Paradigm Issues"; some of the main ideas regarding the mentioned three fundamental issues in communication research have been distilled: 1) the meanings of communication; 2) the disciplinary nature of communication, and 3) the requirements that the field of communication research must fulfill to be considered a science.

The selection of these publications is motivated on their condition as volumes of reference in the field of communication research, being specialized in meta-research. The editor of "Ferment in the Field", Gerbner, requested the authors to express their views about the state of communication research at that moment (1983), specifically, the editor encouraged them to share their perspectives

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[2] According to Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978 and Strauss, 1987, the defining components of the practice of the grounded theory are: 1) simultaneous participation in data collection and analysis; 2) construction of analytical codes and categories based on data, not from logically deduced preconceived hypotheses; 3) to use the comparative method constantly, which entails making comparisons during each stage of the analysis; 4) to progress in the theory development during each step of the data gathering and analysis; 5) writing notes to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relations between categories and identify gaps, and 6) sampling aimed at the construction of theories, not the representativeness of population.

about their relationship with science, about their relationship with society and about their relationship with politics, as well as the objectives that communication research could undertake."Ferment in the field" is included in different chronologies of communication research such as the one of Baran and Davis (2013) and it is considered by Nordenstreng (2007, p. 212) to be an indispensable volume in the search for a "soul" that leads communication research. Getting the idea of "ferment" from this especial volume of the *Journal of Communication*, Nordenstreng (2004, p. 7), identifies six "ferments" in communication research[3], defined by how the left relates with this scientific field, being the volume "Ferment in the Field" in the second "ferment", a time when the perspectives of leftists were being challenged by the increasing commercialization of media and culture.

The special volume of the *Journal of Communication* "The Future of the Field: Between Fragmentation and Cohesion" (1993) was edited by Levy and Gurevitch and most of the contributions deal with social and political issues of communication research. The editors proposed authors some of the following suggestive statements: 1) the search for a paradigm in the field has been replaced with a comfortable acceptance of a theoretical pluralism; 2) communication research is unable to influence on journalism and on public policies; 3) communication research lacks disciplinary status because it lacks a center of knowledge; 4) The Cold War ended, but ideological and methodological battles are still fragmenting the field; 5) the matter of the effects of media remains in its perennial "black box" state and raises unresolved issues.

Finally, the volume I of *Rethinking Communication*, entitled "Paradigm issues" (1989) was edited by Dervin, Grossberg, O' Keefe, and Wartella and it is formed by five essays signed by Giddens, Hall, Krippendorff, Craig and Rosengren, who identified what they consider to be the problem or problems affecting this scientific field, while providing an image of how they believe communication research must be. In addition to these five essays, the volume comprises twenty five comments requested by the editors to scholars from the field of communication research and from related disciplines, thus representing a wide range of interests, backgrounds, and theoretical and political preferences.

4.   Results
The outcomes are presented in the three categories referred that have been defining and that define communication research: 1) the meanings of communication; 2) the disciplinary nature of communication research, and 3) the criteria/procedures to turn the field of communication into a discipline.

4.1.   Meanings of communication
The authors of the ninety-one essays included in the volumes studied approach communication, mainly, in two ways: 1) as a product or result; and 2) as a relation; and for defining communication they put attention to four issues: 1) how communication is shaped, 2) types of communication that can be identified, 3) functions that communication has and can have, and 4) relation of the field of communication research with other disciplines.

As regards the meanings of communication, Balle and Cappe de Baillon (1983) define social communication by identifying three types of communication[4]; 1) interpersonal communication, guided by customs; 2) organizational communication, which determines and it is determined by

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[3] Nordenstreng (2004) identifies five "ferments" in the field of communication research basing on how the left is placed in the field: in the first ferment (1950s) the left is invisible; in the second ferment (1960s) the left took a defensive stance; in the third ferment (1970) the left is stable; in the fourth ferment (1980) the left is challenged; in the fifth ferment (1990) the left is co-opted, and in the sixth ferment (2000) the scholar asks to himself :"Is the left returning?"

[4] The differentiation of Balle and Cappe de Baillon (1983) is still being used forty years later, but it is possible to take into account other types of communication such as "mass self-directed communication" (Castells, 2009), which refers to communication that is neither interpersonal, nor mass media communication, nor organizational communication.

social, economic and political system; and 3) media communication, placed between interpersonal and organizational communication.

Gerbner (1983), the author of the "Cultivation Theory", points out the necessity of focusing on the function of messages. This researcher considers that the study of communication revolves around the production, the nature and the function of messages in life and in society. According to the scholar, the human capacity for storytelling_ now also a capacity performed by algorithms[5]_, allows humankind to evolve, hence its importance.

Concerning the proposals that approach communication as relation, Steeves (1993) highlights that communication is not only the transmission of messages from A to B, but communication also encompasses the shared and changing meanings created through different types of relations, within different economic, political and cultural contexts. Condit (1989) points out that communication is designed, stressing that communication is a process that builds its distinctive and changing possibilities through the relation produced between its components. For her part, Dervin (1993) defines communication as the place where the micro becomes the macro, the space where the structure and the agent, the object and the individual, hegemony and resistance meet. Dervin understands communication as the axis from which relations are structured, as a bridge between structure and agents, similarly to how Habermas does: as a bridge between systems and "lifeworls" (Gómez-Diago, 2019, p. 5).

According to Braman (1993) communication is the manner whereby the elements of a system participate creatively in it, shaping that system by the interactions among those elements. In a similar line, also considering its generating nature, Krippendorff (1989) understands communication as the interactive construction of realities that include communicators who are part of them and who have created and create durable objects such as language, technology and social institutions. The constructive capacity of communication highlighted by Krippendorff is one of its fundamental dimensions, making essential to develop a perspective capable of approaching how elements and actors shape different communicative relations.

Finally, Schramm (1983) stresses the need of considering communication as a transaction where two parties (sender and receiver) are active. This researcher approaches communication as a relation built around the exchange of information, being communication always part of something, and not only representing the relation between individuals, but also between relations, functioning as the network that unites society and being inclusive rather than exclusive.

Below, we are including a table with the main meanings of communication distilled from the volumes studied.

Table 1. *Main meanings of communication. Communication as a product/communication as a relation. Gómez-Diago, G. (2020).*

Meanings of Communication	
Communication as a product or a result	
Balle and Cappe of Baillon (1983)	Social communication ranges from interpersonal communication to organizational communication, with media communication being in between
Gerbner (1983)	The fundamental issue is the ability to tell stories
Communication as a relation	
Steeves (1993)	Shared and changing meaning created through different types of relations, within particular economic, political and cultural contexts
Condit (1989)	Process that builds its possibilities through the relation between its components

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[5] The possibilities for storytelling have been increased by the development of technologies such as the Narrative Science's natural language generation program which write original stories by collecting content from large data sources. Being online storytelling studied from different perspectives, it becomes necessary to delve into aspects such as the influence of mass media on what users comment on social networks, networks that function as contexts for mass media to disseminate the themes addressed off line while users share and contribute to that online content.

Dervin (1993)	Place in which the micro becomes the macro and the macro becomes the micro
Braman (1993)	Manner in which elements of a system creatively participate on it, shaping that system and its interactions with other systems
Krippendorff (1989)	Interactive construction of realities that include the communicators who are part of them and who have created and create durable objects such as language, technology and social institutions
Schramm (1983)	Relation constructed in the exchange of information through a transaction where the two sides (sender and receiver) are active

Source: Gómez-Diago, G. (2020).

Next we will be bringing some perspectives, regarding the scientific character of communication research.

4.2. Disciplinary nature of communication research

Hall (1989) states that communication is not a discipline, but a regional theory inextricably linked to social theories and he contextualizes communication within a broad social theory. This researcher considers communication as a regional theory linked to the success and to the theoretical effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the general social theories as a whole, being this context where the role of communication in the modern social world has to be theorized.

Newcomb (1993) contends that communication is not a discipline because it lacks a "center of knowledge", provoking that research and training programs deal with very limited aspects of reality and thus generating specializations that barely have any development within themselves.

From a different perspective, Craig (1989, 1993) and Bormann (1989) approach communication as a practical discipline. Craig (1989, 1993) considers communication as a discipline established from a type of critical theory aimed at the evaluation of communicative practices rather than focused on providing causal explanations or historical interpretations. To assess communicative practices, Craig proposes using empirical and hermeneutical methodologies.

In a similar sense, Bormann (1989) understands communication as a practical discipline, being its special theories one of its greatest strengths, since, according to this researcher, a lot of what is done in communication research is related to the study and to the implementation of special theories into the daily communication needs of our societies.

Although researchers such as Herbst (2008) emphasize that for the interdisciplinary character to exist, there must be a discipline first, several authors propose considering the field of communication research as interdisciplinary. In this line, Joch (1989) proposes approaching communication as an interdiscipline to integrate different perspectives such as sociology and oral communication while having into account that the field of communication research contains different traditions. Form a similar approach, Newcomb (1993), Pfau (2008) and Rowland (1993) consider the field of communication research as interdisciplinary and they underline the needed for communication research to be based on knowledge of different epistemologies.

Being aware of the fact that communication research can provide a differentiating perspective, Beniger (1993) proposes considering communication as a means for another purpose; as a method for integrating models and data from many disciplines. In this sense, Beniger (1993) affirms that the field of communication should aim to become what Compte wanted for Sociology, that is, the queen of the social and behavioral sciences, since this field meets one of the essential conditions: communication and information play a fundamental role in the central theories and in the models of all relevant disciplines.

Lang and Lang (1993), in a similar line as Beniger, approache communication as a management science aimed at explaining a set of specific problems while Jensen (1993) highlights the social nature of communication research, highlighting that is a world that we have created, something we do in common and that is constantly redefined by social, cultural and interpretive

practices in which we are involved. Finally, Halloran (1983) considers communication as a multidisciplinary science that needs the support of other sciences.

Next, we are including a table with some perspectives regarding the disciplinary nature of communication research.

Table 2. *Disciplinary nature of communication research. Gómez-Diago, G. (2020).*

Disciplinary nature of communication	
Krippendorff (1989)	Interactive construction of realities
Beniger (1993)	Method to integrate models and data from many disciplines
Lang and Lang (1993)	Management science aimed at explaining a set of specific problems, a perspective that can shed light on issues shared with one or more disciplines
Bormann (1989)	Practical discipline
Craig (1993)	Practical discipline in which critical, interpretative and empirical research, as well as the philosophical reflection and applied work have essential functions
Hall (1989)	Regional theory inextricably linked to social theories, their effectiveness or their ineffectiveness
Joch Robinson (1989); Pfau (2008) and Rowland (1993)	Interdiscipline
Halloran (1983)	Multidisciplinary science that needs the support of other sciences

Source: Gómez-Diago, G. (2020).

As we have seen, there are differences regarding how scholars understand the disciplinary nature of of communication research, being approached as a scientific field to integrate data from other disciplines, as a "practical discipline", as a social theory and or as an interdisciplinary science.

Some authors consider that the field of communication research must meet several criteria to become a scientific discipline. These criteria refer to three dimensions: epistemological, methodological and an institutional.

4.3.   Criteria/procedures to transform the field of communication into a discipline

Despite the fact that O´Keefe (1993) considers that there is little justification to continue seeking a unified theoretical consensus, pointing out that it is better for the field of communication research to promote theoretical and methodological tolerance rather than caring about having a disciplinary cohesion, and even when Miller (1989) states that what is universal may never be successfully addressed by communication academics because the process of human communication can be conceptualized and modeled in many different ways, depending on the objectives of researchers and provoking that what makes a satisfactory explanation and sufficient understanding depends on the functions of a specific line of research; different authors of the articles included in the volumes studied proposed criteria that communication research must fulfill to turn into a scientific discipline. These criteria refer to three dimensions of the scientific field of communication research: an epistemological, an institutional, and a methodological dimension.

From an epistemological dimension, researchers such as Servaes (1989) and Katz (1983) highlight that communication, in order to be developed as a discipline, must incorporate perspectives from other disciplines. In this sense, Servaes (1989) states the necessity of integrating multiple and interdisciplinary perspectives and Katz (1983), in the same line of thought, it highlights the need to practice a multidisciplinarity.

Lang and Lang (1993) point out the necessity for the field of communication research to have its own perspective and they contend that for being a discipline, communication must be approached as something more than a vehicle, it must have ontology, that is, a particular way of examining.

Schramm (1986) maintains that communication is a discipline in the sense that it has

managed to attract thousands of researchers who meet, publish together, hold respectable positions in and outside the academy, and who teach a pretty common and shared body of knowledge; but Schramm highlights the lack of an interrelated theory structure upon which scholars can build and unify their thinking. In this sense, Carter (1989) points out the fundamental value of theory in order to build a discipline of communication, considering that in order to generate a discipline it is necessary to produce a type of theory that allows making formulations on which the scientific practice can be built, invented and interpreted and Jakubowicz (1989) places the responsibility of transforming this field into a discipline in researchers, who must combine fields of study and methodology.

According to Gerbner (1983) to transform the field of communication into a discipline, it must have an intellectual mastery, a body of theories and perspectives that set its subject of study. From an institutional dimension, Gerbner (1983) states the necessity for the existence of organizations and also academic volumes for nurturing their members.

From a methodological perspective, Shepherd (1993) underlies the need for the field of communication research to investigate the ways in which particular manifestations of existence (individuals, societies) are communicationally constructed and Rogers and Chaffee (1983) propose to abandon the perspective that by considering communication as something linear, focuses on its effects, and replace it with models for addressing changes introduced by communication technologies.

Daryl Slack and Allor (1983) propose studying media and the processes of mass communication in relation to other institutions and social processes such as the state, the family and the economic organization[6] and Mancini (1993) refers to the necessity to forge links between communication research and society, highlighting that to turn communication research into a discipline, it must take politics and society into account. In this line, Davis and Jasinsky (1993), considering that the field of communication research is seeking a microscopic reform when a substantial change is needed, claim the necessity for communication research to influence institutions, forcing them to fulfill the needs of citizens. According to the scholars, communication research should suggest ways to transform the existing institutions and manners whereby to identify and promote the development of innovative communication practices intended to generate new rituals, new roles and new institutions. Similarly, Davis and Jasinsky (1993) express that there is plenty of research aimed at improving communication of people and of institutions and that, even if this help people accept institutions and deal with a world that is more and more fragmented, it will neither increase the people´s knowledge about their place in the world nor motivate them to seek creative and innovate solutions to their problems. In this sense, David and Jasinsky (1993) highlight the necessity for communication research to contribute to generating a perspective aimed at analyzing the production and negotiation of meanings within communities, an investigation aimed at social change.

Finally, Rosengren (1993) points out that in order to have a differentiated perspective for communication research, it is needed to consider an interaction between the substantive theory, the formal models and the empirical data, an interaction that, according to this researcher, is often absent in the emerging traditions of communication research.

Below we are including, some of the criteria/procedures that the authors of the volumes analyzed propose to turn the field of communication research into a discipline.

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[6] The proposal of these scholars becomes relevant in a context in which most of research conducted during the past decades is focused on studying media contents (Martínez Nicolás and Saperas, 2011, 2016; Anderson and Middleton, 2015); usually through quantitative content analysis that, as we expressed at the beginning of this article, Krippendorff (2017) advises to abandon.

Table 3. *Criteria/procedures to transform the field of communication into a discipline. Gómez Diago, G. (2020).*

Criteria/procedures to transform the field of communication research into a discipline	
Servaes (1989)	Multiple and interdisciplinary perspectives focusing on dominant views and the alternatives
Schramm (1983)	To create a science of man with other disciplines
Katz (1983)	Multidisciplinarity
Gerbner (1983)	Intellectual mastery, theories and perspectives that identify their subject of study, as well as the existence of professional organizations and volumes that inform, socialize and nurture their members
Carter (1989)	Theory for building, inventing and interpreting practice
Jakubowicz (1989)	To combine fields and methodologies into a coherent differentiated whole
Shepherd (1989)	Focusing on how particular manifestations of existence (individuals, societies) are communicationally constructed
Everett and Chaffee (1983)	To abandon the linear effects perspective and shift towards communication convergence models for approaching interactivity in communication technologies
Daryl Slack and Allor (1983)	To understand processes of mass communication in relation to other social institutions and other social processes, such as the state, the family and the economic organization
Mancini (1983)	To attend political communication and society
Davis and Jasinsky (1993)	To direct communication research to influence institutions
Rosengren (1989)	To forge links between substantive theory, formal models and empirical data

Source: Gómez-Diago, G. (2020).

While some researchers focus on identifying criteria for providing a scientific status to the field, scholars such as Hamelink (1983) and Thayer (1983) claim the necessity for communication research to be liberated from the methods considered as scientific to incorporate other forms of obtaining knowledge more connected to creativity. Hence, Hamelink (1983) proposes using more art to seek the emancipation of communication research. Similarly, Thayer (1983) explains that scientists try to emulate the supposed method of laboratory science, being this an error since laboratory science does not predict anything beyond its control. As Thayer points out, it is impossible to study open systems with methods only suitable for closed systems and this myopia makes most of the research done in the USA irrelevant.

5. Discussions and conclusions

We have brought some distilled perspectives expressed in three specialized volumes in meta-communication research regarding three issues: 1) meanings of communication, 2) disciplinary nature of the field, and 3) criteria to turn the field of communication research into a discipline. As regards the manners to approach communication, the authors of the articles analyzed understand communication mainly as a product or a relation, being this last perspective the most appropriate to conduct research, because approaching communication as a relation entails seeing beyond "communication", and making thus possible to analyze a specific context from a communicative approach. From this perspective, communication is understood as the origin of relationships and, therefore, as generator of institutions, associations or societies. By furthering this approach it has been proposed the idea of considering communication as a context for interaction (Gómez-Diago, 2016, 2017.b, 2018, 2019), a perspective that facilitates addressing communication as a space and as a dependent variable. Thus, to overcome the contradiction that Peters (2008, p. 143) finds in wanting to underpin the specificity of communication research in the fact that it is concerned about something

that triggers as much interest as communication, the field of communication research can help thinking communicationally (Deetz, 2010).

The criteria proposed in the analyzed volumes for turning the field of communication research into a science, refer to three dimensions: an institutional, an epistemological and a methodological dimension. From an epistemological dimension the lack of theoretical works and theories in the field of communication research is highlighted. This continues to happen today as demonstrate studies such as the one carried by Anderson and Middleton (2015) where the authors conclude that in communication research are being used the same theories than fifty years ago, provoking that while technologies experience continuous changes, the perspectives for investigating these changes remain in a state of inertia (Wang, 2011, p. 1458). Perhaps this state of inertia is due to the scarcity of theoretical articles (Martínez Nicolás and Saperas, 2011, 2016; Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011; Bryant and Miron, 2004) and maybe the scarcity of theoretical production occurs due to the imposed necessity of publishing (Haniztsch, 2015, p. 351), a need that seems to motivate the use of quantitative research techniques (Martínez Nicolás and Saperas, 2011; 2016), techniques which were already the most used fifteen years ago (Cooper *et al.,* 1994).

From a methodological dimension, authors suggest that the field of communication research must investigate the ways in which the existence of individuals and societies is communicationally constructed and they encourage to leave the study of linear effects behind to incorporate the use of convergence models that allow studying the interactivity of communication technologies. It is proposed to understand the processes of mass communication in relation to other social institutions such as state, family and the economic organization. Furthermore it is highlighted the need to take into account political communication and society while having as objective to influence institutions.

Taking into account the insufficiency of methods to conduct good investigation, and being aware of the fact that a mechanistically implementation of methods leads to irrelevant results, being a close look and a listening more useful than any other methodological procedure (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1996, p. 15); it is essential to develop methodological proposals for communication research because they will be paths for generating new theories to consolidate this scientific field that can be useful in an increasingly unequal society.

Regarding the need to generate research methodologies that yield different results in communication research, Hamelink (2018, p. 3) continues endorsing the view that, in addition to scientific knowledge, experimental and tacit knowledge from non-scientific sources should be taken seriously, and Martínez Nicolás (2019; p. 13- 14), in the Inaugural Lesson of the 2019-2020 academic year of the Rey Juan Carlos University, encouraged social researchers to "work together with society in the research process, making them participants but now in a generalized and systematic way, so consciously exploring all the possibilities of this social intervention in the planning, execution and exploitation of the results of our research projects".

Including the recipients of communication research in its design and performance, giving them a voice, can generate helpful forms of inquiry to consolidate the field intellectually and socially. In this sense, a relevant issue to address in future investigations is the recipients of communication research. This issue, closely linked to the objectives of research, demand a necessary intellectual discussion for redefining and/or broaden the focus of the field of communication research, field which can be useful for society.

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