

On (missing) links between German, Latin American, and French Mediatization Research: Reflections on Diverse Research Milieus and Their Traditions

Sobre os elos (perdidos) entre as pesquisas em midiatização alemã, latino-americana e francesa. Reflexões sobre os diversos meios de pesquisa e suas tradições

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ABSTRACT

Mediatization research is no European invention, being also rooted in Latin American Cultural Studies and semiotics. Building on an analytical scheme on how to analyze the history of a study field in communication research in terms of its *corpus of ideas and its social corpus*, this article discusses the transnational (dis-)connections in the field of mediatization research regarding a) the Latin American and French roots of this research field and b) by trying to answer why they are still so unknown, at least in German communication studies. Still today, E. Verón, J.-M. Barbero, A. Mattelart, and others are more or less unknown authors in German communication studies.

Keywords: Mediatization research, transnational history of communication studies, Eliseo Verón

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RESUMO

A pesquisa em midiatização não é uma invenção europeia, estando também enraizada nos Estudos Culturais e na semiótica latino-americanos. Com base no esquema analítico de Maria Löblich e da autora sobre como analisar a história de um campo de estudo na pesquisa em comunicação nos termos de seu *corpus de ideias* e seu *corpus social*, este artigo discute as (des)conexões transnacionais no campo da pesquisa em midiatização com relação a) às raízes latino-americanas e francesas desse campo de pesquisa e b) tentando responder por que elas permanecem desconhecidas, pelo menos nos estudos da comunicação na Alemanha. As barreiras de recepção contra as tradições latino-americanas e francesas dominam a tradição da pesquisa alemã.

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MATRIZES



On (missing) links between German, Latin American, and French Mediatization Research

Ainda hoje, E. Verón, J.-M. Barbero, A. Mattelart e outros são autores mais ou menos desconhecidos na pesquisa em comunicação alemã. A semiopragmática de Eliseo Verón e a abordagem da mediação cultural de Jesús Martín-Barbero raramente são consideradas como raízes da pesquisa em midiatização nas publicações alemãs. No entanto, nos últimos anos, observam-se contatos de pesquisa transnacionais promissores nos principais meios de pesquisa em midiatização, iniciadas principalmente por acadêmicos latino-americanos.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa em midiatização, história transnacional dos estudos da comunicação, Eliseo Verón

HOW DID AND do European, German, and Latin-American perspectives in communication studies influence each other? Do they at all? We do not yet know much about this – not least the notion of *European* does not make great sense when we even just take into account the knowledge-gap on the two sides of the river Rhine between German and French Communication Studies, which is huge (Averbeck-Lietz & Cordonnier, 2022) but of course not static. Also, Eastern European Research is not much on the reading agenda of Western and Southern European researchers (Richter et al., 2023). When academics travel (via fellowships, teaching and learning programs, conferences, or project meetings) they have ideas, concepts, methodologies, and so forth in their intellectual “baggage”. And this kind of baggage relates to multiple contexts: “Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another” (Said, 1983, p. 226).

A recent study shows that German communication studies in general and regarding subdomains like journalism, media systems, usages, and/or public opinion research do *not* integrate literature from Latin America in a relevant manner, neither in research nor in teaching (Ganter & Ortega, 2019; Richter et al., 2023). This has to be contextualized with the overall finding that the *theoretical and social body of German Communication studies* is still Euro- and US-centric, with a preference for Western and Northern European orientation: “deeper internationalization” is urgently needed (Richter et al., 2023). In the following, this article is going to look for *reasons* for such international disconnections and is going to present smaller scientific milieus that are developing relations between Latin America and Germany.

For the majority of German communication scholars it is true that they have no personal experience participating in Latin-American research

milieus, French ones, or both. This *both* is crucial: The French *sciences de l'information et de la communication* has been overlapping with Latin American research for more than half a century concerning constellations of actors and a joint scientific production (publications, conferences, projects, and exchange between scientific organizations. Regarding mediatization research, see Ferreira et al., 2019).

Let us go one step back and look at the multilayered perspectives academic study fields are *always* embedded in, especially *the positions of meaning and knowledge in relation to their social grounds* (“*Standortgebundenheit des Denkens*,” Mannheim, 1929), the social, historical, generational, and geographical linkages of scientific knowledge, so to speak. Other (intersectional) perspectives like gender or race are highly relevant (Chakravartty et al., 2018). Revealing the backgrounds of knowledge-production helps us to understand the “position” of scientific knowledge in the critical sense of Karl Mannheim and the sociology of knowledge tradition (Beck, 2023).

The author of this article comes from the tradition of German *Kommunikationswissenschaft* (communication studies) and from the generation of researchers who, in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, studied so called “*Publizistikwissenschaft*” (a difficult to translate term, meaning the study of professional publishing) covering mass communication, political communication, public opinion, media systems, and journalism and applying a kind of research that is closely related to standardized survey methods and quantitative content analysis (Daros, 2019; Koenen & Sanko, 2018). But scholars (like the author) cannot be reduced to the structures of the knowledge fields they were educated in as they practice science in dynamic ways. They are often working within transdisciplinary or transnational environments or milieus intermingling over a certain time span.

The author of this article is well trained in historical communication research, with a strong interest in the history of communication studies (which nowadays has become a kind of exotic field in German communication research as professorships in this field are rare)¹. Additionally, and not common in German communication studies, the author is also trained in French *sciences de l'information et de la communication*. During several research stays over the past 25 years in France and in Switzerland (the German part and the Roman part of the country), the author got more and more aware of the specific Latin American-French inter-/transactions in the field. Of course, the author's perspective is a restricted *etic* perspective with regard to France as well as to Latin America. The author's perspective is *positioned* or placed in the sense of sociology of knowledge. Additionally, of

¹ For the discussion on the ongoing loss of the historical perspective in German communication studies, see the *debate forum* in the *German Yearbook for Communication History* (Bellingradt, 2018).



course the pars pro toto notion Latin America is inadequate for going deeper into the background of *different* countries and/or regions of Latin America (Simonson & Park 2016, p. 321). On inter-transnational influences in Latin America, see Fuentes-Navarro (2016), Gomes (2018) and Daros (2023).

THE GERMAN-FRENCH KNOWLEDGE-GAP IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES OR HOW TO PRODUCE BLIND SPOTS IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The missing European research milieu between German and French communication studies is long-lasting and structural. Individual scholars (like the author of this article) interact, not “schools” or stable milieus (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010; Averbeck-Lietz et al., 2020; Bolz, 2019; Koch, 2004). The German-French gap mainly results from:

a) language barriers and different academic milieus: Still today, French scholars mostly publish in the French language, well understandable in the greater *Romanophonie* in Europe, Latin America, large parts of the African continent, and Canada but not in Germany. Only the “big names” travel via citation milieus and not least those with at least more or less stable, long-term personal networks in the other country: like that one Cologne-based mass media sociologist Alphons Silbermann (1909-2000) in France (Averbeck-Lietz & Cordonnier, 2022, pp. 376-378) and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1916-2010) and her concept of the “spiral of silence,” not least via her “friend” Paul Felix Lazarsfeld and his intense French contacts (Noelle-Neumann, 2001; Schmidt & Petersen, 2022). In the field of communication and media history, Pierre Albert (1930-2018) and his work were introduced to Germany by Munich- and Paris-based Prof. Ursula E. Koch (born 1934) during the 1980s and 1990s. These personal contacts relate mostly to the generation of researchers who were active between the 1960’s and 1990’s. It may be that German-French reconciliation at that time had been more on the agenda, as were a post-war order for European social sciences supported by the US. Lazarsfeld came as an advisor to rebuild French social sciences, co-financed by the Rockefeller Foundation (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010, pp. 197-181). Today, such personal milieu contacts are rare and instable, they lack resources and are difficult to establish bottom-up as well as top-down (also Bolz, 2019). The French and the German academic systems differ in career paths, seldom academics work continuously on both sides of the river Rhine. Some efforts were started top-down via cooperations of the German Society of Communication Scholars (*DGPuK*), the French Society for Communication Research (*SFSIC*), and

the Swiss Society (SGKM), establishing first contacts on the level of doctoral projects. But this seems to be not lasting; the 2019 event was not much attended by German doctoral students, whereas Swiss postgraduates have lesser problems following French presentations². Of course, French and German researchers are both involved in bigger European Research projects based on EU-funding but to my knowledge they do not refer to *mediatization research*. Why then talk here about the German-French experience? Because the French experience is irritating the German experience in the same study field: academic border-crossings to *Latin American communication studies*, which are rarely present in Germany, *are common in France*. As a German scholar, this was new to me when I first experienced it during the late 1990s as a Postdoc at the *Institut Français de Presse* (IFP).

There are dense and long-lasting research milieus between French and Latin American scholars since the exodus of Latin American intellectuals to Paris during Latin American dictatorships (Averbeck-Lietz 2010, pp. 418-420; Fuentes-Navarro, 2020; Zarowsky, 2021), but – as Raúl Fuentes-Navarro (2016, p. 331) and Otávio Daros (2023) have shown – also much earlier, when the *Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina* (CIESPAL), a central organization of Latin American communication research, integrated influences from French and US-scholars financed by the Rockefeller Foundation and, for a while, by the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung to strengthen research in Latin America (Daros, 2023). The German influence was more limited to the level of resources, the French reached much deeper with regard to the corpus of ideas and the methodologies of Latin American Communication Studies in general (Daros, 2023).

So, we can say that *from Germany* we look much deeper into transnational research traditions when we are aware that there are strong Latin American/French-milieus and are also aware of our own close relationships to US-communication research milieus, starting as citation milieus immediately after World War II. They became *dominant* in German communication studies, concerning not least quantitative content analysis (Löblich, 2010). The German-US relationship (also Meyen, 2012) is not comparable to the one between the ‘two’ Americas:

“The relationships between the Latin American research, the European tradition and the scientific production coming from the United States never had been easy” (Scolari 2015, p. 1092). “Next door-giant effects” hinder the visibility of Latin American research: “The accelerating dominance of English has helped render the robust tradition of Latin American

² Of the few German doctoral student presenting at the “Doctorales transfrontalières” (<https://bit.ly/3ueeRyJ>), two came from my then Bremen-based team and two others from German Universities specialized in international media systems and international journalism, such as the Ruhr University of Bochum and the TU Dortmund.



communication scholarship virtually invisible in the US and Europe” (Simonson et al., 2022, p. 11).

To make Spanish writing research, aims, and traditions more visible to the US and international communities, the journal *History in Media Studies* published a bilingual Spanish-English volume in 2022 (<https://bit.ly/3swP7gw>).

b) Political and historical contexts: The German-French gap is embedded into history at large – and the *memory of this history*. In this case, it is more a mismatch of memory. Still today, *there is no common memory of the past* of communication studies in the two neighboring countries.

Regarding a scientific discipline that is increasingly cooperating internationally, it is significant to know what traditions guide colleagues in other countries . . . and what theoretical and methodological emphases are part of the collective memory in different countries. (Scheu, 2023, p. 400)

Andreas Scheu is sketching a need not a status quo. This must be added: even with regard to the history of science, collective memory has to be taken in a much wider sense than with regard to academic knowledge in the narrower sense. If we have a look at the European socio-political environment after 1945: why should French communication scholars (or others) have welcomed German colleagues coming from a research field which had massively been involved into the propaganda apparatus of the Nazi State? (Averbeck-Lietz, 2014; Duchkowitsch et al., 2004; Rüdiger, 2019, pp. 77-96). There were only a few exceptions in terms of *bridging* between France and Germany after World War II: Alphons Silbermann (1909-2000), a mass media scholar at Cologne University at the department of sociology, was a Jewish re-migrant to Germany with strong connections to the School of Bordeaux around Robert Escarpit (1918-2000). Silbermann, quite isolated from the German inner circle of *Publizistik*-Professors, became one of the few German scholars with close contacts to France, including the supervising of dissertations, guest professorships, and the like (Averbeck-Lietz & Cordonnier, 2022, pp. 376-378). Leading founding fathers of the French *sciences de l'information et de la communication* had been active members of the *Résistance* against Germany (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010, p. 28, pp. 181-188). The German occupation of France after 1942 was a political, social, and not least emotional barrier not easy to overcome.

Jan Jírák and Barbara Köpplovà (2017, pp. 248-249) show that the 1940 German founding of the Prague Institute for Newspaper Studies abolished

the established Czech tradition of newspaper research. Of this kind were the experiences with the German Nazi *Zeitungswissenschaft*, which after 1933 grew institutionally while abandoning its intellectual roots. This was not science, it was ideology (Kutsch, 1987, 2010). German communication studies were Nazi-Newspaper Studies, they actively supported the regime. The bodies of science and of politics became one. After World War II, it took years to get out of this and to become a legitimated study field again, first under the label of “*Publizistikwissenschaft*,” then “*Kommunikationswissenschaft*” (Koenen & Sanko, 2018). Regarding the also occupied Netherlands, professors Kurt Baschwitz (1886-1968) and Henk Prakke (1900-1964) were bridging figures who on many occasions brought the German scholars back to international milieus of researchers (Klein, 2006; Vroons, 2005).

After 1945, there was a strong shift toward US-American social science research and a positivist paradigm in Germany. Hanno Hardt (2002) and Maria Löblich (2010) describe this kind of overachievement of German communication studies, resulting in a rigid functionalist and positivist paradigm. Again, that was not true for Silbermann, who had a much broader view on the topic and the field and included interpersonal communication, film studies, and *the mediation of social and cultural meaning* into communication research (Rüdiger, 2019, pp. 140-142). The same is true for Prakke, a sociologist who came from the Netherlands to hold a chair of “*Publizistikwissenschaft*” at the University of Münster (Averbeck-Lietz & Klein, 2019; Rüdiger, 2019, pp. 145-154). But their steps in the direction of *social and cultural communication* did not correspond with the main paradigm of the study field of *publicistics* in Germany, which represented a strong barrier against traditions other than the standardized-positivist paradigm. Hence, the lacking international contacts on the personal level were only one reason for the German isolation, the relatively limited analysis of mass communication processes and political communication, the other one. Nevertheless, regarding the German situation, this choice of a research agenda was understandable: there was a strong interest in political communication and propaganda after National-Socialism, not least for the generation of researchers *after* World War II, to understand the political propaganda their predecessors had been involved in (Hagemann, 1948).

One consequence was the then relatively poor role that critical communication studies in the tradition of the Frankfurt School played in Germany after 1945, which did not fit well into the positivist paradigm (Scheu, 2012)—quite the contrary happened in France and in parts of Latin America, in which the Frankfurt School of Adorno and Horkheimer as far



as to Habermas was influential and mixed up with Latin American Cultural Studies (Gomes, 2018; Lozano, 2016; Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997; Paulino et al., 2019; Rüdiger & Escosteguy, 2016; Zarowsky, 2021).

In Germany, critical lines of communication studies in terms of Cultural Studies were late adopted only late (Schwer, 2005)—during the 1990s and later. This was an urgent step to open German communication studies inter-/transnationally and not least to qualitative research in the Grounded Theory tradition (Krotz, 2019; Lohmeier, 2016; Scheu, 2016). This theoretical and methodological shift was a milestone to open the way for mediatization research as a new non-media-centric concept of thought looking at mediatized everyday worlds (Krotz & Hepp, 2012). This meant not looking anymore at the research object “Publizistik,” namely public communication with a focus on political communication and mass media, but widening the view to every day practices of communication, media uses, and the question of how (post)industrialized societies can be described as mediatized societies on different cultural, technological, and social levels (Birkner, 2023). I would like to say that years before Silbermann and also Pracke were predecessors of such perspectives in Germany, but were not well heard in their times and isolated from the mainstream.

As a consequence, regarding the history of science, we have to take into account the history of its ideas and concepts but also its social, institutional and organizational corpus (Löblich & Scheu, 2011; Scheu, 2023). In Germany, the Mediatized Worlds Project (<https://bit.ly/3FW6Dhc>), initiated, guided, and organized by Friedrich Krotz and funded by the German Research Foundation from 2010 to 2016, was a game changer, inspiring other projects like the Communicative Figurations (<https://bit.ly/3MHgtaE>) initiative by Andres Hepp and Uwe Hasebrink from the Universities of Bremen and Hamburg after 2013, which, in its first phase, was funded by the Bremen University Excellence Initiative. These programs were closely related to British and Northern European milieus of research, again not to France. Nevertheless, the study of the mediatization of society through technologically mediated communication is a general topic that interests researchers in many countries—of course also in France, but that may be more in terms of “*industries culturelles*” (Wilhelm & Thévenin, 2017) and “*la pensée communicationnelle*” (Miège, 2005). The problem of mediatized societies is analyzed in a lot of countries and research communities but from different conceptual, theoretical, and socio-cultural angles and sometimes not always in terms of mediatization but also of *mediation* and the like (Livingstone, 2009). There is no “one” or “unified” mediatization research but many different roots of the study

field, different theoretical and methodological orientations not least while looking at different social fields like “mediatized sports,” “mediatized art,” or “mediatized health” (Lundby, 2014).

Some scholars highlight the gap between an “institutional” and a “social constructivist” line of mediatization research and their different theoretical backgrounds and concepts (Averbeck-Lietz, 2015b; Birkner, 2023). They could learn from each other and are often not so far from each other as it seems. The leading figures of social constructivist thinking, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), wrote about institutionalization processes via social communication. The concept of “the mediated construction of social reality” nowadays reframes the institutional grounds of societies, not least how artificial intelligence and algorithms are *figurating* them (Couldry & Hepp, 2016).

The social constructivist approach overlaps Latin American and German traditions, with regard not least to epistemological cross-overs of (Latin American) Cultural Studies, socio-semiotics, and mediatization research. I will delve deeper into this in the course of this chapter—not without stating again that, concerning mediatization research, my own view or standpoint is limited: I am able to read French and Spanish. This is an advantage but I am not well trained in social semiotics, Latin American Cultural Studies, nor (neo-)Marxist communication research, which, after 1945, was no dominant paradigm in German communication studies (Scheu, 2012), whereas, in Latin America and also partly in France, it was highly influential (Daros, 2023; Gomes 2018; Zarowsky, 2021). Such blind spots have consequences: It is a reduction to read Latin American and French communication research beyond their reception and the debate on (neo-)Marxism not least with regard to hegemony theories of the Gramscian type. But this is not my expertise. Consequently, the focus of this article lies on mediatization concepts in the narrower sense (see below my proposal to read Verón).

A SCHEME FOR ANALYZING THE BODY OF IDEAS AND THE SOCIAL BODY OF MEDIATIZATION RESEARCH

Researchers in the field of the history of knowledge and in the history of communication studies do not only refer to persons, institutions, organizations, and their relation to theory building (sometimes resulting in “schools” like the Palo Alto School or the Chicago School) (Katz et al., 2002), but also relate to looser scientific milieus or networks with their nodes (the core milieu) and their *bridges*. Such bridges (in the sense of network



theory) are persons between different milieus and often between different disciplines like sociology or linguistics and communication studies. We may think of Alphons Silbermann between Germany and France or of Armand Mattelart between Chile, France, and other Latin American Countries (Fuentes-Navarro, 2020). Milieus are flexible and more or less stable over time as they share readings (citation milieus) and/or activities and practices (conferences, projects, summer schools, and the like) that are more or less institutionalized and sometimes financed by third party funds or universities, sometimes existing more in terms of intrinsically motivated academic contacts between a few scholars. Milieus often face lacking resources and little long-term commitment (Averbeck-Lietz et al., 2020), whereas highly organized scientific funded projects are often topically limited and also circumscribed when it comes to time and international staff *recruitment*. They do not per se understand themselves as “milieus” of thought (Volk, 2021). Milieus share some aims and goals (making contact about this or that research problem and/or for intrinsic or strategic reasons). Milieus are needed to build more organized forms and practices of scientific cooperation. The historic seed grains of transnational academic practices were milieus (for the early trans-Atlantic scientific relations via persons and their milieus, see Lerg, 2019).

Milieu factors exist since the 1960s, and the Latin American exodus of social scientists to Paris, including currently well-known founding fathers of “French” communication research like Armand Mattelart and Eliseo Verón (he later returned to Argentina), both of which with high international reputation. Mattelart rather came from a critical political economy perspective (Fuentes-Navarro, 2020) and Verón, from a socio-semiotics perspective (Scolari, 2022). Martín-Barbero, who went from Spain to Colombia, shared the same citation milieu: Cultural Studies, political economy of the media, and socio-semiotics on his way “de los medios a las mediaciones” (Martín-Barbero, 1987), which was a pre-step to think mediatization as a broader concept (for a summary of his writing and teaching, see Gomes, 2018; Scolari, 2015). These Latin American-French lines overlap with Italian ones (around Umberto Eco) and also Portuguese citation and contact milieus (García-Jiménez et al., 2019, pp. 129-132). It was not English who served as the lingua franca: “French was the lingua franca of those scholars” (Scolari & Amat 2018, p. 146).

For a long time, German researchers did not play any role in relation to (Latin) American Cultural Studies. As shown above, the “Publizistik” tradition hindered the reception of Cultural Studies in general, and language barriers for Latin American Cultural Studies contributed to this. These barriers

did not open up until the late 1990s with, among others, influences on the adaptation of Cultural Studies in Germany by Friedrich Krotz, Andreas Hepp, Margreth Lünenborg, Tanja Thomas, and others. Krotz is able to read and speak Spanish and bridge milieus, whereas Hepp refers to English translations not least of Martín-Barbero and García Canclini in his writings on transcultural communication.

The transnational schisms we find in mediatization research are not hazardous. They are grounded on diverse histories of communication research in Latin America and Europe, especially in Germany. Such schisms, but also overlaps between national research-communities, can be better understood with the help of the following scheme:

Table 1

The cognitive and the social corpus of mediatization research. An analytical framework

The cognitive corpus of mediatization research	The social corpus of mediatization research
paradigms, theories, concepts, terminologies	institutions, organizations, milieus (“schools” of thought)
references (citations) across disciplines and (trans)national research input (secondary literature and empirical studies) at a given time	(transnational) scientific citation practices (also exclusions and blind spots); contact milieus and their performances (<i>doing science</i>) over time
type of research problems and objects under analysis (“mediatization as a meta-process” or “applied mediatization” with regard to certain mediatized social fields)	(transnational) cooperation and (mutual) knowledge transfer to identify research objects, to outline concepts and theories and to solve research problems
normative (“critical”) orientations while defining research problems, conceptualizing research, and sketching heuristics and theoretical decisions	normative orientations of scientific institutions, organizations, milieus, and their reflections on their own practices, values, norms, and rules (self-criticism, research ethics including ethics of diversity)
methods (standardized and non-standardized), digital methods as tools for analysis	scholars’ methodological reflections and debates in relation to the epistemology of the field applied research beyond academia

Note. Adapted from the models of Averbeck-Lietz and Löblich (2017, p. 8) and Löblich and Scheu (2011, p. 7).

Both sides of this abstract scheme, the cognitive and the social corpus of a study field, are deeply entangled. One of the inspirations for this



model is the concept of “epistemic communities” by Peter Haas (1992, p. 3), meaning expert “networks” which share competencies, norms, and expertise. But inter-/transnational mediatization research and its expert networks are far ahead of building a “community,” they are diverse and not even always aware of exactly this diversity of the academic fields and traditions. “Mediatization” still seems to be a very unsettled epistemic *project* (see, e.g., the critics of the “Northern” mediatization paradigm in Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, while ignoring any concept from the Global South). Maybe the “theoretical conversations” *across transnational milieus* (Scolari et al., 2021) are a chance to bring forward this epistemic project and its social corpus.

The proposed scheme (figure 1) aims at systematizing the intellectual and social history of media and communication studies, to gain a deeper understanding of why mediatization concepts are *not* the same worldwide, which are the barriers between traditions; and how traditions overlap and travel. The question is how “contextual, cultural, political and economic” dimensions play together on “individual, institutional and socio-cultural levels,” as Raúl Fuentes-Navarro asked nearly 25 years ago, in 1998 (Fuentes-Navarro, 2016, p. 329).

Writing the history of Communication studies relates to questions about the (different) disciplinary origins of the field, more related to semiology and structuralism in France and Latin America than in Germany (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010). Disciplinary roots are relevant for understanding which type of mediatization research we face: *semio-discursive* in France and Latin America (originating from linguistics and semiotics) and *socio-constructivist* (rooted in sociological approaches and communication sociology) in Germany, to follow the distinction of epistemological differences by Chauvel and Olivera (2022, see also Bolz, 2019 on differences in German and French journalism research moving in the same direction).

In a more general manner, while not focusing on mediatization research but on usage research and traditions in public opinion research, this scheme has been applied to research traditions in 15 countries (see Averbeck-Lietz & Löblich, 2017) in cooperation with 24 colleagues from Europe (North, West, South, East), the US, Latin America, and the African continent (including Egypt). These scholars from different countries and continents took into account not least periods of dictatorship in Europe and Latin America as contexts of the institutional, organizational, *and* epistemological paths of the discipline. In nearly all national research communities after 1945 (and especially after 1960) US-communication studies were a counterpart and/or next-door giant (ibid.). In many parts of the world since the 1980s, “Global

English” became common, but not everywhere (France is a strong exception). And the Latin American authors of this collaborative publication (Lozano, 2016; Rüdiger & Escosteguy, 2016) revealed a *Histoire Croisée* not least for reception analysis across South-South milieus.

With regard to mediatization research, it still seems not possible to fill the whole scheme above, and for several national scientific fields under comparison, intense research has still to be done. But some big lines of theory building which reflect milieu factors can be outlined. The scheme above is a condensed abstraction of the arguments outlined in this article, which tries to clarify some epistemological and milieu factors in mediatization research.

THE LINES AND PHASES OF MEDIATIZATION RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICA AND GERMANY

Annette Massmann, in one of the few leading German academic journals of communication studies, “Publizistik” (founded in 1956), highlighted, 20 years ago, Martín-Barbero’s approach of looking at “mediatized cultures” and not any longer exclusively at media (Massmann, 2004, p. 287). Today, Massmann is no longer active as a scientist but her analysis of “Communication Studies in Latin America” still makes for excellent reading – even with only 92 views and three citations over two decades (Massman, 2004). Her early and well-informed notion on the dynamic field of Latin American communication studies remained unheard. Like she does, Pedro Gilberto Gomes (2018) and Carlos Scolari and Juan Rodríguez-Amat (2018) name two key figures who brought forward Latin American (and French) mediatization research:

If the Latin-American cultural turn has a key name—Jesús Martín-Barbero—the spread of structuralism in the Spanish language (not only in Latin America) and the consolidation of French semiology also has a referent: Eliseo Verón. (Scolari & Rodríguez-Amat 2018, pp. 138-139)

Still today, the work of both is seminal for many researchers within the horizon of mediatization theory and research in France (Miège, 2019, p. 48) and Latin America (Fausto Neto, 2019, p. 60; Gomes, 2018). Nonetheless – in terms of citation and contact milieus – their writings are distant from academic work in the Northern hemisphere of communication studies.

A word cloud (see below) of communication and mediatization research, established by Julio Alonso and Alejandro Piscitelli, characterizing the academic reading and citation flow at the University of Buenos Aires, published by Carlos

Scolari (2014), shows that the roots of mediatization research in Argentina and France do not fit well with the German tradition of *Publizistikwissenschaft*. Even Bourdieu was read at a rather late time in German communication studies – from the 1990s onward – and mostly with regard to the concept of habitus and its relevance in communicator and/or uses research (Krämer, 2023). Metz, Eco, Mattelart, Flichy, Martín-Barbero, Cardoso, Steimberg (see word cloud below), and many others are no common references in German communication research. It is interesting that the only German and/or Austrian names documented in this cloud are Heidegger, Freud, Sloterdijk, Elias, Habermas, and some others who are – from a disciplinary viewpoint – not at all “communication scholars” but philosophers, sociologists, or psychologists. Even Habermas is more or less reduced in German *communication studies* to his public sphere theory (Averbeck-Lietz, 2015a; Wessler, 2018). His theory of communicative action plays a bigger role in the subfield of communication ethics in German communication studies, at the crossroads between philosophy and political science (Brosda, 2008; Buchstein, 2023).

Figure 1

A word cloud of Communication and Mediatization Research



Note. Scolari (2014).

This word cloud represents the high relevance of Latin American and French research, which overlaps in citation and ‘real world’-milieus (for more concrete details on the French, Italian and Spanish milieus of Verón, see Cheveigné, 2018; Gómez-Mejia et al., 2018b; and Scolari, 2022; for A. Mattelart’s intellectual journey, Fuentes-Navarro, 2020).

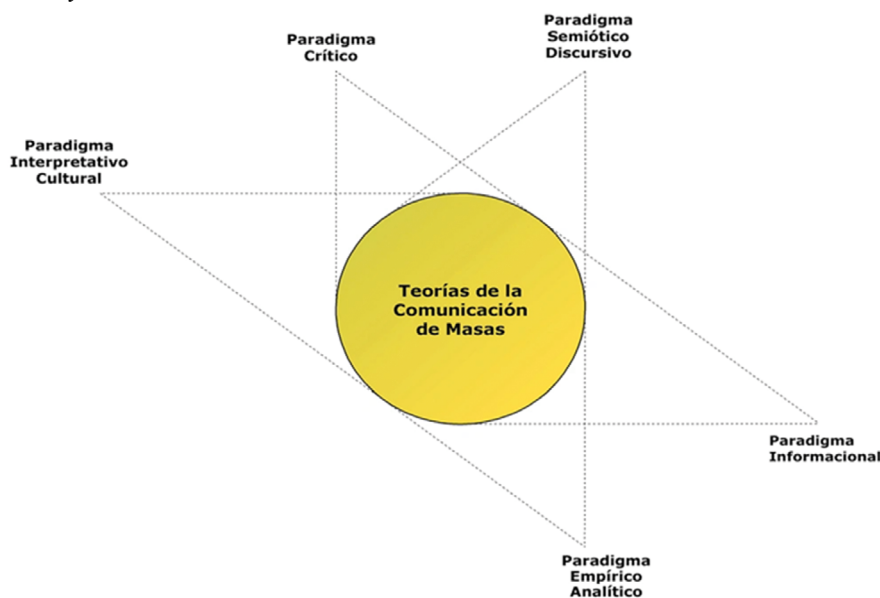
There is another helpful scheme created by Carlos Scolari (2008). The three paradigms in the upper part of his scheme (see below) *do not relate to the roots of German Kommunikationwissenschaft* but to French SIC (see Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997) *and* Latin American Communication Research.

Nevertheless, very early on (during the 1920s and early 1930s), all three paradigms were visible in German Newspaper Studies, inspired to at least some

amount by the *early Frankfurt School*, Max Weber's *comprehensive paradigm*, and the *theories of signs and symbolic representation* stemming from Ferdinand de Saussure and Karl Bühler's writings (Averbeck, 1999; Beck, 2009; Gentzel & Koenen, 2012) – but then these approaches were abandoned and even banned by the ideology of Nazi Newspaper studies. Innovative and promising young scholars from the milieu of Weimar Newspaper studies emigrated to Palestine, Brazil, the US, and other countries after 1933 (Averbeck, 1999, 2001), one of them was Emil (later Emilio) Willems (1905-1997), who graduated at Cologne on a topic concerning the relation of press and public opinion, and after his emigration, became a famous anthropologist in the US and Brazil (Pinto, 2020).

Figure 2

Roots of Latin American Communication and Mediatization Research



Scolari, C. (2008) *Hipermediaciones. Elementos para una teoría de la comunicación digital interactiva*, Gedisa, Barcelona

Note. Scolari (2008, p. 40).

Derived from secondary literature (Fuentes-Navarro, 2016; Massmann, 2004; Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997; Gomes, 2017; Lozano, 2017; Rüdiger & Escosteguy, 2017; Saucedo Añez, 2019; Scolari, 2008; Scolari & Rodríguez-Amat, 2018; Vassallo de Lopez & Romancini, 2016; Zarowsky, 2017) and my own research on French *sciences de l'information et de la communication* and its Latin American influences and cross-overs (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010,



On (missing) links between German, Latin American, and French Mediatization Research

2011), I propose the following overview of lines and phases of research in Latin America and France.

(Common) Latin American and French lines in communication research since the 1970s...

- (Post)structuralism (Barthes, Lévy-Strauss...), (neo)Marxist structuralism (Gramsci, Althusser...);
- Social semiotics, semio-pragmatics (Verón, Boutaud...);
- Latin American Cultural Studies (Martín-Barbero, García Canclini...);
- (Media-)Dispositive theory (Foucault, Baudry...);
- Critical Theory, (Post)Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, Honneth...);
- Qualitative methodologies: Discourse Analysis, Semiology, Visual Analysis;
- Research objects close to every-day culture: popular culture, TV (*Telenovelas*), visual cultures, rural and Indigenous Cultures, Digital Media.

Phases in Latin American Communication Research

- 1950s/60s: Modernization paradigm: Orientation toward US research, like “Communication for development”;
- 1970s/80s: Critical paradigm: Political economy of the media, cultural imperialism;
- 1980s/1990s: Latin American Cultural Studies (“Communication for social change”), (hybrid) media and communication cultures, reception studies, cultural mediation;
- 2000s up to today: Latin American mediatization research, digitalization.

Overall, these lines are more of a political-interventionist understanding of communication studies than in Germany, even if in recent years there has been some change due to the founding of scholarly networks like the *Critical Communication Studies-Network* (“Kritische Kommunikationswissenschaft”) (<https://krikowi.net/>) and the *Cosmopolitan Communication Studies-Network* (“Kosmo Kommunikationswissenschaft”) (<https://bit.ly/47PDGzF>) and their De-Westernization, gender, sustainability, social inequalities topics. The theoretical and methodological directions in German communication studies

(and maybe the normative debates) are now more international and closer to the cultural paradigm and questions of mediatization and mediatized hybrid cultures than in prior decades.

German lines after the late 1990s

- Cultural Studies (British, only partly Latin American Cultural Studies as references in writings by Krotz, Hepp, T. Thomas, Lünenborg, Wimmer, Lohmeier, and others);
- Social and communicative constructivism – based on Berger and Luckmann (1966, re-conceptualized by Knoblauch, Hepp, and others);
- Institutional analysis of media change and “media logics” and their impact on social fields (with reference to Altheide, Hjarvard, Strömbäck by Meyen, Scheu, and others);
- Figurational approach (by reference to Norbert Elias by Hepp, Hasebrink, and others);
- “Mediatization” as a new conceptual approach (by reference to symbolic interactionism and social constructivism outlined by Krotz, Hepp, and others);
- In recent years, Critical Communication Studies (by reference to Fuchs by Sevignani, Krüger, and others), founding of the Critical Communication Network (<https://krikowi.net/>);
- In recent years, Cosmopolitan Communication Studies and De-westernization (by reference to Waisboard, Mellado, and others by Hafez, Grüne, Richter, Fiedler, and others), founding of the Cosmopolitan Communication Studies network (<https://bit.ly/47PDGzF>);
- In recent years, sustainability communication (Schäfer, Kannengießer, and others) becomes more influential in the field;
- mixed methods, in recent years, the rise of digital methods (socio-semiotics *not* crucial!).

NEW CONTACT ZONES BETWEEN LATIN AMERICAN AND GERMAN COMMUNICATION STUDIES IN THE FIELD OF MEDIATIZATION RESEARCH

“There is an evident absence of Latin American research on mediatization in the international literature” (Scolari & Rodríguez-Amat, 2018, p. 132).

Not least by their own initiative to publish a book in English *and* Spanish on “Mediatization(s), Theoretical Conversations between Europe and Latin



America Conversations,” Scolari et al. (2021) bring together diverse intellectual voices from the field in Northern and Southern Europe and Latin America. In fact, the situation is getting better in terms of intellectual travelling (Couldry & Hepp, 2021; Sá Martino, 2019). Former citation milieus start moving and becoming face-to-face milieus. Travelling (in its proper meaning of the word) between two continents is resource-intensive, expensive, and time-consuming not least for junior scholars. Virtual meetings, which have increased since the COVID 19-pandemic, may have fostered connections and the demand for personal meetings.

Especially the publication initiatives by the Brazilian scientific journal **MATRIZes**, which is edited at University of São Paulo, and the Communication study program at Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos), organizing workshops and publications (Ferreira et al., 2019), brought forward the conceptualization of mediatization research and established closer and more stable contacts in mediatization research *across* Latin America and Europe. Other players move in similar directions, like *Centro de Investigaciones en Mediatizaciones* (CIM) in Argentina, compiling, for their 10th anniversary, a special issue with Latin American and European papers by researchers in the field of mediatization (Valdettaro, 2021). It may be supposed to not be coincidental that the CIM home institution, *Universidad Nacional de Rosario*, was the last academic environment in which Eliseo Verón held a professorship after years of having been in France.

A similar initiative represents the invitation of German scholars from the core milieu of mediatization research at the University of Bremen to guest-edit a special issue for a Latin American publication: The Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research (ZeMKI) of the University of Bremen was invited by *DeSignis* to present its work in a special issue (Benz et al., 2022). According to the editors (Chauvel & Olivera, p. 9), one goal was to bring the social-constructivist central European paradigm and the semio-discursive Latin American into debate. This cooperation, initiated by Latin American colleagues, culminated by an event at the ZeMKI in Bremen with Latin American, Spanish, and German scholars in February 2023 and attended, among others, by Escudero Chauvel, Hepp, Krotz, Scolari, and Olivera (<https://bit.ly/40Kb9ZN>).

It is interesting (and up to this day not much discussed) that on this occasion Lucrecia Escudero Chauvel and Guillermo Olivera introduced the aforementioned new distinction between social-constructivist and semio-discursive approaches in mediatization research. In the same sense, Carlos Scolari et al. (2021) highlight that the typical Northern European distinction

between institutionalist and social constructivist approaches *does not make so much sense* for Latin American research because this distinction does not “incorporate well models rooted on semiotic approaches” (Scolari et al., 2021, p. 4).

DeSignis, the online forum of the Latin American Society of Semiotics, was founded in 1999 (currently with Carlos Scolari as a board member and Lucrecia Escudero Chauvel as the editor in charge). The online open access journal addresses the wide range of inter-/transdisciplinary milieus of Latin American language, communication, and media scholars. Its editorial committee often meets in Paris. The only scholar from Germany who is listed as a member of the advisory board is Winfried Nöth (born 1944), a professor emeritus of linguistics. Contrary to the German field of communication studies, semiotics and linguistics are mother-disciplines of communication studies in Romanophone countries. In Germany, semiotics is closer to the discipline of media studies, which is different from that of communication studies (Wagner, 2023).

In most aforementioned edited volumes and special issues, Latin American authors refer to two central authors regarding their relevance for mediatization research: Martín-Barbero, with his conceptual frame “from media to mediation” and Verón, with his semio-pragmatic understanding of mediatized and then datafied societies (Verón, 2013). Verón’s fruitful contribution to the mediatization approach integrates perspectives stemming from (neo)Marxism, (post)structuralism, Peircean semiotics, Mead’s symbolic interactionism, the systemic thinking of the Palo Alto school (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010, pp. 414-446; Scolari, 2022), and, later in his academic path, even from the systemic thinking of Niklas Luhmann (Verón, 2014; Verón & Boutaud, 2007).

THE ARGENTINIAN-FRENCH SCHOLAR ELISEO VERÓN AND HIS INPUT INTO A THEORY OF MEDIATIZATION

“The first stage of human semiosis was . . . the systemic production of stone tools, beginning around two and a half million years” (Verón 2014, p. 164).

Eliseo Verón (1935-2014) is a highly underrepresented Latin American scholar in German communication studies. Verón was a scholar who was active for over half a century on several continents and highly visible in his writing and teaching but he published almost exclusively in French and Spanish. He bridged Latin American and European milieus in France, Italy,



Portugal, and Spain (Chauvel & Olivera, 2018; Gómez-Mejia et al., 2018). The term mediatization got visibility in Verón's writings from the late 1980s onward (Anselmino, 2018, p. 231). Early on, he focused on a crucial point of today's mediatization research:

A careful reading of Verón's work shows that one of his most original contributions to the field of ideas – conceived throughout his life since at least his texts from the 1970s – is his insistence that the emergence of knowledge and forms of knowledge is the result of socio-technological processes and media discursive configurations that are never entirely external to them. (Olivera, 2021, p. 82)

After he passed away, the French journal *Communication & Langages* (special issue ed. by Gómez-Mejia et al., 2018) and the Latin American journals *Estudios* (special issue ed. by Dalmasso & Saur, 2015) and *DeSignis* (special issue ed. by Chauvel et al., 2018) acknowledged his huge contribution to communication and mediatization research. In that same year, the Norwegian scholar Knut Lundby published Verón's (2014) last article, called "Mediatization Theory: A Semio-Anthropological Perspective" for an English-speaking public.

Verón (2014) describes the mediatization approach epistemologically as "a long-term historical perspective" (p. 164). This perspective results from taking into account homo sapiens' general "capability of semiosis" (p. 164). According to Verón, "el primer fenómeno mediático" is the stone artefact with its indexical and iconic functions in the life of homo sapiens. The concept of Semiosis *cannot be reduced* to language and the uses of symbols but corresponds to "una combinatoria específica de orden icónico y del orden indicial" (Verón, 2013, p. 183, in the same sense Verón, 2014, pp. 164-165, Verón 2015).

Verón's approach is not far from German scholar Friedrich Krotz's understanding of mediatization as a "meta-process" (this observation of similarities between Verón's and Krotz's approach is shared by Olivera, 2015, p. 115 and Scolari & Rodríguez-Amat, 2018, pp. 147-148). Krotz and Verón do not refer to each other in their theory building but they share crucial references like George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism (Averbeck-Lietz, 2010, pp. 440-441). Krotz places his own concept of the meta-process of mediatization under the same broad anthropologic horizon, which can be observed in Verón's approach: "Mediatization is beginning when humans use signs beyond of their situational appearance" (Krotz 2012, p. 37).

But the appearance of signs *systematically* produced by human beings is not exclusively grounded in non-verbality and/or verbality via mimicry, gestures, and/or voice but also in material-technical based performances. The materiality of meaning is not external to communication processes but internal: “Verón also says that every manifestation of meaning implies a material manifestation . . . inscribed in a material support or a spatiotemporal configuration of meaning” (Sabich, 2016, p. 3).

Verón develops his theory of mediatization from a standpoint of the history of homo sapiens and its materialized use of signs over time and space. This is crucial for understanding his approach (Olivera, 2015; Traversa, 2018). According to this line of arguing, Verón’s media-historic reference is not Gutenberg’s printing press (like in Hepp & Couldry, 2016). Even the invention of the alphabet is not his point but the *iconicity of the artifacts of labor and hunting in their relation to their indexical qualities*. From the position of the “perception” of an observer, artifacts *externalize social meaning beyond their indexical dimension*: the stone as a weapon or tool has certain functions *and* transports meaning. Artifacts become icons of a particular practice: *The tool makes sense*. Verón speaks of “iconic visual exteriorizations” in relation to “indexical sequences of technical operations of the instrument’s production” and “both processes preceding the appearance of language and qualitative different from it” (Verón 2014, pp. 164-165).

To explain the material background and the spatiotemporal configuration of social communication, Verón takes an example from anthropologist and ethnologist Jack Goody: Inventing the *written* list in the sense of a proto-genre in ancient Egypt alters social processes and social control and brings forth “cognitive processes strongly dissociated from oral communication” (Verón 2014, p. 167). In spoken verbal language, listing in the sense of documenting and cataloging does not make great sense. A written list stores information. Hence, it is organized in time and creates collective *memory*. This thought may be extended as far as search engines on the internet, which operate on 0-1 codes but also need material hardware. People use artifacts as signs and change their symbolic and material life-worlds with them.

In my opinion, Verón’s broad understanding of mediatization represents what Scolari and Amat describe as “general mediatization” (Scolari & Rodríguez-Amat, 2018, p. 147, also Scolari et al., 2021, pp. 4-8) instead of “applied mediatization,” which means the mediatization of social phenomena and institutions in concrete social fields like sports, health, art, or even journalism (Scolari & Rodríguez-Amat, 2018).



Discussing digital communication, Verón (2013) highlights that this type of communication—then again in the sense of general mediatization—is “*non-linear*” (dynamic), “*accumulative*,” and “*radial*” (extensive) (Verón, 2014, pp. 163-165, pp. 169-171). *Accumulative* means more access and more connections over time. The *dynamics* are rooted in the high temporal density of technical innovations. The *radiality* states that *the digital is extensive in all social fields*. The whole process is non-linear, complex, and heterogeneous (Verón, 2014). At the same time, communication processes still relate to the indexical, iconic, and symbolic dimensions of the *human* capacity of social semiosis in production and reception (Verón, 2013, 2014). Taking this human capacity into account, it remains doubtful if Artificial Intelligence (AI) can learn such capacities or can only learn how to *imitate* them. Verón does not tell us much about AI. But what is important: he does not explain digital mediatization as a phenomenon *external* to humans and their social-semiotic interactions. AI (and/or the humans inventing it) is based on the *human* capacity for semiosis. AI-tools like ChatGPT work with word models produced by humans and trained by humans. Technology, materiality, and symbolicity must be considered in relation to each other to understand AI and its role with mediatization processes (see as a further reading Krotz, 2023).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

History [writing the history of disciplines] is a vehicle toward greater collective reflexivity about our own locations, aspirations, and projects within the wider global field. It sheds light on patterns of intellectual hegemony, resistance, and plurality that cut across nations and regions . . . (Simonson & Park, 2016, p. 1)

It has been shown that an analytical concept like “mediatization” with its diverse roots in Northern and Southern traditions concerns the body of ideas of communication studies on the one hand and its social shape via milieus on the other. The history of a discipline serves to define the social and cognitive position of a study field and to *irritate* one’s own disciplinary cognitive and social anchoring. Writing nation- or world region-specific scientific historiographies can be useful (e.g., in Germany to reveal and remember the Nazi past of newspaper studies), but it can also create blind spots and the illusion of linearity and progress contextualized by a taken-too-much-for-granted legitimacy: “*What is written in our textbooks is communication science.*” But what if a large part of research does not

appear and entire research milieus or even communities (not least from the so-called South) are left out of consideration for not being read? (for further reading, see Miike & Yin, 2022). Looking at the *relation Germany–France–Latin America* and its epistemological and social dimensions, this relation represents not a triangle but still a heterogeneous mix of more or less isolated milieus in the sense of *epistemic projects*³ which are not very much noticed either nationally or transnationally.

What can be done now? We have to construct *more stable and more diverse* inter-/transnational research milieus and must not consider this a contradiction. One step can be offered by multilingual calls for papers. The US-Journal *History in Media Studies* has recently published a call in Spanish and English. It is possible to publish bilingual open access issues, as the Brazilian journal **MATRIZes** does. Doing so, citation milieus have a chance to become more dynamic and more inter- or even transnational, with common publications across language milieus and epistemic traditions.

Until now, the initiatives in favor of such cross-overs of milieus often come from Latin American colleagues and institutions like **MATRIZes** and *DeSignis*, seldom from Germany, which is quite isolated from Romanophone communication research in general. But the more we know each other, *read* each other (even if it is via English as a transfer language), and become more integrated into each other in our course syllabi, the less we can ignore “us,” meaning complementary traditions in communication studies. Maybe by way of digital publishing, translations, open access policies (not imaginable when I made my first steps in academia 25 years ago), and colleagues interested in “academic cosmopolitanism” (Badr & Ganter, 2021) and its epistemic richness, we can be optimistic and curious (both intrinsic motivations) regarding future research in the transnational horizon of mediatization and beyond. ■

³The term “epistemic project” originates from our former Bremen team and the discussions with Erik Koenen and Arne L. Gellrich.

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