

# The consolidation of radio and sound media studies in the XXI century – Conceptual keys and research objects<sup>1</sup>

DOI: 10.1590/1809-5844201736

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## **Abstract**

This article synthesizes the results of a cartography of research objects and theoretical perspectives that guided the papers presented at the Radio and Sound Media Research Group, in the national congresses of the Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Studies of Communication (Intercom), from 2001 to 2015. It seeks to characterize the research state-of-art in the field, which shows signs of consolidation after 25 years of the group's creation and moves towards internationalization.

**Keywords:** Communication. Radio. Sound Media. Cartography. Intercom.

## **Introduction**

Brazil has become recognized internationally as one of the countries that produces the most qualified knowledge about sound broadcasting. According to the Spanish researchers Fernández Sande and Gallego Pérez, “in the last years, Brazil is at the forefront of scientific production on radio” (FERNÁNDEZ SANDE; GALLEGO PEREZ, 2016, p.12). It is symptomatic that the first issue of Radio, Sound & Society journal, recently created by the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) radio section, has published the dossier “Latin Radio. Diversity, Innovation and Policies”, containing participation of eight Brazilian researchers signing four of the seven articles.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised and expanded version of paper presented at the XXXIX Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences, held in September 2016 at the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA / USP). The authors are grateful to the Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Research Support in the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) for the support given to the research that resulted in the present work.

According to Oliveira, ex-president of the ECREA Radio Research Section and one of the magazine's editors, this prominence of Brazil owes much to the Research Group (GP – acronym in Portuguese) Radio and Sound Media of the Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Communication Studies (Intercom), which completed 25 years of existence in 2016. In her own words, the GP built “a solid repertoire of bibliographic reference, obligatory for several postgraduate studies and many Portuguese and Spanish authors” (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p.15). This GP inspired the creation, in 2013, of the Working Group on Radio and Sound Media from the Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences (Sopcom), and it is now moving towards internationalization, investing in several projects.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Radio and Sound Media GP, it becomes necessary to review what was produced so far in order to assess to what extent its production really played an important role in consolidating knowledge about radio, music, and sound studies in Brazil. In order to do so, a rich source to proceed an epistemological investigation can be found in the Proceedings of the Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences promoted by Intercom, for it makes possible to identify the state of art in terms of scientific research in the field.

To produce a cartography of the GP's production and to identify trends in it, the Mediation and Radio Interactions Research Group<sup>2</sup> conducted an exploratory survey of the Pro of the Intercom's National Meetings. The delimited corpus of analysis consisted of 570 articles published in the period from 2001 to 2015. This choice is due to the difficulty of physically recovering the papers published before the 1990s, which would represent anyway a considerably smaller sample (totalling 125 articles). The 18 papers submitted between 1991 and 1993 are unavailable, and those published between 1994 and 2000, though available on the Association website, at the section Portcom, are presented in a fragmented way<sup>3</sup>. Hence the decision was to focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> century production.

In doing a cartography of the field, we are affiliating ourselves more to Martín-Barbero's (2002) lyrical sense of the term, of trying to arrange a nocturnal map to guide ourselves and synthesize future surveys, than that used by Deleuze and Guattari (1995). We recognize, as Rosário (2016) puts it, that the uses of the term “cartography” varies considerably among Brazilian Communication Studies, with uses more or less accurate from a theoretical and/or methodological perspective:

Thus, cartography appears as synonymous of mapping, data collection or exploratory research. It seems it is just setting itself up as another term for already existing procedures that make a superficial use of this concept. Other

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<sup>2</sup> This research group is linked to the State University of Rio de Janeiro Postgraduate Program in Communication, listed in the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and led by the first author of this article.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the redesign of the Intercom website in 2016, this section became temporarily unavailable.

authors use it as a compilation of data, that is, a way of presenting the collected information at the end of the work, after a set of methodological procedures development. Finally, there is a group that prefer to use it for a corpus analysis, and there are those who consider convenient to apply it to collect data from human collectives. (ROSÁRIO, 2016, p.178).

In this sense, we built a research structure characteristic of cartography, having as goals the construction of categories and subcategories comprehensive enough as to help in the organization of the empirical work, based on the several epistemic trends in Communication Studies. Subsequently, these categories and subcategories were tested, reassessed and, occasionally, altered and even subdivided as to deal with the new scenarios that emerged from the empirical research.

The 570 papers presented at the GP Radio and Sound Media were analysed from three broad categories: Theoretical Perspectives, Objects of Study, and Methodological Perspectives. The part dedicated to the methodology category was already presented at the National Congress, in 2015, and an expanded version was published in the e-book dedicated to the GP 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (KISCHINHEVSKY et al, 2016). The present article focuses, complementarily, on the results of the Theoretical Perspectives and Objects (themes and subjects) researched in the period.

During the empirical work, we also considered the previous material published about Radio Studies in Brazil (see, among others, HAUSSEN, 2016 and 2004; MOREIRA, 2008; MOREIRA; DEL BIANCO, 1999; PRATA, 2015; PRATA; MUSTAFÁ; PESSOA, 2014; LOPEZ; MUSTAFÁ, 2012). This list includes Doctorate theses, Master's dissertations, papers and books published as well as presentations of research results about radio and sound media studies at congresses in the Communication Studies field.

For the categorization, we initially considered only titles, abstracts and keywords of the articles. However, in many cases, this source of information was not sufficient, so it was necessary to read the full content of those papers. It should also be noted that several texts have been allocated in more than one category and, therefore, the sums generally exceed 100%. In relation to the Theoretical Perspectives, the main epistemic trends in Applied Social Sciences and Humanities areas were previously listed, as well as conceptual keys. We acknowledge that such categories are not taken for granted and that their labelling may be considered controversial and arbitrary. When we talk about semiotics or the political economy of communication, for example, we are talking about a variety of theoretical trends that present a greater or lesser degree of identity among themselves. Each field presents, internally, several strands, linked to theoreticians (Peirce or Greimas in semiotics, for example) or schools, defined only in order to, artificially, construct a certain homogeneity between quite different works. Yet, even at the risk of incurring certain reductions, we argue for the need to build these categories.

After successive adjustments, as a part of the cartographic approach, we arrive at the following listing:

- History / Memory;
- Teaching-Learning / Edu-Communication;
- Political Economy of Communication / Communication Policies;
- Reception Studies;
- Semiotics;
- Discourse Analysis;
- Languages;
- Cyberculture;
- Journalism Studies;
- Community Communication;
- Organizational Communication;
- Genres;
- Mediation / Cultural Studies;
- Mediatization;
- Interactions / Symbolic Interactionism;
- Aesthetics;
- Imaginary;
- Identity;
- Representations;
- Cartography / Panorama / Mapping;
- Orality;
- Culture of Listening / Hearing; and
- Body / Voice Performance.

Some of them have been grouped due to the obvious affinities and interfaces, although they display some diversity among them. History and memory, for example, have already been considered as distinct concepts, but are increasingly recognized as deeply embedded (NORA, 1993; RICOEUR, 2010). In the same vein, we were compelled to gather under the category Teaching-Learning/Edu-Communication papers that vary much from one to another, approaching themes that ranges from radio teaching and learning experiences in Communication undergraduate courses and even works in which there is an effort to bridge an interface between Communication and Education Studies. The same happened with the critical studies affiliated to the Political Economy of Communication, in its several approaches, and with the studies of public policies, regulation of the markets of broadcasting and media economy.

The Objects of Study were listed year by year and, after that, labelled. The relation of labels grew as the survey progressed, requiring a greater delimitation. At the end, the following listing was produced:

- History / Memory of Broadcasters, Programs and Characters;
- Radio-Art;
- Public / Educational Radio;
- Community Radio;
- Local / Regional / Rural Radio;
- Radio Journalism;
- Radio Advertising / Publicity;
- Radio and Politics;
- Radio Theories;
- Radio Market / Management;
- Religious Radio;
- Sports Radio;
- Musical Radio;
- Phonographic Industry / Music;
- Sound Studies;
- Radio Drama / Radio Soap Opera;
- Humour;
- Radio Broadcasting / Practice;
- Media Convergence;
- Web Radio;
- Podcasting;
- Digital Radio;
- Interactivity; and
- Others.

As happened with the Theoretical Perspectives, it was necessary to group some of the subjects (Public and Educational Radio, Local Radio, Regional and/or Rural, for example) as a consequence of the affinity between them, but it was decided to keep some independent labels, such as Web Radio, Podcasting and Digital Radio, although all of them are part of the logic of Media Convergence. It was a necessary manoeuvre as to allow us to capture the variations in interest that each of these subjects presented in form of papers over the years.

## **Theoretical Approaches**

Much in line with Haussen (2004) in her analysis of Radio Studies in the 1990's, we also identified a prevalence of studies in history and memory within the papers we analysed.

These approaches vary in time, but they always remain in high numbers, being in first place with 201 of the 570 papers published in the Research Group Proceedings in the researched period (35% of the total). The major presence was detected in the year 2003, when 22 of the 38 accepted papers (57.9%) were listed in this category. The year with the least presence was 2010, with 11 from 50 papers (22%). It is necessary to underline, however, that 2010 was a year when the GP was about to celebrate its 20th year of activities, then most the papers selected were dedicated to present an overview of radio in Brazil, published later in a book (PRATA, 2011). Ephemerides that inspired collective books organized by the researchers of the GP, as the 50th anniversary of president Getulio Vargas' suicide (BAUMWORCEL, 2004), helped to keep this high level of historical approaches. In 2015, the category compiled 21 papers, 37.5% of the total (56 papers).

This prevalence of history and memory studies happens despite the founding of an association dedicated to media history, the Brazilian Association of Media History Researchers (*Rede Alfredo de Carvalho*, or Alcar), created in June 2001. Between 2003 and 2009, the Alcar Network promoted national meetings annually, but became a biannual event since then, though intertwined by regional editions. Although only in 2011, the Alcar Network started promoting Research Work Groups, including one dedicated to Sound Media History, papers on radio can be found since the first edition of their meetings.

For Ferraretto (2002, p.21), the use of History's theories helps to "offer a contribution, not to establish absolute certainties about radio development [...], but to diminish existent uncertainties". The author sustains that testimonies from the past "can cast some light over sound broadcast in the present times" (p.21). When one looks at the rear-view mirror, with an interest in present themes, it always rises questions of epistemological order.

The systematic presence of papers using history and memory approaches in the GP Radio and Sound Media is a trace of the very history of the field, considered secondary by the academic world due to several aspects<sup>4</sup>. We found that a significant part of the papers analysed are made of mere bibliographical and hemerographic revisions, often undertaken uncritically. The proliferation of online information sources has made research much easier, but at the same time more challenging – when there is the reproduction of unchecked information – and tempting – when institutions and/or individuals are uncritically taken as a kind of "heroes" or "bulwarks" of radio history by a mere moral assessment of the researcher herself or himself.

Writing an academic article about radio does not presuppose telling the history of a station or a radio host, linearly, without historicity, or in a memorialist way

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4 Radio and Sound Media researchers come from radio and/or journalism markets, acquiring degrees later. The radio work is associated with a professional praxis, mostly frowned upon from Communication thinkers, who hold key roles in universities and funding agencies. Only in the current decade, with growing entrances of radio and sound media thinkers in *stricto sensu* post-graduation programs, this prejudice is starting to be neutralized, but there is still a long way ahead in terms of an academic legitimacy for the field.

. A brief history copied and pasted from online sources ever more present and accessible do not bring us more context about the chosen object, nor better qualifies our research. Therefore, we only reproduce what has been written, uncritically, many times by non-academics, contaminated by biased narratives. (KISCHINHEVSKY et al, 2016, p.153).

In second place, after History / Memory comes the category Cartography / Panorama / Mapping (91, or 15.9% - of which 15 were from 2010 only and eight more in 2011, due to the aforementioned book). Thirdly, we identified a levelling between several Theoretical Approaches, with a slight highlight for Languages (71 papers, or 12.5%), Reception Studies (70, or 12.3%) and Teaching-Learning/Edu-Communication (66, or 11.5%). The works about Radio Teaching/Learning Methods and Communication and Education have a balanced distribution through the years. Papers about Languages, on the other hand, are concentrated in 2006. In that year, they represented 44.8% of the total of papers. This may be related to the debates about the limits of radio in relation to digital media (about this, read KISCHINHEVSKY; MODESTO, 2014, among others).

Next are the categories Cyberculture (47, or 8.3%), Culture of Listening / Hearing (41, or 7.2%), Political Economy of Communication / Communication Policies (39, or 6.8%), Aesthetics (36, or 6.3%), Community Communication (35, or 6.1%), Mediations / Cultural Studies, Discourse Analysis (both with 30 papers, or 5.2%), Identity (29, or 5%), Genres (22, or 3.8%), Orality (21, or 3.6%) and Imaginary and Interactions (both with 20, or 3.5%).

Almost all papers (19) that have as conceptual keys the interactional practices between listeners and stations were registered from 2008 onwards. This expressive occurrence may be explained by a surge in interest on symbolic interactionism – a trend most represented by works of Erving Goffman – and its application to Radio Studies.

Finally, the categories identified are Representations (19 papers, or 3.3%), Body / Voice Performance (17, or 2.9%), Mediatization (14, or 2.4%) and Journalism Studies (13, or 2.2%). The approaches linked to Semiotics (7, or 1.2%) and Organizational Communication (5, or 0.8%) are very few. What can justify this absence is the existence of research groups specifically dedicated to Communication Semiotics and Public Relations and Organizational Communication within the Intercom Congress, although this research did not verify those for papers that studied radio, sound or music in the researched period.

## **Themes and objects of analysis**

The choice of the Objects of Study is closely related to the theories used as references, but there are nuances that clearly indicate the strands in radio and sound media research in a continental country like Brazil.

Compatible with what was seen in the Theoretical Perspectives, the greater number of occurrences is of papers that privilege the history of specific radio stations (or that try to recover the memories related to them), programs and/or people related to the history of radio in Brazil (190 articles, one third of the total). The difference in relation to the 201 articles listed in the conceptual keys category is due to a small number of papers dedicated to the historiography of the field, proposals of periodization of the history of radio and the phonographic industry in Brazil and/or theoretical essays.

The second position belongs to papers approaching the radio at local or regional level or what is called “rural radio” (127, or 22.2% of the total). It is no surprise that most of them use the historical method. Following are the articles devoted to Radio Journalism (121, or 21.2%), and papers focused on Media Convergence, in its most diverse aspects (98, or 17.1%).

It is important to note that both Radio Journalism as well as Media Convergence are themes that display an increasingly important presence in the field. In 2015, for instance, both categories had an unprecedented number of papers, featuring in 24 (43% of the total) and 15 (27%) of the 56 approved papers for the GP, respectively. The lowest participation of papers on Radio Journalism had been recorded in 2012, with only three of the 41 presented (7% of the total). In the case of Media Convergence, only in 2002 there was no presentation of articles on the subject. Only 25 (or 20.6%) of the 121 articles on Radio Journalism make use of theoretical contributions related to Journalism Theories, such as the notions of social construction of reality (TRAQUINA, 2005) and newsmaking (WOLF, 2009). It would not necessarily be the duty of the researcher to choose a specific paradigm that drives the objects of study from a theoretical point of view, but considerations on specific questions concerning routines of news production, circulation and reception could be worked out in a more coherent way if the nature of the bibliography converges with its objects.

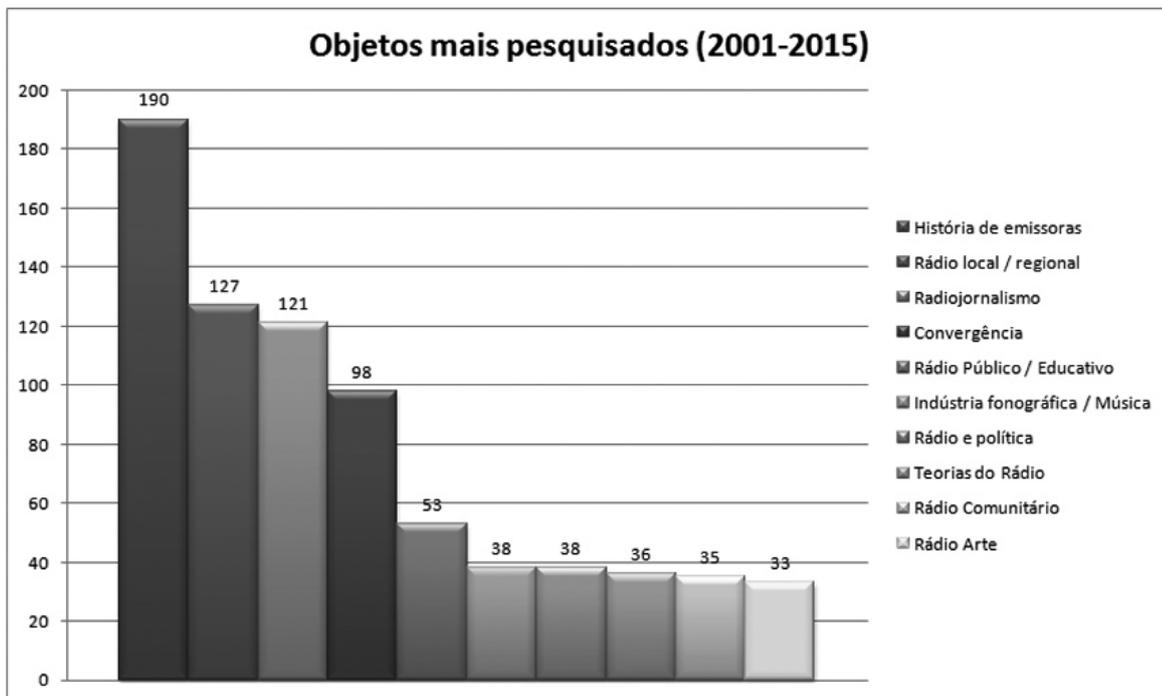
In the fifth place, after Radio Journalism and Media Convergence, are the papers that focus on public and/or educational radio (53, or 9.2%). These include discussions on the use of radio within the school, media education and radio programs aimed at children and youths; the relationship between radio and politics (38 papers, or 6.6%, although with a clear decline after 2004, when a record of 10 articles on the subject was presented); Phonographic Industry / Music (38, or 6.6%); Radio Theories (36, or 6.3%); Community Radio (35, or 6.1%); Radio-Art (33, or 5.7%); Sound Studies (26, or 4.5%); and Musical Radio (24, or 4.2%).

It is also remarkable the steady growth of papers dedicated to music and/or the music industry. It is worth noting that, until 2013, the Radio and Sound Media Research Group was the single space in the Intercom Congress that would accept articles related to these themes. However, from 2013 onwards, with the creation of the of the Communication, Music and Entertainment Research Group, it would be logical to assume that the number of papers

dedicated on music and/or recording industry would decline systematically ever since. This GP brought together 17 work presentations that year, which rose to 26 the following year and to 44 in 2015 – an unmistakable sign of a repressed demand, especially in relation to research related to musical genres, media consumption and aesthetic discussions.

The data analysis indicates that the presentation of works dedicated to such topics in the Radio and Sound Media GP maintained a certain regularity throughout the period (2001-2015). Only in 2003 there was no record of articles related to the subject. The greatest presence was recorded in 2007, when one sixth of the works (five of the 30 presented) addressed these themes. A possible explanation for the persistence of music and the music industry themes in the Radio and Sound Media GP is that there is an opening room for topics such as: a) copyright; b) criteria for the formulation of programming grids for musical stations; c) distribution and circulation of phonograms, in articulation with radio and other digital platforms, such as streaming services; among others. The result of the survey points to a complementarity between those GPs, but only time will tell how this participation will evolve. The graph below displays the ten most researched objects within the period of this study.

**Graph 1** – Graphic representation of the ten most researched objects in the articles of the GP Radio and Sound Media of Intercom between 2001 and 2015.



Source: Elaborated by the Research Group Radio Mediations and Interactions.

Complementing the analysis, it is important to note that certain objects display the variation of researchers' interest over the years, with a significant oscillation. Media Convergence, for example, is the subject of 98 articles (17.1% of the total). But if we look only at the years 2011 to 2015, we will find that the period has 60 of these articles, that is 61.2% of the total classified in this category. Interactivity, in turn, is the focus of 21 articles, or 3.68% of the total, of which 18 were presented from 2009 onwards.

Podcasting is a subject approached in 16 papers (3.15%) from 2005 – the year in which this radio modality begins to be discussed in the academy – until 2008, when it falls into oblivion, being resumed as a subject only in 2012 – coinciding with the emergence of new on-demand radio business models.

Another category that shows strong oscillation is that of Digital Radio, object of 18 papers (3.68%). The peak period of interest occurs between 2006 and 2007, when ten papers discuss the theme, that is, 55.5% of the total works in this category. The climax occurred amid discussions about which standard to be adopted in Brazil – a political decision that was postponed indefinitely after public positioning of the GP Radio and Sound Media in favour of some basic criteria for the choice, as free access, non-proprietary technology (free of royalties) and integration with other digital media.

It deserves attention the relatively low number of works on Radio Advertising / Publicity, Radio Drama / Radio Soap Opera, Web Radio (these three categories have 19 records each, slightly more than 3% of the total between 2001 and 2015), Radio Market / Management with 17 each (or 2.9%) and Sports Radio, with 16 registers (2.8%). The papers on Sports Radio are concentrated in the year 2012, when a collection of papers was published by members of the GP about the relation between radio and the Soccer World Cups between 1938 and 2010 (RANGEL; GUERRA, 2012) – 6 out of the 16 total articles, or 37.5% of the category amount. Finally, among the less discussed themes, there is Radio Broadcasting / Practice, with 14 papers (2.45%), Radio and Religion, with ten (1.75%) and Humour, with only five (0.87%).

The panorama of broadcasters in Brazilian capitals (PRATA, 2011) confirms the importance of religious content in radio programs all across the country. In Rio de Janeiro alone, for example, 17 of the 44 stations researched at the time of the survey had direct links with religious denominations, mostly Neo-Pentecostal (more than 80% of the total). One of the few papers on radio and religion (PRATA; LOPEZ; CAMPELO, 2014) is precisely a mapping that estimates at 40% the stations with religious programming throughout the country, a clear sign that the segment is far from receiving proper attention in the academy.

The same is true for Sports Radio, considering the heavy presence of football on almost daily basis and the revenue generated by advertising. It is true that there is no updated

data on the role of football on radio, but a survey<sup>5</sup> conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Economics of the Getulio Vargas Foundation (Ibre / FGV), commissioned by the Brazilian Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (Abert), covering 917 radio stations throughout the country, showed that, in 2008, sports represented 9.3% of the programming of broadcasters in medium wave, only behind variety programs (24.2%), Brazilian music (21.1%), journalism (17.5%) and religious attractions (14.4%). Nevertheless, there are practically no academic papers that seek to identify the importance of the segment in broadcasting and its specificities in terms of language, productive routines and establishment of bonds with the audience.

Finally, it is equally surprising the low number of papers dedicated to advertising on radio (one to two per year), considering the existence of 445 undergraduate courses on advertising in Brazil<sup>6</sup>. Nor can it be said that the papers on this subject were submitted to Intercom's GP Advertising and Propaganda: between 2004 and 2013, it only received three articles featuring "radio" as keywords (COVALESKI, 2014). A search in the proceedings of this GP, referring to 2014 and 2015, made specifically for this article, does not reveal any paper dedicated to radio advertising. Clearly, there is a vicious circle, in which advertising production based on sound does not generate reflections and, consequently, has its potential ignored by the academy. It is even possible that we are facing a symptom of the acute shortage of professors with professional experience in the production of musical spots, jingles and other radio advertising, due to the great attention of the market on TV advertising and, more recently, the internet.

The same can be said in relation to Radio Broadcasting / Practice, object of very few reflections. If we were to exclude the four papers presented in 2015 that addressed the pioneer work of the Brazilian researcher Zita de Andrade Lima (which were then systematized in a collection – MELO; PRATA, 2015), then we would have only ten articles on the subject presented along 15 years. The undergraduate courses in Radio, Radio and TV or Radio, TV and Internet in Brazil total 40, but these courses are at a defining moment, whose fate hinges on the discussion about the new curricular guidelines<sup>7</sup>.

## Concluding remarks

From the empirical research, we can draw some comments on the interests of hundreds of researchers, what helps to trace a clearer profile of the field.

On the one hand, we can identify the improvement in quality of the material presented in the GP Radio and Sound Media, what can be explained by the growing participation of

5 | Analysis of the social-economic profile of the radio broadcasting sector in Brazil, of the Portuguese *Análise do perfil sócio-econômico do setor de radiodifusão no Brasil*. September 23<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Ibre/FGV.

6 | According to data from the Ministry of Education, available on: <<http://emec.mec.gov.br/>>. Accessed on: July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

7 | According to data from the Ministry of Education, available on: <<http://emec.mec.gov.br/>>. Accessed on: July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

PhDs that work in Postgraduate Programs Communication Studies and correlated areas (about 20, according to an internal survey of the group) as well as masters that work in undergraduate courses in private universities from every region of the country. An evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the high number of papers presented by researchers in training.

In 2001, only two papers (10%) were admittedly derived from Master's dissertations, and there was a predominance of articles written by authors without any informed titles<sup>8</sup>. In 2015, however, seven Doctorate students and 18 Master's students presented a total of 23 works (the equivalent of 41%) from the 56 papers selected by the GP. Many were co-signed with their supervisors, researchers affiliated to the GP for many years – a sign of maturity of the field (KISCHINHEVSKY et al, 2016).

However, there are huge challenges for the future, in relation to the quality of researches in Radio and Sound Media. In privileging the historical and memorial approaches to deal with local personalities, shows and/or radio stations, the field loses touch with contemporary key questions, such as regulation (AM to FM migration, frequency concession policies, legal legislation), market reconfiguration (growth of major networks over local stations, low capacity for management and innovation in languages and formats, competition with new players like streaming services, deregulation and job insecurity) and the limited diversity of voices (from feminist groups, afro-descendants organizations, LGBTQ community and other minorities, effective audience participation).

Nevertheless, we understand that major advancements have been made in recent years, enabling the consolidation of Radio and Sound Studies in Brazil. This movement already resulted in the international recognition for the GP. It remains a necessary effort to intensify the research endeavors at this very critical moment to radio and the sound media in general. We should contribute to the understanding of new challenges not only through reflections based on theoretical considerations, but also through the construction of a collective knowledge that can help to inform public policies and so, secure the continuation of the life of one of the most relevant media channels for the Brazilian society. A medium through which we listen the sounds of the city, the country and the world, and in which is imperative that we make ourselves heard.

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<sup>8</sup> Data about awarded degrees were not explicit in general because there was not a template document that consider this information as a relevant aspect to record. Historically, the Intercom Congress is an inclusive event, open to the presentation of papers from undergraduate students and specialists. Yet, with the consolidation of the GP Radio and Sound Media, there is a prevalence of papers presented by PhDs through the recent years – in 2015, for example, they were 33 (58.9% of the total), both individually written or co-signed with researchers in training.

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Received on: 11.10.2016

Accepted on: 08.28.2017