

Researching to Transform: Feminist Agendas in Latin American Communication

Investigar para transformar: agendas feministas en la comunicación Latinoamericana

Pesquisar para transformar: agendas feministas na comunicação latino-americana

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Abstract: This article analyzes two regional experiences of research cooperation in communication from gender and feminist perspectives: the trajectories of ALAIC's Thematic Group on Communication, Gender, and Diversities (2018-2024), and the *Mujeres de la Comunicación* collection (FES, 2021-2025). It argues that the field has become consolidated as an epistemologically committed space grounded in situated knowledge, intersectionality, and decoloniality. The article identifies significant advances and pending agendas in regional feminist research. The field is characterized as cumulative, polycentric, and oriented toward social transformation, although methodological, geographical, and political tensions persist.

Keywords:

Communication and gender; Latin American feminisms; feminist research; media narratives; situated epistemologies

Resumen: Este artículo analiza dos experiencias regionales de cooperación investigativa en comunicación desde perspectivas de género y feministas: las trayectorias del Grupo Temático de Comunicación, Género y Diversidades de ALAIC (2018-2024) y la colección *Mujeres de la Comunicación* (FES, 2021-2025). Se sostiene que este campo se ha consolidado como un espacio epistemológicamente comprometido, fundamentado en el conocimiento situado, la interseccionalidad y la decolonialidad. El artículo identifica avances significativos y agendas

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pendientes en la investigación feminista regional. Asimismo, caracteriza el campo como acumulativo, policéntrico y orientado a la transformación social, aunque persisten tensiones metodológicas, geográficas y políticas.

Palabras clave:

Comunicación y género; feminismos latinoamericanos; investigación feminista; narrativas mediáticas; epistemologías situadas

Resumo: Este artigo analisa duas experiências regionais de cooperação em pesquisa na área da comunicação a partir de perspectivas de gênero e feministas: as trajetórias do Grupo Temático Comunicação, Gênero e Diversidades da ALAIC (2018-2024) e da coleção *Mulheres da Comunicação* (FES, 2021-2025). Argumenta-se que esse campo se consolidou como um espaço epistemologicamente comprometido, fundamentado no conhecimento situado, na interseccionalidade e na decolonialidade. O artigo identifica avanços significativos e agendas ainda pendentes na pesquisa feminista regional. Além disso, caracteriza o campo como cumulativo, policêntrico e orientado para a transformação social, embora persistam tensões metodológicas, geográficas e políticas.

Palavras-chave:

Comunicação e gênero; feminismos latino-americanos; pesquisa feminista; narrativas midiáticas; epistemologias situadas.

1. Introduction

Research with a gender and feminist perspective in communication in Latin America has been an expanding field since the 1970s. Its consolidation reflects both the academic maturity of feminist studies in the region and the political urgency of women's movements and sexual-diversity movements, which challenge both the media and academic institutions themselves. However, this expansion is neither linear nor homogeneous: it takes place amid tensions between heterogeneous theoretical traditions, situated epistemologies emerging from Latin American struggles, and institutional conditions that continue to reproduce the hierarchies of the patriarchal system.

This article aims to analyze two regional experiences of research cooperation in communication from gender and feminist perspectives: the trajectories of the Thematic Group (TG) on Communication, Gender, and Diversities of the Latin American Association for Communication Research (ALAIC) between 2018 and 2024 (Martínez Toledo and Pedraza Bucio, 2025), and the reflection on feminisms and communication as a field under construction based on the publication of the *Mujeres de la Comunicación* collection (FES, 2021-2025). The article also responds to the question of how gender and decolonial studies can guide academic cooperation in Latin American communication.

This paper argues that the field of communication with a gender and feminist perspective has become consolidated as an epistemologically committed space grounded in situated knowledge, intersectionality, and decoloniality, although methodological, geographical, and political tensions persist, requiring ongoing reflection on the conditions under which knowledge is produced.

2. Theoretical-Epistemological Horizon

2.1 Situated Knowledge as a Place of Enunciation

The notion of situated knowledge (Haraway, 2009) constitutes the first epistemological anchor from which the Latin American field of communication and gender is read here.

Objectivity does not lie in the elimination of the knowing subject, but in making that subject's position explicit: every gaze comes from a place, a body, and an experience. Partiality is not an epistemological defect, but a condition of possibility for what Haraway calls strong objectivity.

In the field of Latin American communication, this idea materializes in a research proposal that can and must commit itself to transforming the realities it studies, recognizing that the researching subject is part of the world being researched. Feminist epistemology rejects the claim to a neutral and disembodied point of view (Harding, 2008) and proposes producing knowledge from the experiences of marginalized groups.

2.2 Decoloniality as an Epistemic and Political Project in the Field of Communication

The decolonial perspective helps name the pattern of domination that, inaugurated with the European conquest of the Americas, classified human beings through the category of race and imposed epistemic hierarchies that survived the end of formal colonialism (Quijano, 2000).

Decolonizing knowledge entails transforming the conditions of production, circulation, and legitimation of knowledge: not merely including other voices within a preexisting framework, but restoring difference to a level of genuine epistemic equivalence (Kaplún, 2022).

A fundamental contribution to the nexus between coloniality and gender comes from Latin American decolonial feminism. The concept of the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones, 2007; 2008) designates the structure of power that articulates race and gender in a co-constitutive manner: coloniality not only imposed racial hierarchies, but also reorganized sexual difference according to the logic of European heteronormative binarism, denying the gender-organizing forms of colonized peoples. This contribution is decisive for the field of communication, since media narratives operate upon the historical articulation of gender, race, class, and coloniality.

The decolonial critique also challenges research in Latin American communication by questioning the tendency of Northern feminism to construct the "Third World woman" as a homogeneous object of analysis, silencing the diversity of her experiences and agencies (Mohanty, 2003). The geopolitics of knowledge condenses this political dimension of decolonial epistemology: naming the location of knowledge is the first act in disputing the hierarchies that determine which forms of knowledge are universalized and which remain at the margins (Ricaurte Quijano, 2022).

2.3 Intersectionality: A Category for Thinking/Doing Communication

Intersectionality refers to the simultaneous and mutually constitutive articulation of multiple axes of inequality—such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and territory—that shape specific positions of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). This notion challenges the additive logic that merely sums vulnerabilities, instead showing that intersections produce unique positions irreducible to each axis considered separately.

Intersectionality articulates both identity-related and structural factors, making it possible to see, at the same time, the construction of oppression and the agency of those who experience it (Collins, 2000). As a political, theoretical, and methodological category, it accounts for the crossed or imbricated perception of power relations (Viveros Vigoya, 2016, p. 2). Vivian May (2014) proposes four dimensions of intersectionality that express the inseparable connection between the structural and the cultural: as an epistemological practice that interrogates

conventional knowledge and makes its silences visible; as an ontological project that recognizes the multiplicity of subjectivity; as a political orientation based on solidarity rather than identity; and as an imaginary of resistance that intervenes in historical memory to interrupt the hegemonic imaginary.

In the field of communication and gender, intersectionality operates as an analytical principle that makes it possible to understand how systems of media representation produce and reproduce hierarchies that are simultaneously symbolic and material, articulating race, class, sexuality, and the territoriality of subjects within representation (Martínez Toledo, 2022). The trajectory of ALAIC's Thematic Group on Communication, Gender, and Diversities shows sustained growth in this approach, from 31% of papers with an intersectional perspective in 2018 to 54% in 2024 (Martínez Toledo and Pedraza Bucio, 2025).

2.4 Feminist Communication, the Epistemology of the Body, and Knowledge from the Margins

Situated knowledge, traversed by decolonial and intersectional dimensions, leads to the recognition that all knowledge comes from a body. This body is not a natural and innocent substrate, but a field of biopolitical disputes in which the marks of race, gender, sexuality, and class are inscribed (Haraway, 2009). From this perspective, violence against women's bodies is not a private or pathological event, but a pedagogy of cruelty, a political text that demands an ethical commitment that positivist epistemologies cannot provide (Segato, 2018).

The feminist and decolonial critique of communicational knowledge begins by recognizing that modern Western thought is not universal, but the result of a historical process of colonization. Decolonizing communication research means recognizing Indigenous communication not as an object of study, but as an autonomous epistemic practice (Magallanes Blanco, 2020). This critique extends to digital spaces, where a new colonial regime has been identified as data colonialism (Ricaurte Quijano, 2023): technological infrastructures and digital platforms concentrate in the Global North the capacity to extract and monetize data produced in the South, generating techno-epistemic dependencies that limit the sovereignty of Latin American communities.

Producing knowledge from the margins is not an external act of solidarity, but an epistemological demand that transforms the conceptual frameworks of the researcher.

Community radio stations, Indigenous media, and feminist communication collectives produce knowledge about gender, violence, and agency that cannot be translated into conventional academic languages without loss. This position requires asking who has access to the resources needed to conduct research, whose voices are cited, and in which languages knowledge circulates.

3. Trajectories Of Feminist Studies in Gender and Communication

3.1 Mujeres de la Comunicación and the Thematic Group on Communication, Gender, and Diversities (ALAIC)

The Mujeres de la Comunicación collection (FES Comunicación, 2021-2025) emerged from a critical diagnosis: a review of the bibliographies used in communication and culture courses showed that the vast majority of authors were white men from the United States or Europe. From its founding volume (2021) to the fifth volume of the Brazilian series (2025), the collection reached 13 volumes covering eight countries and the region as a whole, constituting the most extensive systematization of women's trajectories in the field of Latin American communication available in open access.

The following table summarizes the collection's main characteristics by country/region, temporal coverage, author profile, and methodological emphasis in historical reconstruction.

Country/region	Temporal coverage	Author profile	Methodological emphasis
Latin America I and II	1960s-2024	Regional, diverse	Trajectories and agencies
Mexico	1970s-present	Scholars, activists	Oral history, systematization
Argentina	1970s-present	Scholars	Heterobiographical essay
Brazil (5 vols.)	1980s-present	Scholars (subnational)	Institutional history
Bolivia	1960s-present	Mixed: academic/community-based	Self-narration, oral history
Chile	1970s-present	Scholars	Biographical essay
Ecuador	1980s-present	Scholars, Indigenous women	Community history
Colombia	1960s-present	Scholars, activists, communication professionals	Multiple: academic/community/Indigenous

Table 1. Mujeres de la Comunicación Collection: Comparative Synthesis (FES, 2021-2025). (Source: Author's elaboration based on FES Comunicación (2021-2025))

The collection traces a long-range history that can be organized into three periods: the founding of the first academic programs (1960s-1970s), democratic transitions and the expansion of new graduate programs (1980-1990), and the contemporary period, led by researchers currently active, many of whom are linked to national associations or to movements in community and Indigenous communication. The diversity of the authors varies significantly across volumes: Colombia and Volume II on Latin America present the broadest spectrum, with voices from academia, journalism, Indigenous communication, and community media; some Brazilian volumes focus on university researchers within the academic field.

The systematization of the trajectories of ALAIC's Thematic Group on Communication, Gender, and Diversities, based on 158 paper abstracts from 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024, makes it possible to draw a cartography of a Latin American field in motion: cumulative, polycentric, and increasingly conscious of the conditions from which knowledge is produced (Martínez Toledo and Pedraza Bucio, 2025). The field is organized around four thematic axes. The axis Gender, representations, and discourse reflects the solidity of a critical tradition focused on media analysis. Within the TG, a progressive shift is observed toward the axis Gender, access, use, and appropriation of ICTs, driven by the pandemic and feminist digital activism. The axis Educational, political, and communicative experiences acts as a hinge between cultural critique

and transformative practices. The axis Gender and working conditions in the communication industries remains underdeveloped, signaling an outstanding debt.

At the theoretical level, the trajectory of the TG is cumulative and polycentric: feminist cultural critique and media and ICT studies constitute the consolidated core, while decolonial/Indigenous/Afro-American feminisms (11% of the corpus) and queer theory (13%) articulate emerging perspectives with a clear ethical-political orientation. The most revealing datum is the growth of the intersectional approach: present in 36% of the total corpus, its incorporation rose from 31% in 2018 to 54% in 2024, showing that situated knowledge is becoming consolidated as an analytical practice and not merely as an epistemological declaration. Methodologically, a qualitative orientation predominates, with the hegemony of discourse and semiotic analysis, coherent with its object, although connecting symbolic findings with economic and institutional materialities requires diversifying the methodological repertoire.

3.2 Feminisms and Communication: Tensions and Possibilities from Academic Praxis

Research with a gender perspective in communication has often been perceived as "niche" research, undervalued in comparison with other topics. This perception expresses the so-called Matilda effect, which describes how women's scientific achievements and contributions in academia are systematically denied or minimized, thereby reinforcing hierarchies of recognition (Osses Rivera and Rizo García, 2025). Yet from the margins of academic recognition structures, forms of knowledge are produced that cannot be reproduced from the center: perspectives that articulate the theoretical with the biographical, the academic with the political, and the individual with the collective.

Teaching communication with a gender perspective constitutes a privileged space for articulating research and social transformation. Communication and gender courses are not merely spaces for transmitting knowledge: they are laboratories where tools are built to critically read media and communicative practices from a perspective that names inequalities and proposes alternatives.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Feminist research in communication in Latin America is, above all, a collective and cooperative act: it is produced in networks, research groups, conferences, classrooms, and communities. The feminist and decolonial epistemologies that guide it are also principles for rethinking academic cooperation in terms of who produces knowledge, from where, and for what purposes. Sustaining such research requires examining who has access to research resources, which topics are considered legitimate, and which voices are cited or silenced.

The field has advanced significantly in theoretical sophistication and in political awareness of the conditions under which knowledge is produced. Intersectionality has become consolidated as both an analytical category and an epistemological practice that interrogates the silences of academic knowledge, as well as an imaginary of resistance that intervenes in the field's historical memory (May, 2014). These are indicators of maturity that should not be confused with the closure of the field.

The Latin American field of communication and gender has become consolidated as a privileged space for the production of critical, situated knowledge committed to communicational justice. Its trajectory is one of permanent openness to the region's political urgencies and to the contributions of epistemologies of the South.

Feminist research in communication in Latin America is, at the same time, a consolidated academic field and a political project in permanent construction. This double nature—epistemic and political—defines its most characteristic features and its most productive tensions.

The proposal of feminist narratives as tools of resistance and transformation offers a meaningful response to the tensions identified. By advocating communication that contextualizes, pluralizes voices, and commits itself to social transformation, the feminist narrative approach not only critiques the patriarchal symbolic order: it also proposes concrete alternatives for constructing other possible imaginaries.

Feminist narratives constitute a fundamental epistemological and political tool for the field. The way the media narrate violence against women is not a technical matter: it is a matter of power, justice, and dignity. Disputing these narratives from a feminist, intersectional, and decolonial perspective is, at once, an academic act and a political act.

The feminist academic cooperation that has made this regionally grounded research possible must also recognize its internal asymmetries. Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina concentrate

the field's production (50%, 13%, and 9.5% of TG papers, respectively), indexed journals, and institutional resources available for research, shaping hegemonic centers from which regional debate is projected. This centrality, necessary in terms of critical mass, also casts its shadows: the voices of Central America and the Caribbean remain underrepresented in the field's conferences, publications, and research projects. A feminist academic cooperation consistent with its own principles requires active regional policies that promote the visibility and circulation of communicational production generated in these territories.

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