

**Methodological trends of media and communication theses in
Algeria
-Analytical study of a sample of PhD theses of Constantine3
University-**

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research paper is to describe the methodological trends that prevail in Ph.D theses in the field of media and communication affiliated with Constantine 3 University.

And the results of the analysis show that the theses were based on descriptive studies using the survey or the descriptive method and the type of analysis is mixed method oriented. Moreover, there are multiple data collection tools in one thesis.

Keywords: trend, methodology, methodological trends, Ph.D theses, media and communication.

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Introduction :

“Doing research is much more than just gathering information or writing a description as a journalist would. Research consists in more intensive study, usually involving getting information that would surprise some audiences, and analysing the information carefully before writing up the results. The best research uses data in an original way or offers some new and exciting interpretation of existing data.” (Olsen, 2012, p. 3)

Nonetheless, scientific research carried out in media and communication field entered into a kind of stalemate resulting from the stereotyping that affected the research in that area , and among that, the methodological frameworks used in those researches. Ihab Hamdi JOMAA’s study is one of the researches that emphasizes this issue by doing an analysis of a content of Journal of Media Studies, in addition to a sample of master's and doctoral theses that were approved in media at Alexandria University from 1993 to 2003, and verified its methodology in a way that reveals the most important methodological trends of researchers in different periods. And the main research results in terms of research methods show that the samples were descriptive and quantitative analysis oriented. Furthermore, Aicha KAABACH’s research shed the light on the reality of the scientific research and postgraduate studies in the field of media and communication in Algeria and France, in the

period between 2000 and 2010. This was made possible by monitoring a set of indicators for the approved theses in this field, together with a comparison between the theses of the two countries. However, the focus of this paper is the methodologies used in the Algerian PhD's. It appears that the Algerian PhD theses are mainly oriented to the use of description study in terms of the study design, and regarding the type of the study, in terms of the data collection tools, we find that the research is a quantitative study. Concerning the methods used, they are mostly focused on the survey method, and the same is observed in terms of data collection tools where the majority of the PhD theses lean towards questionnaire and the content analysis.

whereas the two researches are carried out in two different countries and during an approximately different period, the results remain the same; which makes the research in the field being accused of bias. “And of course, in many cases, the reaction to an accusation of bias is a counter-charge, indicating that it is not just research itself but also evaluations of research that can be biased” (Hammersley, taking sides in social research essays on partisanship and bias, 2000, p. 142) which is not good for science especially those done in media and communication since they are considered non-concrete.

Taking a side or having trends in using methodological tools does not make any good for science because it stagnates it.

Notwithstanding “bias has been given rather little attention in the methodological literature. And it is by no means unproblematic.” (Hammersley, taking sides in social research essays on partisanship and bias, 2000, p. 142), so by analysing a sample of PhD theses from 2017 to 2019 and revealing the methodological trends, we tend to help the discipline to take a step forward in the way in which research phenomena are studied. All in all, that makes us ask the following question : What are the methodological trends prevailing in PhD theses in media and communication at the University of Constantine 3?

2. Research questions:

- What is the Mainstream Trend of Study Design in Info-Com Ph.D. Theses Discussed Between 2017 and 2019 in UC3/SB?
- In Terms of data analysis what are the Predominant Types used in Info-Com Ph.D. Theses Discussed Between 2017 and 2019 in UC3/SB?
- What is the Predominant Method Used in Info-Com Ph.D. Theses Discussed Between 2017 and 2019 in UC3/SB?
- What are the Most Exploited Data Collection instruments in Info-Com Ph.D. Theses Discussed Between 2017 and 2019 in UC3/SB?

3. The aim of the study:

The aim of this study is to describe the methodological trends, of doctoral dissertations that were conducted in the science of Info-Com at UC3/SB, which were certified between the years 2017 and 2019, and to find out if there is a type of stereotype in the Use of Research Methodology Toolbox.

4. Materials and methods:

The current survey involved the sampling and the analysis of Science Ph.D. Theses that were certified in media and communication faculty Affiliated to Salah Bounider-Constantine 3 University between 2017 and 2019. To measure the methodological trends, the PhD theses were purposefully selected from the PNST platform, and refer to the pre-knowledge that the author have about the target population of this research. Hence, the sample type was the purposive sample, known as: “the kind of compatibility between species of persons or media content with the scientific template drawn by the researcher, which allows them to be considered as representative to the research they are working on.” (Treadwell, 2017, p. 402)

A total of 17 samples were selected and then descriptively analyzed using the descriptive methods accompanied with the content analysis as a tool. The choice of the method and the tool of data collection are very coherent; this was clearly described in Berelson’s (1952) content analysis definition demonstrated in the following quote: content analysis

is “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 19).

The analysis was done using the thematic unit because treating the idea as a unit of analysis is useful for determining trends and judgments [...] so it is meticulously constructed to serve the meaning that the author aims to convey to the reader, It determines through the repetition of these ideas and meanings the direction of the writer or content... (Abdelhamid, content analysis in media research, 1979, p. 140) It also relied on a number of categories, namely:

- **The category of the Study Design:** here is described the prevailing study design in the doctoral theses of media and communication approved by Saleh Boubnider-Constantine 3 University from 2017 to 2019. For instance: Descriptive research, exploratory research, documentary research, experimental research, in addition to other researches.
- **The category of the Data analysis method:** the researcher here is going to determine the type of data analysis used in the study sample, whether it is a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method.
- **The category of the research methods:** the author is describing the prevailing methods used in the study



sample. There are several types of research methods: The Survey Method, the Historical Method, the Experimental Method, the Comparative Method, the Case Study Method, the Discourse Analysis Method, and the Descriptive method. Besides, the author checks if there is any study in which a certain method was not used at all or in which multiple or other types of methods were used.

- **The category of Data collection tools:** here we tend to describe the various research tools used in the Ph.D. theses to collect the data and among these tools are: questionnaire/survey, interview, observation, content analysis, and focus groups. The author also checks if there is any study that did not use data collection tools at all, or used another type that was not mentioned, or multiple ones.

The process does not end here, since after the successful measurement of the validity and reliability of the research instrument, using the arbitrator, testing, and re-testing the technique in a period of 15 days of taking the first test are necessary.

After all these requirements, the data analysis process begins with the careful reading of the PhD theses content and filling out the Content analysis tool. The analysis tool is then unloaded, using the Microsoft excel and transformed into tables

which are then read, analyzed, and thus answer the main question of the study presented in the introduction.

5. Results and Discussion:

Below, we review the tables and their analyses according to the data analysis tool.

Table 1. shows the Study Design prevailing in the doctoral theses of media and communication approved by the University of Saleh Boubnider-Constantine 3 from 2017 to 2019.

The Study Design	2017-2018		2018-2019		Total	
	freq	%	freq	%	Freq	%
Descriptive Study	9	52,94%	3	17,64%	12	70.58%
Exploratory Study	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
Documentary Study	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
Empirical Study	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
More than one	3	17,64%	0	0,00%	3	17.64%
Others	0	0,00%	2	11,76%	2	11.76%
Total	12	70,60%	5	29,41%	17	100%

The above table shows the lead of descriptive research design in the PhD theses of both periods, where the percentage was 52.94% for the year 2017-2018 and 17.64% for the year 2018-2019. According to the researchers, this is due to the compatibility of the specificities of media studies with the



characteristics of the type of research design. because when we speak about the descriptive research design “it deals with finding out the characteristics or particular behaviour or pattern in a specific group [...] this study deals with coming up with findings in predictive way to understand the different/unusual characteristics or unnoticed behaviour. The research enlists, describes the reasons and the observations.” (Bairagi & Mousami, 2019, p. 77) This in some way fits with the media study because the researcher during his research on the media phenomenon describes and clarifies the ideas, trends and characteristics of a particular phenomenon in its reality. To illustrate, a study entitled: “The Role of Social Networks in the Field of Social Relations, a Survey Study on a Sample of Facebook Users” dealt with the role of social networks in reshaping the pattern of social relations among Algerian youth by addressing the nature of virtual relationships prevailing among Algerian youth on Facebook, in addition to how the virtual identity contributes to reshaping the pattern of social relations among Algerian youth. It also treated the relationship between virtual interaction and the reshaping of the social relations pattern of the young Algerian. Another study entitled : “TV Ads Between the Marketing Function and Cultivation a Field Study on a Sample of Young Algerians.” described the nature of the effects that television advertisements exercise on

Algerian youth in terms of marketing and culture.

The table also demonstrates that researchers rely on more than one type in a single study, for instance, there are studies that combine between the Descriptive Study and the field study. Another doctoral thesis used both Descriptive, Analytic in addition to semiotic Study. From the researcher’s point of view, this combination came to cover the defects of one type of studies with another, which creates a comprehensive coverage of the studied phenomenon.

On the other hand, there is a complete absence of exploratory, documentary, and experimental studies and from the author's point of view, this represents a lack that should be highlighted and addressed because it negatively affects the development of the media and communication field. Through exploratory studies, for example, the researcher tests new fields and angles of research, which opens new horizons in media research. As for documentary studies, they are a window on the past, through which past events are inventoried, which makes it possible to understand present researches and to anticipate future events.

Table 2. shows the Data analysis method prevailing in the doctoral theses of media and communication approved by the University of Saleh Boubnider-Constantine 3 from 2017 to 2019.

Data analysis	2017-2018		2018-2019		Total	
	freq	%	freq	%	Freq	%



method						
Qualitative	3	17,64%	0	0.00%	3	17.64%
quantitative	2	11,76%	4	23,52%	6	35.28%
Mixed	7	41,17%	1	5,90%	8	47.07%
Total	12	70,59%	5	29,41%	17	100%

It is clear from the above table that the majority of Ph.D. theses discussed in 2017-2018 were mixed method oriented with a rate of 41.17% among the studies that used this type of analysis, a study titled: “Topics, Theories and Research Methods in Media and Communication Sciences in Algeria the Algerian Journal of Communication as a Mode”, in which the research topics in communication were dealt with in the oldest Algerian magazine specialized in media and communication sciences to examine the theories, methods, and scientific tools that organize this research in both its theoretical and empirical aspects. The qualitative analysis was used when the researcher analyzed the results obtained from the semi-structured interview, which was directed to some of the magazine's editors-in-chief, in addition to the publishing official. As for the quantitative analysis, it was used when analyzing the journal issues, starting with the second issue, -because the first number was not available- to issue 24.

In second position came the use of qualitative method by 17.64%, and finally the studies that adopted quantitative analysis by 11.76%. These findings show some kind of diversity in terms

of data analysis. As for the year 2018-2019, quantitative research took the lead with a rate of 23.52%. On the other hand, there is a complete absence of qualitative research , and this is most likely due to the difficulty of dealing with qualitative analyzes, especially in Algeria. Because of the absence of software of qualitative analyzes, the work on the data is manual, so the researcher recently avoids that type of research despite its usefulness and especially in the field of media and the following definition explains that accurately “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.” (Hammersley, what is qualitative research?, 2013, p. 1) Another definition explain the role of the qualitative research by by “an array of attitudes towards and strategies for conducting inquiry that are aimed at discovering how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world.” (Hammersley, what is qualitative research?, 2013, p. 1) Both definitions affirm that qualitative analysis is more in line with the media and communication phenomenon.

Among the examples of theses that used quantitative analysis the one entitled “News Channels and Their Role in the Development of Political Awareness Among University Youth in Algeria: A field Study on a Sample of Eastern Algerian States” The main aim of this study was to know the way in



which the role of news channels is determined in developing political awareness among university youth in Algeria.

Table 3. shows the prevailing Methods in the doctoral theses of media and communication approved by the University of Saleh Boubnider-Constantine 3 from 2017 to 2019.

The Methods	2017-2018		2018-2019		Totale	
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%
Survey / Descriptive Method	5	29.41 %	3	17.64 %	8	47.05 %
Historical Method	0	0,00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00 %
Experimental Method	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00 %
Comparative Method	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00 %
Case Study Method	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00 %
Discourse Analysis Method	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00 %
No Method	1	5,90%	0	0,00%	1	5.90 %
Others	0	0.00%	1	5,90%	1	5.90 %
More than one	6	35,30 %	1	5,90%	7	41.2 %
Total	12	70,60	5	29,41	17	100%



%

%

The above table shows the types of methods used in the doctoral dissertations of the study sample, where it is noted that in the year 2017-2018 there was an increase of the researches that used more than one method by 35.29%. As it is the case in Zainab Khalifah's thesis, where she used both the case study method and the descriptive method; moreover, we notice in Mustafa Thabet's study the use of the descriptive and historical method. The researcher also noted that the second highest percentage is due to the survey/descriptive approach with 29.41%, we did not record an adoption of other study methods, It was also noted that there was a study that did not at all indicate its reliance on a method. According to the researcher, this casts doubt on the researcher's conclusions because the method in its definition is: “The researcher's tool in controlling the research in general and adjusting its procedures according to the procedures and standard rules characteristic of each approach” (Abdelhamid, Scientific Research in Media Studies, 2004, p. 15)

As for the year 2018-2019, we found the use of the same method but in different percentage where the list of studies that used the survey/descriptive approach topped the list with 17.64%. An example of studies that adopted this approach is the study of the researcher Randa Hnouz, entitled: “The Role of Political Communication in the Political Upbringing of Algerian Youth Elkhbar daily and Algerian Television as a Model, an



Analytical Field Study” In which the researcher sought to identify the role of political communication practiced by the national media - Elkhobar daily and Algerian television- In the political upbringing of Algerian youth, by analyzing 24 items from the sample, distributed into 12 items related to Elkhobar daily newspaper and 12 items related to news bulletins broadcast on Algerian television.

The researcher has noticed an equivalence in the ratios with regard to the use of other approaches and more than one in the theses of the study sample, and the percentage was 5.90%. An example of theses that have adopted other methods is a study entitled: “Professionalism in the Private Algerian News Channels: An Analytical Study of a Sample of "Al-Shorouk News" Programs” Which relied on the content analysis method. For reference, content analysis is prone to discussion in scientific circles regarding its status as a method or a tool. According to the researcher, the content analysis can be considered as a tool with a specific phenomenon, and it can also be considered as a method with another phenomenon, and this is determined by the studied phenomenon and how the researcher intends to use it. The researcher also believes that the methodology should serve the research and not vice versa, and therefore all methodological frameworks are used to benefit the research.

On the other hand, we note the absence in the individual

use of each of the case study method, the comparative method, and the historical method. The times they were used were attached to other methods, and this is due to the researcher’s discretion, which can be explained by the ineffectiveness of these approaches alone in explaining the phenomenon they are about to address. As for the experimental method alongside with the Discourse analysis method, we recorded a complete absence in the studies, and this is due, -according to the researcher’s assessment-, to their difficulty, which made researchers avoid them over the years. This is a shortcoming because these methods have their advantages and characteristics that add accuracy and credibility to the results. They also show other aspects of the media phenomenon that the researcher cannot address when adopting other methods. The discourse analysis is one of the methods that fits with the media and communication field the best, and it is not used over the years as the previous study mentioned. This raises an even deeper problem which is the direction of research in media and communication towards scientific phenomena that are more related to other fields than that field.

Table 4. shows the prevailing Data collection tools in the doctoral theses of media and communication approved by the University of Saleh Boubnider-Constantine 3 from 2017 to 2019.

The Data Collection Tools	2017-2018		2018-2019		Total	
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%



Questionnaire	0	0,00%	2	11.75%	2	11.76%
Interview	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
Observation	1	5,90%	0	0,00%	1	5.90%
Content Analysis	0	0,00%	1	5,90%	1	5.90%
Focus Group	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
No Method	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
Others	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0.00%
More than one	11	64,70%	2	11,76%	13	76.64%
Total	12	70,60%	5	29,41%	17	100%

From the above table, we conclude that most of the theses approved in 2017-2018 used more than one data collection tool, with the percentage of 64.70%. The researchers have combined different data collection tools in response to the requirements of the studied phenomenon and the study sample. Examples of these studies include a study entitled: “The Uses of Multimedia in the Algerian Electronic Press, an Analytical and Field Study” The current study came as an attempt to present a new coherent vision for evaluating the sites of Algerian electronic newspapers from the perspective of employing multimedia within their sites. And to achieve the goal of the study, the researcher combined more than one tool that were represented in the content analysis tool, the questionnaire, the participatory observation, as well as the regular observation which she applied to a sample of 48 items representing all newspapers, with an estimate of 12 number for Al-Shorouk Online and the same number for each of



the Elkhobar and Elnahar Online. Along with a complete enumeration survey of communicators which was estimated at 48 journalists.

When looking at the results of the table, we note that the observation tool was used by 5.90%, as stated in the study of Amina Hamrani who used the observation tool according to the simplified personal method. On the other hand, the use of the questionnaire/ survey tool, the interview, and the content analysis were not recorded as independent research tools in the theses, but were used along with another set of tools, including observation, content analysis, and interview, and this is of course due to the researcher's evaluation. A complete absence of focus groups was also observed.

As for the period that goes from 2018 to 2019, a parity was recorded in the percentage of survey use and the adoption of more than one tool, where the percentage of use was 11.76%, and the studies that combined more than one tool are the study conducted by Elkhamssa Ramdan where she combined between observation tool and questionnaire, and Amal Fadloun's thesis, which combined the observation tool, questionnaire and content analysis. In another PhD thesis of the researcher Bourhlah Suleiman, there was a combination between observation, interview and questionnaire.

The researchers justify their tendency to use more than one tool due to the specificity of the studied phenomenon that

they are dealing with which required using multiple data tools to understand it.

In another hand as we mentioned previously, there is an absence of the use of the interview tool, observation is not used as a single tool but with other tools like questionnaire and content analysis, but the focus group researchers do not use it at all.

6. CONCLUSION

The description of the methodological trends used in the doctoral dissertation discussed from 2017 to 2019 in Constantine 3 University, more specifically the ones that were discussed in the media and communication faculty, opens the debate about the issue of inertia in the use of the methodology in this area, and the PhD theses reflect this issue. Accordingly, the study through this analysis helps the future output of the field of research and the stereotypical use of the methodological framework, and will allow further researches in media and communication to finally get out from inertia.

Therefore, in this study, we analyzed a sample of science Ph.D. theses using content analysis as a tool and a descriptive method as a methodology where we described the tables, and we found that most of the theses adopted the descriptive study. It was also noted that some theses adopted more than one type of study design to treat the issue. Moreover, we notice the total absence of exploratory, documentary and empirical study in the doctoral theses for the data analysis method, we can see that the

theses vary between qualitative and quantitative analysis, but the dominant trend was toward the mixed method. As for the approved methods, the survey/descriptive approach was the destination of the majority of students in their theses. It was also noted that some studies tend to adopt more than one approach, and one of the observed methodological problems is also ignoring a group of approaches such as the experimental method and the discourse analysis method. In terms of data collection tools, the majority of the theses tended to adopt more than one tool to collect data about the phenomenon they are studying.

These findings In terms of Study Design extend those of Ihab Hamdi JOMAA, confirming that the research in media and communication are descriptive oriented, and the results were once again confirmed by Aicha KAABACH's research study, indeed, the same results are confirmed in terms of the research methods where most doctoral theses used a survey method, however, there was an exception in terms of the data analysis. in our research paper we showed the variety of the theses among qualitative and quantitative methods with the orientation to the mixed method too but in Aicha KAABACH's study the orientation was towards the quantitative method , and the same is mentioned in Ihab Hamdi JOMAA research paper. Regarding the data collection tools, while in our study we noticed that the majority of the PhD theses lean towards the use of more than one tool for collecting data, in Aicha's study there is an orientation towards questionnaires and the content analysis.

Those results show a king of bias in the media and communication studies which negatively affects this area, The studies mentioned previously, in addition to the current study,



showed a kind of stalemate in the methodological frameworks over the years, furthermore, the total absence of experimental, exploratory and documentary studies is one of the points on which the academic community must take a stand in order to investigate the reasons for the absence of this type of study, especially when we know that this type of study allows the development of research and opens new horizons for researchers. For instance: Through exploratory studies, areas and aspects that have not been exposed before are explored, which opens the way for researchers to study new phenomena, besides, through experimental studies, hypotheses are tested, leading to their confirmation or rejection. And the same observation was made regarding the methods that have been used. there is a total Ignorance of some of them, such as the experimental method and the discourse analysis method, both are important methods in the media and communication discipline. Discourse analysis, for example, corresponds to the specificity of media and communication. As for the experimental method, it would give the discipline the accuracy it requires. This raises a question that must be answered by the scientific and academic community too, and the question is about the cause of this fear of this type of methods.

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Appendices

The study sample:

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