



Analysis of the media discourse during the coverage of the mandatory confinement produced by the COVID-19 health emergency in Colombia in 2020

PhD. **Pedro Felipe Díaz Arenas**. En Ciencias de la Educación, pfdiaz@uniquindio.edu.co ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3882-4999>, Universidad del Quindío, Armenia, Colombia.

MSc. **Carolina Montoya Mejía**. En Gestión de la Tecnología Educativa, cmontoyam@uniquindio.edu.co ORCID <https://orcid.org/00000003-3882-4999> Universidad del Quindío, Armenia, Colombia

MSc. **Gerardo Andrés Nossa Ramírez**. En Periodismo de Investigación, Datos y Visualización. , gnossa@uniquindio.edu.co ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8941-2742>

Universidad del Quindío, Armenia, Colombia

Data of Publication: 12 June 2024

ABSTRACT

This article examines the concepts of journalism in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking as a reference the main media outlets in Colombia and the construction of journalistic narratives during the health crisis. The research's main objective was the content analysis of the information and the period of one year was investigated as a reference sample unit of publications related to news coverage, whose findings allowed to describe a media imaginary with levels of perception in relation to journalistic narratives and the construction of the information issued in Semana Magazine and El Espectador Newspaper, in digital format, and the generation of various contents in front of public opinion, This research addressed a qualitative analysis study that allowed to interpret the narrative construction of journalism within the framework of an information crisis, allowing to reveal the journalistic intention of the information in the face of the aforementioned health emergency, and conclude, with the data investigated, analyzed and interpreted from the information, highlighting a proximity to the reflection on the emerging notion of COVID-19, new media terminology and its influence on the use of journalistic discourse, in which the use of proper and common nouns and some

assumptions in the structure from the argumentative point of view are evident.

Keywords: Journalism, pandemic, media discourse, mass media.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism has been crucial not only in the transmission of accurate and timely information, but also in the interpretation and contextualization of events for the public. "In newspapers and television stations we see divergent opinions, but the majority are informed on networks where algorithms group together those who are similar" (García Canclini 2019, p, 21). From a social critical perspective, this role is intensified, as it involves not only informing, but also questioning dominant narratives and unraveling the structures of power and inequality present in media coverage (Murdock, 2013). During the global health crisis, the media have played a temporary role; on the one hand, they have been vehicles for essential information on health measures, statistics and scientific advances and, on the other, they have exposed the shortcomings and disparities in the government response and the socio-economic inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. According to Fairclough (2003), critical discourse analysis in journalism reveals how power relations are negotiated and reproduced through language and the selection of stories that are presented as important to the public.

In addition to reporting on the spread of the virus and containment measures, the media has also amplified the voices of marginalized sectors and highlighted the human stories behind the statistics, which has helped to generate empathy and social solidarity (Hall, 2020). In summary, journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its ability to inform, in addition to questioning and reflecting on the social and political structures that influence public health and collective well-being, thus consolidating its role as a crucial agent in the construction of public opinion and informed democracy. The media and information are leaders in news coverage, their information maintains an ethical and objective line; However, it is difficult to think that these media responded naturally to circumstances that were not addressed and unknown on a daily basis, since the facts at the time of the pandemic and the

logics of the information changed drastically, this from their official or governmental sources and especially the information issued by the media on digital platforms.

This project expresses, in a necessary and objective way, the analysis of the points of view of different media, especially the *Semana Magazine* and the *El Espectador Newspaper*, their media or journalistic agendas, the information consulted from sources documented in books, articles, technical reports, information abstracted and interpreted with respect to each context, by informing with propriety and relevance what the medical organizations of different countries or the same World Health Organization (WHO), among other government entities, provided as information; therefore, one of the purposes of this research proposal was to inquire through analysis in the narrative of journalistic discourse such as the use of language and the choice of words, the role played by the media in the framework of news broadcasting during the period of confinement decreed by the Colombian government in the global emergency produced by the spread of COVID-19. As a source of inquiry, the digital platforms used by these media were addressed. Here, in search of an approach to narrative analysis in times of the health crisis as well as the understanding of key concepts and categories in the type of journalism addressed and their relationship with the public agenda directed by the editorial committees of each media outlet.

For this reason, a contextual tracking of this journalistic narrative was carried out, identifying the factors and the incidence that marked from the discourse, through its editions issued in its editorial line; for which, says McQuail, "when talking about social interactions in audiences, the most obvious reference is the personal contacts between people, although we must also consider a certain type of social relationship between the audience and the sender in mass communication" (MacQuail, 1985, p. 475), it is here that we will find relevance and meaning to this analysis. The pandemic period was assumed by the media as that stage of scientific and governmental sources worldwide, considered as a period of life marked by situations to regulate the information issued

in that period, the situation generated chaos and global fear, where shortcomings in health policies were evidenced, and the economic gap, where the media contributed to social stability. It is necessary, then, to discuss the perception and media imaginaries based on a specific event as in this case, what was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the facts reported by the media, in many cases, impacted political decisions for social actions.

Frame of reference

The journalistic narrative used by the media, today, describes how a perception of reality is generated in each broadcast of news or informative content from the perspective of the critical social paradigm in communication, it also emphasizes the importance of examining how the media reproduce and maintain relations of domination and resistance within society; this is how, during the pandemic, this perspective made it possible to identify that, "COVID-19 is beginning to show the first transformations in social, economic and political life that must be observed". (García Orosa, B. 2022 p.5). To understand the news coverage during the confinement produced by COVID-19, it is necessary to start from the journalistic discourse used by journalists, and how it is appropriated by the audience, creating a global individual/citizen relationship, in which, in the face of the current world situation, the media become that conduit through which information is not only a piece of information, but also a form of information. rather, the reflection of realities that seek through language to preserve the cultural heritage and save for history the future of the human being, "the wide social inequality has a digital correlate, so that not all social groups have the possibility of accessing the new digital media under the same conditions" (Urribarri, R., & Subinas, J. 2023. p.6). In this way, the audience would be influenced by the use of journalistic language used by the media, with which realities that narrate from non-fiction are configured, stories that become the first step to build public opinion. Therefore, it is necessary to approach the notion of discourse in journalism, "In this sense, COVID-19 not only dismantled the repetition of everyday life, but also deepened the use of

technology and modified the lifestyles of populations" (Olmedo Neri, R. A. 2022, p.4). Journalism, then, can be thought of as a complex process of communication, which implies a relationship between the media and the audience and journalism, and its expressions, with their respective contents, share the same code in which the construction of information indicates, according to Hernández, the same symbolic system; that is: "When we talk about communication, we necessarily talk about being in community (...) communicative processes lead to the formation of consciousness", (Hernández, 2009, p. 39). However, making an approach to journalistic production and how it influences audiences based on narrative discourse, in this case journalistic discourse, constitutes a conception of reality or event that marks a certain context with facts, in addition to the citizens who are directly and indirectly involved. In this sense, it could be said that the narrative of journalistic discourse is always intervened by media direction and its interest in the public. That said, and given the possibility of analyzing the functioning of communicative signs, as outlined, it is important to consider what Orozco affirms: "from the audiences, watching the news generally supposes a rational cognitive act, since what is sought is to know, to know, to know, to be up to date and even to analyze what happens in the environment" (Orozco, 2015, p. 208). In other words, the power of the media entails certain problems, one of them is to limit the spaces of information, with a certain public communication, since it indicates controlling or directing the construction of the narrative of the information and the way in which news deliveries are programmed for publications, and the intention of stimulating an impact on public opinion. Thus, the media plays a fundamental role in following the news day by day as a cascade of information that marks the context of the impact of COVID-19, and the strategy for security measures. Here, the media influences who is the protagonist of the news, and builds a narrative in the history of the events that emphasizes a certain event. "The months in which information has been continuously questioned have transformed lifestyles" (Ruiz Torres P 2021, p. 11). Communication and journalism play an important role in georeferential learning of the description of the facts and the evolution in the coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on

audiences. In this context, Colombia is advancing in a slow process of appropriation of information, in addition to the lack of pedagogy and accompaniment to the citizen (audience), and consequently, that allows the intentional integration of global issues and multiple perspectives through citizen processes in relation to the media, adding communication strategies and emerging media, that help to consolidate a unity of criteria in the face of public opinion, who will not only be able to reflect on local problems, but also on perspectives of citizen and creative participation in the solutions to be implemented. Therefore, it will be significant to analyze three elements; one, the media; two, public policy and; 3, Hearings. This, for a good development around the relationship of information with social reality. In this perspective, for citizens, communication is a component that incorporates features of mediation. Luhmann states that: "the problem with news information lies in its selectivity, and this has very broad consequences for what could be called the air conditioning of the Mass Media" (Luhmann, 2007, p. 57). To this extent, the audience develops a construction of imaginaries through a set of signs that are continuously being resignified according to contextual dynamics from the point of view of information. Here the idea of reflecting on the impact of the media on citizens is raised as a possibility of interacting with the narrative of information in the Colombian context. Information, from these perspectives, will play an important role in relation to what is exposed in this article, because sometimes it could be thought that there is a control of the content handled and transmitted by the media; therefore, from the receiving public, it could be stated that such administration of information seems unintentional; however, we would be facing phenomena that are precisely what we want to discover in this analysis, such as the possibility of altering messages, which could lead to misinformation or over-information, in any case affecting society. It is necessary to think about a mediation of the information emitted by the media, under a journalistic narrative structure that is ready to be part of an educational process and that impacts the citizen from the different generations within a sociocultural framework, "the flows of information and the networks of playful creative exchange, with the hybridizations of science and art, of

work and leisure". (Barbero, 2003, p. 54). Currently, audiences and their media spaces mark the constant interaction with the reflection of how journalistic information issued in the media is constituted and the use of their digital platforms. Consequently, reflecting on communication and the narrative of information is also to think of communication as an innovative process that allows knowledge to be built in an interactive way with certain audiences, under a permanent sensitivity that reflects the real context experienced in society, in addition to including the ability to recognize and promote mediation spaces with the content broadcast in the different existing media.

Methodology

COVID-19 represented an unprecedented challenge for media outlets around the world, including Colombia. The way in which the media covered the health crisis was not only crucial to inform the population, but also to influence public perceptions, government policies and social responses, "in the first days of confinement, hundreds of videos and texts on humanitarian and cooperation gestures appeared in the media and social networks" (Rengifo López, J. D. 2020, p.145). They interpret and construct it through discursive frameworks that can perpetuate or challenge existing relations of power and domination in society. The research was methodologically located from the content analysis of the information issued by the media in the journalistic coverage during the mandatory confinement produced by the COVID-19 health emergency in Colombia, allowing an in-depth investigation on how the media have taken into account issues such as public health, government policies, the socioeconomic impact and community responses during the pandemic. From here, a journalistic narrative produced by the media was addressed to respond to the narrative construction that some journalists elaborated on how the coronavirus spreads, and what is the impact of the discourse of the information broadcast, while contributing to understanding the way in which decisions are made in the face of public opinion during the pandemic. offering guidance to mitigate the feasible growth and impact of COVID-19 at the time. As Ford expresses: "It is difficult to talk about the media, their genres, their forms of construction of

meaning, their production or reception" (Ford, 2001, p. 127), referring to the way in which content is elaborated for their social interaction and cultural adaptation of the social phenomena that emerge critically in the media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia, using the discourse analysis of Van Dijk (1993), among other authors that help to consider the analyses developed by this project to understand the discursive dynamics and power relations present in the media.

This journalistic analysis in the media is presented as a case study, addressing the digital platforms of two of the most important traditional media in Colombia, which are recognized for being opinion leaders. The study has a documentary and discourse analysis character, as well as the identification of the characteristics that marked the media influence in the construction of information during the COVID-19 health emergency from the digital platforms of these media for a period of time of seven months, temporarily located between March and September 2020.

In this way, the research proposal was based on the qualitative approach, with a type of descriptive study, which corresponds to its documentary review and discursive analysis, since it will go to sources of information from these media on their digital platforms; for its development and content analysis, and usability of emerging words in the journalistic routine in the construction of information regarding the crisis produced by COVID-19.

For the inquiry and identification of words that linked to journalistic language, an instrument focused on the systematization of content was implemented, as a matrix for its coding and selection of words understood as units of analysis and approximation to elements that considered the construction of the content matrix to be used in the analysis. for which the selection of media and samples considers: written media, selecting national newspapers with coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, newspaper, in this case the El Espectador Newspaper and Semana Magazine and their contents investigated on digital platforms.

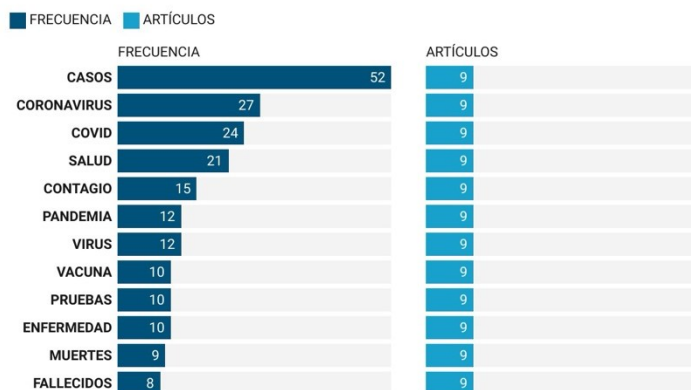
Results and conclusions

The mass media constitute a mediator before public opinion that indirectly shapes the perception of the audience that follows political and social life in Colombia and, in this case with the media, the journalistic discourse in the broadcast of content and its narrative construction on COVID-19 were analyzed. Thus, it is possible to interpret how a narrative of journalistic discourse was created with a scientific and public health language. This analysis located marked categories in the construction of the articles elaborated from the news and facts that involved key circumstances in the dissemination process during the temporality of the pandemic produced by COVID-19 in Colombia, finding the following terminology: pandemic, data, health, contagion, COVID, coronavirus, among other emerging words that reached journalism as evidenced in the following tables.

Table 1.

COVID 19-PALABRAS MÁS USADAS REVISTA SEMANA

Este gráfico representa las 12 palabras más usadas, en relación con la pandemia, en los textos publicados por la REVISTA SEMANA entre marzo y noviembre de 2020.



Es una muestra del 10 % de la totalidad de artículos de 2020.

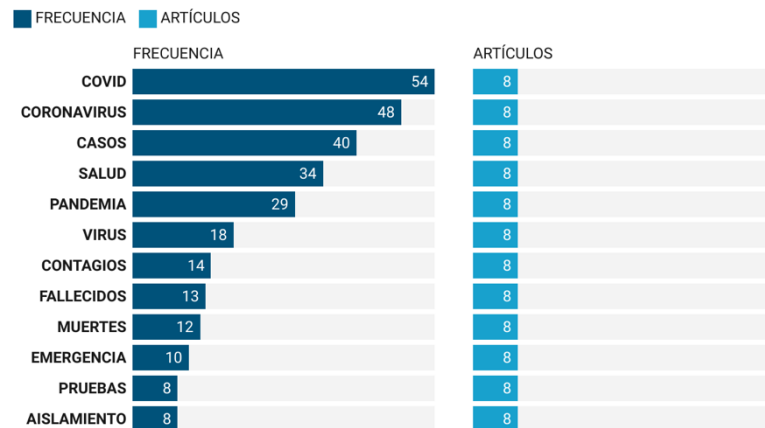
Gráfico: Elaboración propia • Fuente: REVISTA SEMANA • Creado con Datawrapper

Pivot Table Link: <https://www.datawrapper.de//2HnpQ/>. In original Spanish language

Table 2

COVID 19-PALABRAS MÁS USADAS EN EL ESPECTADOR

Este gráfico representa las 12 palabras menos usadas, en relación con la pandemia, en los textos publicados por el diario EL ESPECTADOR entre marzo y noviembre de 2020.



Es una muestra del 10 % de la totalidad de artículos de 2020.

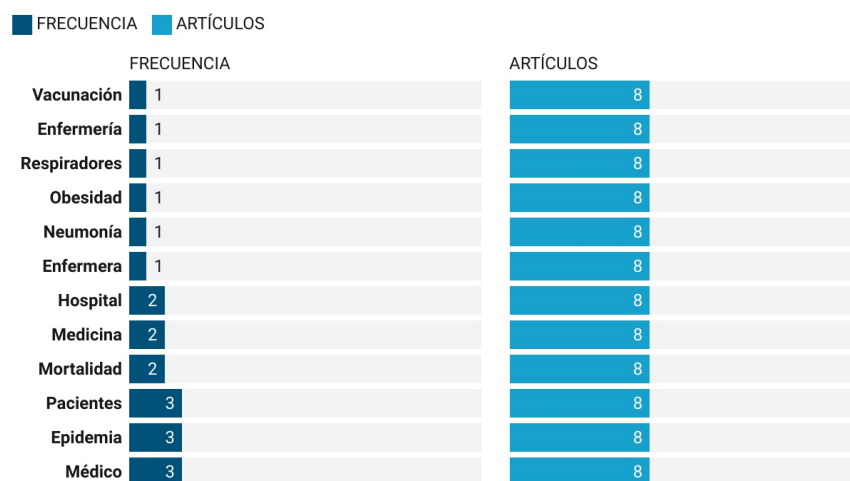
Gráfico: Elaboración propia • Fuente: EL ESPECTADOR • Creado con Datawrapper

PivotTable Link: <https://www.datawrapper.de/-/5ppWy/>. In original Spanish language

Table 3

COVID 19-PALABRAS MENOS USADAS EL ESPECTADOR

Este gráfico representa las 12 palabras MENOS usadas, en relación con la pandemia, en los textos publicados por el diario EL ESPECTADOR entre marzo y noviembre de 2020.



Es una muestra del 10 % de la totalidad de artículos de 2020 analizados.

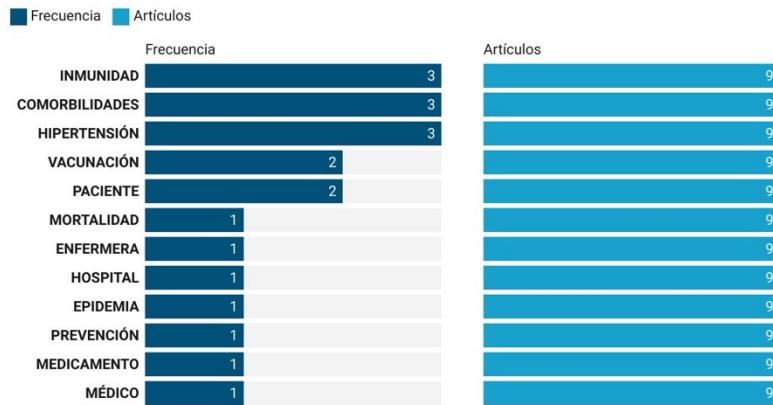
Gráfico: Elaboración propia • Fuente: EL ESPECTADOR • Creado con Datawrapper

PivotTable Link: <https://www.datawrapper.de/-/uC6Yg/>. In original Spanish language

Table 4

COVID 19-PALABRAS MENOS USADAS REVISTA SEMANA

Este gráfico representa las 12 palabras menos usadas, en relación con la pandemia, en los textos publicados por la REVISTA SEMANA entre marzo y noviembre de 2020.



Es una muestra del 10% de la totalidad de artículos.

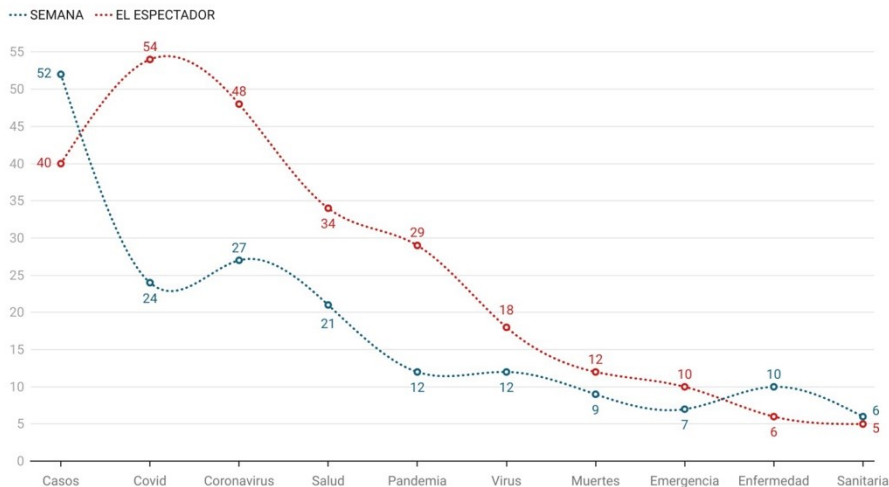
Gráfico: Elaboración propia. • Fuente: Revista Semana • Creado con Datawrapper

PivotTable Link: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/gbPLR/6/>. In original Spanish language

Table 5

COVID-19: COMPARACIÓN PALABRAS R. SEMANA VS. EL ESPECTADOR

Este gráfico muestra y compara las 10 palabras más usadas por EL ESPECTADOR y SEMANA en sus publicaciones sobre temas relacionados con la pandemia entre marzo y noviembre de 2020.



Análisis de 17 artículos. (9) de SEMANA (8) de El Espectador. Equivalen al 10 % del contenido total revisado.

Gráfico: Elaboración propia • Creado con Datawrapper

PivotTable Link: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/BiV3W/. In original Spanish language

This made it possible to identify in the articles the most and least repetitive words in the construction of information during the pandemic process; therefore, a position is maintained in the subtext of the articles, denoting a presumption in public information and this may be related to public opinion. In the case of this study, a certain polarization of discourses was detected in some sectors regarding the different points related to public health. In the narrative of this journalistic discourse, the articles were clear with the information and the use of language, for the most part, was understandable to the common citizen. It should be clarified that in certain articles the use of scientific terms, the use of statistical data and social control from public policy was noted.

In this way, it is highlighted in the results of this project that the media outlets Revista Semana and the Newspaper El Espectador have configured their media and journalistic agendas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The narrative construction of an informative language that goes beyond the everyday has been fundamental in news coverage, addressing documented information from books, scientific articles, technical reports and other data sources. This research focuses on interpreting information in relation to each particular context, providing an informed and relevant analysis in times of global crisis, as corroborated by international medical organizations and the World Health Organization (WHO). In some cases, journalism has been recognized as an essential service during this emergency (UNESCO, 2020), highlighting its crucial role in society. The study allowed us to understand how journalistic narrative is constructed in times of health crisis, as well as to understand the predominant concepts and categories in contemporary journalism and their relationship with the public agenda.

It is essential to understand how the media influences the construction of information and how journalistic narrative reflects and shapes public perception and political decisions. "Technological advances and the integration of ICT in our daily lives have made them a valuable part of the management and offer of educational institutions."

(Castañeda-Maizel, A.J., Tito-Estevez, H.-K., & Mateus, J.-C. 2022, p.11). During the pandemic, the media played a critical role in providing social stability by disseminating accurate and up-to-date information, although significant changes in lifestyles and cultural norms were also observed, largely influenced by media coverage. This situation prompted a redefinition in the construction of scientific journalism, with the introduction of new terms and approaches in the journalistic narrative of the media studied.

We thank the University of Quindío and the Vice-Rectory for Research for sponsoring this publication.

References

- Barbero, J. (2003). Education from communication. Bogotá: Grupo editorial Norma
- Castañeda-Maizel, A.-J., Tito-Estevez, H.-K., & Mateus, J.-C. (2022). ICT in university education during the COVID-19 pandemic: perspectives of students of Communication in Peru. *Miradas*, 17(2), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.22517/25393812.25246>
- Ford, A. (2001). Navigations, Communication, Culture and Crisis. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu Editores.
- García Canclini, Néstor. (2019) Citizens replaced by algorithms. University of Guadalajara Publishing House – Mexico.
- García Orosa, B. (2022). Political communication and emerging strategies in digital electoral campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Keyword*, 25(1), e2516. <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2022.25.1.6>
- Gedisa.Hall, S. (1997). Representation: Questions about visual culture. Paidós Editions.
- Hall, S. (2020). *Representation: Questions about visual culture*. Akal Editions.
- Hernandez, Daniel (2009) Mediatized communication: hegemonies, alternativities, sovereignties. Editorial CLACSO. Buenos Aires. Book chapter, the role of alternative media in the mediatization of communication and society.
- Luhmann, N. (2007). The reality of the mass media. Mexico: Editorial Anthopos México.
- McQuail, D. (1985). *Theory of mass communication*. Paidós.

Murdock, G. (2013). *Communication, power and counter-power in global society*. Editorial Olmedo Neri, R. A. 2022, p.4). #ElOrgulloPermanece in the face of the pandemic. Mexican LGBT+ users, networks and content on Twitter. *Communication and Society*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2022.8130>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2020). *Journalism, press freedom and COVID-19*. Retrieved from: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_covid_brief_es.pdf

Orozco, Gómez, Guillermo. (2015) Communication, culture and spheres of power. Chapter From news to melodrama. New spheres of power built from the television screen. The fiction case A la carte on Mexican commercial TV. Editorial IBERCOM. Sao Paulo – Brazil.

Rengifo López, J. D. (2020). Community and fear: behavior of Colombian society during the months of mandatory quarantine due to the COVID 19 crisis. *Miradas*, 15(1), 143–165. <https://doi.org/10.22517/25393812.24474>

Ruiz Torres, P. (2021). COVID-19: Teleworking in times of pandemic. *History and Social Communication*, 26(Special), 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.5209/hics.74237>

Urribarri, R., & Subinas, J. (2023). Panama: information asymmetry during the pandemic in a country with a digital divide and zero-rating practices. *Keyword*, 26(2), e2622. <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2023.26.2.2>

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Principles of critical discourse analysis*. Gedisa Editorial