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Qualitative Research in Communication. Introductory Remarks

The 20th century's epistemological turn in social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Punch, 2013) acknowledged the importance of qualitative research methods. The need for this turn was also pointed out by Habermas (1979), who noticed that the way data was collected in social sciences affected the analysis and data interpretation. Research gained a comprehensive character and proposed a phenomenological approach of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willig, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Nowadays, we notice a "more confident community of scholars" whose earlier endeavors had "opened up the study of cultures, meanings, symbolic performances, and social practices" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. xi). Qualitative research tends to become the dominant methodology in communication (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), and could be considered a feature of the epistemology of communication. It can be noticed from the contributions in this special issue on qualitative research in communication, that interest in qualitative studies is flourishing. Researchers are responding to the theoretical, epistemological and methodological problems and to questions raised by how people and organizations relate to complex social, global and technological developments.

The current special issue aims to underline the importance of qualitative research conducted in communication and to shed light on its particularities. It does so by focusing on applied qualitative methodologies in various areas of communication. The five papers selected for the special issue were initially presented at the second Qualitative Research in Communication (QRC) conference, hosted by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in September 2015. The second QRC conference, was testimony to the interest in qualitative research across continents. Three international keynote speakers: Professor Bryan C. Taylor (University of Colorado, Boulder, USA), Professor Kim Sawchuk (Concordia University, Canada) and Professor Eugene Loos (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) brought their experience and insight to the opening session. The papers presented at the conference were clustered around the broad themes of ageing, communication and technology; digital explorations; approaching media texts and practices; communication and the emotion economy; and reflexive insights in qualitative methodologies. This special issue reflects some of that richness and diversity of interest with contributions from the sub-fields of gaming studies, media theory, public relations and ageing. The research strategies adopted by

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authors are similarly diverse: phenomenology, case study, critical discourse analysis as well as qualitative analysis used in a mixed-methods approach. It is worth mentioning that authors acknowledge their concern for generalization in the context of using qualitative methods and thus express their preference for mixed methods.

It may seem to the reader that the qualitative approach of the social reality of the papers in this issue are diverse. Bryan C. Taylor's paper addresses qualitative research considering globalization. Taylor argues that local communities of social science researchers are negotiating the internationalization of their disciplinary identities. Also, in this paper the author notices the efforts of researchers in respect to the internationalization of potential resources of qualitative research methods. The paper belonging to Liz Yeomans and Martina Topic addresses engagement and empathy discourses using a case study approach. By using critical discourse analysis, Yeomans and Topic reveal that corporate communication relies on early understanding of engagement as a cognitive behavior based on instincts and persuasive communication. The paper shows that in the analyzed case, people are seen emotional driven and easily manipulated and customers' engagement tends to be measured through liking on Facebook and re-tweeting on Twitter. Ana Adi's paper combines automated online data collection with qualitative observation, aiming to identify the themes, practices and influencers sharing messages about public relations on Twitter using the #publicrelations hashtag. Adi inquires the social media dialogical features and suggests that future research should look into Twitter charts for exploring conversation on public relations. Still in the social media area, but also taking into account printed and online media, Francesca Arcostanzo and Alice Pulvirenti's paper bring some empirical evidence on the existence of an audience-oriented commercial logic which drives online news production. Arcostanzo and Pulvirenti suggest that future research on the way social media had changed communication should start with investigating how people get informed. Based on in-depth interviews and drawing of the existent literature on videogame plot evaluation, Tulia Maria Cașvean argues that videogames genres are a "playing contract" built upon multiple perspective. Thus, Cașvean's paper points out that while videogames genres are built player-centric in the industry, for scholars they are considered tools for examining and comparing games.

As some of the papers in this issue point out, online communication has a significant role in the current development of qualitative methodologies. Several scholars mentioned that the development of the communication technologies and the wide spread of the internet have transformed the way qualitative research is being conducted, especially in communication (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Daymon & Holloway, 2001). Therefore, we expect to see in the future a significant body of research using qualitative methodologies in online communication.

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