



**A Content Analysis of Theoretical and Methodological Approaches in Media and
Communication Doctoral Theses in Algeria
-A study of a Sample from Badji Mukhtar Annaba University-**

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Abstract:

The following research paper study examines the use of theoretical and methodological frameworks in doctoral theses in Information and Communication Sciences at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba, focusing on dissertations defended between 2022 and 2024. By adopting a descriptive approach and employing content analysis as the main research tool, we analyzed an available sample of these theses and arrived at the following results:

In terms of study design the situation is extremely polarized. One single study design (Descriptive) is used in every single thesis, in terms of data analysis method, the research culture in these doctoral theses is overwhelmingly and exclusively quantitative, in terms of Data collection tools, the data shows a clear and strong trend towards using mixed data collection tools, in terms of the Population Coverage Methods The data reveals a strong preference for non-random sampling methods over probabilistic methods. The use of a census is a stable, secondary approach. The emergence of mixed sampling methods.

Keywords: Theory; methodology; research; doctoral thesis; media and communication



1. INTRODUCTION

Media and communication research has attracted significant scholarly interest in recent years, particularly through the growing number of doctoral dissertations produced in the field. Several researchers have examined the methodological foundations of these dissertations—some conducting detailed analyses, while others critique their theoretical or methodological frameworks, or both. This ongoing debate arises from the central role that theory and methodology play in structuring any scientific inquiry.

Theory, for example, is commonly defined as “a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work... an explanation of how two or more ‘facts’ are related to one another” (Young, 2019, p. 62). To illustrate its importance, theory can be understood as the conceptual lens through which the researcher interprets the research problem. Far from being a simple background element, theory organizes the entire investigative process, ensuring a coherent, justified, and academically rigorous analysis.

The same applies to methodology. Defined as the preliminary reflection on the method that should be developed to conduct research (Mucchielli, 2009, p. 262), methodology establishes the intellectual architecture that justifies the chosen procedures and clarifies the researcher’s assumptions, the logic of inquiry, the criteria of rigor, and the rationale for selecting specific techniques or tools. The quality of a study’s final results is therefore directly linked to the strength and coherence of its theoretical and methodological framework.

Despite the recognized importance of these foundations, the theoretical and methodological choices guiding scientific research have long been neglected in academic evaluation—particularly in doctoral programs, where only a limited number of studies have examined the quality of research practices. This lack of scrutiny has contributed to a decline in academic rigor and writing quality. As a result, the field of information and communication sciences faces what can increasingly be described as methodological and theoretical stagnation.

This issue is highlighted in several academic studies. Aïcha Kaabach’s (Kaabach, 2018) extensive analysis of doctoral research in media and communication in Algeria and France (2000–2010) reveals clear trends in methodological and theoretical orientations. Her comparative assessment shows that Algerian doctoral dissertations rely predominantly on descriptive research designs and favor quantitative approaches. Survey methods are most frequently used, accompanied by a strong reliance on questionnaires and content analysis techniques. With respect to sampling, most theses employ purposive sampling, various forms of random sampling, quota sampling, or multi-stage sampling. Furthermore, a significant proportion of dissertations do not adopt a specific theoretical framework; instead, they present general literature reviews, while the remaining works rely primarily on traditional, well-established media theories.



Similarly, Youcef Temar's study on "Imitation and stagnation in communication and media research within the Arab academic community" 2022 identifies also some of the similar patterns of limited theoretical innovation and repetitive methodological choices. Although these studies were conducted in different contexts and across slightly different periods, their conclusions converge. Both underscore the persistent reliance on conventional theories and standardized methodological approaches, pointing to a broader intellectual stagnation affecting the field.

In light of these observations, the central question guiding this study is as follows: To what extent can we identify a diversity, a dominance or a notable absence of specific theoretical and methodological approaches in the doctoral theses in Information and Communication Sciences at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba certified between the years 2022 and 2024?

To answer the main question, it must be broken down into two secondary questions, as follows:

What is the theoretical framework used in the doctoral theses in Information and Communication Sciences at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba certified between the years 2022 and 2024?

What is the methodological framework use in the doctoral theses in Information and Communication Sciences at Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba certified between the years 2022 and 2024?

2. The goal of this study:

This article primarily aim is to conduct an in-depth examination of research practices in information and communication sciences, analyzing the theoretical and methodological frameworks commonly employed in this field at Badji Mokhtar Annaba University which were certified between the years 2022 and 2024. By providing an overview of current research, the article aims to provide a foundation for improving future scholarly practices, ensuring that upcoming studies move beyond intellectual stagnation and the recurring patterns of methodological and theoretical stereotyping.

3. Procedures:

The current investigation involved collecting than analyzing doctoral theses that were certified in media and communication field Affiliated to Badji Mokhtar Annaba University between the 2022 and 2024 to describe the theoretical and methodological framework, the doctoral theses were selected by their availability from DSpace Repository Badji Mokhtar-Annaba university. Hence, the sample type was the convenience sample, known as: "In a convenience sample (also called an accidental or haphazard sample), respondents are selected nonrandomly on the basis of availability." (FREY , BOTAN , & KREPS , 2000, p. 131)



A total of 13 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 tool for data collection is highly coherent, a point clearly articulated in the following definition content analysis is: “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 25)

According to Neuendorf “Content analysis may be conducted on written text, transcribed speech, verbal interactions, visual images, characterizations, nonverbal behaviors, sound events, or any other type of message” (p. 24). Neuendorf does acknowledge that the notion of content analysis started by specifically examining textual works.” (Wrench , Maddox , Richmond , & McCroskey , 2008, p. 244)

As for the chosen unit of analysis, it is the thematic unit known as the most common and widely used unit in media research because treating the idea as a unit of analysis helps in identifying trends and judgments regarding media content. Furthermore, it is the unit that governs the writer's approach to other units (word, sentence, paragraph), as it is carefully chosen and constructed to serve the meaning the writer aims to convey to the reader. The repetition of these ideas and meanings reveals the writer's stance, the content's position... (Abdelhamid, 1983, p. 140) It was also based on several categories:

The category of Theories: here is described the prevailing theories in the PhDs theses of media and communication approved by Badji Mokhtar Annaba University which were certified between the years 2022 and 2024. For instance: Users and gratifications, Functionalism, Symbolic Interactionism, Media dependency, Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism, Agenda setting, News framing Analysis, Innovation Diffusion in addition to More than one theory.

The category of the Study Design: here is described the prevailing study design the PhDs theses of media and communication approved by Badji Mokhtar Annaba University which were certified between the years 2022 and 2024. For instance: Descriptive study, Historical study, Comparative study, Basic study, Longitudinal study, Exploratory study, Futuristic Research, in addition to More than one.

The category of the Data analysis method: the researcher here is going to determine the type of data analysis used the PhDs theses of media and communication approved by Badji Mokhtar Annaba University which were certified between the years 2022 and 2024, whether it is a quantitative, More than one Quantitative method, Qualitative method, More than one Qualitative method, or Mixed method.

The category of Data collection tools: here we tend to describe the various research tools used in the PhDs theses of media and communication approved by Badji Mokhtar Annaba University



which were certified between the years 2022 and 2024 to collect the data and among these tools are: Quantitative Tool, Qualitative Tool, Mixed Tools.

The category of Population Coverage Methods: here we tend to describe the various Population Coverage Methods in the PhDs theses of media and communication approved by Badji Mokhtar Annaba University which were certified between the years 2022 and 2024 among these Population Coverage Methods: Census Method, Random sampling, Non- Random sampling, Mixed sampling methods.

After the research instrument's validity has been successfully established, its reliability must be measured. A recommended method for this is the test-retest technique, which involves administering the same instrument to the same subjects with a 15-day interval.

arrived at the following result.

4. Results:

Table 01: the following table shows the theories prevailing in the doctoral thesis of Badji Mokhtar Annaba University organized by years of thesis defenses

Theories	2022-2023		2023-2024		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Users and gratifications	0	0%	1	7.69%	1	7.69%
Functionalism	0	0%	4	30.76%	4	30.76%
Symbolic Interactionism	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Media dependency	1	7.69%	0	0%	1	7.69%
Marshall McLuhan's Technological	1	7.69%	0	0%	1	7.69%



I Determinism						
Agenda setting	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
News framing Analysis	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Innovation Diffusion Theory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
More than one theory	1	7.69%	5	38.46%	6	46.15%
Total	3	23.07%	10	76.9%	13	100%

The above table shows the theoretical framework used in media and communication doctoral thesis defended in Badji Mokhtar Annaba University

The theories used in the year 2022-2023 are with the similar percentage we are the use of Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism; the use of Media dependency and one thesis used a more than one theory in a single thesis. All those by a percentage of 7.69%

We can see in the table below that the majority of PhD theses defended during the years 2023-2024 are Multi theories oriented by using more than one theory in one thesis by the percentage of 38.46% than the second go to was for the Functionalism with the percentage of 30.76% than and the lower use was for the users and gratification theory by 7.69% As for the remaining theories mentioned in the table, they were not adopted by the dissertations included in the study sample token from this year.

In terms of multi-theorizing the combinations between theories was as follow:

In the year 2022-2023 one thesis combined between (Functionalism and Symbolic Interactionism)

In the year 2023-2024 the five thesis combinations were as follow:

The 1st one: (News framing Analysis- Agenda setting), in the 2nd one: (Media dependency- Users and gratifications) in the 3rd one (Functionalism- Innovation Diffusion- Media dependency) in the

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4th one (Users and gratifications- Functionalism) in the 5th and the last one (Jean Piaget's cognitive theory- Social Responsibility Theory).

Table 02: the following table shows the Study Design prevailing in the doctoral thesis of Badji Mokhtar Annaba University organized by years of thesis defenses

Study design	2022-2023		2023-2024		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Descriptive study	3	23.07%	10	76.9%	13	100%
Historical study	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Comparative study	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Basic study	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Longitudinal study	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Exploratory study	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Futuristic Research	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
More than one	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	3	23.07%	10	76.9%	13	100%

The above table describe the use of different study design used in media and communication doctoral thesis defended in Badji Mokhtar Annaba University and we can see the dominance of the



discerptible study in both years by the percentage of 23.07% in the year 2022-2023 and 76.9% in the year of 2023-2024. Which reflect the use of that study design for 100% in the media and communication PhD theses of our sample, setting aside the others study design type like historical study, Comparative study, Basic study, Longitudinal study, Exploratory study, Futuristic Research and more a decision that can harm the evolution of the discipline

Table 03: the following table shows the Data analysis Methods prevailing in the doctoral thesis of Badji Mokhtar Annaba University organized by years of thesis defenses

Data analysis Methods	2022-2023		2023-2024		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Quantitative method	3	23.07%	9	69.23%	12	92.30%
More than one Quantitative method	0	0%	1	7.69%	1	7.69%
Qualitative method	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
More than one Qualitative method	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Mixed method	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	3	23.07%	10	76.92%	13	100%

It is clear from the above table we describe the use of the methods in used in media and communication doctoral thesis defended in Badji Mokhtar Annaba University and by that we can see that majority of the PhDs in the both years are for the Quantitative method with the percentage of 23.07% witch represent the totality of thesis for the year 2022-2023 and with percentage of 69.23% witch represent All members of the sample for the year 2023-2024, except for one thesis which relied more than one Quantitative method by the percentage of 7.69%. As for qualitative



approaches, we noted their absence from the theses addressed, in both years. The analysis also revealed that the theses did not combine between quantitative and qualitative approaches, in a single thesis. Which can lead to a not so accurate results Because when we speak about phenomena studied in the media and communication, we are faced with complex phenomena that sometimes require combining qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain a complete picture or analysis of a phenomenon.

In terms of the quantitative methods used:

Across the 2022–2023 interval, all three certified theses employed the descriptive quantitative method, reflecting a strong reliance on approaches designed to characterize media phenomena as they occur, without manipulation of variables.

Similarly, in the 2023–2024 interval, the theses continued to adopt a predominantly descriptive quantitative orientation, thereby maintaining continuity with the methodological patterns of the preceding year.

Regarding the use of multiple quantitative methods, there was a combination between the descriptive method and quantitative content analysis, creating a more robust analytical framework.

Table 04: the following table shows the Data collection tools prevailing in the doctoral thesis of Badji Mokhtar Annaba University organized by years of thesis defenses

Data collection tools	2022-2023		2023-2024		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Quantitative Tool	1	7.69%	0	0%	1	7.69%
Qualitative Tool	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Mixed Tools	2	15.38%	10	0%	12	92.30%
Total	3	23.07%	10	76.92%	13	100%

From the above table we describe the use of the Data collection tools in used in media and communication doctoral thesis defended in Badji Mokhtar Annaba University and the table shows



the quantitative tool by the percentage of 7.69% and the use of the 15.38% of the mixed Tools which represents the majority of the thesis sample if the year 2022-2023, in other side the theses defended within the years 2023-2024 were Mixed Tools oriented by a percentage 76.92% of which represent the totality of the theses sample defended in that year.

And what catches our attention where the total absence of the Qualitative Tool in both years.

In terms of quantitative tools used in the years 2022-2023 there was the questionnaire tool based on the three-point Likert scale.

In terms of mixed tools combinations across the two periods (2022-2023 and 2023-2024) Across the two consecutive intervals, the examined doctoral theses employed a notable range of mixed tools reflecting broader methodological trends that emphasize triangulation, complementarity, and the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

For the academic years 2022–2023: the first thesis combined qualitative content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and quantitative content analysis, thus enabling a cross-validation of interpretive and numerical findings. The second thesis employed a configuration that integrated semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and a questionnaire, establishing a triangulated framework that enhanced both depth and reliability.

For the academic years 2023–2024, the methodological diversification became even more pronounced. The first thesis merged an online questionnaire with direct or purposive observation. The second thesis combined quantitative content analysis and an online questionnaire with qualitative content analysis supported by observational tools.

The third thesis similarly integrated quantitative and qualitative content analysis, supplemented by methodological comparison and observation. In the fourth thesis, the researcher fused a the five-point Likert-scale questionnaire with participant observation and a structured interview.

The fifth thesis merged a questionnaire with an unstructured interview and non-participant observation, while the sixth thesis relied on a mixture of an online questionnaire and observation. The seventh thesis assembled online content analysis with participant observation, further supported by an electronic interview tool. In the eighth thesis, the combination consisted of a questionnaire based on the Minnesota Five-Point Likert Scale, non-participant observation, and a semi-structured interview.

The ninth thesis employed a dual-phase design: quantitative content analysis for the analytical component of the study, an online questionnaire for the field component, and simple observation applied to both. Finally, the tenth thesis brought together qualitative and quantitative content analysis with observational tools.



Table 05: the following table shows the Population Coverage Methods prevailing in the doctoral thesis of Badji Mokhtar Annaba University organized by years of thesis defenses

Population Coverage Methods	2022-2023		2023-2024		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Census Method	1	7.69%	2	15.38%	3	23.07%
Random sampling	0	0%	2	15.38%	2	15.38%
Non- Random sampling	2	15.38%	5	38.46%	7	53.84%
Mixed sampling methods	0	0%	1	7.69%	1	7.69%
Total	3	23.07%	10	76.9%	13	100%

In the above table we describe the use of the Population Coverage Methods used in media and communication doctoral thesis defended in Badji Mokhtar Annaba University,

From the following results we can see the use excessive use of Non- Random sampling with a percentage of 15.38% for the year of 2022-2023 and the 38.46% for the year of 2023-2024, the table above showed too the use of Census Method within a percentage of 7.69% in the year 2022-2023 and 15.38% in the year of 2023-2024 from the table we can see also the use of Random sampling in the 2023-2024 PhD theses with a percentage 15.38% in other side the absence of that type of sampling the PhDs defended within the year 2022-2023 and the mixed sampling methods we have only one thesis used that practice in the years 2023-2024 with a percentage of 7.69%.

5. CONCLUSION

The clear finding is that the dominant trend is theorizing by combination. Researchers are increasingly building their frameworks by integrating multiple theories (38.46%), rather than relying on a single one. When a single theory is chosen, Functionalism is the current favorite. The data shows that older, foundational theories like Technological Determinism and Media Dependency are now primarily used as components within these larger, combined frameworks.

In terms of study design the situation is extremely polarized. One single study design (Descriptive) is used in every single thesis, while a wide range of other methodological approaches



are completely absent. As your text notes, this lack of methodological diversity is seen as a potential harm to the evolution of the discipline.

In terms of Data analysis Methods, the research culture in these doctoral theses is overwhelmingly and exclusively quantitative. The sole deviation from this was one thesis that used multiple quantitative techniques, but still did not incorporate any qualitative elements. The author notes this lack of methodological diversity as a potential weakness for studying complex media and communication phenomena.

In terms of Data collection tools, the data shows a clear and strong trend towards using mixed data collection tools. This approach became the universal standard in the most recent academic year (2023-2024), rather than relying on a single quantitative tool. The complete absence of qualitative tools remains a consistent finding.

In terms of the Population Coverage Methods: The data reveals a strong preference for non-random sampling methods over probabilistic methods. While random sampling appears in the 2023-2024 cohort, it is less common than non-random techniques.

The use of a census (studying the entire population) is a stable, secondary approach. The emergence of mixed sampling methods in one thesis indicates a nascent trend towards methodological complexity, though it remains very rare.

The description of the theoretical and methodological framework used in the doctoral dissertation discussed from 2022 to 2024 in Badji Mokhtar Annaba University, an examination of the specific theories and methodologies employed in the Media and Communication department sparks a debate concerning theoretical and methodological inertia within the discipline, a problem that is clearly evident in the body of PhD theses produced.

Accordingly, this analysis contributes to the field by challenging the stereotypical application of theoretical and methodological frameworks. It is intended to enrich future research and facilitate a much-needed shift beyond the current state of theoretical and methodological inertia in media and communication studies.

In terms of theoretical framework, these findings build upon those of Aicha Kaabach, affirming the persistent use of traditional theories in media and communication research. This conclusion is further reinforced methodologically by the work of Youcef Temar, whose study partially corroborates these same results. Especially in terms of the use of the Classical Mass Communication Theories such as Functionalist; Uses and Gratifications, Agenda-Setting, Dependency Theory the same could be said on the methodological framework if we take a look on the finding described aicha kaabach's work the stereotype, the inertia is blatant in all the



methodological process in instance for the methods the orientation was towards the quantitative method.

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