Chapter LXIII
CMC Research in Latin America and Spain:
Metaanalyses From an Emergent Field[*]

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to present a general and retrospective panorama of the CMC studies that have been done in Spain and Latin America from a critic point of view. It is divided in three blocks that show a general description of these studies, its particularities and the principal authors in Spain and Latin America. The chapter establishes a general and introductory map to the CMC studies in Ibero-America and finishes with a reflection regarding its possibilities in the future. Being Internet in general, and CMC specifically world order phenomena, the present text aims to be a contribution on the connection of the studies written in Spanish and Portuguese and those in English.

ROUTE MAP

The start of studies into Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries could be pinpointed at different times, depending on the point of view. In relation to connectivity, for example, it could be noted that while, on the one hand, countries such as Mexico, Brazil and Argentina had access (between 1986 and 1987) to pre-Internet networks, the great explosion in the use of the Net took place after the WWW boom, in the second half of the 1990s[1]. However, although the incorporation of the region into the world access panorama has grown, its connection has occurred with discontinuity and in generally low proportions. This fact is especially unfair and is greater or lesser depending on the different countries, regions and cities. A second initial note that takes on relevance is the fact that, unlike the United States, in Latin American countries the start of connection to computational networks made an especially significant impression in relation to the communication possibilities of the Net. Consequently, one of the first and most important uses that people gave the Net in Latin America was that of communication de-

vice. Although the most widely used application for this end was initially e-mail, the use of other CMC systems later spread with growing interest, including BBS, IRC channels, Web chats, instant messaging systems, and so forth.[2]. As phenomena began to emerge which had as primary axis the use of "new" technologies as communication mediators (computers and the Internet initially, although others were incorporated later, such as the mobile telephone, in the same "category"), and especially as the number of people connected grew, Latin American academics from different fields began to generate an interest in these phenomena[3]. According to the above, the aim of this text consists of establishing a historical, critical and reflexive map of the main studies, authors and proposals whose object of study has been CMC in Latin America and Spain. However, this "map" is limited purely to CMC studies and is far from exhaustive. In addition, it aims to give a single overview of the work whose central theme is "Cyberculture" (Bell, 2001), this being a necessary limited vision in its scope for two reasons. Firstly, because it leaves out a great number of work and research which, despite studying the use of the Internet for communication, have not necessarily been framed within the subjects on CMC[4]. A second limitation is due precisely to the scant discussion that there is in the research into the subject between the various countries.

The text is divided into three main blocks and one of conclusions: the first block is a general introduction to the CMC Studies that have been conducted in Latin America; the second is a general overview of the studies conducted in Spain, with the emphasis on a number of comparative elements with the rest of Europe and the United States; the third block has the same aim but this time comparing Latin America with Spain, Europe and the United States. This third block will take an in-depth look in the three countries in which research into the subject appears to be concentrated: Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. There is a certain element of arbitrariness to this decision

that is appreciated at the moment, and which needs to be justified by the amount of publications and research disseminated in these countries and that turns them into a "natural axis" of research in the region. Finally, the text is completed with a block of conclusions.

In his review of the field of Internet Studies, David Silver (2004) states that a key book in the formation of the field was "Cybercultures Reader," edited by David Bell and Barbara Kennedy. He comments the following with regard to it:

The books also deliver a set of texts that is clearly Western and English-speaking, and primarily academic. As with all fields of thought, our links must be international and language barriers must be considered and somehow overcome ….This is a problem facing all fields of inquiry, yet is especially relevant to our meta-field, with its globally-distributed object of study. Further work – taking the form of anthologies, books, articles, web sites, blogs, listserv discussions and interventions, presentations, workshops, and dialogues – can and must be international in scope. (p. 62)

This is precisely the aim of this text, which despite having no intention of being exhaustive, does seek to make a modest contribution to building a bridge between the CMC studies that are being conducted in English-speaking countries and the ones that have been conducted in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking ones. This apart, the text appears to be positioned at a stage that seems to be revisionist for Internet Studies (Herring, 2004; Hine, 2005; Gómez Cruz and Galindo, 2005; Silver, 2004; Trejo Delarbe, 2004; Wellman, 2004), one that David Silver calls "Critical Cyberculture Studies" (2006). Therefore, this work is positioned as both a brief history and a critique of CMC studies in Latin America. The above is in line with Sterne (2006), when he posits: "We should treat the historical periods in our writing less like self-evident categories in our data and more like problems to be considered

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