






COVID-19 research agenda: Findings in the literature from 2020 to 2024

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Abstract: The public agenda as a reflection of the axes and topics of discussion between the governors and the governed has been oriented to the discussion of the impact of the pandemic on public opinion and government initiatives without considering the findings reported in the literature as indicators of the phenomenon. The objective of the present work was to establish the networks that are inferred from the relationships between findings reported in the literature from 2020 to 2024 regarding political and social actors in the field of social risk communication. The results warn of the prevalence of collateral axes to mobility as a restrictive effect of the policies of confinement and distancing of people. The analysis of health policies is recommended in order to anticipate conflict scenarios between the parties.

Keywords: Agenda, COVID, framing, intensification, participation.

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INTRODUCTION

During the period since the SARS CoV-2 and COVID-19 pandemic, it has been possible to observe the establishment of the public agenda (Tanyara et al., 2021). The predominant axes and topics of discussion in the media and socio-digital networks reflect the asymmetries between the rulers and the governed with respect to the communication and management of risks of contagion, disease and death (Bustos-Aguayo et al., 2022b). The process in which the agenda is established can be analyzed from the trend of topics in the literature during the period of the pandemic (Bustos-Aguayo et al., 2022a). In this way, bibliometric and opinion studies indicate that the public agenda is the result of three factors: framing effect, intensification effect and participation effect.

The framing effect originates when media such as television, radio, press or cinema orient their content towards a predominant topic (Sandoval-Vásquez et al., 2021). This is the case of the legitimization of a biosafety policy such as the Sustainable Development Goals in which the signatory governments undertake to establish the conditions for human development considering the availability of resources and the unavoidable reduction in consumption, but without affecting the nuclear tests, construction of dams, exploitation of basins or extraction of hydrocarbons (Carreón Guillén et al., 2014). In this way, the framing effect is an indicator of the public agenda due to the impact of the dissemination of topics in crisis scenarios and imminent risks.

However, the framing effect only explains the biased dissemination of topics without considering the impact on public opinion (García Lirios, 2019). It is the intensification effect that explains the prevalence of opinions, expectations and information needs that emerge from readers once they have been exposed to the dissemination of the media (García Lirios, 2014). The Human Development Goals can have an impact on the opinions of audiences whenever in a global or local event it is possible to measure the rejection or support for the issues disseminated on television, radio, press or cinema.

Although the framing and intensification effects allow us to deduce the communicative relationships between rulers and the governed, it is the participation effect that explains the response of audiences towards official communication of

risks, contingencies or threats (García Lirios, 2020). The participation of audiences in socio-digital networks is not always generated by the media framing (García Lirios et al., 2015). Internet users are not always exposed to official propaganda and do not always generate their participation on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp or TikTok (García Lirios et al., 2013). Consequently, the analysis of sociodigital participation is in its infancy (Molina Ruiz et al., 2019). Consequently, it is necessary to analyze the route through which participation can emerge as a result of the dissemination of data or figures rather than the dissemination of images, discourses or narratives.

Within the framework of the framing, intensification and participation of the agenda focused on the pandemic, the bibliometric analysis of the pandemic is included (García Lirios, 2021). Understood as a biased diffusion phenomenon, the publishers opened their contents to the review of specialized literature on SARS CoV-2 and COVID-19. In addition, the repositories intensified the dissemination of special issues related to the health crisis and its effects on public health. Magazines even convened and published general and preliminary opinions of the pandemic.

Therefore, the objective of this work was to reveal the structure of relationships between the topics of discussion in the research agenda that were reflected in the literature published from 2019 to 2022, considering a search using keywords.

Are there significant differences between the theoretical structure of COVID published in the last three years with respect to the evaluations of expert judges?

The premises that guide this work suggest that the pandemic impacted the relationships between those who govern and the governed, exacerbating the asymmetries between the parties. The State generated propaganda to legitimize its social distancing and confinement policies. Citizens, transformed into audiences opposed to or sympathetic to state propaganda, intensified their consumption of the media and their participation in socio-digital networks. The established agenda of the differences between the parties reflected axes and topics of discussion. In the case of the research agenda, even when science establishes its positions based on evidence, it is possible to appreciate the framing, intensification and participation effect around the communication and management of COVID-19.

METHOD

The public agenda, unlike the political or citizen agenda, seeks to balance information biases (Aguilar et al., 2016). In this sense, a documentary, transversal and retrospective study is necessary (Ávila and Ávila, 2012). Documentary in the sense of the flow of information in journals indexed in international repositories (Bustos-Aguayo et al., 2018). This is a review of titles and abstracts as a fundamental criterion for information monitoring (Carreón et al., 2014). In this sense, the review cuts in each period mean a cross-sectional study (Feenstra, 2008). Every review is retrospective, but not every retrospection implies a review, which is unlikely given the accumulation of data (García Lirios et al., 2013). In this way, the scope of the public agenda can be established through a documentary, transversal and retrospective journey because the technical and delimited sections are a feasible route for the universe of available information (García et al., 2016).

The bibliographic review was carried out in repositories such as Academia, Copernicus, Dimensions, Google Scholar, Microsoft Academics, Frontiers, Latindex, Scopus, Redalyc, SciELO, Zenodo and Zotero, considering the search keywords as “agenda”, during the period included the pandemic from 2020 to 2024.

Because the information will be processed at different levels and episodes, the filtering of this data was carried out with a Delphi Matrix Inventory in which the ratings of expert judges on the topics are recorded (García Lirios et al., 2017). A second phase consists of self-correction, comparing first impressions with the average evaluations of the judges (García Lirios, 2014). In the third instance, the reconsideration or reaffirmation of the participants' criteria allows a new contrast.

The axes and topics of discussion related to the dimensions of the public agenda were established (Mejía, 2011). The sum of the judges' ratings was considered, which ranged from -1 when considering that the Government influences citizen opinion through the media, 0 for no influence between political and private actors, as well as political and social ones, + 1 for the influence of citizens on local public policies.

Once the research agenda was established from the Delphi Inventory, the statistical distributions of the judges' ratings were estimated (García Lirios et al., 2016). The data were captured in the Excel program and processed in the JASP program (version 14.0); In order to demonstrate the non-parametric distribution, the averages, standard deviations, correlations, chi square, adjustment and residual were calculated (see Table 4).

Values close to unity were assumed as evidence of acceptance of the null hypothesis related to the significant differences between the theoretical structure and the evaluations of the expert judges (Rodríguez, 2011). Values close to zero were assumed as evidence of rejection of the null hypothesis (Sampedro and Resina, 2010).

RESULTS

The centrality values that explain the distance or proximity between the studies reviewed. Values are seen that suggest a structure of theme prevalence. That is, the research agenda related to COVID-19 is distinguished by its proximity in terms of problems and solutions.

The grouping values explain the proximity of the nodes with respect to the themes disseminated in the literature consulted. Learning relationships are appreciated which would explain the prevalence of the themes in the period of analysis. The judges' criteria are configured around the six predominant axes in the literature consulted. In other words, the agenda is made up of content nodes related to problems and solutions focused on the immunization of people, as well as prevention and self-care.

The values that explain the structure of relationships between the findings reported in the literature and evaluated by the expert judges. Learning relationships are observed that range from immunization to mortality. That is, expert judges consider that the findings reported in the literature are more oriented towards deaths associated with COVID-19. In other words, the neural networks of knowledge suggest that the research agenda reflects a negative opinion of the communication and management of the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

The contribution of this work to the state of the art lies in the establishment of the network of the research agenda related to COVID-19. The results demonstrate the prevalence of three problems alluding to infections, diseases and deaths in relation to solutions related to prevention, self-care and immunization. In other words, the framing of the literature consulted lies in a network biased toward deaths, even though it consistently reports immunization, prevention and self-care options. That is, the literature reflects a disapproval of health policy in terms of communication and management of the pandemic.

In relation to the literature consulted where the topics of discussion are reported, the criteria of the judges who evaluated the findings guide an agenda focused on the legitimacy of anti-COVID-19 policies. The investigative agenda inferred by the framing or bias of the dissemination of topics contrasts with the agenda deduced by the intensification of data, images, or discourses and the agenda reflected in the level of socio-digital participation (García Lirios et al., 2016). In this sense, it is necessary to extend the study to the intensification and participation of Internet users to establish the corresponding agenda and compare it with that established in the present review.

However, the inference of the agenda from the dissemination and intensive participation supposes a superior methodology and analysis technique that exceeds the objective of the study, but would enrich the discussion on the nature of the agenda and the comparison between agendas. Consequently, opinion mining around anti-COVID policies, as well as agent-based simulation, are statistical analysis techniques that would open the discussion on the impact of anti-COVID-19 policies on the opinions of lay or expert communities.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this work was to establish the research agenda based on the evaluation of findings related to the pandemic. The judges' criteria suggest a research agenda focused on deaths associated with COVID-19 rather than prevention measures, self-care and immunization. In relation to risk communication and management, it is recommended to direct the research agenda towards the immunization of people. Regarding data analysis techniques, it is recommended to extend the study to opinion mining and agent-based simulation in order to anticipate conflict scenarios between political and social actors.

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