

MEXICAN SERIALS: TITLES, CONTENTS AND READERS OF TREASURES TO TAP*

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ABSTRACT

Mexican journals are usually ignored at local and foreign universities despite the fact that they convey the most updated academic and scientific information generated by national researchers and writers. Libraries and readers have difficulty in accessing Mexican journals, because local serials are normally out of the mainstream of journal indexing and full-text databases from the industrialized world. The barriers for local journals are many, among them the language, limited marketing, and the less relevant universal article content. Mexican serial titles, their contents and their potential readers will be the subject of this presentation that aims to provide guidance on how to acquire the best journals, and overcome the lack of international indexing services' coverage.

* Verónica Flores provided assistance to gather reference information

INTRODUCTION

Serials have been twice part of my life, first, during my childhood, when I made my first savings by renting comics to my neighbors during Summer breaks. This was a time when families in my small Mexican hometown did not have enough means to buy their own comics. My job was to select and to acquire the most popular titles, then hang them on ropes and provide chairs for the readers in front of my house. Prices for rent were lower for those who read the comics on site and higher for those who wanted to take them home. My business went on for some years until I grew up. Then, my grandmother took over the business and incorporated the renting of comics to her corner shop. Years went by and serials were a forgotten medium for me. I did all my schooling up to university hardly using a periodical for academic purposes. Even my university library did not have journal subscriptions and my professors seemed to ignore the existence of periodicals. Later, when I got a grant to study a Master's Degree in Library Science at Denver University, serials become again important in my life. Journals were a must for any essay. Since then, serials have been part of my job at the academic libraries where I have worked. However, serials work is a challenge at most Mexican universities, where demand for periodicals is limited. The use of serials has not changed that much in several universities since my early undergraduate years, because journals are hardly part of the curricula. Here in this paper, the demand for periodicals by academic users is discussed, explaining the factors that inhibit their use, as well as explaining how to acquire the best titles by libraries from overseas. The focus of the paper is on scientific periodicals, and their demand by academic libraries.

SERIALS PRODUCTION

The oldest circulating serials in Mexico date back to the 1800s, such as *Boletín, Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* (1839, ISSN 0188-1442), *Gaceta Médica de México* (1864, ISSN 0016-3813), and *Anuario del Observatorio Astronómico Nacional* (1881). However, the first serials appeared in Mexico in the 1700's, such as *Diario Literario de México* (1766), *Mercurio Volante*, (1772-73), and *Asuntos Varios sobre Ciencias y Artes* (1772-73). These titles were the first in the American continent [10]. The International Standard Serial Number Agency (ISSN) reports 3,500 Mexican titles [8], although it is estimated that there are at least twice as much, due to the fact that many periodicals lack ISSN registration [12]. Journals are, in general, published by state universities and by national research centers financed by the government, usually the federal one. Electronic journals are just emerging. It is estimated that there are around twenty titles evolving. Subject coverage of journals is wide. They cover most disciplines and subjects. However, the strength is on the social sciences and the humanities, where 60% of the production is published [12]. Mexican serials are, as those from other latitudes, the best sources for updated academic and

scientific information, because they publish the best output of researchers and writers.

In terms of comics and magazines, Mexico has a good number of them with large audiences. Some of the most popular titles can reach 800 thousand copies per week [1]. These periodicals play an important role in fostering reading habits among those who have only a few years of schooling, and even among those who did not have the chance to attend school. Comics are also a big export to the US, where Hispanic communities also love to read cowboy and soap opera-like stories. As it may be assumed, these serials are a business of private companies that tend to publish a good number of titles to cover the different classes of topics.

Newspapers, on the other hand, are a market usually divided in four tiers according to their geographical location, where the papers are published, a fact that correlates with the importance of the newspapers. First are the dailies from Mexico City. They dominate the market, because of the broader coverage and a good nation-wide distribution, besides being the news agencies for smaller papers. Second in importance are the dailies from the two other major cities: Guadalajara and Monterrey. Both places have succeeded in distributing their papers to the rest of the country. Monterrey has been even more successful. The news company based in this city publishes the leading newspaper “El Norte” that expanded its operation to Mexico City more than a decade ago with “Reforma”, a newspaper that has become a leading daily in the whole country. Third in place are the papers from the medium sized cities, usually in state capitals. They tend to have a distribution limited to the state borders and normally have good publishing equipment. Finally, the fourth tier of newspapers is the local community dailies. These periodicals are simple and modest, covering political subjects and local topics relevant to their communities. Many of them struggle to survive with limited resources. Some of the local papers are part of national editing companies, relying on their editorials for in-depth articles. Editing of newspapers from the first three tiers has improved through the years. Now, titles from the largest cities are edited electronically and posted on the web, some publish the full articles and some others only summaries of their main news. The list of these papers is included in Appendix 2.

DEMAND OF JOURNALS

Despite the fact that journals, the focus of this paper, are the best sources for quality information, they have low demand in academic institutions, where the main reader market ought to be. No studies were identified about readers’ serial use and needs. The scarce demand of serials may be due to the fact that education is still highly teaching-oriented, where the professors’ lecture and the textbook are the main sources of information for students. Student learning is seldom based on research or essay writing. On the other hand, professors themselves

have limited demand of periodicals; because they often fail to do research. There are more 7,000 recognized researchers by the National System of Researchers (SNI), a government organization that gives economic awards to academics who pass research output assessments. This figure is rather small when compared to the nearly 60,000 full-time professors and lecturers who work at universities. On top of this figure is the fact that most researchers work at national research centers or university research institutes, doing limited or no teaching at all. Researchers, on the other hand, tend to concentrate in Mexico City, leaving state universities with a handful of them, and even institutions with no SNI researchers at all. These factors are likely to contribute to the low demand of serials at most academic institutions.

Price of journals is not a problem for readers' demand. Prices are usually low for most journals, because institutions heavily subsidize the cost of publication. The average price for the best scientific journals included in the ranking list of the Mexican National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) is around \$50 for an annual subscription. These prices may sound good for the reader, but it is bad in the long run for the journal, because the economics of editing do not work well. Journals seldom have the required investment, because it is difficult for journals to have the proper revenue. The low pricing system is even more spoiled by the fact that journal issues are often given free to whomever may request a donation. Issues are normally given away even to institutions that can afford to pay a subscription. The pricing system affects the use of journals, because readers assume, a general belief in academia, that journals are free. Therefore, readers seldom make an effort to subscribe to these periodicals, while they may happily pay for magazines, normally sold at a higher price.

Besides the low demand, journals have additional hurdles. Most titles are difficult to acquire because they lack a distribution system within the country, not to mention abroad. Additionally, institutions lack bilingual staff, and their charging systems for subscriptions are outdated, they seldom manage, for example, credit card payments. The reason for the outmoded subscription systems is that journals are usually part of public institutions, organizations that seldom are business-oriented. Low prices, on the other hand, also affect distribution, because journals jobbers can hardly make any business when doing the normal price-based charge used for foreign journals. Overseas serial distributors are, for example, reluctant to sell local serials to Mexican libraries. Therefore, smaller academic libraries with few national subscriptions often have to do the administrative work of ordering and paying for each Mexican title. This is a time-consuming task for library serial departments that is reflected in low subscription to Mexican journals.

Another factor that inhibit journals' demand is that international indexing services seldom include Mexican titles in their databases [7,13]. For example, Mexican journals make certainly less than 1.0% of titles, that is 7, included in the Science Citation Index and 2 in the science version of such index [12]. Language is also

important barrier, because Spanish is not a science lingua franca. Most secondary sources are in English, a predominant language (40%) for all serials [8]. The lack of visibility/inclusion of Mexican scientific journals in serial databases is a major limitation for local and international readers. It is difficult to identify and locate serial literature, because the prevalent indexing services, even in Mexican libraries, are usually international, that is American bibliographic or full-text databases. An additional negative consequence is that national scientists prefer to publish in international journals, where their contributions have more visibility, and their academic work has more professional recognition [3,7,13].

An additional challenge for some journals is to publish on time. Some of them are behind their official publishing dates. Additionally, several journals focus on local matters, a fact that is an advantage for Mexican readers but not for international clientele that may be more interested in broader geographical coverage. Additionally, content often tends to be endogamic, in other words, written only by local or institutional researchers. Finally, new titles are short-lived and official periodicals commonly change titles according to government changes. These problems can be a nightmare for libraries and it must also be for serial distributors. Editing institutions, on the other hand, seldom market their journals. Readers usually identify scientific periodicals by consulting the bibliography of other types of publications or by word of mouth. This makes discovery of journals difficult for readers, especially for overseas potential clientele

North American demand of Mexican journals is consequently low. According to Lief Adleson [1], who leads the major Mexican book and serial exporting company to academic and research libraries from the United States (US), the demand of local journals is pathetically low, taking into consideration the size and the resources of the American library market. He distributes an average of 30 copies per journal, and the number of titles is also rather limited: less than 120. Adleson's figures may cover most of the exports to the US, because he is the person who distributes journals to the major serial vendors, that is Swets, Faxon, Dawson, etc. This is an indicator that the Mexican serial market is still to be discovered by overseas libraries, especially American and Canadian libraries that may have greater interest in matters from the neighbor South of US border.

It has to be said that the limited demand for serials abroad is also reflected in the Mexican book market, even though it has a better marketing. Adleson stated that his company exports an average of 75 copies of the best-selling books, like those of Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Prize [1]. This low exporting figure may also be due to the Spanish language barrier, because Mexican books are better known than serials to potential readers in foreign academic institutions. Business journals and related periodicals seem to have also a low demand, even though titles are key publications to monitor the Mexican markets. American universities

with Hispanic readers and Spanish/Latin American programs sound like good clients, as well as companies with interest in Mexico.

According to Lourdes Rovalo, a library authority in Mexican serials, the main challenges to several Mexican periodicals, excluding those titles that are on the top, is that journals need to comply with international editing standards [12]. This means that serials ought to have bilingual abstracts, follow guidelines of CONACYT and those of the International Standards Organization (ISO); and editors need to introduce marketing to design and promote journals according to users' demands, and need to get the attention of international readers through the indexing of journals in main stream information services. Another challenge is to explore joint venture businesses with international editors, such as full-text electronic distribution.

Despite the fact that serials still need to play a greater role in education, from basic to undergraduate institutions, they have a place at the collections of important libraries. Mexico has a National Serial Library, a counterpart of the National Library located at the UNAM campus. The serial collection holds more than 5,000 Mexican titles. However, the best general collection of journals in the country is the one built by CICH, the Information Center for Sciences and the Humanities of UNAM. This comprehensive collection, of 13,600 printed titles and 6,500 online full-text journals, includes Mexican periodicals as well as serials from different parts of the world. Its main objective is to serve the information needs of the UNAM academic community. Libraries have, on the other hand, compiled serial union catalogs for some decades. The first one dates the 1940's, and the latest are SERIUNAM that lists 50,000 titles subscribed by more than 300 libraries; and RENCIS, an annually updated catalog that includes 30,000 biomedical titles belonging to a 140 libraries nation-wide [11, 12]. These sources are of great help to map serials around the country for interlibrary loan purposes.

HOW TO ACQUIRE MEXICAN JOURNALS

After reading the previous sections of this paper, acquisition librarians from abroad may question themselves how to identify and to subscribe to the top Mexican periodicals. The best way to discover and evaluate journals is using secondary sources that have done the selection work before they include the periodicals into their repertoires. These sources are Mexican indexing services that are available, in most cases, through local websites. Mexican serial databases are also good for searching the bibliographic production of Mexican researchers as well as Latin American ones. Most repertoires aim to cover the production of the whole region, but nonetheless their focus is towards Mexico, where the databases are compiled. The libraries of the National University, UNAM, produce several of the recommended selection tools. There are also some international sources like the Association of Research Libraries Project [9]

that has created a table of content index to Mexican and some Latin American journals. The best selection tools are described in alphabetical order in the next paragraphs. The aim is to provide a quick selection guide to serial acquisition librarians from overseas.

1. **ARL Latin Americanist Research Resources Project.** This project, sponsored by members of the Association of Research Libraries, provides a table of content index to Latin American journals acquired on cooperative basis [9]. The advantage of the service is that journals are part of American academic/research libraries' holdings, and are, therefore, located within the US, so if a library is unable to acquire a Mexican journal, it can get any required article through interlibrary loan.
2. **Artemisa.** It is an excellent full-text database devoted to the health sciences produced by the Ministry of Health since 1991. The repertory includes more than 38 medical journals. Titles included have to comply with international editing standards. The database is available on CD-ROM.
3. **BIVE.** It is a bibliographic database devoted to veterinary-related journals produced by the Veterinary Library of UNAM since 1985. The repertory holds more than 14,000 records of 76 Mexican journals. The current database can be consulted on CD-ROM and at www.veterin.unam.mx.
4. **CLASE.** This is a bibliographic database produced by UNAM libraries that covers Mexican and Latin American social science journals. It is one of the most comprehensive repertories in the region. The database can be a good tool to select journals of several disciplines from Mexico and Latin America. It covers 1,216 journals and has accumulated 172,000 references since 1975, when it was created [12,3]. They can be accessed on CD-ROM and on the web at www.unam.mx.
5. **CONACYT's best ranked journals.** CONACYT publishes a list of the "quality" scientific and academic journals. It uses an in-depth criteria, applying international standards, to select titles. In most cases, the inclusion of a journal into this list means that the publication is eligible to receive a grant to contribute to the cost of the journal publication [5]. This economic implication seems to make CONACYT criteria harder than international standards, because each journal demands a larger budget to this government organization. However, this is irrelevant to foreign libraries, because the list, after all, means a quality standard for any journal included. Some Mexican libraries use the CONACYT's list as a default selection tool and simply subscribe to all these journals without any screening. The journals included in this list are in Appendix 4.
6. **INFOBILA.** It focuses on library science publications, including nearly 17,000 references to serial articles and to monographic materials of all types from Mexico and Latin America. It is produced since 1986 by CUIB, the *Centro Universitario de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas*, a library science research center of UNAM. The database is available at <http://cuib.laborales.unam.mx/infobila/indice.html>.

7. **INFOLATINA.** An electronic database originally created by a successful Mexican commercial venture that was recently acquired by Internet Securities. It is a full text service of mainly business periodicals, legal publications, newspapers and general interest magazines from Mexico. The number of titles is around 300. The figure is hard to estimate, because it also includes monographic information on legal matters (www.infolatina.com.mx).
8. **International indexes.** Other selection tools to identify the best Mexican journals are international indexing databases. Titles that make it to the leading serial databases are assumed to be the best. However, the limitation of international repertories is that they focus on English-written journals. Therefore, they should not be used as the main guide to pick up the top Mexican periodicals, because this would limit the options to find other possible good serials [2].
9. **IRESE.** It is the Mexican equivalent to ERIC. The database has 57,000 references of education related fields from 427 publications from Mexico (211 titles) Latin America ((168) and Spain (48) [14]. This is another source produced by UNAM and is also available in CD-ROM as well as on the web at: <http://dragon.dgsca.unam.mx/cesu/iresie1.htm>
10. **LATINDEX.** This repertory covers titles published by 10 countries including Mexico, Spain, Portugal and other seven Latin American nations. Latindex is being created in three phases: a compilation of a directory of journals, a catalogue of the best titles, and an index to the content of these journals. The directory, published so far, includes 9,000 journals that had to comply with certain quality criteria. Mexican journals that passed the screening were 1,500 [12,3]. It can be accessed at: www.unam.mx/latindex
11. **Latin Medic.** EBSCO México is about to launch this new full-text product, which includes about 20 Mexican medical journals indexed by Artemisa (www.ebsco.com). This new database will also distribute 80 titles from other Latin American countries.
12. **PERIODICA.** This is a counterpart of the database Clase. It is produced by UNAM Libraries and covers 1,441 science and technology journals from Mexico and Latin America. It has been on the market since 1978, accumulating nearly 174,000 bibliographic references [12]. Between Periodica and Clase index more than 1,000 Mexican journals [3].
13. **UNAM.** The National University publishes a good number of good quality journals, product of its research centers that carry out about 60% of the activity in the country. A list of its journals is included in Appendix 3.

Once the relevant journals are selected, they can be acquired through Mexican subscription agencies that offer reliable services. Most of them will be glad to carry out foreign business. The best agents are Books from Mexico, Difusión Científica, DIRSA, Domexsa, and NyE Omicron. Their addresses including websites are in Appendix 5. There are more agencies, but they are smaller and this may mean smaller service infrastructure. Another option is EBSCO and

Swets Blackwell. Both international vendors know well the Mexican market. However, EBSCO is the only foreign vendor, since 1994, with offices in Mexico to serve the country and the rest of Latin America (See Appendix 5). This company also distributes a list of journals published in Spanish that includes about 500 Mexican serials out of 4,500 titles from other countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Serials in their many formats play different roles in Mexico. Comics, love story magazines and newspapers have an important role in developing reading habits of those with less years of schooling. They are still the basic and affordable reading for people. Academic and scientific journals play, on the contrary a limited role, especially in education, despite of the fact that they are, in general, of good quality and with subsidized prices. Unfortunately, education is still centered on professors' lecture and textbooks, where journals and other complementary materials seem to have limited relevance to the learning process. Mexican journals need a greater demand from academic institutions from home and abroad. Scientific local periodicals are treasures to tap by foreign libraries, especially from American academic ones, where Hispanic readers and those doing Mexican related studies could benefit. Overseas libraries can use secondary sources to identify and select the most relevant titles to their readers. Acquisition can be simple if orders are placed through Mexican or international serial vendors. A sample of the best journals can be found in the following first four appendices.

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APPENDIX 1
BEST MEXICAN MEDICAL JOURNALS
ARTEMISA – A Full-Text Database [4]

1. Archives of Medical Research
2. Archivos del Instituto de Cardiología de México
3. Archivos de Neurociencias
4. Boletín del Colegio Mexicano de Urología
5. Boletín Médico del Hospital Infantil de México
6. Cirugía y Cirujanos
7. Gaceta Médica de México
8. Ginecología y Obstetricia de México
9. La Revista de Investigación Clínica
10. Medicina Interna de México
11. Nefrología Mexicana
12. Neumología Cirugía de Tórax
13. Perinatología y Reproducción Humana
14. Revista ADM
15. Revista Alergia México
16. Revista Biomédica
17. Revista de Enfermedades Infecciosas en Pediatría
18. Revista de Gastroenterología de México
19. Revista del Instituto Nacional de Cancerología
20. Revista del Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias
21. Revista Médica del Hospital General de México
22. Revista Médica del IMSS
23. Revista Mexicana de Anestesiología
24. Revista Mexicana de Ingeniería Biomédica
25. Revista Mexicana de Ortopedia y Traumatología
26. Revista Mexicana de Patología Clínica
27. Revista Mexicana de Puericultura y Pediatría
28. Revista Mexicana de Radiología
29. Revista Sanidad Militar
30. Salud Mental
31. Salud Pública de México
32. Veterinaria México

APPENDIX 2

MEXICAN NEWSPAPERS ON THE WEB [15]

Title	City	Web address
Adelante	Mazatlán, Sinaloa	http://adelante.mazatlan.com.mx
Amanecer en México	Ciudad de México	http://amanecer.com.mx
El Agel de Puebla	Puebla, Puebla	http://puebla.infosel.com.mx/al/
CNI en Línea	México	http://cnienlinea.com.mx
La Crónica de Hoy	Ciudad de México	www.cronica.com.mx
Cuarto Poder	Tuxtla Gtz, Chiapas	www.cuarto-poder.com.mx
EL Debate	Culiacán, Sinaloa	www.debate.com.mx
El Diario de Monterrey	Monterrey, Nuevo León	www.intercable.net/diariomty
Diario de Morelia	Morelia, Michoacán	http://morelia.infosel.com.mx/periodicos/gdm44.htm
Diario de Yucatán	Yucatán, Yucatán	www.yucatan.com.mx/forma.htm
Diario Presente	Villahermosa, Tabasco	www.nexus.net.mx/presente
El Diario	Chihuahua, Chih.	www.diario.com.mx/dch
El Economista	Mexico City	www.economista.com.mx
Excélsior	Mexico City	www.excelsior.com.mx
El Financiero	Mexico City	www.elfinanciero.com.mx
Hidrocalído	Aguascalientes	www.hidrocalido.infosel.com.mx
El Imparcial	Hermosillo, Sonora	www.imparcial.com.mx
El Informador	Guadalajara, Jalisco	www.informador.com.mx
La Jornada	Ciudad de México	www.jornada.unam.mx
Meridiano	Tepic, Nayarit	www.meridiano.com.mx
El Nacional	Ciudad de México	www.el-nacional.com.mx
Noroeste	Culiacán, Sinaloa	www.noroeste.com.mx
Norte, el	Monterrey, Nuevo León	www.infosel.com.mx/elnorte
Notimex	Mexico City	www.notimex.com.mx
Novedades	Mexico City	www.novedades.com.mx
Novedades de Acapulco	Acapulco, Guerrero	www.aca.novenet.com.mx
Novedades de Quintana Roo	Cancún, Quintana Roo	www.novenet.com.mx
Ocho columnas	Mexico City	www.ochocolumnas.com.mx
La Opinión	Torreón, Coahuila	www.ual.mx/opinion/opinion.html
El Porvenir	Monterrey, Nuevo León	www.elporvenir.com.mx
La República	Chiapas	http://larepublica.chiapas.com
El Siglo de Torreón	Torreón, Coahuila	www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx
Tabasco Hoy	Tabasco	www.tabascohoy.com.mx
Tribuna	Cd. Obregón, Sonora	www.tribuna.com.mx
Tribuna de Campeche	Campeche	http://tribunacampeche.com
El Universal	Mexico City	www.el-universal.com.mx
Vanguardia	Saltillo, Coahuila	www.vanguardia.com.mx

APPENDIX 3
UNAM JOURNALS
MAIN ACADEMIC PUBLISHER [15]

TITLE	EMAIL
Acta poética	hberista@mailier.main.conacyt.mx
Acta sociológica	http://socilan.politicas.unam.mx/
Anales de antropología	
Anales del Instituto de Biología. Series: Botánica y Zoología	secteo@mail.ibiologia.unam.mx
Anales del Instituto de Ciencias del Mar y Limnología	ayala@mar.emyl.unam.mx
Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas	ereinoso@servidor.unam.mx
Anuario de letras	
Anuario de letras modernas	
Anuario jurídico	raul@servidor.unam.mx
Anuario Mexicano de Historia del Derecho	raul@servidor.unam.mx
Archivos Hispanoamericanos de Sexología	Gayou@data.net.mx
Armonía	
Arquitectura mexicana	
Atmósfera	raue@mviica.atmosfcu.unam.mx
Bibliografía latinoamericana	biplat@selene.cichcu.unam.mx
Biblioteca Universitaria	informa@panoramx.dgbiblio.unam.mx
Boletín de estudios medicos y biológicos	cavaro@servidor.unam.mx
Boletín de mineralogía	
Boletín del Insituto de Investigaciones bibliográficas	libros@biblional.bibliog.unam.mx
Boletín mexicano de derecho comparado	raul@servidor.unam.mx
Carrizos	
Clase. Citas Latinoamericanas en Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades	biplat@selene.cichcu.unam.mx
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