

# Contemporary Trends in Political Communication and Public Relations: A Global Bibliometric Analysis of Research Patterns in Political Discourse (2020-2024)

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## Abstract

Through bibliometric analysis, this study provides an overview of the evolution of public communication in political contexts between 2020 and 2024 with respect to research trends, collaboration patterns and emerging themes within the fields of political communication and public relations research. Using methods of systematic analysis visiting Scopus database, the study analyzes 2,367 documents that have been published over 860 sources, illustrating the theoretical development and methodological approaches in this field during an era characterized by pivotal technological and social transitions. The study uncovers significant patterns of hierarchy in terms of production and collaboration, with a clear geographical skew towards North American and European institutions but growing activity from the wider Asia-Pacific regions. The United States is at the top of research output, followed by the UK and Germany. The annual growth rate of 1.64% in publication trends reflects a sustained scholarly interest on the subject between 2020 and November, 2023. Thematic analysis reveals a handful of research clusters, identifying digital media and social networks as the home base for most publications, followed by two other themes: electoral politics and crisis communication. This includes the immediate implications of COVID-19, which prompted new research directions around crisis communication and public trust, as well as future-oriented trajectories indicated by emerging topics including alternative media and political fandom.

**Keywords:** bibliometric, communication, trend in political communication

## 1. Introduction

Public communication in politics has changed greatly over the last decade and a half, as technological advancement, global crises and changes in political mobilization have reshaped communication dynamics and public discourses (Zhang & Pankratova, 2023). Even as digital technologies begin to mediate political discourse, and government communication strategies are responding with more innovative practices of engagement, attention to these developments requires systematic analyses of the scholarly contributions best suited to addressing these issues (de Vries, 2020; Susanti et al., 2023). Political communication and public relations is one of the key areas where traditional ideas about political discourse converge with new paradigms of public deliberation, warranting an overview of current scholarship and future directions (Coelho et al., 2017; Fitiawan & N Nasiwan, 2023).

Several related and more recent developments, however, in the study of political communication have not been thoroughly analyzed (da Silva Neto & Chiarini, 2021). The rise of digital platforms has transformed the construction, delivery and reception of political messages by challenging conventional models of political communication. In parallel, international phenomena like COVID-19 have challenged existing paradigms of crisis communication and public trust (Chagas & Da-Costa, 2023; Gollust et al., 2020), but the recent rise of populist movements has brought renewed scrutiny to the relationship between political discourse and public opinion. All this happens while there is a growing unease around information disorder, polarization and the nature of democratic debate.

Individual studies have focused on features of these transitions, but there is scope for a wide-ranging analysis of how this discipline is addressing the challenges. While previous reviews have been more narrowly focused on specific domains of political communication or public relations (Dahlgren, 2005; Nurjanah, 2023), knowledge beyond isolated aspects is lacking, particularly of patterns and trends (Hidayat et al., 2018). As political practices and communication technologies evolve quickly, this highlights the need to systematically reassess research directions to keep theoretical frameworks applicable and sound.

In the current research, we conduct a bibliometric analysis of literature published between 2020 and 2024 to map the evolution of political communication and public relation research in modern times. This analysis wants to trace the evolutionary trajectory of geoscience through publication patterns, research themes and collaboration networks to reveal both how the field is adapting to 21 century challenges but also emerging areas of scholarly investigation. This study particularly seeks answers to three basic questions: as the changes in technological and social environment surface up recently, how has the theoretical and methodological focus of the field changed? How is international collaboration and knowledge transfer manifesting in political communication research today? What are the key strands and approaches that point to potential future developments in the field?

These questions are best approached through a bibliometric analysis that merits the unique methodological insights detailed below (Lawani, 1981; Ninkov et al., 2022; Pessin et al., 2022). Such a method allows for systematic searches of large publication datasets, allowing for the potential to uncover patterns or trends explaining literature review knowledge(s) that may not be possible through traditional methods. Bibliometric methods enable quantitative comparison of research impact as well as collaboration networks and thematic evolution, offering some insight into common structural development and intellectual organization in the field. This analysis includes articles published in journals indexed in Scopus, appropriate since it comprehensively covers the communication and political science literature. The five-year time span (2020–2024) is narrow enough to include contemporary developments, while spanning enough time to discern important patterns and trends.

## 2. Method

This study utilizes bibliometric analysis as the main research approach to systematically explore and interpret trends in academic literature pertinent to the subject being examined. Bibliometric analysis serves as a quantitative method for examining academic publications, aiming to reveal trends, assess research output, and illuminate the intellectual framework of a specific research domain (Fitria et al., 2024).

In contrast to conventional literature reviews that tend to be narrative and subjective, bibliometric analysis employs statistical methods on bibliographic data—encompassing authorship, citations, keywords, and affiliations—usually obtained from extensive academic databases such as Scopus or Web of Science. This method enables an exploration of how knowledge within a specific domain develops, identifies the most prominent themes, highlights the leading contributors, and illustrates the interconnections between various topics or authors.

For instance, citation analysis serves to pinpoint highly influential publications and scholars, whereas co-authorship analysis uncovers collaboration patterns among individuals or institutions. Analyzing keyword co-occurrence, in contrast, aids in recognizing thematic clusters and new research domains.

Bibliometric analysis serves as an effective tool for delineating the terrain of scientific knowledge, particularly in fields that are evolving quickly or are characterized by interdisciplinary approaches. This study employs tools such as Biblioshiny and VOSviewer to perform a range of analyses, including mapping keyword co-occurrence, assessing author productivity, evaluating citation impact, and exploring thematic evolution.

Biblioshiny is a web-based application built on top of the Bibliometrix R package, specifically designed to make bibliometric analysis more accessible to users who may not be familiar with programming in R. It provides an interactive graphical user interface (GUI), allowing researchers to perform comprehensive bibliometric analyses without writing code (Bimandama et al., 2024; Fahamsyah et al., 2023; Nurhayati et al., 2024).

The present study uses an exhaustive bibliometric analysis to investigate recent developments in the disciplines of political communication and public relations spanning 2020–2024. This methodological framework follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to achieve systematic and transparent reporting of the research process (Komang Ariyanto, 2023; Samala et al., 2023).

PRISMA is a systematic framework of reporting standards that assists researchers in detailing each phase of their review process. This facilitates comprehension among readers, reviewers, and researchers regarding the review's methodology, allows for the evaluation of evidence quality, and enables future replication or updates of the review (Civit et al., 2022).

This text has quantitative bibliometric indicators and qualitative content analysis to offer a well-rounded view on the research landscape. Among the existing data sources for scientific literature, Scopus was determined as the main data source because of high coverage of social sciences literature and strong indexing of metadata (Burnham, 2006). Scopus's broad coverage of communication and political science journals, normalized citation data, and rich bibliometric information helped support this decision. Because of rigorous indexing and a defined metadata structure, it offers reliable resources for bibliometric analysis in the domain of social sciences (Fitria et al., 2024; Negahdary et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2022).

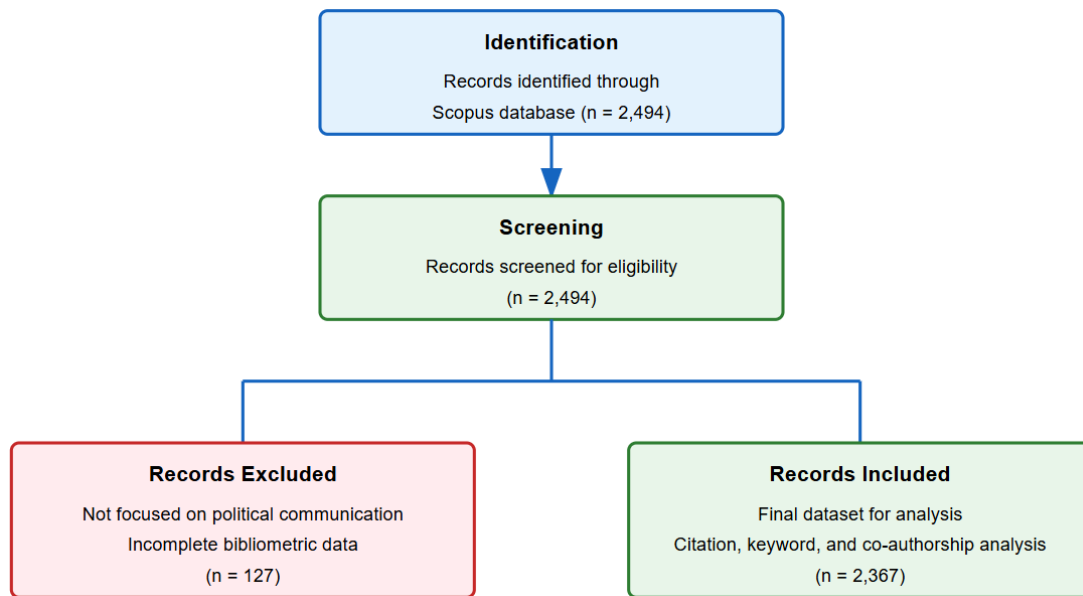


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Study Selection Process

The search strategy for this study was developed through an iterative process of testing and refinement to ensure relevance and coverage. The final search string included keywords such as public communication, political communication, government communication, public relations, strategic communication, and mass communication, with a thematic focus restricted to the domains of politics, governance, and public administration. The search was conducted in the Scopus database in February 2025, limited to English-language journal articles within the social sciences, and confined to the 2020–2024 publication window.

As illustrated in Figure 1, a systematic approach was applied for data retrieval and screening. The initial search yielded 2,494 documents. These were individually assessed based on their titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure relevance to political communication and public relations in political contexts. Articles were excluded if they did not directly address political communication, were duplicates, or lacked essential bibliometric metadata—such as title, abstract, author names, journal information, or keywords—required for accurate indexing, thematic mapping, and co-occurrence analysis. A total of 2,367 articles were retained after screening and deduplication.

Preliminary bibliometric mapping revealed dominant research clusters in critical discourse analysis and machine learning-driven content analysis. However, there was a notable lack of detailed metadata on methodological approaches in many abstracts. Despite this, a closer reading of the retained records suggests that a significant portion of the studies employed qualitative methods, particularly discourse and narrative analysis. A smaller but growing subset utilized quantitative techniques, including sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and survey-based modeling. There is also increasing use of mixed-methods designs, combining computational approaches (e.g., supervised learning, topic modeling) with manual content analysis or interviews. These emerging methodological trends reflect a broader convergence of computational communication science with traditional political communication research.

Data extraction encompasses extensive bibliometric information, comprising publication metadata, citation data, and bibliographic data. The retrieved data underwent a meticulous cleaning and standardization process to guarantee consistency and dependability in the ensuing study. The science mapping technique, executed by Biblioshiny (Silva et al., 2022), facilitates the display and analysis of intellectual structure through shared keyword analysis, co-citation analysis, and bibliographic merging. Abstract content analysis enabled the identification of research themes and methodological trends.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The bibliometric analysis of political communication and public relations research from 2020 to 2024 identifies notable trends in academic output and collaboration. The collection consists of 2,367 documents published in 860 unique sources, illustrating the field's extensive range and varied publication channels. These papers collectively exhibit a consistent yearly growth rate of 1.64% as depicted in Figure 2. The average document age of 1.96 years indicates the modernity of the examined research corpus, whilst the average citation impact of 7.131 citations per document implies

significant academic interaction. The authorship patterns indicate a complicated framework of academic collaboration. Of the 4,696 writers identified in the dataset, 772 produced single-authored documents, indicating a substantial share of independent work in the discipline. The existence of 822 single-authored documents, coupled with a co-authorship rate of 2.33 authors per document, signifies a harmonious blend of individual and collaborative research methodologies. International collaboration constitutes 16.81% of the papers, indicating a moderate degree of global scholarly integration in political communication research.

### Global Publication Patterns and Research Growth Dynamics

The bibliometric analysis of publishing patterns in public and political communication research from 2020 to 2024 indicates distinct geographical distributions and collaborative dynamics across several domains. Our analysis identifies three primary phenomena: the spatial concentration of academic activities, the temporal evolution of intellectual production, and the formation of collaborative networks. The regional distribution of research output indicates a notable concentration in certain regions, mostly led by institutions in North America and Europe. American institutions represent the predominant portion of global research production, contributing 19.2% (455 articles) of total publications, followed by the United Kingdom at 6.2% (146 articles) and Germany at 5.8% (137 articles), as depicted in Figure 2. Figure 2 illustrates the evolution of scholarly output throughout time across various worldwide locations. It indicates a consistent increase in research papers across all fields. The most significant increase is observed in European contributions, which had a compound annual growth rate of 57.3% from 2020 to 2024, slightly above the 45.2% growth in North America. The Asia-Pacific area, exhibits the largest relative growth rate at 69.1%, mostly driven by increased submissions from China, Indonesia, and Australia.

The examination of global cooperation among countries revealed significant variability. Switzerland had the highest degree of cross-border collaboration, with nearly 40% of papers featuring multi-national partnerships, closely followed by Germany and the Netherlands. This stands in stark contrast to Italy and Indonesia, where domestic collaboration constituted the majority of research output. Although America leads globally in publication volume, its international collaboration ratio reveals a more insular academic community, with little over ten percent of papers crossing borders, suggesting that its extensive research ecosystem operates mostly independently.

An institutional analysis of this apparent productivity concentration among elite colleges suggests a concentrated power distribution in research. With 68 publications, the University of Amsterdam is on top of this table, followed by the University of Vienna (41 publications) and the one in Helsinki (33 publications), thus marking a significant European institutional strength in this field. This institutional setting encompasses the full breadth of both legacy research powerhouses and rising excellence hubs, especially so in Asia and Oceania. The diversity of publication venues has been increasing over time, with 860 different sources publishing relevant research during the period under review. By contrast, there are few journals that simply stand out as the clear leaders with lots of articles; "Public Relations Review" comes to mind with 60 articles; "International Journal of Communication," 47; and Political Communication, 44; but the distribution between specialized communication journals and general communication journals is relatively level.

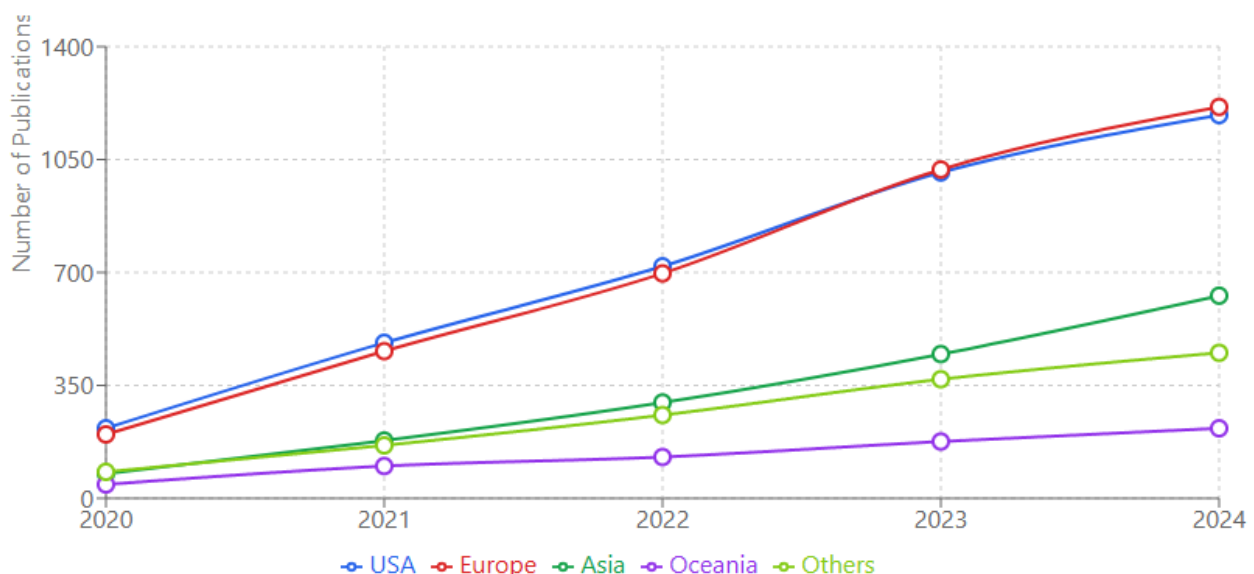


Figure 2. Publication Growth Trends by Major Regions (2020-2024)

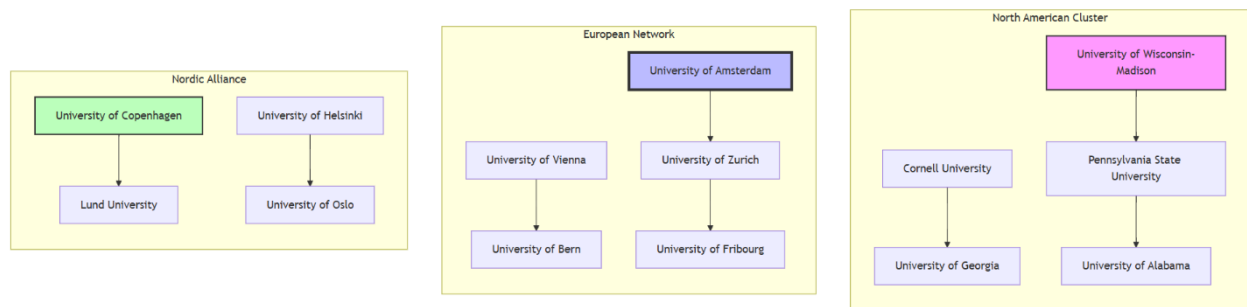


Figure 3. Key Research Collaboration Clusters

Figure 3 illustrates the collaboration network's analysis. The analysis of the collaboration network is illustrated in Figure 3, which demonstrates that the research collaborators extend to countries and institutions worldwide, resulting in diverse and intricate cooperation patterns. Three distinct collaborative communities emerge at the institutional level, each with its own narratives and strengths. The University of Amsterdam is currently performing exceptionally well as a critical crossroads center, as evidenced by its extremely high betweenness (308.183) and PageRank (0.074). It is never out of the network and maintains at least one connection to every other European research university, with the exception of external partner institutions. The dominant, focal location of this leading institution is further enhanced by its extensive connections with other prominent European institutions, including the reputable University of Zurich and the venerable University of Vienna. This ancient Central European research axis serves as the foundation for numerous initiatives. In the interim, the vibrant mosaic of North America is characterized by a robust internal unity, as anticipated, as joint activities converge around the University of Alabama.

Examination of national collaboration networks reveals a more intricate structure characterized by specific regional characteristics. The United States possesses the highest between centrality (419,265) and PageRank (0.109), affirming its position as a pivotal mediator in the worldwide research network. A robust European research cluster is forming, with Germany (between: 84,543) and the UK (between: 165,837) serving as crucial mediators among various research communities. The Asia-Pacific network demonstrates developing connectivity, with China (between: 29,843) assuming a progressively significant role in linking East and West Asian research communities.

### Thematic Evolution and Trend Topics

The examination of author keywords and indexing terms uncovers certain theme trends and conceptual development in political communication and public relations research from 2020 to 2024. A rigorous analysis of 6,105 author keywords and 1,421 indexed keywords has shown numerous prominent research clusters, highlighting the current focus and theoretical advancement of the area. The primary topic cluster, depicted in Figure 3, focuses on digital media and social networks, including almost 28% of all term occurrences. This cluster includes studies on social media platforms, digital political communication, and online public involvement. The frequency of terminology like "social media," "Twitter," "Facebook," and "digital communication" indicates a significant transformation in the comprehension of political communication inside digital environments. The electoral politics and campaigns cluster is identified as the second most prominent theme, accounting for 23% of keyword occurrences. This cluster illustrates the field's persistent focus on election mechanisms, campaign tactics, and voter conduct. Keywords in this cluster often co-occur with digital media terminology, signifying the increasing amalgamation of traditional campaign research and digital communication tactics. The analysis indicates a significant transition from conventional government communication methods to more dynamic, multi-channel strategies.

Crisis and risk communication is a specific category, representing 17% of keywords. The significance of this theme underscores the distinctive challenges of the era, especially concerning pandemic communication, political conflicts, and environmental issues. The data reveals a notable rise in research concerning government response techniques, public trust, and information management in crisis scenarios. The public relations and strategic communication cluster, including 11% of keywords, exhibits notable evolution in its conceptual emphasis.

Figure 3 illustrates the predominant topic groupings, uncovers a complex interrelated network of study themes in political communication and public relations from 2020 to 2024, with discrete clusters forming around central conceptual domains. The research delineates eleven principal theme clusters, each exhibiting differing levels of centrality and influence within the domain. The central cluster, characterized by "political communication" (763 occurrences), exhibits the greatest between centrality and functions as the conceptual nucleus of the field. This cluster is intricately linked to digital platforms, with "social media" (366 occurrences), "Twitter" (151 occurrences), and "Facebook" (88 occurrences) constituting a tightly interwoven research network. The elevated between centrality

ratings of these terms (social media: 1,755.357; Twitter: 1,462.122; Facebook: 1,104.897) signify their essential function in connecting various study streams within the discipline.

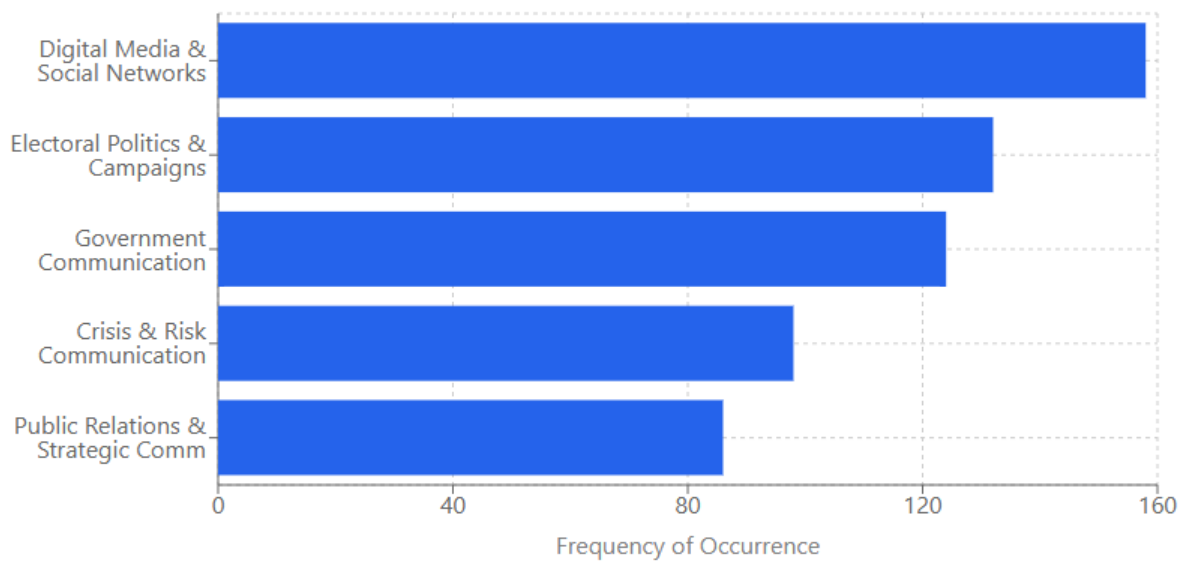


Figure 4. Dominant Thematic Clusters in Political Communication Research (2020-2024)

Emergent cluster focuses on COVID-19 (153 occurrences), which has stimulated novel study avenues in public relations (89 occurrences) and government communication (46 occurrences). This cluster demonstrates significant interrelations with crisis communication (42 instances) and strategic communication (44 instances). The cluster's elevated between centrality scores signify its function in facilitating novel research linkages across conventional theme boundaries. The communication cluster, centered on general terms such as "communication" (66 occurrences) and "journalism" (63 occurrences), indicates the field's persistent involvement with fundamental notions. This cluster has substantial integration with modern issues pertaining to "disinformation" (38 occurrences) and "democracy" (40 occurrences), indicating a theoretical progression in reaction to present societal challenges.

A methodological cluster forms around "framing" (43 occurrences) and "critical discourse analysis" (24 occurrences), highlighting the field's advanced analytical methodologies. The cluster's associations with terms such as "ideology" (21 occurrences) and "discourse" (18 occurrences) indicate the theoretical profundity of current research. Geographical clusters have emerged in certain regional contexts, with study concentrated on China (29 instances), Russia (19 instances), and Indonesia (22 instances), indicating the field's growing internationalization. These regional clusters exhibit diverse patterns of keyword co-occurrence, indicating various research traditions and political communication environments. The study indicates the emergence of a cluster centered on digital transformation, featuring terms such as "artificial intelligence" (14 occurrences) and "machine learning" (11 occurrences). Although less frequent, these phrases have notable between centrality scores, indicating their potential as essential concepts for future research avenues. The temporal examination of research subjects in political communication uncovers clear patterns of development and indicates potential directions for future academic inquiry. Figure 6 illustrates the dynamic interaction between established research traditions and emergent areas of inquiry, highlighting distinct temporal shifts in research focus.

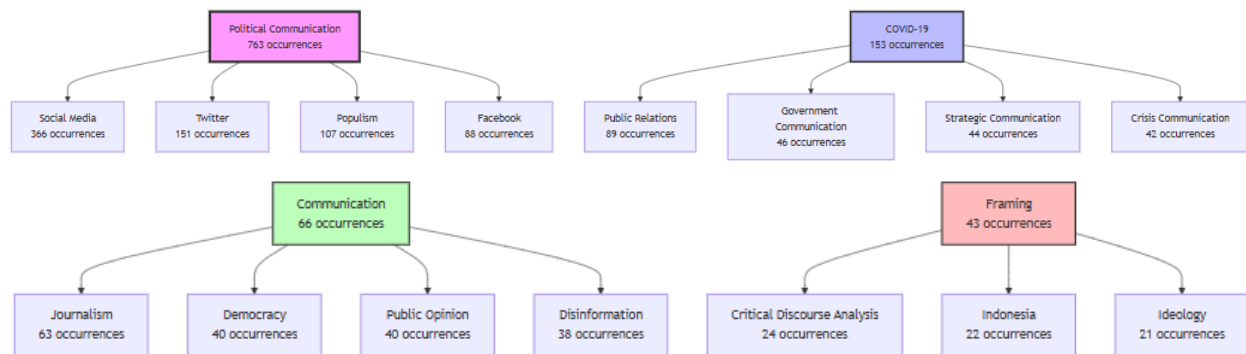


Figure 5. Thematic Network in Political Communication Research



The analysis reveals an emerging cluster of research themes centered on strategic communication (44 occurrences) and public diplomacy (25 occurrences). This trend signifies a growing focus on institutional approaches in political communication, particularly in global contexts. The growing significance of nation branding (9 occurrences, mainly in 2024) underscores this shift towards intentional institutional communication. An important shift is evident in the analysis of polarization (35 occurrences), reflecting increased academic emphasis from 2021 to 2023. This trend aligns with the decrease of traditional false news studies (30 cases, mainly in 2021-2022), signifying the development of a more nuanced understanding of information disorder and its political implications.

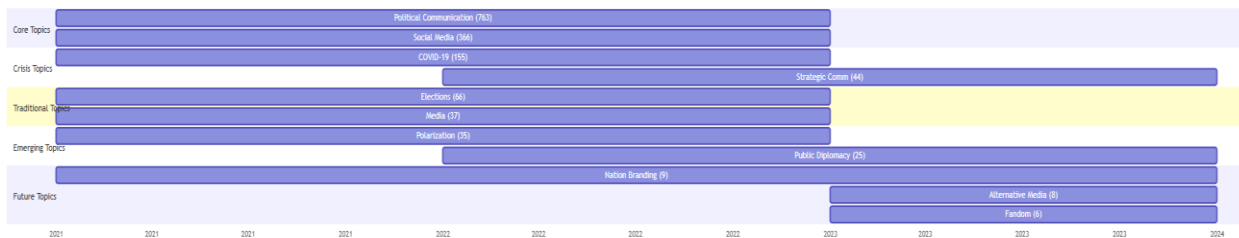


Figure 6. Thematic Network in Political Communication Research

Figure 6 illustrates various study domains that are anticipated to gain prominence. Research on alternative media (8 events, gaining prominence in 2023-2024) seems poised for substantial expansion, indicating scholars' interest in comprehending fragmented media ecosystems and their influence on political discourse. This tendency corresponds with wider apprehensions over media plurality and the robustness of democracy. The rise of fandom studies within political communication (6 instances, primarily in 2024) indicates an increasing fascination with the convergence of political involvement and participatory culture. This innovative study avenue indicates that future academic inquiry may increasingly focus on the influence of emotion and identity in political communication. The diminishing prevalence of traditional subjects such as public administration (10 instances, primarily in 2020-2021) and agenda building (6 instances, 2020-2021) indicates a transition from conventional institutional frameworks to more dynamic, network-oriented interpretations of political communication. The future of political communication research appears increasingly oriented toward understanding complex, technologically mediated political relationships, with particular emphasis on strategic communication, digital platforms, and emerging forms of political engagement.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study's findings illuminate three fundamental transformations in the field. First, the integration of digital platforms has moved beyond mere technological adoption evidenced by the dominant presence of social media-related research (366 occurrences) and the emergence of platform-specific studies. Second, the field has demonstrated remarkable adaptability to crisis events, particularly evident in the rapid development of COVID-19 related research (153 occurrences). Third, the analysis reveals an ongoing shift from traditional institutional approaches toward more dynamic. Our findings highlight the necessity for practitioners to modify communication tactics in response to the growing complexity and fragmentation of media environments, while remaining cognizant of regional differences in communication practices and their impacts. Although research output is predominantly generated by North American and European institutions, the significant growth rate of 69.1% from Asia-Pacific areas indicates a burgeoning and diversifying research community. The very low percentage of foreign collaboration (16.81%) suggests opportunities for enhanced cross-cultural study. This analysis indicates that political communication studies must increasingly address the convergence of technology innovation, social change, and political processes. The domain is primed for substantial theoretical advancement, especially in comprehending how digital platforms and novel communication technologies transform political dynamics and democratic mechanisms. This evolution necessitates not just novel methodological approaches but also enhanced integration of ideas from many global contexts.

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#### Authors contributions

The sole author was responsible for all aspects of the research and writing process, including the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Informed consent

Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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