

Bibliometric Analysis of the Trend of Sociology of Communication Research Topics

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Abstract

Bibliometric analysis can provide extensive data mapping of previous research topic trends to formulate subsequent research topics. There is still a lack of bibliometric analysis of trends in sociology of communication research topics. The study used bibliometric analysis of 37,999 publications in ScienceDirect over three periods. Publication data was selected using the keyword "sociology of communication." Data processing was conducted by co-occurrence between keywords and data presentation with overlay visualization. The results of data processing with VosViewer revealed shifts in research topics over three periods. Topics that emerged after 2022 are related to Covid-19 pandemic, such as healthcare, resilience, stress, and vaccine hesitancy; methodologies like systematic literature review; recent technologies such as artificial intelligence; and other societal concerns, including sustainability. That topic was suggested for future research. However, sustainability and systematic literature review are old issues in other research fields. The research found that the sociology of communication research topics is changing dynamically and is influenced by social phenomena such as pandemics and technological advancements. The presence of two recent topics that have become old issues in other fields of social research shows the challenge for communication scientists to respond responsively to global social and methodological issues.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; communication research; research topic; sociology of communication; trend.

Introduction

Communication is an interdisciplinary science whose development is primarily influenced by other sciences, including sociology (Cheng & Lee, 2019; Craig, 1999; Pooley, 2016). The influence of sociology on communication theory is characterized by one of the fathers of communication science originating from the sociologist, namely Paul F. Kennedy Lazarsfeld (1901–1976) (Singhal, 1987). The analysis of social action, social interaction, symbol analysis, and

phenomenology in communication is evidence of sociology's influence on communication (Kire & Ana, 2018). Sociologists developed communication theories that are still influential to this day. These are Habermas's communicative action theory, Goffman's framing theory, and Luhmann's social system theory (Fuchs, 2016). Recognition of the influence of sociological science on communication is presented in the form of courses in the sociology of communication in the major of communication. This fact led to the

sociology of communication being considered one of the areas of student communication research.

Sociology of communication study begins with sociological scientists' attention to mass communication (Katz, 2009). The emergence of sociology in journalism is rooted in Thomas and Znaniecki's 1918 study of the struggle for power in society (Katz, 2009). Currently, the study of the sociology of communication has evolved into studies of intercultural communication (Dasih et al., 2019), media (Hove, 2021; Kidd et al., 2023), and digital media (Hampton, 2023; Musiani, 2022), health communication (Barnes, 2019; Guenther et al., 2021), and crisis communication (Sadri et al., 2021). The three sociological theories above are still used in communication research. Goffman's theory is used in the analysis of health communication phenomena (Ayuthaya, 2019). Luhmann's theory is applied to organizational and management communication research (Aal, 2022; Lies, 2020). Habermas' theory is employed to study communication in government and corporations (Mahdalena et al., 2021; Yahya et al., 2021).

When conducting research, it is critical to look at previous research topics to gain a better understanding of the field (Zupic & Čater, 2015). By analyzing past research trends, researchers can identify potential areas for future studies (Stefani et al., 2020). Utilizing big data to analyze past research can also help researchers formulate their own objective research topics (Wang et al., 2017). However, finding research that specifically examines trends in the sociology of communication can be challenging. Previous research has focused on using the sociology of communication as a framework for examining phenomena (Duryatmo et al., 2019; Matar, 2017; Tasruddin & Syamsuddin, 2022) or as a theoretical approach (Kire & Ana, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for research that provides an overview of research topic trends within the sociology of communication.

This study analyzes the current trends in sociology of communication research and identifies the latest research topics. Through bibliometric analysis of big data publications within a specific time period (Chahrour et al., 2020; Donthu et al., 2021), the study aims to achieve three objectives: 1) identify the research topics in the sociology of

communication; 2) determine the research trends; and 3) suggest potential topics for further research. By examining 33 years of sociology of communication research trends, this study provides valuable insights that can guide future research in this field. Furthermore, the findings of this study also help to pinpoint where the gaps in knowledge are and suggest new areas of investigation for future research in the field of sociology of communication.

Theoretical Framework

Bibliometric Analysis

Literature reviews are an essential part of scientific writing. The literature review helps define the research focus and problems (Mishra & Alok, 2022, p. 6). The primary reference source for the literature review is previous research (Librero, 2012). Meanwhile, the number of scientific publications continues to increase. Therefore, a method is needed to do a literature review on previous research using big data (Caputo & Kargina, 2022). To better capture the most up-to-date information and advances, an effective method of analyzing the big data of previous research is essential for conducting a comprehensive and exhaustive literature review.

Alongside literature reviews and meta-analyses, bibliometric analysis is gaining attention for its ability to provide insight into the spectrum of topics within a particular research area (Ferreira, 2018). Bibliometric analysis is a method for analyzing large-scale scientific data (Donthu et al., 2021). Bibliometric analysis helps rigorously map unstructured scholarly knowledge data (Donthu et al., 2021). Compared to literature reviews and meta-analysis, bibliometric analysis has broad coverage, more extensive data, and forms of analysis that can be qualitative and computational (Chahrour et al., 2020; Donthu et al., 2021; Ho, 2018). Moreover, bibliometric analysis provides an objective way to interpret scientific data by quantifying trends and impacts (Ho, 2018).

Data in the bibliometric analysis are derived from abstracts or citations of online publications (Caputo & Kargina, 2022). Research data can be taken from Google Scholar data sources (Al Husaeni & Nandiyanto, 2022), Scopus (Faruk et al., 2021), Web of Science (Xie et al., 2020), or ScienceDirect (Buele & Guerra, 2021; Purnomo, 2022). Data for bibliometric analysis

can be downloaded directly from the web, such as on ScienceDirect (Purnomo, 2022), or through publish of perish for data from Google Scholar (Al Husaeni & Nandiyanto, 2022). The data form is adapted to the software used. VosViewer data forms are used in RIS (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The data can then be analyzed as needed, leading to results that provide insight for the researcher.

The study of bibliometrics can be categorized into two parts: performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis involves examining research contributions from various journals, institutions, authors, and countries. Science mapping, on the other hand, looks at the relationships between different research constituents. Techniques used in science mapping include bibliographic coupling, citation analysis, co-word analysis, and co-authorship analysis. (Donthu et al., 2021). These techniques can be used to identify research trends and clusters and to predict future trends in research. Bibliometrics is an important tool for understanding the research landscape and can be used to inform research strategies and decision-making.

The results of the bibliometric analysis can provide an overview of the research topic map from the big data of previous research (Donthu et al., 2021). Bibliometric analysis using VosViewer can present network maps that provide topic information and interrelationships. Trend topics per period can be studied through overlay visualization (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This is beneficial for researchers because it can provide them with an overall view of the research being done in a particular field and how it has changed over time. It can also help them identify potential collaborators and research gaps that need to be filled.

Sociology of Communication Research Topic

During bibliometric analysis, one outcome is the identification of keywords utilized in prior research. In bibliometric analysis, these keywords are referred to in different ways. One term used is "research theme" (Armenta-Medina et al., 2020). Scientific writing associates "theme" with knowledge and wisdom. It is a tool used to structure a sentence as an academic message (He, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the use of the term "theme" can

have varying meanings depending on the context of the research and that it is not always tied to specific keywords.

In academic research, the term "topic" is often used interchangeably with "keywords," as evidenced by previous studies (Ji et al., 2020; Molina-Collado et al., 2022). Research topics refer to specific aspects of a broader research focus, and defining them is a crucial step in scientific writing. By identifying research topics, scholars can better plan their next steps (Luse et al., 2012). This study adopts the term "topic" to describe keyword results from bibliometric analysis. Specifically, topics are determined by looking at the words and phrases most commonly used in research papers related to a particular topic or field of study. They provide an overview of the literature on a particular topic. They can help identify potential research areas not yet explored.

When conducting research in a particular field, it's critical to explore topics that relate to the discipline's focus (Luse et al., 2012). For instance, the sociology of communication involves studying communication from a sociological standpoint, or vice versa. Journals typically have a scope that aligns with their title. This fact means that the reader can identify sociology and communication research by looking at the article's title and the journal it's published in. Some examples of communication research topics published in the Sociology journal include community development and communication (Volterrani, 2019), communication and corporate culture (Pisar, 2020), mobile communication (Alencar, 2020), and political communication (Castro Seixas, 2021; Sovacool et al., 2020). Sociology research topics in communication journals may include media ethics (Hove, 2021), scientific writing (Bazerman, 2019), digital sovereignty (Musiani, 2022), and digital media (Hampton, 2023). The data indicate that communication research in sociology journals or sociological research, and vice versa, can encompass a wide range of topics. Establishing clear boundaries in research into the sociology of communication requires effort, which is why this study aims to define the types of sociology of communication research topics based on software analysis results.

Material and Methodology

The research utilized data from ScienceDirect, as the web provides data from

Elsevier publications, the world's leading academic publishers (Buele & Guerra, 2021). Publication data for the 2000–2023 period accords with the most optimal view of ScienceDirect. Data collection used the keywords "sociology of communication." This stage found 37,999 publications. The data is grouped into three period groups. The period is ten years, except for the third group, because the research was conducted in 2023. Using the average annual publication, the number of

different intervals is investigated. Table 1 shows the period, number of articles, number of samples, and sample number of keywords. The number of sample publications is determined by ScienceDirect's ability to present the maximum amount of most relevant data that can be downloaded (Purnomo, 2022). The number of keywords and keyword samples (keywords that meet the threshold) is determined by data processing in the software.

Table 1. Sample Data

Periods	Number of articles	Number of samples	Number of Keywords	Keyword Sample
2020-2023	9.385	1.000	4.046	77
2010-2019	18.959	1.000	4.228	96
2000-2009	9.655	1.000	2.719	53

Source: Processed from ScienceDirect by VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Data selection and processing were performed using VosViewer software, one of the programs for bibliometric analysis (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Data selection using co-word analysis or included in science mapping techniques (Donthu et al., 2021). Co-word analysis analyzes topics included in the keywords, title, article content, and abstract (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Five co-words were selected for the keyword sample. Through co-word analysis, the relationships between the selected keywords and their respective topics are evaluated and used for science mapping techniques (Donthu et al., 2021). Thus, the data selection, processing, and analysis become more efficient, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the research landscape (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Data processing involves analyzing keyword co-occurrences. The frequency at which keywords appear together, or co-occur, is measured by the occurrence value (Donthu et al., 2021). Additionally, VosViewer provides a total link strength metric that demonstrates the number of connections between two keywords, according to Van Eck and Waltman (2010). The keyword group with the highest co-occurrence is clustered together (Donthu et al., 2021). Overlay visualization is a powerful tool to study the relationships between clusters and topics within a particular time frame (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). By using overlay visualization, one can identify the strongest

connections between keywords and topic clusters, allowing for a more thorough analysis of the data. Additionally, the total link strength metric provides a comprehensive indication of the relationship between two keywords (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Result and Discussion

Research developments in the field of sociology of communication

Figure 1 displays the quantity of publications on communication sociology between 2000 and 2023. The most significant number of publications occurred from 2010 to 2019, but the highest average annual amount was between 2020 and 2023. The data indicate that scientists are increasingly interested in studying the sociology of communication. Analyzing a large number of publications is easier using bibliometric analysis than through the review literature method or meta-analysis (Chahrour et al., 2020; Donthu et al., 2021; Ho, 2018).

Table 2 shows the most significant number of publications in the social science subject area. Communication and sociology are social science subject area (Edelmann et al., 2020). Moreover, psychology, medicine and dentistry, business, management, and accounting, as well as the arts and humanities, are also popular social science subject areas. These areas provide an extensive range of research opportunities. Furthermore, these

areas demonstrate the breadth of research potential in the social sciences, with communication and sociology at the forefront.

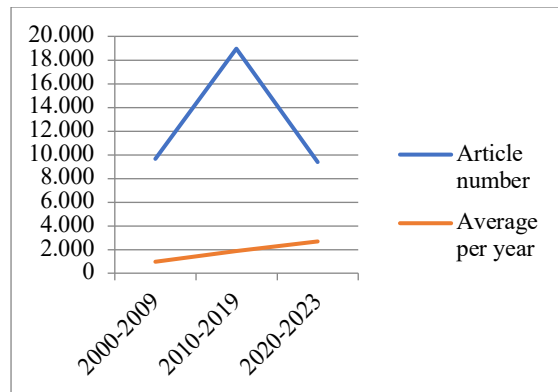


Figure 1. Development of Research on the Sociology of Communication 2000-2023
Source: Processed from ScienceDirect bt VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Table 2. Number of Publication based on Subject Area in 2000-2023

Subject Area	Number of publications
Social sciences	26.323
Psychology	11.972
Medicine and Dentistry	11.441
Business, Management, and Accounting	9.894
Art and Humanities	6.948

Source: Processed from ScienceDirect bt VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Based on the data presented in Table 3, it appears that the publisher primarily focuses on publishing articles related to the sociology of communication, social science, and medicine. This suggests that many health studies are paying attention to the sociology of communication. In light of the recent pandemic, there has been an increase in interest in health communication (de Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2022; Lei & Wang, 2023). In Technological Forecasting and Social Change, there are numerous publications that focus on climate change studies using the sociology of communication approach (Nursey-Bray, 2023; Wu et al., 2021). As such, these studies demonstrate the importance of using the sociology of communication to further understand health, climate change, and other pressing issues.

Table 3. Number of Publication based on Publisher in 2000-2023

Publication Title	Number of publications
Social Science & Medicine	1.958
Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences	1.498
Journal of Pragmatics	1.027
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	610
Poetics	604

Source: Processed from ScienceDirect bt VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Visualization Sociology of Communication Topic Area Trend

Table 4 shows the topics studied from 2000 to 2023 in the field of sociology of communication. The research was analyzed and visualized using a mapping technique, which resulted in the identification of 9 to 11 clusters. Each cluster is based on related topics from previous studies (Donthu et al., 2021). These clusters reveal trends in the evolution of the field, allowing further research to build on the knowledge already acquired.

The VosViewer tool displays the frequency of link strength for each keyword item. The dataset shows that the keyword "communication" has the highest score in both the 2000–2009 and 2010–2019 periods, with 50 and 75 occurrences, respectively. The total linkage strength for these periods is 29 and 62. The keyword "sociology" comes in second place, with 16 and 15 occurrences and a total linkage strength of 46 and 55. In the Covid-19 2020–2023 period, the highest total linkage strength score is Covid-19 with a score of 34, and the second is "social media" with a score of 31. "Communication" was in third place with a score of 28. The "communication" keyword has an occurrence value of 56, which is higher than "Covid-19" with a score of 36 and "social media" with a score of 34. The keyword "sociology" ranks fourth with an occurrence score of 27 and an overall link strength of 25, which is lower than "Covid-19" and "social media". The data suggests that Covid-19 cases have received more attention during the 2020–2023 periods. This finding is consistent with a previous research that shows health communication and social media are the most frequently occurring topics in communication

research related to the Covid-19 pandemic (Kurnaz, 2021; Lei & Wang, 2023).

Table 4. Sociology of Communication Topic Area in Three Periods

Cluster	Period		
	2000-2009	2010-2019	2020-2023
1	Doctor-patient communication, ethics, media, narrative, public relations, risk, risk communication, risk perception, trust, UK.	Climate change, collaboration, globalization, interdisciplinarity, internet, networks, organizations, power, review, social movements, social network analysis, social networks, space, systematic review.	Content analysis, conversation analysis, crisis communication, evaluation, health communication, higher education, public relations, social class, systematic review.
2	Adolescents, context, conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, HIV/AIDS, internet, physician-patient communication.	Communication skills, computer-mediated communication, content analysis, crisis communication, critical theory, education, facebook, health communication, medical education, motivation, social influence, social media, youth.	Emotions, innovation, machine learning, nursing, social media, social network analysis, social networks, technology, twitter.
3	Computer-mediated communication, gender, health, information technology, language, sociology of knowledge, sociology of science.	Culture, evaluation, functionalism, ideology, institutions, intercultural communication, knowledge, meaning, nationalism, religion, sociology, sociology of knowledge, system theory.	Children, diagnosis, ethnography, healthcare, narrative, resilience, stress, uncertainty.
4	Culture, globalization, identity, interaction, power, social capital, social networks.	Adherence, Australia, conflict, conversation analysis, cooperation, diagnosis, emotions, qualitative, risk communication, social capital, trust, uncertainty.	Artificial intelligence, climate change, digitalization, discourse, discourse analysis, industry 4.0, interdisciplinary, sustainability.
5	Chiropractic, education, qualitative research, sociology.	Alienation, civil society, democracy, diffusion, gender, ICT, identity, innovation, media, modernity, participation, technology.	Diversity, health, identity, interdisciplinarity, internet, safety, social sciences.
6	Children, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, methodology.	Anthropology, decision making, discourse, leadership, methodology, norms, psychology, risk, social psychology, symbolic interactionism.	Culture, education, gender, leadership, social capital, spaces, theory.
7	Communication, semiotics, technology.	Ethnography, ethnomethodology, network theory, social change, social interaction, social structure, social theory, sociological theory, sociology of science.	China, Covid-19, depression, pandemic, public opinion, science communication, vaccine hesitancy.
8	Conflict, social control, theory.	China, cognition, decision-making, institutionalization, interaction, language, public relations, public sphere.	Decision-making, globalization, risk, risk communication, risk perception, trust.
9	Australia, discourse analysis, research.	Big data, communication, e-health, ethics.	Communication, participation, qualitative research, scoping review, social science, violence.
10			Disability, interdisciplinary research, medical education, psychology, sociology.
11			Bibliometric analysis, literature review, network analysis, sociology of science, systematic literature review.

Source: Processed from ScienceDirect bt VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Table 4 shows that certain topics were only presented between 2020 and 2023.

Table 5 presents a set of topics that were analyzed qualitatively. The grouping of

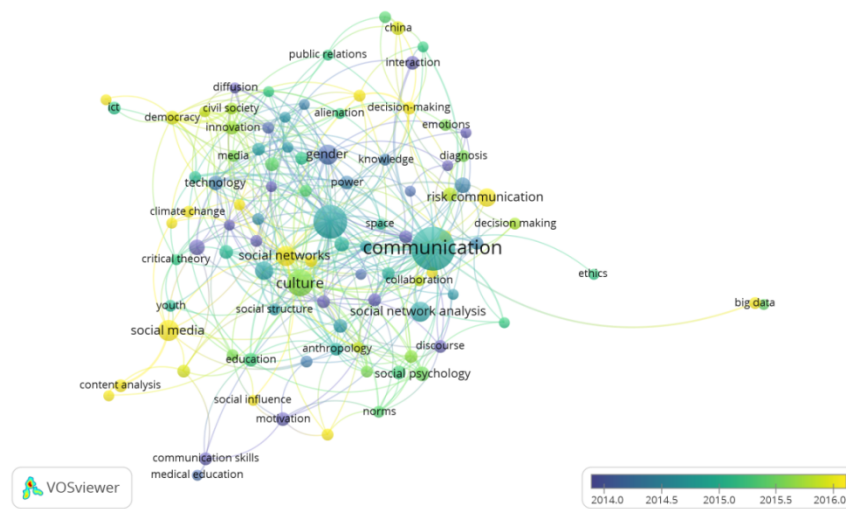


Figure 3. Overlay Visualization in Sociology of Communication Research Topic in 2010-2019
 Source: Processed from ScienceDirect by VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Figure 4 presents research topics and trends for 2020–2023. The new topics in this period were conversation analysis and evaluation in Cluster 1; innovation and social network analysis in Cluster 2; healthcare, resilience, and stress in Cluster 3; artificial intelligence and sustainability in Cluster 4; Covid-19, public opinion, and vaccine hesitancy in Cluster 7; participation in Cluster 9; and systematic literature review in Cluster 11. As the most promising topic for 2019, big data is not the latest topic for 2020–2023. The data in Figure 4 shows that only some of the subjects appearing in Table 5 are the latest. The latest topic was research after 2022. The absence of other topics in Table 5 shows that some studies experienced a decline in attention after 2022. For example, Covid-19 topics have declined due to decreased pandemic impact. Some recent research has shifted towards post-pandemic scenarios (Caffrey, 2023; Kim et al., 2022; Purnomo et al., 2022).

According to the data, the latest topics for 2020–2023 have been studied in the last research period. Topics like conversation analysis, innovation, and social network analysis were not the newest topics from 2000–2019, but they were studied during that period. This demonstrates that these topics continue to garner attention in recent research. However, participation was the newest topic from 2010–2019, indicating that research in this area is still being developed until 2020–2023.

Furthermore, participation has seen a surge in the past decade, suggesting that it is likely to become an even more popular research topic in the years to come.

As for emerging topics in 2022, those related to the Covid-19 pandemic group include healthcare, resilience, stress, and vaccine hesitancy. Other topics include methodology, such as a systematic literature review, recent technology like artificial intelligence, and social issues like sustainability. Covid-19 did not appear in the recent issue. Research on Covid-19 pandemic topics has now shifted to post-pandemic phenomena. Artificial intelligence has become the topic of research in the latest sociology of communication (Chaturvedi et al., 2023). This research follows the development of artificial intelligence technology worldwide (Zhang & Lu, 2021).

Systematic literature reviews and sustainability are recent topics showing that research in the sociology of communication is increasingly focused on methods and issues. However, both topics were not novel issues. Social research implemented systematic literature reviews as the method (Donthu et al., 2021). Sustainability was an old environmental and development issue (Basta & Jongejan, 1970). Therefore, it is evident that research in the sociology of communication is challenging to be more responsive to recent social and methodological issues.

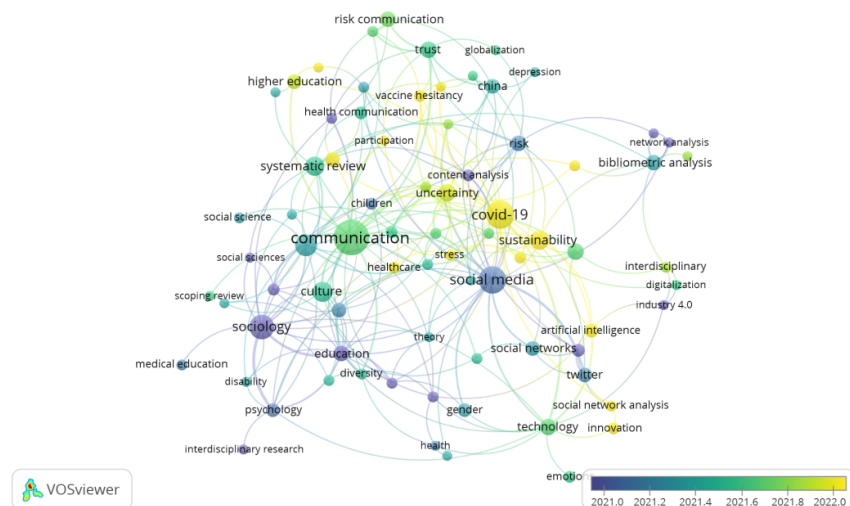


Figure 4. Overlay Visualization in Sociology of Communication Research Topic in 2010-2019
Source: Processed from ScienceDirect by VosViewer, July 18, 2023

Conclusions

A bibliometric analysis of 37,999 articles on ScienceDirect revealed a shift in the topics of sociology of communication research. The latest topics for 2020–2023 were examined in the previous period. Some of the latest topics from 2000–2009 differ from those in the next period. Participation was identified as a topic in both 2010–2019 and 2020–2023. Topics emerging after 2022 are related to the topics Covid-19 pandemic, such as healthcare, resilience, stress, and vaccine hesitancy; methodologies like systematic literature review; recent technologies such as artificial intelligence; and other societal concerns, including sustainability. However, two topics (sustainability and systematic literature review) were found to be old issues in other research fields. These findings demonstrate that the trending topic of research in the sociology of communication is dynamic and influenced by societal phenomena such as pandemics and technological developments. The presence of two recent topics that have become old issues in other fields of social research highlights the challenge for communication scientists to respond to social and methodological issues in a timely manner. This demonstrates the importance of communication scientists being able to stay abreast of emerging topics and respond quickly to the changing societal landscape.

This study provides a map of trending topics in the research sociology of communication that have not been previously explored. Big data analysis allows for a broad

overview of the development of sociology of communication research topics. Future studies may use these findings to select research topics that have the potential to advance the field of communication sociology. However, it is pertinent to note that this research is limited to data from ScienceDirect. Further research is recommended to compare the findings with those from Google Scholar and Scopus.

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