

## Africa Rising? A Meta-Analysis of Published Communication Scholarship

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Using meta-analytic work, this study examines communication research methods, geographic focus, and lead author affiliation in research articles published in four prominent communication journals over the course of a decade (2010–2019). Results point to scholarship by authors from North American and European institutions being dominant throughout the decade of analysis alongside an overwhelming geographic focus on North American and European populations and content, and a continued reliance on a few research methods. Relying on the same, often Western, epistemologies and methodologies may not be applicable in understanding communication phenomena in varying parts of the world and can perpetuate colonialist practices and strengthen existing power structures.

*Keywords: meta-analysis, content analysis, Africa, publishing*

For decades communication and media scholars have critically noted the lack of mass media and journalistic attention to nations on the African continent (Gerbner & Marvanyi, 1977; Golan, 2003; Kalyango & Onyebadi, 2012; Paik, 1999) as well as the overwhelming focus of such coverage on conflict with the absence of reportage on positive events (Asante, 2013; Chavis, 1998; Fair, 1992; Knickmeyer, 2005; Peterson, 1979). While the lack and distortion of media attention on African nations is well documented, what is less commonly discussed in the academic literature is our own focus, or lack thereof, on mediascapes across the African continent. In other words, how much scholarly attention has been given to researching and publishing on mass communication phenomena in Africa?

Scholars from an array of disciplines have pointed out the problematic nature of Western-focused scholarship becoming globally normative (Alvares, 2011; West, 2016)—the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2009)—as well as the limitations and problems with scholars from the United States and Western Europe designing studies used in other regions (Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2018), but less is known about the geographic focus and author location of published communication literature. Academic journals have been referred to as the “gatekeepers of knowledge of the profession” (Hickson, Stacks, & Boden, 1999, p. 179), making it important to examine the ways in which information is shared through journals, and thus, in the profession. To examine the trends in communication literature in the past decade, a content analytic meta-analysis of the published scholarship from four prominent journals was conducted for a period of 10 years (2010–2019) to analyze which regions of the world scholarship has focused the most on, as well as the method used and the location of the lead author’s professional affiliation.

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## **Background**

### ***Meta-Analyses***

Meta-analysis has been defined as the process of synthesizing results from a series of separate empirical research studies (Hedges, 1992) and can be understood as a form of research similar to a survey, except that instead of people research reports are surveyed (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). The use of meta-analysis as a research tool has been used by scholars from various disciplines, ranging from economics (Porteous, 2020), to biology (Shackelford et al., 2021), to counseling (Park, Ha, Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2019), to medicine (Sun et al., 2016) and numerous other fields including communication.

Within the broad umbrella of communication research, meta-analysis has been used to examine a wide array of topics (see, for example, Clark-Gordon, Bowman, Goodboy, & Wright, 2019; Eisend, van Reijmersdal, Boerman, & Tarrahi, 2020). Meta-analytic work in the communication field appears to take two forms, one that combines results from previous studies to gain a fuller understanding of the topic at hand, and the other that examines previous studies to gain understandings about research processes; the latter being less common.

However, a small amount of scholarship has focused on research processes used and the implications of such procedures. Meta-analytic work considering research and publication practices in the communication field has found increasing female authorship (Blake, Bodle, & Adams, 2004; Bodle, Burriss, Farwell, Hammaker, & Joshi, 2011; Dupagne, Potter, & Cooper, 1993; Kramer, Hess, & Reid, 2007) and the prominence of assistant professors (i.e., junior faculty) as manuscript authors (Bodle et al., 2011; Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010). Methodologically, meta-analysis has revealed that research studying fake news published between 2000 and 2018 commonly used qualitative methods, content analysis, and surveys (Arqoub, Elegu, Özad, Dwikat, & Oloyede, 2022). Meta-analytic work examining research focused on an African nation(s) has found a prominent use of qualitative methods (Elegu & Özad, 2018; Wasike, 2017).

Research examining the background or geographic location of the author(s) of communication publications is in its infancy, but considering publications across disciplines, "Recent figures about scholarly production in scientific journals published by Taylor & Francis show that only 25 percent of authors of journal articles are from developing countries" (Green, 2016, as cited in Wasserman, 2018, p. 52).

With regard to communication scholarship specifically, research found similar results. Gearhart and Cho (2020) analyzed 30 years of publication trends in *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* and found "the overwhelming presence of authors based in the United States, which accounted for more than 9 out of every 10 authors over the last 30 years" (p. 388) and Walter, Cody, and Ball-Rokeach (2018) found a lack of global representation in authorship of published articles in *Journal of Communication* between 1951 and 2016. Similarly, Lauf (2005) examined 43 communication journals from 1998 to 2002 ranked by the Institute for Scientific Information and found that 86% of authors were from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, or Australia. None of the top 20 publishing nations were from the African continent. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of the 78 research studies on the effects of political scandals, Von Sikorski (2018) found that the overwhelming majority of research came from scholars and/or institutions in North

America and Europe. Even in journals dedicated to understudied regions, scholars often came from outside those regions. For example, "A large percentage of submissions to journals on African journalism and media studies is produced by scholars located at institutions outside the continent" (Wasserman, 2018, p. 52).

Given the dominance of published articles authored by scholars in Western nations, it is hardly surprising that such research also tends to focus on North American and European communication phenomena. Early research examining national and regional communication journals found no articles focused on communication practices in Latin American, Southeast Asian, or African cultures (Shuter, 1990, 1997). More recently, Miller and colleagues (2013) found that, of 5,228 articles published about intercultural communication between 2004 and 2010, only 39 focused on one or more African nations, and 25 featured authors from an African institution.

It has been suggested that U.S.-based studies are more common in academic journals because many communication theories originated in the United States (Walter, Cody, & Ball-Rokeach, 2018), thus using them makes a study easier to find, cite, and conduct comparative work with/against (Peng & Zhu, 2012). Perceived legitimacy via association may exist, as scholars from outside the United States and Europe "tend to use central knowledge strategically in order to be accepted by their central peers" (Demeter, 2021, p. 58). Scholars may also receive pressure to contextualize their work in U.S.- or European-based ways to appease U.S.-based reviewers' own views of the content being studied (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas, & Davies, 2008; Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019). In fact, recent research found that even among communication scholarship focused on nations other than the United States, many of the works contextualized findings in relation to the United States and tailored their writing to a U.S. readership (Chan, Yi, Hu, & Kuznetsov, 2021).

While the location of the scholar conducting and publishing the research is a concern, what is perhaps more important to consider is the epistemological underpinnings and methodologies used in the research and whether those are applicable in the communities where the research is being conducted. Wasserman (2018) explained that although many authors submitting work to African journalism studies are located outside Africa, "these submissions are often couched in methodologies or framed by research questions that speak the language of international scholarship very fluently but may not be the most interesting way to pose questions about local problematics" (Wasserman, 2018, p. 52).

### ***Pro-Western Biases***

Linkages between colonialism and communication systems have been well documented for decades, with scholars showing that many developing nations have media systems created by (and largely, for the benefit of) colonizers (Ugangu, 2016), and have high amounts of imported foreign mass media content (Udoaka, 1998) that is often filled with stories, characters, and values that represent Western nations (Acholonu, 2011). While the field regularly notes—and critiques—communication structures, less attention has been given to linkages between colonialism and communication *research*.

A small but growing body of literature has begun to examine the paradigms and methodologies used to conduct empirical research in varying fields and how those methodologies and epistemologies were created and expanded. Green (2016, as cited in Wasserman, 2018) noted an "epistemological bias against

scholarship from the South” that is “compounded by asymmetrical distribution of knowledge production” (p. 52), which can be seen in the previously discussed research highlighting that academic journal articles are authored predominately by scholars from developed, Western nations (Gearhart & Cho, 2020; Inonu, 2003; Lauf, 2005). Quantitatively, this is a problem, but it is also, arguably, more of a qualitative issue when considering how hegemonic ideologies are created and disseminated.

The methodologies used in research (along with language used, sources cited, etc.) can be clear markers about the empirical traditions of the author(s) (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Within political communication research, for example, experiments represent the dominant methodology used (Iyengar, 2011), which may or may not be the most applicable method for studying political communication in varying communities and differing political environments. And more than two-thirds of studies on the effects of political scandals used students as sample participants (Von Sikorski, 2018), who are often not representative samples (Hanel & Vione, 2016).

In a discussion of the need to decolonize the methodologies used in media studies, Mohammed (2022) suggested the use of communal conversation circles—a methodology taking roots from focus groups but using a snowball sample and other techniques that enable participants to be more comfortable and replicate social norms from the community.

Geographically, of the few Africa-focused published articles in communication journals, most focused on Kenya and South Africa, two of the most developed, democratic nations on the continent, along with Egypt, which has received much attention related to the Arab Spring (Elega & Özad, 2018; Miller et al., 2013). Cheruiyot (2021) noted a similar focus on five African nations (South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Ghana) in African journalism studies research and attributed it to “the fact that some of these countries have geopolitical influence, long history of collaborations with the West and are centres of publishing in their regions” (p. 98).

The impact of this imbalance can have important and practical implications.

Theoretically, if decision-makers in different countries wanted evidence on the same questions and if research results were not dependent on the local context, then the concentration of research in a handful of low-cost countries would not be problematic. However, I show that more than 60% of articles on African countries are context-specific, not drawing general conclusions or discussing applicability to other countries. This suggests that the uneven distribution of research entails an uneven evidence base for local policy-makers (at least in terms of peer-reviewed articles). (Porteous, 2020, p. 3)

Mamdani (2011) expanded this argument, explaining that:

The assumption that there is a single model derived from the dominant Western experience reduces research to no more than a demonstration that societies around the world either conform to that model or deviate from it. The tendency is to dehistoricize and decontextualise discordant experiences, whether Western or non-Western. (p. 6)

Mamdani (2011) went on to explain that the result of current research production systems is:

The effect is to devalue original research or intellectual production in Africa. The global market tends to relegate Africa to providing raw material ("data") to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa. Research proposals are increasingly descriptive accounts of data collection and the methods used to collate data, collaboration is reduced to assistance, and there is a general impoverishment of theory and debate. (p. 6)

This "impoverishment" has led scholars to call for and propose alternative research methodologies (Gross, Porter, & Wood, 2019; Krupnikov & Searles, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). However, more attention is needed to the geographic location of published authors, their methodological choices, and the accompanying ramifications.

The present study seeks to build on notions of an uneven evidence base and expand our meta-analytic understandings of communication research methods and geographic foci. Building on the work of Miller and colleagues (2013) but moving beyond intercultural communication scholarship to examine broader communication published work, through an examination of research patterns and trends, this study aims to shine a light on geographic and methodological shifts in attention in the communication field over the course of a decade. Specifically, this study asks the following exploratory research questions:

*RQ1: What regions did communication research published in prominent journals focus on, and how did it change from 2010 through 2019?*

*RQ2: What regions are most represented when considering the institutional affiliation of lead authors, and how did it change between 2010 and 2019?*

*RQ3: What methodologies were used in communication research published in prominent journals, and how did it change from 2010 through 2019?*

## **Method**

### ***Sample***

This study analyzed the published articles in four top journals in the communication field. The field of communication is broad as are the tools used to evaluate the quality of a journal, including impact factor. In recent years, concerns have been raised about impact factor rankings, with critics arguing that they measure citation patterns and practices instead of impact or quality (National Communication Association, 2014). In addition to varying ranking tools, an array of "top journal" lists exists, which changes from year to year. In an attempt to capture publications in journals that rise to the top of the field by an array of measurements, journals were selected for this study based on their inclusion in an array of journal-ranking indices. This study analyzes a decade of published research articles in *New Media & Society* (NM&S), *Journal of Communication* (JoC), *International Journal of Press/Politics* (IJPP), and *Political Communication* (PC). Each of these included journals appeared commonly in the top 12 journals on Web of Science's Social Science Citations Index, Harzing's Journal

Quality List, Google Scholar Metrics, and SciMago throughout the study period. It is worth noting, however, that given the fluctuating rankings and changing ideologies about journal measurement/statuses, these journals represent prominent publications in the field but not the consistently "top" ranked ones, as such a title is difficult to determine without subscribing to one particular metric.

The unit of analysis for this study was peer-reviewed journal articles published in four prominent communication journals from 2010 through 2019 (January 1, 2010–December 31, 2019). Content analysis of the entire article was used to complete this meta-analysis. As discussed previously, meta-analytic work can vary in format, but it has been shown to be an effective research tool and has been used in various communication-focused studies for many years (see, e.g., Borah, 2011; Paik & Comstock, 1994; Peng, Zhang, Zhong, & Zhu, 2013; Zhang & Leung, 2015).

A census of articles was used; every original research article from the last 10 years published in each journal was included. This study focused on original research articles and thus excluded book reviews and introductions, instead focusing on empirical research studies/articles (where primary research was conducted) only. Special issues were included. Publication dates can vary from when an article is first published online to when it is published in print (if printed), so this study used the date listed on the journal's website archives. In total, this study analyzed 1,942 published articles.

### ***Coding Procedure***

Each article was read to identify the name of the journal, the month and year of publication, study focus, region of institutional affiliation of first author, and method(s) used in the study.

Study focus was operationalized as the geographic/regional focus of the empirical research conducted, with 11 options (Asia, Africa, North America, Latin America/South America/Caribbean, Antarctica, Europe, Oceania/Australia/New Zealand, Middle East, multiple regions, the whole world [all regions], no country/region specified). For example, a study that said, "Twenty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with Dodgeball users from seven cities throughout the United States" (Humphreys, 2011, p. 577) would have a study focus on North America, given that the empirical research focused on individuals in the United States. Similarly, a study that said, "Undergraduate students (76 women, 74 men) taking upper-level communication courses at a large university in the Midwestern United States participated in this study for extra course credit" (Henningsen, Henningsen, McWorthy, McWorthy, & McWorthy, 2011, pp. 648–649) also would have a study focus on North America. An article that did not have a country/region of focus would be, for example, "we examined violence in Web-based entertainment. YouTube videos (N = 2,520) were collected in 3 different categories: most viewed, top rated, and random, with additional comparisons between amateur and professional content" (Weaver, Zelenkauskaitė, & Samson, 2012, p. 1065) or, for another example, an article that content analyzed a random sample of Twitter data (e.g., Humphreys, Gill, Krishnamurthy, & Newbury, 2013) without specifying where the Twitter users were from/based, or tweets not about a specific person, place or event. An article that was classified as "the whole world (all continents)," for example, would be a study that intentionally tracked the global flows of television content as it travels across the world in different ways or one that examined an audience network "with approximately 2 million panelists in 170 countries under continuous measurement" (Taneja & Webster,

2016, p. 167). Essentially, to be classified as “the whole world,” the article needed to clearly specify that all continents/regions were included in the analysis or the study was global in scope. If the article focused on the African continent, it was further coded for which African nation(s) the study examined.

The region of institutional affiliation of the first author was coded according to the same 11 regional categories. The region of institutional affiliation of the first author was determined based on the listed affiliation and/or corresponding address of the lead author published with the article. This variable obviously accounts for only a snapshot in time—it indicates only the institution in which the first/lead author was affiliated at the time of the article’s publication and does not point to past affiliations or other aspects of the author’s background; neither does it include affiliation information for any coauthors. However, by examining the affiliation of the lead author, we can gain insights into the locations of institutions that house authors publishing about various regions and using specific methodologies. Similar to the coding procedure for the study focus variable, if the author’s affiliation was on the African continent, it was further coded to specify which African nation the author was affiliated with.

Last, all articles were coded for the method(s) used in the study to gain empirical insights about when, how, and where various methodologies were being applied. Articles were classified as one of 24 common methods used in the communication field ranging from a survey to a focus group, to historical/archival, to computational methods and “other.” One of the 24 coding categories was “mixed methods”—thus, if an article used multiple methods, it was classified as a “mixed methods” study. This classification system is admittedly imperfect as the terminology used by authors varies a great deal. For example, one author might write that they used qualitative content analysis and another author doing an almost identical procedure might say that they conducted a textual or thematic analysis. This study classified articles based on how the author of the study described their work. Future research should further investigate differences in terminology used to describe methodologies.

### ***Intercoder Reliability***

After numerous training sessions and adjustments to the coding protocol, intercoder reliability was tested between two coders on a randomly selected 10% sample ( $n = 194$ ) of articles spread across all years and all journals. Krippendorff’s alpha scores were as follows: name of the journal: 1.0; month of publication: 1.0; year of publication: 1.0; study focus: 0.96; region of affiliation of first author: 1.0; method(s): 0.93.

### **Findings**

Initial findings revealed a higher number of published articles in *NM&S* and *JoC* than in *IJPP* and *PC*. In total, 993 published articles were analyzed from *NM&S*, 455 from *JoC*, 232 from *IJPP*, and 262 from *PC*, bringing this study’s total number of analyzed articles to 1,942. Significant differences were found in the number of articles published each year in each journal ( $\chi^2 = 108.08, 27 df, p < .01$ ), with *NM&S* accounting for notably higher numbers and percentages of published articles each year. Table 1 shows the number of articles (and percentages) analyzed per year, per journal.

**Table 1. Number of Articles Analyzed Per Year, Per Journal.**

| Year  | NM&S (%)      | JoC (%)       | IJPP (%)      | PC (%)        | Total (%)     |
|-------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 2010  | 64<br>(45.7)  | 33<br>(23.6)  | 24<br>(17.1)  | 19<br>(13.6)  | 140<br>(100)  |
| 2011  | 72<br>(42.6)  | 54<br>(32.0)  | 24<br>(14.2)  | 19<br>(11.2)  | 169<br>(100)  |
| 2012  | 71<br>(41.8)  | 58<br>(34.1)  | 21<br>(12.4)  | 20<br>(11.8)  | 170<br>(100)  |
| 2013  | 68<br>(38.9)  | 54<br>(30.9)  | 24<br>(13.7)  | 29<br>(16.6)  | 175<br>(100)  |
| 2014  | 68<br>(40.2)  | 51<br>(30.2)  | 22<br>(13.0)  | 28<br>(16.6)  | 169<br>(100)  |
| 2015  | 98<br>(49.7)  | 47<br>(23.9)  | 22<br>(11.2)  | 30<br>(15.2)  | 197<br>(100)  |
| 2016  | 118<br>(53.4) | 48<br>(21.7)  | 24<br>(10.9)  | 31<br>(14.0)  | 221<br>(100)  |
| 2017  | 93<br>(49.2)  | 44<br>(23.3)  | 24<br>(12.7)  | 28<br>(14.8)  | 189<br>(100)  |
| 2018  | 223<br>(71.5) | 37<br>(11.9)  | 24<br>(7.7)   | 28<br>(9.0)   | 312<br>(100)  |
| 2019  | 118<br>(59.0) | 29<br>(14.5)  | 23<br>(11.5)  | 30<br>(15.0)  | 200<br>(100)  |
| Total | 993<br>(51.1) | 455<br>(23.4) | 232<br>(11.9) | 262<br>(13.5) | 1942<br>(100) |

RQ1 asked what regions communication research published in prominent journals focused on from 2010 through 2019. Results indicate that the analyzed scholarship overwhelmingly focused on North America and Europe with 39.6% and 26.1% of articles, respectively, focusing on each region. These percentages were followed by 11.8% of articles that did not specify a region. The “whole world” category had the lowest percentage of articles, with only 0.4%. The geographic region with the lowest scholarly focus (aside from Antarctica) was Africa, with only 1.7% (33 articles) focusing on a nation on that continent. This is consistent with (or minutely higher than) previous research that found that, across disciplines, “despite comprising 12.5 percent of the world’s population, Africa still accounts for less than 1 percent of global research output” (Duermeijer, Amir, & Schoombee, 2018, para. 3).

Within those 33 articles that did focus on a country or countries on the African continent, 15 nations were represented (Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). Some of the 33 articles focused on more than one African nation, but the nations on the continent that received the most scholarly attention were Egypt, with 12 of the 33 articles (36.36%); Ghana and Kenya, each with four of the 33 articles (12.12% each); and Tunisia, South Africa, and Zambia, each with three articles (9.09% each). Interestingly, between Egypt and Tunisia, almost half of articles that focused on an African nation focused on one of these two North African nations. This may point to the field’s focus on the events of the Arab Spring as opposed to broader interests in the continent.



Table 2 shows findings when considering how the region of focus changed throughout the decade of analysis. Data indicate a sustained focus on North America and Europe throughout the 10 years of analysis. There was a slight increase in articles that focused on a Middle Eastern country, particularly from 2015 to 2018 and slight upticks mid-decade in articles focusing on one or more Asian nations. Oceania and Latin America, South America, and Caribbean nations remain vastly understudied, with nations on the African continent receiving almost no scholarly attention throughout the decade, with two years showing no articles published about any African nation.

**Table 2. Region of Focus by Year (Percentages).**

| Region                     | 2010      | 2011      | 2012      | 2013      | 2014      | 2015      | 2016      | 2017      | 2018      | 2019      |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Africa                     | 0.0       | 2.4       | 2.9       | 1.7       | 1.2       | 0.0       | 2.3       | 2.6       | 1.3       | 2.5       |
| Asia                       | 5.0       | 12.4      | 7.6       | 6.9       | 8.9       | 5.6       | 7.7       | 4.8       | 5.4       | 5.0       |
| Europe                     | 24.3      | 18.9      | 22.9      | 21.1      | 27.2      | 24.4      | 27.6      | 32.3      | 29.5      | 28.5      |
| Latin, South Amer., Carib. | 1.4       | 2.4       | 2.4       | 0.6       | 2.4       | 1.0       | 1.8       | 3.2       | 2.6       | 2.0       |
| Middle East                | 1.4       | 0.6       | 2.9       | 0.6       | 3.6       | 4.1       | 4.1       | 5.8       | 2.2       | 3.5       |
| Multiple regions           | 8.6       | 5.3       | 4.1       | 8.0       | 5.9       | 3.6       | 7.7       | 7.4       | 7.7       | 7.5       |
| No region specif.          | 17.1      | 12.4      | 7.1       | 14.3      | 8.3       | 9.6       | 18.1      | 10.1      | 11.2      | 10.5      |
| North America              | 39.3      | 43.2      | 48.2      | 44.6      | 42.0      | 47.7      | 29.4      | 31.2      | 38.1      | 37.0      |
| Oceania, Aus., NZ          | 1.4       | 1.8       | 1.2       | 2.3       | 0.6       | 4.1       | 0.5       | 2.6       | 1.9       | 3.0       |
| Whole world                | 1.4       | 0.6       | 0.6       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.9       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.5       |
| Total                      | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       |
|                            | (n = 140) | (n = 169) | (n = 170) | (n = 175) | (n = 169) | (n = 197) | (n = 221) | (n = 189) | (n = 312) | (n = 200) |

No articles focused on Antarctica.

RQ2 asked what region the first authors of communication research published in prominent journals between 2010 and 2019 were most commonly professionally affiliated with. Results indicate that, similar to the regions of focus, most first authors were affiliated with institutions in North America (49.2% of articles) and Europe (35.8% of articles). These were followed by authors affiliated with institutions in Asia (6.1% of articles), Oceania/Australia/New Zealand (3.8% of articles), and the Middle East (3.7% of articles). Aside from Antarctica, the region with the lowest number of lead author affiliations was Africa, with only 0.2% of analyzed articles (three published articles). Of those three published articles with lead author affiliations in African nations, one was in Botswana, one was in Egypt, and one was in Nigeria. This may be connected to the fact that these three nations are each former British colonies, and English—the lingua franca of academic publishing—is an official language in Nigeria and Botswana. This may also point to nations with governments that have invested funding in research and infrastructure creation and promotion, or to the fact that these nations or academic/research institutions mirror those in North America and Europe (thus, allowing the articles to be accepted into journals that largely publish Western-centric scholarship).

Table 3 shows findings about the region of affiliation of the lead author, by year. Data indicate a steady uptick in lead authors from institutions in Europe and a decrease, albeit slight, in North American lead author affiliations, but authors from institutions in those two regions dominated scholarly publishing in these communication journals throughout the decade. A slight increase in authors from Middle Eastern institutions (primarily from Israel), particularly in 2016 and 2017, was seen, but still never more than 7% of articles came from lead authors at institutions in Middle Eastern countries. The regions with the fewest lead author affiliations were Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean, and even more so, Africa. Only three of the 10 analyzed years featured any article with a lead author affiliated with an institution anywhere on the African continent.

**Table 3. Region of Affiliation by Year (Percentages).**

| Region                     | 2010      | 2011      | 2012      | 2013      | 2014      | 2015      | 2016      | 2017      | 2018      | 2019      |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Africa                     | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.6       | 0.0       | 0.6       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.5       | 0.0       | 0.0       |
| Asia                       | 6.4       | 8.9       | 5.9       | 7.4       | 4.1       | 6.1       | 5.4       | 5.3       | 6.1       | 6.5       |
| Europe                     | 29.3      | 29.0      | 25.9      | 30.9      | 34.9      | 29.9      | 43.0      | 40.7      | 41.3      | 44.0      |
| Latin, South Amer., Carib. | 0.7       | 0.0       | 1.2       | 0.0       | 1.2       | 1.5       | 0.9       | 1.6       | 1.0       | 1.5       |
| Middle East                | 1.4       | 1.2       | 4.7       | 2.9       | 3.0       | 3.6       | 5.9       | 6.9       | 3.2       | 3.5       |
| Multiple affiliations      | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.5       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       |
| No region specif.          | 0.7       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.6       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       | 0.0       |
| North America              | 58.6      | 57.4      | 59.4      | 54.9      | 53.8      | 51.8      | 41.6      | 39.2      | 45.2      | 40.0      |
| Oceania, Aus., NZ          | 2.9       | 3.6       | 2.4       | 3.4       | 2.4       | 6.6       | 2.7       | 5.8       | 3.2       | 4.5       |
| Total                      | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       | 100       |
|                            | (n = 140) | (n = 169) | (n = 170) | (n = 175) | (n = 169) | (n = 197) | (n = 221) | (n = 189) | (n = 312) | (n = 200) |

No articles had a lead author from an institution in Antarctica.

Table 4 data show correlations between the region of focus and the region of affiliation by year. Results indicate that 2013 had the strongest correlation between authors' affiliation location and the region of focus in their studies, with 2010 having the weakest correlation, suggesting that in 2010, it was more common for authors to publish works about regions other than those they were affiliated with. However, given the significant correlations throughout the study period and overall, data do not indicate notable changes throughout the decade of analysis. In short: authors tend to publish works that focus on the same region as that they are professionally affiliated with.

**Table 4. Correlations Between Region of Focus and Region of Affiliation, by Year.**

| Year    | Correlation coefficient |
|---------|-------------------------|
| 2010    | 0.326*                  |
| 2011    | 0.493*                  |
| 2012    | 0.620*                  |
| 2013    | 0.666*                  |
| 2014    | 0.603*                  |
| 2015    | 0.611*                  |
| 2016    | 0.611*                  |
| 2017    | 0.572*                  |
| 2018    | 0.557*                  |
| 2019    | 0.488*                  |
| Overall | 0.565*                  |

\* $p < .01$ .

RQ3 asked about the methodologies used in published communication research. Results indicate that the most commonly used method in the examined articles was a survey, used in almost one-fifth (19.7%) of analyzed studies, followed by mixed methods research, which was used in 16.1% of studies. Experiments (14.2%) and content analyses (11.7%) were the next most common methods, followed by interviews (7.9%), case studies (5.8%), and rhetorical/thematic analyses (5.4%).

In terms of methodological changes throughout the decade of study, while data show small peaks and valleys throughout the decade, overall, the top five most commonly used methods, surveys, mixed methods, experiments, interviews, and content analyses stayed the most common throughout the study period. Table 5 shows the percentage of articles using the top five methods for each year. Data indicate a slight decline in the use of experiments and content analyses in the last few years of the decade and a slight increase in the publication of mixed methods studies, but overall, the field's most commonly used methods did not change throughout the decade of analysis.

**Table 5. Methods Used, by Year (Percentages).**

| Method           | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Content analysis | 17.9 | 10.1 | 14.7 | 13.1 | 15.4 | 11.7 | 10.4 | 11.1 | 9.9  | 7.0  |
| Experiment       | 9.3  | 16.6 | 24.7 | 18.3 | 14.8 | 16.8 | 12.7 | 10.1 | 10.9 | 10.5 |
| Interview        | 2.1  | 4.7  | 9.4  | 5.7  | 8.3  | 7.6  | 8.6  | 8.5  | 11.2 | 8.5  |
| Mixed methods    | 15.0 | 11.2 | 12.9 | 16.6 | 14.8 | 15.2 | 18.1 | 18.0 | 17.6 | 19.0 |
| Survey           | 22.9 | 26.0 | 16.5 | 13.7 | 16.6 | 20.8 | 15.4 | 19.6 | 21.2 | 24.0 |

Columns do not sum to 100% because the table indicates only the top five most commonly used methods. Full data set available on request.

### Discussion/Conclusion

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explained that the word *research* “is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” because “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1). Overall, findings from this study point to scholarship by and about North America and Europe being dominant throughout the decade of analysis, suggesting that histories of colonialism and imperialism still permeate publication practices and the validation of knowledge and construction of meaning in the communication discipline.

While findings about institutional affiliation may point to researcher background or institutional resources, they illuminate the unequal distribution of social capital globally throughout the academy. Of course, there exist a number of publications focused on international communication and region-specific communication studies, including *International Communication Gazette*, *International Communication Research Journal*, *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Journal of African Media Studies*, and the *Journal of Latin American Communication Research*, among others. However, the presence of these specialized journals should not excuse the field from publishing diverse content in its prominent publications. If our understandings of media and communication systems are overwhelmingly based on democratic, Western societies, they are not representative of large segments of the global population, and such hegemonic epistemologies will continue to perpetuate colonialist ideologies and power structures.

Similarly, results from this study shine a light on the lack of methodological pluralism present in these prominent journals. Findings from this study point to a slightly larger range of methods than Iyengar’s (2011) findings about the dominance of experiments in political communication research, but still indicate the supremacy of four main methods used in published articles in leading communication journals: surveys, mixed methods, experiments, and content analyses. Three of these four methods are quantitative, with mixed methods research being the only prominent method that may consist of qualitative work, revealing a methodological (and likely epistemological) bias in the four journals selected for the study.

Building on Asante's (1987, 1988, 1990) notion of an Afrocentric paradigm, Mkabela (2005) suggested the need for an Afrocentric research method. This Afrocentric method "is not to denigrate Western methodology, but to reexamine and complement any thinking that attributes undue Western superiority at the expense of neglecting African thought" (p. 188). The principles underlying the Afrocentric method are

in line with the qualitative research, which researchers should actively be involved in to produce knowledge suited to the cultural and social context in which they operate . . . By viewing research differently, the Afrocentric paradigm provides methods African people can use for making sense of their everyday experience. It takes the indigenous African's point-of-view. This means that the method differs markedly in its reflexive sensitivity to its data and the manner it analytically explores the data. The aim is to be sufficiently detailed and sensitive to actual social contexts and to investigate the methodological bases or orderly character of ordinary social activities. This means that the researcher should understand that what s/he does and how s/he does it is specific to the culture (a situated response), the problem, and dynamics of the particular context. (Mkabela, 2005, pp. 180–181)

Mkabela (2005) suggests that the Afrocentric method can be used as a complement to qualitative research methods, but better accounts for African-centered perspectives, including *ubuntu* (collective orientation, and, in the context of research, "mutuality between the participants, a feeling of tolerance, hospitality and respect for others, their language, opinions, and conversational style is highly regarded," p. 186). Other scholars have similarly noted the connection between qualitative research and African social values (Adams, 2014; Bangura, 2011; Lyons, Bike, Johnson, & Bethea, 2012; Mohammed, 2022; Munung, 2016) as well as the prominence of qualitative research in Africa-focused media research (Elega & Özad, 2018; Wasike, 2017). Such an Afrocentric method does not mean that quantitative research has no home in inquiry focused on such a vast and diverse continent—in fact, Wasike (2017) called for more statistical and hypothesis testing in Africa-focused communication scholarship—but findings from this study suggest the marginalization of Afrocentric epistemologies in the analyzed journals.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that communication research conducted with non-U.S. samples are often held to a different—and higher—standard, and authors must justify to reviewers that their findings are generalizable, something that is less common in research with U.S. samples (Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019). Such findings, taken in conjunction with the results from this study and others, point to the need for more geographic and ideological diversity in citation practices, editorial boards, reviewer pools, and conference planning committees. Many African academics work at universities that lack the financial resources to fully fund libraries (Inonu, 2003; Ondari-Okemwa, 2007; Teferra, 2004) or support faculty research (Ondari-Okemwa, 2007; Tijssen, 2007). To make research and publishing more accessible to African scholars, specifically, electronic database subscriptions need to be less cost prohibitive (Ngulube, 2007), the peer review process should focus less on proper grammar and more on substance, which often disadvantages non-Anglophone African scholars who must spend a great deal of time perfecting their grammar before submitting an article for review (Alperin, 2011; Lauf, 2005; Van Leeuwen, Moed, Tijssen, Visser, & van

Raan, 2001), and article reviewers ought to consider their own biases when suggesting edits that push the study in the direction of their own theoretical and contextual understandings.

While revealing important findings, this analysis has a number of limitations. First, this study relied on various journal-ranking systems that themselves contribute to the hegemonic dominance of specific journals. Also, the selection of journals for the study sample can certainly skew the results. For example, using PC and IJPP could result in conclusions that are narrowly focused on the subfield of political communication and the accompanying ideologies and methods. If other journals were included, for example, more critical-cultural studies publications, the findings may be different. Next, this study analyzed the listed affiliation of the lead author. It is possible that the author is affiliated with varying nations or regions in other ways beyond what is listed. Perhaps by analyzing the affiliation of the lead author, this study is merely pointing to the institutions that have the resources to employ the highest number of researchers and/or most prolific scholars.

Additionally, these results could also be skewed by *NM&S* accounting for such a high percentage of the study's examined articles. Future research should examine additional journals, particularly those outside the most well-cited, and examine data for several more years. Future research should also look into the academic and personal backgrounds of authors to more fully understand how and where scholarly practices are formed and molded. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, more scholarly attention is needed to understand the varying terminology that authors use to describe their research methodologies. It would also be beneficial for future research to include perspectives of authors and journal editors about changes that can be made to make scholarly publishing more equitable across the discipline.

Vorderer (2016), past president of the International Communication Association (ICA), called for a new format of journal that accounts for wider geographic and ideological perspectives; however, this study makes it clear that this has not yet come to fruition. The time is ripe for enhanced methodological pluralism and geographic foci when examining communication practices around the globe. When thinking about communication phenomena in Africa, specifically, Miller and colleagues (2013) suggest "first discovering what is happening on the ground in Africa with respect to communication scholarship and then offering support and capacity building for successful local efforts" (p. 329). Specifically, they point to Tjissen's (2007) research, which found that African scholars may be sharing their work in more accessible journals, and that local, regional, or continental conferences play important roles in many African academics' careers (Miller et al., 2010; Teferra, 2004). The ICA holds regional conferences around the world, with three having taken place in Africa: Ghana in 2018, Uganda in 2017, and Kenya in 2016 (ICA, n.d.). Such conferences point to improvements (albeit minor) in the field's appreciation for and accessibility of African scholarship and can promote needed collaboration, but there is a clear need for the field's main conferences to be held in a wider array of locations, including on the African continent.

Furthermore, there is some (albeit slight) hope that the geographic research dominance of the West is changing. A growing amount of research in varying disciplines "is being carried out in terms of bicultural research, partnership research and multi-disciplinary research . . . [and is being created in partnership with, for example, indigenous populations] in an ongoing and mutually beneficial way" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 17). And such partnerships may be helping increase the amount of published research from



non-Western nations. An analysis of research production from 8,500 research institutions in 220 nations found that

compared to other regions, Africa has by far the strongest growing scientific production: 38.6 percent over a 5-year period from the start of 2012 to the end of 2016. The number of authors is growing at an equally astounding rate of 43 percent over that period. This is 10 percent higher than the next fastest growing author population in the world—that of the Middle East—at 33 percent during the same period. (Duermeijer, Amir, & Schoombbee, 2018, para. 5)

Similarly, a 2014 study conducted by the World Bank found that the quantity and quality of sub-Saharan Africa's research had increased substantially in the previous 20 years and the continent more than doubled its annual research output from 2003 to 2012 (World Bank, 2014).

Although these quantitative changes do not appear to have yet taken hold in the communication field, Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) optimism may still be realized if scholars, journal editors, editorial boards, and conference planners across the discipline make conscious efforts to expand their foci, collaborative efforts, methodologies, and ways of thinking beyond what has historically taken place.

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