Informal But Influential: Bibliometric Insights into Grapevine Communication Research Trends

Paramjit S. Lamba[1], Neera Jain[2]

[1]Asst. Professor, School of Business, Sushant University, Gurgaon.

Email ID: paramjitlambaglobal@gmail.com

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9143-7827

[2]Professor, Management Development Institute Gurgaon.

Email ID: njain@mdi.ac.in

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0507-6296

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Grapevine, Informal communication, Bibliometric Analysis, Leadership, Organizational communication, Employee sentiment, Digital Work Environment	The evolving landscape of grapevine communication research examined in this study, reveals significant shifts in scholarly attention and research patterns over time. The analysis demonstrates a notable surge in publications following the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting increased academic interest as organizations adapted to remote and hybrid work environments where formal communication channels became more limited. Citation patterns show consistent growth post-pandemic, with sporadic fluctuations prior to 2018 but sustained high citation rates after 2019, indicating enhanced scholarly engagement with informal communication topics. The study reveals that productivity and influence among journals are not necessarily correlated, with highly productive journals not ranking among the most influential, while influential journals demonstrate lower publication volumes. Country-based collaboration analysis shows evolving international partnerships, with early collaborations between USA, Australia, and Canada shifting to recent China-Pakistan collaborations. Keyword evolution analysis indicates thematic progression from basic concepts like "rumor" and "teleworking" in 2014 to sophisticated constructs including "positive workplace gossip," "negative workplace gossip," and "knowledge-hiding" by 2024. Author co-citation analysis identifies four distinct research clusters, each contributing unique perspectives on informal communication's role in organizational dynamics, trust-building, social power, and employee retention. The findings suggest that grapevine communication has emerged as a critical organizational phenomenon requiring continued theoretical and empirical investigation in increasingly digital work environments

1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace satisfaction flourishes when organizational environments operate efficiently. Content workers demonstrate enhanced productivity that benefits both their personal development and company success. Collaboration with peers plays a fundamental role in accomplishing tasks effectively. Consequently, strong communication abilities serve as essential components for business prosperity. Understanding both official and unofficial communication channels that exist simultaneously within organizations becomes crucial for developing competent communication skills. The informal communication (IC) system in corporate settings describes the unofficial information networks where employees share details, speculation, and conversations beyond established formal procedures. This network can rapidly distribute information throughout various organizational tiers while offering emotional support to staff members, building interpersonal connections and group cohesion. Nevertheless, these informal channels may also generate miscommunication and create uncertainty.

The grapevine represents an unofficial channel through which data, speculation, and hearsay circulate between individuals

without formal structure. Contemporary organizations face challenges related to this informal information exchange system where employees share unofficial details outside established communication protocols (Ennida et al., 2023). While grapevine networks can serve as supplementary communication mechanisms alongside formal organizational structures, they also generate adverse consequences including the development of misconceptions (Abebe et al., 2024). The accuracy of information transmitted through these informal channels often depends on the specific participants engaged in the communication process.

Mishra (1990) observed that informal communication networks expand continuously, reaching beyond professional environments into personal and social spheres including recreational venues, community organizations, religious institutions, and domestic settings. These communication patterns persist beyond standard work schedules, maintaining activity during non-business hours. Both employees and leadership participate equally in these informal information exchanges. Personnel across different organizational tiers frequently depend on unofficial communication channels to enhance formal messaging and occupy intervals while awaiting authorized information through established institutional pathways.

Informal communication networks foster solidarity and unity within organizations by facilitating spontaneous discussions and information sharing among staff members (Obika and Kibukamusoke, 2023). These social connections often generate normative loyalty, creating ethical obligations for employees to remain within workplaces that emphasize relationship building (Denner et al., 2025). Additionally, unofficial communication pathways can serve as vehicles for conveying subtle messages about corporate principles and organizational culture (Chimenson et al., 2022).

When favorable attributes are disseminated through these informal networks—including unwavering commitment to excellence, respect for leadership hierarchy, and development of collaborative environments—they strengthen normative dedication by establishing shared comprehension of institutional aims and purposes (Mousa at al., 2023). Furthermore, these unofficial communication systems contribute to shaping employee perceptions regarding fairness and equality throughout the organization. Such communication methods create interconnected systems where team members share concepts, perspectives, and feelings beyond formal organizational structures.

Transparent sharing of company information with staff members cultivates organizational pride and strengthens employee identification with their workplace. This openness develops deeper connections between workers and their institution, motivating teams to collaborate in overcoming challenges and achieving collective objectives. To prevent miscommunication and information gaps, messaging should flow through unified channels whenever possible. Furthermore, communication must be rapid and easily obtainable through mechanisms like interactive digital platforms that enable staff participation in regular organizational meetings, providing access to institutional updates, executive insights, and other relevant details.

However, these informal networks can also facilitate the distribution of detrimental or false information, potentially harming individual reputations and fostering toxic workplace atmospheres. Effective management of unofficial communication requires organizations to deliver clear and prompt messaging through established channels, maintain operational transparency, respond quickly to misinformation, and motivate employees to depend on verified information sources

2. BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY

The utilization of bibliometric methodology has experienced significant growth within business studies over recent years (Khan et al., 2022; Donthu et al., 2021), with this expansion largely attributed to enhanced development, increased availability, and improved access to specialized analytical software including Gephi, Leximancer, VOSviewer, along with comprehensive academic databases like Scopus and Web of Science. This rising adoption of bibliometric approaches in commercial research demonstrates their effectiveness in managing extensive volumes of scholarly information while generating substantial research influence.

Such analytical instruments facilitate efficient examination of substantial bibliometric datasets and enable identification of emerging patterns and tendencies within academic literature. Although meta-analytical and bibliometric methodologies both employ quantitative approaches, their primary objectives differ significantly. Meta-analytical studies concentrate on synthesizing empirical findings through investigation of variable relationships, whereas bibliometric examination investigates the intellectual framework of research domains by analyzing connections between scholarly elements including researchers, subject matters, and academic institutions.

Bibliometric methodology examines publication trends within specific academic domains (Baker et al., 2021). This analytical approach focuses on scholarly interactions and organizational relationships between various research components. Science mapping encompasses several methodological approaches including citation evaluation, co-citation examination, bibliographic linking, co-word assessment, and collaborative authorship analysis, as these techniques present literature characteristics in measurable formats such as citation frequencies.

Citation analysis serves as a fundamental science mapping method based on the principle that references indicate scholarly connections between documents established when publications reference one another (Appio et al., 2014). Through this

methodology, publication influence is measured by the frequency of received citations. This approach facilitates identification of the most impactful works within specific research areas. Citation frequency represents the most unbiased and direct indicator of scholarly publication impact (Stremersch et al., 2007). Consequently, citation analysis enables researchers to examine highly influential works within academic fields, providing insights into the intellectual mechanisms governing those domains.

Co-citation methodology represents a science mapping approach operating under the premise that documents frequently referenced together share thematic similarities (Hjorland, 2013). This analytical technique can expose the scholarly framework within research domains (Rossetto et al., 2018), including identification of core conceptual areas (Liu et al., 2015). Within co-citation networks, publications become linked when they appear simultaneously in another document's bibliography. The advantage of employing co-citation methodology extends beyond identifying highly impactful works, as business researchers can also uncover thematic groupings. These conceptual clusters emerge from analysis of the referenced documents. Nevertheless, co-citation examination focuses exclusively on frequently-cited works, potentially excluding newer or specialized publications from its thematic categorizations. Therefore, this approach proves particularly valuable for business academics seeking to identify foundational works and establish knowledge bases.

Bibliographic coupling represents a science mapping methodology based on the principle that documents containing overlapping reference lists demonstrate content similarity (Weinberg, 1974). This analytical approach emphasizes categorizing publications into thematic groups according to shared citations, performing optimally when applied within defined temporal boundaries (Zupic & Cater, 2015). The resulting thematic clusters derive from *citing documents*, enabling newer and specialized publications to achieve recognition through bibliographic coupling (contrasting with co-citation analysis). This characteristic makes bibliographic coupling particularly appropriate for business researchers interested in exploring diverse thematic ranges and contemporary developments. Consequently, this analysis provides insight into the *current state* of research domains.

Differing from citation or co-citation analysis, and bibliographic coupling—which focus on either referenced or referencing publications—co-word analysis examines the actual content within documents themselves. Terms used in co-word analysis typically originate from "author keywords," though significant terms may alternatively be extracted from "publication titles," "abstracts," and "complete texts" when keywords are unavailable (Donthu et al., 2021). Paralleling co-citation analysis, co-word methodology operates under the assumption that terms appearing together frequently maintain thematic connections.

Co-authorship methodology investigates scholarly relationships within academic disciplines. Given that collaborative authorship represents an official mechanism for intellectual partnership between researchers (Cisneros et al., 2018), understanding these scholarly interactions becomes essential (encompassing related author characteristics including institutional affiliations and geographic locations). Academic partnerships can enhance research quality—for instance, diverse scholarly contributions may yield improved conceptual clarity and more comprehensive perspectives (Tahamtan et al., 2016). This analytical approach also facilitates visualization of collaborative patterns across temporal sequences, allowing researchers to examine intellectual evolution trajectories in relation to partnership networks, while providing emerging scholars with strategic information for establishing connections and partnerships with prominent and influential researchers within their academic domains.

This methodology proves particularly effective for charting academic domains, identifying influential documents, researchers, and periodicals that shape scholarly contributions. Additionally, it facilitates the creation of visual representations demonstrating how research themes develop chronologically.

The first objective of this research is to examine the differences if any, between productivity and influence of various sources and countries. The second objective is to explore the collaborations among authors and countries. The third objective is to explore the bibliographic coupling among authors, sources and countries.

3. METHODOLOGY

The authors used one of the largest databases of research papers i.e. Scopus to conduct this study. Since grapevine or informal communication has been in existence ever since humans collectively organized themselves into groups, all relevant research was taken into consideration upto the year 2025. The following keywords were used to search for the relevant research papers: "Grapevine", "Informal Communication", Gossip", "Rumor", "Watercooler talk", "Idle talk", "Bush telegraph", "Scuttlebutt", "Whisper network". All these keywords were paired with 'AND' "Organization". Thus the search string was framed as "keyword" AND "Organization". The tool used for this analysis was VOSviewer. The details of documents sourced from Scopus based on the Boolean string used can be seen in table 1.

Table 1: Keyword search

| Keyword(s)	No. of articles	Post Filters	Title/Abstract	Post Duplicate Removal
"Grapevine" AND "Organization"	317	24	19	19
"Informal communication" AND "Organization"	343	159	54	50
"Gossip" AND "Organisation"	327	166	91	82
"Rumor" AND "Organisation"	615	160	22	22
"Watercooler talk" And "Organization"	0	0	0	0
"Idle talk" AND "Organization"	5	3	2	2
"Bush telegraph" AND "Organisation"	1	0	0	0
"Scuttlebutt" AND "Organisation"	0	0	0	0
"Whisper Network" AND "Organisation"	2	2	2	2
Total	1610	514	190	174

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Publication Trend
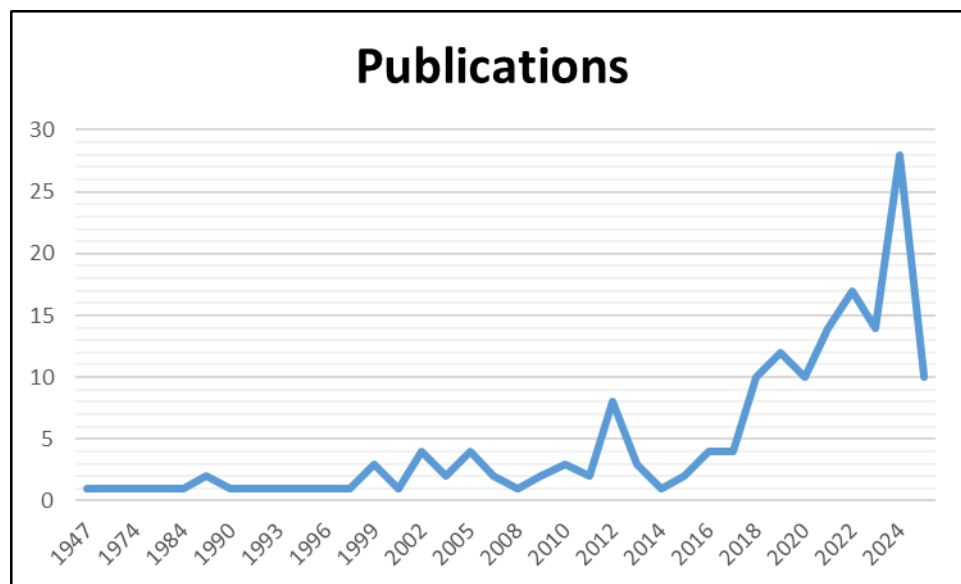
Figure 1: Publication Trend

The publication trend shows that from the year 1047 till 2018, the number of publications remained below 10 documents per year. However, after the Covid-19 epidemic, the number of publications per year increased sharply reaching 28 publications in the year 2024.

Number of Documents and Citations per year

It can be inferred from figure 2 that though the number of documents per year increased steadily after 2018, the number of citations in the year 2012 increased sharply and have been the highest since then.
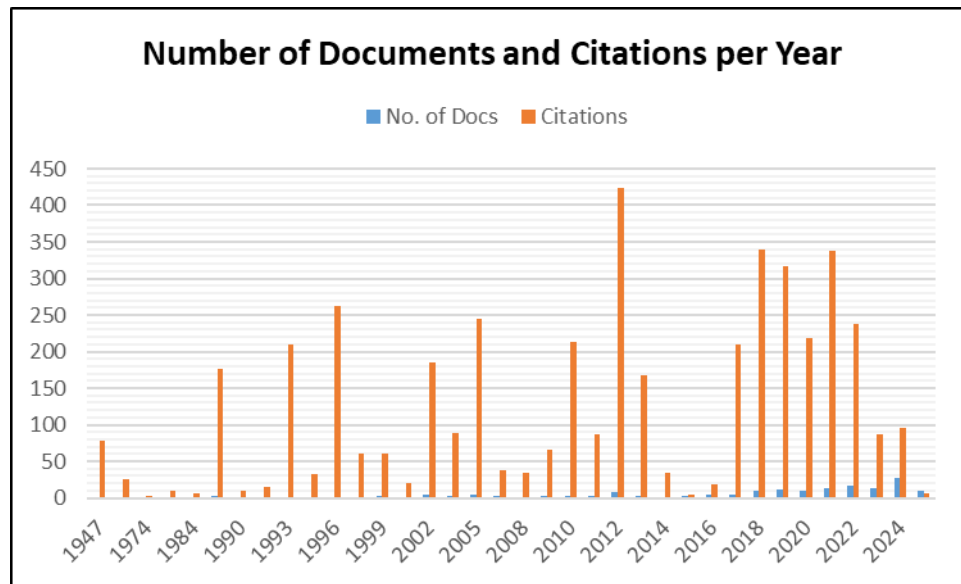
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Figure 2: Number of documents and citations per year

Most Productive vs Influential Sources

Table 2 shows that the most productive journal, *Frontiers in Psychology*, is not the most influential and ranks 10th in order of the most influential journals in this domain. The second most productive journal *Group and Organization Management*, is the most influential journal in this space. The second most influential journal, *Social Networks,* and the third most influential journal, *Academy of Management Review*, do not rank among the top 10 most productive journals. The third most productive journal, *Current Psychology*, does not rank among the top 10 most influential journals.

Table 2: Most Productive & Most Influential Sources

SN	Journal	Number of Papers	SN	Journal	Citations
1	*Frontiers in Psychology*	9	1	*Group and Organization Management*	460
2	*Group and Organization Management*	7	2	*Social Networks*	305
3	*Current Psychology*	6	3	*Academy of Management Review*	263
4	*Corporate Communications*	4	4	*Organization Studies*	225
5	*Journal of Business and Psychology*	3	5	*Corporate Communications*	202
6	*Journal of Business Ethics*	3	6	*Journal of Applied Psychology*	183
7	*Journal of Business Research*	3	7	*Accounting, Organizations and Society*	176
8	*Journal of Communication Management*	3	8	*Journal of Management*	148
9	*Sustainability (Switzerland)*	3	9	*Industrial Relations*	109
10	*BMC Psychology*	2	10	*Frontiers in Psychology*	106

11	*Frontiers in Communication*	2	11	*Journal of Business Research*	95
12	*Health and Social Care in the Community*	2	12	*Health and Social Care in the Community*	94
13	*Human Relations*	2	13	*International Journal of Business Communication*	81
14	*International Journal of Business Communication*	2	14	*Journal of Knowledge Management*	80
15	*International Journal of Conflict Management*	2	15	*Social Forces*	79

Most Productive and Influential Countries

The most productive country, USA, is also the most influential one with 1459 citations. However, United Kingdom though being more influential is lesser productive as compared to China, which ranks fourth in influence. The link strength of Australia is highest among all countries.

Table 3: Top 10 Most Productive Countries

SN	Country	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
1	United States	50	1459	12
2	China	30	544	11
3	United Kingdom	25	930	8
4	Netherlands	17	754	10
5	Australia	11	233	13
6	Pakistan	9	102	5
7	Canada	7	289	7
8	India	7	40	1
9	Sweden	5	77	4
10	South Korea	5	69	1

Most Influential Documents

Table 4 shows that the most influential document in this domain is "Rumors of the death of dispositional research are vastly exaggerated" authored by House et al. (1996), published in the *Academy of Management Review*, wherein they "present a compelling argument for incorporating dispositional theory into explanations of behavior in organizations".

Table 4: Top 10 influential documents

SN	Document	Citations
1	"House e.j.; shane, s.a.; herold d.m. (1996)"	263
2	"Noon m.; delbridge r. (1993)"	209
3	"Brady d.l.; brown d.j.; liang l.h. (2017)"	182
4	"Ellwardt l.; labianca g.j.; wittek r. (2012)"	179

5	"Dirsmith m.w.; covaleski m.a. (1985)"	176
6	"Wu l.-z; birtch t.a.; chiang f.f.t.; zhang h. (2018)"	148
7	"Kalla h.k. (2005)"	129
8	"Ellwardt l.; steglich c.; wittek r. (2012)"	126
9	"Michelson g.; van iterson a.; waddington k. (2010)"	113
10	"Marchington m.; suter j. (2013)"	109

Keyword Co-occurrence – Author keywords

The trend of keyword co-occurrence moved from rumor in the year 2014 to communication and gossip around 2018 (see figure 3). Thereafter, from around the year 2019 onwards, the focus keywords were perceived negative workplace gossip, organization-based self-esteem. In the year 2022, the focus keywords were informal communication, workplace gossip. In the year 2023, the focus keywords were negative workplace gossip, which in 2024 transitioned to knowledge hiding. The minimum (min.) number of occurrences of author keywords were taken as 3. Of the 551 keywords, 26 met the threshold.
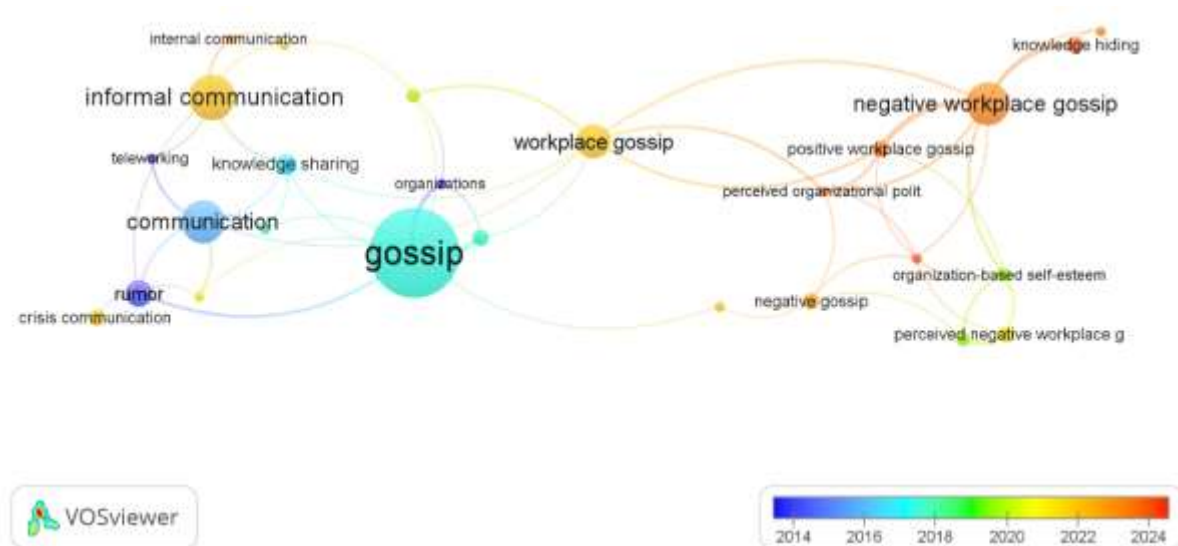

Figure 3: Keyword co-occurrence – Authors keywords

Source citations

Min. number of 2 documents per source taken as qualifying criteria for this analysis. The min. number of citations per source taken as 1. Of the 125 sources, 26 met the threshold. The weight was taken as documents (size of the circle) and the scores were taken of Average Citations. (Red color denotes higher number of citations).

This visualization can be corroborated from Table 2, where in *Organization Studies,* ranked number 4 among the top most influential journals, has 225 citations and is among the most influential journals.
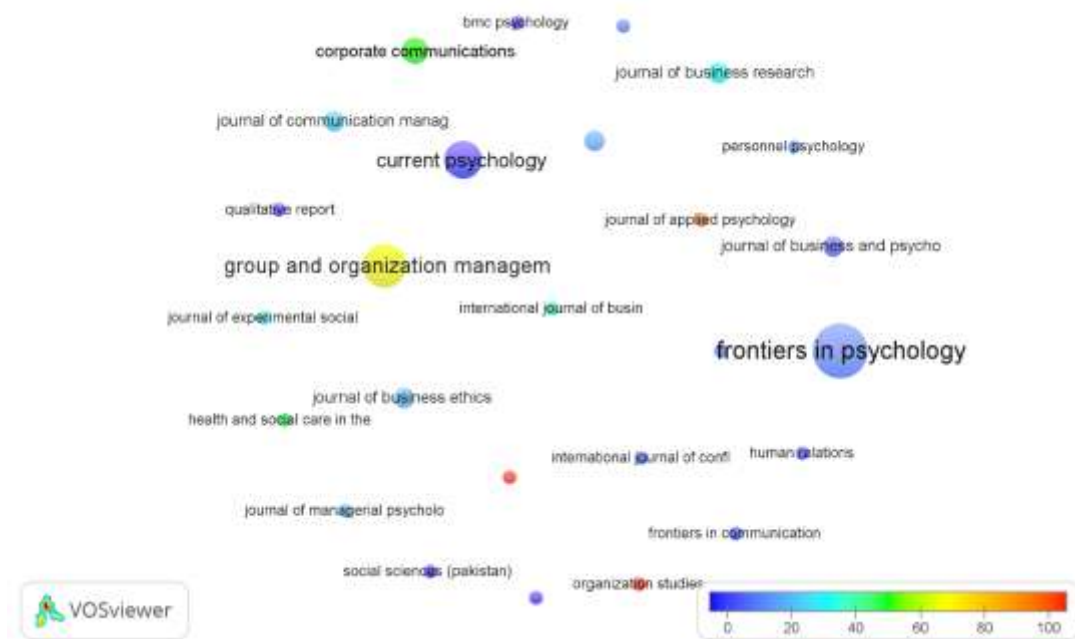
Figure 4: Source citations

Country citations

Min. number of 2 documents taken per country as qualifying criteria for this analysis. The min. number of citations per country was taken as 1. Of the 50 countries, 29 met the threshold. The weight was taken as documents (size of the circle) and the scores were taken of Average Citations.

Co-citations – Authors

While analysing the co-citations author wise, we chose the fractional counting method so as to understand the influence of the authors. The min. number of documents per author was considered as 1, and the min. number of citations per author was taken as 30. Of the 13591 authors, 60 met the threshold. Four clusters seem to emerge in figure 7 – blue, green, red, and yellow.
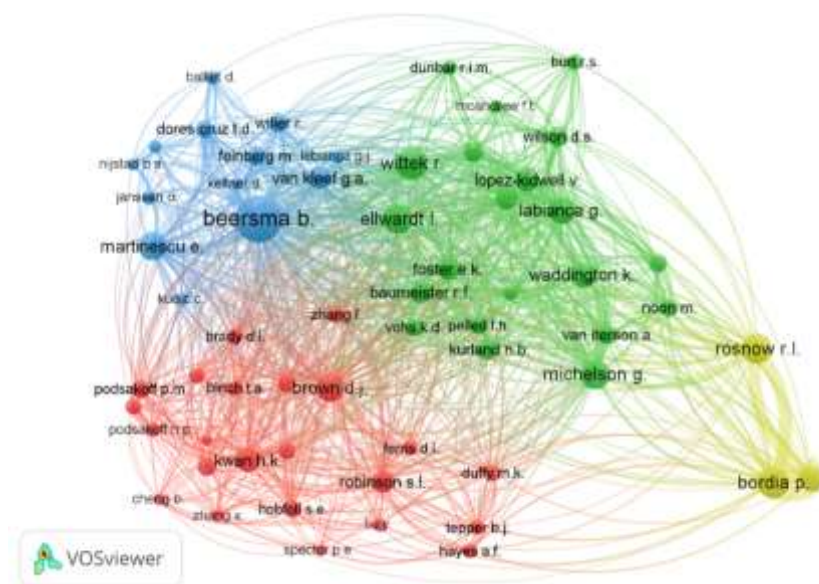

Figure 5: Co-citations among authors

Bibliographic coupling

Documents

A min. number of 30 citations taken per document. Of the 174 documents, 46 met the threshold. For every document among the 46 documents, the total strength of the bibliographic coupling link with other documents was calculated. The documents with the greatest total link strength were selected. The largest set of connected items consists of 36 items.

Author

A min. number of 1 document per author was considered as the qualifying criteria. The min. number of citations per author was taken as 25. Of 173 authors, 53 met the threshold. The largest set of connected items consists of 41 items.

Source

A min. number of 2 documents per source was considered. The min. number of citations per source was taken as 1. Of 125 sources, 26 met the threshold. The largest set of connected items consists of 21 items. The journal Current Psychology has the strongest bibliographic coupling in recent years (2024-2025).
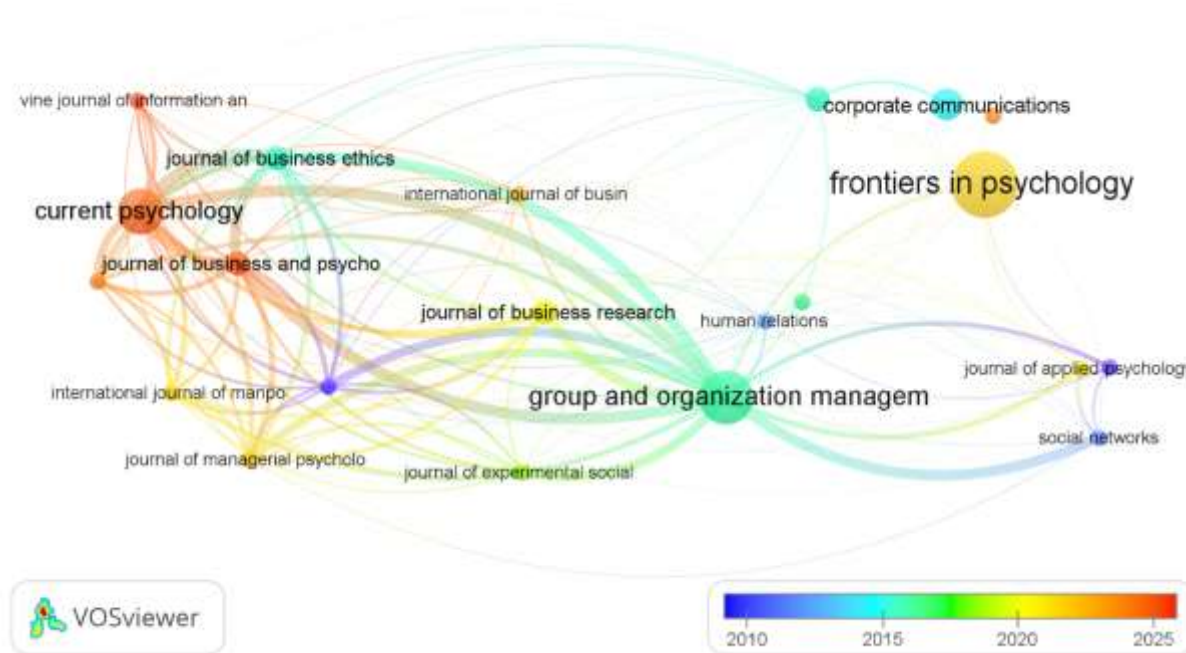

Figure 6: Source-wise bibliographic coupling

Country

A min. number of 2 documents per country was considered. The min. number of citations per country was taken as 1. Of 50 countries, 29 met the threshold. The largest set of connected items consists of 28 items.

Figure 7 reveals that though the United States is the most influential country, it was so in the past around 2016. Among the recent influential countries, China is among the top along with South Korea and Poland.
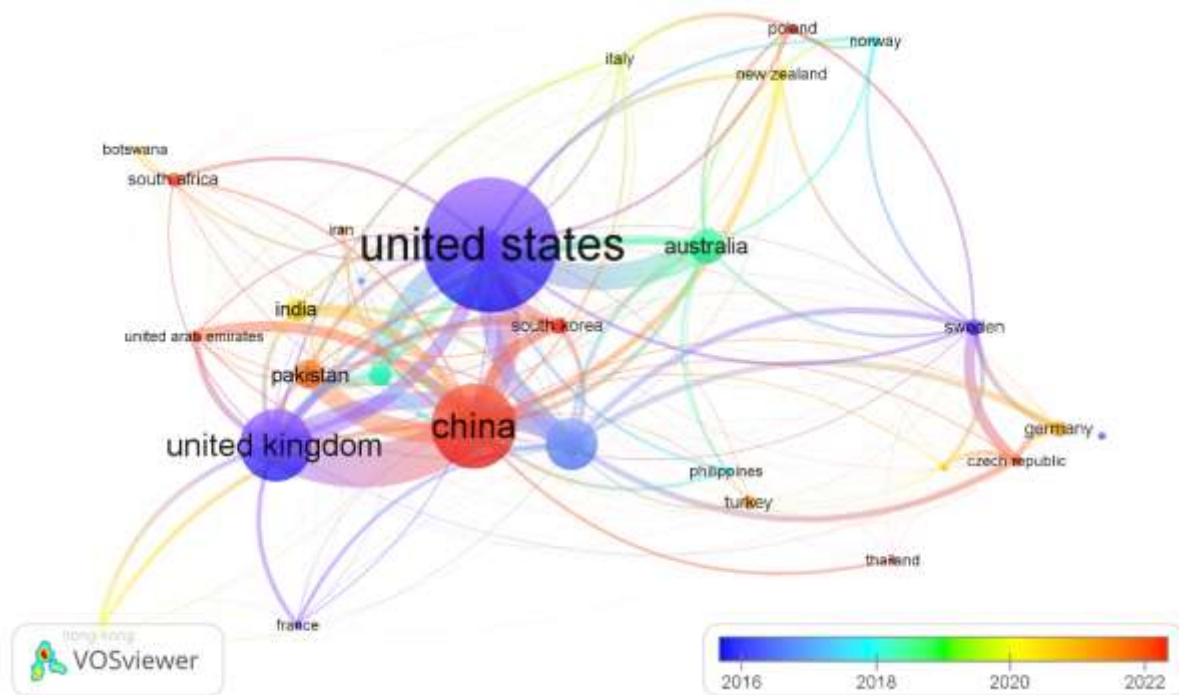
Figure 7: Country-wise bibliographic coupling

4. DISCUSSION

The noticeable increase in the number of publications after the pandemic on this theme reflects the increasing scholarly attention to this topic. With the world working from home, formal communication was limited to virtual means. Even after the pandemic, formal communication to the workforce spread across multiple locations is done using emails or phone calls. Without a face to face interaction, the robustness of information sharing from top down remains limited. This lack of sufficiency in communication may have been a reason for increase in informal communication or the grapevine. This increase may have had negative as well as positive effects on the workforce, stimulating an increase in research on this topic. Thus, we see publications reaching a peak of 28 in the year 2024.

The number of citations is seen to fluctuate over the years. While it was increasingly sporadic up to 2018, with a peak of approximately 420 citations in the year 2012, we see in figure 2, that the number of citations has been consistently high after the pandemic, buttressing our prior observation, that scholarly interest has indeed increased after Covid-19.

The analysis of productivity versus influence among the journals, as seen in table 2, shows that being highly productive does not necessarily translate to being highly influential. Conversely, being influential does not require the source to be highly productive. The most productive journal, *Frontiers in Psychology*, ranks 10th in terms of influence. *Current Psychology*, the third most productive journal on this topic, is not ranked among the top 15 most influential journals. The same applies to the Journal of Business and Psychology, which is the 5th highest ranked journal among the most productive ones but does not feature in the list of top 15 most influential journals. Similarly, the journals Social Networks, Academy of Management Review, and Organization Studies, ranked as 2nd, 3rd, and 4th most influential journals do not rank among the top 15 most productive journals.

Table 4 lists the top 10 most influential documents. Four of the most influential studies by House et al. (1996), Noon et al. (1993), Brady et al (2017), and Dirsmith and Covaleski (1985), explore the constructs about gossip as an informal communication and recommend that gossip as a subject, requires to be studied in greater width and depth in terms of theory and empirical research.

The collaborative research patterns between countries is examined by analysing the overlay visualization of country-based co-authorship. Figure 3 shows that this topic had collaborative efforts between the USA, Australia, and Canada between 2016 and 2018, as well as between Netherlands, India, Germany, and Sweden, while in recent years the collaborative authorship has increased between China and Pakistan.

Keyword co-occurrence as displayed in the overlay visualization of author keywords, show the evolution of author keywords over time (see figure 4). In 2014, the focus author keywords were rumor and teleworking, which around 2018 evolved to communication, knowledge sharing, and gossip. In recent years, around 2022, the prominent author keywords evolved from

informal communication to workplace gossip, and organization-based-self-esteem. In 2024 we see the author keywords evolve to positive workplace gossip, negative workplace gossip, and knowledge-hiding.

The overlay visualization of co-citations of authors as seen in figure 7, shows four clusters emerging. Cluster 1 comprises of Beersma, Martinescu, and van Kleef among others. Cluster 2 shows Ellwardt, Wittek, and Michelson, among others. Cluster 3 shows Kwan, Brown, and Robinson, among others. Cluster 4 shows Bordia, and Rosnow as the prominent authors. In cluster 1, two characteristics of IC emerge which are that "1) IC between humans requires a sender, receiver, and the object of the IC, and 2) the object of the IC may be unaware of the content communicated between the sender and receiver. It also posits that managers need to recognize IC as a channel for diffusing information". Cluster 2 reveals that low level of trust and infrequent contact between the employee and manager leads to an increase in IC. It also posits that IC between two employees increases the likelihood of their becoming friends in the future. It posits that while negative IC is individual-directed, positive IC spreads across the IC network. Cluster 3 examines the relationship between IC and other variables such as uncertainty, emotional validation, self-esteem, influence, turnover and other such constructs. It implies that the potential of "organization-directed IC to serve as a source of social power and a retention tool", needs to be recognized by organizations. Cluster 4 shares that when the organization breaks job-related commitments, it generates a higher intention in employees to transmit negative rumors or IC.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research endeavors should focus on investigating successful informal communication approaches for professionals operating within digital communication environments. Scholars could examine the ways these technological platforms either support or impede communicative effectiveness while establishing optimal implementation practices. Academic investigation should also address communication methodologies within culturally diverse organizational settings. Subsequent research might analyse how cultural variations influence informal communication patterns, interpretations, and comprehension, developing frameworks to promote successful intercultural dialogue in professional contexts. Furthermore, researchers could study the role of nonverbal elements—including gestures, body language, facial expressions, and vocal inflection—in informal workplace communication across both in-person and virtual settings.

6. CONCLUSION

Limitations

This study examined literature using bibliometric analysis. However, a key limitation of this study is that bibliometric analysis does not cover qualitative dimensions such as theoretical descriptions and practical significance of the research. The integration of qualitative insights would enhance the analysis to enrich the perspective about the research domain. Being transparent about the limitations boosts the quality of the bibliometric analysis.

Summary

In conclusion, the research objectives can be condensed into two primary goals. First, the investigation of communication approaches involved examining real-time workplace experiences to analyse the IC throughout business organizations. Second, the exploration of adaptable IC to establish an efficient communication model appropriate for today's digital environment. These goals directed the examination of practical experiences to identify approaches to meet the changing requirements of the digitally-evolving business sector. The key findings regarding IC strategies revealed several important elements. Leveraging customized IC is crucial and requires professionals to adjust communication approaches and content according to audience characteristics and knowledge levels to increase engagement and relevance. The integration of narrative elements is valuable to create memorable and relatable messages that strengthen IC effectiveness. Additionally, maintaining a focus on coherence and organization is essential, with the need to structure information systematically with logical flow, incorporating concise key points to improve understanding and transparency. Finally, establishing ongoing communication enhancement initiatives and gathering regular feedback to respond to changing organizational requirements emerged as an organizational imperative.

Empathetic communication requires recognizing and acknowledging the emotions, viewpoints, and requirements of others around us. Within professional interactions, this translates to being mindful of coworkers' emotional states and concerns while responding with compassion and comprehension. Such empathetic approaches build trust, enhance teamwork, and promote successful collaborative efforts. Inviting team members to express their perspectives, viewpoints, and recommendations regarding communication practices proves invaluable. Such input offers meaningful understanding of improvement opportunities and helps reveal potential confusion or knowledge gaps that may exist. These approaches to IC align with the framework of informal workplace communication networks, representing spontaneous social exchanges that occur in professional environments. This type of communication network highlights the methods through which employees share and transmit information throughout their organizations.

Several approaches can be utilized to effectively manage informal workplace communication networks. Creating an

atmosphere where staff members feel at ease approaching supervisors requires maintaining transparency and honesty. Proactively sharing significant announcements and developments, offering comprehensive explanations, and swiftly addressing potential speculation or false information demonstrates leadership integrity. Setting a positive precedent in communication practices is essential, requiring careful consideration of both message content and delivery methods to strengthen organizational culture.

Establishing a robust organizational culture founded on trust, mutual respect, and open dialogue helps minimize reliance on informal communication channels. By serving as reliable information sources, management reduces dependency on unofficial networks and ensures accurate information reaches all personnel simultaneously. Regular check-ins with team members help maintain well-informed professionals throughout the organization.

Providing opportunities and dedicated time for employees to express their perspectives helps diminish workplace speculation while demonstrating that the organization values staff input and concerns. Identifying and leveraging natural leaders within the workplace can influence communication preferences across the organization. Ensuring universal access to information reduces the likelihood of miscommunication or confusion. Establishing a single designated platform as the primary communication channel helps employees understand where to locate important information. While informal communication networks may never be entirely eliminated, implementing these strategic approaches enables more effective management and reduces their potentially negative organizational impact.

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