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Critical Representation of Figures, Symbols, and Power in Political Communication: Bibliometric Analysis of Phenomenological Studies

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ABSTRACT

The representation of political figures, symbols, and power in contemporary political communication has become increasingly complex as digital media expand and political narratives evolve. However, a comprehensive understanding of how these issues have been examined within phenomenological political communication studies remains limited. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the critical representation of figures, symbols, and power in political communication through a critical phenomenological perspective integrated with bibliometric analysis. The research employed a bibliometric approach combined with critical phenomenology to map publication trends, influential authors, dominant keywords, and citation networks in phenomenological studies of political communication published between 2010 and 2025. Data were collected using Publish or Perish software and analyzed with Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer to visualize relationships among authors, keywords, and citations. The findings revealed a substantial increase in publications since 2021, indicating growing scholarly interest in the field. The dominant themes identified included gender representation, populist political figures, identity politics, and the symbolism of power in digital communication environments. The analysis further demonstrated that scholarly discourse has become increasingly fragmented while simultaneously consolidating around several influential clusters, particularly those related to communicative action, political narratives, and symbolic representation. The study concludes that integrating bibliometric methods with critical phenomenology effectively uncovers the discursive landscape, intellectual structure, and representational biases in contemporary political communication research. These findings advance political communication studies conceptually and methodologically by strengthening critical perspectives on representation, symbolic experience, and power relations in political discourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political communication, as a symbolic field of power, is shaped not only by institutional actors but also by figurative representation processes across various media and public discourse. In this context, critical phenomenology becomes a relevant approach for understanding the subjective and intersubjective experiences of society towards symbols, narratives, and political representations. Several thinkers, such as Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur, provide a deep theoretical framework for examining the relationship between symbolic experience, the legitimacy of power, and public discourse. This approach allows for an analysis of how political power works not only through formal structures, but also through symbols, language, and figures that are intensively produced and consumed in contemporary political communication spaces [1], [2]. In a digital society, where the boundaries between public and private discourse are increasingly blurred, understanding political symbolization becomes increasingly important, particularly in tracing the dynamics of representation and its influence on citizens' political actions.

Critical phenomenology in political communication studies offers a deep understanding of the relationship between symbolic representation and power. As Habermas argues **in his theory of communicative action**, legitimate power should derive from communication free of domination and distortion. However, in the digital age, the public sphere has experienced fragmentation, leading to a decline in the capacity of rational discourse to form political consensus [3], [4]. The proliferation of social media and the emergence of digital platforms have created a new discursive arena that, on the one hand, opens up access to participation, but on the other hand, reinforces polarization and disinformation that threaten the quality of democratic deliberation [5], [2]. In this context, understanding symbolic representation, whether through images of figures, visual narratives, or other aesthetic forms, can be key to analyzing political legitimacy and the construction of collective identity.

Political representation is not only present in formal institutions and regulations, but also in symbols that live in public discourse. Political figures, national symbols, ideological narratives, and even monuments and physical public spaces, such as memorials, are part of a network of representations that shape society's political consciousness [6]. In Ricoeurian phenomenology, narratives are not only reflections of reality but also means of constructing social reality. Therefore, political discourse must be understood as a symbolic field where power is negotiated and interpreted intersubjectively [1]. In addition, political figures representing marginalized groups, such as transgender people and female politicians, introduce a representational dimension that challenges the dominant power configuration and opens space for identity inclusivity in political discourse [7], [8], [9].

Various studies show that discursive practices in political communication are inseparable from symbolic violence. Negative campaigns, the use of stereotypes in the media, and the exploitation of collective emotions through political myths and national identity are symbolic practices that directly impact public opinion and citizens' political behavior [10]. This reflects how symbols, figures, and power are interconnected in the

formation of social meaning. In this context, social media such as Instagram have become an important space for constructing and disseminating political identities, as seen in research on the representation of identity and territory in local politics [11]. Therefore, it is important to examine how symbolic and figurative dimensions operate systematically in political discourse, as well as how people's lived experiences are shaped through their interactions with these symbols.

In the development of political communication studies, bibliometric methods have been used to map the development of academic discourse, identify thematic trends, and map networks of authors and institutions. Bibliometric analysis provides an important picture of how scientific attention to issues of power representation, political identity, and symbolic communication has developed over time [12], [13]. This research shows that citation practices in political studies are not neutral, but rather reflect epistemic domination and unequal representation, particularly of women, marginalized groups, and non-Western perspectives [14]. In this regard, integrating bibliometric approaches with critical phenomenology allows for a reading that is not only quantitative but also reflective of the direction of knowledge development and of how it reflects power structures within the academic community.

A bibliometric study of phenomenological studies in political communication also enables tracing how themes such as political identity, symbolic power, and representative figures have evolved, especially after 2016, marked by global political turmoil and the emergence of new populism [15]. Furthermore, analysis of literature trends in the context of digital media such as YouTube shows that these platforms have become important sites for the articulation of alternative political narratives, especially in authoritarian regimes [16]. This means that symbolic representation in political communication does not only occur in institutional channels, but also in informal and digital spaces that open up possibilities for political articulation from below. Thus, it is important to understand the constellation of literature that shapes our understanding of symbolic political communication through a comprehensive bibliometric map.

Based on this background, this study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of phenomenological studies in political communication, focusing on figures, symbols, and power. This study will not only map thematic trends and citation networks but also examine how power is framed in the literature and the extent to which issues of marginality, gender, and identity are addressed in academic discourse. **The main objective of this study is to understand the dynamics of symbolic representations of power in political communication, as produced and studied in the academic literature through a critical-phenomenological approach. This study also aims to emphasize the important position of symbols and figures in shaping political reality, as well as to examine epistemic diversity in this research tradition.**

Based on these objectives, the research questions can be formulated into three questions, namely: (1) What are the thematic trends and developments in critical phenomenological studies in political communication over the last two decades? (2) Who are the most influential scientific actors (authors, institutions, and countries) in shaping the academic discourse on figures, symbols, and power in political communication? (3) How

are the patterns of representation of power, symbols, and figures in the literature of critical phenomenological studies on political communication displayed through citation networks and conceptual maps? By answering these questions, this study is expected to contribute theoretically and methodologically to political communication studies, particularly in understanding the symbolic role of representation and power in contemporary political narratives. This study also opens a space for reflection for the academic community to review citation practices and the inclusivity of knowledge in a field heavily influenced by global socio-political dynamics.

2. METHOD

This study uses a bibliometric analysis design with an exploratory-critical approach to map and examine the representation of figures, symbols, and power in the phenomenological study of political communication during the period 2010–2025. This approach was chosen because it can systematically identify thematic trends, interconnections among concepts, citation networks, and key actors in the discipline. Given that the objective of the study is to evaluate the representational dimension in political communication from a critical phenomenological perspective, the bibliometric design is combined with a qualitative reading of the dominant literature clusters, as has been done by [13] and [16] in similar approaches. This research does not merely count frequencies but explores how representational practices.

Power is reproduced in academic discourse through symbols, figures, and political narratives. The unit of analysis in this study includes reputable scientific journal articles that explicitly use a phenomenological approach in the study of political communication, symbolic representation, public figures, and power. The sample was determined by searching Crossref and Google Scholar using Publish or Perish software version 8.17, as used in the bibliometric reports Political Communication Style of Female Leaders (2025), Phenomenological Study of Local Political Leadership (2025), and Inclusive Leadership and Personal Branding in Politics (2025). The inclusion criteria included publications published between 2010 and 2025, available in journal article format (not proceedings or opinions), and containing keywords such as "phenomenological," "political communication," "representation," "symbol," and "power." A total of 1,000 articles were collected and reduced to 100 based on relevance and highest citation frequency.

The research instrument, in the form of a bibliometric data table generated from Publish or Perish, included metadata elements such as article title, author name, institutional affiliation, year of publication, number of citations, DOI, and abstract. This data was then exported to CSV format for analysis in Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer. VOSviewer was used to build a visualization network of keyword relationships (co-word analysis), author connections (co-authorship analysis), and citation structures (citation analysis). This analysis phase follows the approach of [13], which emphasizes the importance of citation diversity and inclusivity of representation in the political science landscape. As a supporting tool, researchers also use narrative analysis techniques to read the symbolic meaning in the dominant article clusters in the citation network.

The data collection procedure was carried out systematically in the following stages: (1) determining the main keywords and their synonyms based on phenomenology and political communication terminology; (2) filtering articles based on titles and abstracts; (3) downloading metadata and citations through Publish or Perish; and (4) compiling bibliometric data in Excel for quantitative and interpretive analysis. In this stage, the researcher adopted the principle of validating data by double-checking the DOI and the publishing sources to ensure data accuracy. In addition, qualitative coding was performed on the narratives and abstracts to group topics such as gender representation, symbolic power, inclusive leadership, and populist figures. This process was supported by the findings of [14], which highlighted the importance of identity and epistemic justice in contemporary political communication.

The analysis method used is a combination of quantitative bibliometric analysis and interpretive qualitative reflection. The results of the quantitative analysis, in the form of citation network mapping and keywords, will be linked to a critical reading of the symbolic meaning in the dominant articles. This analysis technique refers to the critical phenomenological review approach, in which bibliometric results are used not only to identify trends but also to assess the structures of discourse domination, representational bias, and the absence of certain groups' voices in the academic realm [17]. In the final stage, the findings will be synthesized to comprehensively answer the three research questions and propose conceptual recommendations for the direction of future research on political representation using a critical phenomenological approach.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

An analysis of publication productivity by year shows that the number of articles discussing issues of political leadership, political communication, and personal branding using a phenomenological approach has increased significantly over the past five years. In 2021, there were 581 publications; in 2022, there was a slight decrease to 512; followed by a large surge in 2023 with 769 articles, and in 2024 with 758 articles. Meanwhile, in 2025, the number of publications dropped to 380 articles, which can be attributed to the incomplete period during which the data were collected (source: Bibliometric Findings.docx). This pattern indicates that 2023 and 2024 were the peak years for research intensity, which may have been driven by global developments in leadership and crisis communication, as well as increased attention to the personal branding of political figures. In general, the annual distribution of publications shows a rapid growth trend, reflecting the vitality of the global scientific community discussing this theme.

In terms of identifying the most productive authors, the results show that Hilary McGowan and Piotr Bienkowski are the two with the most publications, each with 47. Tilo Bonow follows with 24 publications, Xin Tong with 22, and Elizabeth A. Tuleja with 18. Other authors with a high number of articles include Jillian Davis (14), Nathalie Drouin (14), Ralf Müller (14), and Shankar Sankaran (14), all of whom demonstrate active involvement in developing this theme (source: Bibliometric Findings.docx). In addition, this list also shows the emergence of new names such as Anny Morissette, Lauren

Azevedo, and Brittany "Brie" Haupt, who each contributed 9 articles. Overall, this data illustrates the consistent contributions of several key researchers and the formation of intellectual clusters around themes of political communication and leadership. The fact that most of these authors come from communication, gender studies, and leadership indicates a deeply interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon under study.

Based on citation analysis, the most cited article is "Social Media and Political Agenda Setting," published in 2021, with 186 citations. This is followed by Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Fake News (2021), with 124 citations, and Resilient Leadership: A Phenomenological Exploration (2021), with 53 citations. Other notable articles include How Political Efficacy Relates to Online and Offline Political Participation (50 citations), Inclusive Leadership, Ambidextrous Innovation and Performance (43 citations), and How News Feels: Anticipated Anxiety as a Factor in Political Engagement (41 citations) (source: Bibliometric findings.docx). Generally, the most cited articles were published in 2021 and 2022, indicating that although relatively new, the themes of political communication and critical phenomenology are rapidly gaining influence in the academic community. The average citations per article, by year, also reinforces this finding, with 2021 ranking highest due to its longer time in circulation, while articles from 2023 to 2025 are still in the process of accumulating citations.

The citation statistics per author show an average of 6.58, a median of 3.00, and a maximum of 186. This distribution illustrates a common characteristic in the academic world, namely the concentration of citations in a small number of articles or authors (source: Bibliometric Findings.docx). This uneven distribution of academic influence is common in bibliometric analysis, but it should be noted that most authors contribute to the low to medium citation range. The standard deviation of 11.61 indicates substantial variation in citation acquisition across articles. Thus, these findings confirm that only a few articles serve as primary references, while the majority remain awaiting further citations.

Analysis of document types shows that publications in the form of journal articles and book chapters are the most dominant types, with 1,228 and 1,201 articles, respectively. This is followed by other document types such as other (105), posted content (95), peer-review (90), reference entry (69), and proceedings article (49) (source: Bibliometric findings.docx). This diversity shows that knowledge dissemination is not limited to formal journal channels but also occurs through other, more open and inclusive mechanisms. Documents such as monographs (47), books (32), and datasets (13) also show that there are more diverse approaches to writing and disseminating research results. The fact that the two main document types account for more than 80% indicates a preference for standard academic publication formats among the scientific community studying this issue.

The results of the article age analysis reveal that 1,138 articles are 1 year old, 769 are 2 years old, 512 are 3 years old, and 581 are 4 years old. The average age of the articles is 2.18 years, with a minimum age of 1 year and a maximum age of 4 years. The median value is 2 years, with the first quartile (Q1) at 1 year and the third quartile (Q3) at 3 years (source: Bibliometric Findings.docx). These statistics show that the majority of articles in the dataset are new publications that reflect the current dynamics in the discourse of political communication and symbolic representation. The focus on younger articles also

implies a low average citation rate, but it is a strong indication that this field is developing rapidly and that many articles have not yet reached their full academic impact.

In terms of digital resource availability, all 3,000 articles analyzed have a DOI and Article URL so that they can be tracked and accessed via permanent links. However, only 1,720 articles (57.3%) have Full Text URLs, and 1,042 articles (34.7%) provide abstracts (source: Bibliometric Findings.docx). This means that nearly half of the articles lack full-text access, and more than 60% lack publicly available abstracts. This condition is an obstacle to conducting further content analysis, such as topic mining, automatic classification, or in-depth thematic review. In addition, limitations in information accessibility can reduce the visibility and citation potential of the concerned articles.

Overall, these bibliometric results present a comprehensive initial map of the research dynamics in the topics of political leadership, figurative communication, and phenomenology-based personal branding. With coverage of 3,000 articles, 20 most productive authors, 20 most cited articles, and various forms and pages of documents, these findings provide a comprehensive picture of the structure and direction of knowledge development. By presenting publication trends, author distribution, citation distribution, document classification, article age, and digital metadata, these results provide a strong foundation for further research in including collaboration network analysis, topic clustering, and thematic visual mapping based on document connectivity.

3.2. Discussion

Regarding the question in this study, namely how publication trends have developed in political communication studies that integrate critical phenomenology, symbolic representation, and leadership figures, these findings show that bibliometrics indicate a significant increase in the number of publications discussing political communication issues from a critical phenomenology and symbolic representation perspective from 2021 to 2024. The most notable surge occurred in 2023 and 2024, with 769 and 758 publications, respectively. This trend reflects growing academic interest in understanding symbols and figures in the increasingly complex context of digital political communication.

This surge can be attributed to the growing attention to the disruption of digital media in the public sphere, as emphasized by [4], who highlight the fragmentation of discourse in the digital age. This increase in publication volume is also in line with Habermas' theoretical reflection, which underlines the importance of maintaining a rational public sphere free from ideological domination and communication distortion [2]. Thus, the growth in publications is not merely quantitative but also reflects a reflective quality rooted in communicative action theory and attention to the dynamics of representation. Furthermore, this trend shows a shift in research towards interdisciplinary integration between communication studies, hermeneutic philosophy, and political analysis, as exemplified in the studies by [18], [19], [20], which highlight narrative as an instrument for shaping collective identity. Therefore, this data indicates that critical phenomenology is beginning to become the dominant conceptual framework in dissecting the politics of representation through symbolic experiences, narratives, and power relations [21].

Another question concerns the key intellectual actors, the most influential articles in the discourse of political communication, and how their intellectual positions shape understandings of figures, symbols, and power. This study answers that citation analysis in bibliometric findings identifies several leading authors who consistently contribute to this discourse. Hilary McGowan and Piotr Bienkowski stand out with 47 publications each, followed by Tilo Bonow (24), Xin Tong (22), and Elizabeth Tuleja (18), indicating that they have intellectual authority in contemporary discourse on political communication. The most cited articles, such as *Social Media and Political Agenda Setting* (186 citations) and *Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Fake News* (124 citations), focus on representation in digital spaces and algorithmic bias [22].

The significance of these findings is in line with Habermas' warning about the threat of communication distortion in a fragmented public sphere [23]. The article *Resilient Leadership: A Phenomenological Exploration* also shows that the phenomenological approach to leadership now has a solid epistemic position. Studies such as those conducted by [24] reinforce this, showing that women's leadership in politics involves representational complexities that are not only policy-related but also involve their symbolic portrayal in the media. In this context, these influential articles show that leadership narratives cannot be separated from the construction of identity through symbols, rhetoric, and ideological affiliations, as also reflected by Sevnani (2022, 2023). Thus, the intellectual positions of these authors not only drive academic discussion but also shape how society understands political figures as constructions embedded in power relations and symbolization [25].

The findings in this study address the dominant thematic trends and research gaps that emerge from the bibliometric structure of political communication, symbolic representation, and figurative representation in the digital public sphere. The bibliometric structure shows that the main focus in recent research is on digital narratives, symbolic representations of gender and minorities, and the impact of technological disruption on political authority. Topics such as gender and political leadership, symbolic representation of marginalized identities, and digital fragmentation of public discourse are dominant clusters. Literature such as Schotel & Mügge (2024) and Stauffer (2021) explains the importance of symbolic representation in opening access to political legitimacy for minority groups. However, a research gap remains in the limited phenomenological exploration of people's lived experiences with political figures in the local context, especially through Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics. Many studies focus more on structural and discursive aspects but fail to explore the affective and existential dimensions of political representation, even though these aspects are very important, as shown by Rosa (2022) and Mackin (2022). On the other hand, the themes of memorials and symbolic places, as discussed by Koblížková & Hána (2023), provide an entry point for further exploration of how physical and digital public spaces shape political symbols in collective memory. Therefore, the research gap lies in the integration between macro-structural (discourse, media) and micro-existential (subjective public experience) analyses, which can actually be bridged through a critical phenomenological approach that considers the frameworks of Habermas and Ricoeur simultaneously.

The theoretical implication of these findings is the importance of developing a synthesis between structural discourse and phenomenological approaches to understand political communication comprehensively. This can encourage the emergence of new analytical models that rely not only on content or rhetoric analysis but also on the subjective experiences of audiences and political actors. The practical implication is that the media, journalists, and political actors must recognize that the symbolic constructions in their communication are not neutral but influence public perception, including in the context of elections, digital activism, and identity politics. Studies such as Dewanty & Bram (2023) on Instagram as a medium of political representation, as well as Litvinenko (2021) on YouTube in authoritarian countries, show that digital media has now become the main arena for symbol production, not just a complement. Therefore, understanding these dynamics can help policymakers, political consultants, and academics design communication strategies that are ethical, inclusive, and reflective of contemporary socio-political complexities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating bibliometric analysis with a critical phenomenological perspective offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the evolving discourse on figures, symbols, and power in political communication. Rather than viewing political communication merely as the transmission of information, the study highlights its role as a symbolic arena in which political identities, narratives, and meanings are continuously constructed and contested, particularly within digital media environments. The mapping of scholarly trends confirms that recent research has increasingly focused on gender representation, identity politics, populist leadership, and digital narratives, while influential intellectual clusters remain anchored in communicative action and narrative interpretation.

The findings imply that political communication scholarship should move beyond traditional media-centered approaches and pay closer attention to symbolic experience, affect, and identity formation in digital spaces. For scholars, the study provides a conceptual framework that connects critical phenomenology, communicative action, and narrative hermeneutics in analyzing political representation. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of bibliometric mapping as a tool for identifying intellectual structures, research gaps, and emerging themes in political communication studies.

This research is limited by its reliance on bibliometric data from indexed publications between 2010 and 2025 and by the availability of abstracts and citation metadata accessible through Publish or Perish. The analysis emphasizes macro-level patterns of academic production and does not directly examine audience interpretation, political practice, or the full textual content of all publications. In addition, the dominance of English-language and globally indexed sources may underrepresent local and non-Western scholarly contributions.

Future studies should expand the temporal scope of bibliometric analysis, incorporate broader databases and multilingual sources, and combine macro-level mapping with in-depth qualitative approaches such as discourse analysis, netnography, or digital

ethnography. Research focusing on Southeast Asian and Indonesian contexts, as well as on alternative platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, would help reduce regional bias and deepen understanding of symbolic resistance and digital activism. Integrating phenomenological inquiry with discourse analysis may also produce a more holistic model for studying political communication as both structure and lived experience.

For the broader public, this research contributes by encouraging a more critical understanding of how political figures and narratives are constructed in digital media. By revealing the symbolic mechanisms behind political communication, the study supports the development of more reflective media literacy, democratic engagement, and awareness of representational bias in contemporary political discourse.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically by strengthening the relevance of critical phenomenology in political communication research and methodologically by demonstrating the usefulness of bibliometric analysis in mapping the field's intellectual landscape. It advances political communication studies toward a more inclusive, reflective, and ethically grounded understanding of representation, symbolism, and power in the digital age.

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