

The full social science database (SSCI) contains over 3 million records of journal article citation lists from over 5,000 journals. In this study, we focus primarily on about 300 journals in politics, public opinion, social psychology, health communication, journalism, and related fields that typically cite articles and books on media effects and are labeled by ISI as “communication” journals. Also, we focused on a subset of 20,736 articles published over the 50-year period in five particularly prominent mass communication research journals. These databases do not record the citations made in books and edited books, but when books and book chapters are cited in journal articles, the information is duly recorded. Thus, for example, we are able to track the number of citations in articles in the social sciences over time (from 1956 to 2005) of both Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee’s (1954) seminal book, *Voting*, and Davison’s (1983) influential article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* on the “Third Person Effect.”

Having derived the analytic typology described above and in Table 1 from the literature, we proceeded to track the patterns of citation over time of the seminal books and articles in social sciences generally and in five of the most prominent communication research journals. For the most part, the patterns of citation were very similar for the social sciences generally and the communication journals and most key publications were not cited much outside of the communication field. There were some exceptions. Shannon’s (1948) work is cited heavily in library science and information theory; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960), Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Iyengar et al. (1982), and Gramsci and Habermas are cited frequently in political science and related fields. Rogers (1962 and subsequent editions) is cited broadly in the social sciences, including business and economics. Also, a number of psychologically oriented articles and books, such as those by Heider, Hovland, Kelley, Festinger, Bandura, and others, are cited widely across the behavioral sciences, especially psychology.

In the five-journal data set we culled the 200 most frequently cited articles that were subject to further analysis. As we were interested in patterns over time, rather than simply taking the top 200 of all time, we divided the 50-year span from 1956 to 2005 into 10 five-year intervals and sampled the 20 most frequently cited among articles published in each period. (This also helped to adjust for the fact that more recently published articles, by definition, have not yet had comparable time to accumulate a large number of citations.) Our sample of mass communication journals includes *The Journal of Communication* (1956–2005), *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1956–2005), *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (1956–2005), *Communication Research* (1974–2005), and *Human Communication Research* (1982–2005).