

Some heavily cited articles, particularly in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, were narrowly methodological, focusing, for example, on survey sampling and questionnaire design and were excluded from the top 200. We note, of course, that these journals are not representative of the full diversity of the communication field and that a different set of journals may well have revealed a somewhat different set of patterns.

We assembled and carefully read all the top 200 articles and independently coded three levels of theoretical reference: (a) an explicit citation of one of the listed seminal works, (b) an explicit reference to a theoretical tradition in the article text for those cases where one of the listed seminal works was not cited, and (c) a clear indication

that a theoretical tradition was being utilized even when the identifying label, such as third person theory or spiral-of-silence, was not explicitly stated. As expected, intercoder reliability was very high on the first level, moderately high on the second level, and marginal on the third.² This recoding process that partially duplicates the character of the original ISI data set has an important quality that justifies the effort in addition to notation of theoretical references not tied to citations. Because we now had a full list of which of the 29 subtheories were cited in each of the 200 articles, we could now assess not just the frequency but the structure of citation, patterns of cocitation—key to the issue of cumulative theory building. Thus we could analyze, where any one theory was cited or otherwise mentioned, how many of the remaining other 28 theories were also cited or mentioned.³

Analysis and results

Before addressing the citation patterns themselves, we want to draw the reader's attention to a prominent phenomenon in bibliometric data of the sort we have used. Robert K. Merton (1968) called it "The Matthew Effect" after the biblical epigram in the Book of Matthew that makes note of the self-reinforcing cycles of inequity—the rich tend to get richer as the poor get poorer. In scientific literatures, Merton notes, a more eminent researcher is much more likely to be cited and credited than a less well-known (or newer) researcher for the same basic work. Part of the phenomenon is the ritual citation of what becomes fashionably defined as seminal. Part may be the simple fact that researchers are much more likely to be aware of and cite those studies that are themselves frequently cited. The net result for most literatures, and certainly evident in communication, is a logistic curve whereby a few articles are cited frequently and most are not cited at all. Figure 1 illustrates the concentration-of-attention phenomenon among the 20,736 articles in our five-journal sample.