mobile
media &
communication

Current Directions and Future Contours

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Background

Journal Editing:

What counts as mobile communication scholarship?

How might we challenge or expand the contours of the field?

Background

MMC Editorial
What is Mobile Media & Communication?

Mobile Media & Communication is a peer-reviewed forum for international, interdisciplinary academic research on the dynamic field of mobile media and communication. The journal publishes primarily social scientific and humanistic scholarship engaging broadly with the topic of mobility in communication. The study of mobile communication focuses on understanding the social uses and social implications of mobile devices. It also includes the social and cultural analysis of the technological infrastructures that support networked mobility.

Articles published in this journal should draw on literature from within mobile communication studies and discuss the mobile nature of user perceptions and experiences. For example, is there something about being able to communicate from a variety of locations that produces different experiences from using a stationary device in a single location? Or, is there something about the possibility of being constantly available for communication that makes the use of mobile apps a uniquely mobile experience? How does our experience of communication and our surrounding space change when we are able to communicate while moving about? Rather than simply focusing on mobile devices, platforms or apps, we are interested in engagement with the human and spatial experiences of being able to communicate while mobile.

Methods (Qualitative + Quantitative)

Thematic analysis identifying common themes, frames, methods

- All papers in the Inaugural issue: 2013, 1(1)
- next steps
  - All papers in the Anniversary issue: 2023, 11(1)
  - Top papers in each cluster.



Thematic Analysis (Inaugural 2013 Issue)

Field-building over showcasing

More agenda-setting than empirical work — scholars worked to define mobile communication as a coherent domain, distinct from adjacent fields.

Thematic Analysis (Inaugural 2013 Issue)

Technology → Social action

Consistent call to move beyond device/app-centered frames toward social actions, interactions, and contexts in which mobile connectivity is embedded.

Thematic Analysis (Inaugural 2013 Issue)

Mobility foregrounded (Jensen, Campbell, Smith)

Novelty lies in synchronous, localized, individualized integration into everyday practices. Small size, affordance of mobility, mediated social connectivity in physical motion.

Thematic Analysis (Inaugural 2013 Issue)

Critical & Global scope (Chib, Horst)

Calls for power-attentive, infrastructure-conscious research; holistic analyses rather than isolated studies.

Thematic Analysis (Inaugural 2013 Issue)

Methodological Breadth (Boase, Bouwman)

Using mobile media as data-collection instruments for studying mobile phenomena — an early reflexive move.

Methods (Qualitative + Quantitative)

Quantitative analysis:
Bibliometric analysis of ALL the papers published in the journal since 2013.



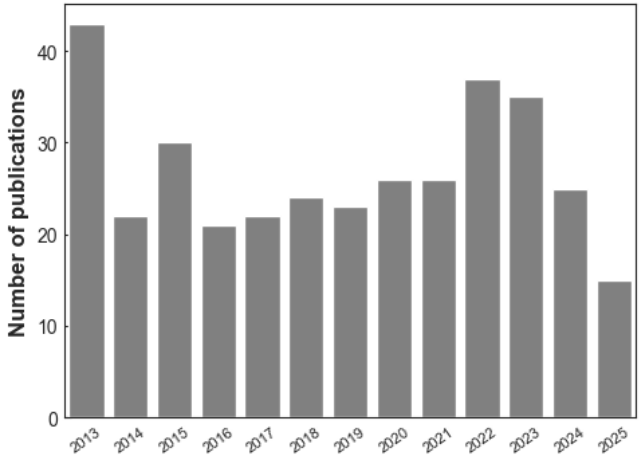
Bibliometrics: What is it?

- A set of methods to **quantitatively** analyze published literature.
- Advances knowledge on the **development of science** by identifying and quantifying **trends in science** (Bornmann & Wohlrabe, 2024).
- Useful for **scientific institutions** to reflect on their development and have practical implications for research planning.

Bibliometric Analysis

- Used **Web of Science** database to retrieve publications from MMC.

- Manually downloaded a total of 474 papers, including 440 articles with unique DOIs, including 341 articles, 89 book reviews, and 10 reviews.

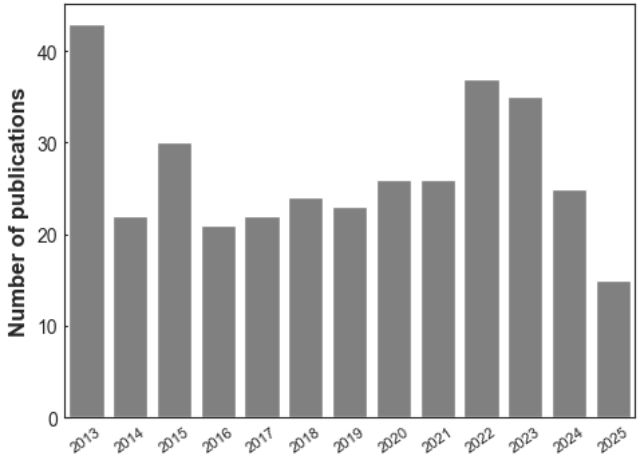


Bibliometrics Analysis

- Used **OpenAlex** database to scrape all of the references related to these publications.

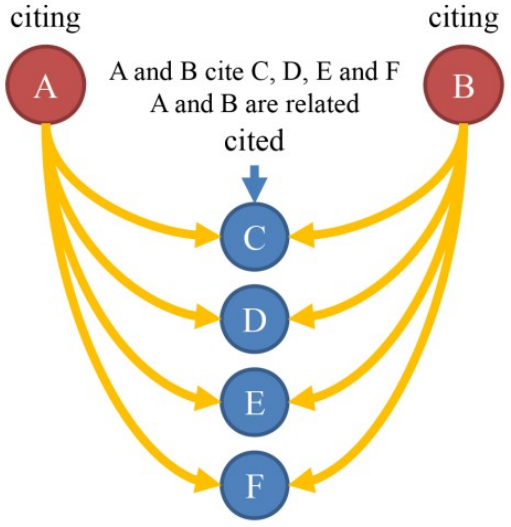
- Final dataset consists of **349 articles*** **and 10,085 referenced papers**.

* excluded the book reviews as they rarely reference other work other than the books they reviewed.



Bibliometrics Analysis

Bibliographic coupling (Kessler, 1963):
Cluster papers based on a shared knowledge base



(a) Bibliographic Coupling

Bibliometrics Analysis

- **Citation-based** mapping
- Bibliographic coupling **(BC)** links documents that **reference** the same set of cited documents (Boyack & Klavans, 2010)**.**
- **BC** is able to **cluster** very recent papers (that have not been cited yet) --> good for nascent fields.
- The empirical network consists of **345 nodes** and **7964 links.**
- Of the filtered network, we detected **11 clusters** with a modularity score of 0.61.

Bibliometrics Analysis

Textual analysis based on titles and abstracts

Preprocessing:

- Remove stopwords (e.g., ‘the’, ‘in’) and numbers
- Lemmatization: to reduce the morphological variability (“played” and “plays” -> “play”).
- Remove corpus-specific stop words: 'mobile', 'media', 'study', 'phone', 'study', 'use', 'article', 'analysis', 'research', 'smartphone.'

Bibliometrics Analysis

Textual analysis based on titles and abstracts

- The corpus includes 31998 **terms** and 4971 **unique terms** (i.e., words and phrases).
- Term frequency and inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) (Jones, 1972).
- Identify discriminative terms within each cluster: Aggregating papers within each cluster

Bibliometrics Analysis

Cluster #1



Cluster #2



Cluster #3



Cluster #4



Cluster #5



Cluster #6



Cluster #7



Cluster #8



Cluster #9

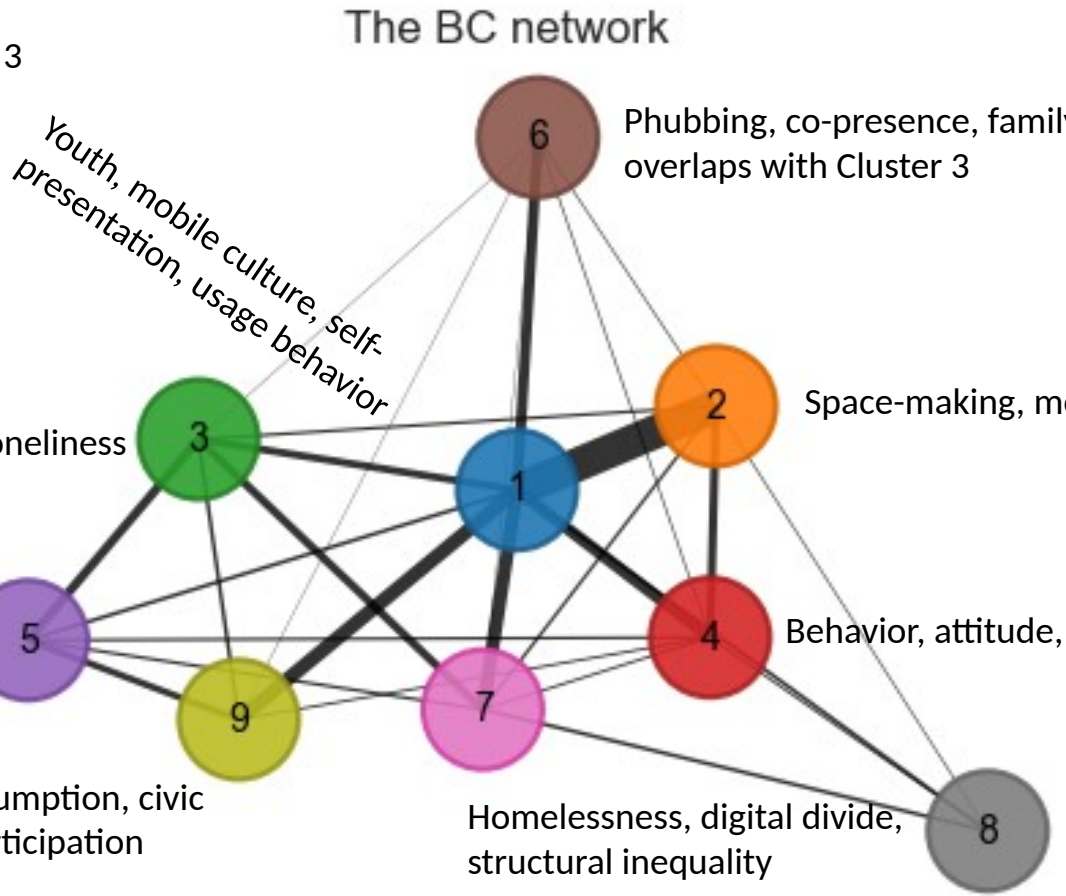


Cluster #10



Next steps: Thematic Analysis of top papers in each cluster

C10: App decision-making, download behavior — only 3 cited papers



Phubbing, co-presence, family & social interactions — overlaps with Cluster 3

Space-making, mobility, locative media

Wellbeing, stress, anxiety, loneliness

Platforms, infrastructure, mobile data

Behavior, attitude, identity, self-presentation

Mobile news consumption, civic engagement & participation

Homelessness, digital divide, structural inequality

Future Directions Discussion (15 min)

- **Past:** What are the surprising findings for you?
- **Present:** What are the major challenges of the field?
- **Future:** What do you think the field should focus on the next 10 years?

Share-out

With larger group (15 minutes)

Concluding Remarks

Thematic Analysis

Continuities from 2013

- Calls for global, critical mobile media scholarship (Cabanes; de Souza e Silva)
- Emphasis on contextual understanding over correlation-only findings (Hartmann)
- Holistic analysis as mobile tech integrates into wearables, IoT, ambient media (Fortunati)
- Mobility, communication & context as shared theoretical anchors (Frith; Hartmann)

Thematic Analysis

Departures & New Directions

- Critique of overwhelming quantitative correlation studies (Hall)
- Call for longitudinal research to establish causal mechanisms (Bayer et al.; Chan)
- No new calls for interdisciplinary integration
- Emerging tech: IoT (Jensen), mobile journalism (Westlund), LBGs (Hjorth & de Souza e Silva)
- Field citation mapping: unique affordances of mobile phones has been one of the core research interests, along with mobile photography, location awareness, and accessing news via mobile phones (Humphreys)

Framing Typology Across the Cluster Corpus

Three ways papers position mobile technology relative to mobility as a concept

Type 1
~90% of corpus

Device / App / Media Centered

The overwhelming majority of highly cited papers. The mobile medium or application is the primary object; social outcomes are measured against it. Mobility as movement or spatial practice is largely absent.

Type 2
~1–2 papers

Mobility Centered

Extremely rare. Foregrounds movement, place-making, and the spatial dynamics of mobile practices as the primary analytical frame. Example: Montague (2023).

Type 3
3–4 papers

Bridging

Papers that connect mobile technology/media to mobility and movement analytically. Campbell (2013), Frith (2013), Hjorth & Pink (2014), Humphreys (2013). These are the papers closest to the field's founding aspirations.

Thematic and Cluster Analysis: Alignments

Device-centeredness critiqued — and confirmed

Both 2013 and 2023 issues called for contextual, mobility-centered work. The cluster corpus empirically confirms the call went largely unanswered: device/app-centered papers dominate almost every cluster.

Critical turn eventually materialized (Clusters 7 & 8)

The founding call for power-attentive, inequality-focused research does appear in the corpus — Clusters 7 and 8 on homelessness and digital divide represent the field's most sustained critical turn.

Framing typology matches editorial concern

The rarity of 'bridging' papers (only 3–4) directly reflects what journal editors and senior scholars have persistently lamented: mobile communication research rarely integrates mobility as a concept.

Early descriptive phase matches cluster chronology

2013 contributors anticipated a field heavy on basic use-pattern research. The clusters confirm: earlier papers (pre-2018) are predominantly descriptive, with critical and longitudinal work emerging later.

Thematic Analysis

Clusters 3 & 6

among the highest citation counts in the corpus

Wellbeing, stress, anxiety, loneliness, phubbing, and co-presence research are not new topics — but they have generated massive citation counts primarily from work published 2020 onwards.

Neither the 2013 nor the 2023 special issue foregrounds wellbeing as a key direction for the field — yet this is where citation gravity has moved.

This suggests a disjuncture: the field's agenda-setters and its most cited empirical work are not pointing in the same direction.

Possible explanations: COVID-era amplification of screen-time concerns; crossover citations from psychology and public health; media attention driving scholar interest.

Thematic and Cluster Analysis: Divergences

Gap 1

Critical achievement invisible in self-assessment

Clusters 7 & 8 show critical research on structural inequality has been produced (2014-2023), the 2023 issue still calls for more critical work as if it hasn't happened.

Gap 2

Cluster 2 mobility/space underrepresented in agenda-setting

The most mobility-centered cluster in the corpus — humanities/critical work on locative media and space-making — barely surfaces in either special issue's self-assessment. The field's strongest mobility work is not centered in its own narrative.

Gap 3

Wellbeing surge unaccounted for in editorial vision

Neither special issue anticipates or reflects on the wellbeing/phubbing citation surge (Clusters 3 & 6). There is no editorial accounting for why this has become where the field's citation capital concentrates.

Gap 4

Interdisciplinary call dropped by 2023

The 2013 issue prominently called for interdisciplinary integration. By 2023 this call has disappeared entirely — either silently achieved or quietly abandoned.

Thematic Analysis

- The special issues function as the field's aspirational self-image — what scholars say MMC should do.
- The cluster analysis functions as an empirical record of what the field has actually rewarded with citations. These two pictures do not match.

NORMATIVE AGENDA
Mobility · Context · Critical inquiry · Global perspectives

CITATION ECONOMY
Wellbeing · Phubbing · App behavior

Thematic Analysis of top papers in each cluster

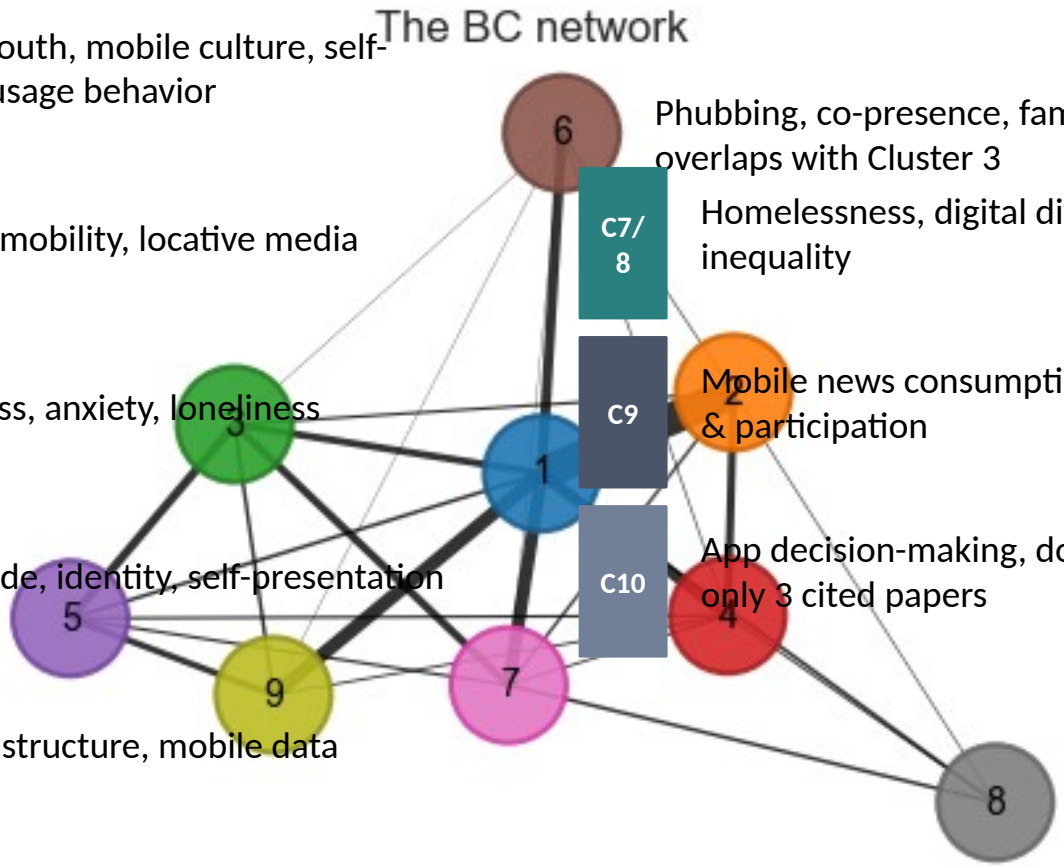
C1 Frameworks, youth, mobile culture, self-presentation, usage behavior

C2 Space-making, mobility, locative media

C3 Wellbeing, stress, anxiety, loneliness

C4 Behavior, attitude, identity, self-presentation

C5 Platforms, infrastructure, mobile data



C7/8 Homelessness, digital divide, structural inequality

C9 Mobile news consumption, civic engagement & participation

C10 App decision-making, download behavior — only 3 cited papers

Phubbing, co-presence, family & social interactions — overlaps with Cluster 3