



## Original Article

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

Anida Kusuma Ning Ariati<sup>1</sup>, Anang Sujoko<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

Correspondence Author: [anidakusuma@student.ub.ac.id](mailto:anidakusuma@student.ub.ac.id) 

### Abstract:

This study aimed to examine the critical representation of figures, symbols, and power in political communication through a critical phenomenological approach combined with bibliometric analysis. It mapped research trends, key authors, dominant keywords, and citation networks that emerged in phenomenological studies of political communication during 2010–2025. Data were collected using Publish or Perish software and analyzed with Excel and VOS viewer to illustrate relationships among keywords, authors, and citations. The findings showed a significant increase in publications since 2021, with dominant themes including gender representation, populist figures, and the symbolism of power in digital media. The results also indicated that scholarly discourse in this field had become increasingly fragmented while simultaneously consolidating around certain clusters, particularly those related to communicative action, political narratives, and identity politics. The study concluded that combining bibliometric methods with critical phenomenology revealed the discursive landscape and representational biases in contemporary political communication. It further provided conceptual and methodological contributions to the development of political communication studies grounded in the critique of representation and symbolic experience.

**Keywords:** Political Communication, Bibliometrics, Political Representation

### 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

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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 ([Karnaukhova et al., 2021](#); [Verovšek, 2021](#)). 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 ([Chambers & Kopstein, 2023](#); [Lafont, 2023](#)). 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 ([Patberg, 2025a](#); [Verovšek, 2021](#)). 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 ([Hána & Šel, 2022](#)). 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 ([Karnaukhova et al., 2021](#)). 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 ([Schotel & Mügge 2024](#); [Stauffer 2021](#); [Wahman et. al, 2021](#)).

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 ([Nai et al., 2022](#)). This reflects how symbols, figures, and power are interconnected in the formation of social meaning. In this context, social media such as Instagram has become an important space for constructing and disseminating political identities, as seen in research on the representation of identity and territory in local politics ([Dewanty & Bram, 2023](#)). Therefore, it is important to examine how symbolic and figurative dimensions work systemically in political discourse, as well as how people's lived experiences are shaped through interaction 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 ([Fuhat & Wahab, 2024](#); [Zhu & Cheng, 2025](#)). 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 ([Momčinović, 2023](#)). 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 ([Sjoraida, 2025](#)). 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 ([Litvinenko, 2021](#)). 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.

## Methods

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 [Zhu & Cheng, \(2025\)](#) and [Litvinenko, \(2021\)](#) 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 [Zhu & Cheng, \(2025\)](#), 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 conducting double-checking the DOI and 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 results of studies by [Momčinović, \(2023\)](#), which highlighted the importance of identity and epistemic justice in contemporary political communication discourse.

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 ([Jinbao, 2025](#)). 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.

## 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 concentration on younger articles also implies a low average citation rate, but it is a strong indication that this field is developing rapidly, and 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, and 20 most cited articles, as well as 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.

## 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 [Lafont, \(2023\)](#), 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 ([Verovšek, 2021](#)). 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 [Pitigoi \(2021\)](#) and [Ricoeur in Izotov & Inshakov \(2021\)](#), 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.

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.

The significance of these findings is in line with Habermas' warning about the threat of communication distortion in a fragmented public sphere ([Patberg, 2025](#)). 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 ([Momčinović, 2023](#)) 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 [Sevignani \(2022, 2023\)](#). 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.

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 comprehensively understand political communication. 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.

## Conclusion

This study has successfully revealed the structure of knowledge in the field of political communication through a bibliometric approach integrated with a critical phenomenological perspective. The main findings show that from 2021 to 2024, there was a significant increase in publications discussing figures, symbols, and power in political communication, which are conceptually linked to Habermas' idea of communicative action and Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics. The identification of key authors such as McGowan, Bienkowski, and Nai, as well as influential articles such as *social media and Political Agenda Setting*, confirms that academic attention is now focused on how digital media shapes leadership figures and symbolic representations in a more complex and fragmented manner. Furthermore, thematic trends such as gender representation, identity politics, and digital narratives indicate that political

communication is no longer understood solely as a channel of information, but as an arena for the production of symbolic meanings that shape political reality. This study contributes theoretically by emphasizing the importance of integrating critical phenomenological approaches in the study of political communication, as well as methodologically through the use of bibliometric analysis to map academic discourse that has been under-explored by qualitative approaches, with critical netnography complementing the bibliometric approach.

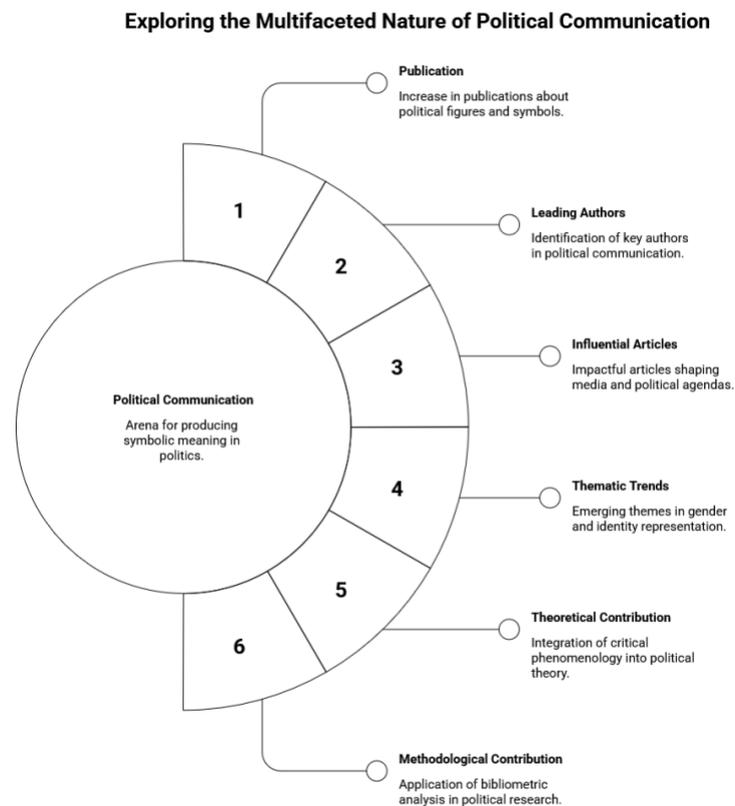


Figure 1. Exploring the Multifaceted of Political Communication

Second, exploration of local and non-Western contexts, such as Southeast Asia and Indonesia, needs to be expanded to avoid the bias of discourse domination from the global North, which has long dominated academic studies. Third, it is important to explore the role of alternative media, such as YouTube and Instagram, in shaping political figures and symbolic representations, as shown by [Dewanty & Bram \(2023\)](#) and [Litvinenko \(2021\)](#), particularly in the context of digital activism and symbolic resistance. Fourth, the integration of discursive and phenomenological analysis needs to be strengthened to create a more comprehensive model of political communication analysis that examines not only the structure of discourse but also the audience's affective and existential experiences. Finally, researchers are advised to adopt an inclusive approach in citation practices to encourage more equitable academic representation, as emphasized in the studies by [Zhu & Cheng \(2024\)](#) and [Barnett et al. \(2022\)](#). Thus, future research is expected to not only enrich conceptual understanding but also promote more ethical, reflective, and democratic political communication practices.

## Suggestion

Future studies should extend the bibliometric window beyond the last five years, improve access to abstracts and full texts, and complement macro-level mapping with deeper qualitative inquiry—especially discursive and critical phenomenological analysis that captures the affective and existential “lived experiences” of audiences and political figures in digital environments, potentially through netnography or digital ethnography. Researchers are also advised to broaden investigation into local and non-Western settings (e.g., Southeast Asia and Indonesia) to reduce regional and language bias, examine the role of alternative platforms such as YouTube and Instagram in constructing political figures and symbolic resistance, strengthen integrated models that connect discourse structures with phenomenological experience, and adopt more inclusive citation practices to support fairer academic representation and promote more ethical, reflective, and democratic political communication.

This research provides important theoretical and methodological contributions in the fields of political communication and representation studies. Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of the critical phenomenological approach in explaining how political figures are produced and received through symbols and narratives in the context of increasingly digital and fragmented public communication. The integration of Habermas communicative action theory and Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics provides a reflective basis for understanding politics as a realm of experience rather than merely a structure. Methodologically, the main contribution of this research is the use of a bibliometric approach to map the structure of knowledge and identify key intellectual actors. This approach has rarely been applied in depth in political phenomenology studies. By constructing this mapping, this research opens up space for a systematic understanding of how discourse on figures, symbols, and power develops in the global academic community. Furthermore, this research encourages a reorientation of political communication studies toward greater sensitivity to the dynamics of identity, affection, and symbolic power.

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