Women in Communication Research: A Thematic and Epistemological Analysis from a Gender Perspective

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.13165/WinS-26-09

Abstract: This study analyses the presence of women as an object of research in the field of communication from a gender perspective. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining a systematic literature review and a content analysis of 350 articles indexed in Scopus during 2025, selected using the search terms “women” and “communication.” The results show that research is mainly concentrated on the geographical origin of the women studied, health-related topics, and analyses of women's participation in roles traditionally associated with men. Other areas addressed include sexuality, social vulnerability, the digital environment, and language. However, studies specifically focused on gender equality and women’s empowerment remain a minority. In conclusion, although women increasingly appear as a focus of analysis in communication research, traditional thematic approaches persist, and perspectives that more deeply challenge gender structures in knowledge production remain limited.

Keywords: Gender perspective; women in communication research; scientific production; content analysis; gender equality.

Introduction

Communication studies from a gender perspective draw on diverse and critical feminist traditions (Vázquez González & Cárdenes Hernández, 2021). Among them, Feminist Standpoint Theory, developed by authors such as Sandra Harding, argues that all knowledge is produced from socially situated positions. Traditional science, historically configured within male-dominated spaces of power, has tended to construct an androcentric perspective that

presents itself as universal (Silvestre Cabrera et al., 2020). In response, Harding (1993, p. 69) proposes the notion of "strong objectivity," according to which incorporating historically marginalized experiences does not introduce bias but rather enables more comprehensive and less distorted knowledge. This perspective challenges the supposed neutrality of scientific knowledge and demonstrates that dominant epistemological frameworks have privileged forms of rationality associated with masculinity while marginalizing alternative ways of knowing.

Within this same critical tradition, intersectional feminism, formulated by Crenshaw (1989), expands the analysis by emphasizing that gender does not operate in isolation but interacts with other structuring categories such as race, social class, sexual orientation, and nationality. Intersectionality makes it possible to understand how systems of oppression intersect and generate specific forms of inequality. This approach is particularly relevant in communication studies, where media and academic discourses may simultaneously reproduce multiple hierarchies.

From this theoretical framework, the literature has documented the ambivalent position of women in academic production in the field of communication. Despite the growing feminization of the discipline, dynamics of symbolic invisibilization and unequal recognition persist (Garzón & Quisimalín Santamaría, 2025; Minchola et al., 2024). The so-called "Matilda effect" describes the systematic tendency to undervalue or attribute to male colleagues the scientific contributions made by women (García-Jiménez et al., 2022). In the field of Ibero-American communication studies, Segado-Boj et al. (2021) show through network analysis that although there are female researchers occupying central positions, the overall structure of scientific communities continues to be organized around male authors, relegating many women to peripheral positions. This inequality is reflected not only in bibliometric indicators (such as citations or project leadership) but also in the configuration of research agendas and in the criteria used to define academic prestige (Palomo-Domínguez et al., 2024).

Similarly, topics related to women tend to concentrate in specific areas, such as female media representations or gender-based violence, often approached through stereotyped frameworks (Salinas-Vázquez et al., 2026). Researching communication from a gender perspective therefore involves critically examining the degree of heteronormativity present in both media and academic discourses. The theoretical and methodological decisions adopted in research may contribute either to dismantling gender inequality or to reproducing it. Consequently, the absence of a gender perspective does not constitute methodological neutrality but rather a position that perpetuates androcentric bias (UPF, 2017).

The concept of a gender perspective in science involves recognizing gender as a cross-cutting analytical variable throughout all stages of the research process. The ICM (2022) emphasizes that integrating this perspective

improves the quality, rigor, reproducibility, and creativity of research. In the field of communication, this implies analysing how discourses construct identities, roles, and hierarchies, and assessing the extent to which they reproduce or challenge gender-based power structures. Thus, a gender perspective is not limited to quantifying the presence of women in scientific authorship but also interrogates the epistemic logics, disciplinary criteria, and interpretative frameworks that shape knowledge production (ICM, 2022).

In the Spanish context, although women represent approximately 42% of research personnel (a figure higher than the European average) this quantitative presence does not automatically translate into research conducted from a gender perspective (Ecoavant, 2023; RTVE, 2017). Studies in the field of communication indicate that research with a gender approach remains a minority and is primarily carried out by women. This reinforces the idea that the analysis of inequality continues to fall disproportionately on those who experience it. This situation highlights that numerical equality alone does not guarantee epistemological transformation. This example is offered as illustrative of a broader pattern observed across various national contexts.

Within this context, the present study is based on the premise that making women visible (both as researchers and as subjects and objects of analysis) is a necessary condition for expanding and enriching scientific knowledge in communication. The general objective is to determine when, how, and in which areas women appear as the focus of analysis in academic production in the field, identifying possible thematic concentrations and evaluating their epistemological implications.

Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods methodological approach that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how women are treated as objects of study in academic research in communication. The combination of these approaches allows not only the identification of patterns and trends in scientific production but also the interpretation of their meaning and implications within the field of communication. Such a design is particularly appropriate in bibliometric and content-analysis studies, as it enables the integration of systematic quantitative data with contextualized interpretations of the phenomena analysed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Krippendorff, 2019; Sáenz-Torralba et al., 2025).

The study is structured in two complementary phases. In the first phase, a systematic review of the scientific literature was conducted to identify research related to women and communication. The search was carried out in the Scopus database in 2025 due to its extensive coverage of international

scientific publications and its frequent use in bibliometric studies in the social sciences. Document retrieval was performed by searching the title, abstract, and keywords fields using the terms “women” AND “communication” in order to locate studies explicitly addressing the relationship between these two concepts. Additionally, a filter was applied to include only publications within the “Social Sciences” category. This procedure initially yielded a total of N = 955 records.

Subsequently, a process of data cleaning and sample selection was conducted to ensure that the documents included corresponded to the specific focus of the study. The inclusion criterion required that women constitute the primary object of analysis. In other words, studies in which women appeared only as a secondary component of the sample or merely as another demographic variable were excluded. To facilitate classification and optimize the filtering process, the artificial intelligence tool Gemini was used, enabling a more precise identification of articles whose analytical focus explicitly centred on women. After this selection process, the final sample used in the research was established. Within this sample, a specific subgroup of studies related to artificial intelligence and digital technologies applied to communication was identified, representing a relevant subset for analysis. This subgroup includes a total of N = 672 documents.

At the initial stage of the study, all articles published during the year under analysis were collected. However, after a preliminary review it was observed that thematic and discursive patterns were consistently repeated throughout the period. For this reason, and in order to optimize the analytical process without compromising the representativeness of the sample, the study focused on the first six months of the year.

The selection of this period was justified because the articles published during this interval presented the same trends, approaches, and structures observed throughout the rest of the year, and were therefore considered representative of the overall dataset. This strategy allowed for a more detailed analysis while maintaining the validity of the study. Consequently, the final sample includes a total of N = 350 documents.

In the second phase, a content analysis of the selected articles was conducted. Content analysis is one of the most widely used techniques for systematically examining large volumes of textual information, allowing researchers to identify thematic categories, discursive patterns, and trends in scientific production (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). In this case, the analysis combined a quantitative coding process with a subsequent qualitative interpretation of the results.

To this end, a system of thematic categories was designed to classify the main approaches through which women are addressed in communication research. These categories were defined based on a preliminary literature review and an inductive process derived from the initial exploration of the

articles included in the sample. The main categories analysed include the geographical origin of the women studied, health-related studies, analyses of sexuality, research focusing on male roles in relation to women, studies addressing situations of vulnerability, research focusing exclusively on women, sociolinguistic content, studies related to digital and technological environments, and research addressing issues of equality and empowerment.

Each article included in the sample was coded according to these categories, making it possible to quantify the frequency with which specific thematic approaches appear in academic communication research. Subsequently, the quantitative results were interpreted from a qualitative perspective in order to understand which types of representations and approaches predominate when women are placed at the centre of scientific analysis.

Results

Relevance of Place of Origin

The analysis of the documents included in the sample revealed that a large proportion of them explicitly mention the geographical origin of the women involved in the studies. Locations cited include diverse contexts such as *Pakistan*, *Tel Aviv*, *Afghanistan*, *Latin American women*, *Uganda*, *India*, *Spanish women*, and the *United States*, among others.

Highlighting origin is directly related to the fact that it may be associated with different cultural, social, and even educational contexts, which in turn may influence behaviours, perceptions, experiences, and access to resources.

In this regard, 105 documents in the sample consider the geographical origin of the women included, representing 24.9% of the total and constituting the most numerous categories (see Fig. 1).

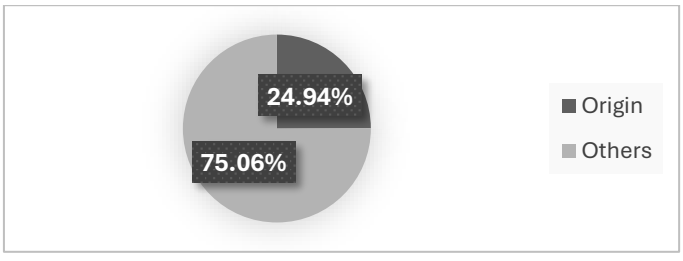


Fig. 1. Representation of the category "place of origin"

Therefore, considering the origin of the women included in the study sample makes it possible to interpret results within a specific social and cultural context that may shape research outcomes. It also allows for the identification of variations or patterns across different groups of women. These similarities or differences may be explained by cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, educational or healthcare systems (analysed in another section of this study),

public policies in each region, and other contextual factors linked to geographical origin.

The Importance of Health-Related Topics

The second most prominent category consists of documents addressing issues related to women's health. Biological differences between men and women, as well as the fact that female health influences many aspects of women's lives, make this variable an important field of study. These particularities may affect women's circumstances as a group, just as being a woman may determine the onset, progression, or treatment of certain diseases.

In many contexts, gender inequalities exist in access to healthcare, as well as in the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. Studying health allows researchers to identify potential gaps or inequalities that specifically affect women.

Moreover, women's health is also influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors, which can affect both physical and mental well-being.

Research on health-related topics helps to make visible issues that particularly affect women, such as reproductive health, maternal health, or diseases with higher prevalence among women.

Among the items associated with women and health in the analysed documents are *menstrual cycle*, *cervical cancer*, *pregnancy testing*, *incarcerated mothers*, *contraceptives*, and *menopause*, among others. A total of 76 documents in the sample address health-related issues, representing 18.05% of the total, making this the second largest category (see Fig. 2).

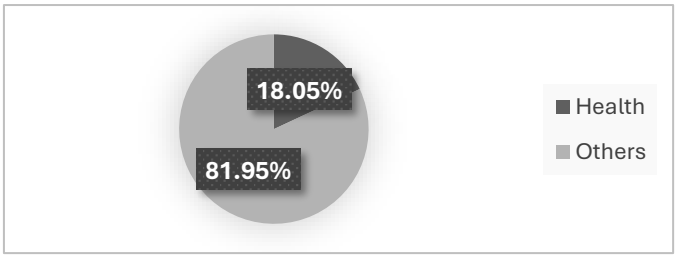


Fig. 2. Graphical representation of health-related topics

Sexuality and Women

Although this topic may overlap with the previous category related to women's health, sexuality deserves specific attention in studies focused on women. While smaller in number, 30 of the analysed documents address sexual topics, and they are nevertheless highly significant within the final sample.

This demonstrates that examining sexuality in women-centred research helps to understand how female sexual experiences are socially and culturally

constructed, as well as to identify potential inequalities, representations, and discourses that influence women's well-being and autonomy in relation to men.

Throughout history, female sexuality has been shaped by social, cultural, and gender norms. Studying this issue therefore allows for the identification of how these factors influence women's experiences. Female sexuality is often surrounded by taboos, stigmatization, and inequalities; analysing this topic helps to make these dynamics visible.

For this reason, it has been included as one of the study categories. Within this category, topics such as *romantic relationships*, *sexual pleasure*, *family planning*, *marital quality*, and *sexual dissatisfaction* were identified.

From the total sample, 30 studies relate to sexuality, representing 7.13% of the total (see Fig. 3).

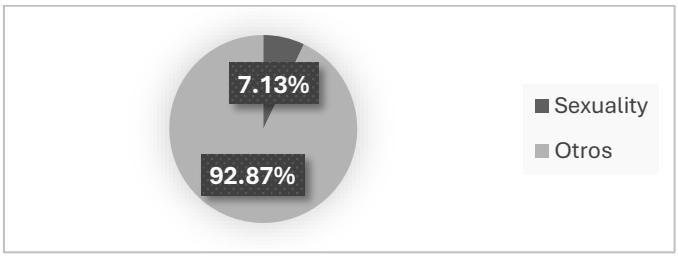


Fig. 3. Visual representation of sexual topics

Topics in Historically Masculinized Fields

Analysing roles traditionally associated with men that are now also linked to women allows researchers to identify transformations in gender roles, question stereotypes, and understand how female representation and participation in different social spheres are being redefined.

Therefore, it is significant to determine how many studies that place women at the centre of analysis are directly related to the social changes that have positioned women in activities historically associated with men.

Studying these roles helps identify whether traditional gender stereotypes are being broken or whether limits and resistance still exist in the ways women are represented or socially accepted. It also helps explain how female identities are being redefined and what new models of womanhood appear in society or within the analysed discourses.

In the specific case of this research, the results show that 63 studies (14.96% of the total) (see Fig. 4) address topics related to women's social roles in historically masculinized fields.

Among the topics included in this category are *female political candidates*, *women in government*, *women academics*, *local women in leadership roles*,

women in professional leadership positions, and *women in institutional positions*.

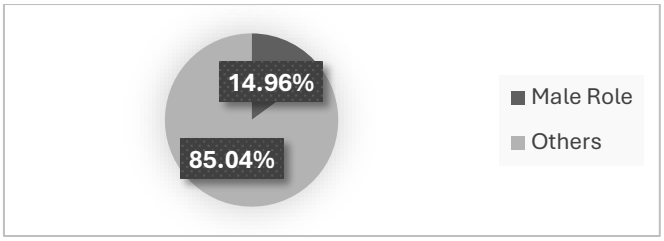


Fig. 4. Graphical representation of women's presence in historically masculinized fields

Vulnerability and Women

Analysing vulnerability in women-centred studies makes it possible to identify structural inequalities and social factors that may place women in situations of greater risk or disadvantage. This variable is relevant for understanding how gender dynamics influence women's living conditions and experiences.

Examining vulnerability is important because it allows for a deeper understanding of the social, economic, and cultural conditions that may place women at greater risk in certain contexts.

In this study, research focusing on women in vulnerable situations was included. Examples include *incarcerated Aboriginal mothers*, *rural women*, *women of colour with autoimmune diseases*, *migrant women*, *refugee women*, *violence along migration routes*, and *women prisoners*.

Overall, 35 studies address situations of vulnerability among women, representing 8.3% of the total sample (see Fig. 5).

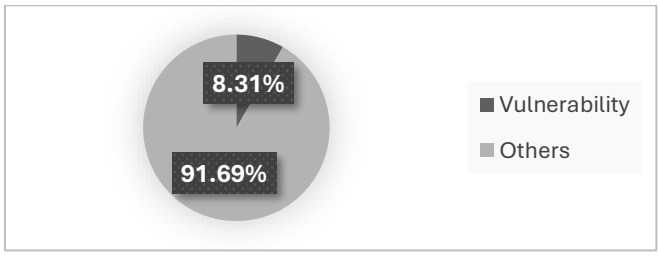


Fig. 5. Female vulnerability represented in studies on women

Experiences and Conditions Socially Associated with Women

As mentioned in previous sections, certain experiences and conditions are disproportionately associated with women due to a combination of biological and sociocultural factors. In this context, analysing these socially situated experiences helps to understand the particularities that may influence women's life circumstances, without assuming that such experiences are universal or biologically determined.

These experiences are shaped by the interaction between biological factors and social, cultural, and institutional contexts, making it necessary to consider them in order to interpret study results accurately.

Analysing these experiences in scientific research is important because it allows for a better understanding of the biological, social, and cultural factors that may influence women's experiences, behaviours, or living conditions—factors that are always mediated by specific social and historical contexts.

It should be noted that the topics grouped under this category—ranging from reproductive health and motherhood to medical technologies and sexual violence—are analytically diverse. Their inclusion within a single category reflects a grouping based on their shared presence in the reviewed literature, not a claim that these are inherently or universally female experiences. They are better understood as areas where women appear disproportionately as research subjects due to intersecting social, biological, and structural conditions.

In this study, several topics were identified within this category, including *pregnant women*, *postnatal care*, *mothers*, *contraceptive pills*, *traumatic childbirth*, *reproductive health*, *HIV during childbirth*, and *sexual violence*.

In total, 42 of the analysed studies include themes related to characteristics specific to women, representing 9.98% of the sample (see Fig. 6).

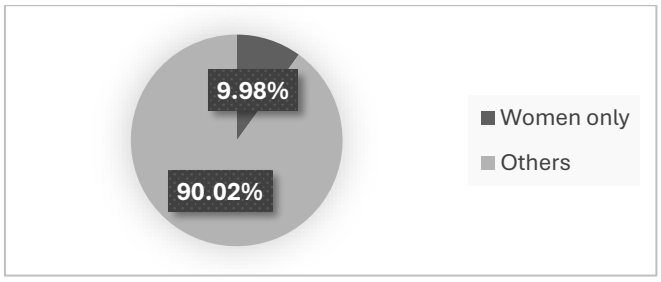


Fig. 6. Graphical representation of socially situated experiences of women

Gender and Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistic analysis makes it possible to examine how gender influences language use and the construction of discourses about women. Differences between men and women in the linguistic domain are often linked to social, cultural, and socialization factors that shape communication practices and gender representations.

Sociolinguistics studies how social factors (such as gender, age, social class, or cultural context) influence language use. Analysing this dimension in research on women allows us to observe how identities and experiences are constructed and expressed through language.

In the analysis of the documents included in this study, several works addressing women were directly related to sociolinguistic topics, including

hate speech, *corporate language*, *linguistic sexism*, *sexist language on Twitter*, and *language and analgesia*.

Overall, 19 of the 350 analysed studies are related to language issues (see Fig. 7).

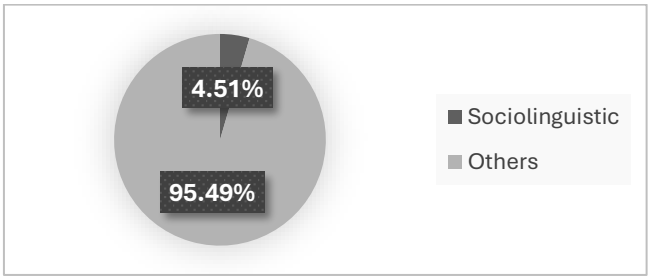


Fig. 7. Visual representation of sociolinguistic studies

The Digital Dimension as a Gender-Differentiating Component

Currently, scientific research increasingly includes the digital sphere as an object of study because a significant portion of social interaction and identity construction takes place within these spaces. Digital environments provide valuable data for understanding contemporary social phenomena more comprehensively.

In the specific case of this study, analysing the digital dimension allows researchers to examine how women represent themselves, express themselves, and participate in virtual environments, as well as to identify associated opportunities and risks.

Digital tools affect multiple aspects of daily life, including education, work, communication, information consumption, and socialization. Therefore, understanding their specific impact on women is relevant and explains why this dimension appears prominently in the analyzed documents. In fact, 40 of the included studies (9.5% of the total) have some connection with the digital sphere (see Fig. 8).

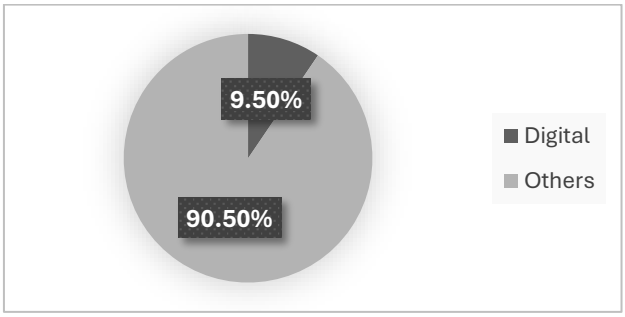


Fig. 8. Studies related to digital environments

Topics included in this category include *social media and communication*, *digital divide*, *digital literacy among girls*, *digital literacy among rural*

women, *menstruation tracking apps*, *emojis and female friendship*, and *FOMO and sexting among young people*, among others.

Equality and Female Empowerment

Studying equality and female empowerment in scientific research focused on women is essential because it helps explain how gender relations are constructed, negotiated, and transformed, and how women gain access to opportunities, rights, and spaces for participation that were previously restricted.

Although it might initially seem that a large proportion of studies focusing on women would address empowerment, the data show otherwise. When analysed as an independent category, it is the least represented theme, as only 11 of the 350 studies included in the sample address this specific topic.

Within this 2.6% of the total sample, topics include *gender empowerment on Twitter*, *authenticity among women politicians*, *autonomy and clothing among noble women*, and *gender equality and empowerment among women pharmacists*.

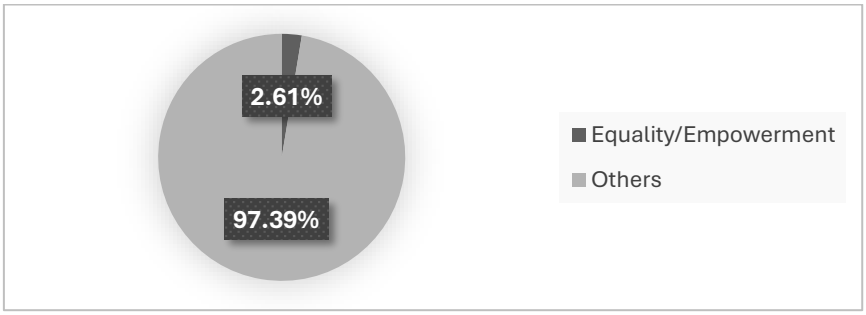


Fig. 9. Visual representation of studies addressing female empowerment

Overall Analysis of Results

The results show that a significant body of research focused on women incorporates the geographical origin of study samples, revealing notable disparities depending on the participants' location. This highlights the importance of considering territorial context when interpreting research findings.

Regarding the topics studied, health-related issues constitute the most prominent thematic area within research on women and communication, indicating a predominant interest in addressing issues related to women's physical and social well-being. Another notable trend is the growing body of research examining women in roles historically associated with men, demonstrating how transformations in gender patterns are increasingly documented and analysed.

On the other hand, and contrary to initial expectations, studies addressing gender equality and female empowerment do not represent a statistically

significant proportion of the total sample. This suggests that, despite their social relevance, these themes remain underrepresented in the scientific literature reviewed.

Overall, these results make it possible to identify areas of concentration and thematic gaps in research on women, providing a general overview of prevailing trends and highlighting aspects that require greater attention in future studies, as illustrated in the following figure.

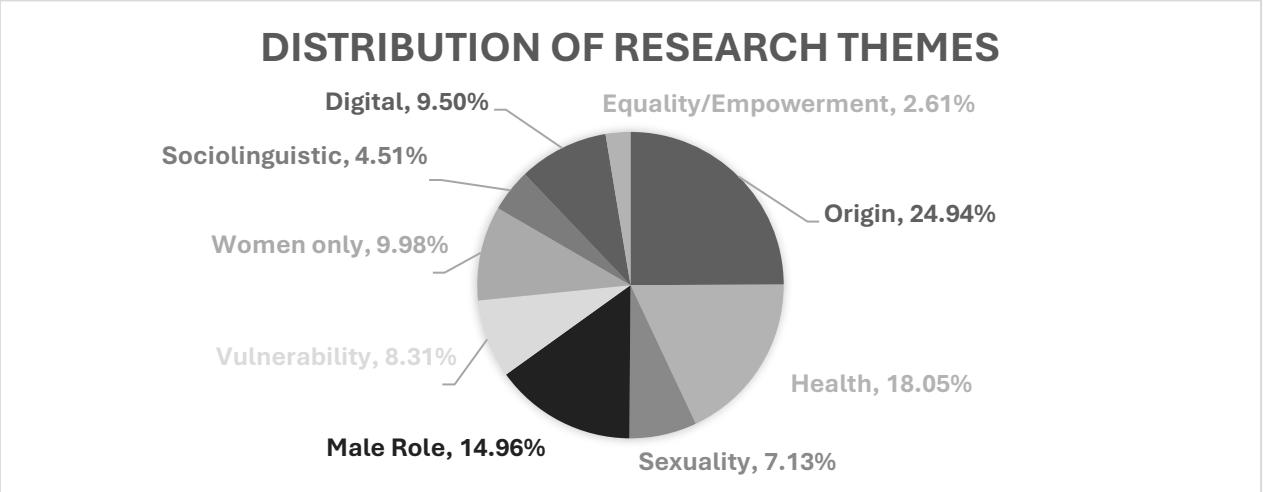


Fig. 10. Global representation of research results

Discussion

The analysis of the works included in this research sample indicates that women are indeed placed at the centre of many studies; however, these studies often still focus on topics with a strong gendered orientation. The findings therefore highlight a complex reality: although women have a significant presence in communication research, the ways in which they are studied still reflect traditional patterns.

This is evident in the prominence given to the geographical origin of the analysed samples, which constitutes the most frequent category in the dataset. These findings support the notion that territorial origin is fundamental for interpreting results within a specific social and cultural context. Factors such as local norms, educational systems, and socioeconomic conditions shape women's experiences in distinct ways.

Regarding dominant thematic areas, health emerges as the second major axis of research on women. This interest focuses primarily on highlighting gender gaps in healthcare access and on analysing specific biological and social conditions, such as reproductive and maternal health.

At the same time, the study also reflects an evolution in the academic agenda, as it documents a significant number of studies examining women's

participation in historically masculinized roles. Research on institutional leadership, political candidacies, and professional success suggests an effort to record the breaking of traditional stereotypes and the redefinition of female identities in contemporary discourse.

Furthermore, the digital dimension has become a transversal factor that allows scholars to analyze how women navigate virtual spaces, facing both risks (such as the digital divide and hate speech) and opportunities for socialization and health management.

Similarly, the focus on vulnerability provides a framework for examining structural inequalities affecting specific groups, including migrant women, refugees, and incarcerated women, thus offering an important perspective on marginalization within scientific research.

Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal a consistent pattern in how women are positioned as objects of analysis in communication research: they appear predominantly in thematically bounded areas—geographical origin, health, and vulnerability—that, while academically relevant, tend to reproduce rather than challenge established frameworks for studying women. The underrepresentation of gender equality and empowerment as research topics is particularly striking, as it suggests that even studies explicitly centred on women do not systematically adopt a transformative gender perspective. This points to a broader tension within the field between the quantitative inclusion of women as research subjects and the qualitative shift required to produce genuinely feminist knowledge.

This study is not without limitations. The corpus is restricted to a single database (Scopus) and to a six-month window of publications, which, while justified by the observed thematic saturation, may not fully capture the diversity of research produced across the entire year or in journals not indexed in that platform. Additionally, the search was conducted using only two terms ("women" and "communication"), which inevitably excludes studies that address related phenomena under different terminology. The analytical categories, while grounded in both the existing literature and an inductive exploration of the corpus, reflect interpretive decisions that other researchers might configure differently. These limitations should be considered when generalizing the findings beyond the specific scope of this study.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the corpus to include additional databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, and by incorporating longitudinal analyses that track how thematic trends in women-centred communication research evolve over time. It would also be valuable to examine the relationship between the gender of the authorship and the thematic orientation of the studies, to assess whether and how

feminist perspectives are more consistently present when women occupy leading roles in research teams. Finally, applying a more explicitly intersectional framework to the classification of topics could offer a richer understanding of how race, class, nationality, and other structural categories intersect with gender in shaping both research agendas and the experiences of the women studied.

Funding

No external funds were used.

Author Contribution

Author 1: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft.

Author 2: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Author 3: Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

Tools of Artificial Intelligence

No AI tools were used in preparing this research.

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International Conference

Women in Science

Empowering Inclusive Futures

February 11-12, 2026
Mykolas Romeris University
Vilnius, Lithuania

Women in Science International Conference 2026: Proceedings

Edited by:
Isabel Palomo-Domínguez, Rūta Tamošiūnaitė, and Ana León-Manzanero

Published by:
Mykolas Romeris University
Vilnius, Lithuania

Publication date: 1 July 2026
ISBN: 978-609-488-138-1
DOI: 10.13165/WinS-26

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