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The Impact of the Monographs Crisis on the Field of Communication

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ABSTRACT

This study replicates and extends Yates and Chapman's [(2007), *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, 26(1), 39–51] study of references from *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Research*, and *Journal of Communication* for the years 2010 and 2015 to draw further conclusions on the use of monographs in journal literature in the field of communication. Results show that the use of monographs in these journals has been outpaced by references to journal articles by a ratio of 5 to 1. The references were further analyzed by date and publisher. The authors then selected a random sample of the monographs cited in the journals to explore the availability of these monographs in electronic format and found that many are available as ebooks, particularly the more recent titles. The authors also examined the references from a collection of scholarly books in communication from 2005, 2010, and 2015 and found that the use of monographs may be declining slightly. The most notable trend in these references was the increase in the number of references to items in other formats such as film, television, comic books, and websites. The authors conclude that the monographs crisis is indeed affecting citation patterns in the field of communication.

In 1997 the Association for Research Libraries convened a symposium called “The Specialized Scholarly Monograph in Crisis: Or, How Can I Get Tenure If You Won't Publish My Book?” Scholars, publishers, and librarians shared their perspectives on issues related to the declining markets and growing expenses of publishing scholarly monographs (Mulligan, 2015). However, the crisis was not really new. For decades, publishers have struggled with how to finance these works with limited audiences and specialized markets; comments to that effect appeared as early as 1927 (Armato, 2012). In the two decades since the 1997 symposium, the crisis has only deepened (Mulligan, 2015).

One of the ways to track the impact of the monographs crisis is through citation analysis. Are scholars using and citing these works? In 2007 Yates and Chapman conducted a study of top journals in the field of communication to explore this question. They tracked citations to monographs found in three leading communication journals for the years 1985, 1995, and 2005. They found a slight increase in the percentage of citations to monographs between 1985 and 1995, but a definite decline from 1995 to 2005. However, while the percentage may have been smaller, the actual numbers of monograph citations in 1995 and 2005 were very similar. The purpose of this study is to build on the Yates and Chapman (2007) study to explore how monograph citations in the field of communication may have changed in the intervening decade.

The first step will be to replicate Yates and Chapman's original study

for the years 2010 and 2015 to determine whether any more definitive trends have emerged. These intervening years have seen massive growth in the availability of ebooks. Our second step is to check a random sample of the monographs cited in 2010 and 2015 to explore the availability of the cited books in electronic format. Finally, we test the hypothesis that monographs are cited more often by other monographs than by journal articles. We collect the references from a sample of communication monographs from the years 2005, 2010, and 2015 to determine how trends in monograph citations of monographs might differ from the results found for the journal articles.

Rikk Mulligan, Program Officer for Scholarly Publishing at the Association for Research Libraries, lists these types of long-form scholarship: monograph, scholarly book, critical edition, textbook, and edited collection (Mulligan, 2015). Douglas Armato, director of the University of Minnesota Press, has concluded that the only difference between a monograph and a scholarly book is that the monograph doesn't sell many copies (Armato, 2012). In this study we will use the definition of a monograph given by Yates and Chapman, (2007, 40): “a whole work by one or more authors that is written for an academic audience and attempts to treat fully a small subject area”. We note that it can be difficult to judge whether an item is truly a monograph based solely on a bibliographic citation and observe that Yates and Chapman included scholarly books and occasionally textbooks among the items they designated as monographs.

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Literature review

Several studies have considered aspects of monograph usage in a variety of disciplines. The reader is referred to [Yates and Chapman \(2007\)](#) for a literature review of studies prior to 2007. The search for studies since 2007 yielded few relevant results, discussed below. A few pertinent thought pieces on the state of the monograph in academia are worth mentioning here. [Stewart \(2011\)](#) posited that HathiTrust was an earnest step for academic libraries away from the “just-in-case” model of collection development where possible use dictated need to a “just-in-time” model where immediate use dictated need. Stewart went on to note the need for space in academic libraries might mean that existing print monographs may lose their campus real estate as mass digitization projects like HathiTrust gained momentum. [Pochoda \(2013\)](#) outlined the shift from an analog publishing system, buttressed by a tenure system that expected monograph publication from faculty seeking promotion, to an emerging digital publishing system, with changing demands in scholarship and output from faculty that do not necessarily require monograph production. [Woolwine \(2014\)](#) forecasted that academic library collections would transition to being entirely electronic, yet urged caution in deaccessioning to maintain the most beneficial mix of resources, specifically translations, in humanities and social science collections. Woolwine also noted that electronic books and the establishment of consortia to promote cooperative lending may prompt further evolution in academic library collections. These prognosticators captured dominant trends in the discussion of the future role of the monograph in academic library collection development.

Three studies from recent years address the role of monographs in libraries and academe widely across all subjects or specifically in the humanities. [Jones and Courant \(2014\)](#) provided more evidence for collection developers in their ambitious look at 35 years of academic library purchases of university press monographs to determine whether the “serials crisis” was to blame for declining university press purchases. They found that the decline in purchases happened years after that “crisis.” Growth in the holdings of university press monographs outstripped growth of book collections overall for most of the period, and in later years when growth slowed or even declined, the university press purchases suffered less than the overall book purchases. [Kellsey and Knivel \(2012\)](#) examined 28 monographs published between 2004 and 2009 by the humanities faculty at University of Colorado Boulder (UCB) to see if the monographs cited in the 28 monographs were held in the campus library collection. Almost a quarter of the monographs cited in the sample were over 25 years old, a percentage that could impact weeding decisions. Three quarters of the monographs cited in the sample were held by the UCB library due to approval plans in place with vendors. [Williams, Stevenson, Nicholas, Watkinson, and Rowlands \(2009\)](#), in a qualitative study of 17 arts and humanities faculty at University College London, found that faculty continued to see monographs as critical to hiring and promotion decisions in arts and humanities except for information science, a discipline sometimes considered part of the communication field, the area examined in the current study.

Only two recent studies cover the role of scholarly monographs specifically in the social sciences. [Tang's \(2008\)](#) look at the citation characteristics of 750 scholarly monographs equally distributed among religion, history, psychology, economics, mathematics and physics provided insight into the citing characteristics of scholars in each of those fields. In Tang's sample, psychology monographs held the highest number of citations to other monographs while religion and history monographs held the lowest number of citations to other monographs. Also, the half-life values for humanities monographs were shortest in the sample while the half-life values of the hard science monographs were the longest, contradicting previous citation discussions. [Neville and Henry's \(2014\)](#) case study of monographs in the field of journalism, considered a subfield of communication, found that 83 different publishers produced the 232 monographs published from 2007 to

2011. They analyzed both citation rates and holdings to rank leading publishers in the communication subfield. They found that, while university presses were well-represented among the leading publishers, they did not dominate the ranked lists; many commercial publishers were also significant. While these studies are valuable, the analysis of monograph use in the field of communication remains a gap in the literature. The current study addresses that gap.

Methodology

The first part of our study replicates the [Yates and Chapman \(2007\)](#) study for the years 2010 and 2015. To identify leading communication journals, Yates and Chapman turned to the impact factor rankings in Thomson Reuters' Journal Citation Reports. They identified three journals that covered the broad discipline of communication and were also ranked among the top five journals in the Communication category in Journal Citation Reports at least twice in the six-year period 1999–2004. In order to make our study results directly comparable to the earlier study's, we chose to examine the same three journals: *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Research*, and *Journal of Communication*. Each journal is still actively being published. We looked at their impact factor rankings for the period 2009–2014 and discovered that each journal has indeed been included in the top five journals of the Communication category in Journal Citation Reports at least twice during the period. However, we also noted that *Journal of Communication* was ranked third or higher four times and never ranked lower than seventh, with an average ranking of 3.00; *Communication Research* had rankings ranging from first to eighth with an average ranking of 5.50; and *Communication Monographs'* rankings showed a great deal of variability, with the journal ranking first and second once each, but also ranking thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth once each, for an average over the period of 17.83. Our selection of these journals as targets of the study is reinforced by [Feeley's \(2008\)](#) bibliometric study of journals in communication, which found that these are three of the four most central journals in the field.

We collected the references from each article in the three journals that appeared in 2010 and 2015. [Table 1](#) shows the number of articles, number of references, and average number of references per article for each journal in each year. We coded each reference according to the four categories established in the earlier study: monograph, book or part of a book, journal article, or other. We also collected the following information for each monograph cited: first author, title, publisher, and date.

To explore the availability of the cited monographs in electronic format, we selected a random sample of the cited monographs for each year of sufficient size to yield a 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval. We searched each title in the sample in WorldCat; if a record for an ebook was found, we flagged the title as available. Finally, to test the use of monographs by other monographs, we collected a sample of monographs covered in *Choice*, a prominent review publication of the Association of College and Research Libraries, and listed in *Choice's* Communication subject category. We looked for monographs that had a clearly identified comprehensive reference list

Table 1
Profile of journals analyzed.

	Year	Articles (no.)	References (no.)	Average references per article (no.)
<i>Communication Monographs</i>	2010	31	1792	57.81
	2015	22	1362	61.91
<i>Communication Research</i>	2010	36	2076	57.67
	2015	47	3030	64.47
<i>Journal of Communication</i>	2010	36	2096	58.22
	2015	48	2469	51.44

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