

# Media and communication as a field of research

Presentation in conference

Reframing Media/Cultural Studies in the Age of Global Crisis

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# Media and communication as a field of research

1. has its **roots** leading to centuries of history
2. has **expanded** dramatically since the 1950s
3. while getting more and more **diversified**

# 1. Historical roots

- Enlightenment and democracy with freedom of opinion and press, public debate (18<sup>th</sup> Century) – the first freedom of information bill in Sweden's Diet (1766)
- Catholic church propaganda (17<sup>th</sup> C)
- Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle (3-4<sup>th</sup> C BC)
- Chinese philosopher Confucius (5<sup>th</sup> C BC)
- Arab, Persian and Indian cultures (3-5<sup>th</sup> C BC)

# Social Theories of the Press



Constituents of  
Communication Research,  
1840s to 1920s  
SECOND EDITION

**Hanno Hardt**

Foreword by  
James W. Carey

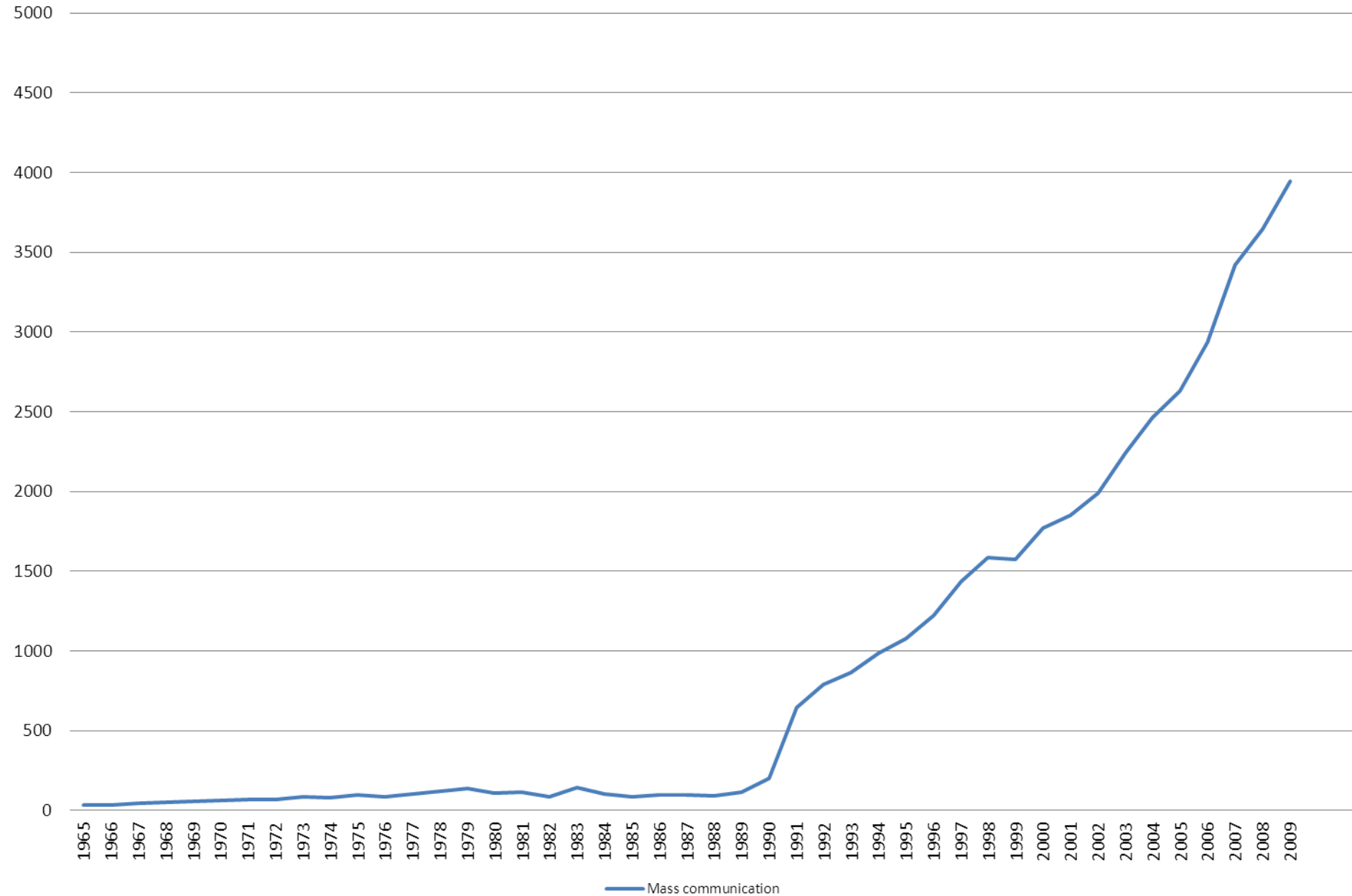
## 2. Expansion

The field has experienced an **explosive growth** since the 1960s – something that in the academic world compares only with the rise of computer science and biotechnology as shown by

- growth of **publications** (data from Web of Science)
- increase of **teachers** (data from France and USA)
- increase of **students** (data from Germany)

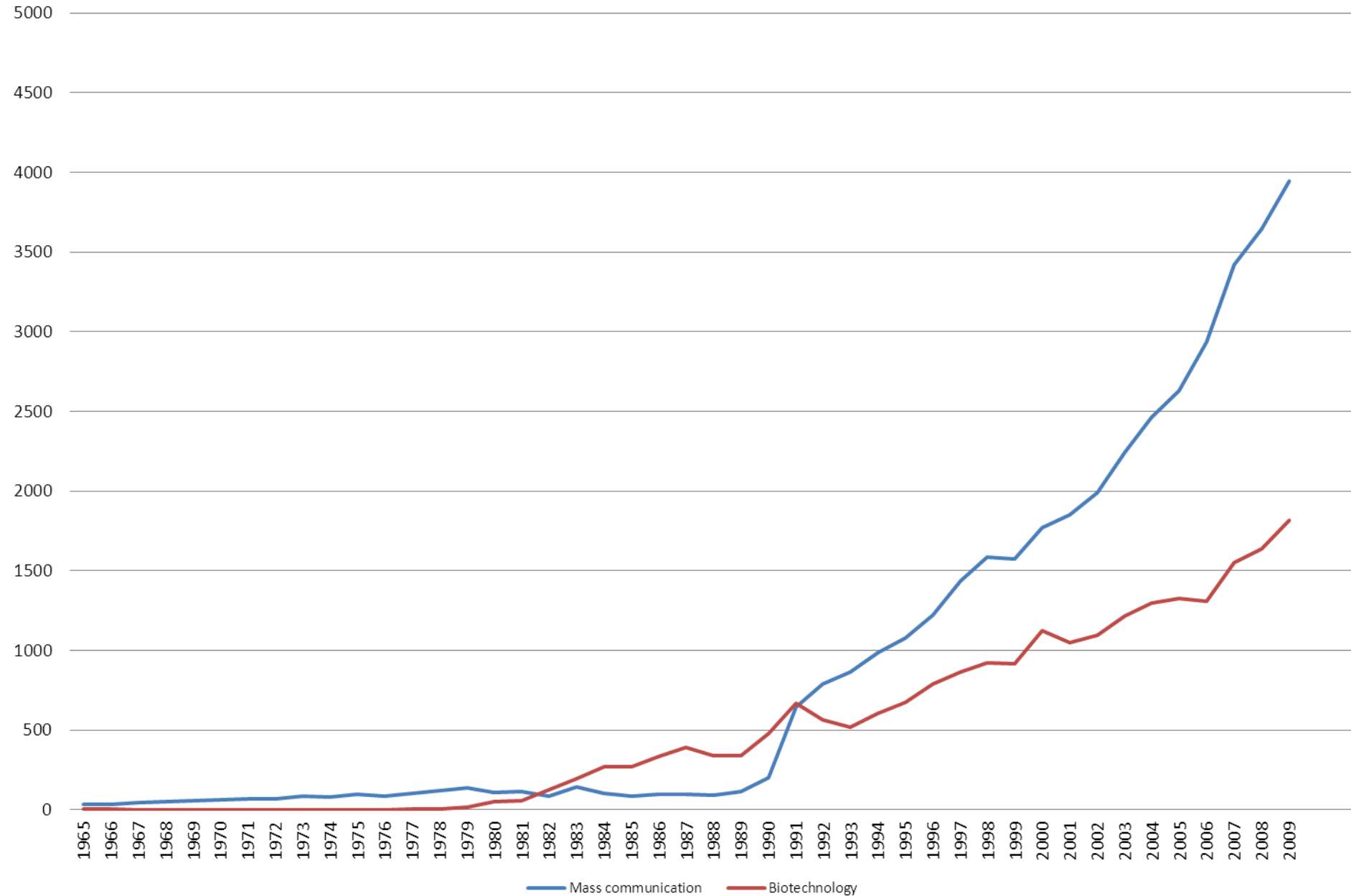
# Growth of publications 1965-2009

Source: Web of Science; constructed by Maria Forsman, November 2011



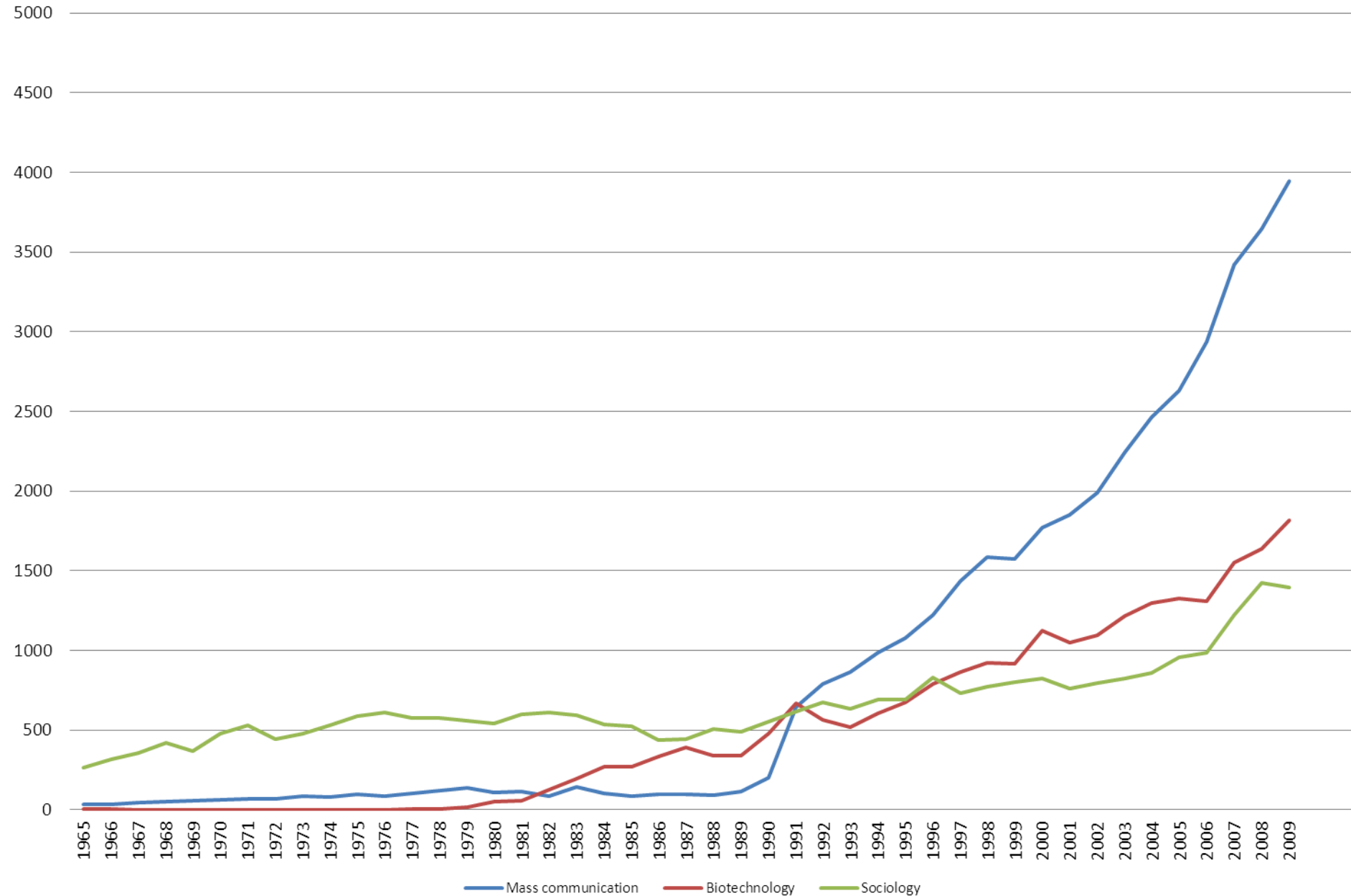
# Growth of publications 1965-2009

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# Growth of publications 1965-2009

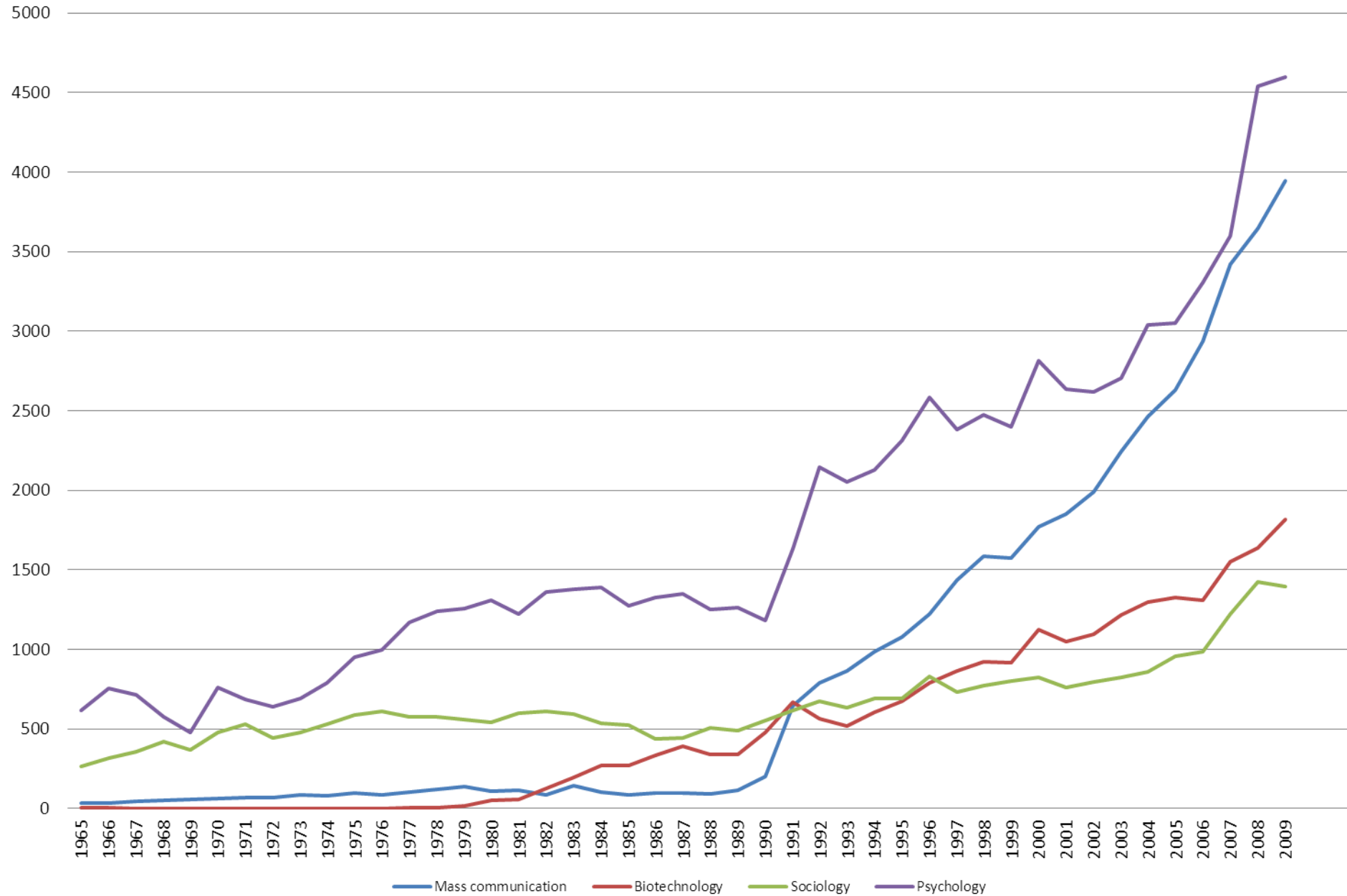
Source: Web of Science; constructed by Maria Forsman, November 2011





# Growth of publications 1965-2009

Source: Web of Science; constructed by Maria Forsman, November 2011



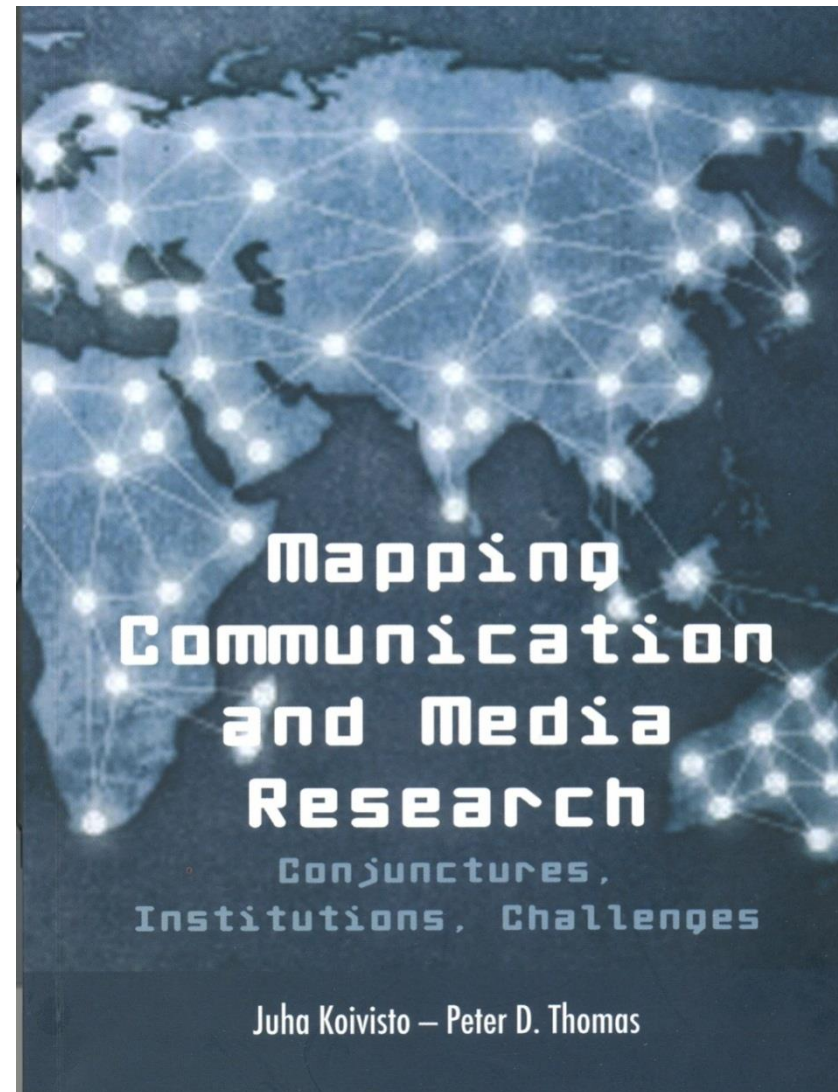
### 3. Diversification

by **focus**: production, content, audience...

by **approach**: behavioural, political economy, cultural studies...

as shown by

- scholarly **journals** – dominated by American publishers and English language
- contemporary **books**
- international **associations** with sections and interest groups



<http://tampub.uta.fi/handle/10024/66336>

# The Passing of Traditional Society

Modernizing the Middle East

**Daniel Lerner**

with the collaboration  
of Lucille W. Pevsner

Introduction by  
David Riesman



# Lerner in Preface to the paperback edition (1964)

A decade of effort went into the studies from which this book was made. Another half-decade has passed since the book appeared. These fifteen years have witnessed the passing of traditional society from every continent. No area of the world has resisted the attractions, despite the increasingly evident risks, of modernization. The emerging nations have hastened to become new states and emulate the ways of modern societies.

Haste has made waste; risks have turned into losses. The “want: get ratio” has been upset – since people have learned to want for more than they can get. As a result, the “revolution of rising expectations” we celebrated so confidently fifteen years ago has, in many places, become a “revolution of rising frustrations.” Modernization is harder than one supposed...

# Assessments of the field

- Bernard Berelson's "obituary" in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1959) and Wilbur Schramm's response – see next two slides
- My article in *Gazette* (1968)  
<file:///C:/Users/qtkano/AppData/Local/Temp/339a3cfd-gazette1968.pdf> Original interviews of Berelson and Lasswell at <https://sites.tuni.fi/kaarle/nordenstreng-publications/>
- My article in *Nordicom Review* (2007)  
[http://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/248\\_248\\_nordenstreng1.pdf](http://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/248_248_nordenstreng1.pdf)
- My chapter in *Making the University Matter* (2011)  
[file:///C:/Users/qtkano/AppData/Local/Temp/fe98ebeb-making the university matter-11 10 2011.pdf](file:///C:/Users/qtkano/AppData/Local/Temp/fe98ebeb-making_the_university_matter-11_10_2011.pdf)

# The State of Communication Research

By BERNARD BERELSON

From time to time the Public Opinion Quarterly reviews the progress that has been made in one of the fields of research within its ken and surveys the current status of work in that field. Without waiting to publish a special issue, it presents in the following article and discussion a review of communication research which is of modest dimensions but unusual significance.

Bernard Berelson is Director-Designate of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. He is now Professor of the Behavioral Sciences at the University of Chicago and Director of the Study of Graduate Education. His article is based on a paper he presented at the 1958 Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. It is discussed by Wilbur Schramm, Director of the Institute for Communication Research at Stanford University, David Riesman, Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, and Raymond A. Bauer, Ford Foundation Visiting Professor at the Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University.

**M**Y THEME is that, as for communication research, the state is withering away.

The modern version of communication research began about twenty-five years ago with the development of both academic and commercial interest—the former largely coordinated, if not stimulated, by the Rockefeller Foundation seminar of the late 1930's and the latter developed in response to radio's need to prove its audience. Since then there has been a great deal of research activity on both fronts, so much so that for a time the field exhibited many of the characteristics of a scientific fad. What has it all come to and where do we now stand?

## THE PAST

In the past twenty-five years or so, there have been four major approaches to communication research, and perhaps six minor ones. The four major approaches are so well characterized by their leading proponents that it is convenient and revealing here to identify them by name, as in the chart below. In my view, the major lines of inquiry have been the political approach, represented by Lasswell; the sample survey approach, represented by Lazarsfeld; the small-groups approach, represented by Lewin; and the experimental approach, represented by Hovland. (Whether Lewin really should be counted as a student of "communication research" is a matter of definition with which I am not particularly concerned here.) Lasswell, with his interest in broad



out direct and immediate regard to the detailed, empirical underpinning. David Riesman and others have made important contributions along this line already, as a counterbalance to the minute and atomistic inquiry, and I look forward to more such studies in the future.

5. Popular culture. Some interests that earlier would have been called communication are now being followed up under this heading. With aesthetic aspects emphasized, the field has a chance to get some help from humanistic studies, and the cooperation ought to be stimulating. Communication problems have been reflected on a great deal in the past—by very good minds—and such reflection should have a good deal to say to the modern empirical researcher.

6. *Mass* communication. Such “new generation” sociologists as James Coleman and William McPhee tell me that the first word needs more emphasis relative to the second. Their position is that the field is better seen as one of a variety of *mass* activities and that headway will be made by stressing the similarities of such mass phenomena rather than the particularities attaching to a mass communication system. That is, the oblique attack may yield more than the frontal.

7. Practical affairs. One way an intellectual field can advance is by dealing directly with the theoretical problems of the discipline itself. Another is by dealing with practical problems to which the discipline can contribute answers. The former is the academic approach and the latter the professional. Of our four major figures, Lasswell, Lewin, and Hovland were primarily concerned with academic matters, and only Lazarsfeld was sometimes concerned with professional problems. A practical, or more professional, turn may now be indicated.

In sum, then, it seems to me that “the great ideas” that gave the field of communication research so much vitality ten and twenty years ago have to a substantial extent worn out. No new ideas of comparable magnitude have appeared to take their place. We are on a plateau of research development, and have been for some time. There are two ways to look at this phenomenon, assuming that it is correctly gauged. One is to regret that no new “breakthrough” has developed in recent years; the other is to be grateful that the field has a period of time to assimilate, incorporate, and exploit the imaginative innovations of the major figures. The reader reads the journals; he can take his choice.

#### COMMENTS BY WILBUR SCHRAMM

WHEN ONE has been pronounced dead, it is ungracious to rise and make comments. Indeed, it shows a certain lack of faith in the attending physician. Nothing is farther from my wishes than to show any lack of faith in my friend Bernard Berelson, and therefore if he pronounces us dead I am content to believe him.

But it is a somewhat livelier condition than I had anticipated. I have just come from the doctoral examination of a young man who demonstrated depth in psychology, sociology, mathematics, and research method, as well



# So what?

- The field is extremely dispersed
- while excessively media-centred
- distracted by abundance and popularity
- trapped by presentism as Paddy reminded
- in need of assembling itself as Annabelle reminded
- Needs research on research
  - national histories
  - overviews in philosophy of science

Regards from Denis McQuail from Eastleigh this Thursday...



# Denis McQuail reading our conference programme:

For me the conference theme revives the disputes between on the one hand various types of social science approach to media and communication and those that come from literary and cultural studies. I think that these two branches of inquiry have their own separate methods and principles of study and they don't mix easily. I don't think there is not much point in trying to reconcile them in a fundamental way or pretend they are all part of the same enterprise...

I'm still looking for something that was born but was never live and kicking which was a robust set of principles of communication process with which to sketch a framework of human communication and the relationship between different spheres of public and interpersonal communication...

So the study moved on without having resolved or got together what would have been useful partly because it was diverted into answering a variety of questions which were not fundamental – important perhaps but not terribly relevant to the purely theoretical concern of what the discipline was...

# Denis McQuail on our plenary theme:

Old/new theory in media studies – I'm not sure. Old theory opened up possibilities to become much more effective in persuasion and all forms of propaganda. It's not old or new theory but older and newer circumstances of much expanded industry of communication for all participants in public and commercial life. I also think that if we had better core principles we would not be diverted to all kind of fancy notions and ideas...