Mapping the Landscape: A Scoping Review of Internal Communication in Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a scoping review of the research on internal communication practices in libraries, highlighting publication trends, methodological approaches, thematic focus, and research gaps. Based on 27 documents published between 2001 and 2023, the study identifies key trends through bibliometric mapping and thematic analysis. Findings reveal a significant focus on library communication and management, underscoring its pivotal role in enhancing organisational efficiency and staff engagement. However, topics like modern communication tools are underexplored, with artificial intelligence, social media, and mobile platforms notably absent. Research is largely concentrated in the United States, with minimal global representation. Qualitative approaches, particularly case studies, dominate the field, with limited use of quantitative and mixed methods. Future research should adopt interdisciplinary approaches, integrate emerging technologies, and expand global perspectives to address evolving communication needs. This review offers an exploratory mapping of the field to guide future research and strategic communication practices in libraries.

Keywords: Internal communication; Organisational communication; Libraries; Scoping review; Bibliometrics

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Internal Communication

Internal communication, as a field of study and practice, encompasses the exchange of information, ideas, and messages within an organisation. It is multifaceted, intersecting with organisational behavior, human resources, public relations, and leadership studies. Scholars have offered various definitions of internal communication, highlighting its role in information dissemination, relationship-building, and alignment of individual and organisational goals[1,2].

Effective internal communication fosters trust, employee engagement, and a sense of belonging within organisations. Studies across industries reveal its positive impact on employee satisfaction, productivity, and decision-making processes[3,4]. It also serves as a critical enabler during organisational change, where transparent and timely communication helps mitigate resistance and build consensus[5]. Furthermore, during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, internal communication proved instrumental in maintaining stability, reducing employee anxiety, and facilitating collaborative problem-solving efforts[6].

Communication strategies within organisation vary in form, from face-to-face meetings and newsletters to digital tools like email and collaboration platforms.

The choice of medium often reflects organisational culture, technological capacity, and staff preferences[7]. Despite ongoing innovations, challenges persist, such as fragmented messaging, limited feedback mechanisms, and communication silos.

1.2 Internal Communication in Libraries

Libraries are multifaceted organisations that rely on coordinated communication across service units, technical operations, and administrative leadership. Effective internal communication ensures that these diverse units work in harmony, supporting the library's mission and improving user services[8,9].

Despite its operational significance, internal communication in libraries has received less attention than outward-facing engagement. The current state of internal communication practices is mixed. Some libraries adopt formal communication protocols, while others depend heavily on informal networks. This inconsistency may affect efficiency, innovation and staff well-being.

Internal communication is increasingly seen as a key factor in how well organisations function, but when it comes to libraries, it has not received the same level of attention. Libraries depend on teamwork across various areas and staying in sync is crucial for everything to run smoothly. The current state of internal communication in libraries varies widely. While some institutions have adopted structured communication frameworks, many continue to rely on informal exchanges or operate with

siloed systems. The absence of shared platforms and inconsistent feedback mechanisms can hinder decision-making processes and negatively impact service quality. Moreover, effective internal communication plays a crucial role in fostering staff morale, managing organisational change, and ensuring that daily operations align with the institution's broader mission-particularly in light of the ongoing digital transformation and the shift toward remote work accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic[10,11].

To address this gap, the present study conducts a scoping review to evaluate how internal communication in libraries has been studied over time. Scoping reviews are particularly suitable for exploring complex, interdisciplinary topics like internal communication. Unlike bibliometric reviews, which focus on publication metrics, or scientometric reviews, which analyze scientific output and citation patterns, scoping reviews aim to map the breadth of research, synthesize emerging themes, and uncover knowledge gaps. This approach allows for an inclusive and exploratory assessment, especially useful in understudied fields[12,13]. In addition, it identifies methodological trends and maps thematic areas that have been underexplored. This exploratory overview aims to contribute to scholarly discourse while offering practical insights for library management.

1.3 Research Questions

Recognising the pivotal role of internal communication within an organisation, this study seeks to analyse the research trends in internal communication within libraries in the twentieth century to identify gaps and provide springboards for potential future research endeavors. Moreover, this research aims to contribute to the limited literature on internal communications within libraries.

Specifically, the study will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the publication trends in research on internal communication within libraries, including patterns over time, predominant publication sources, and geographic focus?

2. What research methodologies and trends are commonly used in studies of internal communication within library settings?

3. What are the main topics and themes addressed in the literature on internal communication within libraries?

4. What gaps exist in the current research on internal communication practices in libraries?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a scoping review design to systematically map existing research on internal communication in libraries. Guided by the Arksey & O'Malley[14] framework and aligned with PRISMA-ScR[15] standards, the scoping review was selected to provide a broad overview of existing research, especially appropriate for mapping fields that are underexplored. The process involved defined steps: formulating the research questions, identifying relevant studies, applying inclusion criteria, charting data, and synthesising results.

This study selected multiple databases for document extraction, namely Scopus, ProQuest, EBSCO, and Taylor and Francis. The data used in this study were extracted on 27 March 2024. Scopus was selected as it is considered the most extensive online multidisciplinary publication and citation database[16], while EBSCO and ProQuest were chosen as they are aggregators that provide vast collections of scholarly journals[17]. Taylor and Francis was also picked since it publishes and provides access to high-quality and cross-disciplinary journals in humanities and social sciences[18]. The four databases were searched for relevant documents using the combined search terms in the Title, Abstract, and Keyword fields. Table 1 presents the search string used per database, which resulted in 985 documents.

To ensure relevance and rigor, only studies that met the following inclusion criteria were included: published between 2001 to 2023; written in English; peer-reviewed journal articles or conference proceedings.

After removing duplicates and irrelevant records, 27 documents were selected for review. These were managed in Mendeley and then exported using RIS file type to VOSviewer[19] for keyword co-occurrence analysis.

Table 1. Search string per database

Database	Search string	Result
Scopus	"internal communication" OR "organisational communication" AND "librar*"	118
ProQuest	abstract("internal communication" OR "organisational communication") AND abstract("librar*") OR subject("internal communication" OR "organisational communication") AND subject("librar*") AND title("internal communication" OR "organisational communication") AND title("librar*")	147
EBSCO	SU ("internal communication" OR "organisational communication") AND SU (library OR libraries) AB ("internal communication" OR "organisational communication") AND AB ("librar*") TI ("internal communication" OR "organisational communication") AND TI (library OR library*)	685
Taylor and Francis	[[Publication Title: "internal communication"] OR [Publication Title: "organisational communication"] AND [Publication Title: "librar*"]] AND [[Keywords: "internal communication"] OR [Keywords: "organisational communication"] AND [Keywords: "librar*"]] AND [[Abstract: "internal communication"] OR [Abstract: "organisational communication"] AND [Abstract: "librar*"]]	35
TOTAL		**985**

Keywords with a minimum of two mentions were mapped while isolated or repetitive items were excluded. This visual mapping revealed conceptual clusters and helped surface gaps in the literature.
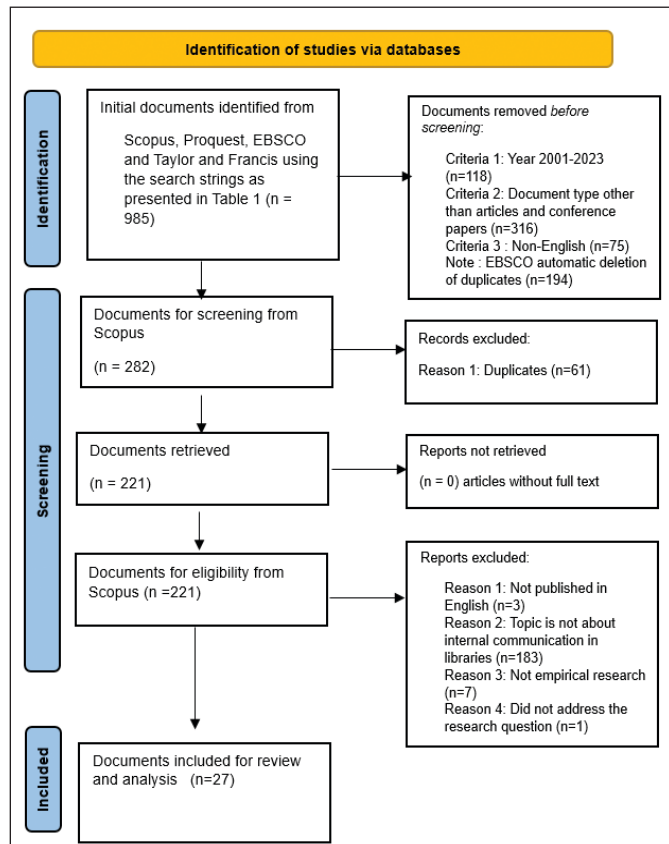

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Publication Trends in Research on Internal Communication in Libraries

3.1.1 Patterns Over Time

The publication trends from 2005 to 2023, as shown in Fig. 2, reveal an initial period of low and stable output between 2005 and 2009, followed by a sharp surge in 2010. After this peak, the number of publications decreased but remained relatively consistent, with minor fluctuations, until a significant uptick in 2021 and 2022. This trajectory suggests a growing awareness of the relevance of internal communication in library operations.

3.1.2 Predominant Publication Sources

The Journal of Web Librarianship was the most productive source, with five documents accounting for 18 % of the total publications. Other contributions were scattered across journals focused on digital libraries and information science. This distribution indicates an intersection between internal communication discourse and the growing importance of digital environments in library work.

3.1.3 Geographical Focus

The geographical distribution of publications on internal communication in libraries, as depicted in Fig. 4, reveals a significant concentration of research in the United States, far outpacing contributions from other countries such as Australia, Canada, Slovenia, China, and New Zealand. This disparity highlights a lack of global representation, with research predominantly reflecting the priorities and contexts of a single region. The underrepresentation of non-Western countries points to a critical gap in understanding how internal communication practices vary across diverse cultural and organisational settings.

3.2 Research Methodologies and Trends

Table 2 shows the distribution of research methods used. The analysis of research methodologies and trends indicates that qualitative research is the dominant approach in the study of internal communication practices in libraries, accounting for 66.67 % of the reviewed articles. This prevalence of qualitative research, primarily utilising case study methods, highlights the emphasis on in-depth exploration of experiences, perceptions, and contextual dynamics within library settings. Case studies are particularly well-suited for capturing the nuanced and complex nature of internal communication processes, making them an invaluable tool for uncovering rich, detailed insights[20].
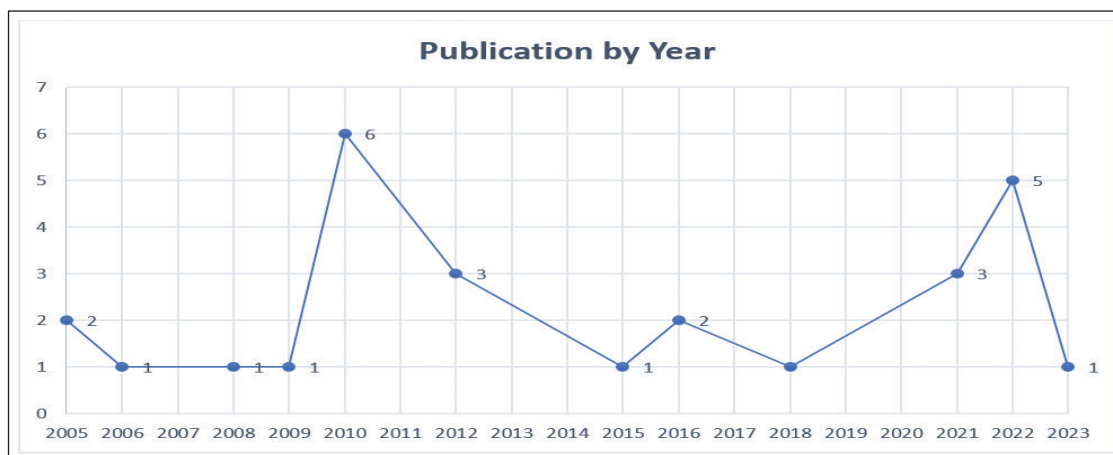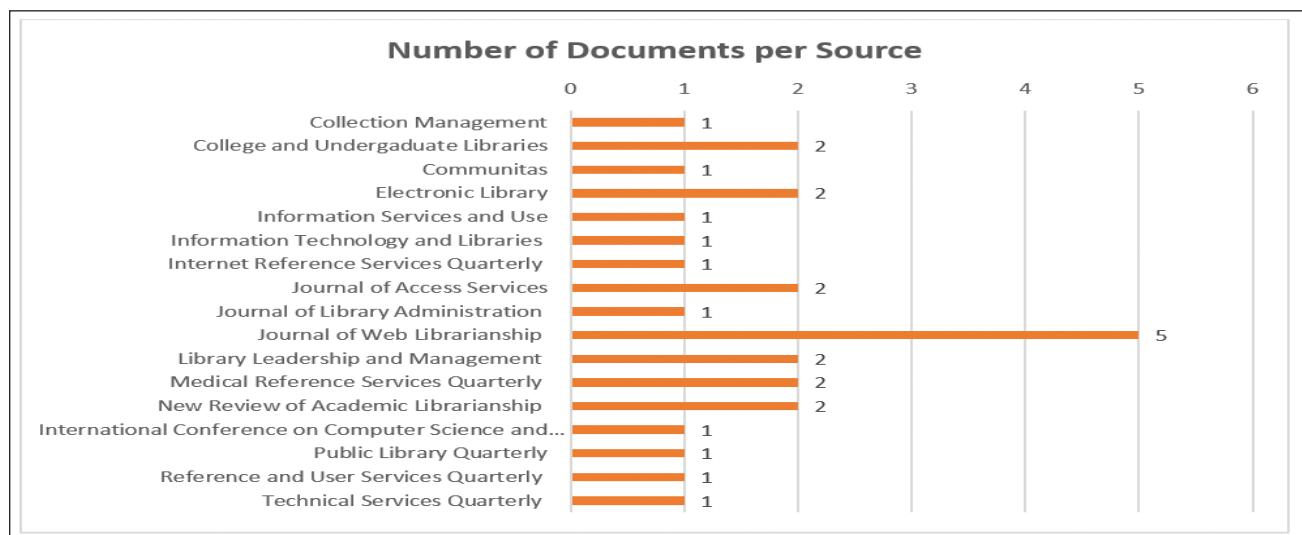

Figure 2. Publication by year.
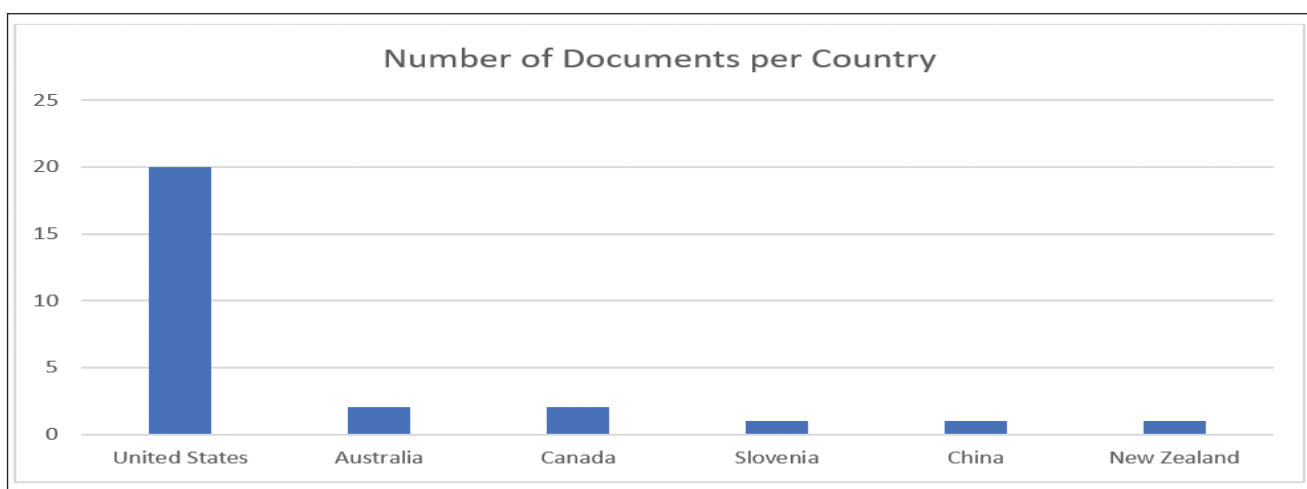
Figure 3. Publication by sources.

Figure 4. Publication by country.

Table 2. Publication by research design

Design	Method	Documents	%
Mixed methods	Focus group and survey; Survey and interview; Survey and textual analysis; Survey and Case Study	4	14.81%
Qualitative	Case study	18	66.67%
Quantitative	Survey; Content inventory	5	18.52%

Quantitative research, by contrast, is less frequently employed, comprising 18.52 % of the studies. This approach often involves surveys and content inventory methods, which provide measurable and generalisable data about internal communication practices. Although quantitative methods enable a broader understanding of trends and patterns[21], their limited use suggests a potential gap in leveraging data-driven approaches to complement the in-depth findings of qualitative studies.

Mixed methods research, which combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques, represents the smallest proportion of studies at 14.81 %. Examples of mixed methods include combinations such as surveys with interviews, focus groups with surveys, or textual analysis with case studies. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding by integrating numerical data with contextual insights[22]. However, its limited use suggests that researchers may not be fully utilising the

strengths of combining methodologies to address the multifaceted nature of internal communication in libraries.

3.3 Main Topics and Themes

Co-occurrence is used to identify the conceptual structure by analysing keywords' presence, frequency, and proximity across articles[23]. Fig. 5 presents the keyword co-occurrence network with a minimum number of occurrences set to 2. A total number of 80 keywords were found in the 27 articles with thirteen meeting the threshold. Two items were removed as it was either a duplicate (academic library) or is not connected with the main network (covid-19). The remaining 11 items were grouped into clusters. The colored circles represent the occurrence of keywords while the lines indicate the relationship between keywords. Further, the size of the nodes is proportional to the frequency of appearance for the specific keywords.

In coming up with meaningful interpretations and determining patterns, the key to making sense of the keywords lies in the qualitative approach of contextualising data. The categorisation and contextualisation of research themes are observed based on the data evidence. Combining enumerative and thematic analyses would yield more flexibility and depth than quantitative counts of occurrences and frequencies[24].

The literature review associated with the scientific mapping enabled the categorising of the clusters into three research themes, representing the studies' core ideas. This process of analysis allows us to identify emerging topics in the given field[25].

Thematic labels were attached to each cluster based on their keyword co-occurrence network and grouped according to how they appear and relate to similar phenomena[26]. According to Grbich[27], "…labels may be imposed by you derived from previous relevant literature, which you have reviewed, from evidence within the area being studied or from your gut feelings…"

Based on the keyword co-occurrences presented on Table 3, the clusters were analysed and categorised into 3 research themes. The first theme "Collaborative intranet tools" emphasises specific tools and technologies, such as Drupal, and their application in fostering collaboration within organisations. It takes a technology-centered approach, focusing on the implementation of these tools. In contrast, the second theme "Library communication and management" adopts a broader perspective, addressing organisational and internal communication specifically within the context of academic libraries. It is more domain-focused, centering on libraries, and less about the details of specific technological tools. Lastly, the
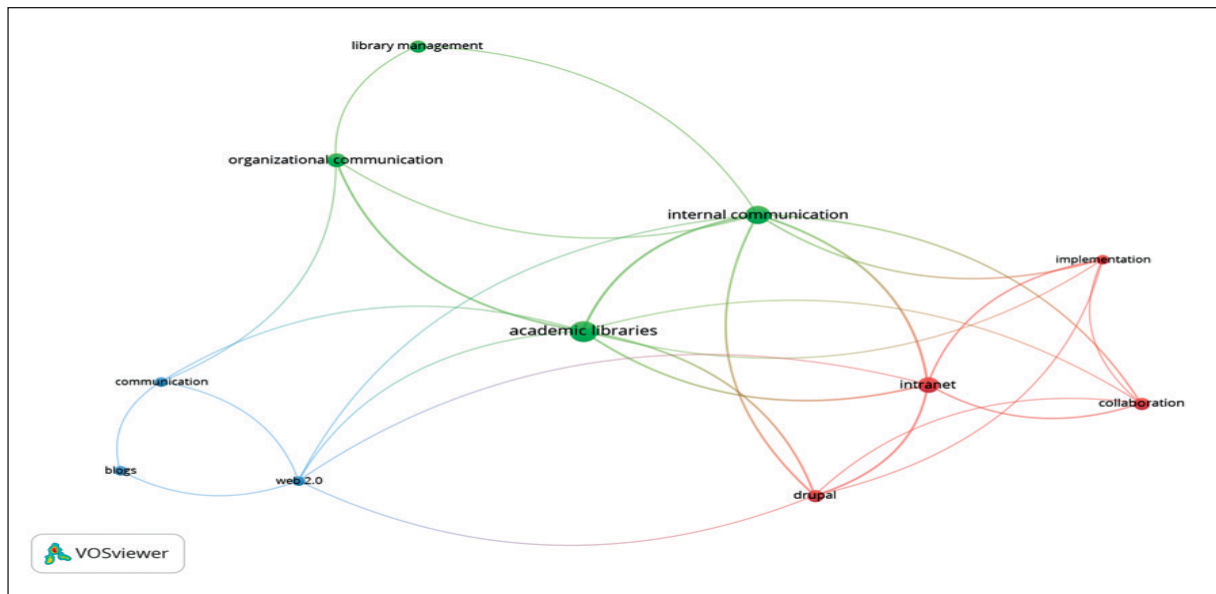

Figure 5. Keyword co-occurrence network.

Table 3. Theme-based clustering

Clusters	Keywords (occurrences)	Theme
Cluster 1 (Red)	Collaboration (3), drupal (3), implementation (2), intranet (5)	Collaborative intranet tools
Cluster 2 (Green)	Academic libraries (9), internal communication (7), library management (3), organisational communication (4)	Library communication and management
Cluster 3 (Blue)	Blogs (2), communication (2), web 2.0 (2)	Blogs and Web 2.0 in communication

third theme "Blogs and Web 2.0 in communication" has a narrower focus. It is less tied to a particular domain or comprehensive system, concentrating instead on the broader application of these tools in contemporary communication practices.

3.4 Gaps and Limitations

The analysis of the research clusters reveals several significant gaps and underexplored areas in the current body of literature on internal communication practices in libraries. While certain topics, such as library communication and management, are well-represented, other critical areas remain sparse or absent, highlighting opportunities for further exploration. Library communication and management emerge as the most thoroughly researched theme. This cluster, characterised by frequent occurrences of keywords like "academic libraries", "internal communication", and "organisational communication" underscores a strong emphasis on communication frameworks within academic libraries. The prominence of these keywords suggests that substantial research has been dedicated to understanding and improving internal communication processes in libraries. However, the high representation of this theme also highlights the concentrated focus on traditional library contexts, potentially overshadowing other dimensions of internal communication.

Topics related to communication tools, such as blogs and Web 2.0 technologies, receive limited attention. Despite their growing relevance in enhancing communication and engagement within organisations, keywords like "blogs" and "Web 2.0" occur infrequently. This indicates that research in these areas remains niche or underdeveloped. The narrow scope of this cluster suggests a potential gap in understanding how libraries can leverage these tools for internal communication, particularly in fostering collaboration and innovation among staff.

The absence of certain contemporary themes in the dataset further underscores gaps in the research. Emerging digital communication technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), mobile communication platforms, and social media, are notably missing. These tools have transformed communication practices across various sectors, yet their application within libraries' internal communication strategies remains unexplored. Similarly, broader frameworks, such as global communication strategies, privacy and ethics in digital tools, and the integration of communication technologies in education and e-learning, are absent. This lack of representation suggests a limited engagement with interdisciplinary and forward-looking perspectives in library communication research.

There was also little exploration of cross-cultural or multilingual communication within libraries, perhaps because the reviewed studies were restricted to English publications. The small number of mixed-methods and quantitative studies limits the generalisability of findings. Given the limited sample size, the results are positioned as exploratory rather than definitive.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this scoping review reveal research on internal communication in libraries is still in its developmental stage. The increase in publication after 2010, and particularly during the years 2021-2022, reflects a growing recognition of the importance of organisational communication, possibly amplified by disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These shifts underscore the evolving expectations placed on libraries as adaptable, communicative, and digitally literate institutions.

Another important aspect is the identification of predominant publication venues such as the Journal of Web Librarianship. These journals often have thematic focuses that align well with topics at the intersection of digital library services and organisational practices, making them natural homes for research on internal communication. Their prominence may also reflect a broader disciplinary interest in the convergence of communication technologies and information work. Moreover, it offers insights into editorial preferences and disciplinary priorities that shape how internal communication is theorised and reported.

The concentration of studies in the United States suggests a research environment supported by greater access to funding, research infrastructure, and publication platforms. This regional skew, however, raises concerns about the applicability of these findings to global contexts, especially considering that the dominance of U.S. research output, while reflecting leadership in the field, also highlights a significant imbalance in global participation[28]. Internal communication challenges in libraries in other parts of the world, may differ significantly due to cultural, structural, and resource-based constraints. Future studies must address this imbalance to ensure a more inclusive understanding of library operations worldwide.

The predominance of qualitative research, especially case studies, suggests that researchers value rich, context-sensitive insights into internal communication. While these studies offer valuable depth, the field would benefit from complementary quantitative and mixed-method approaches that could validate findings across broader samples. Such methodological diversity could strengthen evidence-based decision making for library administrators.

The keyword clustering analysis revealed clear thematic interests in communication infrastructure, organisational alignment, and the use of older digital tools. What is striking, however, is the near-total absence of research on more recent communication innovations such as artificial intelligence, instant messaging applications, or collaborative platforms. This suggests a lag between technological adoption in library workflows and academic inquiry into their communicative inquiry. Bridging this gap is critical for aligning scholarly output with real-world communication shifts.

Finally, a lack of focus on cross-cultural, multilingual or inclusive communication practices highlights a critical area for further exploration. As academic libraries become increasingly diverse in both staff and users, understanding

how internal communication strategies support or hinder inclusivity is a necessary evolution of this field.

5. CONCLUSION

This scoping review mapped the evolving scholarly landscape of internal communication in libraries from 2001 to 2023. Although the body of literature is modest, it reflects growing interest in the role communication plays in library operations, staff engagement, and service coordination. The review highlights a dominant reliance on qualitative methods and case-specific contexts, with limited use of broader quantitative or mixed-method approaches.

A key finding is the absence of research on modern communication tools, particularly AI-driven platforms, mobile messaging, and real-time collaboration software, that have become integral to organisational communication elsewhere. This technological gap signals a pressing need to align library research with contemporary communication practices.

Additionally, the concentration of studies in few western countries and journals suggest a need for broader geographic participation and a diversification of publication channels. Addressing these limitations can enhance the global relevance and practical impact of future research.

The study's implications are twofold: First, it provides a conceptual foundation for future research agenda by identifying underexplored themes and emerging challenges in library communication. Second, it encourages library leaders to reflect critically on their internal communication practices, especially in the face of ongoing digital transformation, workforce diversity, and evolving institutional missions.

By synthesising trends and highlighting gaps, this review contributes to a growing conversation about how libraries communicate internally and how such communication supports their broader organisational goals.

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