

## The Internet and Transformation of Epistemic Communities: An Exploratory Review of Communication Research between 2002 and 2022

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**Abstract :** Drawing on the Foucauldian conception of episteme, epistemic communities refer to a community in which members share common frames of epistemic reference, delineating the proper construction of social realities for their members. One of the most cited definitions of epistemic communities is a group of professionals possessing acknowledged expertise and proficiency in a specific field, influencing policymaking and governance. More recently, the advancement of the Internet has changed the way society produces, disseminates, and consumes knowledge. Against this backdrop, this literature review explores the ways in which online epistemic communities are studied in communication scholarship between 2002 and 2022. Examining 92 peer-reviewed journal articles from the Web of Science database, three research objectives have been addressed: (1) geographical contexts, platforms, and methods that are studied in communication research, (2) different types of epistemic communities, and (3) prevailing themes and concepts that are related to the research of the chosen epistemic communities. This research demonstrates increasing scholarly attention towards the lay public as prominent online epistemic communities along with more conventional epistemic communities such as academia and journalists, hinting at how the Internet provides epistemic capacities for negotiating the boundaries of epistemic authority and competencies between experts and lay people. Through qualitative reading of these papers, the findings show that communication research tends to approach epistemic communities of the political left and right asymmetrically: The right-wing epistemic communities are studied in connection with mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories, populist rejection of authoritative epistemologies, whereas the left-wing communities are studied as emancipatory epistemic struggles and activism against Western, colonial, white, and male-centric knowledge systems. This points to a grave need for communication and multidisciplinary scholarship to investigate such uncharted characters of right- and left-wing epistemic communities.

**Keywords :** communication research, internet, knowledge, online epistemic communities

**Conference Title :** ICJMC 2024 : International Conference on Journalism and Mass Communication

**Conference Location :** Budapest, Hungary

**Conference Dates :** August 22-23, 2024