

Corporate Reputation in Public Relations Research: A Bibliometric Analysis of Trends and Themes (1970–2024)

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Abstract

Corporate reputation is of growing interest in communication studies as an intangible and inimitable asset. The multiple-stakeholder view of reputation is believed to intersect with the responsibility of the field of public relations. This study explores the intellectual landscape of corporate reputation research within public relations by identifying current trends such as the influence of social media and crisis communication on stakeholder relationships. These trends are crucial for understanding how public relations strategies adapt to evolving communication platforms and global crises, directly affecting corporate reputation by shaping public perception and trust. The study systematically examines 10,873 academic publications retrieved from the WoS database using bibliometric analysis. The analysis employs BiblioShiny and VOSViewer due to their advanced capabilities in visualising performance metrics and mapping scientific networks. The findings suggested that social media, crisis communication, and COVID-19 hold significance and are fundamental to the field of public relations in terms of corporate reputation. Keyword co-occurrence network analysis suggested that public relations, corporate reputation, and crisis communication are three clusters that reflect the crucial role of public relations in both cultivating and sustaining corporate reputation, as well as its significance in managing crisis communication effectively. These findings emphasise the necessity for organisations to adopt proactive crisis communication strategies and integrate social media into reputation management. Integrating these topics into public relations curricula can better prepare future professionals to manage corporate reputation in a complex media landscape.

Keywords

corporate reputation, public relations, communication management, bibliometric method, brand reputation, stakeholder perception

Introduction

The volume of research on corporate reputation has been growing significantly (Mohd Sofian et al., 2023) because of its interdisciplinary nature. The corporate reputation is affected by its beginnings across various distinct fields. In the realm of reputation, it is argued that there is currently no single source that fully encompasses the entirety of the concept of reputation (Chun, 2005). There is some overlap and conflicting definitions within the literature. Because approaches to understanding the concept of reputation differ based on the theoretical perspective (Whetten, 1997).

However, the interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary nature of reputation research serves as a valuable source of insight (Chun, 2005) and provides challenges in terminological issues (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002). Especially,

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Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article



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new factors such as digitalisation, social media, crisis communication, and sustainability have been added to this interdisciplinary approach, creating new challenges and opportunities in understanding corporate reputation (Hamidi et al., 2023; von Berlepsch et al., 2024). Thus, it has been called for a systematic review of the vast and diverse literature on reputation, as this type of analysis enables scholars to comprehend and assess the current status of research on corporate reputation (Veh et al., 2019). Several studies have carried out bibliometric analysis on corporate reputation and related subjects such as reputation and corporate social responsibility (CSR; Li et al., 2020), reputational risk and sustainability (Nobanee et al., 2021), research on corporate reputation (Mohd Sofian et al., 2023), reputation and media (Leila et al., 2020), reputation and management (Veh et al., 2019), reputation and banking (Budianto, 2023; Carè et al., 2024), reputation and sustainability (von Berlepsch et al., 2024), brand reputation (Saglam, 2022), digital reputation (Navarro Beltrá & Martínez Polo, 2020) reputation and Industry 4.0 (Hamidi et al., 2023). Although reputation has become a paradigm in its own right (Chun, 2005), its diverse subject areas reflect its roots in various disciplines, leading scholars to explore different facets of the construct. However, public relations (PR) scholarship still lacks a field-specific and longitudinal understanding of how this concept has been conceptualised, theorised, and developed within the discipline. Reputation plays a critical role in shaping stakeholder trust, reinforcing organisational legitimacy, and guiding communication strategies (Deephhouse & Carter, 2005).

Within the PR domain, however, reputation is not simply the outcome of communication activities; it is a relational and communicative process that unfolds through ongoing interactions between organisations and publics. J. E. Grunig and Hung (2002) define reputation as a set of cognitive representations collectively held by publics. From this perspective, reputation cannot be managed directly but can be influenced indirectly through strategic public relations practices that shape both managerial behaviour and stakeholder perceptions. PR is considered to play a great role in managing reputation, especially in this complex digital age when the corporation faces an unprecedented level of expectation regarding its visibility, openness, authenticity, and transparency (Men, 2014). PR focuses on measuring relationships and reputations (Volk, 2016), with crisis communication and reputation management dominating the field (Demir et al., 2020). However, existing studies have largely overlooked the theoretical and practical contributions of PR to the development of corporate reputation. Although some studies have made initial attempts to bridge relationship and reputation

theories (Yang & Grunig, 2005), integrative theoretical syntheses remain limited in PR literature (Volk, 2016). Despite its central role in managing stakeholder relationships and transparency, PR remains underrepresented in reputation-related scholarly mapping. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a bibliometric analysis exclusively grounded in the PR literature. While research on CSR (Li et al., 2020) and reputational risk (Nobanee et al., 2021) has been conducted, there is no comprehensive study that systematically examines the relationship between corporate reputation and PR using bibliometric analysis. The lack of bibliometric research in the field limits our understanding of the intellectual landscape, trends, and emerging topics at the intersection of these two critical areas. The study deliberately focusing on PR domain provides a unique theoretical and practical framework for understanding the relational and communicative aspects of reputation building. Although PR research has long emphasised relational trust, dialogue, and stakeholder engagement, these perspectives have rarely been systematically linked to the broader intellectual trajectory of reputation studies. The exclusion of other disciplines, such as marketing and management, is not a denial of their relevance, but a methodological choice to provide an in-depth, discipline-specific analysis that has been largely neglected in previous bibliometric studies.

Equally missing is a longitudinal perspective. Reputation research within PR has evolved through distinct phases, from early work on corporate image and media representation in the 1970s to the emergence of digitalisation, social media dynamics, crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic in the 21st century. Yet, no bibliometric inquiry has systematically traced how these contextual transformations have shaped the intellectual structure and thematic development of PR-based reputation research. To address these gaps, this study maps the PR domain by focusing on journals indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database. Using targeted keywords such as “corporate reputation” “corporate communication” “public relations” and “communication management” the analysis ensures disciplinary precision and relevance. By adopting this approach, the study provides the first comprehensive, field-specific, and longitudinal mapping of corporate reputation research within PR. In doing so, it establishes a foundation for theoretical integration, identifies key contributors, and traces the thematic evolution of reputation scholarship across more than five decades (1970–2024). Thus, this approach will not only highlight the foundational theories and practices but also uncover new directions for research and professional application, addressing the need for a structured exploration of this relationship.

Corporate Reputation in the Field of Public Relations

The literature examines the reputation paradigm through three schools of thought: evaluative, impressionist, and relational (Chun, 2005). The difference between the three schools is mostly related to which stakeholder is taken as the focal point. While evaluative and impressionist schools define reputation based on the evaluations of a single stakeholder, the relational school is based on stakeholder theory, recognising that different stakeholders have different expectations of the organisation, and takes into account multiple stakeholder views.

In this approach, reputation is considered a combination of different stakeholder perceptions, such as employees, customers, suppliers, investors, and the public (Post & Griffin, 1997). Thus, according to the relational school, the concept of corporate reputation, which is evaluated as the result of all shared individual stakeholder impressions, is a collective assessment that depends on the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the organisation over a long period (C. J. Fombrun, 1996). It is also regarded as a perceptual representation of the organisation's past actions and prospects (Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994), describing the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders (C. J. Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). The relational school regards corporate reputation as an equal reflection of the external and internal perceptions of the organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Reputation management highlights relational gaps between internal and external views, with the relational school emphasising stakeholder theory, acknowledging diverse expectations, and incorporating multiple perspectives, unlike evaluative and impressionist schools that focus on single-stakeholder evaluations as seen in the conceptualisation of reputation in fields of economy, marketing, and organisational behaviour.

To sum up, a critical examination of the literature on corporate reputation reveals notable divergences and overlaps among theoretical frameworks. While the evaluative, impressionist, and relational schools offer valuable insights into corporate reputation, they lack a unified approach to integrating digital-era challenges such as social media dynamics, real-time communication, and stakeholder engagement in a virtual environment. Although the relational school recognises the multidimensional nature of reputation through a multi-stakeholder approach, it overlooks the nuances introduced by digital platforms, where perceptions can shift rapidly due to viral content or misinformation. This highlights a significant gap in understanding how corporate reputation is co-constructed in a digital environment. The advent of social media has fundamentally

transformed the corporate reputation landscape (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Nuortimo et al., 2024). Schena et al. (2022) highlight the role of digital platforms in amplifying or undermining stakeholder trust through real-time feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, the impact of emerging technologies such as AI and machine learning on reputation management is underexplored despite their growing importance. Aleryani (2024) states that AI tools can enhance digital reputation by enabling real-time monitoring, sentiment analysis, and analysing of online data, thus, it helps to promote ethical business practices, enhance transparency, and foster trust.

This evolving landscape necessitates further exploration of how digital tools, particularly AI and machine learning, can be integrated into broader theoretical models to address the dynamic challenges posed by modern digital ecosystems. This gap underscores the need for a holistic approach that integrates traditional theoretical models with contemporary frameworks, which emphasises the interconnectedness of stakeholders in digital environments. By addressing these gaps, current research can provide a more nuanced understanding of how corporate reputation is formed, managed, and maintained in the face of evolving challenges, such as fake news, misinformation, crises through social media, and the increasing demand for corporate transparency and social responsibility.

This comprehensive field encompasses strategic communication, relationship-building, and crisis management to protect and strengthen an organisation's reputation among its stakeholders (L. Zhang, 2016). To achieve this, organisations must align their strategies with the dynamic expectations of their stakeholders. Thus, it can be stated that the multiple-stakeholder view of reputation intersects with the responsibility of the field of PR. Defined as the management of communication between an organisation and its public (E. Grunig, 2013), PR is integral to shaping, maintaining, and protecting corporate reputation by managing communication, relationships, and perceptions with various stakeholders and the public. Today, PR places a greater emphasis on stakeholder engagement than ever before. It is recognised as the foundation of stakeholder involvement, which is crucial for sustaining an organisation's reputation and long-term success. Engaging stakeholders is vital because they are key supporters of the organisation and can significantly influence its reputation, as well as its financial and social performance (Lee, 2022).

The focus of communication management today is shifting to the identification and management of intangible assets that will gain stakeholder support. It is of critical importance to manage and measure corporate reputation, which is considered a strategic intangible value and asset that cannot be imitated (Hall, 1992). A

strong reputation provides a sustainable competitive advantage because it is very difficult to be imitated by other organisations and gives only that organisation a unique capability (Kowalczyk & Pawlish, 2002). In addition, when employees believe that their organisations are perceived as prestigious by external stakeholders, they develop a stronger cognitive and emotional bond with their organisations and take pride in their organisations (Carmeli et al., 2006). A strong positive reputation enhances customer loyalty and employee commitment (Davies et al., 2003) and reflects stakeholders' overall evaluation of an organisation based on its past and future actions (C. J. Fombrun, 1996; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Successfully managing multi-stakeholder relationships is greatly reliant on the involvement of PR discipline (Anani Bossman, 2021), which is implicated in definitions of PR as relationship management and reputation management (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2002). Thus, PR serves as an institutional framework for harmonising all communication efforts to establish and preserve a positive reputation between a corporation and its diverse stakeholders (Cornellisen, 2004). The primary objective of PR is to manage corporate reputation through effective communication and the cultivation of positive relationships with all stakeholders, which is congruent with the idea that PR is evolving into a multi-disciplinary field best characterised by reputation management. The role of PR in reputation management is not merely promotion or customer relationships but it involves anticipating and analysing new issues that, upon emergence, will significantly impact the corporation and how its stakeholders perceive it (Anani Bossman, 2021).

Today, there is a shift from the traditional profit-oriented organisational paradigm, which assumes that capital accumulation is the sole legitimate role of business, to contemporary organisational paradigms based on the stakeholder approach, social responsibility, corporate social responsiveness, issues, and the triple bottom line approach. In parallel with the changing organisational paradigms, the structure and functions of PR have also changed, and it has become a strategic function that is articulated into the top management strategy formulation process. PR, strategically articulated in this process, is no longer defined as traditional management of communication practices, but as strategic communication management, which points to the balance between the financial obligations of the organisation and its social-societal behaviours and carries the responsibility of evaluating the organisation as an outsider with the boundary-spanning role. With a strategic mandate, PR helps the organisation to adapt to its macro and micro environment by involving strategic stakeholders, social issues, and publics around issues in the strategy formulation process (Steyn, 2007) and by helping the

organisation to adapt to the value system in the ever-changing nature of the organisational environment due to its dynamism (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). Thus, PR has evolved into a strategic management function that helps organisations to identify and achieve socially acceptable goals and thus, balance organisational priorities with socially responsible behaviour (Steyn, 2011). Corporations today are encouraged to adopt socially responsible practices, a vital tool in reputation management (Anani Bossman, 2021; Dahlsrud, 2008). Corporations are progressively communicating regarding their activities related to CSR, referring to their endeavours to incorporate ethical, environmental, social, consumer concerns, and human rights into their fundamental business operations and strategies (Eberle et al., 2013). A key aim of this communication is to attain organisational legitimacy (Arvidsson, 2010) and corporate reputation (Eberle et al., 2013).

An organisation can enhance its reputation through its CSR engagement by effectively presenting its positive impact on the community (Aranguren Gómez & Maldonado García, 2023; Ennenbach & Barkela, 2024; Kumari et al., 2021). Because stakeholders, especially young consumers, are increasingly concerned about the social and environmental impacts of organisations within society (Feng & Kuppelwieser, 2025). As a result, organisations are investing more in CSR campaigns to foster favourable perceptions among stakeholders (Lim & Young, 2021). This is often achieved through coordinated communication of CSR initiatives aimed at gaining stakeholder trust while enhancing corporate reputation through a positive image (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021).

Also, the relationship between organisation and its stakeholders has a vital role in maintaining the organisation's reputation, especially in a crisis period (Haigh & Brubaker, 2010). Because crises, defined as sudden and unexpected events, can significantly jeopardise an organisation's operations, posing both financial and reputational risks (Coombs, 2007; Nöhammer et al., 2023). Business literature has traditionally emphasised economic indicators during crises, while communication literature has focused on corporate reputation markers that extend beyond metrics in marketing (Voges et al., 2024). Although communicators may recognise market value and economics as significant variables, PR particularly prioritises reputational indicators and brand perceptions (Claeys & Ogenhaffen, 2021). The fact that today's organisations operate in a complex, dynamic, and uncertain environment and the rapid dissemination of information to all stakeholders through social media, paves the way for organisations to experience crises more frequently and intensively than ever before. Especially, with the rise of social media, crisis management, entailing strategic set of actions designed to effectively manage

crises and reduce their potential impact on corporations and stakeholders, has changed dramatically over time (X. Zhang & Nekmat, 2024). Therefore, the need for crisis communication is an increasing area in the field of PR. Ensuring effective communication during crises has become a crucial concern for organisations aiming to boost their competitiveness and maintain success in the social media landscape (N. Zhang et al., 2024). Organisations that build their crisis communication strategies through social media are positively affected by their reputation (C. Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003), which is one of the most valuable assets under threat during crisis periods (Ki & Nekmat, 2014). To sum up, it can be suggested that relationship management, crisis communication, and social responsibility, which are the critical elements of PR, are interrelated to corporate reputation management.

Method

Corporate reputation constitutes a core dimension of the field of PR, yet its scholarly positioning remains insufficiently explored. The unique theoretical and strategic contributions of PR to reputation scholarship have yet to be systematically mapped and articulated within the field's intellectual boundaries. Addressing this gap requires a comprehensive analysis that not only identifies key contributors, themes, and scholarly networks but also examines how PR-specific perspectives on reputation have evolved in response to digital transformation and shifting stakeholder expectations. Accordingly, it seeks an answer to the following questions:

RQ1. What is the temporal distribution of the publications?

RQ2. Which authors, countries, and institutions have played pivotal roles in advancing the intellectual structure of PR-focused reputation research?

RQ3. What are the predominant and emerging conceptual themes in corporate reputation research within PR literature and how do these align with stakeholder theory and legitimacy theory perspectives?

RQ4. How have trend topics evolved, especially in response to digital transformation and shifting stakeholder expectations?

RQ5. How do the keywords co-occur in this specific literature?

RQ6. What are the patterns of scholarly collaboration and citation dynamics, and to what extent do they reflect global inclusivity?

RQ7. How has the digital era reshaped the conceptualisation of PR's role in managing corporate reputation?

To enhance the analytical depth of this bibliometric investigation, the research questions are grounded in the conceptual frameworks of stakeholder theory and legitimacy theory. Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) emphasises the dynamic relationships between corporations and their stakeholders, underscoring PR's pivotal role in managing these interactions to foster trust and credibility. Legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995), on the other hand, frames corporate reputation as a socially constructed perception that organisations must continually negotiate within their environment. By aligning the research questions with these theoretical perspectives, the study aims not only to map the descriptive intellectual landscape but also to uncover how PR scholarship frames reputation management as a process of stakeholder engagement and legitimacy maintenance.

The research questions formulated in line with the research objective require the employment of the bibliometric analysis as a methodological approach in this study, as it is recognised for its ability to enable the extensive review of vast datasets of scientific literature within a specific domain, uncovering the primary characteristics of the literature in that area (Donthu, Kumar et al., 2021). The bibliometric analysis technique not only elucidates the developmental trajectory of the specified field but also uncovers its trends and maps out the intellectual framework of the field as represented in contemporary literature (Donthu, Reinartz et al., 2021; Verma et al., 2023). Previously employed in the PR literature as a tool to map the state of the field by identifying patterns in knowledge creation and uncovering underlying network connections (Ivanitskaya & Erzikova, 2023), bibliometric analysis offers a robust basis for innovatively and significantly advancing the field being investigated. It enables researchers to comprehensively map the field, identifying knowledge gaps and areas ripe for further exploration (Ball, 2017; Patil & Rahman, 2023). Given these characteristics, the method was considered suitable for this study to provide a thorough and detailed analysis of the scientific domain at the intersection of corporate reputation and PR. This study's bibliometric approach complements and extends beyond traditional systematic reviews by integrating scientometric indicators and science mapping techniques. These methods collectively illuminate the thematic, collaborative, and citation patterns shaping PR's role in reputation management, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of the field's trajectory. As explained by previous studies (Ball, 2017; Donthu, Kumar et al., 2021; Donthu, Reinartz et al., 2021; Patil & Rahman, 2023) bibliometric analysis uncovers the main

characteristics of the scholarly literature on a specific field, and since this paper seeks an answer to the research questions above which require the comprehensive assessment of the literature on PR and corporate reputation, the bibliometric analysis method was deemed appropriate for fulfilling the research objective and answering the research questions.

The scope of the bibliometric analysis includes three main aspects of corporate reputation as reflected in PR research: (1) thematic areas, (2) theoretical and methodological foundations, and (3) stakeholder perspectives. While the first aspect includes crisis communication, social media influence, etc., the second aspect identifies dominant theories, models, and methodological approaches used in PR scholarship on corporate reputation. Lastly, the third aspect explores how corporate reputation is managed and evaluated by key stakeholders including employees, customers, and the public, within PR frameworks.

The study adopts quantitative bibliometric methodology as its research strategy to provide an objective and replicable analysis of large volumes of academic literature. This research strategy incorporates two complementary streams of analyses, as proposed by Donthu, Kumar et al. (2021), namely performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis techniques enable the researchers to map the most prolific authors, institutions, countries, and journals as well as the most frequently used keywords, and track the annual publication trends (answering **RQ1**, **RQ2**, **RQ3**, and **RQ4** through frequency and correlation analysis), while science mapping reveals and visualises the intellectual structure and thematic clusters within the field through keyword co-occurrence, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling techniques which provide the means of discovering the answers to the remaining research questions. This dual strategy enables a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge production and evolving focus areas in corporate reputation studies within PR.

Data Collection

The study sourced its data from the WoS database on February 20, 2024. WoS was selected as the exclusive database for this study for several reasons. First of all, recent studies confirm that WoS remains a robust and widely accepted database for bibliometric analysis, especially in communication and PR research. For instance, Ivanitskaya and Erzikova (2023) argue that Scopus does not fully index all core PR journals, while WoS covers a more curated selection, enhancing data quality and reliability for communication studies. Secondly, being among the most favoured and trustworthy databases (Gasparyan et al., 2013), WoS ensures the inclusion of high-quality,

peer-reviewed publications, as it systematically indexes top-tier journals, unlike Google Scholar, which has been harshly criticised due to its inconsistency of search results, duplicate entries, non-peer-reviewed publications, and lack of metadata control (Aguillo, 2012; Chertow et al., 2021; Farooq, 2023; Jacsó, 2010). Thirdly, WoS provides better precision and avoids dilution of quality due to the inclusion of less rigorous content, even though Scopus and Google Scholar seem to have broader coverage. Finally, encompassing over 20,000 bibliometric studies across more than 250 disciplines (Ball, 2017). WoS indexes journals, approximately 99.11% of which are also covered in Scopus, indicating that WoS's selectiveness could be advantageous for focused and high-quality bibliometric analyses, especially when considering the quality over the number of journals (Singh et al., 2021). In light of these considerations, WoS was selected as the sole database for this study to ensure the robustness and high-quality standards of the research.

In the process of identifying the keywords to select the publications within the scope of the study, terms related to the core concepts of corporate reputation and PR were reviewed in the pertinent literature. The keywords applied in the WoS database query are outlined below:

TS=(“corporate reputation”) OR TS=(“corporate communication”) OR TS=(“public relations”) OR TS=(“communication management”) AND (DT=(“ARTICLE”) AND EDN=(“WOS.SSCI” OR “WOS.ESCI” OR “WOS.SCI” OR “WOS.AHCI”) AND LA=(“ENGLISH”)

The WoS database search yielded 11,096 publications. Several data selection criteria were applied. The data search did not use any filters (e.g., publication year, country, or journal) except for WoS categories, publication type, and the language of publications. Categories considered were those indexing journals where the study's keywords appeared, excluding all but the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Science Citation Index (SCI), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), and Emerging Science Citation Index (ESCI). This study only included original research articles on corporate reputation and PR published in academic journals. It excluded all publication types other than “article,” such as book chapters and conference proceedings, to maintain academic integrity, ensure consistency, and enhance reliability by eliminating the lack of standardised peer-review processes (Magrini et al., 2019), or irregular citation behaviour (Aslam, 2024) posed by such publication types (Vandewalle et al., 2022). Selection also depended on the authors' language proficiency, as the studies in the data set were to be closely reviewed for evaluating and understanding research clusters in the science mapping process of the data analysis. Therefore, studies not in English, the author's proficient language, were excluded. A total

of 11,096 publications were downloaded as a .txt file. To ensure the accuracy and integrity of the dataset, a systematic de-duplication process was applied. Duplicate entries ($n = 201$) were first automatically identified and removed using BiblioShiny's in-built duplicate detection algorithm, which flags records with identical titles, authors, and DOIs. Following the automated process, a manual verification step was conducted to check for any residual duplicates ($n = 14$) caused by metadata inconsistencies such as variations in author names or publication details. Additionally, retracted papers ($n = 8$) were identified and removed from the dataset by the authors. This rigorous data-cleaning process resulted in 10,873 unique and valid publications, ensuring that no redundancy or data overlap influenced the subsequent bibliometric analysis.

Data Analysis

The data underwent bibliometric analysis through performance analysis and science mapping techniques within the BiblioShiny and VOSViewer applications. Performance analysis aids researchers in descriptively assessing how publications on a specific topic contribute to the field and offers an overview of the characteristics of these publications, including authorship, institutional affiliations, country, journals, citation counts, and collaborations (Cobo et al., 2011; Ramos Rodríguez & Ruíz Navarro, 2004). Science mapping explores the connections among publication characteristics in a given field by integrating sub-techniques like citation analysis, co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-word analysis, and co-authorship analysis with network analysis. This approach allows researchers to uncover the bibliometric and intellectual framework within the field (Baker et al., 2020). In this study, BiblioShiny was utilised for conducting performance analysis, citation analysis, and co-authorship analysis. Meanwhile, VOSViewer was employed for analysing keyword co-occurrence, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling, among other science mapping analyses. The selection of these tools was based on their robust capabilities in bibliometric analysis, particularly suited for large datasets and network visualisations in communication and PR research. BiblioShiny offers flexible statistical tools within R, supporting detailed performance and thematic analyses, as demonstrated by previous social sciences literature (Castro et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2023; Shekhar & Shah, 2023). VOSviewer complements this by providing advanced, user-friendly visualisations of co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword networks, validated in recent studies like Patra et al. (2024). Compared to tools like CiteSpace, which require paid licencing and focus heavily on temporal analysis, BiblioShiny and VOSviewer are open

source, enhancing transparency and reproducibility. Additionally, alternatives like Gephi or Sci2 Tool offer less bibliometric-specific functionality and steeper learning curves. This combination ensures analytical depth, visual clarity, and methodological rigour aligned with current best practices.

The data analysis procedures were explained step-by-step through considering two different streams of bibliometric analysis methods: performance analysis and science mapping. The initial phase of performance analysis included the quantification of the scholarly contributions to the field. Via the BiblioShiny application, the annual growth rates, publication trends, and citation metrics were calculated to establish an overview of the temporal distribution of research outputs. In this regard, the frequency of the total publications was taken into account while determining the annual growth rates, most prolific authors, institutions, countries, sources, and keywords used by the authors. Besides, the author productivity rates were evaluated by applying Lotka's Law, which is a common technique to identify the concentration level of authors in a specific field. Furthermore, the core sources publishing articles in the field were discovered by using Bradford's Law, which helps researchers find out the leading journals that generate the most influential publications. The thematic map, which highlights the basic and motor keywords as well as the niche and declining keywords, was generated on the BiblioShiny application by using 500 most common author keywords accumulated through the Louvain algorithm. In the performance analysis stage, the total citation numbers were considered while assessing the impact of the journals in the field of research, and the journals with the most citations were compared to those with the most publications to indicate the role of the possible interrelationships between citations and publications in the level of influences of a journal.

The science mapping stage involved three types of analysis: keyword co-occurrence, co-citation analysis, and bibliographic coupling. These analyses were conducted on the VOSviewer application. For the keyword co-occurrence analysis, the author keywords were selected through the full counting method which enables giving equal weight to all occurrences of a keyword, and then the occurrence threshold was set to a minimum number of 100 co-occurrences a keyword must have, considering that the higher the threshold, the fewer the keywords will be included, focusing on the most frequently occurring ones. In terms of the co-citation analysis, cited references were chosen to find connections between specific references cited by articles in the dataset, and all occurrences of cited references were given equal weight through the full counting method. The co-citation threshold was set to a minimum of 100 co-

citations for a publication to be included in the analysis. While a higher threshold reduces the number of references in the network, it centres around the most influential ones. Finally, the bibliographic coupling analysis was carried out by selecting the documents as a unit of analysis to analyse the individual articles and their shared references. Again, full counting was implemented, and the coupling threshold was set to a minimum number of 350 shared references required for a document to be included in the analysis. It was determined to set a higher threshold to limit the analysis to the most strongly coupled items.

Beyond applying standard performance analysis and science mapping, this study advances bibliometric techniques in the PR context through three methodological innovations. First, we combined algorithmic clustering (Louvain modularity in BiblioShiny and VOSviewer) with PR-specific conceptual segmentation, labelling clusters according to established PR theory domains such as excellence theory, relationship management, and crisis communication, thereby enhancing interpretability for field professionals. Second, we implemented a longitudinal keyword trend analysis that tracks thematic evolution over five decades, revealing shifts in PR scholarship that are often missed in cross-sectional bibliometric maps. Third, by setting higher inclusion thresholds for co-occurrence (≥ 100), co-citation (≥ 100), and bibliographic coupling (≥ 350 shared references), we concentrated the analysis on the most influential and thematically cohesive nodes, yielding more robust and noise-resistant network structures (Cobo et al., 2011; Ramos Rodríguez & Ruíz Navarro, 2004; Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). This integration of clustering precision, theory-informed interpretation, and temporal trend mapping offers a replicable model for domain-specific bibliometric studies seeking to bridge technical rigour with disciplinary relevance.

Results

The publications included in the analysis were prepared between 1970 and 2024. The annual growth rate of the area was determined as 5.7%.

Performance Analysis Results

When the publications written with a focus on corporate reputation and PR were evaluated in number by year, it was seen in Figure 1 that publications on this subject gained momentum after 2005, and the most publications were found in 2023 ($f = 821$). Although there were few publications until 2004, after the first publication in 1970, a significant number of publications were determined to have occurred after 2015. Considering the

citation status by year, it was determined that citations fluctuated, and the most citations were received in 2002 ($f = 68$), and citations tended to decrease after 2020. The growth of publications after 2005 aligns with the increasing scholarly and practical interest in the strategic role of reputation management in the context of PR. This momentum, peaking in 2023, reflects the evolving complexities of corporate reputation as a strategic asset in an interconnected global landscape. This trend may derive from the rise of digital media and increased emphasis on stakeholder engagement, which transformed how corporations interact with their publics, leading to a greater need for reputation management and strategic communication (Men, 2014). In the same vein, it is noted that the proliferation of social media and the heightened visibility of corporate actions have prompted organisations to pay more attention to their reputation and to actively engage in PR strategies (Coombs, 2007). Furthermore, the significant increase in publications after 2015 may be attributed to several global developments, such as the rise in CSR initiatives, crises that require reputation management, and the increasing acknowledgement of corporate reputation as a vital intangible asset for business sustainability (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021; Kumari et al., 2021; Park et al., 2024). Yet, the decline in citations after 2020 might be due to several reasons, such as the influence of the global pandemic (COVID-19), which has likely redirected scholarly focus to more current and relevant themes.

The data shows that there were 17,168 authors publishing in the field. When a descriptive evaluation is made in terms of authors contributing to the field, the most published author in the field of corporate reputation and PR is Maureen Taylor (TP = 43; TC = 3,681), followed by Jordi Xifra (TP = 39; TC = 492), Sungsu Kim (TP = 38; TC = 1,067), Yeunjae Lee (TP = 36; TC = 729), Ansgar Zerfass (TP = 36; TC = 623), Yan Jin (TP = 34; TC = 1828), Glen T. Cameron (TP = 33; TC = 846), Damion Waymer (TP = 31; TC = 487), Michael L. Kent (TP = 30; TC = 3,179), and Linjuan Rita Men (TP = 30; TC = 1,247). Taylor emerged as the most prolific author, demonstrating a strong influence on the field, which might be linked to her extensive work on crisis communication and the strategic use of social media in PR that set foundational guidelines and provided practical frameworks for both researchers and practitioners (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Lotka's Law is used in bibliometric research to determine the scientific productivity of authors (Thompson & Walker, 2015). According to this law, 60% of the total number of authors publishing in a particular scientific field contribute to the field with a single publication, while 15% contribute two publications and 7% contribute three publications to the relevant field (Patra &

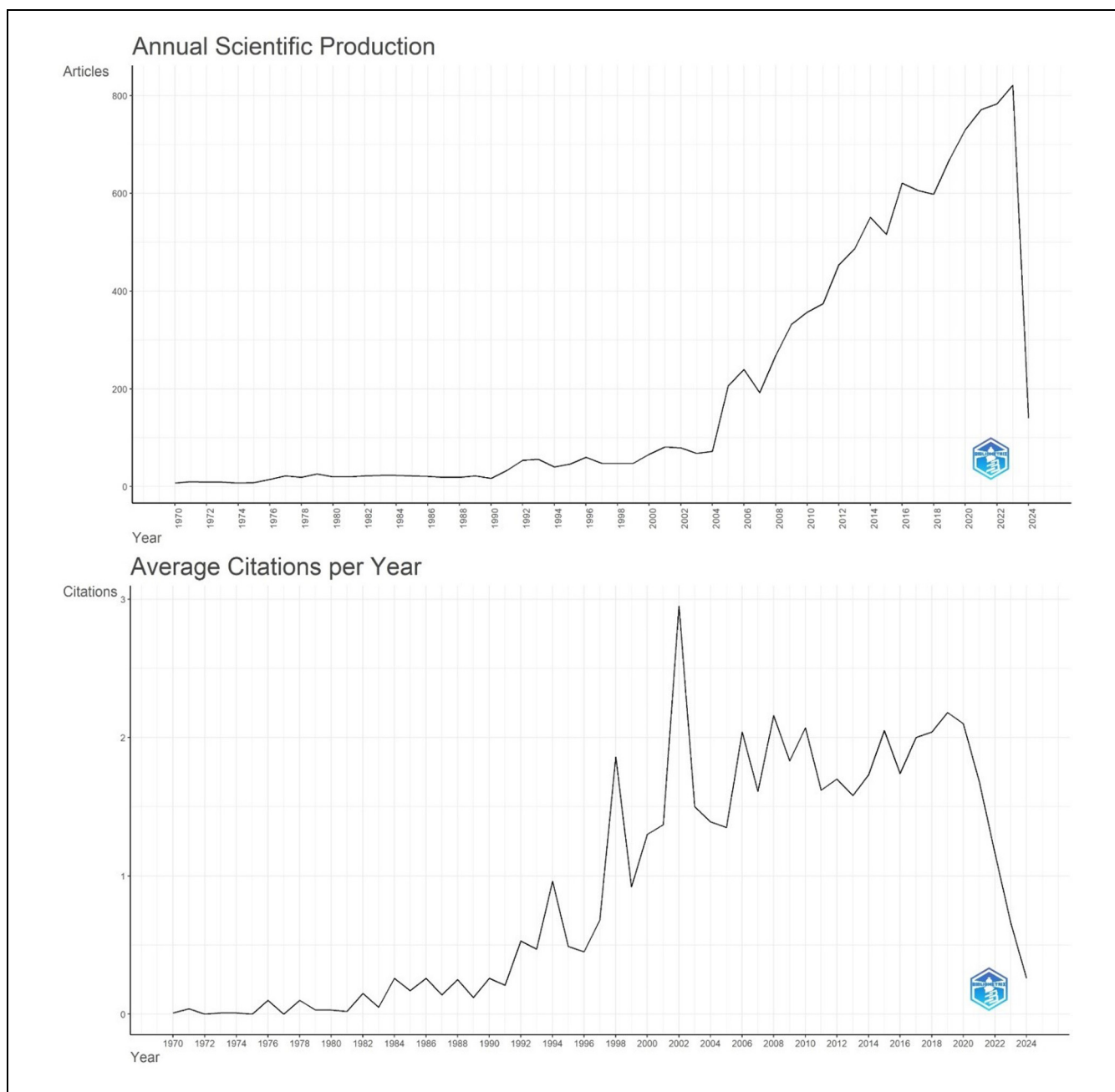


Figure 1. Average number of publications and citations by year.

Mishra, 2006; Thompson & Walker, 2015). Considering the contribution rate of authors who have published in the corporate reputation and PR literature to the field, the ratio of authors with one publication in the field is 84%, the ratio of authors with two publications is 9% and the ratio of authors with three publications is 2% (Figure 2). This distribution indicates a higher concentration of authors contributing only a single publication to the field than what Lotka's Law would typically predict. The percentage of authors with one publication

(84%) is significantly higher than the 60% baseline suggested by Lotka, while the percentages of authors with two or three publications (9% and 2%, respectively) are lower than the expected rates of 15% and 7%. In summary, the ratio of authors in the corporate reputation and PR literature deviates from the typical distribution predicted by Lotka's Law, suggesting unique characteristics or stages of development in this field that lead to a higher proportion of one-time contributors. This deviation from Lotka's Law could be due to higher barriers to

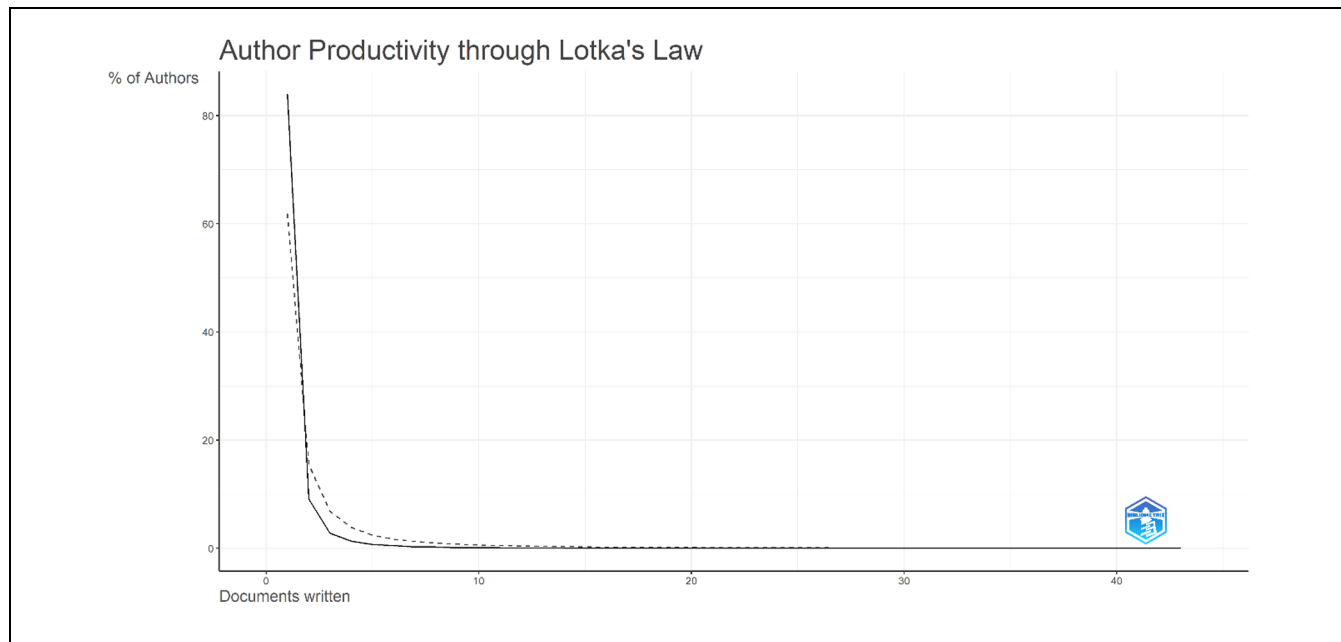


Figure 2. Productivity level of authors according to Lotka's Law.

Table 1. Most Productive Journals.

	Journals	TP	TC	PY_start
1	<i>Public Relations Review</i>	1,578	34,471	1978
2	<i>Journal of Communication Management</i>	328	5,010	2005
3	<i>Corporate Communications</i>	303	5,226	2005
4	<i>Journal of Public Relations Research</i>	217	6,331	2008
5	<i>Corporate Reputation Review</i>	186	4,270	2005
6	<i>Public Relations Inquiry</i>	178	1,740	2012
7	<i>Sustainability</i>	117	1,787	2011
8	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	110	10,000	1987
9	<i>Profesional de la Informacion</i>	74	630	2010
10	<i>Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly</i>	59	1,205	1995

Note. TP = total publication; TC = total citation; PY_start = publication start year; TA = topic area.

entry or continuation, a large number of peripheral contributors, or the ever-growing nature of the field. The skewed author productivity pattern – few prolific authors alongside many single publication contributors – suggests PR scholarship remains relatively fragmented, consistent with the characteristics of an emerging or still-consolidating field (Persson, 2010; Price, 1976).

Publications in the relevant field between 1970 and 2024 were published in a total of 2,807 journals. The total number of citations and the year of publication of the 10 most published journals are presented in Table 1 below. The top three journals with the most publications are *Public Relations Review* (TP = 1,578; TC = 34,471; PY_start = 1978), *Journal of Communication Management* (TP = 328; TC = 5,010; PY_start = 2005) and *Corporate*

Communications (TP = 303; TC = 5,226; PY_start = 2005). When examined in terms of total number of citations, the top three journals were *Public Relations Review* (TP = 1,578; TC = 34,471; PY_start = 1978), *Journal of Business Ethics* (TP = 110; TC = 10,000; PY_start = 1987), and *Journal of Public Relations Research* (TP = 217; TC = 6,331; PY_start = 2008). While *Public Relations Review* leads in both the number of publications and citations within this field, it is notable that the *Journal of Business Ethics* has garnered more citations than other journals ranked higher in the list of the top 10 most productive journals, even though it publishes fewer articles. This indicates the substantial impact and quality of research published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, highlighting its significant contribution to the field despite a smaller volume

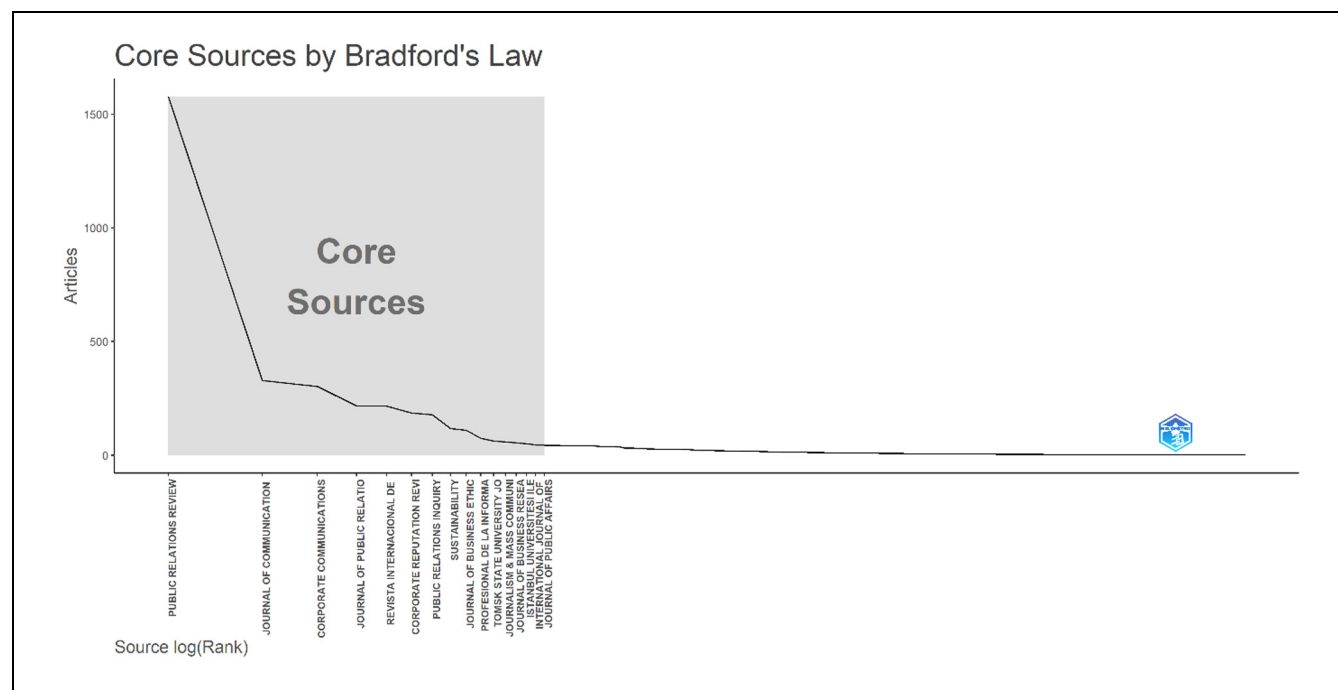


Figure 3. Core journals by Bradford's Law.

of publications. The contrast between the number of publications and the total citations across these journals suggests that while publication volume is one measure of a journal's influence, the quality, relevance, and interdisciplinarity of the content also play crucial roles. Journals like the *Journal of Business Ethics* demonstrate that even with a smaller number of publications, a focus on high-impact, widely applicable themes such as ethics, CSR, and stakeholder management can result in a significant citation count and influence across multiple disciplines (Anani Bossman, 2021). Overall, these trends indicate that while *Public Relations Review* remains the dominant journal in terms of both volume and impact thanks to its being the oldest of the top three journals, its longstanding presence and consistent contributions to the field addressing emerging issues such as crisis communication, other journals like *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* – counted as one of the top cited journals with a focus on rigorous empirical research, theory testing, and the application of social science methodologies to PR problems – play critical roles in shaping scholarly discussions and advancing the theoretical and practical understanding of corporate reputation and PR.

Bradford's Law is applied in bibliometric studies to determine the efficiency levels of journals publishing in a selected field by taking into account the citations they receive (Ball, 2017). The basic argument of this law is that a few core journals publishing in a particular field produce one-third of the publications in that field, and

these journals are called “core sources” (Patra & Mishra, 2006). The other third of the publications are published by a larger number of journal groups (Region 2) than the core sources, and the publications in the last third are presented to the literature by a third journal group (Region 3), which is larger than the first two journal groups (Tripathi & Thukral, 2018). Figure 3 shows that 16 journals in the core region have a share of 33.31% with 3,622 publications, 344 journals in Region 2 have a share of 33.7% with 3,664 publications, and 2,447 journals in Region 3 have a share of 32.9% with 3,587 publications. This distribution closely aligns with Bradford's Law, as we see a concentration of a significant portion of publications (about one-third) in a relatively small number of core journals. The subsequent regions, despite having significantly more journals, each contribute roughly another third to the total publications in the field, with each group of journals producing progressively fewer publications on average. Thus, based on this distribution, it does comply with Bradford's Law, which points to a small but growing core publication outlets, indicating gradual movement towards a mature core-periphery journal structure (Egghe, 2005).

Upon evaluating the data concerning the top 10 institutions where publications in the specified field were produced, as detailed in Table 2, it is evident that the majority of these universities are situated in the United States of America (USA). This finding aligns with the broader trend of the USA institutions leading scholarly

Table 2. Most Productive Institutions.

	Institution	Country	TP
1	University of Alabama	USA	360
2	Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine	Ukraine	271
3	State University System of Florida	USA	251
4	University of North Carolina Chapel Hill	USA	208
5	University of Houston	USA	188
6	Universidad de Malaga	Spain	176
7	University of Georgia	USA	176
8	University of Florida	USA	151
9	University of Missouri	USA	147
10	University of Ohio	USA	143

contributions in many social sciences, including PR and communication studies (Coombs & Holladay, 2015; Ki & Khang, 2005). It is observed that, although the USA hosts a greater number of universities compared to other regions globally, the list comprises universities only from Ukraine and Spain. The inclusion of institutions from only two other countries – Spain and Ukraine – among the top 10 institutions suggests that while research in corporate reputation and PR is truly global, the concentration of leading research institutions remains relatively limited geographically. This may be attributed to specific research strengths or academic traditions within these countries, as well as the collaborative nature of the authors from these countries with those from the US counterparts.

In the country-based analysis in Table 3, independent of institutions, it was found that the USA and Spain hold the top positions on the list of top 10 countries producing the most publications, aligning with institutional findings. However, the USA has produced three times as many publications as Spain. Following the USA and Spain, the United Kingdom (UK) and China occupy the third and fourth spots, respectively, deviating from the institutional findings. The UK's academic tradition in communication studies accounts for its strong performance in this area (Gregory & Willis, 2022). Similarly, China's growing presence is reflective of its rapid economic development and globalisation, which has driven a growing interest in corporate reputation, PR, and strategic communication (Chen et al., 2019). Another notable observation is that the volume of publications from the USA, which leads the list, is roughly 15 times greater than that of Brazil, which is positioned tenth. Brazil's position signifies the growing interest and contributions of Latin American scholars to corporate reputation and PR. The dominance of USA-based publications shows that language barriers and limited access to funding may restrict the visibility and participation of scholars from

Table 3. Most Productive Countries.

	Country	TP
1	USA	5,671
2	Spain	1,656
3	UK	1,099
4	China	1,028
5	Germany	800
6	Australia	791
7	Russia	749
8	Ukraine	481
9	South Korea	393
10	Brazil	364

non-English-speaking regions, leading to their underrepresentation in indexed literature.

Considering the cross-country co-authorship situation, it was seen that the highest number of research partnerships occurred between the USA and China, with 106 joint publications, as seen in Figure 4. This suggests a strong collaborative relationship in research between these two countries, likely driven by complementary expertise, shared research interests, or strategic academic partnerships (Chen et al., 2019). When the top 10 country pairs with the most partnerships are examined, the country pairs following USA-China are USA-Korea ($f = 90$), USA-UK ($f = 66$), USA-Australia ($f = 56$), USA-Germany ($f = 44$), USA-Canada ($f = 43$), UK-Australia ($f = 39$), UK-China ($f = 36$), Spain-UK ($f = 33$), and UK-Germany ($f = 30$). The USA features prominently in this list, appearing in all of the top six country pairs, which implies that the USA is a central hub in international research collaborations, possibly because of its extensive research infrastructure and investment in scientific inquiry (Ki & Khang, 2005). Furthermore, there appears to be a significant number of collaborations between the UK and other English-speaking countries such as the USA ($f = 66$), Australia ($f = 56$), and Canada ($f = 43$), which could be facilitated by shared language and cultural ties, as well as historical connections through the Commonwealth (Godin & Gingras, 2000). The UK also has a notable number of partnerships with European countries like Germany ($f = 30$) and Spain ($f = 33$), which might be influenced by geographic proximity and the European Union's (pre-Brexit) research funding and mobility programmes that encourage intra-European collaboration. Apart from the USA's collaboration with Asian countries, UK-China ($f = 36$) partnerships are also notable, pointing to the UK's strong research ties within the Asia-Pacific region.

It was determined that the number of keywords added to the publications by authors publishing in the field of corporate reputation and PR was 20,426. When we look

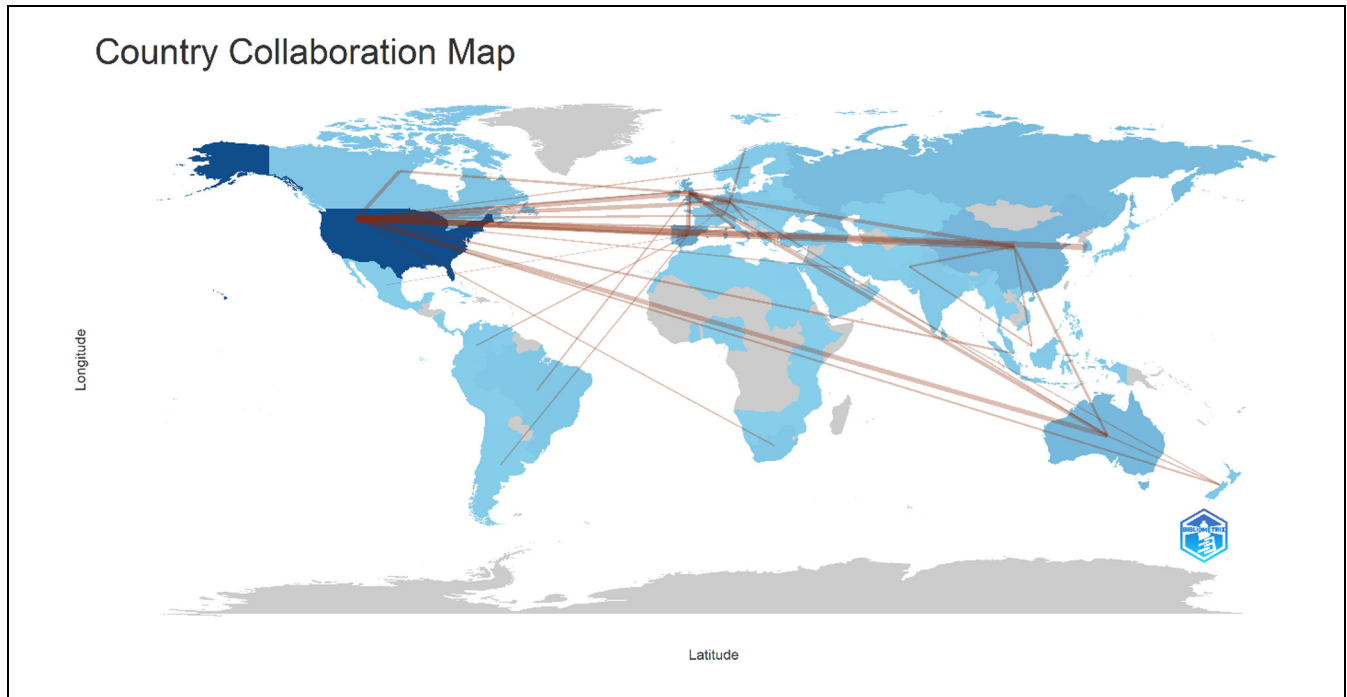


Figure 4. Country collaboration map.

at the top 15 keywords in publications, the word “public relations” ($f = 2,092$) comes first, followed by “corporate reputation” ($f = 1,049$), “communication management” ($f = 629$), “corporate social responsibility” ($f = 628$), “social media” ($f = 594$), “corporate communication” ($f = 543$), “crisis communication” ($f = 248$), “strategic communication” ($f = 160$), “ethics” ($f = 156$), “trust” ($f = 151$), “advertising” ($f = 134$), “stakeholders” ($f = 130$), “sustainability” ($f = 125$), “journalism” ($f = 123$), and “corporate image” ($f = 113$). The predominance of the term “public relations” indicates that the field remains strongly grounded in traditional PR concepts. It suggests that much of the scholarly work revolves around the role of PR in reputation management and stakeholder engagement, which aligns with foundational theories and frameworks that position PR as a key strategic function in building and maintaining corporate reputation (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The second most used keyword – corporate reputation – underscores the centrality of reputation as a core concept in the field. Research emphasises that it is an essential asset for organisations, influencing stakeholder perceptions and contributing to competitive advantage (C. J. Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). Keywords like “communication management” and “corporate social responsibility” also feature prominently. The emphasis on “communication management” highlights the importance of strategically managing communication processes to support reputation building (Zerfass & Viertmann,

2017). Meanwhile, research has increasingly explored how CSR initiatives contribute to the perceived legitimacy and trustworthiness of organisations (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021). The presence of “social media” reflects the influence of digital communication technologies on PR and corporate reputation management. Scholars have explored how these channels impact corporate communications, stakeholder engagement, and reputational crises (Kent & Taylor, 2016). Other notable keywords like “crisis communication,” “strategic communication,” and “ethics” reveal key themes within the field. The attention to crisis communication points to the critical role of PR in managing reputational risks and responding to crises effectively, as highlighted by theories like Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007). The emphasis on “strategic communication” aligns with the broader trend of integrating communication strategies into overall organisational management (Hallahan et al., 2007), while the keyword “ethics” reflects the growing concern for transparency, integrity, and ethical conduct in shaping corporate reputation. Finally, the presence of keywords such as “trust,” “advertising,” “stakeholders,” “sustainability,” and “journalism” illustrates the diversity of research interests in the field. “Trust” is a fundamental component of reputation and is critical to building strong relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. “Stakeholders” are central to reputation management as their perceptions and actions can significantly impact a

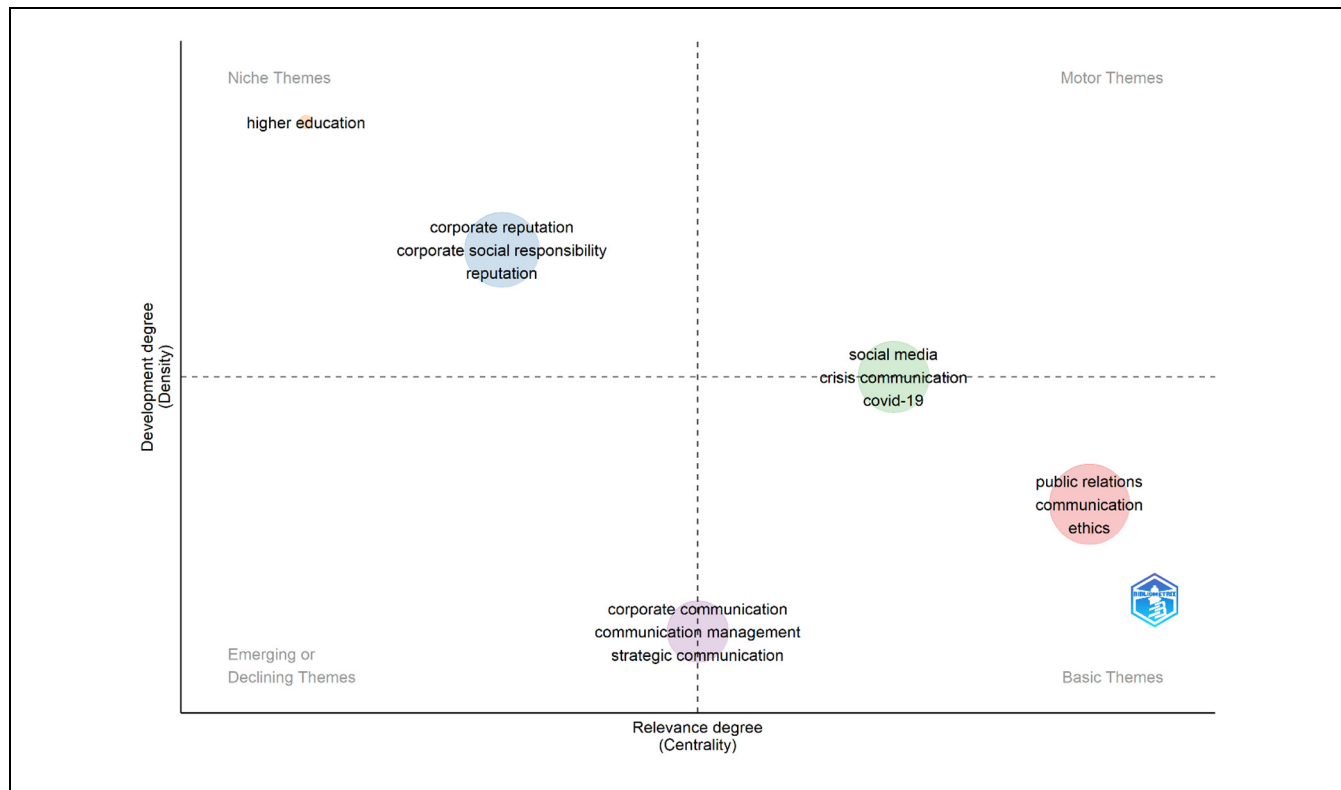


Figure 5. Thematic map (Unit: Author's keywords).

company's public image (Freeman, 1984). The keywords "advertising" and "journalism" suggest that PR research often intersects with other communication fields, exploring different forms of media and messaging that influence corporate reputation (Kim et al., 2021). "Sustainability" reflects the growing academic focus on how sustainable business practices and CSR initiatives affect stakeholder perceptions and contribute to long-term reputational capital (Gomez Trujillo et al., 2020).

The thematic map created with 500 keywords using the Louvain algorithm, which is determined to be the most accurate algorithm among clustering algorithms (Emmons et al., 2016), essentially consists of four regions (Figure 5). The region called "motor theme" contains well-developed words that create and shape the structure of the research field examined (Franco et al., 2023). The region named "basic theme" contains words that are frequently emphasised but not developed enough, and it is considered valuable to address the words here in future studies for the development of the field (Efendi et al., 2022). The words in the third region, the "niche theme" region, include words that are specialised but remain in the marginal field and therefore need to be given extra attention by researchers (Ahadi et al., 2022). Finally, although the words in the "emerging or declining theme" region affect the field examined at a low level, they can

lead to the emergence of research areas that will make a difference if they are emphasised (Mühl & de Oliveira, 2022). In this study, the topics "social media," "crisis communication" and "COVID-19" are in between the "motor theme" and "basic theme" regions indicating they are important and central to the fields as topics in the "motor themes" quadrant, yet they may still be possibly in a stage of active development and refinement due to their position in the "basic themes" quadrant. Specifically, for "COVID-19" theme, this positioning could indicate that it is a relatively new area of research prompted by the recent pandemic, and this has rapidly become central and connected to many other research areas due to its global impact. "Social media" and "crisis communication" are established yet evolving fields, driven by rapid technological and social changes, sustaining ongoing research and discussion. Taken together, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have accelerated digital strategies in PR-driven reputation management, with social media serving as both a rapid-response platform and a potential amplifier of crises (Park et al., 2024; Roshan et al., 2016). Similarly, the topics "corporate communication," "communication management," and "strategic communication" are in between the "basic themes" and "emerging or declining themes" regions indicating that these topics are established concepts

within the field, either being redefined and gaining new relevance due to emerging trends, or shifts in corporate strategies or potentially losing prominence in current research compared to more contemporary issues, leading them towards the “Declining Themes” quadrant. This positioning reflects a transitional status in the research landscape, highlighting the dynamic nature of these fields as they adapt to new challenges and scholarly interests (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). In the “basic theme” region, we also encounter the words “public relations,” “communication,” and “ethics.” These themes form the conceptual backbone of PR and reputation management. “Ethics,” in particular, has been a long-standing concern within PR, emphasising transparency, integrity, and responsible corporate behaviour as key components of managing reputation and stakeholder trust (Bowen, 2007). Furthermore, in the “niche themes” region, two clusters emerge; one cluster includes only the word “higher education” while the other cluster contains the words “corporate reputation,” “corporate social responsibility,” and “reputation.” Research in this niche often focuses on issues such as university reputation management, branding in the higher education sector, and the role of PR in academic institutions (Roper & Davies, 2007), while it also shows that it focuses on specialised aspects of corporate reputation management

such as the impact of CSR on stakeholder perceptions and the building of corporate image (Kumari et al., 2021). From the Thematic Map, it can be seen that the position of the word “higher education” is higher than the other words in the same quadrant, which means that the former, as a theme with a relatively high development degree or density within the field, has attracted a substantial body of research. Yet, it is seen as a niche area that, while perhaps not central to the overall field (as indicated by its leftward position on the horizontal axis), is nonetheless a significant and specialised domain of knowledge.

Science Mapping Results

The science mapping in this study is based on three analyses: keyword co-occurrence, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling. In the keyword co-occurrence network analysis (Figure 6), three clusters emerge. Cluster A (blue) focuses on “public relations” and includes nodes like “media,” “journalism,” “ethics,” “advertising,” and “marketing.” This suggests that the theme “public relations” is commonly discussed in conjunction with these themes in the analysed literature. Cluster B (green) centralises around “corporate reputation” and includes nodes such as “corporate social responsibility,”

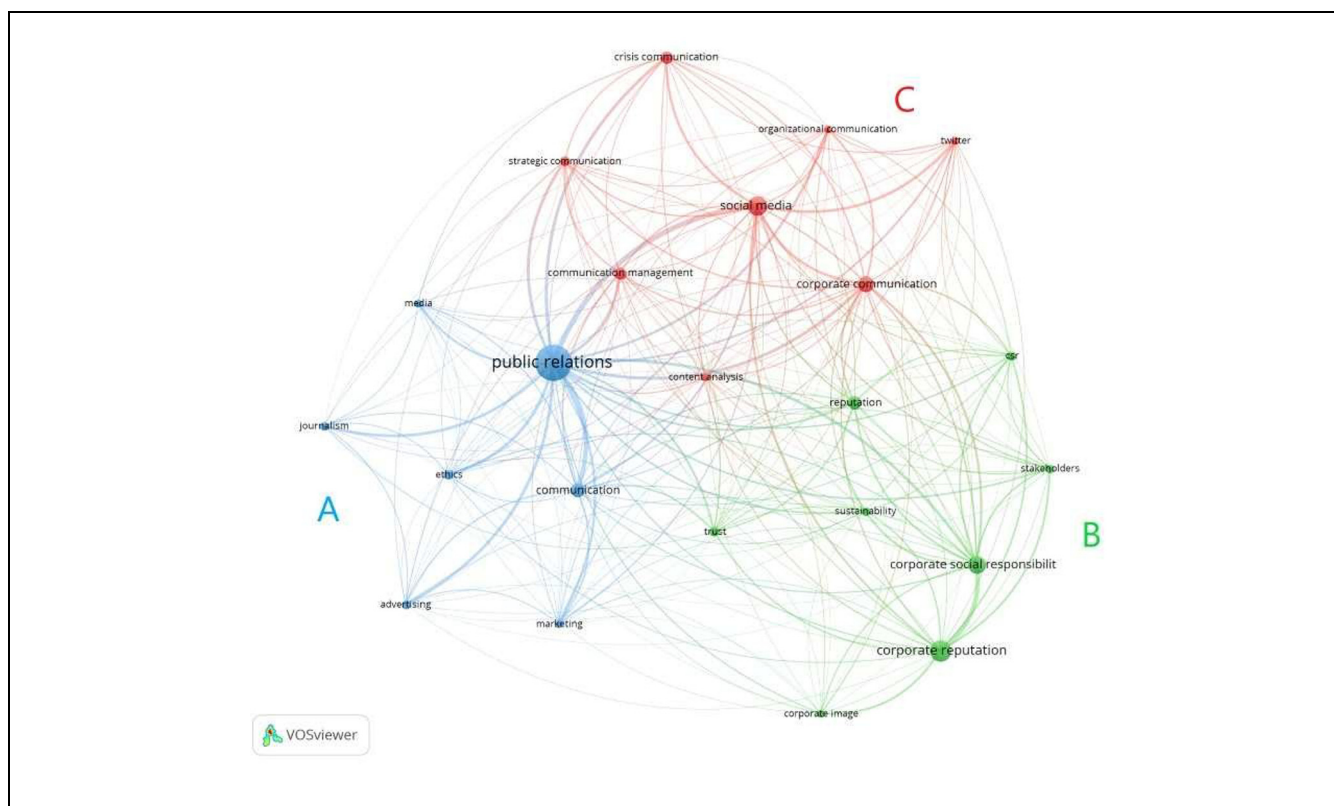


Figure 6. Keyword co-occurrence map.

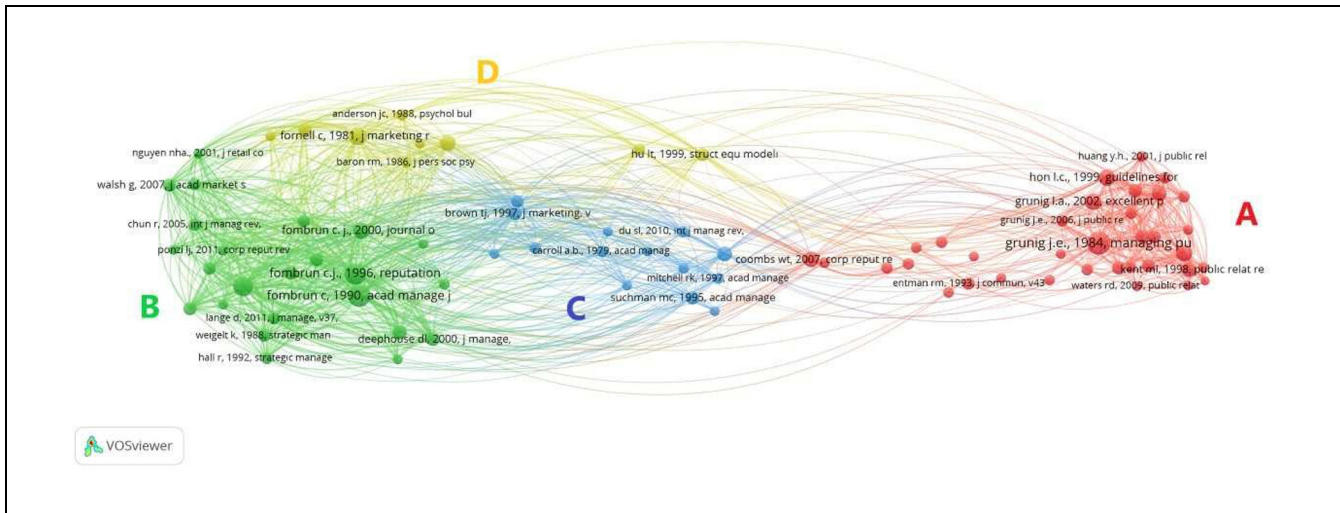


Figure 7. Co-citation analysis map.

“sustainability,” “trust,” “stakeholders,” and “corporate image.” Furthermore, Cluster C (red) is concerned with “crisis communication,” and includes nodes like “social media,” “strategic communication,” “communication management,” “organisational communication,” and “Twitter.” This indicates a connection between crisis communication and these specific areas, possibly reflecting the role of social media and strategic considerations in managing communications during crises. The overall network illustrates that the field is interconnected, with certain themes bridging across clusters. The strength of the connections and the proximity of the nodes to each other suggest how closely related the concepts are within the literature. The fact that “social media” is closely linked to “crisis communication” might suggest that many discussions about crisis communication in the current era include the role of social media. In sum, the lines connecting terms within Cluster A to terms in Clusters B and C indicate that “public relations” has its distinct body of literature and shares common ground with “corporate reputation” and “crisis communication.” This might reflect the role of PR in building and maintaining corporate reputation, as well as its importance in crisis communication efforts.

Donthu, Kumar et al. (2021) argue that the publications cited together typically concentrate on similar themes. Leveraging this principle, co-citation analysis (Figure 7) was employed on the references cited by publications in the field of corporate reputation and PR. This analysis aimed to uncover the intellectual structure and common themes within this specific research field. In this analysis, references needed to be cited at least 100 times to be included. Out of the initial pool, only 86 references met this criterion, and 82 of these were analysed to produce significant insights. These 82 references formed four

clusters, interconnected by a network of 2,839 links, illustrating the intellectual cohesion and thematic concentration within the field.

The co-citation analysis results in four main clusters. Cluster A seems densely packed with nodes, indicating a high degree of co-citation among these works, which suggests that they are strongly related thematically and have significantly influenced each other. The works by Grunig and colleagues are prominent and seminal in the field of PR. The presence of works titled “Managing Public Relations” and “Excellent Public Relations” suggests this cluster could be centred around foundational theories and practices of PR as congruent with the study researching the models in PR bibliometrically (Demir et al., 2020). The predominant theme of this cluster is PR strategies and their effect on corporate and organisational image. Topics covered include crisis communication, dialogic engagement with stakeholders, and relationship management in PR. Cluster B focuses on corporate reputation and identity, with a significant emphasis on how organisations are perceived by external entities. This cluster looks at the definitional landscape of reputation, legitimacy, and strategic management of reputational assets. Cluster C has the central theme of CSR and its integration within corporate strategy. It includes stakeholder theory, moral management, and the effects of CSR on organisational performance. Notably, CSR emerges as a paradoxical case: it forms a smaller, niche cluster in the thematic map yet shows high citation impact, echoing prior findings that CSR-focused studies – while fewer in number – often exert disproportionate influence across PR and corporate reputation research (Anani Bossman, 2021; Arvidsson, 2010). This may indicate that CSR scholarship in PR has developed around concentrated, high-quality contributions rather than a

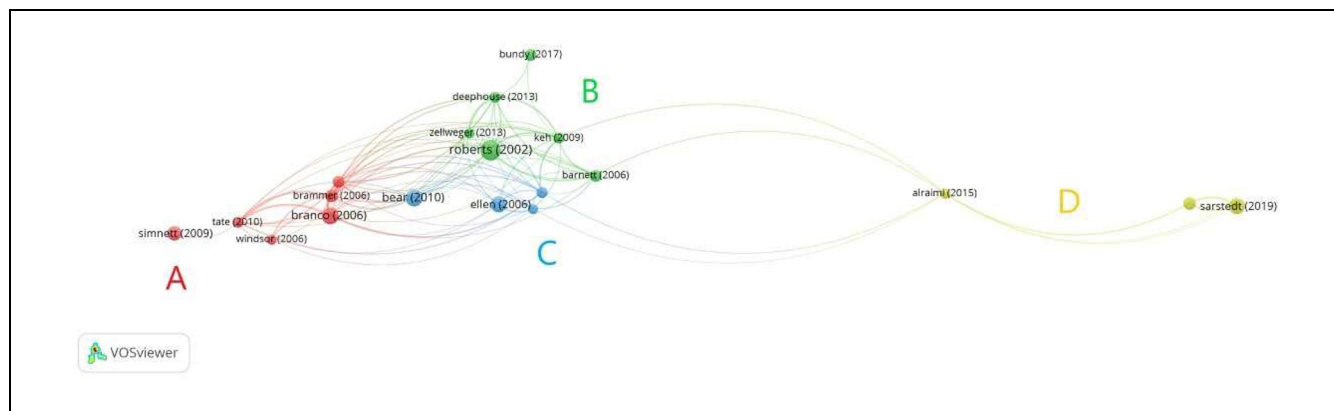


Figure 8. Bibliographic coupling map.

broad research stream. Lastly, Cluster D seems to revolve around statistical methods and modelling in the context of marketing and management research, particularly structural equation modelling and measurement theory.

The basic assumption of the bibliographic coupling technique, which is one of the science mapping techniques, is that two publications with common references will be similar in content. Thanks to this technique, researchers can reveal the comprehensive themes and recent developments of publications written in a particular field (Donthu, Reinartz et al., 2021). In this study, using the VOSViewer application, the number of citations in the publication was adjusted to be at least 350, and as a result of the analysis, 20 publications formed four clusters (Figure 8).

Based on the publications listed under each cluster, cluster themes were deduced. Cluster A, focusing on the intersection of corporate reputation and social responsibility, resonates with prior studies emphasising how philanthropic actions and CSR alignment with social performance enhance organisational image and stakeholder trust (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021; Kumari et al., 2021). Revolving around crisis management and reputation, cluster B aligns with the crisis communication literature, demonstrating how strategic response, stakeholder engagement, and digital platforms – particularly social media – shape reputational outcomes during crises (Coombs, 2007; Roshan et al., 2016). Cluster C deals with the impact of CSR on different aspects of business performance, such as brand equity, reputation, and potentially on greenwashing practices, and it reflects debates on the credibility and authenticity of CSR claims in PR strategy (Arvidsson, 2010; Kent & Taylor, 2016; Lim & Young, 2021). The focus of Cluster D seems to be methodological, concentrating on the use of Partial Least Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in marketing and management research. This

methodological orientation illustrates the growing sophistication of quantitative modelling in communication and management research (Hamidi et al., 2023). These themes suggest a focus on CSR, reputation, crisis management, and advanced statistical methodologies for business research within the literature.

Overall, the findings reveal that research on PR and corporate reputation has evolved around several interrelated themes that collectively define the field. Foundational discussions on crisis communication, dialogic stakeholder engagement, and relationship management highlight the role of PR as both relationship and reputation management, as suggested by earlier scholarship (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2002). Studies on corporate reputation emphasise the importance of legitimacy and the strategic management of reputational assets, reinforcing the view that organisations depend on societal approval to maintain positive reputations and demonstrate responsibility (Steyn, 2009; Steyn & Niemann, 2010). A further body of work foregrounds CSR and stakeholder theory, supporting the argument that CSR functions as a critical communication tool for reputation management (Anani Bossman, 2021). Finally, a methodological focus underscores the significance of measurement and structural equation modelling in reputation management. Collectively, these themes encompass vital aspects of organisational management, spanning from external communication and perception to internal strategies and analytical methodologies.

Discussion and Conclusion

Bibliometric studies create a comprehensive map of literature by identifying pivotal works, conceptual linkages, and research gaps. This methodological rigour is particularly invaluable in disciplines like PR, where interdisciplinary intersections often blur thematic boundaries. Through the integration of performance analysis and

science mapping, this study underscores the critical role of bibliometric methods in aligning theoretical constructs with actionable insights to navigate the complexities of reputation management in a rapidly changing communication environment. This study aims to provide the first comprehensive bibliometric mapping of corporate reputation research within the field of public relations (1970–2024), thus offering implications for PR theory, professional practice, and curriculum development. It demonstrates not only the chronological development of this research area but also the thematic shifts that have shaped its trajectory. In particular, the increasing attention to digital communication, stakeholder engagement, and organisational transparency in recent years confirms the expanding relevance of corporate reputation in a globalised and highly mediated communication environment.

The results suggest that crisis communication via social media is a trending topic and strategic function in PR research to maintain corporate reputation because of the dual nature of social media as a tool for engagement and a platform for misinformation. The positioning of the topics “corporate communication,” “communication management,” and “strategic communication” refers that these concepts are well-established within the field. However, they are undergoing a process of redefinition and gaining renewed relevance due to emerging trends, technological advancements, or shifts in corporate strategies. This positioning mirrors a transitional phase in the research landscape, illustrating the dynamic nature of PR and reputation as they evolve to address new challenges. On the other hand, the concepts of corporate reputation and CSR have been positioned in the niche theme region, which refers to these concepts remaining on the periphery of the field, but needs additional attention from researchers to fully understand their significance and potential impact. An inconsistency arises with corporate reputation and CSR: while mapped as niche themes, their high citation counts underscore their centrality to PR scholarship. This discrepancy highlights the need for closer examination of how these concepts are conceptualised and categorised, as their practical and theoretical significance may be underestimated by their bibliometric positioning.

Building on this foundational understanding of bibliometric analysis, the results extend and refine foundational theories of reputation management. The prominence of crisis communication and digital media themes aligns with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), underscoring the increasing need for adaptive, transparent, and platform-sensitive crisis responses. The nature of social media demands a broadened interpretation that prioritises proactive monitoring and agile strategies. In addition, the recurring emphasis on stakeholder trust, legitimacy, and corporate responsibility reflects the

enduring relevance of the Reputation Quotient Model (C. J. Fombrun et al., 2000), but also points to the need for updated reputation metrics that incorporate digital-era indicators such as social media sentiment, algorithmic visibility, and AI-driven analytics.

Our findings also build upon and extend earlier bibliometric studies. For instance, Ki et al. (2019) identified crisis communication as a dominant theme in PR scholarship, a trend that our analysis further confirms. This is congruent with the work of Elgueta Ruiz and Martínez-Ortiz (2022), which shows that over the last two decades PR research has been largely shaped by social media, strategic communication, and crisis management. The COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies this trajectory, as it rapidly emerged as a central focus for PR scholars (Park et al., 2024), particularly within the context of crisis communication. Unlike earlier studies, however, our analysis positions corporate reputation at the core of PR research, offering a more nuanced perspective on how crisis communication, CSR, and digital transformation converge to define the evolving role of PR in reputation management, thereby highlighting key directions for both future research and practical implications in the field.

This study reveals that social media and digital platforms both enable stakeholder engagement and pose misinformation and reputational risks, underscoring the need for educational programmes to equip future professionals for complex, technology-driven communication environments. In this regard, PR education should move beyond traditional case-based instruction and incorporate simulation-based learning (e.g., VR/AR crisis scenarios), digital monitoring tools, and AI-driven analytics to prepare future professionals for real-time crisis management. From a professional standpoint, corporations should adopt AI-powered sentiment analysis and predictive analytics to anticipate reputational threats and respond proactively. Training programmes for practitioners must therefore emphasise digital literacy, data-driven decision-making, and ethical crisis responses. Building on these needs, we propose a competency framework for PR professionals that prioritises: (1) digital crisis agility, (2) stakeholder-centric legitimacy building, (3) ethical and transparent communication, and (4) fluency in AI-assisted tools. These educational and professional priorities underscore the necessity of equipping both future and current PR professionals with the competencies required to manage reputation in an era defined by digital disruption and ethical complexity. Building on these practical implications, the next step lies in outlining a forward-looking research agenda that can guide the future trajectory of PR-reputation scholarship.

We propose a structured research agenda built on three interconnected pillars: Stakeholder-Centric Engagement and Legitimacy, Digital Transformation and Technological

Integration, and Methodological Innovation. Firstly, integrating Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory, scholars should examine the dynamic interplay between stakeholder expectations, corporate actions, and the evolving definitions of reputation. Secondly, the digital era has redefined the mechanisms through which reputation is built and managed. Research should investigate how emerging technologies – such as AI-driven analytics, VR/AR, and algorithmic communication – reshape PR practices related to reputation management. Lastly, methodological approaches in reputation research require addressing current bibliometric limitations. Future studies should combine quantitative bibliometric mapping with qualitative content analysis to enrich insights. These three pillars outline a clear agenda for future research, guiding scholars towards theoretical advancement and practical strategies that capture the changing role of PR in managing corporate reputation.

This study is not beyond limitations. The reliance on the WoS database may introduce selection bias, as it tends to favour journals with higher impact factors and Western-centric editorial policies. This constraint could lead to the underrepresentation of significant contributions from emerging economies, non-English-speaking regions, or practitioner-oriented publications that are not indexed in WoS. Future studies benefitting from more databases and articulating books, book chapters, dissertations, and proceeding papers could provide more insightful contributions to the literature. Furthermore, it is suggested that the concepts of crisis communication, CSR, and digitalisation, which are vital elements of PR, should be researched bibliometrically in terms of corporate reputation. Also, the methodological aspects of reputation should be revisited, as the nature of reputation is rooted in different fields. Moreover, although citation counts serve as a useful proxy for academic influence, they do not necessarily reflect the theoretical depth, practical relevance, or societal impact of a publication. Citation behaviour can vary across disciplines, and factors such as self-citation, journal visibility, and publication language may distort the interpretation of scholarly influence (Haustein & Larivière, 2015). Finally, the exclusive reliance on quantitative bibliometric data may result in the exclusion of qualitative research contributions and non-indexed yet impactful publications, leading to potential selection bias (Magrini et al., 2019). Addressing these limitations in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pivotal role of PR in sustaining corporate reputation.

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Ethical Considerations

There are no human participants in this article.

Consent to Participate

Informed consent is not required in this article.

Author Contributions

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Data will be made available on request.

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