# Strategic Communication in Public Relations Practices: A Bibliometric Analysis Based on Scopus Database from 2015 to 2025

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**Abstract**
Researchers systematically analyze studies on strategic communication in public relations through a bibliometric review. The aim is to determine the current state and development of research on strategic communication, especially in the context of Public Relations. This research contributes to a broader, more precise understanding of the research landscape on strategic communication and to the identification of keyword trends for future research. The research employed a qualitative approach, along with bibliometric and thematic analyses, to review the literature on strategic communication in the context of public relations. The researcher collected scientific articles on strategic communication in the context of public relations through the Scopus database. The finding that attracts the researcher's attention is the annual growth rate of 2.54% which suggests that academic attention remains relatively limited, which consequently impacts the field's growth trajectory. Another finding of this research is the significant

evolution in research topics that occurred during the period from 2015 to 2025. While previous studies positioned social media and digital technology as 'hot topics' for future inquiry, this study finds that both have since become mature and developing fields. The high density of these keywords indicates that scholars are no longer merely exploring the definitions of social media but are instead investigating in depth how it functions strategically to shape public opinion. The evolution of research topics confirms that the profession is moving beyond technician roles toward strategic management functions, where PR practitioners are increasingly involved in high-level organizational decision-making. The research over the past decade has primarily focused on the corporate context. Consequently, we suggest exploring how non-corporate sectors, such as NGOs, government agencies, and advocacy groups, adopt digital strategic communication practices to achieve their organizational goals.

## 1. Introduction

Strategic communication is an emerging field of study in communication and management science. Hallahan et al. (2007) Introduced the notion of strategic communication as a set of communication efforts intentionally undertaken by an organization across all aspects of its activities to achieve organizational goals. It focuses on the role of communication in achieving its strategic goals and objectives. In simpler terms, strategic communication means individuals engage in planned communication practices on behalf of the organization and its goals. The results of this study elucidate that the construction of meaning within communication serves as a pivotal factor in effective strategic communication.

Another perspective on strategic communication comes from Holtzhausen et al. (2015), who propose that strategic communication is an intentional, purposeful practice carried out by communicators in the public sphere on behalf of communicative entities to achieve set goals. The communicative entities referred to in this context are the entire spectrum of economic and social sectors, including politics, non-profit and government institutions, activist groups, and even public figures. Through strategic communication, organizations can invest their resources efficiently and effectively (Taylor & Sommerfeldt, 2021). According to Patterson et al. (2009, pp. 1–3), after the organization

determines its goals, vision, and mission, it must develop a clear, measurable communication strategy, planning step by step. The steps taken in making a strategic communication plan are analyzing the problem and situation, determining the target audience, setting communication objectives, message planning and design, plan implementation, and measurement and evaluation. To evaluate strategic communication that has been implemented, organizations need to carry out five stages of assessment, which consist of determining the audience and evaluation objectives, reviewing measurable goals and objectives, forming an evaluation team and implementation schedule, determining evaluation methods, and compiling a review process for evaluation reports (Patterson et al., 2009).

Strategic communication planning is a long-term need because it is directly related to an organization's goals. Planning that is less mature from the start can threaten the organization's sustainability. Strategic communication is even more crucial when an organization faces a crisis or a specific issue, requiring a quick, creative, and structured response through proper strategic communication planning. Furthermore, the role of the communicator who represents the organization, in this case, Public Relations, cannot be ignored, because the communicator's credibility in the eyes of a broad audience can affect the effectiveness of delivering organizational messages. The higher the level of public trust in the communicator, the greater the opportunity for the organization to achieve its communication goals.

The preceding explanation demonstrates that strategic communication is recognized as a fundamental framework within Public Relations practice, with direct implications for the sustainability of an organization. This urgency within the practical context must inherently align with the academic advancement of strategic communication, as scientific literature serves as the theoretical reference that provides the foundation for implementing and achieving effective strategies. However, a sufficiently mature theoretical framework to support the strategic communication needs of the PR profession has not yet been comprehensively mapped or identified.

Therefore, this research is crucial to identify urgent areas for inquiry within the intellectual structure of strategic communication. The bibliometric map generated in this study will provide insights into future research directions, ensuring that scholars do not misdirect their focus when selecting research topics, thereby producing scientific references relevant to the needs of PR  practitioners in addressing contemporary

challenges. Furthermore, this mapping is essential to prevent the saturation of specific topics within the field.

This research will systematically analyze studies on strategic communication in the context of public relations using a bibliometric review. The aim is to determine the current state and development of research on strategic communication, especially in the context of Public Relations. In recent years, bibliometric approaches have been increasingly utilized to map trends within communication studies. For instance, research by Wahdaniyah et al. (2025) Provides a comprehensive overview of the influence of social media platforms, such as Twitter, Telegram, YouTube, and Facebook, on the success of election campaigns. This study argues that campaign success is not solely determined by social media factors but is rather the result of the strategic integration of various political elements, such as political communication models and social media.

Furthermore, another study employing bibliometric analysis comes from Priyowidodo & Inri Inggrit Indrayani (2024), who analyzed strategic communication as a mechanism for constructing the image of political candidates in the digital era. That study utilized the Google Scholar database spanning the period from 2000 to 2023. The findings identified that social media and digital technology serve as strategic instruments for political actors to interact with the public. From the perspective of analytical methodology, both aforementioned articles exhibit similarities to this study. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain within these studies, particularly regarding the field of study and thematic focus. While Wahdaniyah et al. (2025) focus on social media usage within the political landscape, and Priyowidodo & Inri Inggrit Indrayani (2024) examine strategic communication within the political realm in the digital era. These studies have not yet elucidated whether social media dominates the discourse in other sectors, such as NGOs, nonprofits, or government institutions. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge this gap by dissecting the intellectual structure of strategic communication within PR practice, specifically looking beyond the context of political power struggles. Unlike previous research focused on sectoral politics, this study specifically maps and analyzes how strategic communication has been adopted in PR practices within corporate, non-profit, and government sectors during the digital transformation decade of 2015 – 2025. The primary novelty of this research lies in its objective to reveal whether a sectoral bias exists in the

application of strategic communication by PR practitioners across diverse industries.

This research contributes to a broader, more precise understanding of the research landscape on strategic communication and to the identification of keyword trends for future research. The bibliometric analysis in this research encompasses annual publication volume to observe research trends, the identification of the most productive authors, influential articles, journals that most frequently publish the topic, and countries with the highest contributions. Furthermore, it includes citation analysis to identify impactful articles, keyword co-occurrence analysis to top map research concepts and thematic networks, as well as a thematic map to visualize research topic trends.

## 2. Method

This article aims to explore and analyze the direction of development of strategic communication studies in the context of public relations during the period 2015 - 2025. The research used a qualitative approach and bibliometric analysis to review the literature on strategic communication in public relations. This method provides a relatively objective and reliable way to understand a field quickly. The bibliometric method can identify trends in the field and predict the frontier of future disciplinary development, thereby improving research efficiency and clarifying research direction (Priyowidodo & Inri Inggrit Indrayani, 2024; Safitri et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024). Through structured analysis of large amounts of literature, trends can be inferred over time, research topics identified, and the relevance of many existing studies assessed (Donthu et al., 2021).

The data for this bibliometric analysis were obtained from the Scopus database on September 02, 2025. The Scopus database was chosen in this study as a source of research data because it provides reliable, high-quality publications, thereby offering accurate, efficient, and relevant information on the field under analysis (Abdullah & Aziz, 2020, p. 930; Elsevier, 2021).

This study collected data from the Scopus database using the keywords "Strategic Communication" AND "Public Relations". These keywords were selected to represent the core of the research, specifically the utilization of strategic communication within public relations activities, and to explicitly filter for articles that bridge the theoretical gap between strategic communication frameworks and PR practices. Furthermore, the adoption of these streamlined keywords aims to

identify the specific intersection of strategic communication concepts within public relations literature. Prior to finalizing these two keywords, researchers employed variations of alternative terminology, such as: TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "Strategic Communication" AND "Public Relations" OR "Corporate Communication" ). However, this string yielded an excessive number of irrelevant articles; consequently, to enhance search precision, the query was refined to "Strategic Communication" AND "Public Relations". The publication timeframe of 2015 – 2025 was selected to encompass research from the last decade, as this period reflects significant technological and digital media developments that have impacted the PR profession.

The search using the keywords "strategic Communication" AND "Public Relations" yielded a total of 383 articles published between 2015 and 2025. Subsequently, to ensure data relevance, researchers filtered the initial 383 articles down to a final set of 145 articles. This screening process was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which encompass identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021), as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Identification**
The initial search yielded 383 documents published between 2015 and 2025

**Screening (Automated)**
- (a) Source Type: Journals (to ensure peer-reviewed quality)
- (b) Document Type: Articles (excluding conference papers and reviews)
- (c) Language: English (to ensure keyword comparability)

**Included**
145 article

**Eligibility**
A manual screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to remove irrelevant entries

**Figure 1.** Flowchart of the used bibliometric methodology

Several inclusion criteria were applied to screen the data; the source type was limited to journals to ensure peer-reviewed quality, and the

document type was restricted to articles in English to ensure keyword comparability. This initial selection process resulted in 182 articles. Following this automated selection, researchers performed a manual screening of article titles and abstracts to eliminate irrelevant results. The primary criterion established for this manual filtering was that the articles must focus on the relationship between strategic communication and the PR profession. In other words, articles focusing solely on military command, political warfare, or internal business management without a clear connection to public relations functions were excluded from this study. Based on this selection workflow, a final dataset of 145 articles was obtained.

The 145 documents were downloaded in BibTeX and CSV formats and subsequently imported into Biblioshiny and VosViewer software for visualization and analysis. Biblioshiny, an R-language-based software, efficiently analyzes large volumes of literature to generate global trend network data, top contributing countries, trend topics, and thematic maps (Safitri et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024). Meanwhile, VosViewer is utilized to identify keywords frequently employed by authors with a minimum co-occurrence threshold established at 5 (Safitri et al., 2025). The bibliometric analysis results are presented as graphs, diagrams, and network maps for interpretation.

To achieve comprehensive analytical results, this study not only describes and analyzes the bibliometric mapping outcomes but also integrates them with a thematic analysis of eight selected articles. These ten articles were chosen based on specific criteria established by the researcher. The first criterion required the author to be listed among the top 10 most-cited authors. The subsequent criterion required the article to be ranked among the top 10 most-cited publications. The selection of these two criteria was based on indicators such as publication count, total citations, and h-index, which serve as measures of significant research contributions (Tang et al., 2024). The final criterion ensured that each analyzed article was keyword relevant to the theme clusters identified in the thematic map, based on the understanding that keywords reflect the main research direction (Tang et al., 2024).

## 3. Results
### 3.1 Trends in the annual production of original papers

Researchers collected scientific articles on strategic communication in public relations from the Scopus database. The keywords used in collecting data are "Strategic Communication" AND "Public

Relations". The use of these two keywords defines the core topic of this study, making the research more specific and relevant. The selection of the period 2015 – 2025 for data collection was based on the relevance of the topic under study to various global issues. This period globally coincides with digital transformation (Safitri et al., 2025) and the use of big data, social media (communication in the US), and artificial intelligence, which change the pattern of organizational communication with the public. Then, significant issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic also encouraged research on strategic communication and the role of PR in managing crises, reputation, relationships, and public trust (Hobbs & Allen, 2023; Surahmat et al., 2021).

**Figure 2.** Overview

Figure 2 presents an overview of 145 articles on strategic communication in the context of public relations, collected from the Scopus database for the period 2015 - 2025. The finding that attracts researchers' attention is the low annual growth rate of studies on the topic, at only 2.54%. This percentage was derived using the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) calculation.

$$CAGR = \left[ \left( \frac{N_{akhir}}{N_{awal}} \right)^{\frac{1}{n}} - 1 \right] \times 100$$

$$CAGR = \left[ \left( \frac{9}{7} \right)^{\frac{1}{10}} - 1 \right] \times 100$$

$$CAGR = \left[ (1,2857)^{0,1} - 1 \right] \times 100$$

$$CAGR = [1,0254 - 1] \times 100$$

$$CAGR = 0,0254 \times 100$$

**Figure 3.** Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

The compound annual growth rate indicates three distinct aspects of development. A positive percentage signifies that a research field is expanding; conversely, a negative percentage or one approaching zero suggests that the field is experiencing stagnation or decline (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Meanwhile, research fields currently garnering significant scholarly attention, characterized as "emerging topics," are typically denoted by a growth rate exceeding 10% (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Based on these criteria, it can be inferred that the field of strategic communication has reached a stage of thematic maturity. Nevertheless, the overall volume of publications over the past decade has not exhibited a significant decline. In other words, the annual growth rate of 2.54% suggests that academic attention remains relatively limited, which consequently impacts the field's growth trajectory. This figure significantly lags behind the annual growth observed in other domains of communication science, such as cross-cultural communication studies. Data from Safitri et al. (2025) The growth rate of cross-cultural communication studies on digital platforms is 18.53%.

The number of articles published from 2015 to 2025 on strategic communication in the context of public relations shows a fluctuating trend. Figure 4 illustrates a slow upward trend year by year, culminating in 2018 with the highest number of publications (22). In 2018, scientific articles on strategic communication in the context of public relations showed several important trends, including CSR as an authentic and participatory strategic communication (H. Kim & Lee, 2018; Overton, 2018; Pang et al., 2018), then the trend of strategic communication in the digital era, using social media to observe public interaction and organizational reputation (Lee & Seltzer, 2018; Navarro et al., 2018; Plowman & Wilson, 2018). The last trend highlighted by scholars in the year was the importance of message framing and dialogic ethics as a form of strategic communication in overcoming crises, conflicts, and marketing (Burton & Bradish, 2018; Lan, 2018; Xie et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018; Zukas, 2018).
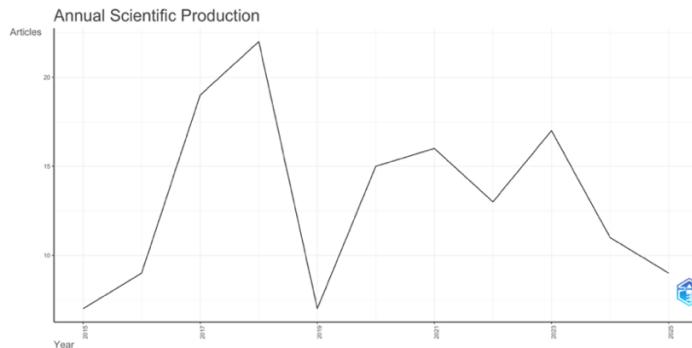
**Figure 4.** Annual scientific production

Following a substantial surge in publication volume in 2018, research on strategic communication within the context of the PR profession witnessed a significant decline, falling from 22 articles to just 7 in 2019. This dramatic decrease in 2019 does not indicate a waning of scholarly interest in the field of strategic communication; rather, it reflects a focal shift from popular themes such as CSR, social media, Crisis Communication, and framing toward more specific, critical, and in-depth inquiries. For instance, a study conducted by (Yue, 2019) Examined PR contributions within a Chinese enterprise. The findings revealed that PR practitioners tended to be more proficient in executing technician roles rather than managerial functions and were frequently excluded from decision-making processes. Furthermore, during this period, an article by (Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019) Explicitly investigated the psychological challenges faced by PR practitioners in ethical decision-making. The study elucidates that practitioners may rationalize unethical behavior to alleviate psychological strain when prioritizing organizational interests that conflict with the public interest.

The subsequent analysis focuses on the article titled "Old Comedy, Public Intellectuals and the Origins of Dissent Communication: The Case of Aristophanes" by Ifra (2019). This article approaches strategic communication from a distinct perspective compared to the preceding studies, conducting an in-depth historical analysis to trace the origins of dissent public relations. Dissent PR is defined as a public relations technique or strategy designed to garner public attention for the introduction of new ideas aimed at influencing public opinion or policy (Xifra, 2019). The findings indicate that historical satirical comedy served as an early form of strategic communication management used to voice resistance against the ruling powers of the time. This article

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demonstrates that PR activity possesses a long history and is not solely a modern phenomenon.

Another noteworthy article for analysis is titled "From an 'Outside Group' to a Catalyst for Corporate Change: Examining Activities Legitimation Strategies" by (Woods, 2019). This study analyzes strategic communication as a mechanism for establishing legitimacy among organizational activists. A key finding from this research is the identification of a new strategic communication concept termed "Endorsement by Circumstance". This strategy is employed when activists align or embed their specific messages and issues within broader narratives currently circulating in public discourse, with the aim of attracting attention and validating their concerns.

Based on the analysis of these four articles published in 2019, it can be concluded that the research dynamics between 2018 and 2019 reflect an evolution in strategic communication research topics. A distinct shift occurred from a focus on communication tools toward the exploration of more specific fundamental issues, such as the ethics and psychology of PR practitioners in the application of strategic communication.

## 3.2 Most cited authors

In this section, we have selected 10 researchers with the most citations and articles relevant to strategic communication in the context of public relations, as shown in Table 1. These researchers were selected based on several indicators, namely, number of publications, h-index, and number of citations (Tang et al., 2024). Based on these indicators, Vercic D and Zerfass A are key authors who are consistently productive and whose scientific work has a more decisive influence than that of other authors, as evidenced by their citation counts and h-indexes.

**Table 1.** Top 10 Most Cited and Relevant Authors in Scopus

| Author | Local Citations | Articles | Author | h-Index | Total Citations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vercic D | 116 | 5 | Vercic D | 4 | 116 |
| Zerfass A | 94 | 4 | Moreno A | 3 | 57 |
| Ciszek El | 82 | 2 | Seiffert-Brockmann J | 3 | 47 |
| Nothhaft H | 80 | 2 | Zerfass A | 3 | 94 |
| Andersson R | 67 | 3 | Andersson R | 2 | 67 |
| Mareno A | 57 | 4 | Binder-Tietz S | 2 | 16 |
| Macnamara JR | 51 | 2 | Ciszek El | 2 | 82 |

| Author | Local Citations | Articles | Author | h-Index | Total Citations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Seiffert-Brockmann J | 47 | 4 | Dimitrov R | 2 | 7 |
| Weisenberg M | 47 | 2 | Furst S | 2 | 33 |
| Overton HK | 43 | 2 | Hoffmann Cp | 2 | 16 |

Vercic & Zerfass (2016) Published an article from their collaboration, entitled "A comparative excellence framework for communication management," in the Journal of Communication Management, and it has been cited 41 times. The article introduces the Communication Excellence Framework (CEF) as a strategic framework for communication. This article is not only a reference but also a means of connecting research and trends in measuring the quality of strategic communication.

### 3.3 Most cited research articles

Table 2 shows that research on strategic communication in the context of public relations has shifted focus from 2015 to 2021, with articles by Y. Kim (2018), H. Kim & Lee (2018), dan Houston et al. (2015) Rank at the top in citations, indicating that issues of organizational legitimacy, crisis communication, and public engagement are central to the study of strategic communication and communication management.

Falkheimer et al. (2017) and Davies & Hobbs (2020) Also, reinforce the dominance of the crisis theme, highlighting organizational efforts to build trust during emergencies. On the other hand, Ikonen et al. (2017) and H. Kim & Lee (2018) Both emphasize the role of trust as a core element in organization-public relations, showing the consistency of research focus on trust as a key dimension of strategic communication.

**Table 2**. Top 10 Most Cited and Relevant Articles in Scopus

| Paper | DOI | Total Citations | TC per Year | Normalized TC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kim Y, (2018). J. Commun. Manag. | 10.1108/JCOM-03-2018-0025 | 118 | 14,75 | 4,83 |
| Houston JB (2015). Am. Behav. Sci. | 10.1177/0002764214548563 | 111 | 10,09 | 3,85 |

| Paper | DOI | Total Citations | TC per Year | Normalized TC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kim H (2018). Int. J. Strateg. Commun. | 10.1080/1553118X.2018.1425692 | 85 | 10,63 | 3,48 |
| Borchers NS (2021). Public Relations Rev. | 10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102041 | 58 | 11,60 | 5,69 |
| Ciszek El (2017). J. Commun. | 10.1111/jcom. 12319 | 56 | 6,22 | 2,83 |
| Ikonen P (2017). Int. J. Strateg. Commun. | 10.1080/1553118X.2016.1252917 | 56 | 6,22 | 2,83 |
| Falkheimer J, (2017). Public Relations Rev. | 10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.10.011 | 54 | 6,00 | 2,73 |
| Davies Cj, (2020). Public Relations Rev. | 10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101983 | 43 | 7,17 | 3,31 |
| O'Connor A (2018). Int. J. Strateg. Commun. | 10.1080/1553118X.2018.1452242 | 43 | 5,38 | 1,76 |
| Macnamara Jr (2018). Int. J. Strateg. Commun. | 10.1080/1553118X.2018.1428978 | 42 | 5,25 | 1,72 |

Borchers & Enke (2021) and Ciszek (2017) broaden the discussion by highlighting dialogic communication, inclusivity, and the representation of marginalized groups, marking a shift towards more ethical and participatory PR. On the other hand, O'Connor & Shumate (2018) and Macnamara (2018) emphasize the evaluation of strategic communication, underlining the importance of measuring effectiveness

in evidence-based professional practice. According to the results of this analysis, it can be seen that there is a pattern of research that shows the evolution of strategic communication-related research from a focus on legitimacy, crisis, and public engagement to an emphasis on inclusivity, evaluation, and dialog-based communication, which reflects the new demands of public relations in the digital era to be more open, accountable, and oriented towards social responsibility.

## 3.4 Journals that host the highest number of articles

In this section, the research will identify key journals to obtain the latest information on strategic communication. In accordance with the principles of Bradford's Law of scattering, articles are divided into two zones: the core zone and the peripheral zone. The core zone represents sources with high productivity, relevance, and frequent citations, while other journals with fewer contributions are scattered in the peripheral zone. (Prabha et al., 2025) .
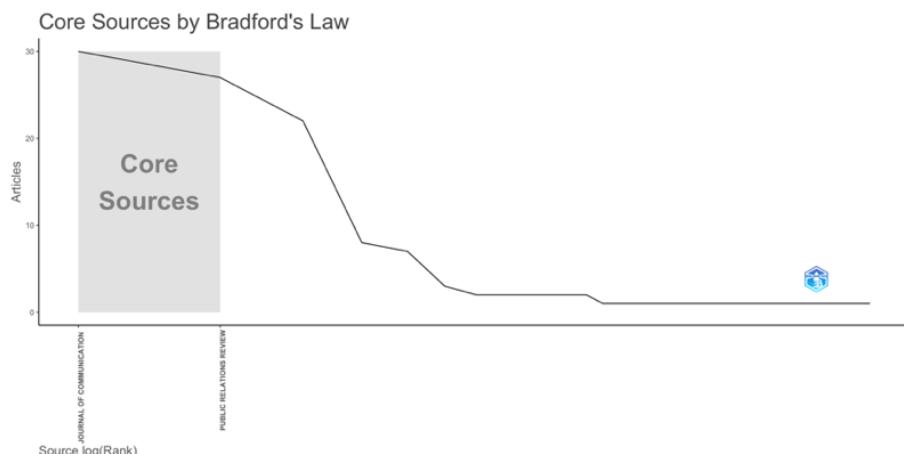


**Figure 5.** Bradford's Law

Figure 5 shows the distribution of articles published in various communication journals, with an emphasis on identifying core sources. The most important sources in the core zone are the Journal of Communication and the Public Relations Review, with 25 – 30 articles each, according to the Scopus database. This data indicates that these two journals are the main reference points in strategic communication research within the context of public relations. These journals not only have a high publication frequency but also serve as primary channels for developing theories, models, and practices in

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strategic communication. This finding has important implications: researchers can target these core journals to increase the visibility and academic impact of their work and to gather relevant articles for literature reviews more efficiently.

## 3.5 Most contributing countries

Researchers from 29 countries have contributed to research on strategic communication in the public relations context. Figure 6 shows that the country with the highest number of publications and citations is the United States of America, with 64 articles and 994 citations. Germany leads with 17 articles and 262 citations; Slovenia is third with six articles and 126 citations; and Finland, New Zealand, and Norway each have three articles.

Country Scientific Production



**Top 10 Most Contributing Countries**
1. United States = 64 articles & 994 citations
2. Germany = 17 articles & 262 citations
3. Slovenia = 6 articles & 126 citations
4. Sweden = 5 articles & 121 citations
5. Australia = 8 articles & 110 citations
6. Spain = 13 articles & 106 citations
7. United Kingdom = 8 articles & 94 citations
8. Finland = 3 articles & 87 citations
9. New Zealand = 3 articles & 61 citations
10. Norway = 3 articles & 53 citations

**Figure 6.** Most Contributing Countries

Based on this data, a significant gap in the number of publications and citations between the United States and the other nine countries is evident. This dominance is rooted in a strong tradition of publication and high-quality research, robust infrastructure and funding, and extensive collaborative networks (Tang et al., 2024). Another factor supporting the dominance of the United States is a linguistic bias, which provides an advantage in accessing English-language publications, thereby increasing the visibility of their research (Tang et al., 2024).

## 3.6 Trends of Topics and Relationship among Keywords

Keywords represent the main research direction of an article, and their frequency indicates the areas of most significant interest to researchers in a field (Tan Luc et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2024). The researcher integrated three forms of data visualization, such as trend

topic, keyword co-occurrence network, and thematic map, to dissect the keyword structure, primary focus, and developmental dynamics of strategic communication studies in the context of public relations.

The trend topic visualization highlights the focus of articles on strategic communication over the past decade, which is dominated by the terms "public relations" and "strategic communication." These two keywords are displayed in the largest circle, clearly identifying them as central concepts and the most frequently discussed themes in communication management or strategic communication.

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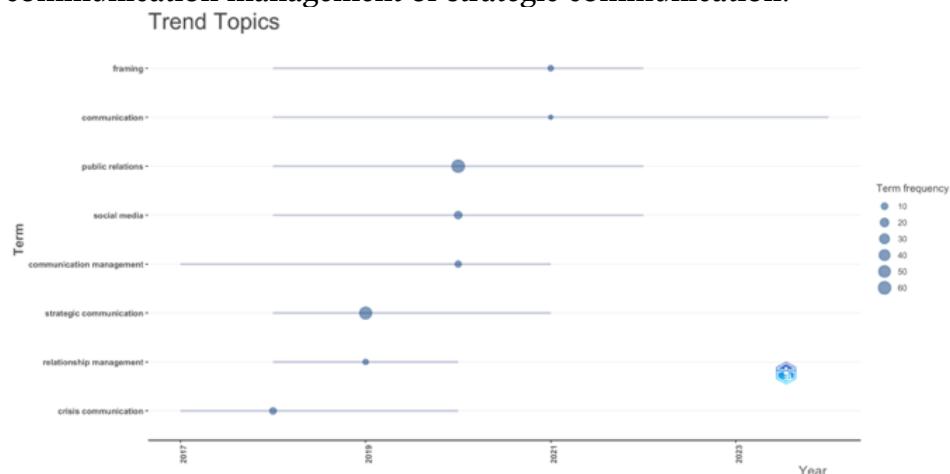
**Figure 7.** Trend Topic

Based on Figure 7, the second theme is identified as social media, communication management, and crisis communication. These secondary themes identify specific areas and contexts of primary concern to researchers in strategic communication. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the themes in strategic communication research, the keyword network was analyzed, as shown in Figure 9.
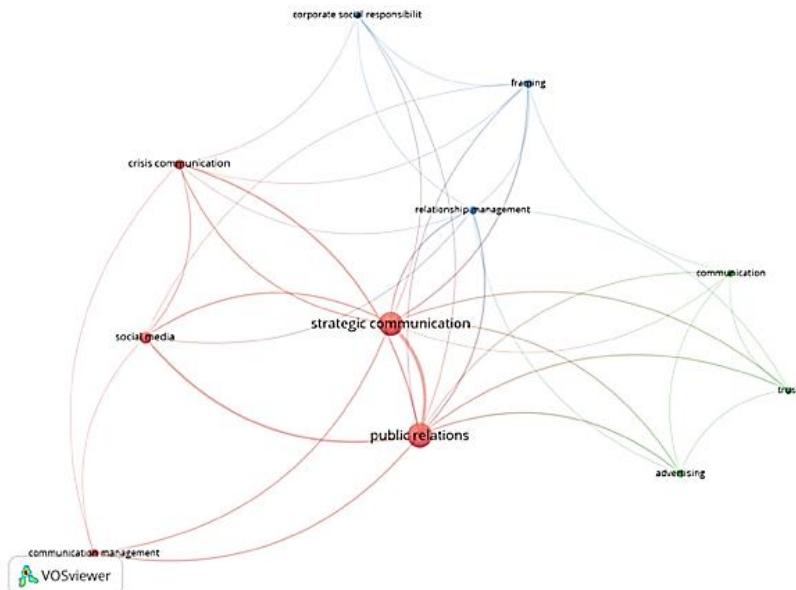
**Figure 8.** Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

The keyword co-occurrence network map visualizes relationships between keywords, with proximity and connecting lines indicating that keywords often appear together in the same publication. The large circles indicate their high frequency of occurrence. The 10 most frequent keywords are detailed in Table 3. Based on Figure 8, 3 thematic clusters consisting of 11 keywords (nodes) were identified.

**Table 3.** Top 10 Most Frequent Words in Scopus Collections in Strategic Communication

| Words | Occurrences |
|---|---|
| Public Relations | 58 |
| Strategic Communication | 53 |
| Social media | 14 |
| Crisis Communication | 10 |
| Communication Management | 9 |
| Framing | 7 |
| Relationship Management | 7 |
| Advertising | 6 |
| Communication | 6 |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | 6 |

The first cluster is represented by a red circle containing the keywords "communication management", "crisis communication", "public relations", "social media", and "strategic communication". The keywords "strategic communication" and "public relations" are fundamental concepts in this cluster, with 53 and 58 occurrences, respectively. Furthermore, the keyword "social media" is closely related to the function of PR in the digital era and is a form of strategic communication (Jiang et al., 2017; Khan & Pratt, 2022). Finally, the keyword "crisis communication" indicates that strategic communication research focuses on the role of PR in crisis management (Y. Kim, 2018). Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that within this cluster, there is a distinct effort to legitimize Public Relations as a strategic management function. Furthermore, the correlation between social media and crisis communication topics indicates that social media serves as the primary domain where crises originate and are subsequently managed.

The second cluster examines the sub-field of public relations. In this cluster, the research focuses on important factors in the PR profession, such as trust (H. Kim & Lee, 2018; Moreno et al., 2021) and persuasive communication (Ikonen et al., 2017) which shape organizational image. In contrast to the preceding clusters, this second cluster highlights the outcomes of PR activities, specifically regarding the cultivation of public trust and the fostering of stakeholder relationships. Additionally, this cluster identifies the impact of digital advancements on the paradigm shift within the fields of Public Relations, Advertising, and Strategic Communication.

The last cluster consists of the keywords "corporate social responsibility", "framing" and relationship management" (Ali, 2022; Capizzo & Luisi, 2024; Moreno et al., 2021; Solano Santos et al., 2024; Zerfass et al., 2016), which shows that strategic communication is closely related to social legitimacy, the formation of public image and perception, and relationships with stakeholders. Based on the visualization and subsequent analysis, it is evident that a focal shift has occurred form message management (in the first cluster) toward relationship management and image construction (in the final cluster). This trajectory clearly signifies an effort to elevate the competencies of PR practitioners, moving beyond mere message dissemination to the management of complex issues that impact organizational or corporate reputation.

### 3.7 A Thematic Review of High-Impact and Related Article Strategic Communication Research in Public Relation Practices

This study mapped 145 strategic communication articles using bibliometric analysis and identified four main clusters that served as the driving themes in research on strategic communication. After conducting bibliometric mapping to obtain more comprehensive insights into trends, gaps, and understudied areas, this study presents a thematic analysis that groups eight articles into themes identified from the mapping results.
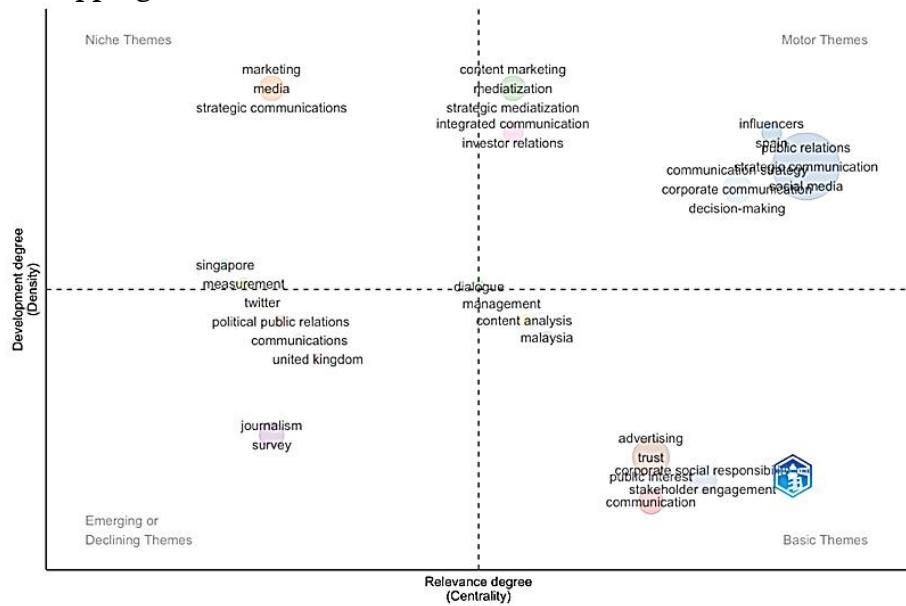


**Figure 9.** Thematic Map

Based on Figure 9, the map contains four theme categories: motor themes, niche themes, emerging or declining themes, and basic themes (Safitri et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024).

### 3.7.1 Digital-based strategic communication

Figure 9 illustrates that the motor themes (upper-right quadrant) consist of influencers, public relations, strategic communication, communication strategy, social media, and corporate communication. The results of the thematic map align with O'Connor & Shumate (2018), identification of strategic communication research trends, which highlight digital evolution as a significant shift in the field's focus. They introduced a multidimensional network perspective, emphasizing that digital platforms and influencers can shape public opinion and amplify

organizational messages. The identification of themes in this study reinforces O'Connor & Shumate's (2018) findings, specifically, social media and influencers are identified as motor themes, indicating that the interconnectivity of various systems and devices has now become a primary driver in the development of strategic communication research.

Consistent with the theme identification above, strategic communication research has begun to evolve toward digital media. This is evidenced by studies such as *"Public Relations in the Age of Data: Corporate Perspective on Social Media Analytics (SMA)"* by Fitzpatrick & Weissman (2021) These explicitly show that PR and corporate communication practices are central to researchers in the era of digital technology. The digital transformation of the PR profession is not merely the adoption of new tools but an ecosystem change concerning how PR manages relationships and builds reputations in an environment fully mediated by technology (Pia Wulandari et al., 2025). On the other hand, an article by Fitzpatrick & Weissman (2021) Provides a broader view of PR practices in multinational corporations transitioning from intuition-based PR to data- and evidence-driven practices. PR and corporate communication are well-developed themes that drive research in strategic communication, communication management, and public relations.

### 3.7.2 Integration of media and marketing in strategic communication

The niche themes in the upper-left quadrant are highly developed but specialized. These include *media, marketing,* and *strategic communications*. These themes have low centrality but high density, indicating they are well developed within their specialized areas. Ikonen et al. (2017) They are among the researchers interested in this theme. Their article, entitled *"Transparency for Sponsored Content: Analysing Codes of Ethics in Public Relations, Marketing, Advertising and Journalism,"* provides a new perspective on the boundaries between strategic communication, advertising, and journalism. This study examines the codes of ethics in Public Relations, Advertising, and Journalism regarding the use of sponsored content in PR and Journalism materials, which pose a threat to the legitimacy of both professions. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of transparency in advertising so that practices in PR and Journalism remain ethical and credible.

However, this study presents certain limitations, particularly its lack of comprehensive explanations of how each profession interprets the ethics of sponsored content and its omission of how cross-professional

collaborations influence the quality and transparency of PR and Journalistic content. Therefore, a comparative study across the professions of PR, Advertising, and Journalism constitutes a new research area that needs further exploration. These new areas are expected to reduce research saturation of the strategic communication and public relations studies.

### 3.7.3 Strategic communication as a strengthening of public relations and trust

This subsection analyzes the basic themes located in the lower-right quadrant. This category includes trust, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and stakeholder engagement. Trust serves as a central element within these basic themes, exemplified by the study titled *"Enhancing employee communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving in crisis situations"* by (Y. Kim, 2018). Y. Kim (2018) Comprehensively discusses how transparent communication is key to building employee and public trust during crises. Beyond focusing on building trust, the study also emphasizes stakeholder engagement as a prerequisite for effective crisis and internal organizational communication. Thus, these findings validate that the themes of trust and stakeholders serve as the fundamental basis for implementing strategic communication.

The third basic theme is CSR. Supported by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CSR is currently a topic of interest for research from a communication perspective, as corporate communication plays a crucial role in shaping and defining sustainability (Strauß & Šimunović, 2025). These themes are important to the field of strategic communication but have not yet developed into independent research areas.

Capizzo & Luisi (2024) Contribute to the research about CSR as a strategic communication through their article *"Responsibility, sustainability, or environmental justice? Strategic communications for stewardship and citizenship".* The article examines the relationship among these three concepts within Public Relations practice and corporate sustainability. Based on their analysis, the scholars find that corporate honesty and transparency, particularly regarding clarity, conflict, reflexivity, community empowerment, and justice-oriented collaborative outcomes, have a significantly positive influence on corporate sustainability.

However, the study has limitations, as it does not examine how companies effectively implement sustainable strategic communication to manage controversial issues. It is well established that controversial

issues such as governance and environmental concerns receive the most significant public attention compared with other social issues (Diprose et al., 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2025; Stäbler & Fischer, 2020). Furthermore, the rise of digital media must also be taken into consideration, as digital platforms increasingly accelerate the spread of social or controversial issues (Coombs & Holladay, 2018).

To fill this gap, further research is needed into how strategic communication in PR can effectively manage media coverage of corporate social responsibility initiatives. Media reporting plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, which in turn affects a company's long-term sustainability.

### 3.7.4 Public perception and evaluation

The thematic map also identifies political public relations, journalism, and survey as emerging or declining themes (lower-left quadrant). These themes represent innovations in strategic communication that warrant further exploration. For instance, research by Koch (2016) The phenomenon of brand journalism, or corporate journalism, analyzes the dual roles of corporate publication editors who are bound by journalistic norms while also serving the organization's strategic communication goals to build its image and advance its interests.

Suppose previous studies explained how editors perform two professional roles simultaneously in producing content. In that case, the study by Zerfass et al. (2016) Examines media relations from the perspectives of both Media and PR practitioners in Europe. These researchers argue that the media relations paradigm has shifted significantly. In the 20th Century, the relationship between organizations and the media was linear; PR supplied information, and the media disseminated it. Talking about PR and Media, of course, it cannot be separated from framing. Communication practitioners use framing as a strategic tool to persuade the target audience to accept the interpretation of the message that suits the organization's goals or interests (Khan & Pratt, 2022).

However, current findings indicate that organizations no longer depend entirely on the media to distribute information. Instead, they have begun to produce, distribute, and manage content independently, an approach now known as owned media. The growth of social media and other digital platforms has reinforced this development. Nevertheless, the study identifies a gap that warrants deeper analysis of the impact of owned media on the relationship between organizations

and the media as a key stakeholder. Therefore, future research needs to conduct a comprehensive examination and analysis of strategic communication that bridges Media and PR in the modern era.

Another researcher discussing Journalism and PR is Ali (2022) In an article titled "Fake news network model: A conceptual framework for strategic communication to *deal with fake news"*. This article analyzes how consumers come to believe fake news about a brand and the strategies used to counter such misinformation. The findings show that fake news operates through a network model consisting of context, perception, key opinion leaders, and cognitive processes, which together construct a new "truth" through the dissemination of fabricated information and influence specific groups to believe it. To address misinformation through a Fake News Network (FNN), corporate PR must develop proactive strategies, particularly given the real-time, polarized nature of the social media ecosystem. Accordingly, the study recommends strategic communication practices for managing fake news crises, including environmental scanning, audience segmentation, and the development of context-based cognitive messaging. The analysis of these three articles successfully reveals a new theme for exploring strategic communication in the context of PR, offering substantial potential for further study.

## 4. Discussion

This study examines the development of strategic communication studies within public relations practice through bibliometric analysis. The bibliometric analysis in this study used 145 articles sourced from the Scopus database, which were divided into four thematic themes. Based on an analysis of eight key aspects that encourage research on strategic communication in the context of public relations, it was found that the concepts of strategic communication and PR reached saturation, as evident in Figure 2.

Based on the findings from the thematic map, social media and influencers are categorized as motor themes, signaling a significant paradigm shift. This finding aligns with recent bibliometric work by Priyowidodo & Inri Inggrit Indrayani (2024), which confirms that digital technology and social media have emerged as dominant keywords in strategic communication research. This demonstrates that digitalization is a cross-disciplinary phenomenon affecting both political and corporate sectors. Empirically, this supports the multidimensional network perspective proposed by O'Connor & Shumate (2018), who

predicted that the field of strategic communication would shift toward "networked influence".

The high density of the keywords "Social Media" and "Influencers" indicates that PR research has reached a stage of maturity in understanding Web 2.0 platforms. This implies that scholars are no longer merely exploring the definitions of social media but instead investigating in depth how these platforms function strategically to shape public opinion. However, this very maturity highlights a critical void regarding advanced technology topics. The dominance of social media research appears to absorb the vast majority of academic attention, resulting in stagnated innovation regarding Web 3.0 topics such as AI and Big Data.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the keyword "decision making" in this quadrant implies that the PR profession is increasingly recognized not merely as a tool for tactical dissemination, but as a strategic management function that informs high-level organizational decisions, consistent with the research results of (Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019).

However, several sub-themes are still relevant and need to be studied more deeply, for example, CSR and framing as strategic communication oriented towards image building and evaluation. This conclusion is based on the thematic map findings, which identify "trust" and "CSR" as the basic themes. Although these themes do not exhibit the explosive growth seen in digital themes such as social media and influencers, their high degree of relevance indicates that these two topics constitute foundational and essential elements for any effective strategic communication effort. This aligns with the findings of H. Kim & Lee (2018), who position trust not as a fleeting trend, but as a fundamental outcome of transparent communication, particularly within crisis situations.

In addition, findings from analyzing research trends, the most-cited authors and articles, influential journals, keyword networks, and thematic maps indicate potential new areas for future research. The research area concerns how organizations such as NGOs, associations, and corporations understand the identity of PR practitioners in the era of convergence. Therefore, the study recommends research on the impact of brand journalism on audience trust, and then on how the organization's PR efforts build relationships with the media to manage social issues related to the organization. These recommendations are

intended to complement previous studies conducted by Ali (2022), Moreno et al. (2021), and Zerfass et al. (2016).

Furthermore, while the research by Priyowidodo & Inri Inggrit Indrayani (2024) Recommended future research should focus on Twitter and Blogs; this study, conversely, demonstrates that within the PR context, these topics are already highly saturated. This implies that the future challenge in PR is no longer centered on social media platforms, but rather in addressing the research gap regarding Artificial Intelligence, an emerging topic in the digital era that has not yet appeared in either study.

In addition to reviewing the basic concepts of motor themes, such as strategic communication and PR practices, based on the results of analysis of bibliometric data related to communication studies in the context of public relations practice, this study notes that research on strategic communication topics over the past decade has focused on the corporate context, as evidenced by studies such as those by (Ali, 2022; Diprose et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick & Weissman, 2021; Harrison, 2019; Ikonen et al., 2017; Koch, 2016; Liu & Zhang, 2025; Macnamara, 2018; Moreno et al., 2021; O'Connor & Shumate, 2018; Stäbler & Fischer, 2020; Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019; Woods, 2019; Yue, 2019). Therefore, it is recommended to explore how non-corporate sectors, such as NGOs, government agencies, and advocacy groups, are adopting digital strategic communication, including strategic mediatization practices, to achieve their organizational goals.

The interpretation regarding the dominance of corporate terminology and the prevalence of the United States in publication volume within these results must be understood within the context of methodological limitations. In this study, data were collected from a single source, the Scopus database, and were limited to English-language articles, which reinforces a bias toward developed nations. Consequently, significant research regarding strategic communication topics in social activities, government realms, or local communities from developing countries or those written in local languages may have been overlooked due to language barriers and indexing limitations.

The implication of this limitation is an unbalanced set of research findings. Therefore, future bibliometric research is strongly advised to expand the scope of data sources by integrating regional databases, such as Google Scholar or national indices, as well as multilingual literature. This is necessary to capture more inclusive strategic communication dynamics and to deconstruct the Western narrative bias that has

historically dominated the field. Nevertheless, this study contributes by presenting a tangible overview of the most dominant trends in strategic communication research within PR practice during the 2015–2025 period. These findings may serve as a foundation for future research regarding thematic disparities within strategic communication scholarship.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the field of strategic communication within the context of public relations has reached a stage of thematic maturity. Based on the bibliometric analysis of 145 articles sourced from the Scopus database between 2015 and 2025, the annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.54% indicates a stabilization of academic interest rather than rapid expansion. While the United States remains the dominant contributor to scientific production, the research landscape has evolved from general discussions of communication tools toward more specific, critical, and complex inquiries. This trajectory reflects a discipline that is consolidating its theoretical foundations while simultaneously adapting to the disruptions of the digital era.

Thematic mapping reveals a significant paradigm shift driven by "motor themes" such as social media, influencers, and digital strategy. The high density of these clusters underscores that digital technology is no longer viewed merely as a tactical instrument for dissemination but has become central to the ecosystem of "networked influence." The evolution of research topics confirms that the profession is moving beyond technician roles toward strategic management functions, where PR practitioners are increasingly involved in high-level organizational decision-making. This shift highlights the growing complexity of the field, where managing algorithms and digital reputation is as critical as traditional media relations.

Despite the rapid acceleration of digital-focused topics, this study identifies that fundamental values remain the bedrock of effective strategic communication. The classification of "Trust" and "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) as basic themes demonstrates their enduring relevance. Although these topics do not exhibit the explosive growth of digital trends, they are identified as essential prerequisites for organizational legitimacy and stakeholder engagement. The findings suggest that while the methods of engagement have digitized, the core objective of building and maintaining trust through transparent communication remains unchanged, particularly in times of crisis.

However, this study identifies significant gaps in the current body of literature, particularly the overwhelming dominance of corporate-centric research. The existing discourse largely overlooks the application of strategic communication in non-corporate sectors, such as NGOs, government agencies, and local advocacy groups. Furthermore, emerging phenomena such as "brand journalism" and the management of "fake news" networks present new ethical and practical challenges that have not been fully explored. Future research must bridge these gaps by examining how non-corporate entities utilize strategic mediatization and by critically analyzing the blurring lines between journalism, advertising, and public relations.

Finally, the interpretation of these findings must be contextualized within the methodological limitations of relying solely on English-language articles from the Scopus database, which inherently reinforces a Western and developed-nation bias. This methodological constraint likely obscures significant strategic communication insights from developing regions and local communities. Consequently, future bibliometric studies should integrate regional databases, such as Google Scholar or national indices, and include multilingual literature to deconstruct the dominant Western narrative. By doing so, scholars can capture a more inclusive and globally representative dynamic of strategic communication in public relations practices.

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