How are government public relations addressed in existing and future research?

Achmad Syahrully Bachri[1], Munadhil Abdul Muqsith[2], Radita Gora Tayibnafis[3]

[1,3]Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta (UPNVJ), Jakarta, Indonesia
[2]Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional (BRIN), Jakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Background: Several studies have investigated Government Public Relations (GPR) over the last few decades. However, very little exhaustive research has been conducted on this issue so far. **Purpose:** The study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the literature and a bibliometric analysis of GPR based on existing empirical research. **Methods:** The study employed a Systematic Literature Review, searching for the phrase "Government Public Relations" in article titles, abstracts, and keywords in the Scopus database, yielding 126 articles from 1976 to 2025. The evaluation was done on October 19, 2025. The raw data were analyzed bibliometrically using VOSviewer. **Results:** The research shows that GPR has experienced remarkable worldwide expansion, with the greatest concentration in the United States and Indonesia. This growth is driven primarily by digital transformation, global crises, demands for democratization, the complexity of global issues, and the professionalization of GPR. **Conclusion:** The GPR sector in emerging countries is still under-researched. Research works in the past have primarily dealt with advanced countries, for example, the United States and South Korea. Future research should address the needs of developing countries, particularly Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia. The paper argues that there are five essential qualities of effective GPR: transparency, accountability, public participation, responsiveness, and two-way communication. The paper also analyses the conceptual framework of GPR. **Implications:** The consequences for the sustainable administration and development of government organizations and for ensuring their adherence to GPR principles.

Keywords: Government public relations; literature review; VOSviewer; bibliometric analysis; organizational

Correspondence: Achmad Syahrully Bachri, S.Kom.I., Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta (UPNVJ), 12450. *Email:* 2510422002@mahasiswa.upnvj.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Government Public Relations (GPR) refers to the public relations strategies employed by governmental entities to improve the openness, transparency, and responsiveness of state policies and actions to public demands, while also promoting the democratic process (Kareem & Bali, 2024). GPR plays an important role in socializing positive messages and good performance to the public to achieve public trust and government reputation (Afrilia et al., 2023). This approach comprises strategic communication planning, the use of traditional and digital media, problem and crisis management, and the management of internal organizational relationships to effectively advance the government's public objectives (Afrilia et al., 2023; Connolly-Ahern et al., 2025). GPR is grounded in key principles such as transparency, accountability, trust, and credibility. The authors also stress the roles of listening in communication as well as public participation, adherence to ethical standards, compliance with the law, and strategic coordination. Transparency requires the government to provide clear and easily accessible information to build public trust and prevent misinformation (Qasim, 2024). Accountability means that communication activities should give citizens the opportunity to evaluate policies and demand that institutions implement them (Luo et al., 2024; Qasim, 2024). Trust and credibility are also very important, as official messages and communication channels should help strengthen public trust and increase public involvement (Alenzi & Miskon, 2024). Furthermore, GPR, at its best, would be about not only releasing information but also about initiating dialogue and encouraging citizens to participate in policymaking (Nurhidayat et al., 2024; Qasim, 2024). Justice and legality are vitally important as well, representing an assurance that communication is conducted in accordance with ethical standards and legal norms and, at the same time, avoiding propaganda that can be detrimental to democracy (Kareem & Bali, 2024). Strategic planning and coordination are in place to ensure that communication between government agencies is harmonized and the message remains consistent, especially during emergencies and policy execution (Nurhidayat et al., 2024; Qasim, 2024).

While the GPR has a clear theoretical role in democratic governance, empirical evidence shows that many government organizations have over and over again neglected to use public relations research in their policy development and communications strategies. It has made their institutional credibility and the public's trust foreseeable instruments. Public trust in the federal government in the United States

fell dramatically from 35% in 2022 to 23% in 2024, with the crisis being blamed directly on poor government communication and lack of transparency (Weisner, 2024). Besides that, 85% of Americans now think that the government is "wasteful" and three-quarters of them believe that it is "corrupt". These perceptions have risen significantly in the last few years due to a lack of stakeholder engagement and the integration of communication research (Schulman, 2025). According to the 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer, worldwide, 70% of people surveyed believe government officials intentionally mislead the public through lies or exaggerations, indicating that many people believe government communication has not yet been updated to incorporate modern public relations research standards of transparency and ethical communication.

Indonesia offers a very clear example of how government agencies have simply ignored public relations research when developing policies, even though they were able to earn public trust at the beginning. Gallup data (in a report titled 'Organization at a Glance 2017') released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows how Indonesia was ranked first with 80% public trust. However, the situation has changed drastically due to a critical erosion, mainly driven by the government's failure to communicate properly with citizens. This situation was confirmed by the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, which pointed out that the government's image has shifted from "ethical and competent" to "unethical and incompetent." This is basically a big drop, indicating that the government does not consult public opinion or engage stakeholders effectively. More importantly, studies show that Indonesia's public involvement in the decision-making process is significantly low, which is the main factor for the authorities remain on a track of creating policies without the public. These policies, for the most part, are not explained with transparent evidence and, therefore, are met with mass public protests or illegitimate court cases (to be annulled). Based on research by the team at Universitas Gadjah Mada, the Indonesian government's strategy merely revolves around "firefighting," in which it develops policies without public input. After publication, they face backlash, and only then do they reconsider their decision to withdraw. This stands in clear contrast to a policy initiative that engages the public first through systematic consultation based on communication research (Tasya, 2025). Such behavior is inconsistent with GPR standards and ultimately undermines the government's credibility.

The impacts of not including GPR research have been heavy, and the COVID-19 pandemic has especially brought this out. The Indonesian

Health Ministry's communication strategy during the pandemic showed a total disregard for epidemiological research and public communication best practices. Government officials made baseless claims about science, with the Health Minister publicly going against the agreement of scientists on how the virus spreads. More importantly, the government took an exclusive hold on providing information about the Coronavirus, leaving citizens completely dependent on the state's communications, which were marked by a lack of clarity and inconsistency. An offensive comment by the government's official COVID-19 spokesperson, asking the poor to "protect the rich by not transmitting disease" as a way of inter-class solidarity, was a clear indication of the lack of professional public relations research guidance and public opinion analysis.

Human Rights Watch has revealed that the Indonesian government deliberately misled the public about pandemic cases and transmission data, and that this was made worse by the government's threats against citizens and journalists who criticized official pandemic communication (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Indonesian Survey Institute research has shown that these communication mistakes directly broke down public trust and reduced people's willingness to follow government health instructions, which eventually led to the failure of the government's most important goal: consolidating the pandemic (Sugiarto, 2021). Here is an example of how ignoring GPR research leads to policy failure and public health consequences.

Similar evidence of government agencies' failure to apply GPR research appears in policy implementation beyond health. The case of the TAPERA (government-sponsored housing savings fund) program reveals how a government communication strategy without a participatory research foundation failed to build public trust and stakeholder buy-in. Analysis showed that the TAPERA program's communication approach lacked the systematic stakeholder engagement and transparency mechanisms that GPR research literature establishes as foundational. The structural assessment found that Indonesia's absence of national standards for policy communication leads to severe capacity disparities among institutions. While the healthcare sector developed publicbased risk communication through crisis-driven research integration, the housing sector operated without an equivalent research foundation. Thus, it results in challenges for policy implementation and continued stakeholder skepticism.

Additionally, a systematic review of Indonesia's major policy initiatives reveals that numerous government economic and social policies "only ended on paper," with

field implementation proving inappropriate or failing, a pattern scholars attribute partly to the government's failure to conduct and integrate public consultation research during policy formulation and communication design stages.

The global context further underscores the urgency of understanding the adoption of GPR research and barriers to implementation. Although interest in GPR research has risen substantially, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies that systematically explore the change, dissemination of research, and the theoretical and practical implications for future research trends. Some articles focus on the theory and practice of GPR, for example, culture-based communication behaviors (Hidayat et al., 2018), on handling disorder in public social organizations (Saragih et al., 2023), on the Health Department's role (Mustafa et al., 2021), and on responses to significant public health crises (Lee & Park, 2025). There is a notable lack of research that synthesizes the existing literature and offers a structured analysis through a systematic literature review (SLR) combined with bibliometrics. After a comprehensive search, relevant studies were identified. Dong et al. (2023) focused on the theoretical and definitional dimensions of GPR, using data from Scopus and Web of Science, even though restricted to 15 journals in Public Relations, Communications, and

Public Administration published between 1976 and 2021. Next, Alamsyah et al. (2024) focused on Electronic Government Public Relations (E-Government), which was not immediately aligned with the notion of GPR, using Scopus data from 2019 to 2024. The study combined an SLR with bibliometric analysis, without chronological constraints. This methodology guarantees that the results provide a more thorough viewpoint and yield original insights for future research.

The enduring lack of government agencies' willingness to systematically integrate public relations research, despite the continuing development of academic literature in the field, represents a substantial research gap that carries democratic consequences. Governments that ignore stakeholder engagement research, public participation frameworks, and communication best practices in policy development unconsciously discredit their institutional legitimacy and erode the democratic base that relies on an informed and trusting citizenry. The experience in Indonesia, the United States, and other democracies shows that a thorough, in-depth study of how GPR research is created, shared, and, most importantly, why it is not implemented, is necessary for both the academic field and institutional reform.

This research sheds light on the history of the discipline, pinpoints the main topics and

theoretical progress, and, most importantly, highlights the gap between research recommendations and institutional practice through an extensive bibliometric analysis along with an SLR of the GPR field. Such an evaluation, hopefully, gives decision-makers and communication experts an evidence-based map for integrating public relations research into government work. Thus, it reinforces democratic legitimacy and institutional reputation at a time when public trust is decreasing.

This study examines the current state of GPR research and assesses its continued significance for future studies. This study examines the evolution of academic discourse on GPR and seeks to discover how this research might enhance public relations theories and organizational practices. The research inquiries presented are: (1) Is the exploration of Government Public Relations a subject that continues to hold significance for future scholarly inquiry? (2) What is the present allocation of research investigations related to Government Public Relations? (3) What are the theoretical and practical implications from the perspective of Government Public Relations for future research?

This study used SLR and Bibliometric Analysis to address the three research issues. Conducting an SLR on the variable GPR is essential for enhancing both scholarly research

and practical implementations in contemporary public communication. SLRs reveal essential facilitators and benefits of open government, including enhanced transparency, democratic oversight, reduced corruption, and improved public services (Naeem, 2019). Furthermore, research on public involvement through government social media platforms indicates that people's trust in government is significantly affected by the efficacy of governmental use of digital media for interaction and communication (Chi et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2024). SLRs enhance professional expertise and help researchers in developing pertinent, evidence-based study objectives (Juhász, 2025).

The primary advantages of conducting SLRs in this domain include identifying research gaps and formulating guidance for practice and policy development (Nyoni et al., 2025). In addition, SLRs offer a deep understanding of the literature, ease the way for managerial decisions, and combine the main findings of different studies to direct research, practice, and the creation of policies (Camilo & Garrido, 2019; Clark et al., 2021). It is seen from the present trends that global perspectives on government social media use and text-mining methods are gradually developing synergy and integration in SLR studies to enhance analytical accuracy and effectiveness (Chi et al., 2024; Mao & Li, 2022).

SLRs are instrumental in shaping the research agenda of GPR. They not only list the studies conducted but also illustrate the relationships among themes and guide future studies (Nerantzidis et al., 2022; Volk, 2016). However, one must acknowledge that undertaking such reviews is challenging, especially in continuing the analytical rigor and addressing their highly labor-intensive nature (García-Peñalvo, 2022; Nyoni et al., 2025).

Within this framework, an SLR in GPR is designed to build a solid scientific knowledge base, enhance the efficiency of government communication, and increase public trust in state institutions. To further this examination, a bibliometric analysis is used to determine the spread of publications on GPR and their impact within the field.

RESEARCH METHOD

An SLR, which agrees with bibliometric studies, quantitatively examines the literature and identifies the main trends, patterns, and influential figures in the scientific community, typically using PRISMA guidelines. By doing so, the approach facilitates the check and re-check of the review process while clearly elucidating the subject of research (Chotisarn & Phuthong, 2025; Majid et al., 2025).

Here, the filtering terms for the final selection of research works were (1) the research articles published until October 19, 2025, (2) the papers written in English, and (3) the articles with a major emphasis on GPR. Subsequently, a bibliometric study was conducted using VOSviewer to visually display bibliographic data and explore citation networks, author collaborations, and co-occurring keywords. Thus, investigating the intellectual structure and dynamics of the domain. A bibliometric analysis, along with a systematic review, helps researchers connect empirical evidence with a wider research landscape view, which includes key players and the emerging themes (Ni & Abdullah, 2025). Together, these sets of methods reveal a more complete story of how the field has been evolving, where it came from, and a bit about future directions, which are especially valuable for interdisciplinary studies seeking a deeper understanding (Marzi et al., 2025).

The first step in this kind of academic inquiry is to define the keywords, usually through a macro, top-down approach that moves from broad search terms to more specific topics and questions (Majid et al., 2025). Given the limited number of earlier studies on GPRs, this research therefore uses the term "government public relations" as a core keyword in article titles, abstracts, and keyword fields. The Scopus database is employed not only for this mapping exercise but also because it is widely used by
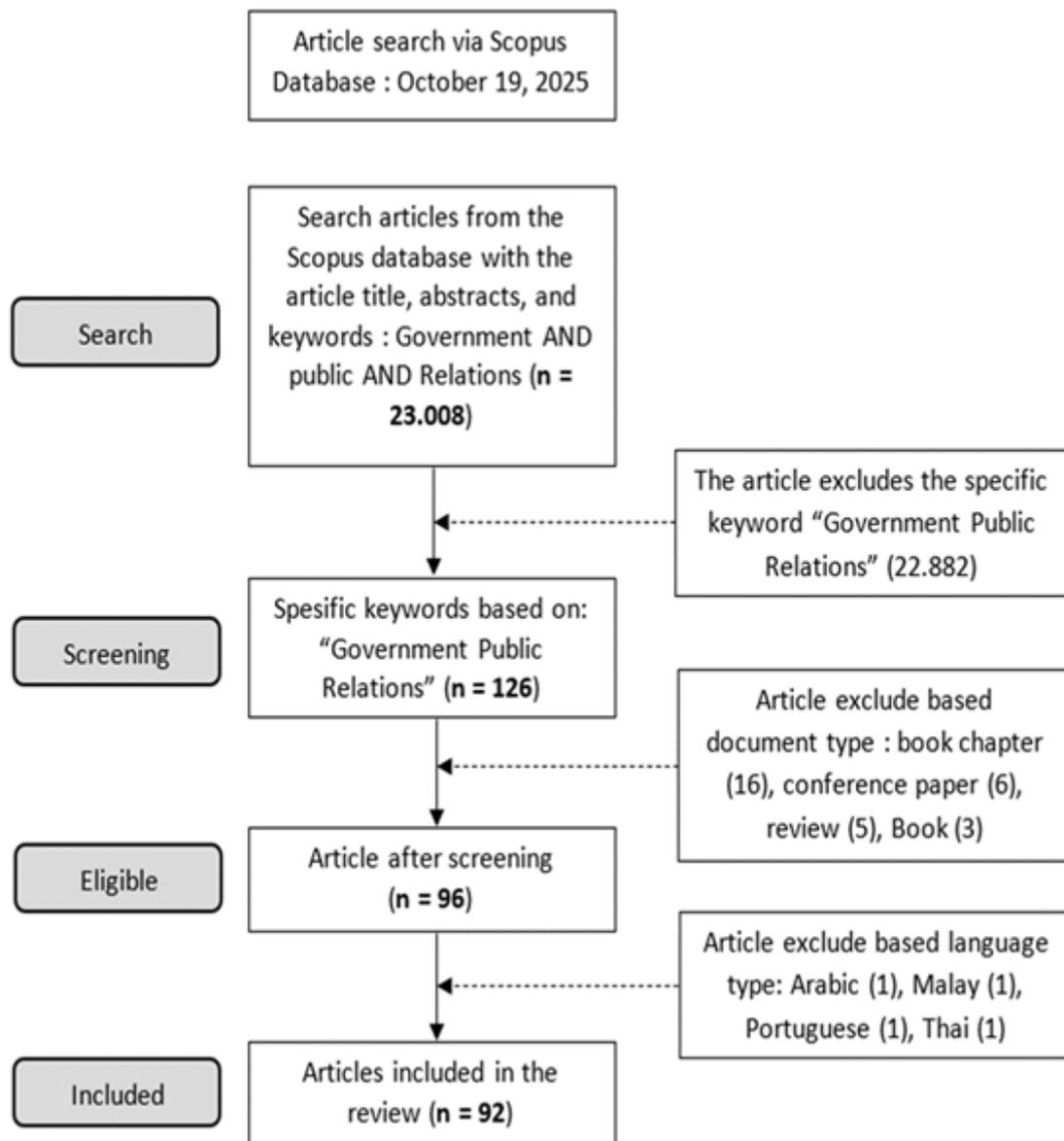
Source: Researchers' data, 2025

Figure 1 Systematic Literature Review Information Flow Using PRISMA

scholars to support literature reviews, identify subject experts, and monitor research trends.

As per the search results obtained on October 19, 2025, from the Scopus database using the article title, abstract, and keywords: "Government AND Public AND Relations" across various academic fields. From the earliest publication in 1976 to the latest in 2025, the total number of articles on Government Public Relations is 23.008 (see figure 1). Following these discoveries, a screening mechanism categorizes documents by classification. Items are excluded according to type: book chapter (16), conference paper (6), review (5), book (3), and non-English (4), for a total of 34 items. The screening outcomes, classified by document

kinds, produced 92 articles. This document is then further analyzed in this study to answer the 3 research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study's conclusions are based on findings from 92 publications in the Scopus database regarding GPRs. This data is derived from the enumeration of published articles, annual publications, and journal sources. This study also emphasizes the most significant factors in GPRs, including the authors, affiliations, and the countries involved.

According to the Scopus database, research has discovered a total of 92 journal papers on GPRs in the last 50 years. This means that research in this field is still quite scarce, as shown in Figure 2. The very first research work of Cutlip (1976), named "Public Relations in the Government," marked the beginning of the term GPR. Figure 2 shows that the number of studies related to it has not been stable, with fluctuations mostly influenced by global events, crises, and developments in communication technologies. The general trend shows a significant increase in recent decades, with some years seeing remarkable peaks due to major events.

During the foundational period (1976–2000), which is represented by only five documents, the focus was mainly on establishing
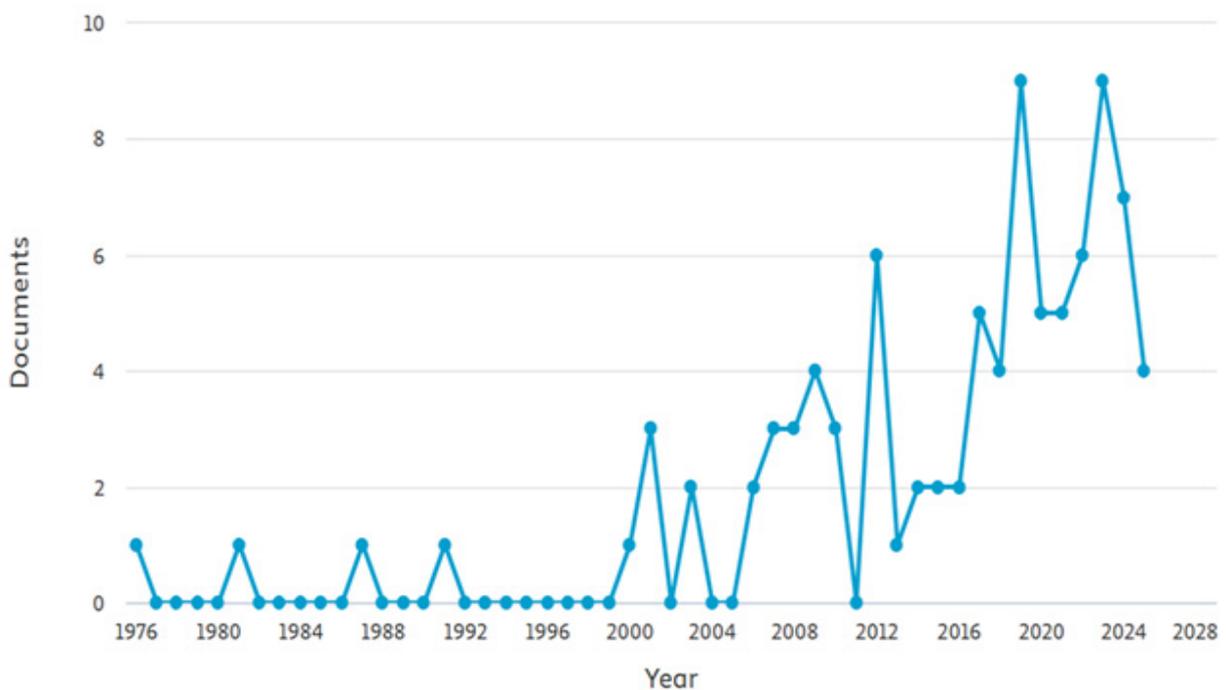
Source: Scopus Database, 2025

Figure 2 Number of Documents by Year

the basic concepts, history, and media relationships of GPR. The hallmark studies, such as Cutlip (1976), which investigated the function of public relations in government, and other studies that examined the portrayal of GPR in movies, were typical of that period. Nonetheless, the discipline was hindered by a predominance of the one-way communication model, a restricted political environment, traditional communication technology, and the non-recognition of Public Relations as a profession.

Then, the next phase (2001–2009) recorded a steep rise to 17 documents, showing a change in focus towards the two-way communication model and public relations. During this time, case studies of crises became increasingly common. For instance, Liu & Horsley (2007) developed communication models for governments. All these changes were accompanied by world events such as the post-9/11 period, the proliferation of digital media, democratization in several countries, as well as the crises of SARS (2003) and the Global Financial Crisis (2008).

There was an explosion of research, especially in 2010–2019, with 34 articles published. The focus shifted sharply toward social media, transparency, public participation, and relationship management theory, which became the dominant paradigm. For example,

a study by Kim & Cho (2019) examines relationships with the community, and research on the use of social media in GPR illustrates this trend. This was stimulated by the social media revolution, a series of worldwide events (e.g., the Arab Spring, the refugee crisis, and climate change), the ever-increasing public demand for accountability, and the institutionalization of GPR.

The pandemic period (2020–2022) made 16 documents. The studies on the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis communication dominated the documents. Big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) analysis were the novelty of the research, as demonstrated by Chon & Kim (2022), analyzing 360.861 COVID-19 tweets. This short research phase was very intensive and was characterized by the pandemic, the accompanying infodemic, the accelerated pace of digitalization, and the management of multidimensional crises.

Analyzing the recent and future (2023–2025) research trends through 20 articles, the emphasis has been broadened to cover AI, digital participation, and sustainability concerns. The use of cross-cultural and comparative study approaches is increasing, as shown by the systematic review of GPR by Dong et al. (2023) and the narrative on diplomacy strategies by Arceneaux (2024). This leading edge is shaped by the unraveling of global issues (e.g., the

Documents by country or territory
Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.
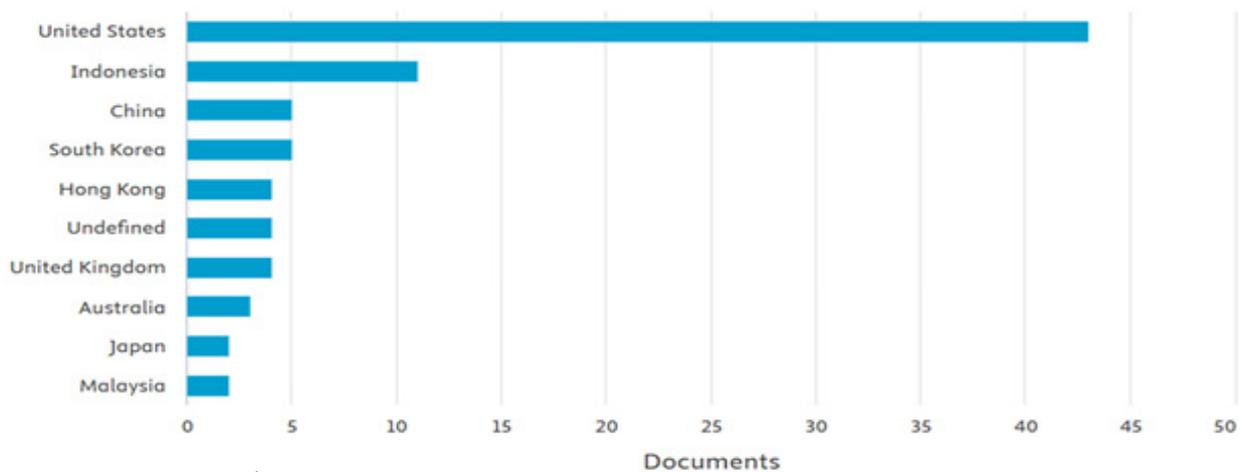
Source: Scopus Database, 2025

Figure 3 Number of Articles by Country or Territory (Top 10 Countries)

war in Ukraine, climate change, and economic downturn), alongside technological advances, new governance challenges, and the further professionalization of GPR.

Since 1976, there has been insufficient research published in esteemed publications, and the perception that GPR is not yet a vital strategic role. Furthermore, the media environment during that period did not facilitate intricate exchanges. In the current era, characterized by an abundance of information, misinformation, and concurrent global crises, the significance of GPR has intensified markedly. Hence, it is anticipated that the volume of studies, articles, and reports on this subject will remain substantial in the future, particularly focusing on AI adaptation, misinformation management, and multidimensional crisis communication.

The distribution of GPR research across 92 articles was examined by categorizing them by nation, area, affiliation, source, and author, with the top 10 articles included in each category. Insight into the distribution of scholarships related to GPR can benefit researchers and practitioners in clarifying the upcoming research agenda, especially in the sustainable development of its framework.

The distribution of academic research related to GPR, classified by country or region, is predominantly led by the United States with 43 articles, followed by Indonesia with 11 articles, China and South Korea each with 5 articles, Hong Kong with 4 articles, an undefined category with 4 articles, the United Kingdom with 4 articles, Australia with 3 articles, and Japan and Malaysia each with 2 articles (see Figure 3). These findings demonstrate that GPR is expanding rapidly in both developed

nations, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. It also expands in developing countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, along with several other Asian nations, underscoring the global significance of this subject.

When examining the relationships between countries, the articles do not appear to be isolated national cases. Instead, they form several overlapping clusters of collaboration and citation that link institutions across regions. In this network, the United States tends to occupy a central position and is frequently connected to scholars and institutions in South Korea, China, Indonesia, and several European countries. This pattern suggests that the development of GPR as a field is shaped by international research ties, even though it still leans heavily on the capacity and resources of a few research-intensive nations.

In terms of institutional affiliation, publications on GPR are concentrated in a relatively small set of universities with strong traditions in communication and public affairs. Several American institutions, such as the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Auburn University, account for a notable share of the output. Indonesian universities, such as Universitas Padjadjaran and Universitas Brawijaya, also appear among the most active contributors. This pattern indicates that GPR has attracted interest not only from established

research centers in the Global North but also from universities in emerging contexts where governance and public communication issues are highly important.

From the perspective of publication outlets, most GPR studies are published in leading communication and public relations journals. Public Relations Review stands out as the primary venue, alongside titles such as Asian Journal of Communication and Journal of Public Relations Research, as well as several regional journals in Asia and Africa. Together, these outlets show that GPRs are increasingly recognized as part of the broader international conversation on strategic communication, public administration, and governance.

When examining the authorship patterns, a small group of scholars emerges as central figures in shaping the field. Authors such as Lee, Chon, Chen, and Kriyantono appear repeatedly with multiple publications, while several other researchers contribute two or three articles each. The presence of these core authors points to the gradual formation of a specialist community that advances both the theoretical and practical dimensions of government public relations. It also highlights opportunities for new researchers to engage with an already established body of work.

The study was performed on 92 manuscripts obtained from the Scopus database. VOSviewer
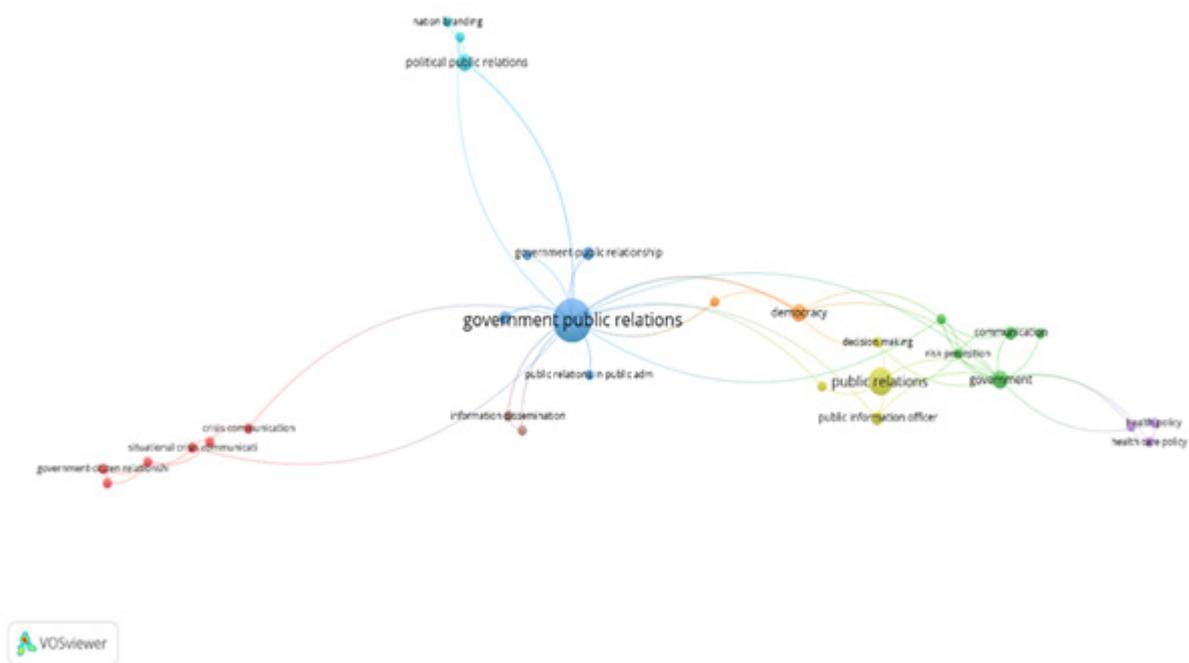
Source: Output VOSViewer Software, 2025

Figure 4 Co-Occurrence Framework and Representation of Key Terms

was used to illustrate that the results may have theoretical and practical significance for future GPR research. The results of the metadata analysis performed with VOSviewer help scholars and practitioners in understanding the premises and conclusions related to GPR. The bibliometric analysis performed using VOSviewer identifies factors that have been extensively studied by previous researchers and those that have been minimally explored, providing a foundation for future research initiatives. From a practitioner's perspective, the results of the literature review using VOSviewer can assist in the sustainable implementation of GPR in the future and advance its model for governments worldwide.

From Figure 4, the occurrences of nation branding (2), Public Diplomacy (13), Political Public Relations (5), government–public relationship (3), government public relations (33), government-citizen relationships (2), situational theory of problem solving (2), government–public relations (2), situational crisis communication theory (2), crisis response strategies (2), crisis communication (2), public information (2), information dissemination (2), public relations in public administration (2), relationship management (2), democracy

(5), public opinion (2), decision making (2), public relations (13), information subsidies (2), public information officer (3), risk perception (2), communication (3), government (6), health policy (2), and health care policy (2).

From a bibliometric perspective, the VOSviewer map shows that the knowledge structure of GPR is arranged in several connected thematic clusters, with "government public relations" at the center and displaying the strongest links, with a total link strength of 40 to other keywords. Around this core term, there is an institutional-communication cluster that brings together "government," "public relations," "communication," "public opinion," "risk perception," "public information officer," and "information dissemination." It reflects a long tradition of research on how public bodies relate to citizens, shape opinion, and handle issues through planned communication and information management. A second cluster is tied to public health and groups "health policy," "healthcare policy," and "public health," all of which are closely linked to "government" and "communication." This suggests that health policy and health-related crises, especially during the COVID-19 period, have become important testing grounds for GPR practice and theorizing, including the use of social-media data and big-data tools in crisis settings.

Beyond these clusters, the map also points to a democracy–politics cluster that combines "democracy," "political public relations," "public diplomacy," "nation branding," and "government–citizen relationships." It connects GPR to work on democratic legitimacy, public diplomacy, and national image-building in international contexts. This pattern indicates a shift from viewing GPR mainly as an administrative communication function towards understanding it as a strategic tool for maintaining political trust, framing policy narratives, and managing power relations among governments, citizens, and external audiences. In addition, terms such as "situational crisis communication theory," "situational theory of problem solving," and "relationship management" form a smaller theoretical cluster. The terms show that GPR research still relies heavily on established public relations theories that have been adapted to the public sector to explain citizen responses, responsibility attributions, and the quality of government–public relationships in both crisis and normal conditions.

Read alongside the earlier periodization of the literature, these clusters suggest that the GPR field has moved from an early focus on institutional structure and media relations toward newer concerns such as health policy, digital participation, and strategic diplomacy. However, this shift has not yet produced a single agreed-upon set of features defining GPR

practice. On the theoretical side, the separation between institutional communication, public health, and democracy–politics themes indicates that GPR is still conceptualized in a rather fragmented way across public relations, public administration, and policy studies. It highlights the need for further work to build a more integrated framework that links these three areas. In practical terms, the distribution of keywords across clusters suggests that GPR activities are often carried out separately across various sectors, such as government communication units, health agencies, and diplomatic services. This mapping helps policymakers and practitioners think about more coordinated cross-sector communication models and guide future studies that test these models across different political, cultural, and developmental settings.

Previous mapping and analysis revealed a geographical imbalance in GPR research. Most research has focused on nations with particular political and economic contexts, notably the United States and several Asian countries, including Indonesia and South Korea (see Figure 3). Then, future research should extend to nations or regions exhibiting diverse governance attributes, including developing countries in Africa, Latin America, or Central Asia. The study might help bridge gaps in the current literature and provide a lot more

understanding of how the government uses public relations globally. Also, it explores how effective these are across different political systems and cultures, which is crucial, as government communication plays an important role in national development and social welfare (Chen, 2009; Liu & Horsley, 2007).

Therefore, if government communication adopts a contextual approach, it can lead to better governance quality by making communication strategies consistent with local values and hence meeting the specific requirements of society, an issue becoming more and more urgent in today's complicated global environment (Waymer, 2013). For example, Arceneaux (2024) found that new research on UN initiatives in Switzerland and Norway reveals the increasing importance of strategic narratives in diplomatic practice. Stjernholm (2023) argues that the use of media by the government in Sweden has become more informal, while in the Philippines, scholars have begun studying how communication strategies are applied in counterinsurgency programs (Silvallana & Hagling, 2023).

Earlier studies reveal that GPR has to focus on the major elements that make government communication effective. The basic elements of government communication are based on the principles of transparency, accountability, public participation, and responsiveness. At

Source: Research Results, 2025

Figure 5 Government Public Relations Attribute

the same time, they also imply the importance of virtues, such as integrity, honesty, effective communication, and tech-savviness. Furthermore, GPR should constantly strive to harmonize practical purposes with democratic values in order to ensure communication that truly facilitates good governance. Drawing on multiple sources, this analysis brings together and highlights the core qualities that characterize GPR in practice (see Figure 5).

Based on an in-depth review of 92 research documents on GPR, this study identifies five key attributes that consistently appear in successful practice: (1) transparency, (2) accountability, (3) public participation, (4) responsiveness, and (5) two-way communication. Across the literature, these five traits are mentioned most frequently, appearing in roughly 65–78% of studies, which points to a strong level of agreement among scholars about their central role. Together, they form an important normative foundation for contemporary governance: transparency and accountability function as ethical pillars (Waymer, 2013); public participation and responsiveness describe the quality of the relationship between government and citizens (Chon et al., 2020; Praratya et al., 2024); and two-way communication provides the practical mechanism that connects and sustains all of these elements in everyday GPR work (Kim,

2015; Kriyantono, 2017).

Besides the core attributes, it is equally important to think about them as a broad conceptual framework that can be supplemented with more specific qualities. For example, on a practical level, digital engagement initiatives, crisis management, trust-building efforts, and community-focused strategies can be interpreted as some of the tangible manifestations of the five main principles (Chon & Kim, 2022; Dong & Morehouse, 2022). Five characteristics are so universal that they can be applied in political situations all over the world at different cultural and governance levels, from sophisticated democracies to underdeveloped nations, without losing their conceptual essence (Aghazadeh, 2024; Arceneaux, 2024). Moreover, strong empirical evidence from various field studies confirms the validity of this choice, each characteristic's ability serving as an extension of the mechanisms by which public trust is generated, policy compliance is improved, and government sustainability is secured (Liu et al., 2018; Micallef et al., 2025).

All five of these characteristics form a single, consistent, and mutually supporting ecosystem, thus establishing a logical chain of causes leading to the adoption of a comprehensive GPR application. While elements such as technological, managerial, and cultural characteristics are important, their instrumental and situational nature makes them more likely to be operational derivatives rather than the main pillars (Stjernholm, 2023; Zhu et al., 2022). Hence, the choice of these five features reflects a scholarly agreement and provides a broad theoretical framework for understanding and implementing efficient GPR in the complex and ever-changing environment of contemporary governance (Dong et al., 2023; Kriyantono et al., 2022).

This article proposes a conceptual model in which GPR is treated as an independent variable that influences five main outcomes in public governance (see Figure 6). Drawing on an analysis of 92 research documents, the model suggests that effective GPR can strengthen public trust in government, increase policy support and compliance, raise levels of citizen engagement, improve the quality of government–public relationships, and enhance the organizational reputation of public institutions.

Studies by Li et al. (2025) and Liu (2023) show that transparency and accountability in GPR help build public trust by strengthening how citizens view the government's credibility. Further, Chon & Chung (2024) and Li et al. (2025) indicate that clear and consistent communication through GPR can improve how people understand and accept policies, which in turn supports higher levels of compliance.
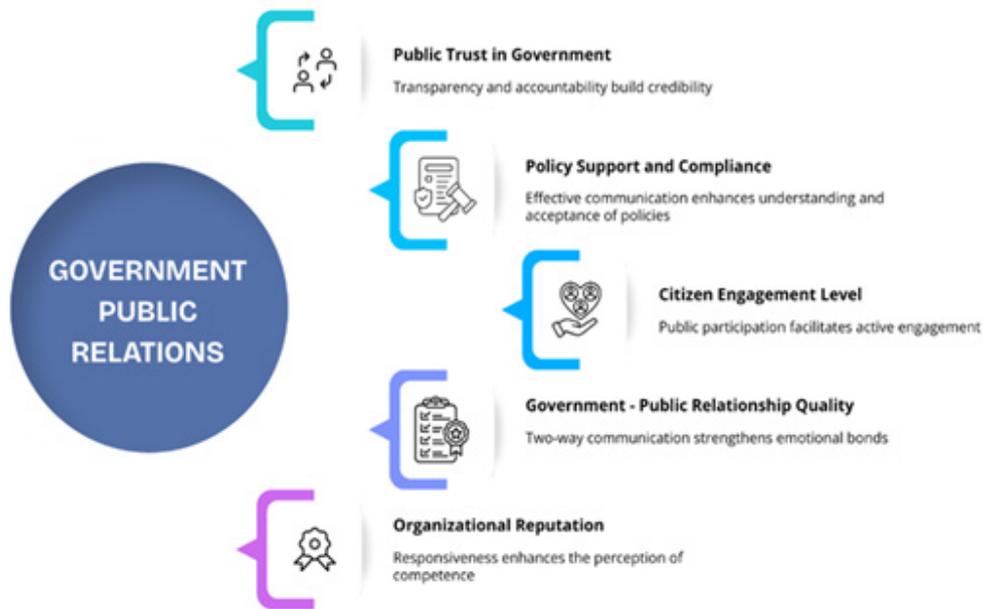
Source: The authors' elaboration is based on previous research

Figure 6 Conceptual Model of Government Public Relations

Public participation coupled with two-way communication, as elaborated by Praratya et al. (2024) and Aghazadeh (2024), places citizens at the center of governance processes rather than making them passive recipients of information. Besides, sustainable GPR practices influence the entire government–public relationship. Dong & Morehouse (2022) and Kim & Cho (2019) argue that through two-way communication and government responsiveness, people can emotionally connect with their government and thus be more satisfied with its performance. Last but not least, according to Arceneaux (2024), a government's reputation is boosted when its institutions not only respond adequately but also create well-thought-out narratives that show their capabilities.

Moreover, the conceptual framework not only charts the direct impact of GPR on some governance outcomes but also examines how other variables shape these relationships. For instance, public perceptions (Chon & Chung, 2024) and parasocial interactions (Liu, 2023) function as intermediate variables that explain how GPR influences policy support and political trust. Moreover, different political, cultural, and media milieus can modulate these effects either by amplifying or diminishing them, as demonstrated by Waymer (2013) and Hidayat et al. (2018). Thus, all these points, when combined, reveal how GPR can be dissected and fine-tuned to achieve improved governance outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to answer three fundamental issues regarding research in GPR. Firstly, whether GPR is still a worthy field for scholarly research (RQ1). Secondly, we sought to find the global distribution of GPR publications and their main features (RQ2). Thirdly, it aims to identify the theoretical and practical implications of these findings to predict the future direction of the field (RQ3). The methodology combined an SLR with a bibliometric analysis of 92 articles from 1976 to 2025. The analysis revealed a discipline that has significantly increased its research output over the past few years and whose research currently resonates with the challenges of real governance in a time of digital media, trust deficits, and overlapping crises.

Moving on to RQ1 first. The temporal pattern shows that GPR hardly attracted scholarly attention in the 1980s–1990s. However, it experienced a significant boom after 2000, especially during crises, including the post-9/11 period, the 2008 economic crisis, the rise of social media, and most notably the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a clear indication that researchers are interested in GPR when government communication encounters difficulties. However, only 92 articles over fifty years indicate a field that has not been sufficiently developed. The latest research on AI, digital participation, and information disorder suggests that GPR will be at the core of the concept of governance and public relations.

Moreover, the GPR studies have highlighted a clear geographic imbalance in the distribution of research work for the RQ2 topic. The U.S. tops the list, trailed by Indonesia, China, and South Korea. There is a noticeable lack of papers from Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia, where issues of government communication and public trust are particularly critical. Furthermore, most studies are limited to a few institutions and journals, with one-third of the articles studied coming from Public Relations Review alone. Although such concentration helps create a scholarly community, it still restricts access to diverse viewpoints and experiences.

Lastly, addressing RQ3, a very clear trend can be seen in the studies. Five components are generally present and closely related to one another: transparency, accountability, public participation, responsiveness, and two-way communication. These factors represent a complex system of human interactions that not only shape citizens' feelings of trust and legitimacy toward authorities and their compliance with them, but also their political engagement and their sense that their voices are heard. We can only imagine how the framework could be challenged in different political

systems, how far cultures can diverge, and how policy domains vary.

Current literature mainly treats GPR as a communication tactic rather than a fundamental factor influencing democratic quality and governmental legitimacy. Literature has insufficiently explored technology's transformative role, particularly AI and algorithmic communication. Research on the Global South has underexplored GPR's connections to nation-building, welfare delivery, and peacebuilding.

For researchers going forward, expand beyond Scopus by using computational analysis and longitudinal tracking, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons to examine how political systems, media landscapes, and traditions affect the effectiveness of government communication. For policymakers and officials, treat GPR as a core organizational priority, integrating the five elements into organizational structures, performance measures, and professional standards.

We acknowledge that this study has real limitations. We depended only on Scopus and worked with English-language publications. These decisions limit what we can convey. However, we think the evidence points to one obvious conclusion: GPR is a field that deserves significant attention from scholars and practitioners, but it has not yet received it. The

issues involved (e.g., democratic governance, institutional credibility, and the relationship between governments and citizens) are so important that we cannot afford to be indifferent.

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