

Exploring Public Relation Campaigns Research from 2019 to 2024: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The current systematic review study reviewed articles on public relations campaigns published between 2019 and 2024. It aimed to explore these articles regarding development, theories, models, methodologies, data analysis tools, media types and platforms, the geographic distribution of the issues discussed, first author affiliations, and key themes addressed through computerized quantitative content analysis. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 articles were collected. The study revealed a significant qualitative shift in the number of articles published in 2021, a trend that continued in subsequent years. This finding is essential for understanding the current landscape of public relations campaigns. Most research did not utilize a specific theory to understand the campaign under study. Public relations campaign articles tended toward a qualitative approach, with case studies and questionnaires emerging as the most prominent data analysis tools. Our analysis of the regions discussed, as well as the geographic distribution of the first authors, reveals that North America was the most prevalent, with the United States leading the way. Digital platforms and social media have overtaken traditional media in PR campaign articles, marking a significant shift in the industry.

Keywords

Public Relation Campaigns, Digital Public Relations, Theories in Public Relations, Systematic Review

1. Introduction

Public relations, often considered the front guard of an organization, plays a pivotal role in numerous communication activities. Its primary goals are twofold. Firstly, it focuses on construction, which involves communicating the organization's values and fostering a positive image among the public. Secondly, it empha-

sizes correction, aiming to address internal issues within the organization. This dual approach helps in understanding public opinion and behavior towards the organization, and subsequently, raising it to the management (Gunawan & Salamah, 2018).

Therefore, planning, managing and implementing campaigns is one of the basic and important tactics in the work of a public relations practitioner to achieve immediate (short-term) goals that fall under the general and ultimate goal of the organization. Despite its importance, public relations is linked to many specializations due to its presence as a department or department in all organizations of various types (governmental, volunteer, private sector, educational, health, etc.), as well as its overlap with other departments such as the planning, marketing, or media departments. It has opened the door for many researchers in other disciplines to research the impact of “communication” campaigns in various fields. It made public relations—as a stand-alone science—lose the compass of setting a methodological framework and steps on a purely communicative basis (Zerfass et al., 2020).

Goldberg and Gustafson (2023) believe that the success of public relations campaigns (PRC) depends on the influence of the driving force, which is all the communication efforts, contexts, and systems that work to achieve the campaign objectives, versus the influence of the constraining force, which is the obstacles and distractions that restrict the campaign objectives. This vision requires the public relations practitioner to develop a detailed and changeable communication plan. Therefore, he must be a researcher in the issue he wants to direct the public towards and easily adapt to changes in the surrounding environment.

Therefore, a systematic review of the literature on PRC research from a communication perspective is important. Because it explores “collective” trends in the field of public relations in terms of research topics, developing theories and models used, types of samples, and methodological approaches used in collecting and analyzing data. It also provides suggestions for researchers and practitioners alike (Eriksson, 2018).

The main goal of this study is to examine the development, theories, and methods of data collection and analysis, the main topics discussed while exploring articles focusing on PRC, the geospatial distribution of the first author’s affiliation, and the geographic distribution of the study population. The current study also serves as a review of articles published in the last five years about PRC. It is a topic that has yet to be dealt with previously within the limits of the researcher’s knowledge systematically and analytically.

It should be noted that this study’s main limitation is that it only focuses on research articles that use the term “campaign” or “campaigns” published in specific academic databases and communication journals from a public relations perspective. Although hundreds of articles deal with communication campaigns, they do not use the term “campaign” or “campaigns” explicitly, and they were published in journals far from the field of public relations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. PRC, History, and Definition

During the pivotal period of the 1960s and 1970s, political and sociologists (Schramm, 1962; Howeth, 1963; Mendelsohn, 1973; Lasswell et al., 1979) began to show a growing interest in communication campaigns as they were then known particularly electoral campaigns. They delved into various aspects, including the most effective means of communication to achieve campaign objectives, the content of messages that resonate with the target audience, the ethical standards of these campaigns, and the persuasive methods used beyond propaganda.

It should be noted that the analysis and criticism of campaigns began in the 1940s, as is the research case (Knoles, 1942; Mott, 1944; Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947), but the systematic publication of research specialized in campaigns appeared in the 1960s and 1970s (Rice & Atkin, 2012).

Rice and Atkin (2012) define communication campaigns as purposeful attempts to inform large audiences or influence their behaviors over a specific period of time. These campaigns utilize an organized set of communication activities and generally comprise a set of messages across multiple channels to produce non-commercial benefits to individuals and society. Importantly, communication campaigns necessitate an approach that allows for flexible adaptation of the campaign strategy based on continuous evaluation.

Designing a public relations campaign is also known as goal-oriented strategic communication. Various communication channels are employed to achieve strategic goals related to long-term marketing. Campaign design is usually based on choosing three main elements: (1) message, (2) channel, and (3) content (Jin et al., 2022).

Jiang and his colleagues (2022) point out that (PRC) aim to spread awareness and knowledge among the masses and reduce uncertainties related to products or services by identifying the factors involved in shaping resistant behaviors to a behavior (Jin et al., 2022).

Despite the many types of (PRC) and the diversity of their objectives, they all include a set of basic steps, which begin by defining a set of objectives, then developing several strategies that ensure the achievement of those objectives, followed by disseminating the campaign messages through the appropriate channels for the target audience, and then the fourth step includes the latter is to conduct systematic research to evaluate campaign activities (Zhao, 2020).

Zhao (2020) considers choosing the target audience the most important step in planning a communication campaign. Because focusing on subgroups achieves more effective results than targeting a general audience, the public relations practitioner must ask the target audience for the campaign: Who is the audience whose orientation or behavior we aim to change? Who is the audience expected to respond to this change? The answers to these questions will shape the segmentation of the campaign's audience.

The strategies employed in (PRC) can be divided into two parts: Content strat-

egies, which are ideas and concepts aimed at changing, suppressing, or strengthening a behavior. These strategies are, therefore, the basis for building campaign messages to change “targeted beliefs.” The second type is executive strategies, decisions aimed at mobilizing content, emotional appeals, framing messages, narrative persuasion, and others (Zhao, 2020).

2.2. Digital PRC

In light of the rapid digital development, social media platforms have become essential to our lives. This makes it imperative for the public relations practitioner to regularly prepare digital content tailored to the context of the moment and to suit the target market of that organization. Such a strategy effectively disseminates information and builds a good mental image of the organization (Lee & Chan, 2015).

Social media has changed the mentality of the public relations practitioner. It has become the main reference for individuals in searching for information, and everyone can easily write their opinion. Thus, it has become the most important and efficient strategy to attract public attention to interaction, as it indirectly makes the public support the organization. The more positive comments or interactions there are, the easier for the organization to spread its positive image (Gunawan & Salamah, 2018).

Jungherr (2016) underscores the adaptability of digital tools in campaigns, which is influenced by several factors such as the nature of the organization’s work, its structure, and its social media presence. He argues that digital tools are no longer mere implements for specific goals but can reshape the campaign’s structure, strategies, and activities to align with the available digital tools, fostering a sense of flexibility and innovation.

Significantly, much digital campaigns research has focused on studying the impact of digital tools and their connection to media coverage. However, recent studies, such as Namkoong’s et al. (2016), have shown that interactive communication on social networking sites between individuals and between individuals and organizations can positively influence individuals’ beliefs and behavioral intentions. This finding instills optimism and hope, highlighting the effectiveness of digital tools in campaigns, particularly in health (Namkoong et al., 2016) and political (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016) contexts.

2.3. PRC Research

Despite the differences in naming (PRC) and their overlap with many disciplines, they have a long history of analysis in research, according to agreed-upon methodological frameworks and strategic principles. Most campaigns research literature draws from a review of research conducted by Rogers and Storey (1987), who identified the basic elements that characterize all communication campaigns (Werder, 2020).

According to Stacks (2016), public relations professionals always practice re-

search in an “informal” manner in their organizations. Reports regularly prepared about the target audience are considered research, or reports that evaluate the effectiveness of messages and media used in previous campaigns or other organizations are considered research. However, this method may not yield the desired results because the information was not collected systematically, nor was a representative sample of the target audience reached. Therefore, the public relation practitioner not just the researcher must resort to “official” research to avoid mistakes and achieve the best results.

The need for public relations research has increased with the development of this profession over the years and its shift from the technical to the administrative side. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) explained that the percentage of public relations practitioners’ use of research in their campaigns reached 25% in 1980, while it reached 75% in 1998. Not only has the pace of conducting research increased, but it has also become more complex. With the emergence of new media, there is a need for public relations practices to be proactive. To better understand social and economic challenges before crises arise rather than after them (Stacks, 2016).

Stacks (2016) defines public relations research as systematically collecting, analyzing, and evaluating data using quantitative or qualitative approaches. It involves observing people, events, or things of interest as they occur to understand the impact of public relations in many disciplines.

PRC is crucial in understanding and influencing audience behavior. To effect meaningful change, a practitioner often needs a deep understanding of the audience’s beliefs and attitudes, their willingness to change, and the most effective communication channels. It requires drawing on previous research efforts to inform campaign objectives and utilizing the conceptual frameworks established to overcome potential campaign limitations (Zhao, 2020).

2.4. Quantitative Approach in PRC Research

Stacks (2016) defines the quantitative approach in public relations research as the process of collecting data objectively, systematically, and controlled. Objective means that the researcher carefully identifies the elements under study and precisely determines what will be studied. As for systematic, the researcher follows specific rules in collecting and evaluating data. The results also provide a description based on agreed-upon units whose reliability (consistency) can be verified.

This approach can be used when measuring behavioral changes among the target audience in the campaign, whether it is the internal audience, as is the case in the study by Lestari & Hartanti (2018), or the external audience. As Parvanta and others (2013) point out, quantitative data can be used to develop and select promotional advertisements in social marketing campaigns, and surveying cross-sectional data can determine beliefs about the behavior targeted by campaign messages. This proposal may differ from what we are accustomed to regarding following qualitative methods when analyzing messages.

2.5. Qualitative Approach in PRC Research

Qualitative data analysis can be defined as an effort in which data is collected, organized, sorted into manageable units, adapted, looking for and finding patterns, finding what is important and what is learned, and determining what can be transferred. Analyzing data in public relations research includes several types, starting with the data reviewed, explained, and inductively concluded through individual and cross-site analysis. At this stage, the researcher examines all data collected from observations, interviews, and document reviews (Ramdan, 2023).

To facilitate the analysis of qualitative data, one can resort to the Interactive Model technique from Miles and Huberman, where the analysis is divided into four parts: collecting data, reducing data, displaying data, and drawing conclusions. Or verify the data (Ramdan, 2023).

The qualitative approach in public relations research serves a dual purpose. It not only aids in data analysis and pattern exploration but also provides insights into the goals of public relations practitioners. Additionally, it helps in understanding how these practitioners measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their communication campaigns. This approach also sheds light on the factors that impede the effective measurement and evaluation of these campaigns across multiple media platforms (Komodromos et al., 2021).

It should be noted that analyzing the content of (PRC) can be more in-depth when considering the campaign as a media discourse and using elements of discourse analysis when analyzing and deconstructing the campaign's messages and contents. To find implicit meanings (Özoran, 2021). Furthermore, the research could move towards evaluating PCR management through in-depth interviewing and analysis (Widanarko & Atmadi, 2023).

2.6. Mixed Approach in PRC Research

Zakharchenko (2022) believes that public relations practitioners and political analysts often resort to conducting a quick mixed analysis (quantitative and qualitative) of the results of media campaigns similar to the campaign intended to be carried out by analyzing the messages of those campaigns. This provides a framework for evaluating efficiency and reliability on the one hand and an in-depth analysis of the factors that contribute to achievements or failures on the other hand.

Morehouse (2021) referred to the same method in his study as an effective method for analyzing the content of a specific campaign and measuring its impact on the target audience. In addition to the interview tool and its qualitative analysis, quantitative content analysis was used to produce more accurate results. The subject of the research and the purpose of conducting it determine the most appropriate approach.

2.7. Theories and Models Used in PRC Research

Although no specific theory has been developed to explain and predict public

communications campaigns, researchers in the field of (PRC) resort to relying on one theory or several theories to guide campaign strategies. Different theories and models provide deep insights into the social and environmental factors influencing behavior and predicting the response to changing it (Zhao, 2020; Rice & Atkin, 2012). The most prominent theories and models used for the research objective can be classified as follows: (Jin et al., 2022; Matusitz, 2022; Zhao, 2020; Rice & Atkin, 2012).

Firstly, Behavioral theories are the most commonly used in PRC research. Because campaigns aim fundamentally to change behavior, a systematic understanding of what drives behavior and how behaviors can be changed must be developed. Include:

- Classic Communication Persuasion Matrix, or input-output model. McGuire (1983) designed a model to persuade the target audience and bring about a change in its behavior and attitude toward something. This is done through a matrix containing a set of inputs called Input Communication Factors, which are five in number and include the source, the message, the channel, the audience, and the direction (i.e., who says? What does he say? Through what media does he say? Moreover, to whom does he say? And regarding What? (Rice & Atkin, 2012).

McGuire (1983) explained that these elements must have certain characteristics to ensure the success of the persuasion process, and they also go through certain stages that must be clarified through the matrix. To reach the set of outcomes, called Output Persuasion Steps, they include exposure to communication messages, followed by understanding their content, paying attention to them, changing the situation, storing the new situation in memory, and retrieving the new situation from memory when appropriate. Then, the decision to act based on the new situation, then act (change the behavior), and begin to influence the change in the attitudes of others around (Rice & Atkin, 2012).

- Theory of reasoned action. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) identified a set of variables (linkages) that determine the relationship between belief and behavior and assumed the presence of intention mediating the relationship between them (Hagger, 2019). Therefore, researchers resort to this theory to measure behavioral intention to perform a behavior as studies (Akther & Nur, 2022; Cudjoe et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020; Norman et al., 2020), or to understand the factors that form an intention for behavior in A specific social context as my study (Copeland & Zhao, 2020; Xiao, 2020).

- Theory of planned behavior. Ajzen (1985) developed the Theory of Reasoned Action into the Theory of Planned Behavior by adding new criteria that mediate the relationship between belief and behavior, improve the theory's predictive ability, and obtain more realistic results (Alhamad & Donyai, 2021). This theory is considered the most widely used in studies dealing with behavior change (Ali et al., 2021; Baber, 2020; Setiawan et al., 2020), especially in health behavior (Shmueli, 2021; Hamilton et al., 2020; Jang & Song, 2020).

- Health belief model. This model is considered a useful theoretical framework

for exploring individuals' motivations for performing a behavior and the reasons they refrain from a behavior. The model is based on the fact that measuring current beliefs can indicate future health behavior (Al-Metwali et al., 2021). Therefore, the model is specifically used for health behavior research, including health campaigns of all kinds (Chen et al., 2021; Karimy et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2021).

- The transtheoretical model (or stages of change model). Prochaska (1979) developed the TTM model as a tool for behavior modification. It consists of no stages, starting with creating awareness and ending with ensuring the sustainability of the behavior. It has been applied in various fields, such as nutrition, sports, and others (Pennington, 2021).

- Diffusion of innovations theory. The theory highlights how people are persuaded to adopt a new product or behavior. Rogers (1962) argued that with an innovation with comparative advantage, compatibility, less complexity, trialability, and observability, the target audience tends to adopt it more quickly. He also argued that the innovation decision-making process consists of five steps: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This theory is widely used in planning marketing, sports, and political campaigns (Lee, 2021).

- Innovation Resistance Theory. In contrast to the previous theory, IRT theory provides an understanding of resistance-oriented consumer behavior. Resistance to innovation can be defined as the belief resulting from rational thinking due to potential changes resulting from changing the status quo (using innovation or changing behavior), and this resistance may fail the success (diffusion) of the innovation (Kaur et al., 2020). IRT theory is commonly used in research dealing with modern technological applications (Jin et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022a; Van Klyton et al., 2021; Kaur et al., 2020).

Secondly, Communication theories that provide systematic accounts of the effects of communication processes. Below are the most prominent ones:

- The elaboration likelihood model, a key communication theory, offers a systematic account of how messages are received and processed by a target audience. It emphasizes the importance of considering all elements of the message due to the diverse temperaments, abilities, and motivations of individuals. This model is particularly useful in marketing, as it aids in crafting persuasive messages that cater to the capabilities and motivations of the target consumers (Shahab et al., 2021). Its practical applications are evident in various marketing campaigns (Li et al., 2022b; Liao & Huang, 2021).

- The extended parallel process model or EPPM model. Kim offered Witte (1992) as a model for how to deal with fear-inducing messages. According to the model, when an individual does not perceive a problem as a threat, he will ignore it and not act. However, if he senses danger, he will evaluate his self-efficacy (i.e., his belief in his ability to implement the proposed action to avoid the danger) as well as the efficiency of the response (i.e., his belief in the effectiveness of the proposed action to avoid the danger). Therefore, perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived self-efficacy, and perceived response efficacy predict the extent

of an individual's response to the messages designed in campaigns and communication plans (Nazione et al., 2021).

- The agenda-setting theory posits that major media sources, such as journalists, editors, and reporters, play a significant role in shaping public opinion. They do so by setting the public agenda, determining what issues citizens should focus on and when. This theory is based on the concept of 'need for orientation,' which suggests that individuals have a natural inclination to stay informed about their surroundings. The media, through the news and information they provide, fulfill this need (Towner & Muñoz, 2018).

Researchers usually use agenda-setting theory in political and electoral campaign research (Towner & Muñoz, 2018; Cushion et al., 2018; Lee & Xu, 2018; Gilardi et al., 2022).

- Message frames. This term originates from Psychological Reactance Theory, where Quick & Bates (2010) argue that messages that are reinforced with a gain frame for positive behavior versus a loss frame for negative behavior are more likely to elicit a reaction (response) from the audience (Rice & Atkin, 2012).

Thirdly, psychological theories provide insights into dividing the audience and determining targeted messages for each audience segment. Include:

- Social cognitive theory. Also known as "Bandura's theory" and "Bandura's social cognitive theory," the theory assumes that the environment surrounding the individual affects the process of his motivation, learning, and self-regulation. The theory has been used in several fields, such as education, business administration, and health, and its use is not limited to psychological fields. The theory can only be used to motivate individuals to perform a certain behavior, study their motivations for a certain behavior, and design goal-oriented activities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Researchers usually use this theory to research extension campaigns that address environmental issues (Shahangian et al., 2021) or health (Dono et al., 2020; Derksen et al., 2020).

- Self-Efficacy Theory. It refers to an individual's ability to succeed in organizing and carrying out a specific task. Satisfies him and encourages him to participate in new actions and behaviors. Moreover, an individual's perceived ability leads him to exert sustained effort at the task, effectively allocate resources to its success, and search for solutions that often lead to better actual performance and outcomes (Kim & Jang, 2018). The theory is based on campaign research on health behaviors (Kite et al., 2018; Guignard et al., 2018; van Rijen et al., 2021; Duong et al., 2023).

- Uses and gratifications theory. An early theory of mass communication, Katz and others (1974) argue that audiences select and use media effectively according to their own needs and thus feel satisfaction due to this use. It can be said that the theory answers the question of "how and why media are used" (Eginli & Tas, 2018). Therefore, this theory can be used in research that focuses on the target audience's motivations to choose a particular means or the optimal media in certain campaigns.

Based on everything mentioned in the studies mentioned above, it can be said

that public relations campaign research is of great importance in enabling communication experts and public relations practitioners to bring about changes in the environment surrounding the organization and enabling the organization to advance in both stable (Rossolini et al., 2021) and unstable (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015) environments. However, this knowledge is often fragmented across many disciplines and non-PR fields. This makes it difficult for researchers and practitioners to distill this knowledge and map key strategic considerations (Goldberg & Gustafson, 2023). Therefore, this article seeks to determine the trends of this research in magazines specializing in public relations, specifically in the last five years, by addressing the following research questions:

- 1) How has (PRC) research developed over the years?
- 2) What are the most commonly used theories in (PRC) research?
- 4) What main methods are used in published (PRC) research?
- 5) What specific analytical methods have been adopted in published (PRC) research?
- 6) What media and platforms have been explored in published (PRC) research?
- 7) What is the geographical-spatial distribution of the study population within published (PRC) research?
- 8) What is the geospatial distribution of the first author's affiliations within published (PRC) research?
- 9) What types of campaigns have been discussed in published (PRC) research?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The current exploratory study focuses on (PRC) research over the past five years. Its goal is to understand trends in published research on (PRC) in terms of development, theories, methodologies, media types, geographic distribution, and key themes. To achieve this, the researcher will rely on the quantitative approach through content analysis of the study's research sample. This method helps reach conclusions by systematically and repeatedly identifying certain characteristics of visual or printed texts (Bryman, 2017).

3.2. Data Collection Method

To obtain the required research, the scope of the review was limited to include academic journals dedicated to public relations research and related communication sciences. It was selected according to the following criteria: (1) academic, (2) contains a classification system for published articles of various types to assist peer reviewers in conducting review research, (3) specializes in public relations research and communication sciences, and (4) is written in English.

Since there is no formal, extensive list of academic journals in the public relations and communication sciences field, selecting appropriate journals followed an iterative process. Journals that were previously used by peer review in the following systematic reviews were selected (Wang, 2023; Roth-Cohen & Avidar,

2022; Volk, 2016; Schönhagen & Meissner, 2016). **Table 1** shows the selected journals, the number of articles in the study sample.

It should be noted that inclusion criteria included the following:

- Journal articles Peer-reviewed articles Contained in one of the academic Journals.
- Explored Only articles written in English Language.
- Keyword: campaign must be mentioned in either the title, keywords, or abstract.
- Articles published only within the public relations field.

Conversely, exclusion criteria included the following:

- Articles do not contain campaign in their title.
- Conference papers, books, book chapters, and other academic resources.
- Other languages, Other fields that are not public relations, or related to communication that have no analysis and reference lists Book reviews Repeated articles.

Table 1. Public relations journals.

Public Relations Journals.			
<i>No.</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Search Outcome</i>	<i>No. of Certified Papers</i>
1.	Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, Deakin University, Australia	37	1
2.	International Journal of Strategic Communication	165	3
3.	Public relations review journal	207	6
4.	Journal of Communication Management	58	2
5.	Journal of Public Relations Research	43	4
6.	Corporate Communications: An International Journal	318	2
7.	Public Relations Inquiry	112	2
8.	International Journal of Business Communication	202	1
9.	Corporate Reputation Review (CRR)	31	0
10.	Journal of Business Ethics	79	3
11.	PRism	12	0
12.	Case Studies in Strategic Communication, University of Southern California, United States	-	- (It has stopped publishing since 2018)
Total		1264	24

3.2.1. Search String & PRISMA Flow Diagram

The researcher used logical operators such as AND when searching the search bars of approved journals. She also matched the word “campaign” using quotation marks to narrow the search and find more accurate results.

For example. The literature search was conducted manually within the Journal of Public Relations Research (<https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/hpr20>). The search string applied was:

“campaign” (restricted to occurrences in the title).

Additional filters included:

Language: English

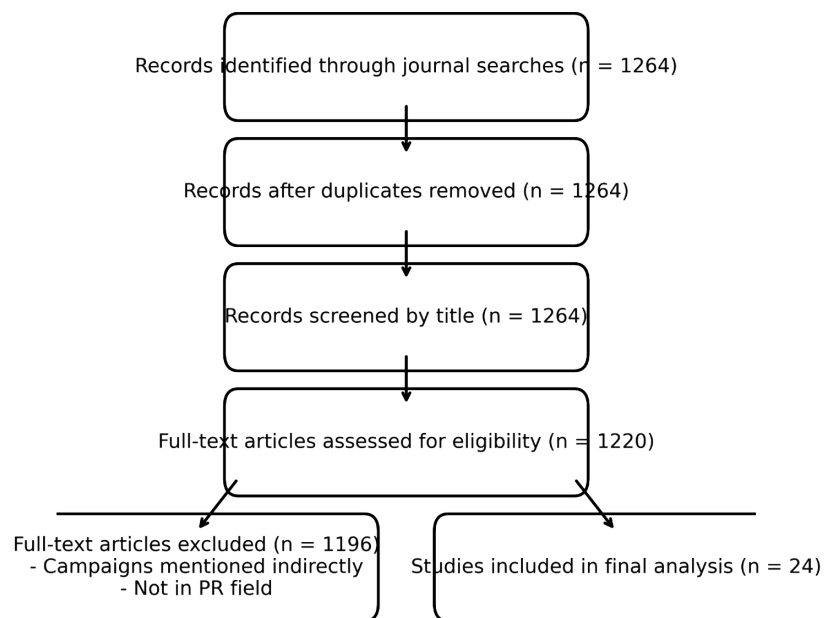
Document type: Peer-reviewed journal articles

Time span: 2019 to 2024

The Boolean structure of the search was as follows:

“campaign” AND (title)

This process was repeated across other selected journals as listed in **Table 1**, using equivalent keyword filters where supported. Only articles related to the field of public relations or strategic communication were retained based on journal scope and content review. The research strategy can be summarized in the following diagram:



3.2.2. Codebook Categories and Report Intercoder Reliability

Table 2 shows the data encoding categories:

Table 2. Codebook for PR campaign analysis.

No.	Variable Name	Data encoding categories	
		Description	Values/Coding Scheme
1.	Year of Publication	The year the article was published	2019-2024
2.	Country of the study population	The geographical-spatial distribution of the study population based on country	Specific country (includes all countries of the world), No Country
3.	Continent of the study population	Geographical distribution of the study population based on continent	Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Australia, and Antarctica, No Continent

Continued

4.	Type of campaign	Types of campaigns have been discussed in published (PRC) research	Environmental, Institutional, Fundraising, Awareness, Social Responsibility, Social Advocacy, Political, Fundraising, Educational, Religious, Cultural, Health.
5.	Media types	Media types have been explored in published (PRC) research	Digital Media, Traditional Media, Multiple Media types, No Media Genre
6.	Media Platforms	Platforms have been explored in published (PRC) research	Organizations' Online Websites, Application, Newspaper, Radio, Television, Face-book, TikTok, Instagram, Snap-chat, Twitter, Multiple Platforms, No Media Platforms
7.	Country of the first Author	The geospatial distribution of the first author's affiliations	Specific country (includes all countries of the world)
8.	Methodology	The methodology followed by the researcher in published (PRC) research	Qualitative approach, Quantitative approach, Mixed approach
9.	Analysis methods	Methods are used in published (PRC) research	Content Analysis, Systematic Review, Discourse Analysis, Survey, Historical Analysis, Experimental Analysis, Survey, Case Study, Comparative Analysis, More Than One/Multiple
10.	Theories	The theory/theories that the researcher relied on to build the theoretical framework	Specific theory (includes all theories in the field of communication, public relations, media, health, education, economics, and psychology), No theory, More Than One/ Triangulation of theories

This study was conducted by a single researcher. While intercoder reliability could not be formally assessed, a structured codebook was developed and applied consistently throughout the analysis. Coding categories were informed by prior literature and refined through an iterative process to ensure clarity and coherence. Although this approach does not include statistical reliability measures, careful attention was given to rigor and consistency in the coding process.

4. Results

The article searches results showed 1264 articles, of which 24 were selected after applying exclusion and inclusion criteria. This section presents the development findings, theories, approaches, analysis methods, geographic affiliation of the first author, geographic affiliation of the study population, and topics.

Regarding the development of research over the past five years, the analysis results—as illustrated in the following **Figure 1**—showed that only one specialized PRC study was completed in 2019, while it increased at a relatively slow pace in 2020, reaching three. It was noted that 2022 and 2023 witnessed a significant increase in published studies, with (8) studies in 2021 and (6) in 2022. The difference between 2019 and 2021 is perhaps due to researchers' investment in the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world during that period and the “quarantine,” which enabled many researchers to redouble their efforts and produce more research. In addition, the economic, social, and health crises (Both et al., 2021) that occurred due to the pandemic have made public relations specialists realize the importance of campaigns—of all kinds—in reaching specific audiences. For example, one article analyzes “crowdfunding” campaigns, i.e., public donations made by some organizations to help those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in China.

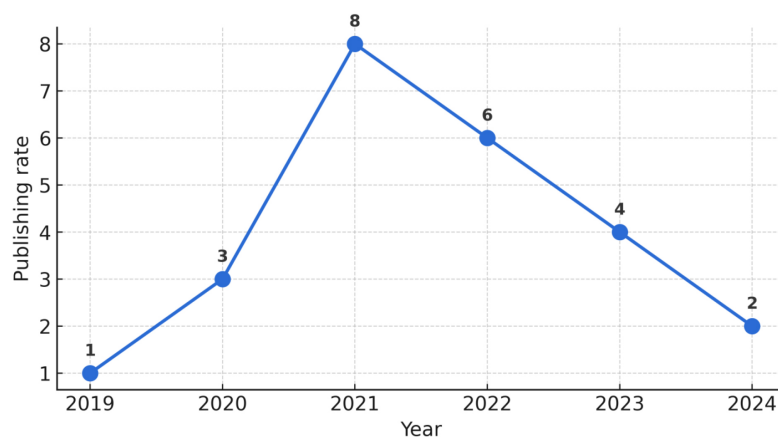


Figure 1. Publishing rate of public relation campaigns research.

It is worth noting that only two studies were published in 2024, a decrease from the previous three years. This indicates that researchers' focus on public relations campaign research is linked to contextual factors based on current circumstances, and there is no genuine belief in the importance of studying public relations campaigns as a phenomenon worthy of investigation.

Regarding the theories and models adopted in PRC, the content analysis results showed that more than half of the research in the study sample was not based on a theory. The researchers relied primarily on previous studies on the concepts and terms covered in the study to formulate the questions and construct the study tool.

The researcher found that 16 articles did not rely on any theory, while other theories were distributed among the remaining studies without duplication. It is

worth noting that none of the papers in the study sample relied on more than one theory or model to fill gaps in the communication topics under study. This indicates a clear weakness among public relations researchers in how to employ theories to measure the phenomenon accurately. **Table 3** shows the theories and models used in the study sample.

Table 3. Theoretical framework of public relation campaigns research.

<i>Valid</i>	Theoretical framework		
	<i>Theories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	No Theory	16	66.7
	Framing Theory	1	4.16
	Dialogic Communication Theory	1	4.16
	Rhetorical theory	1	4.16
	Image Restoration Theory	1	4.16
	Willner's strategic approach	1	4.16
	Relationship management theory	1	4.16
	Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory	1	4.16
	Normative theory	1	4.16
	Total	24	100.0

Regarding the methods used in data collection and analysis, the results showed that the descriptive approach was the most widely used in PRC research, with 12 studies. In contrast, the quantitative approach was followed by 46%. Meanwhile, researchers relied on a mixed approach in only one study. Consistent with previous findings, the case study method was the most widely used, followed by the survey. Only one study relied on more than one method. This may have been a qualitative approach, such as relying on interviews and content analysis, or a mixed approach, such as a questionnaire and content analysis, to obtain more accurate results and answer the research questions. The research was distributed among other analytical methods, as shown in **Table 4**:

Table 4. Methodologies used within public relations campaigns research.

<i>Valid</i>	Methodologies		
	<i>Methods</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Qualitative	12	50
	Quantitative	11	46
	Mixed	1	4
	Total	24	100.0
<i>Valid</i>	<i>Data Analytical Techniques</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Case Study	5	20.8
	Survey	4	16.7
	Content Analysis	3	12.5
	Discourse Analysis	3	12.5
	Experimental Analysis	2	8.3
	Historical Analysis	2	8.3
	Systematic Review	2	8.3

Continued

More Than One/Multiple	1	4.2
Comparative Analysis	1	4.2
Interviews	1	4.2
Total	24	100.0

Analyzing the data, it was found that 50% of the research sample did not address media platforms in any way, while digital media, such as websites for organizations or websites for mass media, topped the research that touched on different media and platforms, with a percentage of 24.4%. Social media platforms came in second place, with 14 searches. Multimedia ranked third with eight research papers.

Table 5 shows the prominence of private applications over other digital media. Twitter was the social platform most interested researchers in campaigns compared to other social media platforms.

Table 5. Media genres and platforms of public relations campaigns research.

<i>Valid</i>	Media genres and platforms		
	<i>Media genres</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	No Media Genre	13	54.2
	Digital Media	8	33.3
	Social Media	2	8.3
	Traditional Media	1	4.2
	Total	24	100.0
<i>Valid</i>	<i>Media Platforms</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	No Media Platforms	13	54.2
	Multiple Platforms	4	16.6
	Organizations' Online Websites	3	12.5
	Twitter	2	8.3
	Application	1	4.2
	Television	1	4.2
	Total	24	100.0

To know the geographical distribution of the study population in (PRC) research, the researcher identified the continent and countries covered by the research sample of the study. This indicates that researchers are turning to countries themselves because phenomena deserve study in the field of public relations in general and the field of campaigns in particular. It also reflects the interest of universities in those countries in producing research specialized in public relations. The results showed that the research that focused on the continent of North America had the highest number of 10 research studies, followed by studies that did not specify a specific continent/country as the study population. In addition to the above, the results showed that the United States of America topped the countries under study with a percentage of 41.6 %. In contrast, the rest of the percentages were distributed as in **Table 6**:

Table 6. Continents and countries discussed within public relation campaigns articles.

<i>Valid</i>	Continents and countries		
	<i>Continent Discussed</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	North America	10	41.7
	No Continent	6	25
	Asia	3	12.5
	Europe	3	12.5
	Australia	2	8.3
	Total	24	100.0
<i>Valid</i>	<i>Countries Discussed</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	USA	10	41.6
	No Country	6	25
	Australia	2	8.3
	Norway	2	8.3
	South Korea	1	4.2
	India	1	4.2
	Belgium	1	4.2
	China	1	4.2
	Total	24	100.0

It's worth noting that the United States ranks first among countries most interested in public relations campaign studies, which explains its continued dominance of the global public relations market, according to the latest statistics (PRLab Website, 2024). It's also worth noting that the continent of Africa, or the countries it covers, did not appear in all the research included in the study, which is a negative indicator in the scientific or applied field of public relations.

As for the geographical affiliation of the first author, the results showed that most of the researchers come from the United States of America, at a rate of 26.7%, and from Australia, which comes in second place, at a rate of 10%. This standard is considered another indicator of the quality of scientific research in these countries, especially in public relations. **Table 7** shows the distribution of researchers according to their geographical affiliations:

Table 7. Continents and countries discussed within public relation campaigns articles.

<i>Valid</i>	First Authors' Affiliations		
	<i>First Author by Country</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	USA	14	58.3
	Australia	3	12.5
	India	1	4.2
	Austria	1	4.2
	UK	1	4.2
	Belgium	1	4.2
	Norway	1	4.2
	Denmark	1	4.2
	China	1	4.2
	Total	24	100.0

The types of campaigns addressed in the study's research sample were analyzed to explore public relations experts' research trends. The researcher has identified specific classifications for these species to classify them easily. **Table 8** shows the operational definition of each type.

Table 8. Definition of campaign types.

<i>No.</i>	Definition of types		
	<i>Type</i>	<i>Operational Definition</i>	<i>Related terms</i>
1.	Fundraising campaign	Articles deal with campaigns that primarily aim to collect donations, whether public donation campaigns, known as "crowdfunding," with multiple reasons for launching this type of campaign.	Fundraising, Crowdfunding, whip round.
2.	Political campaign	Articles related to election campaigns, campaigns to promote a new law or campaigns for general referendums.	Presidential elections, parliamentary elections, citizen political rights campaigns, referendum campaign on amending the constitution.
3.	Health campaign	Articles dealing with health campaigns about diseases or epidemics, whether the word "health" or the disease or epidemic itself is mentioned. Some regardless of the goal of the campaign, whether persuasion, investigating fake news, or measuring public opinion.	4.2 Covid-19, vaccine promotion, awareness of the effects of diabetes, awareness of the danger of obesity in children and adolescents... etc.
4.	Environmental campaign	Articles that deal with awareness campaigns to preserve the environment, whether by encouraging positive practices or warning against negative practices. These campaigns are conducted by analyzing the content of one of the communication channels or by surveying reactions to the extent of the campaign's success.	Preserve green areas, identify negative phenomena that harm the environment, evaluate the effectiveness of a specific communication channel in spreading awareness about a threat to the environment, and evaluate a national environmental campaign.
5.	Social responsibility campaign	Articles that explicitly mention the term "social responsibility" address the role of an institution in some complex social issues and how it can contribute to solving them.	-

Continued

6.	Social advocacy campaign	Articles that explicitly mention the term “advocacy,” which address the role of a body or group of people in supporting marginalized and oppressed groups in a given society.	-
7.	Awareness campaign	Articles that explicitly mention the term “awareness,” which aims to persuade the public to change a specific behavior on a specific issue, have far-reaching implications for society.	-
8.	Cultural campaign	Articles that address topics related to the culture of a particular community, such as language, traditional food, or traditional dress.	-
9.	Institutional campaign	Articles about corporate campaigns, which are campaigns for an internal audience in an organization and surveys of the target audience’s opinions, are usually conducted to measure the campaign’s effectiveness.	Organization, institutional work, public motivation
10.	Educational campaign	Articles targeting education often focus on good classroom behavior or provide additional educational content. Campaigns may also include promoting online education or supporting community education initiatives.	-
11.	Religious campaign	Articles that deal with controversial religious issues and how a particular audience accepts them.	-

The results showed that social responsibility campaigns ranked first, tied with political campaigns and fundraising campaigns, with 4 studies for each, while social advocacy campaigns came in second. **Table 9** shows the ranking of the most popular topics:

Table 9. Discussed campaign types.

<i>Valid</i>	Campaign Types		
	<i>Campaign Type</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Social responsibility	4	16.6
	Political	4	16.6
	Fundraising	4	16.6

Continued

Social Advocacy	3	12.5
Health	2	8.3
Environmental	2	8.3
Awareness	1	4.2
Cultural	1	4.2
Institutional	1	4.2
Religious	1	4.2
Educational	1	4.2
Total	24	100.0

5. Discussion

After analyzing the content of 24 articles specializing in public relations campaigns, the results revealed their theoretical, methodological, and substantive trends. The analysis revealed a qualitative shift in the number of research papers in 2021, attributed to the emergence of the coronavirus and its subsequent health and psychological (O'Connor et al., 2020), social (Venkatesh, 2020), and economic (Wang & Huang, 2021) impacts. A study (Fraser et al., 2021) indicated that researchers had published nearly 125,000 scientific papers across various fields just ten months after the first confirmed virus case. Therefore, the coronavirus has impacted all sectors of life, and communication and public relations experts must investigate the impact of communication in resolving this crisis. A study by Lestari et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of “hospital public relations” in training medical staff to communicate effectively with infected and isolated patients and to resolve problems resulting from communication barriers between the hospital’s “internal public” and its “external public.” These topics only emerged after the outbreak of the virus, which revealed many new phenomena and raised numerous research gaps and questions that need to be answered.

Thus, the emergence of the coronavirus has accelerated research on the role of public relations and the importance of its campaigns in shaping public awareness. However, researchers are still at the beginning of their journey to shed light on public relations campaigns. Meanwhile, public relations practitioners themselves continue to confuse the concepts of “public relations campaign,” “communication campaign,” and “media campaign,” limiting researchers’ opportunities to analyze specialized campaigns and arrive at more in-depth and accurate findings.

Regarding the theories used, the results revealed that 66.7% of the studies did not use any theory. This is a negative indicator, as theories provide generalizations that help researchers describe the phenomenon, identify measurable variables, and predict its consequences. Without a theoretical framework, researchers may face difficulty formulating accurate hypotheses, choosing the most appropriate methodology, and defining criteria that enable data collection and interpretation. Therefore, theory is the umbrella under which the researcher operates throughout the research period (Milat, 2024). Relying solely on “research terms” and previous studies is insufficient to work accurately and obtain generalizable results. There-

fore, the researcher recommends that PRC specialists draw on theories from other fields relevant to the analyzed campaign (Rice & Atkin, 2012).

It is worth noting the emergence of some theories, such as framing theory, which is typically used to define and highlight specific content by highlighting, analyzing, and studying a set of information (Luo & Ling, 2023). It is also used to analyze publications or media materials for a specific campaign to identify the frames used and evaluate their effectiveness and achievement of campaign objectives. In addition to dialogic communication theory, its use has been observed in research examining the impact of social media. This theory is considered one of the most prominent theories in the field of public relations, as it is based on the principle of reciprocal dialogue between an organization and its audience, building a relationship with them through interpersonal and mediated relationships (various types of media), and organizational relationships (Wang & Yang, 2020). However, researchers rely on the “mediator,” a key figure facilitating dialogue between the organization and its audience, to build this relationship.

Given the specific nature of the public relations profession, which requires work across diverse sectors, this means that there are public relations campaigns in the health, education, political, social, and other diverse fields. Consequently, researchers must resort to a theory triangulation approach (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021) to integrate more than one theory across multiple fields and measure the phenomenon under study in an optimal manner. This approach applies whether the goal of the study is to analyze the content of the campaign or to study the campaign’s effects on the target audience. Therefore, the researcher advises public relations campaign specialists or researchers in this field to rely on more than one theory in more than one field. For example, suppose a study analyzes a health campaign related to early breast cancer screening. In that case, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the health belief model (Janz & Becker, 1984) can be used.

As for the methods and tools used, the results showed progress in qualitative approaches and case studies. Meanwhile, quantitative approaches and questionnaires come in second place. PCR researchers typically use a quantitative approach when studying audience reactions to a particular campaign (Lestari & Hartanti, 2018). A qualitative approach is used when analyzing and deconstructing campaign messages and content to find underlying meanings (Özoran, 2021). These results are a good indicator; they demonstrate a researcher’s mindset that does not seek to satisfy audiences superficially and quickly or read the noticeable results. Instead, they think deeply about crafting messages that establish a long-term relationship between the audience and the organization. Perhaps the best way to analyze campaigns is a mixed approach because it provides a framework for assessing effectiveness and reliability on the one hand, as well as an in-depth analysis of the factors contributing to successes or failures on the other (Zakharchenko, 2022).

The study also revealed disappointing results regarding the media used in cam-

paings. At a time when the world is witnessing rapid digital development and a revolution in the field of artificial intelligence, we find that half of the research in the study sample did not address any media outlet. This is even though public relations, by its nature, is adaptable to all environments and contexts (Grunig, 2020). It must be aware of the importance of digital transformations, the extent of the impact of social media platforms and other digital media on the public (Quesenberry, 2020), and their investment in delivering messages. Here, the researcher recommends focusing on the role of digital media, which has become an essential part of our daily lives, whether at the work level (Song et al., 2019), education (Greenhow & Lewin, 2019), or marketing (Appel et al., 2020). Therefore, regardless of the organization a public relations practitioner works for and the type of campaign to achieve a specific goal, new media will be a part of that campaign. It will be an integral part of the phenomenon under study.

It must be noted that “Twitter” was the most prominent in the research compared to the rest of the other platforms, and this is not an indicator because the spread of one platform more than another depends on societies’ inclination towards one platform more than the rest. Perhaps in similar future research, we will find the emergence of the “Tik Tok” platform, which began to spread recently. Alternatively, the Threat platform appeared less than a year ago. On the other hand, the research results confirm a clear decline in traditional media and that it is on its way to extinction.

Moreover, the penetration of social media into our daily lives has made it necessary for individuals to have more than one account on different platforms. However, they practice electronic communication on one platform more than the rest. This paradox extends from individuals to countries. For example, Facebook is the most used platform in Palestine compared to other platforms, at 94.6% (StatCounter Global Stats Website, 2025), while Instagram ranks first in Jordan (Similarweb Website, 2025a), despite the geographical proximity and similar demographic characteristics. In contrast, TikTok is considered the most used platform, while Facebook ranks second, and Instagram ranks third (Similarweb Website, 2025b). Therefore, PR campaign researchers must consider the social context and the most frequently used platforms in the campaign under analysis.

On the other hand, the study sought to explore the interests of researchers in (PRC) in terms of geographical region, as well as the country to which the first author belongs. The results were identical, with North America leading the way, and United States of America, a powerhouse in public relations, was the top country in terms of the study population or the geographical affiliation of the first author. This underscores the country’s significant role in the development of public relations, with notable figures like Ivy Lee (Hiebert, 1966) and Edward Bernays (Bernays, 2013) making substantial contributions to the field.

The answer to the last question about the most frequently discussed topics in (PRC) research was fundraising, political and social responsibility campaigns. These results, while indicating the current state of the field, also point to the po-

tential benefits of a shift in focus. The public relations practitioner is still under the other specializations umbrella and is not independent. However, by focusing on awareness and advocacy campaigns, we can work towards the ultimate goal of public relations, bringing about positive change and progress.

It should be noted that the current study has several limitations. First, the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, which may introduce bias, despite the researcher's use of a structured, literature-based guide.

Second, the study was limited to articles written in English and published in selected public relations journals, potentially excluding relevant research in other languages or regions.

Third, the scope of definitions of "campaign" may vary from study to study, potentially affecting the consistency of inclusion. These limitations point to the need for further research that encompasses broader linguistic, geographic, and methodological diversity.

6. Conclusion

The current study provides a clear vision for specialists in public relations at the theoretical and applied levels. The results have proven the importance of public relations as a distinct field, dominating many specializations. However, at the same time, researchers still face many challenges in separating public relations from other communication sciences and making it an independent science in its own right. This requires more future research in the field of campaigns and other fields.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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