

Examining reputation from a communication perspective: A systematic review

Examinando la reputación desde la perspectiva de la comunicación: una revisión sistemática



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Abstract:

The present study aims to systematically review communication reputation-focused research. After investigating several databases, a total of 366 peer-reviewed communication journal articles were selected. This study adopted quantitative content analysis to examine journals, as well as the progression, methodologies, media genres and platforms, geospatial distribution of discussed issues, and affiliations of first authors. The results revealed that communication reputation-focused articles have increased during the last decade. Most of the articles were published in public relations (PR) journals and adopted quantitative research methodologies. The most commonly used theories were related to communication, PR, and crisis communication theories. The articles discussed mostly social media and then digital media genres and platforms. The discussed regions and first-author affiliations were focused on the US.

Keywords:

Communication; public relations; corporate and organizational reputation; meta-analysis.

Resumen:

Este estudio tiene como objetivo revisar de forma sistemática la investigación en comunicación centrada en la reputación. Después de un estudio de varias bases de datos, se seleccionaron un total de 366 artículos revisados por pares de las revistas científicas de comunicación. Este estudio adoptó un análisis cuantitativo de contenido para examinar las revistas, así como la progresión, las metodologías, los géneros y las plataformas de los medios, además de la distribución geoespacial de los temas tratados y las afiliaciones de los primeros autores. Los resultados revelaron que los artículos de comunicación centrados en la reputación han aumentado durante la última década. La mayoría de los artículos se publicaron en revistas de relaciones públicas (RR.PP.) y adoptaron metodologías cuantitativas de investigación. Las teorías más utilizadas estaban relacionadas con las teorías de comunicación, RR.PP. y comunicación de crisis. Los artículos versaban principalmente sobre las redes sociales y luego sobre los géneros y plataformas de los medios digitales. Las regiones consideradas y las afiliaciones de los primeros autores se centraron en los EE. UU.

Palabras clave:

Comunicación; relaciones públicas; reputación corporativa y organizativa; meta-análisis

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1. Introduction

Reputation is a multidisciplinary field and a constructive concept first introduced in the business discipline (Helm et al., 2011; Hutton et al., 2001). Corporate reputation-focused research originated from the business, marketing, and management perspectives and fields, with the exclusion of the communication perspective. Several academic publications have ignored the communication aspect of reputation, including *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Reputation* (Barnett & Pollock, 2012), which discussed corporate reputation within the field of business and related disciplines while ignoring the communication perspective. Meanwhile, corporate reputation as a concept and research area has been developed via an interesting pathway from a communication and public relations (PR) perspective over the last three decades, “reputations are formed based on communication and are a topic of communication” (Chory, Mainiero, & Horan, 2022, p. 3). For example, *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Reputation* (Carroll, 2013) offered a communication perspective that contrasted with the multidisciplinary perspective of reputation discussed by Barnett and Pollock (2012). The handbook offers a uniquely communication perspective on reputation by focusing on reputation as what is generally said about an organization.

After the 2000s, with the acceptance of the multidisciplinary nature of the concept, studies, jointly authored books, and other reference materials (Carroll, 2013b; Heath, 2013) have asserted that corporate reputation should be reconsidered as a communication and PR discipline. Carroll (2013b, p. 3) stated that “for those who want to understand corporate reputation in greater depth, communication perspectives must be included.” Since the beginning of the 21st century, various studies have assumed and identified reputation as a new philosophy for managing traditional PR and communication activities within organizations (Hutton et al., 2001; Origgi, 2014; ŞİRZAD, 2022). This is a significant motivation driving the present study to closely examine reputation from a communication perspective.

Hence, the present study aims to chart the peer-reviewed research on reputation to provide a systematic literature review and to determine how communication researchers and journals have studied this topic and to understand their perspectives and discussions regarding this concept. This is an important step in terms of identifying clear trends and directions within the literature on reputation and helping further studies that are interested in examining reputation from a communication perspective to find its path. As previously mentioned, reputation is a multidisciplinary concept, and thus far, disciplines have developed their own conceptualizations based on their respective frameworks and perspectives, which distinguish this study from a field that simply focuses on reputation research from a communication perspective. Therefore, the current study aims to empirically and quantitatively examine the annual developments in journals in terms of main theories, methodologies, data collection techniques, media genres and platforms, and the geospatial distributions of discussed issues and first-author affiliations of the communication reputation-focused articles published until 2021.

In addition, this research genre should lead to and address further research in this field to find strong, clear, and comprehensive connections to communication theory. The results will expand the empirical knowledge on reputation by highlighting research trends that have received scholarly attention and those that have been largely ignored in the literature. Thus far, no specific systematic review has ever been conducted on existing reputation-focused research from a communication perspective to settle the scholarly controversy about reputation as a communication area.

1.1. Literature review: Reputation definition and field development

“Reputation derives from the Latin words ‘re,’ which means over and over, and ‘putare,’ which is calculating. Reputation literally means calculating over and over again the pros and cons of a subject, a person, an organization, or its products” (Carroll, 2013b, p. 15). Carroll (2013b) further defined reputation a perception about positive feelings, the degree of admiration, and trust an individual has for another organization, person, an industry, or even a country. Corporate or organizational reputation refers to what is said about a corporate/organization. There are different types of reputations, and more than one reputation can exist (Carroll, 2008). As cited in Helm et al. (2011) the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (2008) defines it as (1) the opinions or beliefs that are generally held about something or someone and as (2) a common belief that something or someone has a particular characteristic.

Reputation has also been defined as the phenomenon of earning legitimacy and acceptability to a much wider audience as something that you own and assigned to you by others. One’s can define good reputation that persons’ or organizations stick to values and able to make correct decisions in a way of presenting standards and clearing out reactions for specific organization principles (Origgi, 2014, p. 4).

According to Fombrun (1996), corporate reputation is a “perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describe the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading competitors” as cited in (Chan, Sathasevam, Noor, Khiruddin, & Hasan, 2018, pp. 205–206). Later, Fombrun showed the new descriptions of corporate reputation which focused on the different stakeholder groups (Barnett & Pollock, 2012). As *Bratus & Sydorov (2021)* discussed that the key ideas that characterize Fombrun’s definition and approach of reputation are: First, Every organization has one reputation while its level depends on stakeholders. Second, Corporate reputation is relating to comparing of the organization to others within the same sector. Third, reputation is considering as a source of competition which has advantages and disadvantages.

In addition, Barnett et al., (2006) defined corporate reputation as stakeholders’ collective judgements based on the evaluation of social, financial, and environmental approach over times. Chan et al. (2018) and Walker (2010) asserted that corporation has significant characteristics of reputation based on enduring and cumulative perceptions of all stakeholders.

Meanwhile, many researchers have discussed corporate reputation in relation to organizational reputation. Corporate reputation is associated with satisfaction, trust, perceived risk, and loyalty, all of which can affect firm profits in a positive or negative way (Helm et al., 2011; Kim & Cha, 2013). Corporate reputation is differentiated from the related concepts of organizational identity and corporate image. As Walker (2010) found in his review of reputation, organizational identity is the most enduring, central, and distinctive about an organization. Identity was apparently viewed as the core or basic character (Barnett et al. , 2006) of the organization from the perspective of employees (Charles J. Fombrun, 1996). Fombrun (1996) described identity as if it is a group of features for the company that appears to be central and enduring to employees.

While organizational image can be described as “the various outbound communications channels deployed by organizations to communicate with customers and other constituencies” (Walker, 2010, p. 366). Researchers within the literature reputation mentioned external stakeholders and purposely exclude internal stakeholders when they talk about organizational image. Organizational image can be described as an internal picture expected or projected to an external audience and is a shape for

outsider judgments, while also it focuses on the perception. In contrast, corporate reputation is relatively stable and refer to the actual positive or negative stakeholder perceptions. Given that corporate reputation represents what is actually known by internal and external stakeholders. Time was also a significant distinction between image and corporate reputation because building a reputation takes long time while images change frequently and quickly (Charles J. Fombrun, 1996; Walker, 2010).

In the summary, as has been reviewed in (Walker, 2010), specific characteristics are assigned to the corporate reputation as: it is a dynamic concept, it takes time to build and manage, there is a bilateral relationship between reputation and image, it crystallizes a company's principle ranking in a competitive market, different stakeholder groups may have different reputations of the same organization based on their background (C. J. Fombrun & van Riel, 1997; Charles J. Fombrun, 1996; Walker, 2010).

Reputation is a complex phenomenon that is worthy of being managed well. It depends on the communication processes and the signals it determines to address the marketplace, focused on the corporate name, management, and favorable representation of an organization to its stakeholders (Davies & Miles, 1998; Sohn & Lariscy, 2015). This clarifies how reputation is not stable or static; rather, it is affected by organizations' behaviors, performance, and actions through past, present, and stakeholders' future expectations (Heath, 2013; Zinko et al., 2007). Positive reputations come when observers agree on the effective actions and when stakeholders see organizations adhering to sound principles (Salgado, 2012). In this vein, reputation management (RM) can be defined comprehensively and simply as follows:

Reputation management is the strategic use of organizational resources to influence the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of various, and sometimes conflicting, stakeholder groups. Reputation management seeks to emphasize an organization's positive attributes while carefully managing its risks to reduce the likelihood of negative impacts on its overall reputation. (L. Heath, 2013, pp. 790-791)

In the same context, reputation has been criticized by some scholars, who argued that "reputation management (RM)", "perception management", and "image management" appear partly due to wrong reasons, such as the superficial views of managers who lacked training and knowledge about the terms "image" and "perception." Meanwhile, many PR entities owned and managed by advertising agencies were able to use these terms more easily (Hutton et al., 2001). Later on, researchers found that some job titles and department descriptions of numerous entities throughout the world contained the term "reputation management." Several practitioners responded by describing their functions as "reputation managers" (Hutton et al., 2001; Origi, 2014). When a PR trade publication entitled *Reputation Management* was launched in 1997, other major international PR agencies also launched and adopted this concept (Hutton et al., 2001; Origi, 2014).

Practitioners and researchers began to gain interest in the concept of "reputation" in the 1990s (Griffin, 2014; Hutton et al., 2001). Carroll (2013b) revealed that this concept actually originated from business books in the 1980s, which were generally about topics related to corporate reputation, such as leadership, innovation, excellence, employee and customer satisfaction, and corporate culture. Only a few parts were about communication and how to communicate better (Carroll, 2013b). In 1983, public interest in corporate reputation started when "Fortune Magazine" first published its rankings of the "Most Admired Corporations." The edition was so popular that the magazine turned it into an annual survey (Carroll, 2008). Fombrun and Shanley's (1990) was the first scholarly article that regarded corporate reputation as a central topic in their work entitled, *What's in a Name? Reputation Building and Corporate Strategy* published in *the Academy of Management Journal*. According

to Carroll (2013b), this management article had the greatest impact because the authors focused on multiple dimensions of reputation.

Fombrun's (1996) book, *Reputation: Realizing Value from the Company Image*, published by *The Harvard Business Press*, was the next major development in the scholarly literature devoted to corporate reputation. In 1997, additional important developments emerged. First, Professor Charles Fombrun from the New York University Stern School of Business and Professor Cees van Riel from the Erasmus University/Rotterdam School of Management launched an international interdisciplinary conference devoted to corporate reputation (Carroll, 2013b).

The conference led to the second major development in the same year: the publication of the academic/practitioner journal, *Corporate Reputation Review*, which eventually evolved into a full scholarly journal. In the journal's inaugural issue reviewed by Fombrun and Riel (1997), six academic business disciplines were related to corporate reputation while communication was excluded (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). This is evidenced by other released works, such as Barnett and Pollock (2012), which identified the scholarly developments of corporate reputation from business-related disciplines. However, communication was once again excluded, thus leaving many gaps and unaddressed issues related to the concept.

As stated by Carroll (2013b), the third major development in this field was van Riel's (1997) work entitled *Research in Corporate Communication: An Overview of an Emerging Field*, in which he argued that corporate communication should mainly be responsible for corporate reputation. Carroll (2004, 2011) and van Riel (1995, 1997) outlined the main developments and contributions from the communication and corporate communication perspective, while others, such as Hutton et al. (2001), have done so from the PR perspective. In the first chapter Carroll was interested in proving that corporate reputation overlaps in different communication and sub-communication fields such as PR, public opinion, interpersonal communication, corporate communication, organizational communication, advertising, communication management, marketing communications, visual communication, journalism and mass communication, and corporate communication law. (Carroll, 2013a).

At the same time, Carroll (2016) published *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Corporate Reputation*, which had over 300 entries and contributions from well-respected academics. This encyclopedia presents corporate reputation as a growing academic field in business studies. Since then, reputation has grown as an academic area across 40 academic disciplines, thus reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the concept. The first section of the encyclopedia featured 54 multidisciplinary theories in the areas of organizational communication (critical theory, postmodern theory, postcolonial theory, stakeholder theory, and institutional theory) and communication and PR (agenda-setting theory, sense making theory, framing theory, and spiral of silence theory) (Carroll, 2016). However, PR offers rich scholarship and benefits from the match between core ideas and issues of reputation (Carroll, 2013a).

Hence, the main gap that is found in the previous mentioned reputation literature is ignoring the communication aspect and dimension of reputation. In specific, business and management literature embraced reputation in all its dimensions and ignored the communication perspective (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Carroll, 2013b). In addition to, the first literature of reputation published in a business and management publications and has written by non-communication scholars as Professor Charles Fombrun from School of Business and Professor Cees van Riel from School of Management. Even the *Corporate Reputation Review* journal exclude communication from the disciplines that related to reputation (Barnett & Pollock, 2012; Carroll, 2013b;

Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). All this coined the purpose of this study to explore the communication dimension and perspective of reputation which has appeared in the new literature of reputation as (Carroll, 2013a).

1.2. Reputation and Public Relations

Reputation is conceptualized as an intangible asset with a significant role in PR and is the most suitable guiding philosophy for organizational PR (Helm et al., 2011). RM advocates see it as a guiding paradigm for the entire PR field, in which losing reputation for an organization is considered a greater sin than losing money. Indeed, studies have suggested that PR practitioners see RM as a galvanizing core concept and important role that enhances the central role of PR within an organization. As a result, RM is considered the new face of an organization's PR that is implicated in education and practice (Hutton et al., 2001; L. Heath, 2013; Origgi, 2014; Salgado, 2012).

A historical review of PR definitions suggested by PR practitioners and scholars revealed numerous metaphors and definitions, such as the lawyer in the court of public opinion, engineer of public consent, persuader, perception manager, relationship manager, and reputation manager, among others. In a corporate context, RM has been identified as a form of corporate communication, corporate affairs, and corporate relations (Hutton et al., 2001; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Reputation is not only confined to companies; rather, it is also a vital issue in governmental departments, schools, hospitals, political entities, and charities within the non-profit sectors, all of which understand that their funding and financial support, ability to attract, survival, and mission achievement depend on their positive reputations (Griffin, 2014; Helm et al., 2011; Hutton et al., 2001; Heath, 2013).

Recently, numerous organizations have adopted reputation as a PR strategy and approach that contributes about the planning process that considers reputation in their policy, vision, values, behaviors, communication actions, and relationships. All of these can help meet stakeholders' expectations and manage their perceptions (Chan et al., 2018; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Gray & Balmer, 1998). Furthermore, the management of an organization's reputation strategically affects its competitive advantage. PR working alongside other departments practice their management function in building, improving, and managing organizations' reputation. RM is related to attempts to influence impressions, perceptions, and interpretations of organizations' past, present, and future. It has various definitions and is likened to terms, such as "impression management," "perception management," and "expectations management." Organizations use mass media to manage their reputations through media coverage, visibility, and ads to propagate images that enhance their reputation (Hutton et al., 2001; Heath, 2013; Zinko et al., 2007).

In relation to strategic communication (SC) Reputation management was defined as "the strategic use of organizational resources" (L. Heath, 2013, pp. 790-791). SC is providing communication solutions, managing the communication process between different stakeholder groups, presenting the positivity of organization, focusing on the message, managing the media outlets, audience, caring about the timing and the completeness of the information disclosed, building strategies and tactics that related to the all aspects of organization and how to plane to it rightly with a long-term strategic goal, avoiding crisis that affect reputation, caring about image in a long-term horizon, and alongside many more factors (Craig E. Carroll, 2013a; Maor, 2020). However, organizations that have planned strategically to their communication have increased proficiency in the ability

to manage their reputation and influence public perceptions which expand their global impact. Indeed, the ultimate aim of SC is to maintain a healthy reputation for the communicative entity in the public sphere (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014).

Basically, organizational reputation is necessary for several reasons. An effective reputation offers competitive advantages that are equally significant for organizations, governments, corporations, and other. Overall, organizations that have good reputations attract qualified and distinguished professionals and graduates. Moreover, studies have proven that reputation affects customers' decisions in purchasing and selling goods, as well as their loyalty to a specific brand. Investors also consider reputation as a main factor in selecting companies in which to invest their assets. Reputation also indicates the possible risks in an organization that can affect their insurance options (Charles J. Fombrun, Ponzi, & Newburry, 2015; Tameling & Broersma, 2013). Van Riel & Fombrun (2007) assert that the positive reputation of organizations can lead to new markets, grants, facilities, partnerships, and even their potential to become international entities. Moreover, an organization's favorable reputation gains positive and valuable media coverage, which forms a shield that can protect organizations in times of crises (L. Heath, 2013; Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011).

Hutton et al. (2001) empirically studied 500 companies and found that "reputation management is gaining ground as a driving philosophy behind corporate public relations" (p. 247). Furthermore, they found that the most important roles of the corporate PR department include RM, advocacy of company/policies, provision of information to the public, image management, management of relationships with non-customer publics, driving publicity, management of relationships with all publics, and supporting marketing and sales (Hutton et al., 2001).

Ultimately, the present article objectives are firstly to assert that reputation in having a significant communication dimension and hypothesize it as a sub-communication area. Secondly, to identify a reputation framework from the communication and PR perspectives. Thirdly, this study explores the developments of reputation in terms of journals, main theories, methodologies, data collection techniques, media genres and platforms, and the geospatial distributions of discussed issues and first-author affiliations of the communication reputation-focused articles published until 2021. However, it is asserted that communication is core dimension of reputation and the main perspective to discuss it, which is the primary objective of this study. As a new field of communication, reputation has to be identified in terms of theories that most suitable to analyze case studies from a communication perspective, media genres and platforms play a significant role in affecting reputation and must be identified and examined. As reputation is an area of communication, specific methodologies and analytical tools are more suitable for studying it, which can be identified through conducting this study.

Fourthly, it tends to measure trends of the sub-communication area that guide and lead future studies in this area through back to addressing the following research questions. This extracted from previous meta-analyses in the communication field as (Abu Arqoub, Efe Özad, & Elegá, 2019; Abu Arqoub, Elegá, Efe Özad, Dwikat, & Oloyede, 2020; Elegá, Aluç, Abu Arqoub, & Ersoy, 2022; Elegá, Efe Özad, Oloyede, Omisore, & Abu Arqoub, 2020; Li & Tang, 2012; Volkmer, 2013):

- RQ1. How has published communication reputation research got increased over the years?
- RQ2. What communication journals published the most reputation-focused research?
- RQ3. What are the most used theories in published communication reputation research?

RQ4. What are the major methodologies and specific analytical methods adopted in the published communication reputation research?

RQ5. What media genre and platforms were explored in published communication reputation research?

RQ6. What is the geospatial distribution of discussed issues and first-author affiliations of the published communication reputation research?

2. Method

The present exploratory study adopts quantitative content analysis to understand the current trends, patterns, and developments of communication reputation-focused research within the last decades. This research timeline was determined according to the first search results indicated in the first journal article published in a communication journal, which first mentioned the term “reputation” in 1977. Meanwhile, the end of the period was specified according to the data collection period that took place in January 2022.

2.1. Data collection methods and sample

To obtain a logical sample of empirical peer-reviewed articles, those published in the interactional well-known databases were investigated. According to past studies (Abu Arqoub et al., 2019, 2020; Li & Tang, 2012), the explored databases were reputable and were affiliated with high-impact factor journals and quality empirical peer-reviewed research articles in the field of communication and media studies. Furthermore, specific communication journals were selected based on whether they were fully or partly devoted to communication and its sub-disciplines, such as communication theory, journalism, media studies, PR, mass media, semiotics, political communication, public opinion, new media, social media, digital media, communication, media education, international communication, mass media ethics, cultural communication, strategic communication, crisis communication, and related fields (Abu Arqoub et al., 2020; Liu & Wei, 2017).

The keywords “reputation or reputation management” and “corporate\organizational” were used to search for articles on reputation within the mentioned databases. Then, the following sets of inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted. The articles must generally be empirical studies and must have been published in the field of communication and media studies. In addition, articles published only within communication or sub-communication fields, dose not duplicated, only articles written in English Languages, and full text articles. For the exclusion criteria, other kinds of publications as (Conference papers, books, book chapters, Book reviews, magazine or newspaper articles, report, and working papers) and articles about reputation published in business, marketing, economy, and management journals were excluded. Also, articles do not contain reputation, RM Keywords in its titles, keywords or abstracts, other languages, articles could not be accessed or just have a printed copy and duplicated articles. To explain the systematic search method and criteria, Table 1 presents the number of articles in each database and the strict inclusion and exclusion criteria that were applied.

Table 1: Database search outcomes and certified papers

N.	Databases	Search Outcome	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Certified Papers
1.	Elsevier Science Direct	768	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journal articles Peered reviewed Full text articles Contained in one of the academic databases explored. Only articles written in English Languages Keywords: reputation, RM must be mentioned in Either the titles, keywords or abstracts of the articles Articles published only within communication or sub-communication fields. Dose not duplicated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles do not contain reputation, RM Keywords in its titles, keywords or abstracts. Articles do not focus on reputation or RM in its parts. (some articles were just mentioned reputation in its abstracts but do not discus or focused on it, or it was mentioned in abstract spontaneously). Conference papers, books and book chapters and other academic resources. Articles we could not access even from the library remote access or just have a printed copy. Other languages Other fields that are not communication, especially in business, marketing, economy, and management fields. Short papers that have no analysis and references list. Book reviews Repeated and duplicated articles 	119
2.	EBSCO's Communication & Mass Media Complete	722			21
3.	SAGE Journals	1598			79
4.	Taylor and Francis Online	717			45
5.	Web of science	851			102
	Total	4656			366

Source: created by the author

Some academic databases did not include any communication journals that published articles on reputation; hence, these were deleted. In the end, the database search generated 4656 articles, which were investigated according to the mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. Among the search outcomes, the total number of communication reputation-focused studies reached 366 articles, which were qualified for inclusion in this study's sample.

2.2. Coding scheme

To investigate the content of communication reputation-focused research and to answer the quantitative research questions this study adopted the categories proposed by (Abu Arqoub et al., 2019, 2020; Elega & Efe Özad, 2018; Fuchs, Pernul, & Sandhu, 2011; Li & Tang, 2012) by modifying the codes according to the present study sample and provides the following content analysis scheme.

1. Progression

Considering the fact that no study has assessed the timeline of communication reputation research comprehensively, this study seeks to identify a clear trend of the increase or reduction of communication reputation Focused articles throughout the researched period. The researcher coded the years of published communication reputation articles from 1977 to 2021.

2. Journals

Communication and minor-communication journals that published reputation focused research. The researcher coded all journals that were found.

3. Theory

As mentioned, Carroll (2016) published *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Corporate Reputation* which contribute reputation as an academic area across 40 academic disciplines. The first section of the encyclopedia featured 54 multidisciplinary theories in the areas of communication and PR which this study trying to explore its usage over the communication reputation research. Hence, theory expresses the theoretical framework that has been used in the context of communication reputation focused research. As (Situational crisis communication theory, Image repair theory, Agenda-setting theory etc.)

4. Research methodology

According to Wasike (2017) "Contemporary research shows changing trends regarding data collection methods" (p. 202) while no empirical studies have investigated the major methodologies and Analytical Methods used in communication reputation research and suitable for future studies, this study examine the research methodologies adopted by communication reputation focused papers (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies) based on Abu Arqoub et al. (2019) and (2020).

Specific analytical methods

The data collection and analytical tools and techniques adopted by communication reputation Focused research by collecting information from all appropriate sources since this provides answers to research questions.

6. *Media genre*

Media generation and media outlets used in the studied communication process of reputation research can explain the direction and the aim of the all process. Organizations use media for many reasons as to contact the audiences, build relationships with stakeholders, reflect a positive image...etc. which is important for shaping the organizational reputation (Ferreira & Zambaldi, 2019; Gill, 2016). To achieve that the category, type or kind of media generation used in the studied communication process especially communication reputation which in our case include: (1) Traditional media (2) Digital media (3) Social media (4) Multiple media genres (5) No Media genre.

7. *Media platforms*

The exact type of media outlets that analysed in communication reputation focused research which used in the mass communication process to contact the audience such as: TV, Radio, Facebook, Twitter etc.

8. *Geospatial first-author affiliations*

First-author affiliations and Discussed Countries explain the number of universities access to research funding from the government and organizations, consultancy services availability, efforts of researchers and institutions, and to what extent the faculty of communication and media studies become highly instrumental to the output of peer-reviewed articles with high standards (Elega & Efe Özad, 2018). These variables exploring case studies distribution over the world which explain also the differentiation of the cultural contexts in using reputation from a communication perspective. Geospatial distribution of authors' teaching or schooling at the time of publication by country and continent. Countries and continents were coded as they found according frequency.

9. *Discussed continents and countries*

This is based on the geographical concentration of the issues had been discussed and studied within communication reputation focused research by continent and country. Countries and continents were coded as they found according frequency.

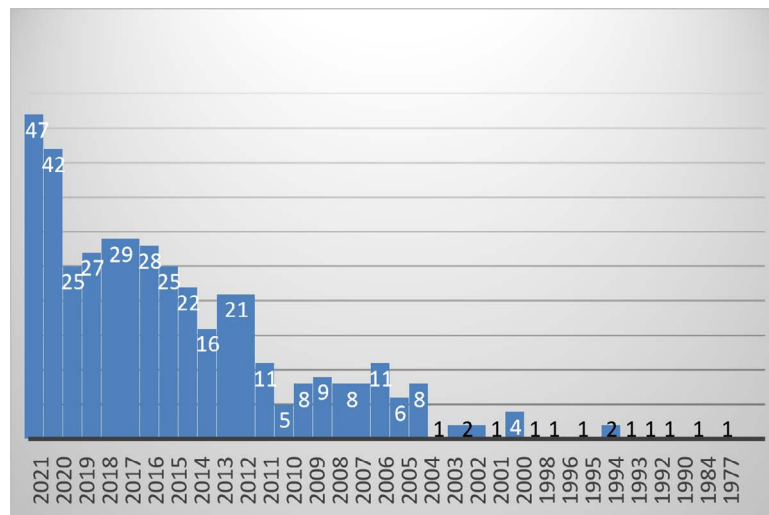
2.3. *Coding process and inter-rater reliability*

The unit of analysis in the present study is a single communication reputation-focused article that we confirmed and coded according to the previous scheme. The present study used Cohen's Kappa coefficient formula (Cohen, 1960), and two researchers in the field of communication and media studies applied the coding process for this study. The inter-rater agreement in the sample occurred at $K=0.90$, with the full agreement percent being 1.00. Hence, the sample is reliable and considered excellent (Cohen, 1960; Fleiss, 1971).

3. Results

Overall, 366 certified articles that met the inclusion criteria covered reputation from a communication perspective. The present section presents the results that address the research questions, including the following quantitative variables: yearly progression, journals, methodologies, data collection methods, the geospatial distribution of the discussed issues, and the affiliations of the first authors.

Figure 1: Yearly progression of communication reputation-focused research



Source: created by the author

As shown in the figure, 1977 is considered the starting date for examining the evolution of publications on reputation according to the Public Relations Review. From 1984–2003, the number of articles reached 17, indicating that this period was growing slowly while other journals began to show interest in this topic. From 2004–2019, the number of published articles increased steadily, thus indicating the growing focus of journals and researchers on reputation as a communication area and their contributions in laying down a theoretical framework for the concept. Notably, 2020 and 2021 have the highest publication numbers at 89 articles. These results indicate that reputation, from a communication perspective, has become an interesting and evolving research trend in recent years.

Table 2: Journals that published reputation-focused research

Journals		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Public Relations Review	121	33.1
	Others	71	19.4
	Journal of Communication Management	39	10.7
	Journal of Public Relations Research	32	8.7
	International Journal of Business Communication	19	5.2
	New Media & Society	15	4.1
	Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly	11	3.0
	Public Relations Inquiry	10	2.7
	Public Relations Quarterly	9	2.5
	International Journal of Communication	8	2.2
	Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal	7	1.9
	Communication Research	6	1.6
	Communication & Sport	5	1.4
	Journal of Creative Communications	5	1.4
	Journalism and Mass Communication Educator	4	1.1
	Malaysian Journal of Communication	4	1.1
Total	366	100.0	

Source: created by the author

As the above table shows, specialized PR journals are the ones that are most interested in publishing communication reputation scholarship, with $N=179$ articles distributed in several journals, namely, *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of PR Research*, *PR Inquiry*, *PR Quarterly*, and *Asia Pacific PR Journal*. This indicates that reputation is a significant research area in the PR field. The rest of the articles specially (Others) were distributed to a wide variety of journals specializing in communication sub-fields, such as business and marketing communication, communication management, and journalism.

Table 3: Theoretical frameworks of communication reputation-focused research

Theories		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No theory	143	39.1
	Others	66	18.0
	Multiple theories	46	12.6
	Situational crisis communication theory (scct)	44	12.0
	Image repair theory	10	2.7
	Agenda-setting theory	9	2.5
	Crisis communication theory	9	2.5
	Framing theory	4	1.1
	Expectancy violation theory	4	1.1
	Stakeholder theory	4	1.1
	Attribution theory	4	1.1
	Gatekeeping theory	3	.8
	Relationship management theory	2	.5
	Systems theory	2	.5
	Uses and gratifications theory	2	.5
	Misinformation debunking theory	2	.5
	Public diplomacy theory	2	.5
	Expectation theory	2	.5
	Positioning theory	2	.5
	Discourse theory	2	.5
	Social presence theory	2	.5
Institutional theory	2	.5	
Total	366	100.0	

Source: created by the author

Table 3 shows that 223 articles applied theoretical frameworks while discussing reputation. The main theories adopted within the communication reputation scholarship included those on communication and crisis communication. Interestingly, the

SCCT has the highest number at 44 articles, image repair theory has 10, and crisis communication theory has 9. This indicates the importance of reputation in the field of crisis communication. Various other theories have been applied to reputation owing to the multidisciplinary nature of this field of study and it were distributed to many areas without focusing on a specific discipline.

Table 4: Methodologies used within communication reputation scholarship

Methods		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Quantitative	191	52.2
	Qualitative	140	38.3
	Mixed	35	9.6
	Total	366	100.0
Data Collection Techniques			
Valid	Experimental analysis	80	21.9
	Survey	65	17.8
	Case study	51	13.9
	Multiple	38	10.4
	Content analysis	37	10.1
	Review	30	8.2
	Interviews	20	5.5
	Rhetoric analysis	10	2.7
	Others	10	2.7
	Discourse analysis	5	1.4
	Ethnography	4	1.1
	Textual analysis	4	1.1
	Framing analysis	4	1.1
	Historical analysis	4	1.1
	Comparative analysis	4	1.1
Total	366	100.0	

Source: created by the author

Table 4 shows the results for the two important variables of methods and data collection techniques. As can be seen, most of the articles ($N=191$) used quantitative methods, as indicated by the identified data collection methods, such as experimental analysis, survey, and content analysis. There were less studies ($N=140$) that used qualitative methods, including reviews, interviews, rhetorical analyses, and discourse analyses. These results demonstrate the diversity of methodologies used owing to the multidisciplinary nature of the field of study. Furthermore, there should be more mixed method studies in the future.

Table 5: Media genre and platforms of reputation-focused research

Media genre		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No media genre	188	51.4
	Social media	61	16.7
	Digital media	46	12.6
	Traditional media	43	11.7
	Multiple genre	28	7.7
	Total	366	100.0
Media Platforms			
Valid	No media platforms	208	56.8
	Multiple platforms	50	13.7
	Online websites	37	10.1
	Newspapers	24	6.6
	Twitter	15	4.1
	Others	9	2.5
	Facebook	8	2.2
	Television	5	1.4
	Youtube	4	1.1
	Websites of traditional media	2	.5
	Blogs	2	.5
	Instagram	2	.5
	Total	366	100.0

Source: created by the author

Table 5 shows that many articles do not discuss or analyze any media genre or media platform because the methodologies used depended on experimental and survey data collection tools. In contrast, a high number of articles ($N=61$) have discussed and analyzed the social media genre through articles focusing on the rise of social media and reputation research in recent years. The genre with the lowest numbers ($N=43$) is traditional media because most new articles followed the research trend in discussing social and digital media.

Meanwhile, media platforms on online websites ($N=37$) are the most used platforms and include news websites and organizations' respective websites. Newspapers are the most traditional media platform discussed and analyzed, while the most commonly used social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Notably, many articles ($N=50$) discussed more than one platform, while the highest number of articles did not discuss any media platforms.

Table 6: Continent and countries discussed within reputation-focused research

Continents discussed		Frequency	Valid percent
Valid	North America	149	40.7
	Europe	72	19.7
	Asia	45	12.3
	No continent	45	12.3
	Multiple continents	28	7.7
	Australia	17	4.7
	South America	7	1.9
	Africa	3	.8
	Total	366	100.0
Countries discussed			
Valid	USA	143	39.1
	No country	50	13.7
	Multiple countries	33	9.0
	Others	31	8.5
	Australia	16	4.4
	China	13	3.6
	Netherlands	10	2.7
	Malaysia	9	2.5

UK	8	2.2
Korea	7	1.9
New Zealand	6	1.6
Canada	6	1.6
Belgium	5	1.4
Germany	5	1.4
Japan	4	1.1
Spain	4	1.1
India	4	1.1
Brazil	4	1.1
Norway	4	1.1
Italy	4	1.1
Total	366	100.0

Source: created by the author

Table 6 explains the importance of communication reputation according to the places discussed (mainly developed countries), which discussed reputation and have developed organizations and corporations. North America has the highest number of articles at 149, with the USA having 143 articles. This is a reasonable number in relation to the American levels of research productivity, researchers, and journals. This is followed by Europe (72), Asia (45), and Australia (17). Africa and South America have the lowest numbers of articles. At the same time, articles that did not mention any continent or country focused on discussing the field itself, along with the review concepts and the literature.

Table 7: First authors' affiliations by continents and countries

First-author affiliations by continent		Frequency	Valid percent
Valid	North America	184	50.3
	Europe	99	27.1
	Asia	45	12.3
	Australia	32	7.4
	Africa	5	1.4

	South America	3	.8
	Total	366	100.0
First-author affiliations by country			
Valid	USA	177	48.4
	Others	37	10.1
	Australia	23	6.3
	UK	16	4.4
	Netherlands	14	3.8
	China	12	3.3
	Spain	10	2.7
	Belgium	9	2.5
	Korea	9	2.5
	New Zealand	9	2.5
	Malaysia	8	2.2
	Canada	7	2.0
	Germany	5	1.4
	Denmark	5	1.4
	Italy	5	1.4
	South Africa	4	1.1
	Korea	4	1.1
	Switzerland	4	1.1
	Finland	4	1.1
Norway	4	1.1	
	Total	366	100.0

Source: created by the author

The present table clearly shows the interest of American researchers and universities in communication reputation research, with results revealing that, in terms of continent, North America has the highest number of articles (184), of which the USA has 177 articles. This is followed by Europe with 99, in which countries that mostly focused on reputation include the UK, the Netherlands, and Spain. The next highest number of articles comes from Asia, with 45 articles, mostly from China, Korea and Malaysia. Then comes Australia, with 32 articles, and Africa, with 5 articles, the countries with the lowest number of articles.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The present meta-analysis of communication reputation-focused research shows many important conclusions, indicating-reputation is a significant area in the communication and PR fields. Reputation-related discussions started 45 years ago in 1977, when an article published in *Public Relations Review*. Generally, the investigated databases indicate that 366 communication articles focused on reputation and studied the concept from a communication perspective. This is a respectable number of research articles reflecting the importance of reputation as a sub-communication research area.

This study contributes to the literature on reputation from a communication perspective and helps resolve the scholarly controversy about its multidisciplinary origins and apparent overlaps in communication and PR. The results support the arguments of Carroll (2013b, 2016, 2008, 2011), Heath (2013), Fombrun & van Riel, (1997), Fombrun (1996), Fombrun et al. (2015), Ponzi et al. (2011), van Riel & Fombrun (2007) and others regarding the role of communication and benefits that can add value to reputation. In the same context, most of the articles have published in specialized PR journals, indicating interest in the PR field by studying reputation and considering all of it as a strategy and subfield (Huang-Horowitz, 2015; Hutton et al., 2001; Livingstone, 1998).

Meanwhile, the progression of reputation research shows that it has increased steadily in the last decade and reached its peak in 2020 and 2021. This is due to increasing the importance of reputation within organizations as new PR research, as well as the increased use of social media and its influence on reputation and communication crises in the digital age. This is consistent with past findings on the evolution of reputation as a research field, where Griffin (2014) and Hutton et al. (2001) considered the beginning of the 21st century as the start of the identification of reputation as a new philosophy of managing traditional PR and communication activities within organizations. Here, reputation from a communication perspective considered as active research area in the present decade. Journals of sub-communication areas should show more interest in investigating reputation and its relationship to other sub-areas in order to understand reputation in all communication contexts.

In terms of the theories used, unlike Walker (2010) review that showed the main theories are used in reputation research were Resource-based-view, Signaling theory, and Institutional theory the present study also found that reputation from communication perspective focused on using PR and crisis communication theories. The results show that there is a high percentage of articles that deny using specific theories, thus revealing the gap in theory-based on research in this area. In addition, numerous articles have used crisis communication theories and frameworks, revealing the vital relationship between reputation and crisis communication as a research area and how crisis management may have a practical influence on reputation through many aspects. Hence, identifying the exact relationship between reputation and crisis communication, and building a clear significant models for managing reputation during communication crisis is a clear need (du Plessis,

2018; Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Shim & Yang, 2016). However, reputation research applied core communication theories as (discourse theory, rhetorical, framing, agenda sitting, gatekeeping, uses and gratification, dialogue theory, etc.) limitedly.

In terms of the reputation models that have been applied in the reputation articles, in spite of the clarity of the RepTrak model (Fombrun et al., 2015; Ponzi et al., 2011), Fombrun's quotient model (Fombrun and van Riel 2004), and Van Riel and Fombrun's expressive profile/communication dimensions models of reputation (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007) with a rare number of studies applied it in the field of communication. The articles were published before 2010 focused mostly on concept creation, theoretical conceptualization, and definition. Furthermore, new elements and dimensions of corporate reputation could come up according to the case study and the organizational type for example, analyzing the country or government reputation could need different dimensions and supplements. Hence, communication reputation research did not identify specific theories, models, elements, dimensions, and components of reputation that works in different communication cases, sub-areas, and situations which can build and tested based on the above-mentioned models, theories or also by examine reputation in deferent organizations and contexts.

In terms of methodologies, quantitative data collection methods are mainly used because such methods are more valid in measuring the stakeholders' assessment of reputation based on reputation dimensions and elements (Origgi, 2014). At the same time, the usage of qualitative methods are consistent with other communication meta-analyses as (Elega et al., 2020; P. Zheng et al., 2016) and are different from others which revealed that qualitative methods are more favorable (Abu Arqoub et al., 2019, 2020; Liu & Wei, 2017; Wasike, 2017). Communication reputation research did not apply important qualitative data collection and analytical tools that are ambitious and deeper such as using (discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis, historical analysis, social networking analysis, textual analysis, archival analysis, ethnography, and framing analysis).

With respect to modern trends in the media genre and platforms of reputation research, the social media and digital media genres are mostly used and analyzed, which explains the trend of online and digital reputation and the high number of reputation articles published in recent years. This finding is consistent with the literature on online reputation and the effects of digital technologies on this field of study (Cobos-Urbina, 2021; Dudzic, 2018; Duffy & Chan, 2019; Kotras, 2020).

In the last two decades, especially with the advent of Web 2.0 technology, websites and social media networks have emerged, allowing various kinds of organizations to have an online presence. Furthermore, the public, stakeholders, consumers, and so on, have enabled the practice of the role of meaning-making and sharing positive and negative content about organizations and their activities (Vrabec & Odziomková, 2018, p. 321). Online reputation management (ORM) is the process of monitoring, positioning, measuring, talking, listening, and engaging as an organization with its various online stakeholders (Oksiutycz & Kunene, 2017). Furthermore, online reputation management is "the process of ensuring that the right information appears when people searches for it in browsers and social networks sites such as Google and Facebook (Pollak & Svetozarovova, 2017, p. 319).

This give us a glance to the future of the reputation research that going to focused on digital reputation in terms of conceptualization and develop more accurate models to measure reputation automatically. In the same context, communication reputation research did not examine new communication tools, media, and platforms, in order to keep focus

on with the development of social media platforms as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and some other traditional media outlets as magazine and radio.

For the geographical distribution of the discussed issues and organizations, the results show that the continents and countries discussed within communication reputation research are dominated by North America. This is reasonable considering American research productivity and journals, as well as articles discussed in this field. Regarding to the first authors' affiliations, the interest of American researchers and universities in the concept of reputation is clear, especially when considering the developed organizations based on the country. These findings are not surprising, that it has been reported in the US provides funding and academic support via colleges and universities, estimated to be about US\$51.9 billion (Matthews, 2012). In addition, our results are consistent with other communication and PR reviews, which are also related to the role of American researchers and scholars in developing the field of communication (Abu Arqoub et al., 2019, 2020; Botan & Taylor, 2004; Günther & Domahidi, 2017). However, communication reputation research is rare in the undeveloped countries and other international cultural contexts as (Arab countries, Asian countries, and African countries) which is a call for researchers from these regions to investigate reputation in different experiences and contexts.

In addition, it is clear that reputation has many definitions and consensus on one definition is not easy, and investigating the terminology of "reputation" as a concept helps for understanding the attractive complex construct of the term (Salgado, 2012). However, reputation in the communication context needs to be accurately defined and determined, because each sub-communication area has its specialty and priority in applying or practicing reputation. All these results indicate that reputation practices specially in communication still indistinct and the literature dose not reflexes and dealing with all of the aspects.

In conclusion, this study offers an empirical and systematic review of communication reputation-focused research, which should help researchers, students, journals, and others in the process of understanding research areas and patterns in this field. This paper highlights the need for more significant scholarly contributions to this academic field from a communication and PR perspective through the application of communication theories, models, and methodologies. Indeed, "PR researchers have much work to do in identifying the mediating role that reputation may play" (Hutton et al., 2001, p. 258).

4.1. Limitations and recommendations for future research

As with other studies, the present study has some significant limitations. First, reputation is a multidisciplinary research area, but the present study focused only on communication. Thus, analyzing other disciplines could yield different results. The second limitation is the sample, which restricted by making excluded not specialized in communication and also not highly journals, this show more other forms of research, such as proceedings, and books. Moreover, selecting articles during the database search was limited to only those that had the term "reputation" in its title, keywords, and abstracts. Some articles may have been missed due to the inaccuracy of the database search.

For future studies, researchers should discuss reputation as a communicational concept, along with its role within organizations. This role has to be reviewed by PR and organizational leadership while PR has the communicative and a relationship role, such that ,if anyone should be a candidate to the position of Chief Reputation Officer, this person should also be the Chief Executive (Origi, 2014). Another significant issue that articles must focus on is building clear models and distinct theories that can be

adopted for RM in all kinds of organizations or entities. Researchers must clarify how they are going to measure and examine reputation empirically and in which cases this could be deemed useful. “It also requires that empirical researchers carefully match their measures of organizational reputation with the conceptual dimension (or dimensions) being measured, which will likely require advances in the sophistication of measurement approaches” (Lange et al., 2011, p. 179). Future studies could indeed focus on qualitative analysis to investigate the contribution of communication to reputation research, and to elucidate the relationship between the communicative and relational dimensions involved in constructing and managing organizational reputation.

Furthermore, it would be valuable if communication journals, especially those that focus on PR, would allocate special issues for discussing various aspects and dimensions of reputation. Applying communication theories is required in future research. Toward a holistic and deep understanding of reputation issues, more qualitative and mixed methods research must be conducted based on analyses of new media in specific cases (Origi, 2014). Furthermore, the latest research trend in this field is ORM, which requires specific models, measurements, tools, cases, and dimensions that must be investigated and identified in scholarly works. Researchers should also focus on developing countries that have different case studies and circumstances to gain a holistic view of reputation as a concept and how it is applied in many countries. Finally, critical studies should investigate the abuse of reputation in the fields of communication and PR and its negative aspects, considering the rise of digital and social media, big data, and algorithms that enable politicians, states, organizations, and corporations to use reputation to deceive their stakeholders.

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