

TINJAUAN BIBLIOMETRIK KOMUNIKASI PEMERINTAH DAN DISINFORMASI: PEMETAAN TREN RISET GLOBAL

A BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISINFORMATION: MAPPING GLOBAL RESEARCH TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of 219 Scopus-indexed publications on government communication and disinformation from 2014 to 2025. Government communication is defined as the strategic and institutional communication activities undertaken by public authorities to inform, engage, and build trust with citizens in policy-related contexts. Disinformation is conceptualized as misleading information typically generated by non-state actors and digital media ecosystems, affecting policy-related messages and public issue communication, and impacting citizens as the primary recipients. This study aims to map the development, thematic structure, and research trends of government communication and disinformation studies using a bibliometric analysis. The findings show a significant growth in scholarly output after 2017, with a notable surge during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting increasing concerns over misinformation and infodemics as governance challenges. The literature is dominated by contributions from developed countries, alongside growing participation from Asia-Pacific regions. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies four major thematic categories encompassing foundational, strategic, specialized, and emerging research areas. Based on bibliometric thematic evolution analysis, the findings indicate a shift from post-truth and political communication toward more strategic and legitimacy-oriented topics such as propaganda, infodemic, reputation, and digital communication. Overall, the findings show a shift toward a strategic and legitimacy-focused paradigm in government communication research, particularly at the institutional and organizational level, amid increasingly complex information disorders.

Keywords: Government communication, disinformation, public trust, strategic communication, bibliometric analysis.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyajikan analisis bibliometrik terhadap 219 publikasi terindeks Scopus mengenai komunikasi pemerintah dan disinformasi pada periode 2014–2025. Komunikasi pemerintah didefinisikan sebagai aktivitas komunikasi strategis dan institusional yang dilakukan oleh otoritas publik untuk menginformasikan, melibatkan, dan membangun kepercayaan masyarakat dalam konteks kebijakan publik. Disinformasi dikonseptualisasikan sebagai informasi menyesatkan yang umumnya dihasilkan oleh berbagai aktor di luar pemerintah dan ekosistem media digital, yang memengaruhi pesan-pesan terkait kebijakan dan komunikasi isu publik, serta berdampak pada warga negara sebagai penerima utama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memetakan perkembangan, struktur tematik, dan tren penelitian dalam kajian komunikasi pemerintah dan disinformasi melalui analisis bibliometrik. Temuan menunjukkan pertumbuhan signifikan jumlah publikasi setelah tahun 2017, dengan lonjakan yang menonjol selama pandemi COVID-19, yang mencerminkan meningkatnya perhatian terhadap misinformasi dan infodemik sebagai tantangan tata kelola. Literatur didominasi oleh kontribusi dari negara-negara maju, disertai dengan meningkatnya partisipasi dari kawasan Asia-Pasifik. Analisis ko-okurensi kata kunci mengidentifikasi empat kategori tematik utama yang mencakup area penelitian dasar, strategis, terspesialisasi, dan yang sedang berkembang. Berdasarkan analisis evolusi tematik bibliometrik evolusi tema menunjukkan pergeseran dari post-truth dan komunikasi politik menuju isu yang lebih strategis seperti propaganda, infodemi, reputasi, dan komunikasi digital. Secara keseluruhan, temuan mengindikasikan pergeseran menuju paradigma komunikasi pemerintah, khususnya pada tingkat institusional dan organisasional, yang lebih strategis dan berorientasi legitimasi di tengah semakin kompleksnya disrupsi informasi kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi pemerintah, disinformasi, kepercayaan publik, komunikasi strategis, analisis bibliometrik.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, government communication understood as the strategic and institutional communication activities undertaken by public authorities to inform, engage, and build trust with citizens in policy-related contexts, has undergone a significant transformation, as documented in prior studies on disruptive digital technologies, algorithmic media, and the growing prevalence of information disorder (Arora, 2024; Bennett & Livingston, 2018). The expansion of social media has enhanced the speed and reach of official communication, yet it has simultaneously intensified the spread of misinformation and disinformation (Arora, 2024; Levenshus, 2024). Disinformation false information intentionally crafted to mislead—has emerged as a critical governance threat, eroding public trust, weakening institutional legitimacy, and destabilizing democratic processes (Malik et al., 2023; Vandecraen et al., 2025). As citizens increasingly rely on digital platforms to interpret government actions, credibility and trust have become essential governance assets.

Despite the urgency of these challenges, governments continue to struggle with developing strategic and evidence-based communication approaches capable of countering information disorder. Traditional one-way, message-centric communication is no longer adequate in algorithm-driven environments where narratives compete and evolve rapidly (Álvarez-Nobell et al., 2025). Moreover, research during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that fragmented and inconsistent communication amplified public confusion and misinformation exposure. This highlights the need to treat public communication as a strategic management function rather than a supporting administrative task.

Parallel to these developments, communication scholars in public sector communication and strategic communication research argue that citizens increasingly evaluate government credibility in ways comparable to consumer brand evaluation, prioritizing reliability, consistency, authenticity, and relational engagement (Levenshus, 2024). This conceptual shift aligns with strategic management and marketing frameworks such as Brand Trust Theory (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), Reputation Management Theory (Fombrun, 1996), and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) (Schultz, 1993). While these frameworks are widely applied in the private sector, their application in government communication research remains fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped (Canel & Sanders, 2010; Lim, 2015).

However, scholarly work in government communication remains dominated by political communication, journalism studies, and crisis management, creating a theoretical gap where strategic communication and marketing perspectives are not fully integrated. Existing research addresses fake news, media trust, public engagement, and transparency (Liu et al., 2012), but it does not offer a consolidated understanding of how governments manage trust and reputation in digital environments shaped by disinformation.

An empirical gap also persists. Most studies are country-specific or crisis-specific, limiting cross-regional comparability and failing to map long-term global developments in government communication. Although research surged during COVID-19, these studies remain episodic and lack a comprehensive overview of global scholarly collaboration patterns, influential authors, and dominant intellectual structures (Zhu & Yang, 2023).

A methodological gap exists as well: despite the rapid expansion of research on misinformation and public trust, no bibliometric study has systematically mapped the evolution of global scholarship on government communication and disinformation. Bibliometric analysis offers a powerful approach for identifying publication trends, thematic clusters, and emerging research directions, yet it has not been applied to this field.

To address these gaps, the present study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of publications on government communication and disinformation indexed in Scopus between 2014 and 2025. This approach enables a systematic examination of scientific production, collaboration networks, thematic structures, and research evolution. Moreover, this study uniquely interprets the findings through strategic communication and marketing management lenses, offering deeper insight into how public trust, reputation, and message integration are conceptualized within the literature. Guided by these objectives, the study answers the following research questions:

This study addresses several interrelated research questions to systematically examine the development of scholarship on government communication and disinformation. First, it explores the overall publication trends in this field between 2014 and 2025 in order to identify patterns of growth and key periods of scholarly attention. It then examines which countries have led scientific contributions and how international collaboration networks have evolved over time. Building on this descriptive mapping, the study investigates the authors and seminal works that shape the intellectual core of the field. Furthermore, it analyzes the conceptual clusters that characterize the structure of research on government communication and disinformation. Finally, the study examines how research themes have evolved across different periods, with particular attention to the emergence of strategic themes during the 2020–2024 period.

This study makes three contributions. First, it offers the first systematic bibliometric overview of the global evolution of government communication and disinformation research. Second, it introduces a novel interdisciplinary interpretation grounded in Brand Trust Theory, IMC, and Reputation Management, positioning government communication as a strategic, trust-building capability. Third, it provides actionable insights for policymakers by identifying the communication strategies most frequently associated with public trust, transparency, and information resilience.

Through this contribution, the study advances both communication and management scholarship by demonstrating how strategic communication frameworks can enhance government capacity to counter disinformation and sustain institutional legitimacy in digitally saturated environments.

1.1. Literature review

Building on this institutional and strategic understanding, prior studies conceptualize government communication as a key governance function aimed at fostering legitimacy, cooperation, and public trust (Canel & Sanders, 2010). In contemporary governance, the role of strategic communication has expanded significantly as digital technologies transform how governments interact with the public. Instead of functioning merely as transmitters of information, governments now act as relational communicators responsible for maintaining credibility, transparency, and dialogue with increasingly critical and networked publics (Levenshus, 2024).

However, the emergence of social media ecosystems has complicated this role. The decentralization of information, combined with algorithmic visibility and fragmented audiences, has intensified challenges in shaping coherent public narratives (Arora, 2024). Consequently, government communication must evolve beyond traditional public relations and adopt strategic approaches that build trust, engage citizens, and address misinformation dynamics.

Disinformation, false information intentionally produced to mislead has become one of the most severe threats to public institutions. Studies show that disinformation undermines institutional legitimacy, weakens public compliance with policy measures, and reduces overall trust in government (Malik et al., 2023). During crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic,

the spread of misleading narratives further amplified public confusion and resistance toward official guidelines (Vandecraen et al., 2025).

Public trust is therefore recognized as a critical asset of governance. It influences whether citizens accept policies, support public programs, and follow crisis communication (Liu et al., 2012). Yet, maintaining trust is increasingly difficult in an information environment where official messages compete with influencers, partisan content, and viral misinformation (Álvarez-Nobell et al., 2022). This condition positions communication as a strategic function essential for resilience and legitimacy.

1.2. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in Public Sector Context

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) emphasizes the consistency and integration of messages across multiple channels to create a unified audience experience (Schultz, 1993). Although originally developed for private sector marketing, IMC principles are increasingly relevant for public institutions navigating fragmented digital environments.

In government settings, IMC supports coherence of crisis messaging across platforms, alignment between policy communication and public expectations, and strengthened clarity to prevent information gaps exploited by disinformation. Álvarez-Nobell et al. (2022) note that inconsistent messaging among government actors during crises significantly increases citizen confusion and vulnerability to fake news, suggesting the need for integrated, cross-agency communication frameworks.

1.3 Brand Trust Theory, Reputation Management Theory, and Its Application in Government Communication

Brand Trust Theory posits that trust emerges when an institution is perceived as reliable, honest, and competent in delivering expected outcomes (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). Traditionally applied to consumer behavior, the concept is increasingly relevant in the public sector because citizens evaluate governmental credibility similarly to how they evaluate brands (Levenshus, 2024).

Trust in government communication influences policy acceptance, public compliance, crisis response behaviours, and engagement with digital government services. In disinformation contexts, brand trust functions as a protective cognitive filter citizens with high trust in institutions are less susceptible to misleading narratives. Therefore, trustworthy, consistent, and transparent communication forms the foundation of disinformation resilience.

Reputation Management Theory describes how organizations shape perceptions by aligning actions, communication, and performance (Fombrun, 1996). In the public domain, reputation is tied to perceived competence, fairness, transparency, and responsiveness of government institutions.

In this study, disinformation refers to misleading or manipulative information typically produced by non-governmental actors within digital media ecosystems, which distorts policy-related messages and public issue communication disseminated by government institutions, thereby affecting citizens as the primary recipients. Such disinformation poses a direct threat to governmental reputation by shaping negative or inaccurate public perceptions. Effective strategic communication, therefore, functions not only to inform but also to protect institutional legitimacy and public trust. By adopting proactive reputation management strategies, governments can strengthen resilience against false narratives and rebuild public confidence after communication failures.

Although research on disinformation, public trust, and government communication is growing, it remains fragmented across communication studies, political science, and public management (Zhu & Yang, 2023). A systematic bibliometric analysis is therefore essential to identify dominant theoretical frameworks used in the field, map how concepts such as IMC, brand trust, and reputation appear in global scholarship, reveal collaboration networks and intellectual structure, trace evolution of themes from crisis communication to digital governance.

This integration of bibliometric evidence with management and marketing theories strengthens understanding of how governments can formulate communication strategies that enhance credibility and counter disinformation.

In addition to brand trust and reputation management perspectives, Stakeholder Relationship Theory provides a relational lens for understanding government communication beyond organizational boundaries. Originating from relationship marketing, this theory emphasizes long-term interaction, mutual trust, and value co-creation among multiple stakeholders rather than one-way information exchange (Grönroos, 1994). In the context of government communication, this perspective highlights the importance of sustained engagement not only between governments and citizens, but also across institutional, national, and transnational actors, particularly in addressing complex challenges such as disinformation.

2. METHODS

The present study adopts a bibliometric research design to systematically map the intellectual structure, scientific production, and thematic evolution of scholarship on government communication and disinformation. Bibliometric analysis is increasingly used in social sciences due to its capacity to capture large-scale publication patterns and generate evidence-based insights into how a research field develops over time. Similar to the approach used by Parlina & Kusumaranani, (2023), “a comprehensive analysis of publication characteristics was performed” to generate an evidence-based overview of the structure of research in the selected domain.

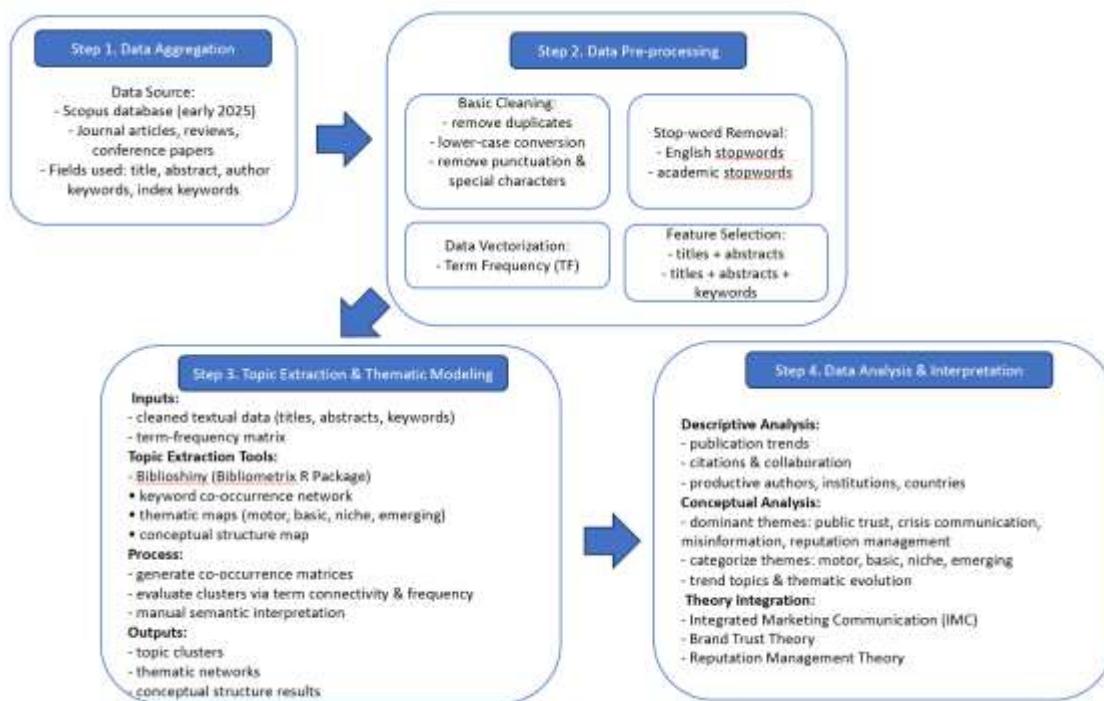


Figure 1. Bibliometric Analysis Workflow

Figure 1 illustrates bibliometric workflow adopted in this study. Data for this study were retrieved exclusively from the Scopus database, which is widely recognized for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals and suitability for advanced bibliometric mapping. The search was conducted in January 2025 using a refined query designed to capture publications at the intersection of government communication, disinformation, and public trust. The search string incorporated multiple clusters of keywords related to strategic communication, misinformation, credibility, and marketing-based constructs such as brand trust and integrated communication. Only documents written in English and classified as articles, reviews, or conference papers were included. The search generated an initial dataset of 219 documents published between 2014 and 2025.

Following data extraction, a rigorous cleaning procedure was applied to improve the accuracy of bibliometric indicators. This involved standardizing author names, consolidating institutional variations, correcting country labels, and harmonizing synonymous keywords (e.g., “fake news,” “fake-news,” “misinformation”). Duplicate records were removed using automated filters in the Bibliometrix package, followed by manual verification. The final dataset was exported in CSV and BibTeX formats for further analysis.

The analytical process combined descriptive and network-based bibliometric techniques. Descriptive analyses were conducted using the Bibliometrix R package and its graphical interface, Biblioshiny. These analyses generated insights into annual publication trends, the productivity of authors and institutions, the distribution of documents across journals, and citation patterns. Network analyses were performed using VOSviewer, which is particularly suitable for visualizing scientific maps with complex co-authorship structures, co-citation networks, and keyword co-occurrence relationships. Co-authorship analysis allowed the identification of collaboration clusters among authors, institutions, and countries. Co-citation analysis revealed the intellectual foundations of the field by identifying frequently co-cited authors and landmark publications. Keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to detect thematic clusters that represent the conceptual structure of the research domain.

To examine the evolution of research themes, the study applied thematic mapping and thematic evolution techniques available in Biblioshiny. These techniques categorize themes into motor, basic, emerging, and niche themes based on their centrality and density. The analysis was conducted across two distinct time periods (2014–2019 and 2020–2025) to capture a substantive shift in the research landscape. The year 2020 was selected as a critical boundary due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which marked a turning point in government communication research by intensifying scholarly attention to disinformation, infodemics, crisis communication, and public trust. This periodization enables a meaningful comparison of thematic structures before and after a major global disruption. Trend topic analysis was also conducted to identify rapidly growing themes in the last decade, particularly those related to digital governance, misinformation mitigation, and strategic communication approaches.

Finally, the interpretation of the bibliometric results was guided by theoretical lenses drawn from strategic communication and marketing literature, including Integrated Marketing Communication (Schultz, 1993), Brand Trust Theory (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), and Reputation Management Theory (Fombrun, 1996). These frameworks were not used as analytical variables but as interpretive tools for understanding how concepts related to trust, credibility, and communication strategy emerge within the scientific landscape. This integrative approach provides a deeper understanding of how government communication is conceptualized in response to disinformation and why certain themes become more prominent over time.

Overall, the methodological approach provides a comprehensive and systematic basis for mapping the development of research on government communication and disinformation, identifying influential scholars and institutions, and uncovering emerging research directions within an increasingly complex digital information environment.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Publication Growth Trend

The analysis of 219 documents published between 2014 and 2025 reveals a steady increase in scholarly attention toward government communication and disinformation. During the early 2014s, the number of publications remained low, with fewer than five publications per year. A noticeable upward trend began around 2015, coinciding with heightened global concerns over misinformation, political polarization, and the strategic use of digital platforms.

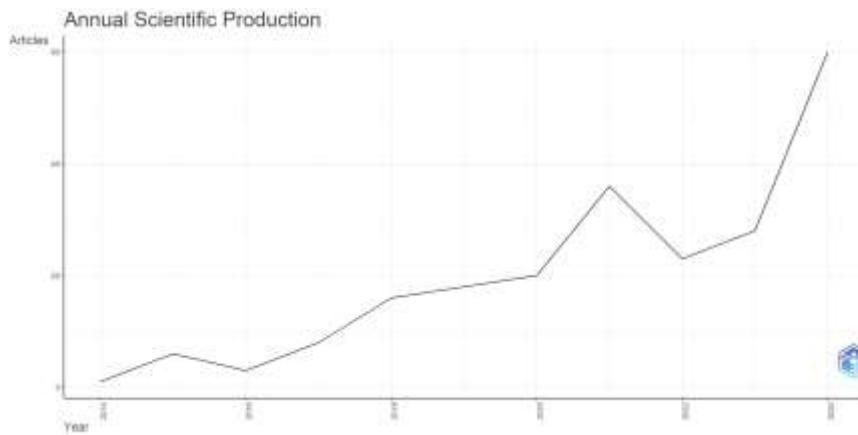


Figure 2. Publication trend

Figure 2 illustrates publications growth trend. The most significant surge occurred after 2017, aligning with global debates on “fake news” and major political events in the United States and Europe. Publication growth accelerated further during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), reflecting rising scholarly interest in crisis communication, institutional trust, and the role of governments in countering health-related misinformation. By 2024, annual publications reached their highest level of the total dataset. This pattern indicates a growing scholarly recognition of disinformation as an increasingly salient issue in government communication, particularly within discussions of governance, crisis management, and institutional trust. Citations followed a similar trajectory. While documents published before 2014 received limited attention, works produced post-2016 demonstrated a sharp increase in citation counts, indicating the emergence of a more established and influential research domain.

3.2 Country Contributions and Corresponding Author

Scholarly output is geographically concentrated. The United States leads with the highest number of publications ($n = 58$), followed by the Spain and Australia. European countries including Spain, the Netherlands, and Germany also contribute substantially, reflecting strong academic interest in public governance and digital communication.

Asian contributions, while smaller in volume, have grown in recent years. China, Malaysia, and India show increasing engagement, especially in studies related to misinformation detection

and digital citizen engagement. Germany forms the largest co-authorship cluster. Meanwhile, research originating from Asia tends to be more domestically concentrated with fewer international co-authors.

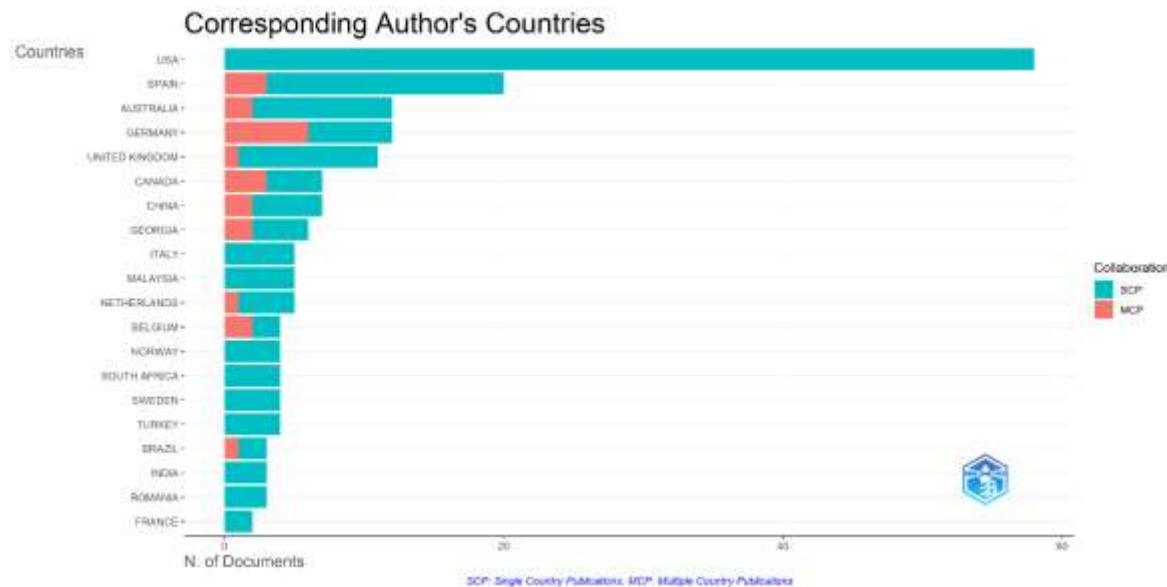


Figure 3. Author's Countries Collaboration

Emerging contributors such as China, Malaysia, and Italy also show consistent growth, indicating a gradual diffusion of research interest from Western to Asian contexts. This geographical diversification mirrors the global recognition that disinformation poses a systemic governance challenge transcending regional boundaries. The presence of multi-country publications (MCP) across European and Asia-Pacific nations further demonstrates a collaborative shift toward comparative and cross-cultural analyses of government communication effectiveness in combating misinformation. Although the overall volume of publications by Indonesian authors remains smaller compared to leading Western countries, their growing presence signals increasing regional engagement with government communication and disinformation research.

The increasing cross-country collaboration in publications emphasizes the evolution of the field from nationally confined studies toward a transnational knowledge network that aligns with the principles of Stakeholder Relationship Theory (Grönroos, 1994). This shift reflects the necessity of multi-stakeholder engagement in addressing information disorders that transcend political and cultural boundaries. It also signals that scholarly communities are embracing a systems-oriented understanding of government communication as a shared public good, requiring both international cooperation and localized adaptation.

While the number of publications remains modest compared to more established fields, the growth rate suggests increasing academic maturity and the gradual institutionalization of government communication studies within strategic and marketing paradigms. This expansion also indicates that the topic has evolved from a descriptive inquiry about "how governments communicate" to a more analytical investigation into "how communication enhances governance effectiveness and public trust."

From a theoretical standpoint, the surge in publication output corresponds to what can be described as the *managerial turn* in public communication studies. Scholars are progressively drawing from management theories such as Reputation Management (Fombrun, 1996), Integrated Marketing Communication (Schultz, 1993), and Brand Trust Theory (Delgado-Ballester, 2004) to explain how governments construct and maintain legitimacy in a fragmented information environment. This shift signals a paradigmatic convergence between strategic communication and public management, where communication is treated as both a relational process and a governance capability.

The citation impact analysis reveals a clear hierarchy of foundational and high-velocity contributions shaping the intellectual structure of research on government communication and disinformation. Bennett and Livingston's (2018) work, *The Disinformation Order*, emerges as the most influential publication, accumulating 980 citations and a Total Citations per Year of 122,5. This exceptionally high citation impact indicates the work's central role in establishing a shared conceptual framework for understanding disinformation as a systemic threat to democratic legitimacy, making it a key intellectual reference across communication, political science, and governance studies. Casero-Ripollés, (2020) article, examining the democratic and communicative consequences of media consumption during COVID-19, follows with 407 citations and Total Citations per Year 67,833, highlighting the pandemic's role as a catalyst for accelerated scholarly attention to misinformation ecosystems. Subsequent influential contributions, notably by (Jin et al., 2020), focus on corrective communication strategies, each receiving 67 citations and Total Citations per Year 11,167, signaling growing empirical interest in the mechanisms through which governments may counter crisis-driven misinformation. Cheng's works (2019; 2021) further expand this domain by exploring trust dynamics and misinformation intensity within digitally mediated environments, consolidating trust as a central theoretical axis in contemporary communication research.

Table 2. Most Cited Authors

Author	Title	Total Citations	TC Per Year
1 (Bennett & Livingston, 2018)	The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication And The Decline Of Democratic Institutions	980	122,5
2 (Casero-Ripollés, 2020)	Impact Of Covid-19 On The Media System. Communicative And Democratic Consequences Of News Consumption During The Outbreak	407	67,833
3 (Jin et al., 2020)	The Effects Of Corrective Communication And Employee Backup On The Effectiveness Of Fighting Crisis Misinformation	67	11,167
4 (Cheng & Lee, 2019)	Online Crisis Communication In A Post-Truth Chinese Society: Evidence From Interdisciplinary Literature	50	7,143
5 (Hameleers et al., 2022)	Mistake Or Manipulation? Conceptualizing Perceived Mis- And Disinformation Among News Consumers In 10 European Countries	45	11,25
6 (Cheng & Chen, 2021)	Encountering Misinformation Online: Antecedents Of Trust And Distrust And Their Impact On The Intensity Of Facebook Use	39	7,8
7 (Flew, 2019)	Digital Communication, The Crisis Of Trust, And The Post-Global	38	5,429
8 (Boman & Schneider, 2021)	Finding An Antidote: Testing The Use Of Proactive Crisis Strategies To Protect Organizations From Astroturf Attacks	37	7,4

9 (Zhang et al., 2021) Assembling The Networks And Audiences Of Disinformation: How Successful Russian Ira Twitter Accounts Built Their Followings, 2015-2017 37 7,4

Hameleers' (2022) cross-national study on mis/disinformation demonstrates substantial citation velocity (Total Citations per Year 11.25), reflecting the global relevance of comparative misinformation research. Meanwhile, Flew (2019), Boman (2021), and Kim (2021) contribute to emerging perspectives on networked disinformation, crisis communication resilience, and platform-driven audience manipulation. Collectively, these highly cited works illustrate a paradigmatic shift: from descriptive accounts of misinformation to strategic, theory-driven analyses grounded in trust, legitimacy, and organizational resilience—core constructs that now underpin the evolving landscape of government communication scholarship.

3.3. Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

The keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 4) reveals the conceptual architecture of research on government communication and disinformation, illustrating four dominant clusters that structure the field's intellectual landscape. The first cluster centers on public trust and reputation, anchored by terms such as *credibility*, *media trust*, and *reputation*. This thematic grouping reflects the influence of Brand Trust Theory, which positions trust as a strategic asset in mediating citizens' perceptions of governmental legitimacy. Its proximity to concepts like *journalism* and *democracy* underscores how reputational dynamics increasingly intersect with information integrity and democratic stability.

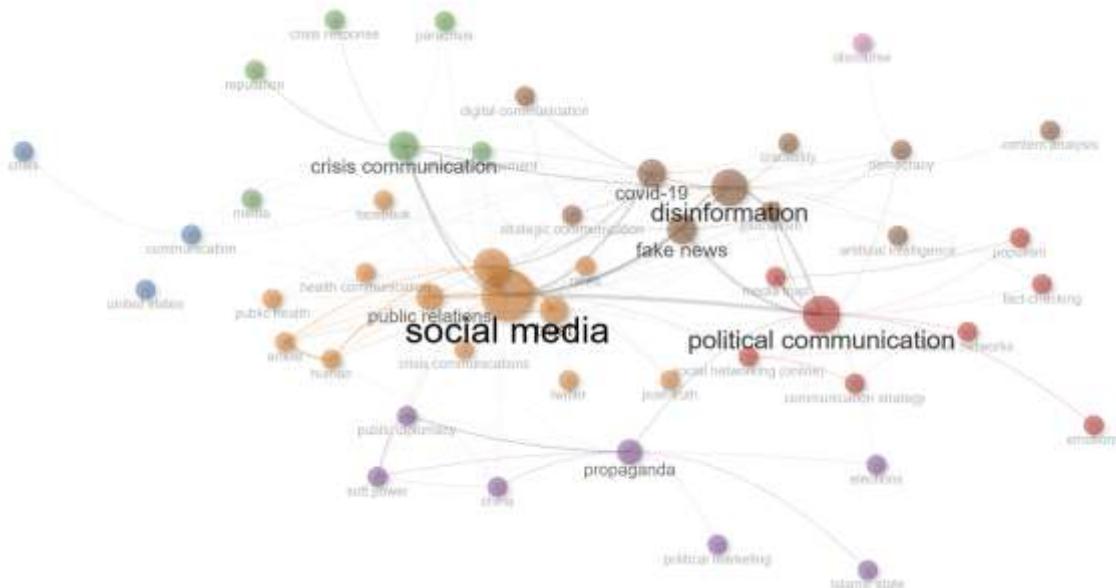


Figure 4. The keyword Co-occurrence Network

A second, tightly interconnected cluster comprises crisis communication and disinformation, with prominent nodes such as *crisis communication*, *fake news*, *COVID-19*, and *disinformation*. The density of links within this cluster aligns with Reputation Management Theory, highlighting how governments deploy corrective and strategic communication during crises to protect institutional legitimacy amid misinformation shocks. The convergence of crisis-related and misinformation-related keywords signals a research emphasis on adaptive communication strategies under high-stakes conditions.

The third cluster focuses on transparency and engagement, represented by terms like *public diplomacy*, *soft power*, *health communication*, and *public relations*. This pattern maps onto

Stakeholder Relationship Theory, suggesting that effective government communication extends beyond message dissemination to involve co-creation, participation, and relational governance. The presence of *social media* as the network's largest and most central node further indicates its role as the primary interface for public engagement and information negotiation.

The final cluster highlights marketing communication and branding, consisting of keywords such as *propaganda*, *political marketing*, and *communication strategy*. This grouping reflects the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) principles, where consistency, segmentation, and strategic framing are essential for shaping public narratives and countering competing information frames.

3.4. Thematic Map and Thematic Evolution Analysis

The thematic map (Figure 5) provides a structured overview of the conceptual landscape, positioning research themes according to their centrality (relevance) and density (development). The analysis identifies four major thematic categories that describe the intellectual architecture of studies on government communication and disinformation. The motor themes, located in the upper-right quadrant, include highly developed and central topics such as public trust and crisis communication. Their strong centrality reflects their foundational role in shaping theoretical and empirical work, particularly as governments increasingly rely on strategic communication to maintain legitimacy amid disruptive information environments.

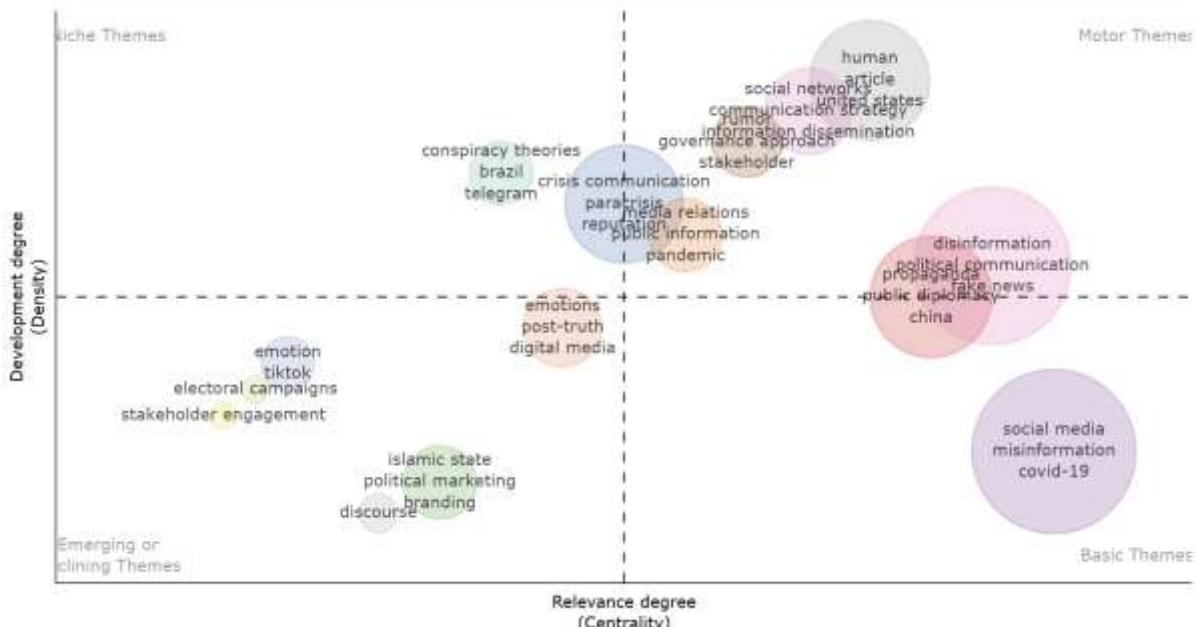


Figure 5. Thematic Map

In contrast, the basic themes represented by fake news, misinformation, and the broad cluster of *social media* and *COVID-19*, occupy the lower-right quadrant. These themes are central but less internally developed, functioning as the conceptual backbone of the field. Their positioning illustrates that research continues to draw heavily on these constructs to explain the mechanisms through which disinformation spreads and how it shapes political and social dynamics.

The niche themes, such as digital ethics and transparency, appear in the upper-left quadrant, indicating well-developed but peripheral domains. These specialized areas provide depth to the field by engaging with normative and governance-oriented questions but remain less integrated into the main research flow. Meanwhile, emerging or declining themes, including AI governance and information resilience, occupy the lower-left quadrant. Their low density suggests early-stage conceptualization, yet their centrality is increasing as scholars explore technological and institutional responses to disinformation.

The thematic evolution diagram (Figure 6) further demonstrates a clear transition between the 2014–2019 and 2020–2024 periods. Early research concentrated on political communication, post-truth, and the emerging discourse on fake news. In the later period, these themes evolve into more complex and strategically oriented clusters such as disinformation, crisis management, strategic communication, propaganda, and reputation. The emergence of terms like infodemic, digital communication, and strategic governance indicates a deepening managerial and organizational orientation within the field.

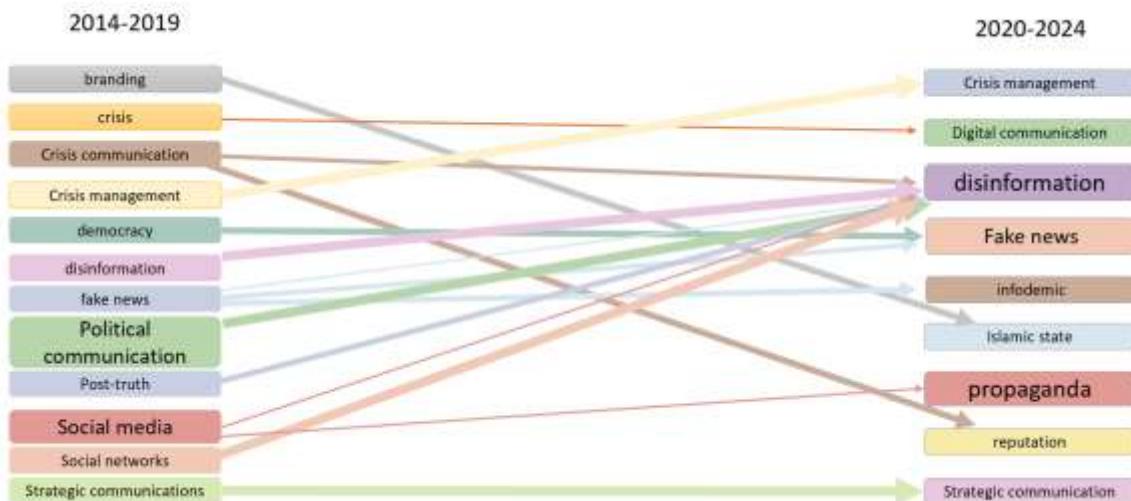


Figure 6. Thematic evolution of government communication and disinformation research across the 2014–2019 and 2020–2024 periods. Arrow colors are used to distinguish overlapping, diverging, and continuing thematic trajectories between periods, while arrow thickness is standardized for visual clarity.

Together, the thematic map and evolution analysis reveal a decisive shift from political and media-centric approaches toward strategic, managerial, and trust-oriented paradigms. This transition confirms a managerial turn in government communication research, wherein communication is increasingly conceptualized as an integrated capability for crisis response, reputation building, and institutional resilience in the face of escalating disinformation threats.

Table 3. Emerging Keywords

	Keyword	Freq	Q1	Median	Q3	Interpretation
1	social media	37	2020	2022	2024	A medium-emerging theme; the primary arena for disinformation flows and government-citizen interaction.
2	trust	16	2021	2022	2024	A strong-emerging theme centered on institutional trust repair and credibility reconstruction.
3	misinformation	25	2021	2023	2024	A rapidly growing theme driven by post-pandemic information disorder and algorithmic amplification.
4	crisis communication	24	2021	2024	2024	An emerging theme highlighting communication as a strategic response to crises and reputational threats.

5	digital communication	6	2023	2024	2024	A newly emerging theme reflecting digital-first governance and AI-enabled communication systems.
6	disinformation	30	2021	2021	2023	A strong-emerging theme central to contemporary public communication research.
7	covid-19	22	2021	2021	2023	An event-driven emerging theme tied to the global infodemic and crisis governance.
8	political communication	29	2020	2021	2023	A mature-to-emerging theme transitioning toward strategic communication perspectives.
9	fake news	23	2019	2020	2022	A mature but still relevant theme, foundational to misinformation research.
10	propaganda	18	2019	2020	2021	A re-emerging theme associated with geopolitical information warfare and narrative manipulation.

The findings provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions by demonstrating how peer-reviewed communication and governance research on government communication and disinformation has evolved thematically, geographically, and conceptually. Addressing RQ1, the publication trajectory shows accelerated growth beginning in 2015 and peaking between 2020 and 2024. This rise corresponds with increased global attention to “fake news,” political polarization, and the COVID-19 infodemic, confirming that disinformation has become a central governance challenge rather than a peripheral communication concern (Bennett, 2018; Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

Regarding RQ2, the United States, Spain, and Australia lead scientific contributions, while China, Malaysia, and India show growing participation, particularly in misinformation detection and digital engagement studies. The expansion of multi-country publications indicates a shift toward transnational knowledge production, consistent with Stakeholder Relationship Theory, which emphasizes collaborative responses to complex information disorders (Grönroos, 1994).

For RQ3, citation patterns reveal a clear intellectual core shaped by seminal works such as Bennett & Livingston, (2018), (Casero-Ripollés, 2020), Jin et al., (2020), and Cheng & Lee, (2019). These works emphasize crisis misinformation, corrective communication, and trust dynamics issues that remain central in the post-pandemic period.

Addressing RQ4, keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies four dominant conceptual clusters: (1) public trust and reputation, (2) crisis communication and disinformation, (3) transparency and public diplomacy, and (4) strategic and political communication. These clusters highlight the integration of Brand Trust Theory (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), Reputation Management (Fombrun, 1996), and Integrated Marketing Communication (Schultz, 1993) into public communication research.

Finally, for RQ5, the thematic evolution shows a transition from early emphases on political communication, democracy, and post-truth (2014–2019) toward more strategically oriented themes such as reputation, propaganda, infodemic, and digital communication (2020–2024). The sustained presence of crisis management and strategic communication across both periods

suggests their centrality in explaining how governments maintain legitimacy and respond to misinformation shocks. This evolution confirms a broader “managerial turn,” positioning communication as a governance capability essential for institutional credibility in increasingly volatile information environments.

4. Conclusions

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of how peer-reviewed research on government communication and disinformation has evolved between 2014 and 2024. Beyond documenting the acceleration of publications, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings demonstrate a structural reorientation of the field toward governance, legitimacy, and strategic communication concerns, positioning disinformation as a core issue in contemporary public management scholarship. Thematic patterns reveal a shift from early emphases on political communication, social media, and post-truth toward more strategically oriented themes such as crisis management, propaganda, infodemic, reputation, and digital communication. This trajectory demonstrates a clear “managerial turn” in the field, where government communication is increasingly conceptualized as a strategic capability linked to trust, legitimacy, and institutional resilience.

Theoretical implications highlight the growing integration of communication scholarship with management frameworks. Concepts from Brand Trust Theory (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), Reputation Management (Fombrun, 1996), and Integrated Marketing Communication (Schultz, 1993) increasingly underpin analyses of how governments construct credibility in fragmented digital environments. This convergence suggests that public sector communication is evolving from message dissemination to relationship-centered and strategy-driven governance.

Practical implications emphasize the need for governments to adopt coordinated, multi-platform communication strategies, particularly during crises and infodemic conditions. The prominence of themes such as crisis management, fake news, and reputation underscores the necessity of investing in communication capacity, cross-agency integration, and rapid misinformation response mechanisms.

Future research should expand cross-national comparative studies to better understand contextual variations in trust and misinformation dynamics. With themes like digital communication and propaganda gaining prominence, further inquiry is needed into platform-specific communication strategies, narrative competition, and the role of state and non-state actors in shaping information ecosystems. Longitudinal analyses and mixed-method approaches would deepen understanding of how communication strategies influence public trust across different governance contexts.

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