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An assessment of progress in research on global public relations from 2001 to 2014

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ABSTRACT

Designed to investigate the trends, patterns and rigors of research studies examining global public relations, this study conducted a content analysis of published articles in public relations journals as well as other communication journals between 2001 and 2014. During this time span, a total of 163 articles examined topics related to global public relations. Information including journal name, publication year, country examined, authorship, theoretical application, method approach, and future research direction was recorded for each article. Given the steady increase in the number of articles addressing global public relations during the timeframe examined, the field should shift from description to theorization and establish theories specific to global public relations with methodological diversification. The United States was the nation of most frequent focus in the articles, followed by China, the United Kingdom, and South Korea.

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Due to the convergence of financial markets and advancement of communication technologies, the popularity of and demand for global public relations practices are rapidly escalating across various types and sizes of organizations. For example, the value of U.S. multinational companies in 2009 was \$3.593 billion, comprising about 40% of U.S. businesses (Barefoot & Mataloni, 2011). Furthermore, approximately one-third of public relations firms in the United States have at least one office in a foreign country (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006), with this globalization trend steadily increasing every year. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) confirmed this trend, stating that almost “all public relations is global or international” (p. 541).

With the prevalence of global public relations practices, scholars have attempted to examine this phenomenon from a scholarly perspective. Several books including *The Global Public Relations Handbook* by Sriramesh and Vercic (2003b) have extended knowledge regarding global public relations theories and practices. Some scholars have used the case study method to present public relations practice abroad (e.g., Al-Enad, 1992; Beng, 1994; Berkowitz & Lee, 2004), while others have applied theories developed in the United States to investigate the similarities and differences of public relations practices in foreign nations (e.g., Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995; Huang, 2001; Rhee, 2002). Indeed, *global issues* is a frequent topic in current public relations research (Ki & Khang, 2005; Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010).

While global public relations research has been on the rise, a systematic review of academic articles addressing this topic has not yet been conducted. Tomasello (2001) suggests, an assessment of published articles demonstrates various topics, approaches and methodologies used by scholars in a given field. To understand the status of global public relations and

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determine methods for future improvement, it is necessary to evaluate what has been done in the past. This study aims to observe the patterns and trends of global public relations research through content analysis of published articles in public relations and related mass communication journals. Specifically, this study intends to assess: 1) progress that has been achieved in global public relations research, 2) prominent topics presented in each journal, 3) public relations theories and cross-cultural or intercultural theories applied, and 4) methodologies applied. The results of this research may contribute to knowledge about global public relations by investigating the generality of individual study findings and establishing several empirical generalizations.

1. Literature review

1.1. Global public relations vs. international public relations

Although the terminology and constructs of international public relations and global public relations have been used interchangeably in the scholarship, each conveys a different meaning. *International* as defined by New Oxford American Dictionary as “existing, occurring, or carried on between two or more nations” while *global* is “relating to the whole world.” The meanings of the words are similarly reflected in scholarly definitions. For example, Wakefield (1997) defined international public relations as “a multinational program that has certain coordination between headquarters and various countries where offices and/or publics are located, and that carries potential consequences or results in more than one country” (p. 355). Wilcox and Cameron (2006) conceptualized it as “the planned and organized effort of a company, institution, or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations” (p. 516). These definitions highlight that international public relations are strategic communication activities performed in more than one country beyond an organization’s country of origin.

The term “global public relations” has gained momentum in the literature. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) define public relations as “the strategic communication that different types of organizations use for establishing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with relevant publics, many of whom are increasingly becoming culturally diverse” (emphasis added) (p. xxvii). To reflect the change of publics in the field, Szondi (2009) conceptualized global public relations as “the internationalization of the profession, including being practiced in more and more countries throughout the globe” (p. 119). In this sense, the term “global public relations” is broader, more inclusive, and holistic because the term “global” denotes the whole world. As global public relations represents strategic communications all around the world, this is a progression from international public relations.

In recognition of the terminological relationship described above, this study employs the term “global public relations” to mean communication efforts to establish and/or cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with publics on the globe.

1.2. Examining the state of the field

Using a thematic meta-analysis, scholars in the public relations domain have endeavored to evaluate what has been accomplished in academic research in order to understand the state of the field. Such studies can be divided into two primary categories: 1) analysis of the state of the field, and 2) analysis of a specific topic. The first stream tends to investigate the general state of the field by emphasizing topics and theoretical approaches (e.g., Botan & Taylor, 2004; Ferguson, 1984; Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003). Conducting the first of such studies in the field of public relations, Ferguson (1984) synthesized 10 years of articles published in *Public Relations Review*, categorized them according to three types (i.e., social responsibility/ethics, social issues and issues management, and public relationships), and concluded that the field was underdeveloped in terms of theory construction. Twenty years later, Sallot et al. (2003) replicated and expanded Ferguson’s study by analyzing 748 peer-reviewed articles from three public relations journals (i.e., *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review* and *Public Relations Research Annual*) and established research categories similar to Ferguson’s while adding others. After reviewing public relations articles, Botan and Taylor (2004) grouped public relations theories into two groups: functional¹ versus cocreational² perspective. They concluded that the most prominent change in public relations scholarship over the past two decades has been a transition from a functional to a cocreational perspective. The latter two studies concluded that the field of public relations is more theory-driven than before.

The other stream of study examines academic articles relating to a specific topic. For example, in their review of academic articles addressing organization-public relationships from 1985 to 2013, Ki and Shin (2015) found that the number of studies covering organization-public relationships has rapidly increased in recent years, but the area still lacks a consistent definition. An and Cheng (2010) analyzed a 30-year span of articles regarding crisis communication in the two leading public relations journals (i.e., *Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Public Relations Review*) and demonstrated that a majority of

¹ The functional perspective, which was popular in the formative years of the field, considers publics and communication as a tool or means to achieve organizational goals. Research with this perspective primarily focuses on the use of public relations as an instrument to attain specific organizational goals and evaluates an organization and its mission (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

² The cocreational approach views publics as partners or co-creators of meaning and communication, making it possible to agree on shared meanings, interpretation, and long-term orientation (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

the studies employed a qualitative approach, while the quantitative approach has recently experienced increased growth. Furthermore, they encouraged scholars of crisis communication to apply theoretical frameworks and more solid methodological approaches. Similarly, Kim, Avery, and Lariscy (2009) investigated articles on the topic of crisis response strategies and found that bolstering was the most often applied strategy, followed by denial. They concluded that scholars should work to bridge the gap between practice and theory. Recently, Ye and Ki (2012) reviewed studies featuring online public relations and concluded that such research was on the rise, with a dominance of quantitative research and an emphasis on use of the Internet in public relations; however, they determined that the field still suffers from a lack of theoretical application. Most of the aforementioned studies reached similar conclusions in that the topical areas they examined lacked theoretical applications. As this study has focused on examining academic articles regarding the topic of global public relations, it fits into the second stream of the study.

1.3. State of global public relations research

Several thematic meta-analytic studies have specifically targeted global public relations. In the early 1990s, Botan (1992) conducted a literature search and concluded that the body of global public relations literature was small at best. In an analysis of articles from the leading public relations journals, Ki and Khang (2005) indicated that global issues were increasing in frequency as a studied topic, and the same pattern was demonstrated regarding non-U.S. authorship. Using citation analysis, Pasadeos et al. (2010) noted that global research represents the “largest category of new studies” (p. 144) and has developed dramatically in recent years.

Despite the increasing interest in global public relations, only a handful of scholars have evaluated its state. With the first such study, Taylor (2001) reviewed the body of global public relations research and summarized the trends into four major categories: 1) symmetrical communication (as proposed by J. E. Grunig), 2) contextualized or comparative research, which describes public relations practices in different countries across the world, 3) the ethical and educational foundation of global public relations practice, and 4) the foundation to develop new theories of public relations, which can be applied to other countries. In a similar vein, Gower (2006) categorized studies on global public relations into two main streams. The first category focused on studies conducted at universities in the United States that applied a two-way symmetrical model to public relations practice in other countries. The other category featured studies originating in Europe that examined public relations practices in other countries. After reviewing the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, McKie (2001) noted that only six critical/cultural articles and four global articles had appeared in the journal since 2001, and that the four global articles covering global public relations were aimed at criticizing two-way symmetry.

The aforementioned studies obviously contribute to expanding knowledge of global public relations. However, the studies are limited in scope of analysis, as none have systematically reviewed articles in public relations or related journals in the field that present theoretical and methodological perspectives. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed for this study:

RQ1: What is the status of global public relations research in terms of theories, methods, and countries examined?

RQ2: What are viable suggestions for further research directions for global public relations?

2. Method

To fill the demonstrated research gap, this study analyzed the content of empirical studies related to global public relations published between 2001 and 2014. As described in the literature review, this study broadly defines the term *global public relations* as “communication efforts to establish and/or cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with publics in other nation(s).” As the definition reflects, this study focused on articles that involved comparative practices across multiple countries or a single country that applied discipline(s) from another country.

The study employed two steps in locating articles regarding *global public relations*. First, the researchers found articles that met the definition of *global public relations* by inspecting the titles and abstracts of all articles published between 2001 and 2014 in the following five journals: *Journal of Public Relations Research* (JPRR), *Public Relations Review* (PRR), *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (JMCQ), *Journal of Communication Management* (JCM), and *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (IJSC). JPRR, JMCQ and PRR have been deemed major intellectual outlets in the field (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Ki & Shin, 2006, 2015; Sallot et al., 2003; Ye & Ki, 2012), while JCM and IJSC have recently been recognized for frequent publishing of public relations research (Sallot et al., 2003).

In the second step, the researchers reviewed the reference lists of articles collected in the first step in order to locate additional relevant articles. When a reference list included an article related to global public relations, the researchers reviewed the title and abstract of the article to determine if the article should be added to the sample for this study. Additional articles published in other outlets such as *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* (CCIJ) and *Public Relations Journal* (PRJ) were identified.

Following suit from some earlier thematic meta-analyses (An & Cheng, 2010; Ki & Shin, 2006, 2015; Ye & Ki, 2012), this study examined full-length peer-reviewed research articles as the unit of analysis and excluded editorials, book reviews, commentary, and responses. The researchers identified 163 articles to constitute this study's sample.

Table 1

Research topics investigated in published global public relations research articles from 2001 to 2014.

| Topic | Operational Definition | Example |
|--|---|---|
| PR practice in one country/region or targeting at one country/region | Research examining public relations practice in one country/region by applying principles from other countries/regions, or involved another country/region, or public relations practice targeting at one country/region. | One country's image management in another country, a multinational corporation's public relations practice in a certain country, transnational crisis management. |
| Comparative GPR practice | Research identifying similarities and differences among public relations related systems and practices in multiple countries | Different countries' online media strategies |
| Global environment for GPR practice | Research investigating impact of political, cultural, economic and legal contexts on practice of global public relations. | Language policies in multinational corporations |
| GPR theory development | Research aimed to extend existing theories and/or provide foundation for new theories development | Extending the generic approaches of the Excellence theory to global public relations |
| PR professionals | Research analyzing public relations professionals' perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral changes during globalization process. | Managerial roles, social roles, views of reputation management |
| GPR pedagogy | Research investigating education related issues in global public relations field | Curriculum design, requirements for educators |
| GPR ethics | Research investigating ethical issues in global public relations field. | Ethical standards, and elements affecting practitioners' ethics |
| GPR research methodology | Research contributing to methodology of conducting research in global context. | Developing public relations measurement and evaluation tools in global settings |
| PR practice in global settings | Research discussing general global strategies, general practice in global settings, or practice targeting at global publics | DHL Worldwide Express' management of service crises in 68 countries during a 15-month period. |

2.1. Measures

The coding of each article was based on: (1) *general information* of the article (i.e., journal title, and publication year), (2) *content of the article* (i.e., country of study, research topic, and future research), and (3) *research tool used in the article* (i.e., theoretical applications, research methods, sampling methods, and statistical applications).

2.1.1. Journal and year

The journal name and publication year were recorded to assess which journals publish more articles examining global public relations topics and to allow for tracking yearly trends on this topic.

2.1.2. Authorship

Each article was coded for names and authors' affiliations. This information helped us determine which universities, organizations, and/or individuals have been productive in global public relations research.

2.1.3. Research topic

This category refers to the primary subject(s) examined in each article. Based on Taylor's (2001) four paths of global public relations research, the researchers identified the following nine categories of global public relations research topics: comparative practice, ethics, global environment for practice, pedagogy, practice in one country/region or targeting one country/region, practice in global settings, professionals, research methodology, and theory development (see Table 1 for the operational definitions of each category).

2.1.4. Country of study

Each article was coded for country or region to be examined. This analysis provided information about which countries or regions are prevalent or underrepresented, which will help to clarify the direction of future research.

2.1.5. Theoretical application

This study examined each article according to whether or not it demonstrated a theoretical framework by using (1) theories, (2) testable hypotheses, and/or (3) research questions. The designated theory was recorded for each article. This information provides a sense of the level of theoretical development in global public relations.

2.1.6. Research method

The researchers coded each article according to its use of qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interview, focus groups, case study, etc.), quantitative methods (e.g., content analysis, survey, experiment, etc.), or critical methods (e.g., critique, ethnographic study, etc.).

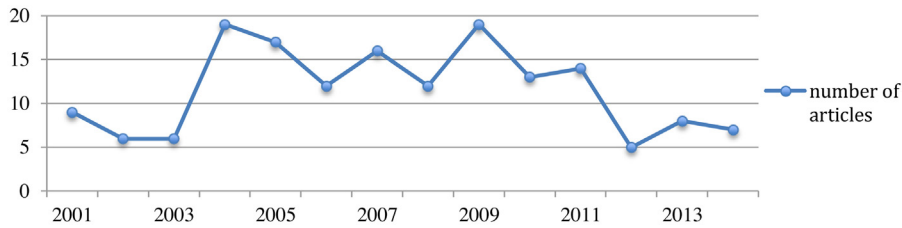


Fig. 1. Trend of published global public relations research articles from 2001 to 2014.

2.1.7. Sampling method

The researchers also coded for the sampling method (probability sampling vs. non-probability sampling) and sample type (i.e., people, data, and both) employed in each article. This information on various sampling techniques offers insight into the rigor of sampling approaches employed in global public relations research (external validity).

2.1.8. Statistical analysis

To grasp the statistical rigor of global public relations research, the researchers coded each article based on use of either descriptive statistical analysis methods (e.g., frequency, mean, chi-square, etc.) or inferential statistical analysis methods (e.g., correlation, regression, ANOVA, MANOVA, SEM, etc.).

2.1.9. Future research direction

The future research direction suggested by each article was examined for the purpose of determining the optimal steering direction for global public relations research.

2.1.10. Inter-Coder reliability

About ten percent of the total sample was randomly selected to evaluate coder reliability. Calculating Scott's pi (Scott, 1955) showed that coder reliability for each coding category was above the acceptable level of 0.80 (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998) across all coding categories.

3. Results

The first research question examined the state of global public relations research from 2001 to 2014. A majority of the 163 articles analyzed were retrieved from *PRR* ($n=95$, 58.3%), with approximately a quarter of the *PRR* articles selected being research-in-brief ($n=22$). *CCIJ* ($n=22$, 13.5%), *JPRR* ($n=19$, 11.7%), and *JCM* ($n=18$, 11.0%) provided coverage of global public relations issues, while *PRJ* ($n=5$, 3.1%), *IJSC* ($n=3$, 1.8%), and *JMCQ* ($n=1$, 0.6%) published much less related to this field. As demonstrated in Fig. 1, though the trend is not stable, global public relations research has increased slightly throughout the 14-year timespan examined. Scholars devoted greater attention to the globalization of public relations and intercultural/cross-national public relations in both 2004 (11.7%) and 2009 (11.7%). Over half of the articles were published after 2006.

3.1. Authorship and affiliation

To investigate productivity, this study adopted Pasadeos, Renfro, and Hanily's (1999) cumulative article credit.³ The most frequently published author was Krishnamurthy Sriramesh (5 articles, 2.66 credits), followed by Suman Lee (4 articles, 3.00 credits), Juan-Carlos Mollada (4 articles, 2.50 credits), Maureen Taylor (4 articles, 2.50 credits), and T. Kenn Gaither (4 articles, 2.00 credits). The affiliated institution with the most publications was the University of Missouri (7 articles, 5.33 credits), Iowa State University (6 articles, 4.50 credits), University of Florida (5 articles, 3.83 credits), Nanyang Technological University (5 articles, 3.66 credits), and Purdue University (4 articles, 3.50 credits).

3.2. Research topics

Of the nine topic categories, the most frequently covered topics were "practice in one country/region or targeting one country/region" ($n=60$, 36.8%, e.g., Pratt & Adamolekun, 2008; Zhang & Cameron, 2003) and "comparative global public relations practice" ($n=34$, 20.9%, e.g., Fletcher & Melewar, 2002; Pan & Xu, 2009), followed by "global environment for public relations practice" ($n=22$, 13.5%, e.g., Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011; Fletcher, 2006), "global public relations theory

³ A credit of 1.0 was assigned to each article. For a single-author article, both the author and the author's institution received a credit of 1.0. For multi-authored articles, the authors and their institutions obtained partial credit. For example, each author received 0.5 for a two-author article or 0.33 for a three-author article. Credit for each article was then calculated.

Table 2

The countries examined in published global public relations research articles from 2001 to 2014 (N = 163).

| Region Country | n | % |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| Asia | 69 | 42.3 |
| China | 32 | 19.6 |
| South Korea | 13 | 8.0 |
| Japan | 11 | 6.7 |
| Singapore | 8 | 4.9 |
| India | 7 | 4.3 |
| Israel | 6 | 3.7 |
| Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia | 5 | 3.1/each |
| United Arab Emirates | 4 | 2.5/each |
| Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Taiwan | 3 | 1.8/each |
| Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam | 2 | 1.2/each |
| Bahrain, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, North Korea, Pakistan, Sri Lanka | 1 | 0.6/each |
| North America | 64 | 39.3 |
| United States | 58 | 35.6 |
| Mexico | 6 | 3.7 |
| Canada | 5 | 3.1 |
| Belize, Costa Rica, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica | 1 | 0.6/each |
| Europe | 45 | 27.6 |
| United Kingdom | 18 | 11.0 |
| Germany | 10 | 6.1 |
| Denmark, France, Netherlands | 8 | 4.9/each |
| Croatia, Italy, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey | 6 | 3.7/each |
| Belgium, Finland, Poland | 5 | 3.1/each |
| Bulgaria, Spain | 4 | 2.5/each |
| Cyprus, Norway, Romania, Serbia | 3 | 1.8/each |
| Austria, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia | 2 | 1.2/each |
| Bermuda, Greece, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Scandinavia, Vatican | 1 | 0.6/each |
| Africa | 11 | 6.7 |
| South Africa | 6 | 3.7 |
| Egypt | 2 | 1.2 |
| Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia | 1 | 0.6/each |
| South America | 9 | 5.5 |
| Brazil | 5 | 3.1 |
| Chile, Venezuela | 3 | 1.8/each |
| Peru | 2 | 1.2 |
| Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama | 1 | 0.6/each |
| Oceania | 5 | 3.1 |
| Australia | 5 | 3.1 |
| New Zealand | 1 | 0.6 |

development” (n = 19, 11.7%, e.g., Kent & Taylor, 2007; Wakefield, 2008), and “PR professionals” (n = 15, 9.2%, e.g., Moss, Newman, & DeSanto, 2005; Murray & White, 2005). Under-explored topics are pedagogical issues (n = 10, 6.1%, e.g., Austin & Toth, 2011), ethical issues (n = 9, 5.5%, e.g., Jeong, 2011), research methodology in studying global public relations (n = 6, 3.7%, e.g., Lee, 2004), and general global public relations practice in global settings (n = 4, 2.5%, e.g., Wang, 2005).

3.3. Country of study

A total of 88 countries were studied in the analyzed articles. More than half of the articles investigated public relations practice in multiple countries (n = 94, 57.3%), 30.1% focused on a certain country or region (n = 49), and 8.0% discussed general global public relations without focusing on a specific country (n = 13, e.g., a global strategic plan for corporate philanthropy in Valor, 2007). Only six countries were represented in ten or more articles: the United States (n = 58, 35.6%), China (n = 32, 19.6%), the United Kingdom (n = 18, 11.0%), South Korea (n = 13, 8.0%), Japan (n = 11, 6.7%), and Germany (n = 10, 6.1%). Thirty-one of the 88 countries were examined only once (see Table 2).

Most articles were written in the context of Asia (n = 69, 42.3%), North America (n = 64, 39.3%), and Europe (n = 45, 27.6%), followed by Africa (n = 11, 6.7%), South America (n = 9, 5.5%), and Oceania (n = 5, 3.1%, see Table 2). A cross tabulation analysis of countries studied and research topics revealed that of the studies focused on “practice in one country or targeting one country” (n = 33, 55%), “global environment” (n = 10, 45.5%) and “theory development” (n = 11, 47.8%), more were conducted in Asian contexts than any other setting. North American (n = 23, 67.6%) countries were studied most frequently in comparison to other countries in terms of public relations practice, while European countries (n = 6, 40%) were more often explored in studies addressing issues concerning public relations professionals. Both North America (n = 4, 44.4%) and Europe (n = 4, 44.4%) were the focus of studies examining ethical issues, and North America (n = 3, 30%) and Asia (n = 3, 30%) received greater attention than other regions regarding pedagogical issues.

3.4. Theoretical framework

The proportion of articles that applied theories or models has continually increased over time. Twenty of the 50 articles that applied theoretical frameworks employed public relations theories (e.g., excellence theory, image restoration theory, situational crisis communication theory, contingency theory of conflict management, personal influence model, etc.). However, the majority of research articles ($n = 113$, 69.3%) still lacked an explicit theoretical framework. Similarly, there was a notable lack of research questions and/or hypotheses ($n = 102$, 62.6%).

The most frequently applied theories among the selected articles were excellence theory ($n = 12$, 7.4%); image restoration theory ($n = 7$, 4.3%), which suggests five typologies of image repair strategies (i.e., denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification); and Hofstede's national culture theory ($n = 6$, 3.7%), which identifies five cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and long versus short-term orientation.

The most frequently used models were the "circuit of culture model" ($n = 5$, 3.1%), which consists of five cultural processes of moments (i.e., representation, production, consumption, regulation, and identity); "four role typology" ($n = 2$, 1.2%), which suggests that public relations practitioners perform four basic roles (i.e., expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solver, and technician); and "manager-technician dichotomy" ($n = 2$, 1.2%), which suggests two public relations practitioner roles (i.e., manager and technician).

Realizing that there is insufficient theoretical guidance for global public relations practices, some scholars have attempted to reconstruct existing theories and build new models or theories to offer specific guidance for practices across cultural, political, and economic boundaries. [Gregory and Half \(2013\)](#) suggested that the models that dominate global public relations practice, such as excellence theory, are rooted in "western" thinking, and do not accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of public relations practice across cultures. Therefore, they called for public relations models and practices that integrate localized diversity in order to more accurately represent globalization. Similarly, [Choi and Cameron's \(2005\)](#) study of multinational corporation practices in Korea revealed that one-way communication may not always result in advocacy, as is common in Western cultures, but may actually lead to accommodation, thus suggesting that local cultural dimensions should be explored. [Wakefield \(2008\)](#) suggested necessary refinements to the generic principles of excellence theory due to increased Internet use. [Kent and Taylor \(2007\)](#) extended the generic approaches in excellence theory to global public relations research by explicating rhetorical generic theory. [Molleda and Quinn \(2004\)](#) stated ten propositions related to cross-national conflict shifting (e.g., magnitude, involved parties, corporate responses, etc.); for example, "national conflicts with a great human-interest focus are likely to be shifted to the international arena" (p. 7). [Verčič and Verčič \(2007\)](#) extended the co-orientation theory that assumes that people strive for psychological balance, which can be achieved when individuals hold mutually consistent attitudes in reference to an object ([Heider, 1946](#)). This theory was later used to explain organization-public relationships ([Broom, 2005](#)).

3.5. Research method

Overall, quantitative methods dominated global public relations research ($n = 77$, 47.2%). There was no significant difference between the proportions of articles employing qualitative methods ($n = 54$, 33.1%) and critical methods ($n = 42$, 25.8%). Ten articles (6.1%) used mixed methods. Content analysis ($n = 45$, 27.6%) and survey ($n = 38$, 23.3%) were more prominent than such data gathering procedures as critique ($n = 35$, 21.5%), case study ($n = 23$, 14.1%), and interview ($n = 19$, 11.7%). Only one article used the experimental method.

3.5.1. Sampling

Of the 163 articles reviewed, 102 articles identified the sample type. The most popular sample type was people ($n = 58$, 35.6%), followed by data ($n = 46$, 28.3%). Two articles (1.2%) used multiple samples. In studies that used people as samples, professionals represented the primary sample type ($n = 48$, 29.4%, e.g., PR practitioners, executives, journalists, educators, etc.), followed by students ($n = 7$, 4.3%) and the general public ($n = 5$, 3.1%). Studies that identified a data sample examined online messages ($n = 24$, 14.7%; e.g., webpages, blog posts, messages on forums, etc.) more frequently than offline messages ($n = 15$, 9.2%, e.g., news) and literature ($n = 5$, 3.1%, e.g., journal articles). A majority of the articles that identified sampling methods ($n = 97$, 57.1%) applied a non-probability sampling method ($n = 72$).

3.5.2. Statistics

Although less than half (47.2%) of the articles employed statistical analysis, an increasing trend emerged in the articles' application of statistics, which was the same as the trend of application of quantitative methods (see [Fig. 2](#)). Descriptive statistics ($n = 70$, 43%) were used more often than inferential statistics ($n = 39$, 24%). Thirty-five articles (21.5%) used both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis methods. Frequency ($n = 63$, 38.7%) was the most prevalent statistical method applied, followed by mean ($n = 35$, 21.5%), ANOVA/MANOVA ($n = 20$, 12.3%), Chi-square ($n = 15$, 9.2%), correlation ($n = 13$, 8.0%), and factor analysis ($n = 11$, 6.7%). Regression was used starting in 2004, while cluster analysis did not appear until 2009, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was not used until 2012.

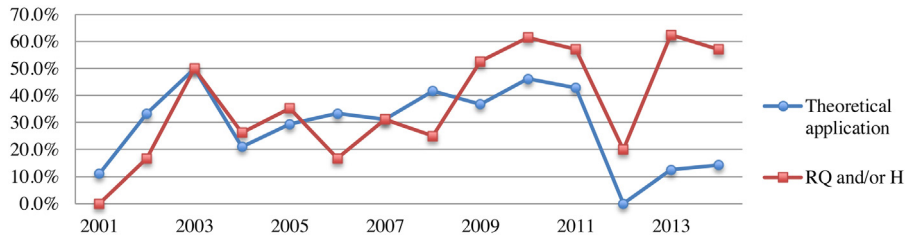


Fig. 2. Percentage distribution of global public relations research articles using theoretical framework and research questions/hypotheses (N = 163).

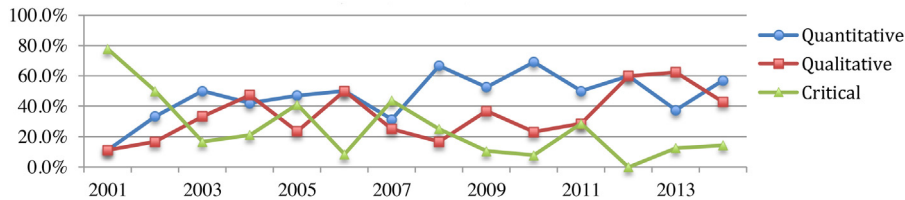


Fig. 3. Percentage distribution of global public relations research articles in terms of research methods and statistical analysis (N = 163).

3.5.3. Future research direction

The second research question explored viable suggestions for future research directions. Beyond a call for a global public relations theory, a certain proportion of articles mentioned a need to further explore the role of culture as an influential factor for global public relations practice. For example, articles suggested future research to examine the correlation between cultural dimensions and strategies employed (Low, Varughese, & Pang, 2011), the communication strategies that companies may use to establish their national identity in the Chinese cultural context (Wang & Wang, 2007), and the impact of culture on corporate image management (Lee, 2004). Scholars also mentioned the need for further research on non-Western cultures (e.g., Lee, 2004).

Several articles suggested meaningful future directions in global public relations research. For example, some scholars identified the need for an effective model for global public relations professionals to anticipate and/or confront transnational crises (Molleda, 2011) as well as the need for a benchmarking system to guide corporate social responsibility practice (McDermott, 2009). Some articles also suggested that existing theories may need to be refined according to the new global social context, such as the widespread dispersion of the Internet, increasing Internet usage by activist groups, and other societal changes (Wakefield, 2008).

4. Discussion and conclusion

4.1. Global public relations research is on the rise

Over the 14 years examined, the interest in global public relations research increased steadily. A total of 163 articles written by 244 scholars in various countries were published in 7 journals. Greater numbers of foreign-born scholars working at U.S. universities have contributed to global public relations research. Perhaps the different research traditions and unfamiliarity with publishing in English-based journals or the fact that not all of them can write in English might be an explanation for the lack of participation from other countries' scholars. This dearth of global contributions to journals limits the discipline, and as a result, public relations knowledge development may be unintentionally stifled. A potential exists for cross-national collaboration on research in global public relations. Collecting cross-cultural data is challenging and expensive, but can increase the level of external validity. Global collaboration could ease the data-collection task and foster synergy among scholars as shown in Fig. 3.

This study found that more than half of the articles examined multiple countries or regions. The United States was the nation most frequently explored in the articles, followed by China, the United Kingdom, and South Korea. These findings somewhat contradict those of Culbertson and Chen (1996), who concluded that Europe was the one area examined extensively in both the literature and field during the 1990s. The United States and United Kingdom' dominance observed in this study can be explained by the fact that most of the concepts, perspectives, and theories in public relations were developed in these two countries. Scholars often use the US and UK as a basis for comparing public relations practices in other countries or test the applicability of theory developed in these countries in other countries in order to find universal public relations theory. That a majority of the articles used a comparative approach is encouraging because knowledge in the area of global public relations can be extended by comparing and contrasting different publics, cultural, economic, legal, political, social, and technological environments, and so forth to improve global public relations practice. However, it is noteworthy

that some nations or regions are clearly underexplored, especially developing or emergent countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. More endeavors need to be made to explore these regions in the future.

4.2. *Lack of theorization and need for diverse theoretical applications and development*

Global public relations research should shift from description to theorization. While the proportion of global public relations studies with applied theories or models has increased, a majority still fall short in theoretical application. Although it is important to have descriptive studies of public relations practices from each country (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003a), to move the field forward, it is necessary to develop and test a theory in multiple countries. Such research can be seen in the Verčič and Verčič's study (2007), which proposed second-order co-orientation theory by extending the notion of co-orientation in international relations to include not only evaluations of two countries' attitudes towards a third country, but also evaluations of opinions the two countries hold between themselves (and to which the first was only an observer).

Theoretical application in the global public relations research has been limited. The two most frequently applied theories are excellence theory and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which were mainly developed in Western countries. As postmodernists have criticized, the American view of public relations does not apply globally (Bardhan, 2003; Holtzhusen, Petersen, & Tindall, 2003). As the public relations field in each country has developed differently, even among Western countries (e.g., U.S. from corporate focus and UK from public sector focus), American theories or models developed from the corporate sector focus might not be applicable to other countries with a different focus (Gregory & Halff, 2013). There are three possible ways to improve theoretical development in global public relations. First, an indigenous global public relations theory is needed. For example, scholars in the marketing field developed global consumer culture theory (GCCT), original marketing theory and have empirically applied to other countries. Second, as each country's public relations has evolved in unique ways, country-specific theories should be developed. For example, while testing relationship measures in Taiwan, Huang (2001) identified *face and favor* as the country-specific measure of relationship. Third, theories developed in other countries and disciplines should be introduced to the public relations literature in the U.S. to diversify and improve the global public relations domain.

In terms of the topical areas of research, "practice in one country/region or targeting one country/region" was the most common research topic addressed in the articles, followed by "comparative global public relations practice." Naturally, the first step to learning about global public relations is understanding how public relations is practiced in each country, including similarities and differences in practices between countries. Topics related to "pedagogical issues" and "ethical issues" seem to be least often researched by global public relations scholars. The lack of research pertaining to pedagogical issues could indicate that global public relations is not widely taught at the university level. While some faculty members may have incorporated the topic into their courses, the lack of pedagogical issues addressed in the research corresponds with the fact that courses dedicated to global public relations are not yet common.

4.3. *Need for methodological diversification*

The quantitative approach was more common than the other approaches in global public relations research, and content analysis was the most frequently applied method. Scholars pointed to a need for more qualitative research (e.g., Halff, 2009; Rhee, 2002) and more advanced quantitative methods such as experiment (Sriramesh, Moghan, & Wei, 2008) in the global public relations domain. More importantly, scholars should consider developing methodologies specific to global public relations such as global big data analysis and global network analysis to enhance understanding of complex global public relations.

4.4. *Limitations and future research agendas*

As with any research, this study faced some issues that limited the findings, but could be explored in the future. First, this study encountered the limitation of focusing on English-speaking journals. As some non-English journals could be viewed as important, scholars from other nations should examine this limitation from their points of view. Moreover, future study should explore some tactics to broaden the participation of authors from all around the world. Several scholars recommended that having editors and editorial board members from various countries might encourage researchers from diverse countries to contribute their research (Svensson, 2005). Finally, other tactics aimed at improving the global dispersion of authorship should be explored.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study offers valuable insights into the current landscape of global public relations research and a call for more scholarly attention to the area. Although we have noted the increasing significance of global public relations, it is obvious that specific global public relations theories and methods must be developed to move the field forward. In addition, the effects of global public relations practice should be empirically explored.

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