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BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE TRAJECTORY AND STATUS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH IN THE GULF CORPORATION COUNCIL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Abdulhadi Mohammed Almfleah Alkahtani

Associate Professor, College of Media and Communication - Department of Public Relations and Marketing Communication, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Corresponding Author: Abdulhadi Mohammed Almfleah Alkahtani

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ABSTRACT

PR practice in the Arab world predates the documented historiography of modern corporate PR. Although the trends of PR research in the Arab world and in the Middle East have been analyzed before, there has not been context-specific, bibliometric analysis of PR research in the GCC countries. With focus on the six GCC countries, bibliometric analysis based on records obtained from Scopus and Web of Science databases (N= 244) was performed. The records were merged in R and analyzed using Bibliometrix (Biblioshiny) and VOSviewer supported by Microsoft Excel for chart generation. The findings showed that the UAE and Saudi Arabia were the most productive countries. Public Relations Review journal was the most popular source and UAE's University of Sharjah was the most productive institution based on author affiliations. Artificial intelligence (AI), public relations, social media are important yet underdeveloped themes. Future research is needed in these topics and bibliometric analysis in Arabic language based on sources drawn from Arabic databases would be helpful in advancing inclusion of PR research from the GCC that is not published in Scopus and Web of Science databases.

KEYWORDS: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Public Relations Research, Bibliometric analysis, Bibliometrix, Biblioshiny, VOSviewer.

INTRODUCTION

Communities and countries in the Arab Gulf region have long practiced forms of public relations (PR) rooted in rich socio-cultural traditions. Across the Middle East and North Africa, these practices are reflected in poetry, hospitality, emissaries, and various customs that have historically shaped both internal and external relations among tribes, as well as between rulers and their societies (Badran, 2014). These longstanding practices predate the formal historiography of corporate PR, which is often associated with the industrialization era (Miller, 2000). Historical interpretations also suggest that early forms of public communication in the region reflect longstanding traditions of information exchange and community engagement (Almfleah, 2017). The evolution of public relations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was significantly shaped by Saudi Aramco during its early establishment period, reflecting how corporate presence contributed to the emergence and development of PR practices in the country (Degnah & Theofilou, 2026).

A recent scoping review by Alkathiri and Alharbi (2024), focusing on Arab PR scholarship and employing text mining and content analysis, provides valuable insights into the development of the field. The review highlights patterns in research methods, analytical approaches, media platforms, industries, and dominant perspectives, as well as commonly used keywords. While the findings indicate areas of variation in research trends, they also demonstrate that PR research in the Arab world is a developing and evolving field with significant potential for growth in both scholarly output and academic interest.

A bibliometric approach analyzing PR research conducted between 2000 and 2025 within the six Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) countries was performed to counter the potential pitfalls described above. Since the early Nineties, bibliometric research has been employed in PR to trace development of the discipline after every 6 to 15 years incrementally (Page and Capizzo 2021; Pasadeos and Renfro 1992). Applying bibliometric analysis enable the integration of the evolving literature with inherent thematic analysis to achieve comprehensive analysis given the complexity of PR as a discipline and practice (Ki et al., 2023). Bibliometric analysis also offers a mechanism to explore the metrics of performance and an ability to map the collaborative, social and intellectual structures of scholarly research (Harker and Saffer 2018). More than a conventional literature review, bibliometric review enabled the examination

of multitudes of literature based on evidence and enabling a broader, in-depth scope of analysis (Wamba and Queiroz 2020). Furthermore, PR works and authors were analyzed and presented more effectively with bibliometric visualizations and methods (Ki et al., 2019).

Although the trends of PR research in the Arab world (Alkathiri and Alharbi 2024; Badran 2014) and in the Middle East (Dhanesh and Duthler 2019) have been analyzed before, there has not been context-specific, bibliometric analysis of PR research in the GCC countries. Thus, this bibliometric research fills the gap by focusing the scope on PR research in the six GCC countries comprising the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The aim of this bibliometric analysis is to analyze the trajectory and status of PR research in the six GCC countries in the 21st Century (2000-2025). The research questions guiding this study were:

1. Which authors are the most active contributors of PR research in the GCC?
2. What are the most active institutions, journals, and countries contributing to PR research in the GCC?
3. Which are the most researched and emerging areas of PR research in the GCC?

METHODOLOGY

Bibliometric analysis was preceded by structured literature search to maintain topic relevance and contain research to the GCC geographical scope. Bibliometric analysis was chosen based on its suitability to summarize huge bibliometric data quantities while providing the status of intellectual structuring and emerging trends within a given research field (Donthu et al., 2021). Bibliometric analysis enabled provision of both science mapping and performance analysis of literature. Essentially, science mapping enabled the identification of relationships among various PR research constituents in the GCC including co-authorship and co-citation networks. Performance analysis helped in examining and describing the contributions of authors, institutions, journals and countries (Donthu et al., 2021).

Data Search and Extraction

Data search was conducted in Scopus and Web of Science databases on December 11, 2024 and a confirmation repeat search on January 15, 2025. Scopus comprises an adequate repository of scholarly journals and publications with global

recognition and is an assurance of the quality of articles (Fadillah and Huiquan 2024). Figure 1 includes the string of keywords used for the search and the data file is available.

The search results were filtered by timeline (from 2000 to 2025), country/region (6 GCC countries and the region) and by document type. On document type, editorials, opinion articles and commentaries were excluded to limit the results to articles, book chapters, conference papers and books. Both VOSviewer version 1.6.20 (van Eck and Waltman 2023) and the web-based platform, Bibliometrix (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017), which was invoked using the `bibliometrix::biblioshiny()` command in R, were employed for data analysis on several accounts. While still rare, the combination of R and VOSviewer in bibliometric analysis has been emerging recently across PR and PR-related disciplines and fields of research including political communication (Saravanan et al., 2023), digital PR research (Ki et al., 2024) and sports journalism (Hafiar et al., 2025), relationship management (Ki et al., 2023) and social construction of PR research in academia (Ivanitskaya and Erzikova 2023), among other areas.

Firstly, while VOSviewer creates ready-to-use visualization networks with superior clarity (Markscheffel and Schröter 2021), Bibliometrix has more advanced options for both data tabling and visualization. For instance, Bibliometrix can produce author, source, country and institution production of documents over time and this is not possible in VOSviewer. Secondly, VOSviewer limits usage of a database source at a time thereby necessitating manual combination of data files from different databases. In R, a string of commands enables automated combination of data files and removal of duplicates without manual data coding, which eases work and guarantees accuracy. Still, VOSviewer is comparatively more user-friendly and easier to use than Bibliometrix, which requires programming

knowledge in R. Altogether, using both Bibliometrix and VOSviewer for analyses enabled more robustness, comprehensiveness and novelty in this research.

Data were downloaded in text format for use in Bibliometrix upon conversion into Bibtext format in R. The text files were first converted to database format in R using the `convert2df` command. The `mergeDbSources` command was invoked to merge the Scopus and Web of Science data files and the `remove.duplicated` command was deployed to delete duplicates. Manual cleaning in Microsoft Excel to remove records that were irrelevant to the research topic, scope and field was performed. The cleaned data file was imported into Bibliometrix for final analyses and generation of a comprehensive report. To ensure compatibility with VOSViewer, the ensuing file was saved in text (MS-DOS) format. The report generated in Bibliometrix was exported to Microsoft Excel, which has more superior chart generation and manipulation features.

Scopus yielded 292 records, which were further reduced to 271 records, based document type and further to 252 records after filtering out records whose publication date was before 2000. From Web of Science 120 records were obtained. Thus, 372 records were obtained from both databases. In the corresponding R processes of data merging and removal of duplicates, the command resulted in 11,217 duplicated document instances being removed leaving 249 records in the file. Further manual review resulted in the removal of five other records on account of research topic, field, discipline irrelevance or missing a significant amount of bibliographic information as to potentially impact on the bibliometric analysis. In the end, 244 unique records with substantive bibliographic information were analyzed (N= 244). Figure 1 below illustrates the data search, extraction and research process.

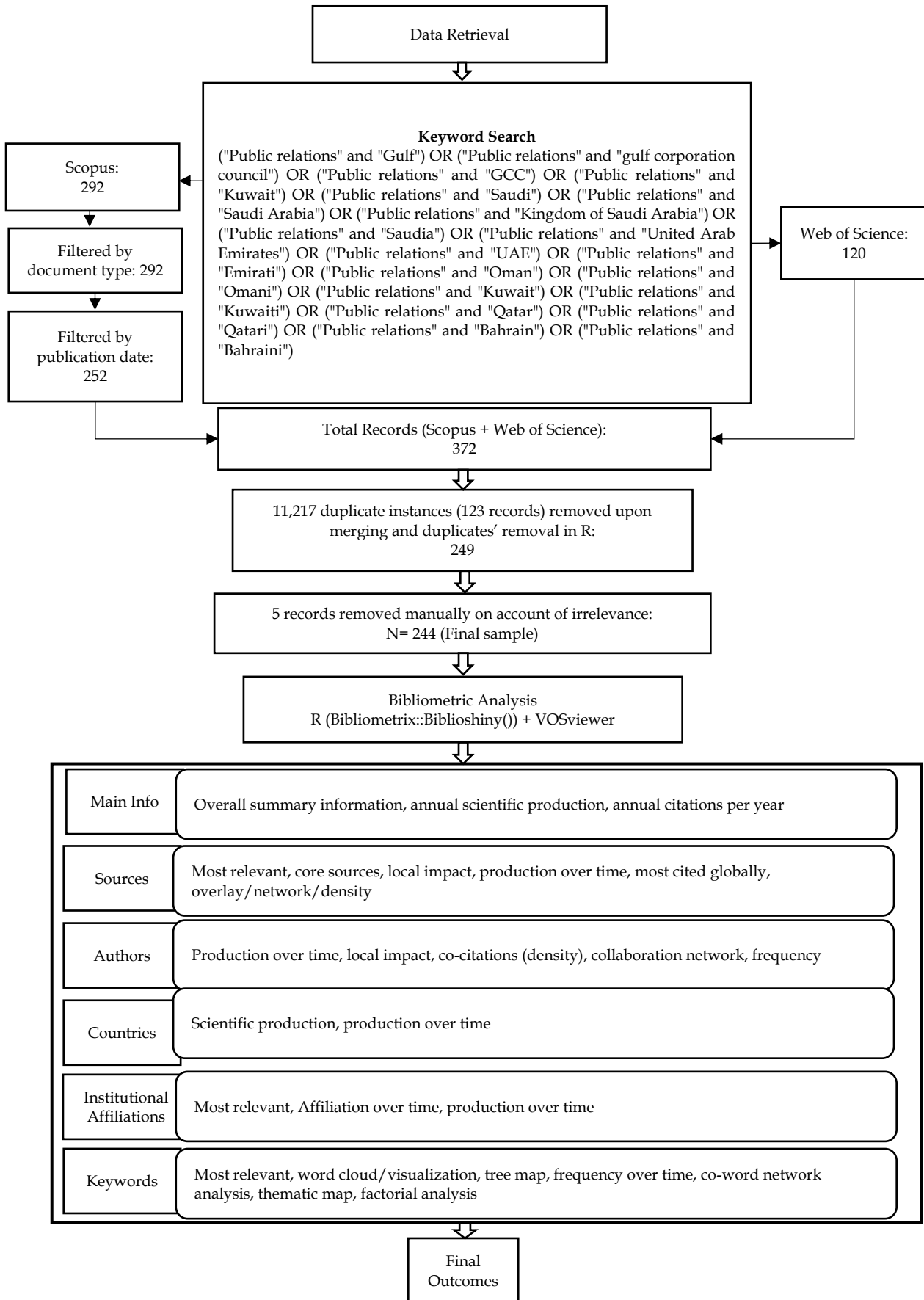


Figure 1. An illustration of the data search, extraction and research process

ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Main information

Of the 244 records, there were 184 articles, 31 conference papers, 27 book chapters and 2 books. The documents registered a 6.2% annual growth rate of publications with an average age of 8.43 and average of 11 citations per document. A total of 760 distinctive author keywords and 1,225 keywords plus was recorded among the 675 authors amongst whom 63 had single-authored publications in the 73 single-author documents. With hundreds of authors featuring in the documents, this indicates growing scholarly interest in public relations in the GCC. On average, co-authored documents had about three authors (3.36), as shown in Table 1 below.

Analysis of the annual scientific production shown in Figure 2 below revealed a steady increase from less than 10 published records during the first 10 years of 2000 (n= 1) through 2010 (n= 10), albeit with fluctuations between 4 and 8 records in the years 2004 through to 2009. During the second decade (2011 to 2020), an initial reduction in 2011 (n= 8) and 2012 (n= 4) was followed by a marked increase in 2013 and 2014 (n= 13) before another dip in 2015 (n= 9), 2016 (n= 6), and 2017 (n= 7). From 2018, until now, the number of publications per year remained above 10 with the highest being in 2019 (n= 21) with 9 records already published within the first quarter of 2025. Globally, COVID-19 has been found to have been instrumental in influencing the explosion of research publications (Park et al., 2024). Thus, this 2019-2024 spike in PR publications and scholarly works in the GCC could be linked to this global trend with several studies covering issues related to or around COVID-19 (Alasgah et al., 2023).

Table 1. Main information about the records retrieved.

Description	Results
Main information about data	
Timespan	2000:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	184
Documents	244
Annual Growth Rate %	6.2
Document Average Age	8.43
Average citations per doc	11
Document contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	1225
Author's Keywords (DE)	760
Authors	
Authors	675
Authors of single-authored docs	63
Authors collaboration	
Single-authored docs	73
Co-Authors per Doc	3.36
International co-authorships %	0
Document types	
Article	184
Book	2
Book chapter	27
conference paper	31

Altogether, in the GCC, the growth of public relations activity can be associated with evolving international engagement strategies, where member states have increasingly expanded their global partnerships. For example, economic collaboration with major global actors and constructive roles in regional mediation have generated scholarly interest in examining how public relations practices are adapting to support diversified external relations, reflecting a direction toward diversifying international partnerships and expanding areas of cooperation, thereby enhancing strategic flexibility and supporting development priorities. (Shabaz and Hassaniyan, 2025). Global events such as the FIFA World Cup in Qatar also inspired some PR researchers (e.g., Dun, 2019).

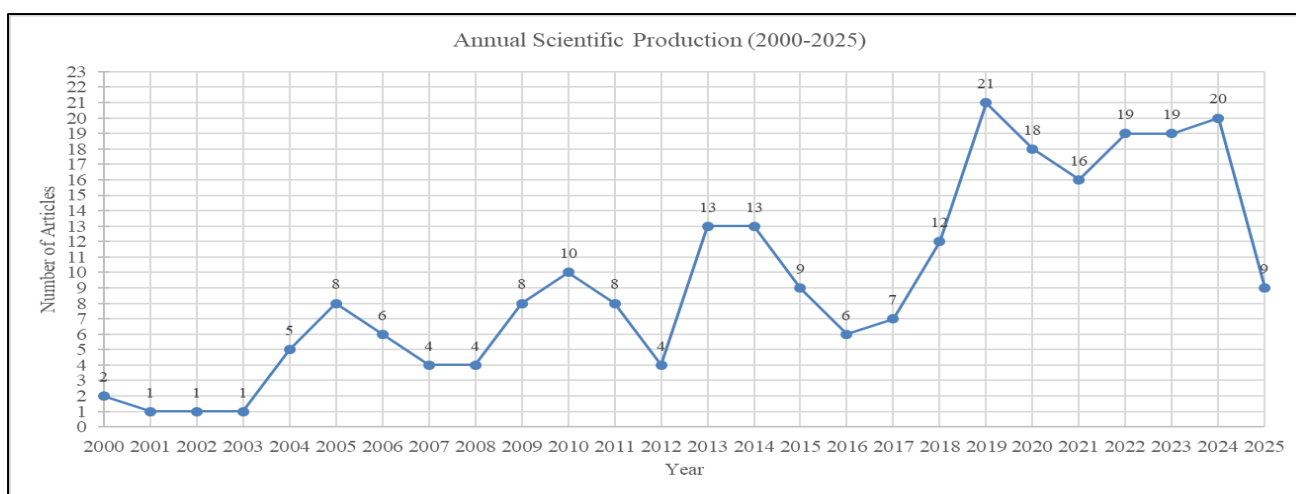


Figure 2. Annual scientific production from the year 2000 to 2025

The highest average citations were recorded in 2009 (3.88) followed by 2017 (2.56), 2023 (1.88), 2006 (1.65), and 2018 (1.62) respectively. Average citations per year (Figure 3) was below 0.5 from 2000 to 2005 with 2003 recording the lowest citation average of 0.04. Without an established trend in the average citations per year, it can be inferred that PR authors in the GCC cite each other sparingly in their works.

Sources

Popularity of sources

The highest number of records were obtained from *Public Relations Review* (n= 16) making it the most popular publisher of GCC PR research articles with corporate communication (White and Alkandari 2019; Marschlich and Ingenhoff 2022) and social media (Albishri et al., 2019; Storie 2015; Kirat 2007; Ben and Benmessaad 2021) being the dominant topics in the most popular journal. The *Journal of Interprofessional Care* (n= 11) and *BMC*

Medical Education (n= 7) followed in count with both journals predominantly featuring articles about interprofessional education and education matters (Alzaabi et al., 2023; Algahtani et al., 2021; Zaher et al., 2022). Three records each were obtained from six sources (*BMC Health Services Research*, *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Media Watch* and *PLoS One*). The inclusion of two sources that focus on health in the top-six most popular publishers can be attributed to the significance of PR in health in the GCC, as explicated by Alkazemi et al. (2022). Notably, the two of the three records obtained from the *Journal of Public Relations Research* (Bashir 2019; Creedon and Al-Khaja 2019) were published in the Journal's *Special Issue on Public Relations in the Middle East*. This implies that dedicating special issues to PR Research in the Gulf could further boost PR research publications in the region. Figure 4 illustrates the sources with at least two records each.

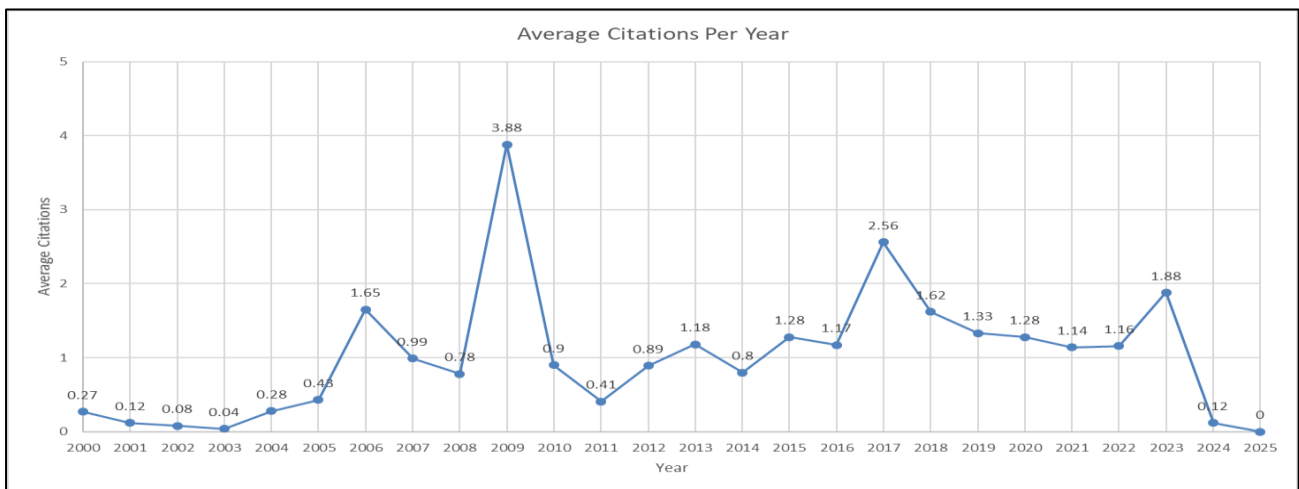


Figure 3. Average citations per year

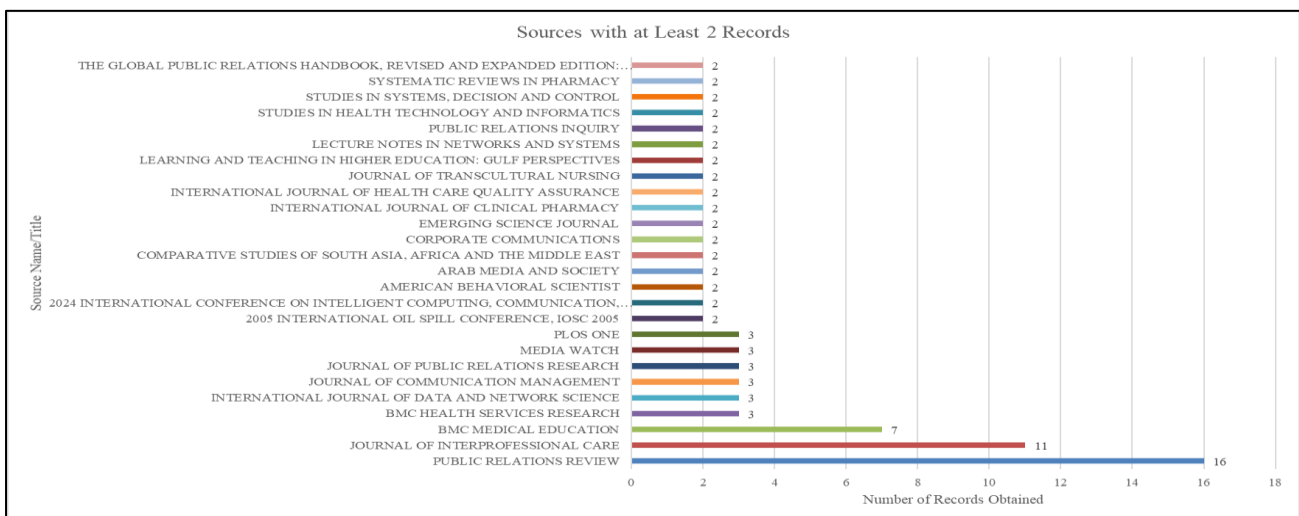


Figure 4. An illustration of the sources with at least two records retrieved

Ranking based on Bradford's Law (Bradford, 1934) further confirmed that the top-ranking sources starting

with *Public Relations Review* were, indeed, the core sources of PR research records in the GCC (Figure 5).

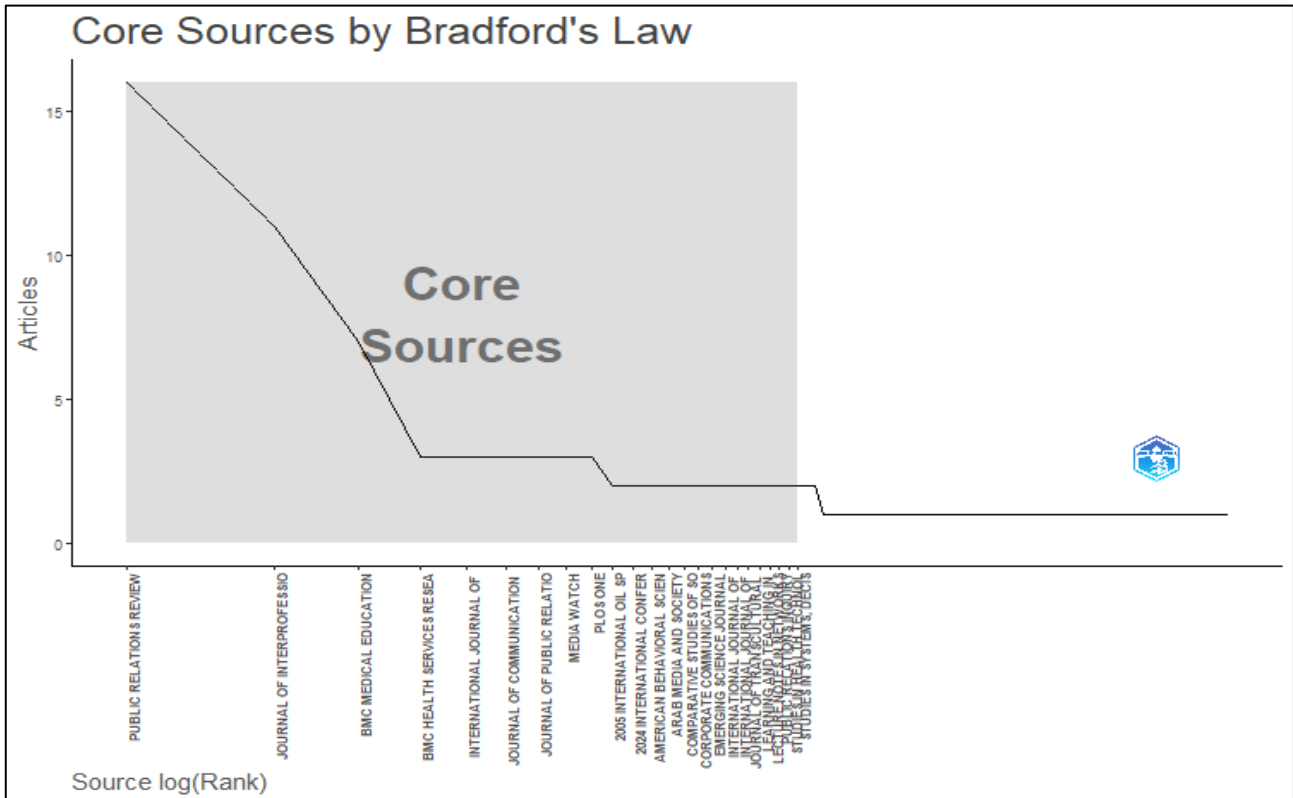


Figure 5. Core sources based on Bradford's Law of scattering

Bibliographic coupling of sources

Bibliographic coupling was performed in VOSviewer to examine the extent to which the sources cited the same documents based on the citation links' strength with other sources (van Eck and Waltman 2023). *Public Relations Review* had the

highest total link strength of 2,752 followed by *Journal of Interprofessional Care* and *BMC Medical Education* with total link strengths of 1,947 and 1,267 respectively, as shown in the overlay visualization of the sources and the number of documents per source, citations per source and the total link strength of each source in descending order in inset table in Figure 6.

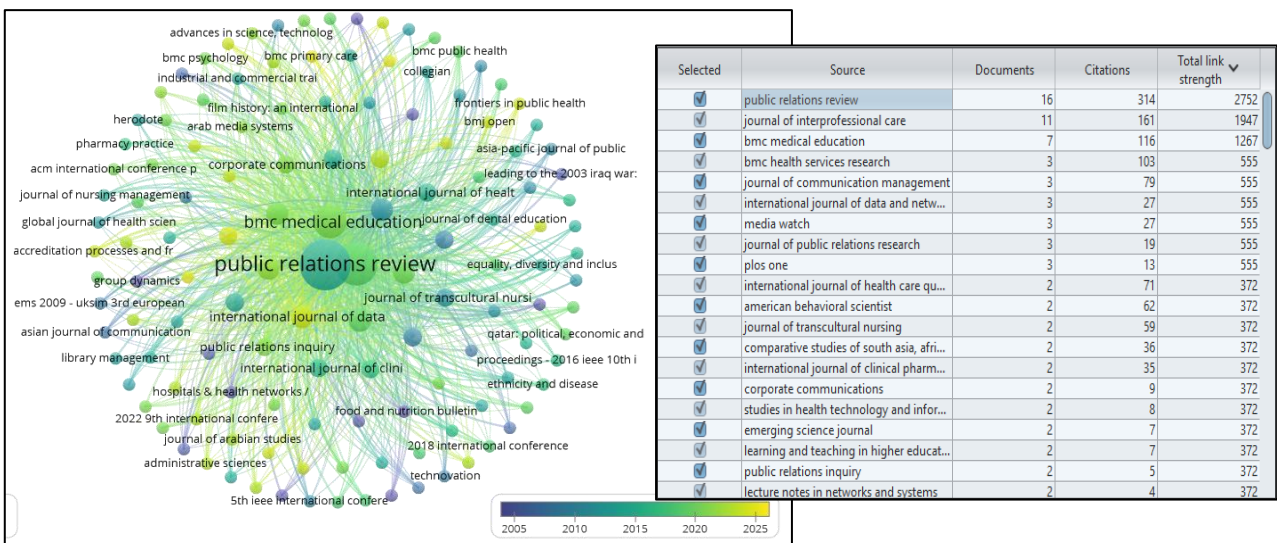


Figure 6. Overlay visualization of sources with an illustration of documents, citations, and total link strength in descending order

However, *Technovation* recorded the highest number of citations (n= 431) and was followed by *Public Relations Review* (n= 314), the *Journal of Interprofessional Care* (n= 161), *BMC Medical Education* (n= 116) and *BMC Health Services Research* (n= 103). Interestingly, *Technovation* only produced one non-PR research document on online banking acceptance in Saudi Arabia (Al-Somali et al., 2009). Even then, *Technovation* registered the lowest total link strength of 187 together with another 220 sources that had produced only a document each. A notable trend was that the number of documents per source translated into the same total link strength where sources with six sources that had three documents each recording an equal total link strength of 372 while sources with a single document (e.g., *Technovation* and

Communication Research Reports) recording the same total link strength of 187 regardless of number of citations per source.

Sources production over time

Bibliometrix was used to generate the cumulative production of sources over time, which refers to the number of documents per source per year for the research period 2000 to 2025. Focus was on sources with at least three documents published within the research timeline resulting in nine sources. For the period 2000 to 2004, none of the top-nine sources published a document. *Public Relations Review* was the first to publish and published four documents in 2005, which increased by one document per year to reach seven documents in 2008, as shown in Figure 7.

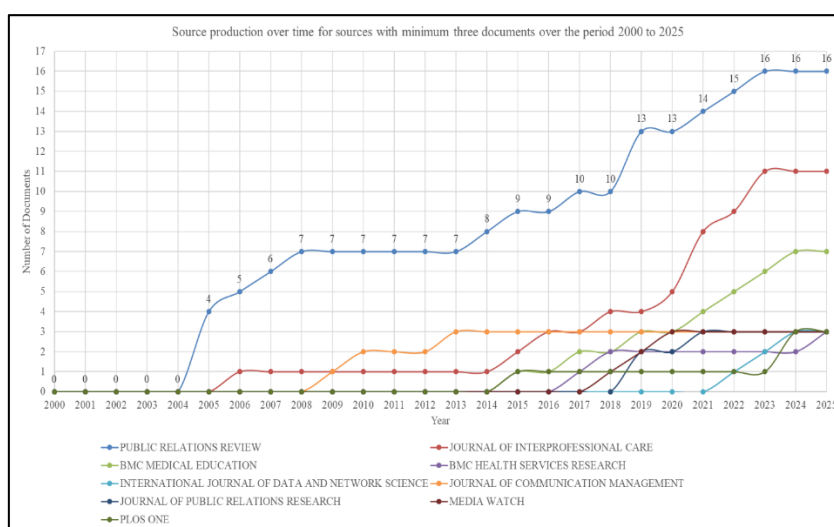


Figure 7. Source production over time for sources with a minimum three documents over the period 2000 to 2025

Local impact

Local impact of sources was generated in Bibliometrix to measure the number of times a source that was included in the sample records had been cited by other sources within the same sample collection (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017). The outcome is based on the h-index (Hirsh index), which

measures both the citation impact and the productivity by the respective source (Hirsh 2005). Of 184 sources, 133 met the minimum thresholds with *Public Relations Review* recording the highest h-index at 12 followed by the *Journal of Interprofessional Care* at 7, *BMC Medical Education* at 5 and *Journal of Communication Management* at 3. A dozen other sources recorded a h-index of 2 (see Figure 8).

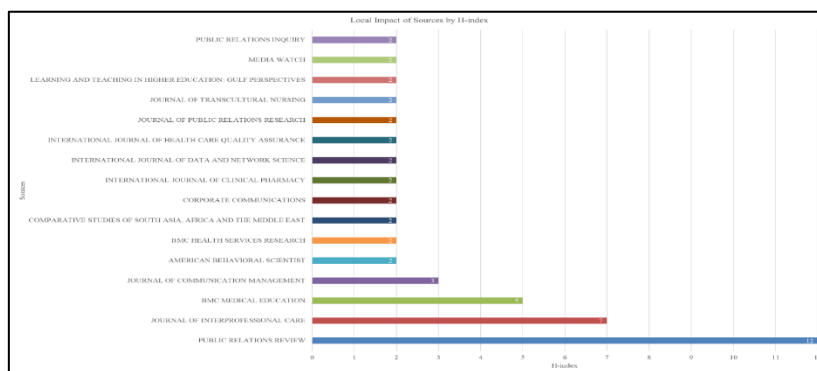


Figure 8. Local impact of sources by H-index

Authors

Popularity of authors

Only two authors (Farhi F and Jeljeli R) had published more than 10 articles (n= 11) while both Al-Jenaibi B and El-Awaisi A had 7 publications each to rank second most popular. Further desk research on Google Scholar by author name revealed that these two top-ranking authors had collaborated in

authoring over 30 publications across different disciplines. Dashti A was next featuring in 6 documents while four authors (Al-Kandari A, Awaisu A, Guraya S and Zamoum K) had five records each. Another five authors (Awad A, El H M, Katoue M, Wilby K and Zahra A) featured in four publications each. For illustrative purposes, Figure 9 only shows the 14 authors who had authored in at least 4 publications.

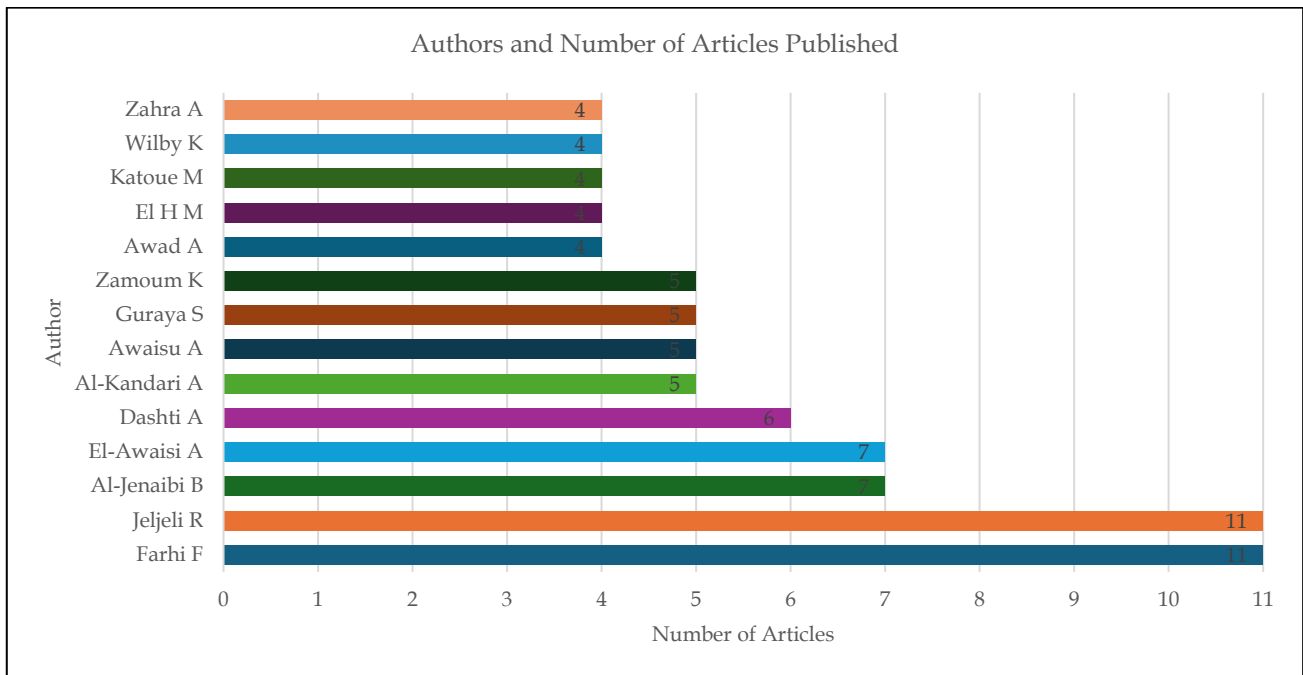


Figure 9. Most popular authors with authorships in at least four publications

The results of author production over time showed that, among the top-15 most popular authors, Dashti A was the only one that had authored an article before 2010. Some authors (e.g., Al-Jenaibi B) authored publications at the beginning of 2011 and

have remained consistent into the 2020s with at least a publication authored. A majority of the authors were incrementally productive from 2015 onwards with new entrants such as Farhi F, Jeljeli R and Zahra A being more productive post-COVID (Figure 10).

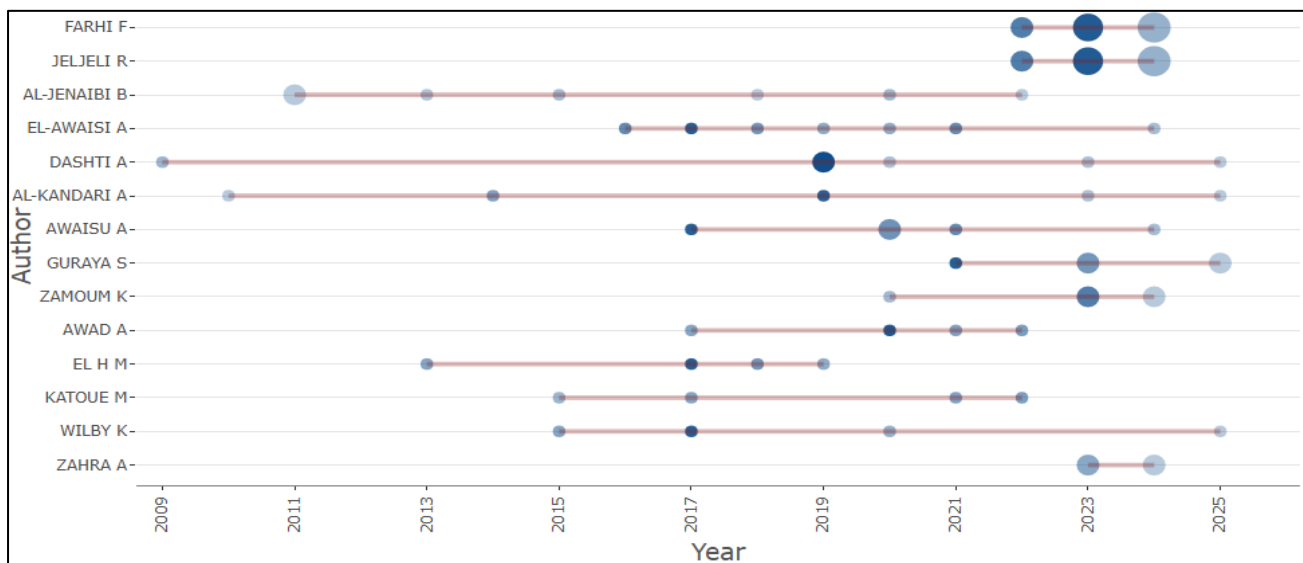


Figure 10. Authors' production over time

Authors' local impact

Based on the H-index computation, El-Awaisi A was the most cited author amongst with an H-index of 6. Awad A, Awaisi A, El HM and Katoue M recorded a H-index score of 4. Ranking next was a batch of 12 authors with an H-index of 3 while 24

authors had an H-index of 2 and the rest scored a 1. Figure 11 illustrates the local impact of authors with an h-index of 3 and above (n= 17). Further interrogation of the data showed that all 17 authors had published their respective works from 2016 to 2024 across 6 journals and mainly in the *Journal of Interprofessional Care* (n= 6), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Authors' local impact, year, source title and number of citations

Authors	Year	Source title	Cited by
El-Awaisi et al.	2016	Journal of Interprofessional Care	26
El-Awaisi et al.	2017	BMC Medical Education	39
Katoue et al.	2017	Pharmacy Practice	13
El-Awaisi et al.	2018	International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy	16
El-Awaisi et al.	2019	BMC Medical Education	8
El-Awaisi et al.	2020	Journal of Interprofessional Care	7
Albassam et al.	2020	PLoS ONE	27
Stewart et al.	2020	International Journal of Clinical Practice	6
El-Awaisi et al.	2021	Journal of Interprofessional Care	12
Katoue et al.	2021	Journal of Interprofessional Care	8
Katoue et al.	2022	Journal of Interprofessional Care	7
El-Awaisi et al.	2024	BMC Primary Care	1

Global citations

Global citations were generated in Bibliometrix to determine the most cited article/document globally based on total citations including from sources and documents outside the 244 records in this study. *Technovation's* one journal article on online banking (Al-Somali et al., 2009) also topped the global citations consistent with having the highest citations. The second most cited article was about improving patient safety culture in Saudi Arabia (Alswat et al.,

2017) with 60 citations and published in *Psychiatry*. De Bussy and Kelly's (2010) article on stakeholder identification and salience in government had the highest global citations among articles that were purely about PR and non-interdisciplinary with 39 citations. Notably, 12 of the top-20 most cited articles globally were published in health, healthcare, medical, and nursing journals with 4 articles published in the *Public Relations Review* being the only purely PR field articles ranking among the top-20 (Figure 11).

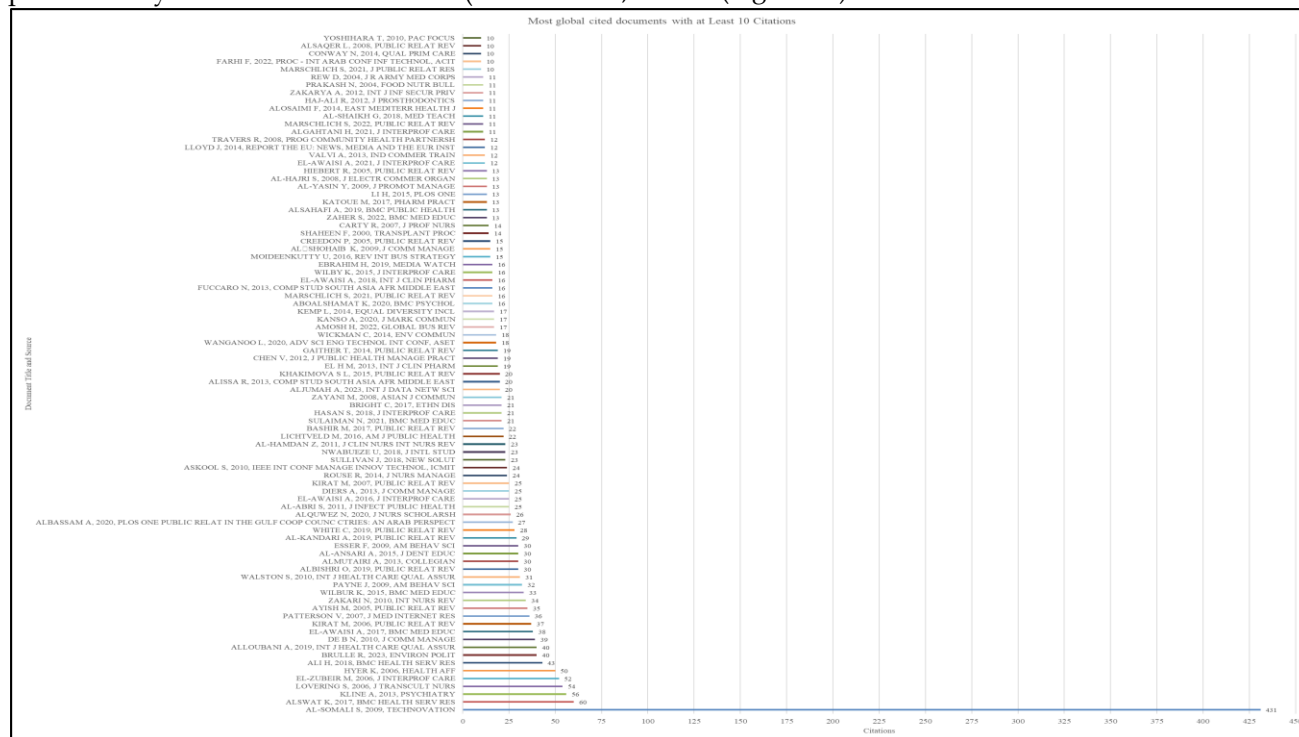


Figure 11. Most globally cited articles

Countries

Most popular countries and country co-authorship

The highest number of citations in the publications were attributed to the USA (n= 556) and the UK (n= 465). For GCC countries, the UAE had the highest number of affiliated citations (n= 225) followed by Saudi Arabia (n= 201), Qatar (n= 130), Kuwait (n= 121), Oman (n= 47) and Bahrain (n= 11),

as shown in Figure 12. Country co-authorship analysis was performed in VOSviewer to examine authors' collaboration extent across the various countries. Of the 28 countries selected, 23 had shared connections. From the network visualization based on link strength (Figure 13), strong collaboration in terms of citations across all six GCC countries exists. However, these collaborations are also strong between the USA and the UK as well as between the GCC countries and both the USA and the UK.

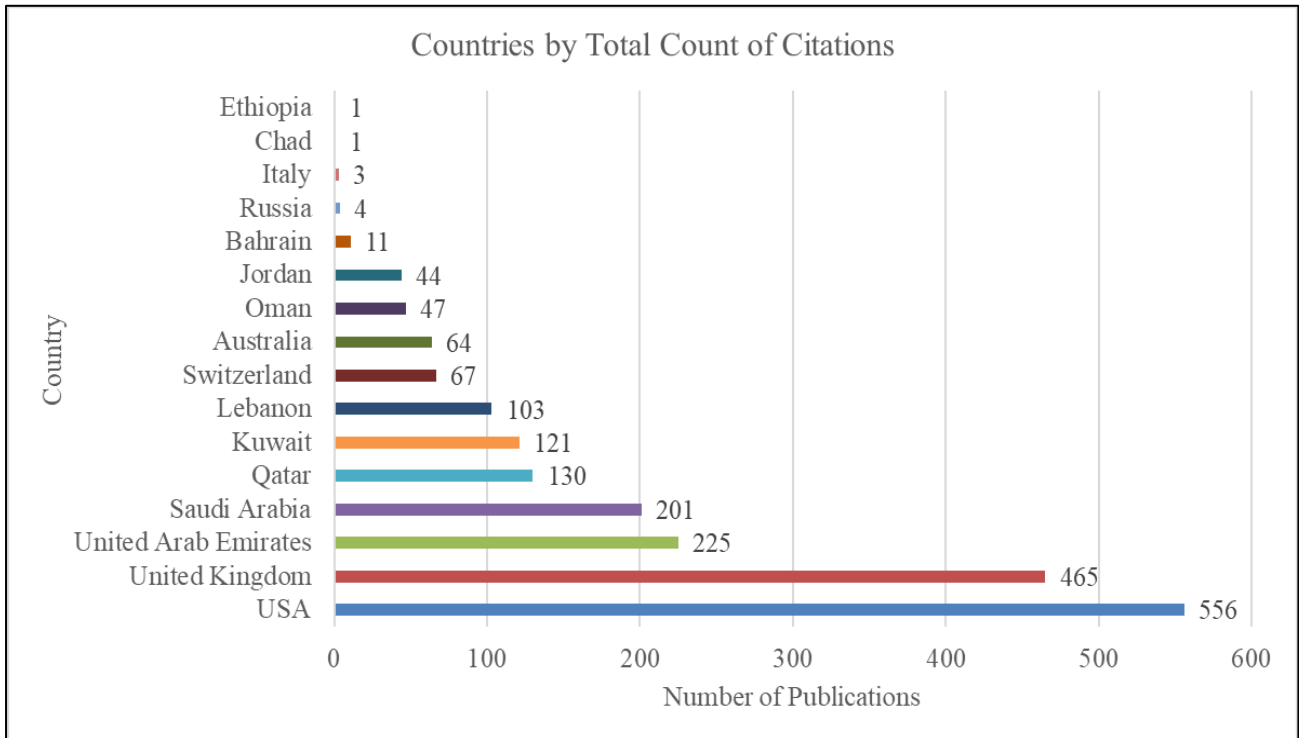


Figure 12. Illustration of Countries by Total Count of Citations

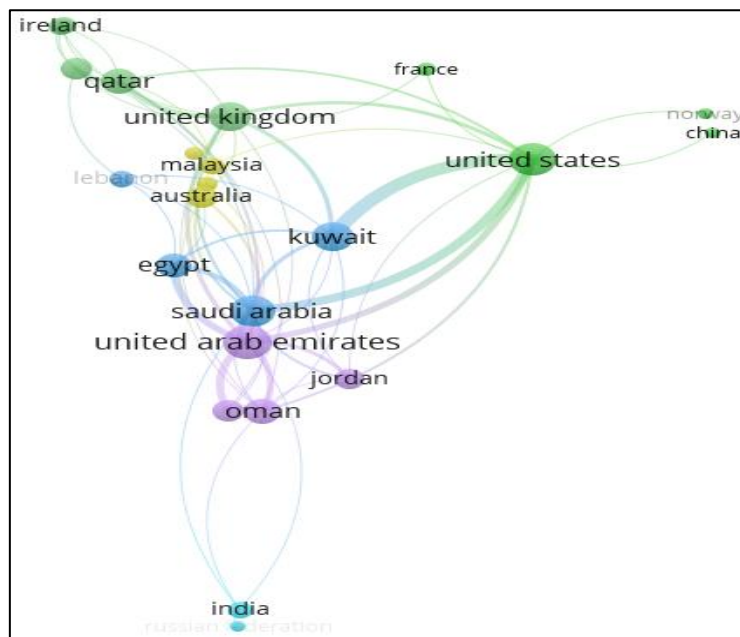


Figure 13. Co-authorship of countries by link strength

Country scientific production

Country scientific production showed the count of authors by country affiliations. As shown in Figure 14, the UAE recorded the highest scientific production ($f= 53$) followed by Saudi Arabia ($f= 21$), Kuwait ($f= 18$) and Bahrain ($f= 8$) respectively, which compliments the results on country total citations.

This digresses from the general trend of by-country research productivity reported by Al-Marzouqi and Arabi (2022) on general research performance of the GCC countries where Saudi Arabia ranked higher than the UAE with Qatar having the highest increase. While the overall trajectory may have remained, this study shows that the countries may rank differently across different research disciplines and subjects.

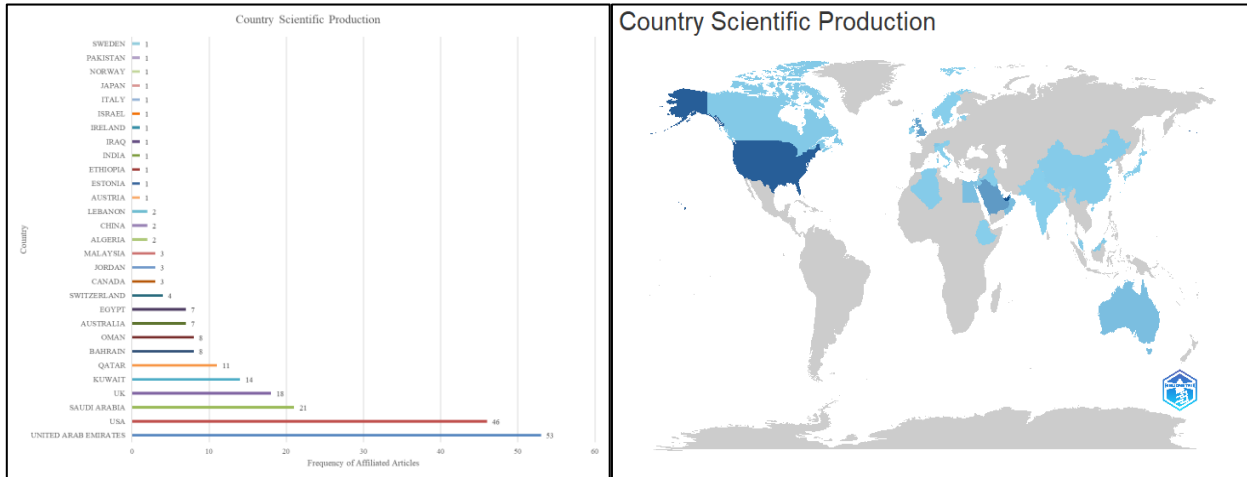


Figure 14. Country scientific production

There was more concentration of the country scientific production in North America and Europe. This is attributable to the huge number of author-country affiliations to the USA and the UK. Although both the USA and the UK have higher scientific PR research production in the GCC than the top GCC

countries (UAE and Saudi Arabia), analysis of the countries' production over time shows that the UAE overtook the USA and Saudi Arabia overtook the UK after 2022. A similar rising trend is notable for Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain (see Figure 15 below).

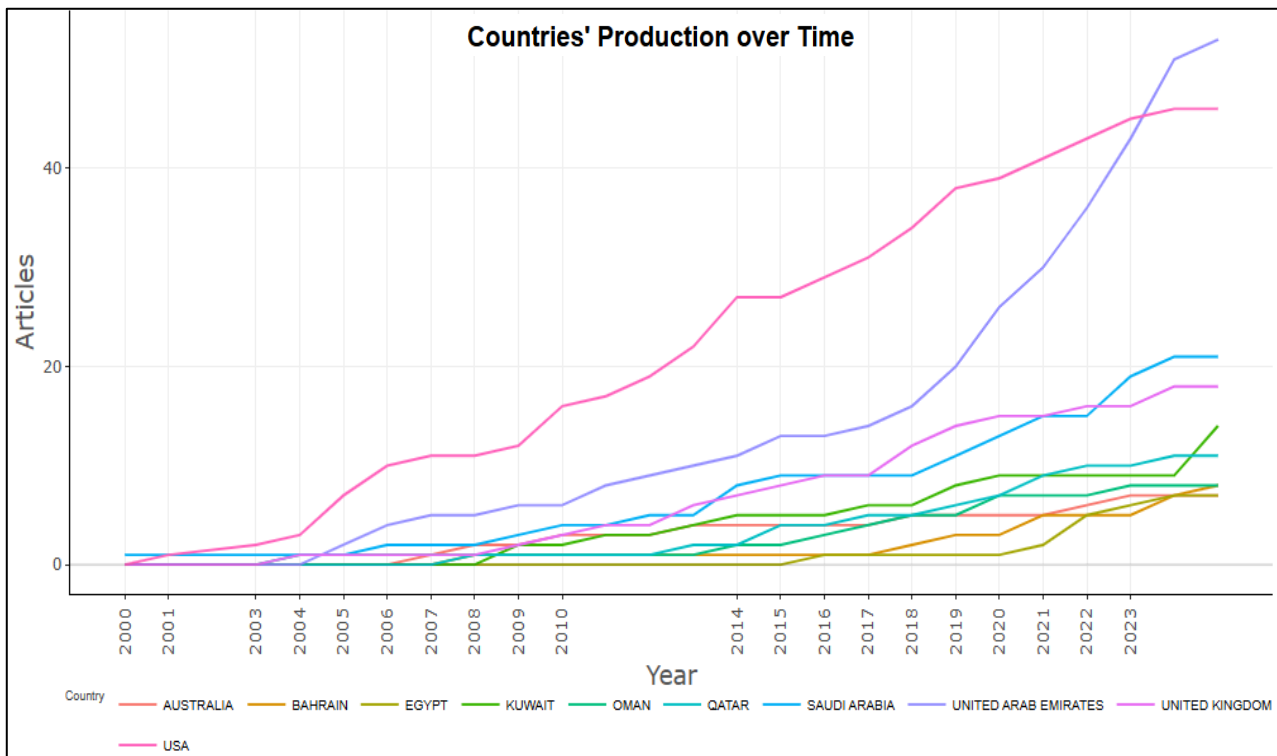


Figure 15. The scientific production of countries over time

Institutional Affiliations

A total of 301 institutional affiliations were extracted. Among these, 237 institutions recorded only one affiliation and 37 institutions had two affiliations each. Only 19 institutions had three or more affiliations. The University of Sharjah (n= 33) and Al Ain University (n= 24) topped the

list. This can be linked to the top-ranking co-authorships of Farhi F and Jeljeli R and the high number of articles that they have co-authored. Kuwait University (n= 19) ranked third-highest and was followed by 17 articles from King Saud University of Saudi Arabia and Qatar University each. Figure 16 shows the most relevant institutions featuring with at least three articles.

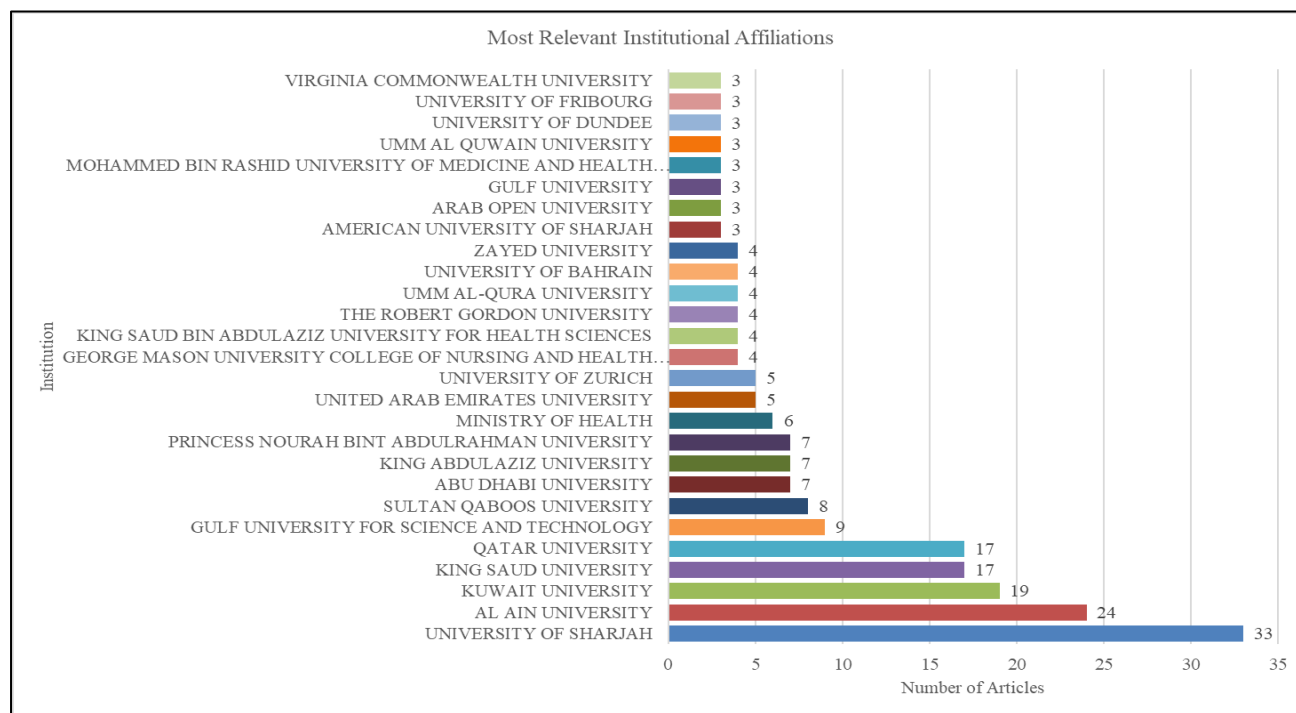


Figure 16. Most relevant institutional affiliations with at least three affiliations

Further desk research indicates that Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University represents a prominent institutional case in the region, offering a comprehensive academic structure in public relations, including Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral programmes within a dedicated Department of Public Relations in the College of Media and Communication. Although its research output may not be fully represented in bibliometric databases limited to Scopus and Web of Science, due to the exclusion of Arabic-language publications and alternative indexing sources, it nevertheless reflects the breadth of education in the field.

In addition, King Saud University and King Abdulaziz University are considered leading institutions in the field, with well-established academic programmes and contributions to public relations education and research. Similarly, the University of Sharjah, Kuwait University, and Qatar University maintain specialised departments dedicated to public relations teaching. Al Ain University also offers a College of Media and Communication that provides a Bachelor's degree in

Public Relations and a Master of Arts in Digital Media and Public Relations. This institutional emphasis on PR education may partly explain the high ranking of certain institutional affiliations, as students and academic staff are often required to produce research aligned with their fields of teaching and study.

Other universities that were less prominently represented in the results have also begun expanding their academic offerings in public relations, media, and communication studies.

Institutional production over time

Numerous institutions including University of Sharjah, Kuwait University, Qatar University and Sultan Qaboos University began recording increasing affiliations post-2010. There is also marked growth in institutional affiliations in the post-COVID era (after 2019) with top institutions increasing and fresh entrants such as Al Ain University and Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University recording affiliations (Figure 17).

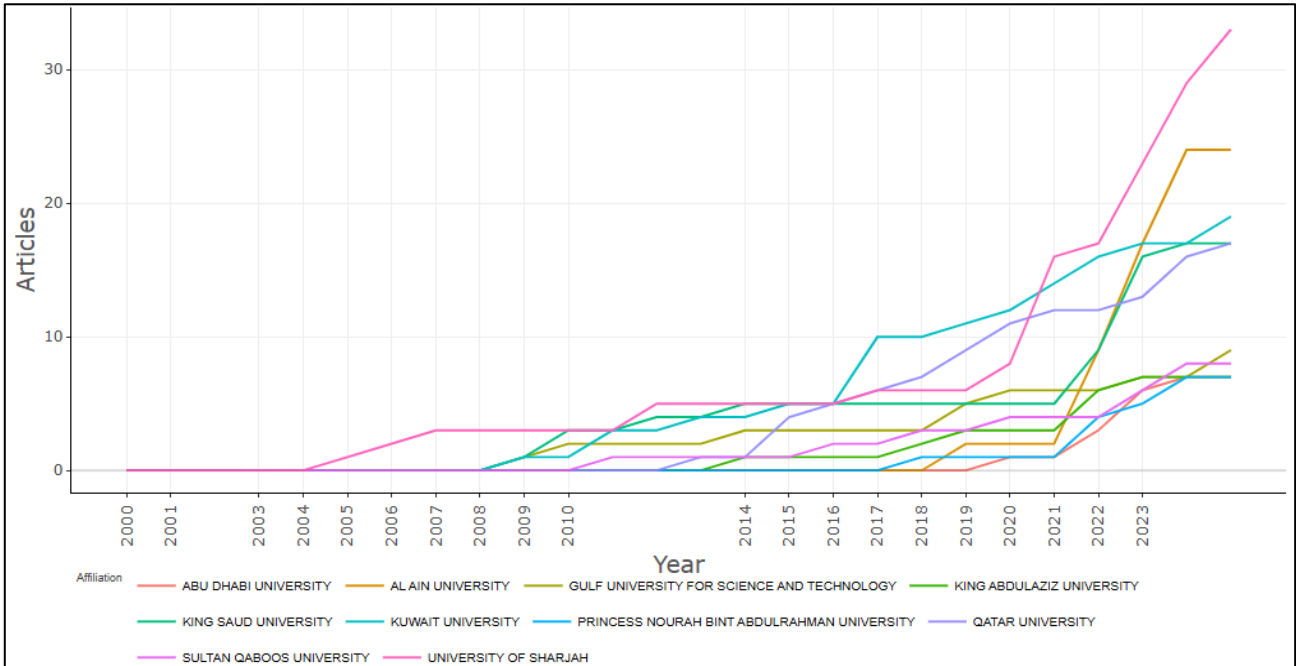


Figure 17. Institutional production over time

Keywords

Keyword occurrences

Of the 1,225 keywords plus, “public relations,” was the most popular keyword with 115 occurrences. The gendered words, “female,” (f= 86) and, “male,” (f= 79) recorded the second-highest and third-highest occurrences. One potential explanation for this could be linked to the featuring of, “questionnaire,” (f= 25) and, “cross-sectional,” (f= 20) where most authors included the two options for gender in their questionnaires and demographic reporting more

than the existence of gender-specific PR studies. Another explanation is that medical and health studies (e.g., Alquwez, 2020; El-Awaisi et al., 2020; Katoue et al., 2021, 2022) with focus on females were numerous in the search results as was the case with humans and adults. Saudi Arabia (f= 62), Qatar (f= 33) and United Arab Emirates (f= 29) were the only country names that featured in the 20 most occurring keywords in the dataset, as shown in Figure 18. From the review of the study keywords, many authors did not include the names of their countries in the keywords and chose topic/subject keywords.

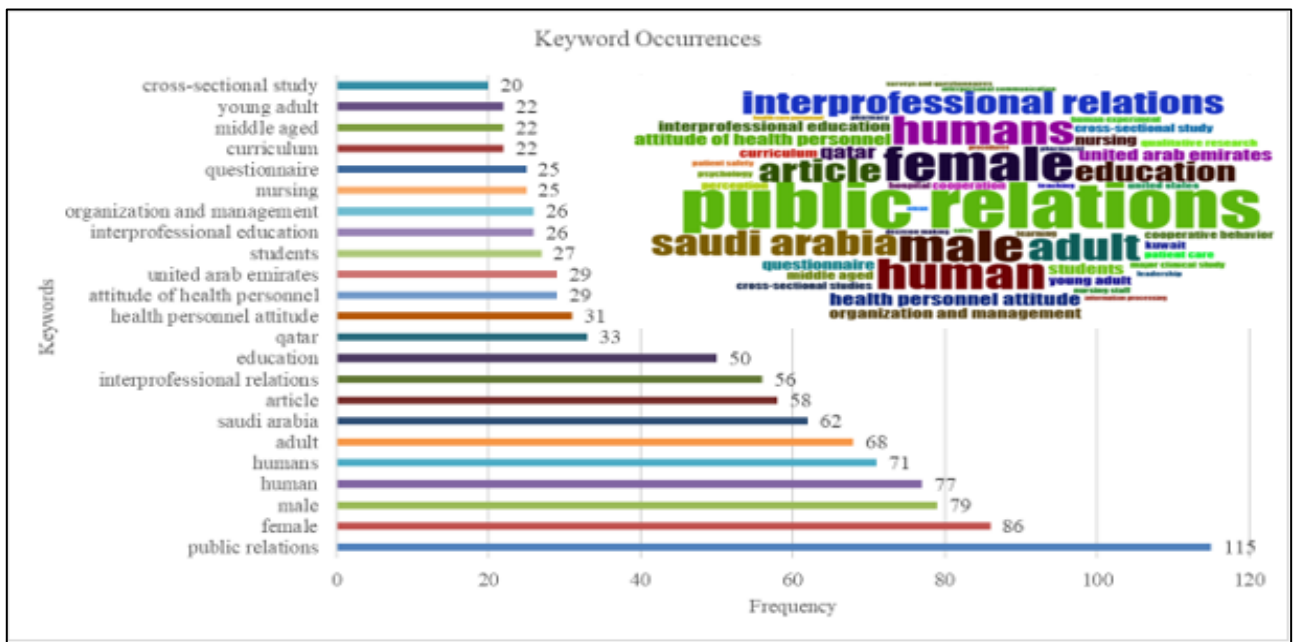


Figure 18. Top-20 most relevant keywords based on occurrence with word cloud

“communication,” “emotional intelligence,” “patient safety,” “artificial intelligence” and “collaborative practice” (see Figure 21). The emergence of these trends also speaks to the multidisciplinary nature of PR research in the GCC as to include fields of

healthcare, psychology, management, and technology. Further supporting this view is the demonstrable popularity of the Journal of Interprofessional Care, which is a multidisciplinary journal.

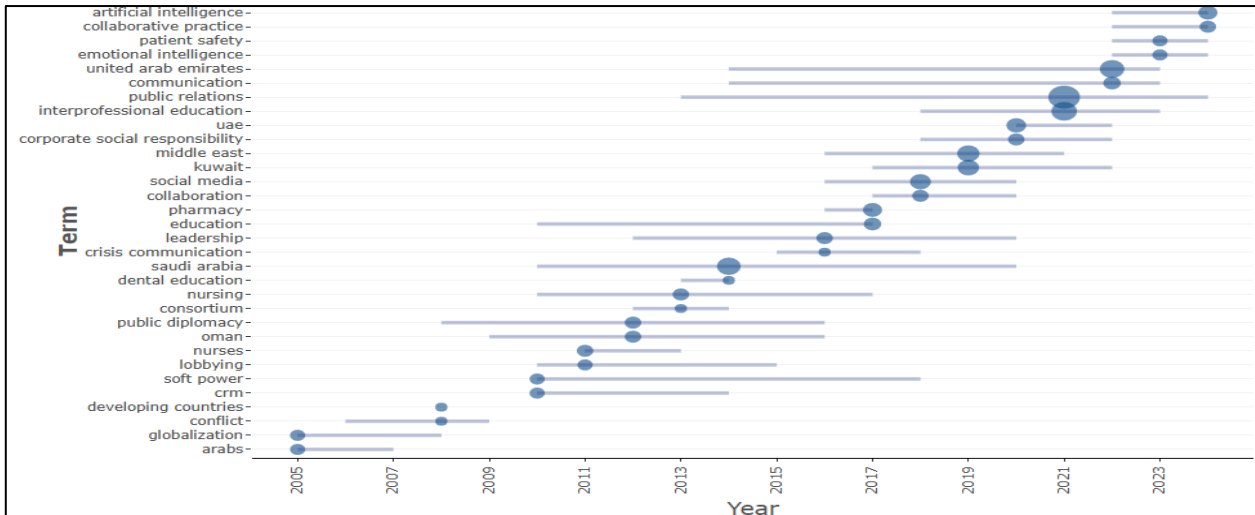


Figure 21. Trend topics in PR research in the GCC (2000-2025)

Thematic mapping of topics

Topic clusters based on authors’ keywords were mapped into four quadrants. Theme positioning in the two upper quadrants is a reflection of substantive density or development. Placement in the lower quadrants denoted the number or centrality of a cluster’s external links (Galeano-Barrera et al., 2022).

Bidding strategies, construction industry, accidents, international construction, corporate communications, disasters, dental education and dental students were clustered as niche themes (see Figure 22). These are specialized topics that have strong internal relationships and weak external relationships thereby rendering them very low-impact in PR research in the GCC.

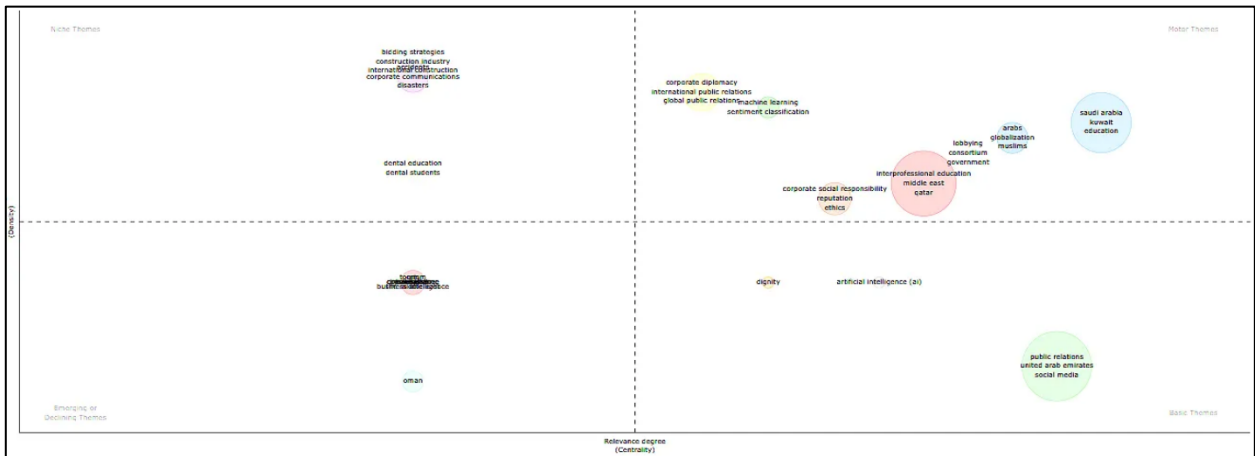


Figure 22. Thematic map of author keywords

Oman, tourism, COVID-19, CRM and business intelligence were emerging or declining themes. This means that integrating them in PR research in the GCC is either coming up or fading away. Considering Oman ranked lowest in country popularity and country scientific production while the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19 is no longer a major global, pandemic-

level threat (Roknuzzaman et al., 2024), it implies that the interest in topics in this quadrant was declining.

Topics such as corporate diplomacy, international public relations, global public relations, interprofessional education, reputation, globalization, Muslims, Arabs, government, lobbying and corporate social responsibility among others were clustered in the motor themes’ quadrant.

This was alongside Middle East, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The implication is that these topics are well developed and properly consolidated within the PR research in the GCC. As such, they are significantly important topics/themes (Galeano-Barrera et al., 2022). Artificial intelligence (AI) public relations, social media marketing and United Arab Emirates were classified under basic themes. Accordingly, they are important themes/topics in PR research in the GCC, but still need further development (Galeano-Barrera et al., 2022).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

PR research has undoubtedly gained momentum in the GCC over the years. Overall, a substantial proportion of the retrieved PR-related studies fall within the domains of medicine, health, and healthcare. This does not indicate that public relations as a discipline is medical in nature, but rather that PR research in the GCC is frequently applied within healthcare communication and interprofessional education contexts. This is evidenced by the prominence of healthcare-related trending topics (Figure 21). There was notable iteration of PR research around interprofessional education and healthcare or education in healthcare. Several studies drawn from *Journal of Interprofessional Care* (e.g., Wilby et al., 2015; Algahtani et al., 2021; Alzaabi et al., 2023) and *Biomedical Journal* (e.g., El-Awaisi et al., 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2021; Al-Qallaf et al., 2024) covered topics related to both healthcare and education. Among these and other studies cited from the two popular journals, the attitude of healthcare professionals attracted the greatest PR research interest. Attitude of healthcare professionals was common even from journals with less popularity such as in the *Journal of Prosthodontics* (Haj-Ali et al., 2012), *Medical Teacher* (Al-Shaikh et al., 2018), *PLoS*

One (Aboalshamat et al., 2024; Abusabeib et al., 2024), and *Quality in Primary Care* (Conway et al., 2014). Potentially, the growing interest in healthcare and interprofessional education can be linked to the economic trends of growing, aging populations, economic prowess, and heavy investments in the healthcare reforms by the GCC countries. These socio-economic and demographic developments have significantly increased investment in healthcare and education sectors across the GCC, creating broader contexts in which public communication and public relations activities are required, particularly in governmental and institutional settings.

The study included English-only articles that are indexed in Scopus and WoS databases thereby excluding PR documents written in Arabic and indexed in other databases. While this points to the need for future research written in Arabic to be translated in English and indexed in international databases, it is also a challenge to databases such as Scopus and WoS to extend coverage to non-English research. Also, future research should consider bibliometric analysis and meta-analyses conducted using Arabic keywords and in Arabic databases. There is also need for increased production and publication of PR research from the GCC countries by GCC PR researchers/authors. Considering that Artificial intelligence (AI), public relations, social media were clustered as important yet underdeveloped themes, future research is needed on PR and AI, PR and social media in the GCC. At the same time, ongoing socio-economic transformations in GCC countries—particularly in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030—have elevated the strategic importance of public relations across governmental and institutional sectors, thereby contributing to the growing academic interest in the field.

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