

Government Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Governments increasingly rely on social media to inform, reassure, and mobilize citizens during crises, yet the scholarly field examining this practice remains dispersed across public relations, public administration, disaster management, and public health. This study maps the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaboration patterns of research on government crisis communication on social media through a bibliometric analysis. A total of 753 Scopus-indexed documents published between 1993 and 2026 were analyzed using VOSviewer through keyword co-occurrence, co-authorship, and citation analyses. The results show four thematic clusters: disaster and emergency communication via social networking platforms, core crisis communication and public relations, pandemic governance and public behavior, and health communication with misinformation. Research output accelerated sharply after 2020, with recent attention shifting toward misinformation, disinformation, SARS-CoV-2, and survey-based studies of public compliance. The United States dominates publication output and collaboration, followed by China, Spain, and the United Kingdom, while author networks remain fragmented around a small number of productive scholars. The most cited works emphasize trust, message strategy, and the role of social media in local government and pandemic communication. This study offers a roadmap for future research and practical insights for governments seeking credible, dialogic, and misinformation-resilient crisis communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Crises such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and pandemics place governments under intense pressure to deliver timely, accurate, and credible information to the public. Crisis communication in the public sector differs from corporate crisis communication because governments are responsible not only for protecting their reputation but also for coordinating

collective action, safeguarding lives, and maintaining institutional legitimacy (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2007; Kim & Liu, 2012). Early scholarship on government crisis communication drew on major events such as Hurricane Katrina and the SARS outbreak, demonstrating that poorly coordinated or opaque communication can rapidly erode public trust (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2007; Lee, 2009).

The rise of social media has fundamentally transformed how governments communicate during crises. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo allow public agencies to disseminate warnings instantly, monitor public sentiment, and engage directly with citizens without the mediation of traditional news outlets (Graham et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2016). Studies show that information form and source on social media shape how the public interprets disaster information and whether they intend to take protective action (B. F. Liu et al., 2016). Local governments that actively use social media during crises tend to be perceived as more responsive, although adoption and capacity remain uneven across jurisdictions (Graham et al., 2015; Neely & Collins, 2018). Research has also shown that the content of government messages shifts across the phases of a disaster, moving from preparedness and warning toward response and recovery information (Spence et al., 2015; Wukich, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic became a turning point for this field. Governments worldwide relied heavily on social media to explain restrictions, promote vaccination, and counter false information, making crisis communication a central instrument of pandemic governance (Boin et al., 2021; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). Studies of government and health agency communication on Twitter revealed large variations in message strategies, framing, and public engagement across countries (Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). At the same time, the pandemic exposed the consequences of ineffective communication, including declining trust, public anxiety, and the spread of misinformation (Su et al., 2021; Torpan et al., 2021). Public trust in government has consistently been identified as a determinant of compliance with protective measures, from the H1N1 pandemic to COVID-19 (Abdelzadeh & Sedelius, 2024; Van Der Weerd et al., 2011).

In Indonesia and other emerging democracies, government crisis communication on social media faces additional challenges, including politically motivated online buzzers, fragmented information ecosystems, and low institutional trust (Syahputra et al., 2021). More recently, scholars have begun to examine new technologies such as AI-generated messages in government crisis response and robust communication strategies for turbulent times (Zhan et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2023). These developments indicate that the field is expanding rapidly and becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, spanning communication science, public administration, disaster management, and public health.

Despite this growth, research on government crisis communication on social media remains fragmented across disciplines and contexts, and there is limited systematic understanding of how the field has evolved, which themes dominate, and who drives knowledge production. Existing reviews tend to focus on specific crises, platforms, or regions, leaving the broader intellectual structure of the field insufficiently mapped (B. F. Liu & Mehta, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of global research on government crisis communication on social media by identifying its thematic clusters, temporal trends, research density, collaboration networks among authors and countries, and the most influential publications.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric approach to examine the development and intellectual structure of research on government crisis communication on social media. Bibliometric

analysis enables a systematic assessment of large volumes of scientific literature by combining performance analysis, which describes publication output and citations, with science mapping, which visualizes the relationships among keywords, authors, and countries. This approach is suitable for identifying dominant themes, influential publications, collaboration patterns, and shifts in research focus in a field that spans communication science, public administration, disaster management, and public health.

The bibliometric procedure involved several stages, including literature identification, data collection, bibliographic mapping, and interpretation of research patterns. The collected documents were analyzed to examine publication trends, thematic structures, influential studies, and collaboration networks among researchers and countries. This process allows the study to capture both the quantitative development and conceptual evolution of government crisis communication research on social media.

Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, selected for its broad multidisciplinary coverage, reliable citation indexing, and compatibility with VOSviewer. The search combined terms related to crisis communication, government or public sector actors, and social media platforms in titles, abstracts, and keywords, using the string: TITLE-ABS-KEY (("crisis communication" OR "risk communication" OR "emergency communication") AND (government OR "public sector" OR "public agency") AND ("social media" OR twitter OR facebook OR weibo OR "online communication")). The data were exported on 29 September 2026 in RIS format. The final dataset comprised 753 documents published between 1993 and 2026, consisting of 513 journal articles, 112 book chapters, 53 conference papers, 31 reviews, 26 books, and 18 other document types, most of which were written in English (719 documents). Publication output increased sharply after 2020, as 553 documents (73.4%) were published from 2020 onward with a peak of 110 documents in 2025, and the leading sources were the Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management (22 documents) and Public Relations Review (21 documents).

VOSviewer was used to perform keyword co-occurrence analysis, co-authorship analysis at the author and country levels, and citation analysis. Keyword maps were presented in network, overlay, and density visualizations, in which each node represents an item, node size reflects its frequency of occurrence or number of documents, and link thickness indicates the strength of co-occurrence or collaboration. A minimum occurrence threshold was applied to maintain the readability of the maps, clusters were generated automatically by the VOSviewer clustering algorithm, and Scopus citation counts were used to identify the ten most cited documents in the dataset.

RESULTS

Keyword Co-Occurrence Network Visualization

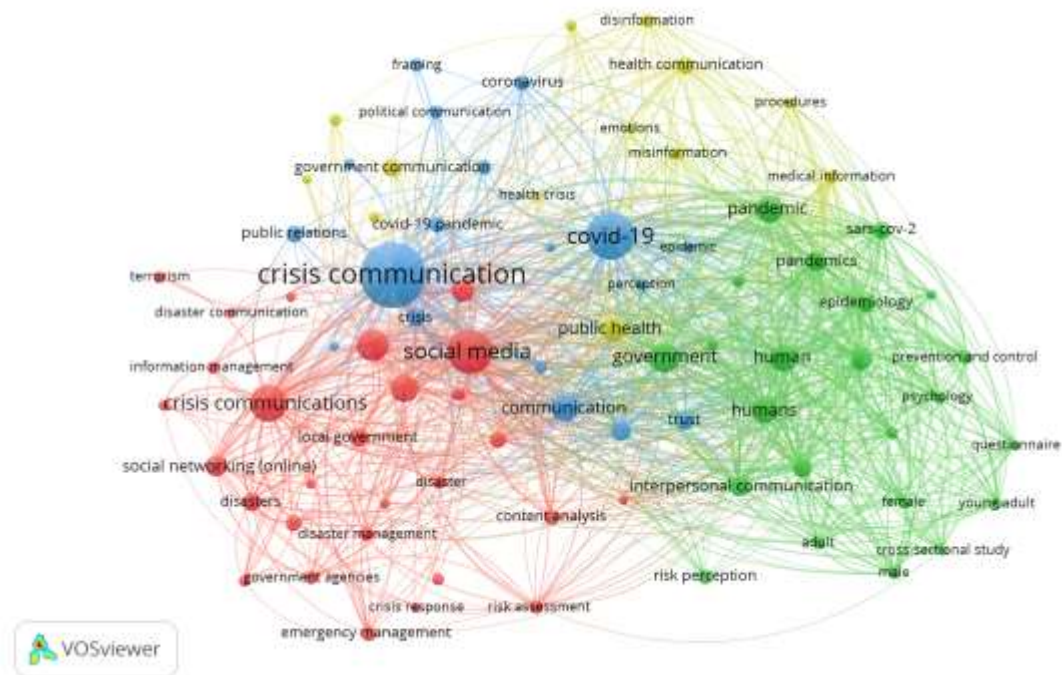


Figure 1. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 1 displays the keyword co-occurrence network of research on government crisis communication on social media. The largest nodes are crisis communication (329 occurrences), covid-19 (182), social media (156), and crisis communications (106), confirming that the field is anchored in the intersection of crisis communication, digital platforms, and the pandemic. The map forms four clusters. The red cluster centers on social media, crisis communications, and social networking (online), together with disasters, disaster management, emergency management, government agencies, local government, crisis response, risk assessment, terrorism, and content analysis, reflecting research on how public agencies use social networking platforms during disasters and emergencies, often through content analysis of official posts.

The blue cluster is built around crisis communication and covid-19, linked to communication, public relations, political communication, framing, coronavirus, perception, and trust, and represents the conceptual core of the field that focuses on message strategy, framing, and public trust. The green cluster contains pandemic, government, sars-cov-2, epidemiology, prevention and control, interpersonal communication, risk perception, psychology, and questionnaire, capturing survey-based studies on pandemic governance and public behavior; terms such as human, female, and male in this cluster are index keywords from medical databases rather than substantive themes. The yellow cluster includes public health, health communication, government communication, health crisis, misinformation, disinformation, emotions, and medical information, reflecting research on health communication and the fight against false information during public health emergencies.

The positions of government-related keywords show how the government actor is studied from several perspectives: local government appears in the red disaster cluster, government in the green pandemic cluster, and government communication in the yellow health communication cluster, while government, communication, public health, and trust sit near the center and connect all clusters (Christensen & Lægheid, 2020; Graham et al., 2015). This structure indicates that the field is

shaped by a communication and public relations tradition focused on message strategy and reputation (Jin & Liu, 2010; Kim & Liu, 2012) and a public health and governance tradition focused on risk perception and compliance (Hong, 2024; Van Der Weerd et al., 2011), with social media serving as the meeting point because it is both a channel for government messages and a source of data on public reactions (Lwin et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021)

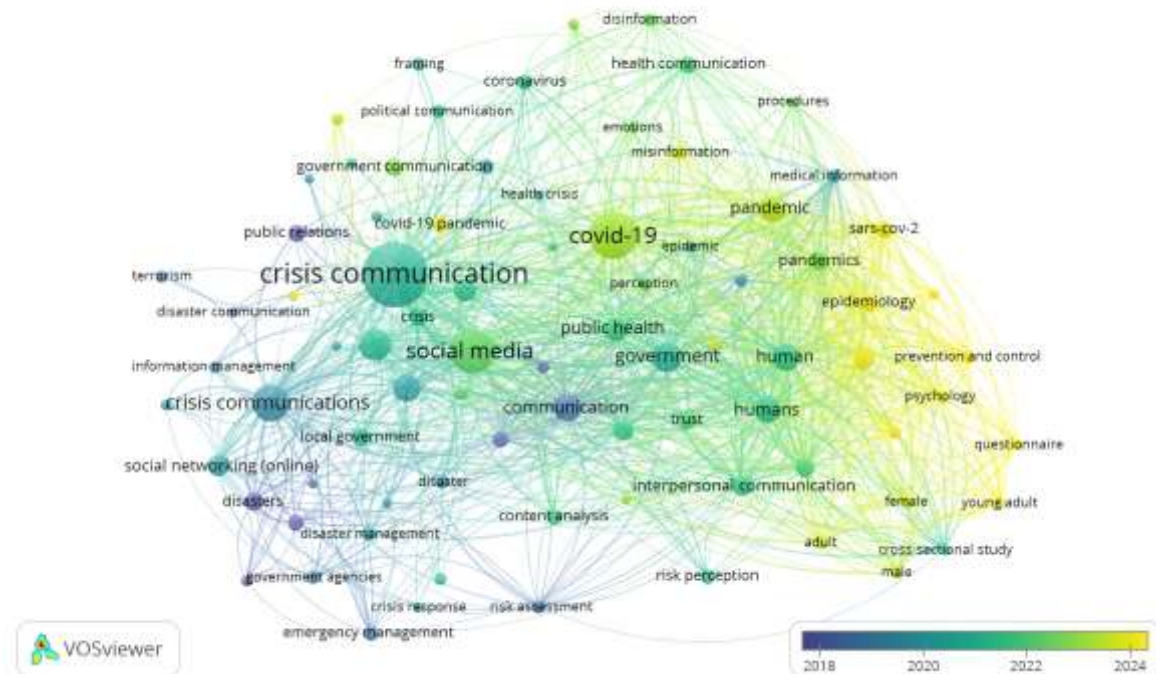


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 presents the overlay visualization, in which colors indicate the average publication year of each keyword, ranging from dark blue (around 2018) to yellow (2024). Earlier research, shown in purple and dark blue, focused on public relations, disasters, disaster communication, government agencies, emergency management, risk assessment, and crisis communications. This phase reflects the foundation of the field, which examined how government agencies adopted social media and how their messages varied across the phases of natural disasters (Spence et al., 2015; Wukich, 2016).

Keywords shown in teal and green, such as crisis communication, government, local government, social media, covid-19, government communication, and disinformation, emerged around 2020 to 2022, when research analyzed government messaging on social media and the strategies of political leaders during the pandemic (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). The most recent keywords, shown in yellow, include covid-19 pandemic, sars-cov-2, pandemic, misinformation, epidemiology, prevention and control, psychology, questionnaire, and young adult, indicating a shift toward survey-based studies that assess how government communication affects trust, risk perception, and compliance (Abdelzadeh & Sedelius, 2024).

The overlay map also reveals topics that are receiving less attention. Foundational concepts such as public relations, disaster communication, and government agencies are located in the lower-left part of the map, distant from the most recent keywords, which suggests that lessons from disaster communication have not been fully integrated into pandemic-era research (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2007; B. F. Liu & Mehta, 2021). Meanwhile, the appearance of misinformation in yellow close to

health communication and public health indicates that managing information disorder during health emergencies has become the newest research frontier (Torpan et al., 2021).

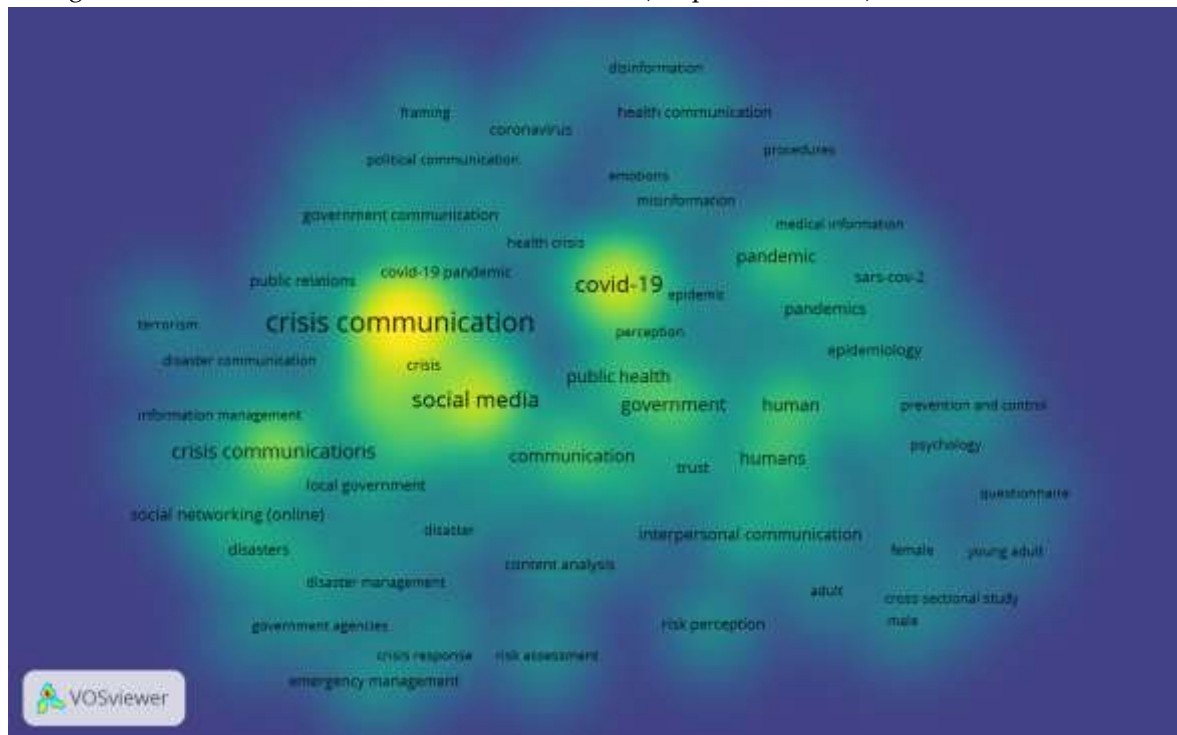


Figure 3. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 shows the density visualization, where yellow areas indicate a high concentration of keywords and blue areas indicate lower concentration. The brightest areas are concentrated around crisis communication, social media, and COVID-19, confirming these themes as the dominant core of the literature. The map displays a dual-core structure, with one core around crisis communication and social media on the left and another around covid-19 in the upper center, indicating that pandemic-related research has developed into a relatively distinct body of work within general crisis communication scholarship.

Moderately dense areas surround government, human, humans, pandemic, public health, and communication, which function as supporting themes connecting the two cores. A secondary concentration around crisis communications and social networking (online) in the lower left represents disaster-oriented studies, while the area around human, humans, and pandemic on the right represents health and epidemiological studies.

Keywords in darker regions, such as trust, framing, emotions, disinformation, risk perception, local government, government agencies, and terrorism, show lower density, which means they receive limited attention relative to their practical relevance. Trust, for example, is repeatedly identified as a key determinant of public compliance during crises (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Van Der Weerd et al., 2011), and the low density of local government and government agencies suggests that the institutional capacity of public organizations to manage social media during crises remains underexamined (Neely & Collins, 2018). These areas represent promising directions for future research.

Co-Authorship Network

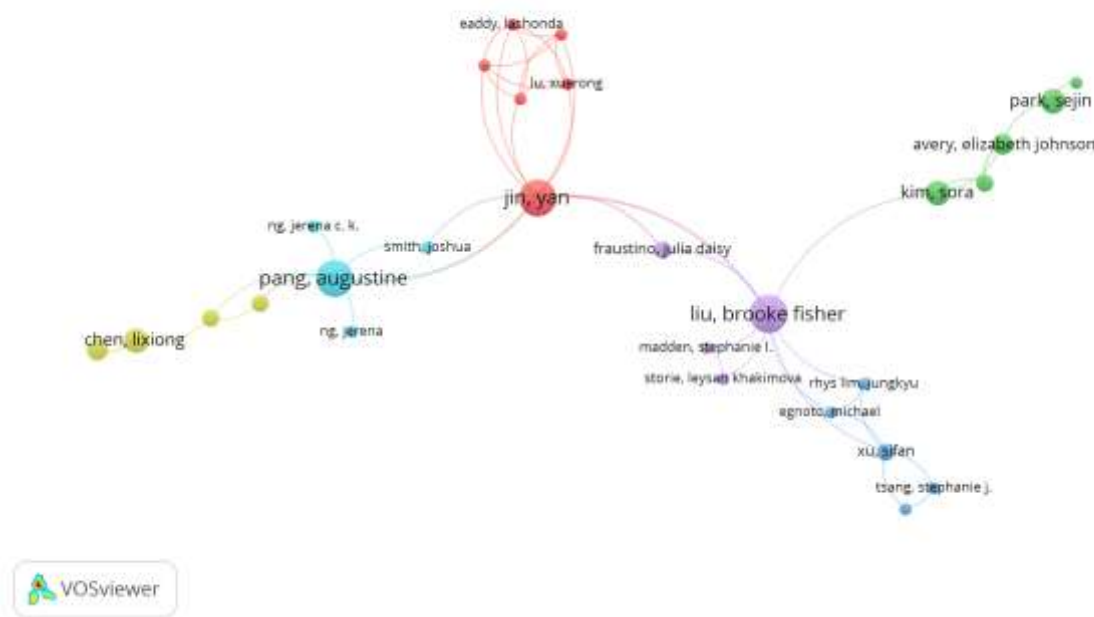


Figure 4. Author Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 4 displays the co-authorship network of authors, which consists of several small and loosely connected clusters. The purple cluster is centered on Liu, Brooke Fisher, the most productive author in the dataset (13 documents), who collaborates with Fraustino, Julia Daisy, Madden, Stephanie L., and Storie, Leysan Khakimova, and is linked to the blue cluster that includes Xu, Sifan, Egnoto, Michael, Rhys Lim, Jungkyu, and Tsang, Stephanie J. The red cluster is centered on Jin, Yan (9 documents), who works with Eaddy, LaShonda and Lu, Xuerong, while the cyan cluster is led by Pang, Augustine (9 documents) with Ng, Jerena and Smith, Joshua.

The network follows a hub-and-spoke pattern in which Jin, Yan occupies a brokerage position linking the Pang group and the Liu group, while Liu, Brooke Fisher connects the purple, blue, and green clusters. The collaboration among these authors reflects a coherent research program on social-mediated crisis communication, which examines how information source and form shape public responses to disasters (B. F. Liu et al., 2016, 2019). The green cluster, consisting of Kim, Sora, Avery, Elizabeth Johnson, and Park, Sejin, reflects a related line of research on social media use by local governments during crises (Graham et al., 2015), while the yellow cluster around Chen, Lixiong connects to the network only through Pang.

Despite these productive hubs, the network remains sparse, and knowledge production depends on a small number of teams, mostly based in the United States and within the public relations discipline. The map also shows separate nodes for Ng, Jerena and Ng, Jerena C. K., which most likely represent the same author recorded under different name variants in Scopus. Because only authors meeting the minimum threshold are displayed, many scholars from Asia, Europe, and the Global South do not appear in the connected network, indicating the need for broader multi-country and multidisciplinary collaboration.

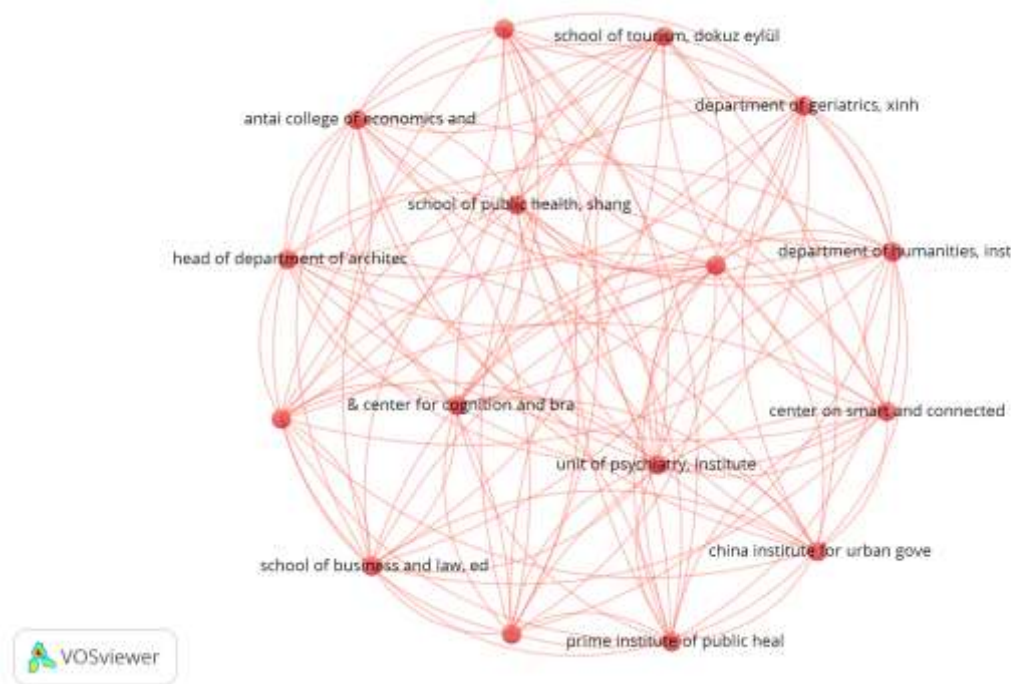


Figure 5. Institution Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 5 presents the co-authorship network at the institutional level. The map forms a single red cluster of 16 institutions that are all fully interconnected, including the Antai College of Economics and Management, School of Public Health, China Institute for Urban Governance, and Department of Geriatrics at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Unit of Psychiatry and Center for Cognition and Brain Sciences at the University of Macau, the Center on Smart and Connected Health Technologies at UT Health San Antonio, the Department of Humanities at the Institute of Technology Carlow, the School of Business and Law at Edith Cowan University, the School of Tourism at Dokuz Eylül University, the Department of Architecture and Built Environment at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, and the Prime Institute of Public Health in Peshawar.

Tracing these affiliations in the dataset shows that the entire network originates from a single highly cited multi-institutional publication, namely the study on the mental health consequences of COVID-19 media coverage and the need for effective crisis communication practices (Su et al., 2021). Because every institution in that article is linked to every other institution, VOSviewer displays a dense, circular network with equal link strength. Consequently, this map reflects the collaborative structure of one influential article rather than sustained, repeated partnerships among institutions across the field.

This result indicates that institutional collaboration in research on government crisis communication on social media remains weak and episodic. Most institutions contribute only a small number of documents and rarely co-publish repeatedly, so only one large collaborative publication is able to form a visible network under the applied threshold. The composition of this cluster, which combines public health, psychiatry, geriatrics, urban governance, business, and humanities units, also confirms that the most visible institutional collaboration is driven by the COVID-19 health crisis and is interdisciplinary in nature. Establishing long-term institutional

partnerships, particularly between communication, public administration, and public health units, would therefore help consolidate the field.

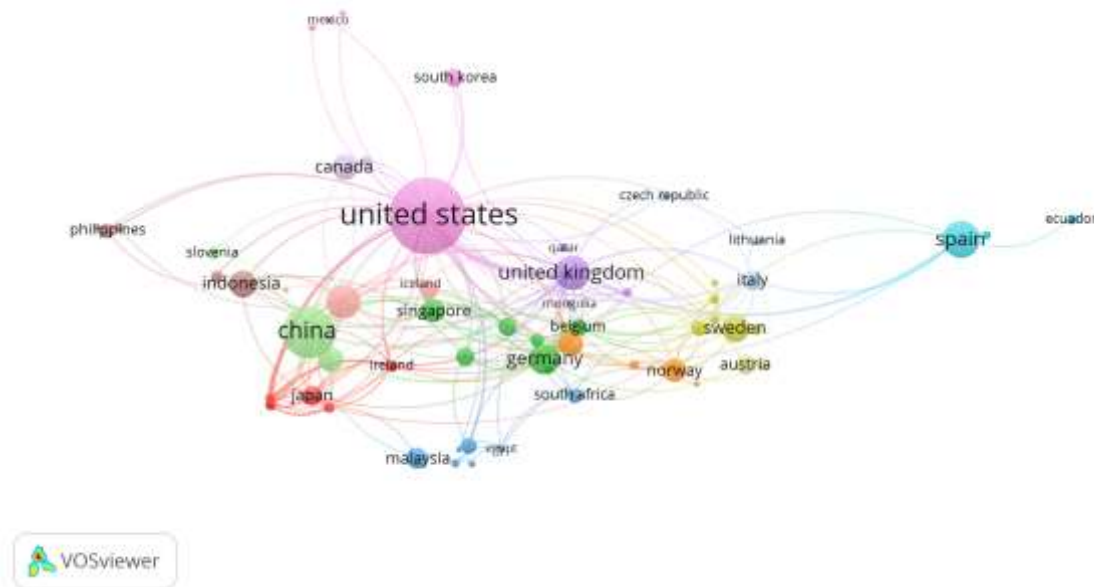


Figure 6. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 6 illustrates the co-authorship network at the country level. The United States is the largest and most central node (206 documents) and is connected to almost every other country, confirming its leading role in both output and international collaboration. China (94 documents) is the second largest contributor, followed by Spain (50 documents), which forms a distinct cluster with Ecuador, and the United Kingdom (43 documents), which connects with European partners and Qatar.

European collaboration appears in several clusters, namely Germany and Belgium together with Singapore, Sweden and Austria, Norway, and Italy together with Lithuania and the Czech Republic. In the Asia-Pacific region, Indonesia (26 documents) forms a cluster with the Philippines, Malaysia connects with Egypt and South Africa, and Canada, South Korea, and Mexico are closely tied to the United States. These clusters also reflect linguistic and regional traditions, such as Spanish-language research on government communication during COVID-19 (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2020) and Nordic public administration research linking crisis communication with institutional trust (Abdelzadeh & Sedelius, 2024; Christensen & Lægreid, 2020).

Overall, the country network exhibits a core-periphery structure in which the United States, China, and several European countries occupy the core, while emerging economies remain at the periphery. Indonesia is the leading contributor in Southeast Asia, yet its ties mainly connect to the Philippines and the United States, even though research from Indonesia highlights context-specific challenges such as social media buzzers that undermined government messaging during the pandemic (Syahputra et al., 2021). Strengthening international partnerships would increase the visibility of research from the Global South and support comparative studies of government crisis communication across different political and media contexts.

Citation Analysis

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title
402	Hyland-Wood et al. (2021)	Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19
384	Van Der Weerd et al. (2011)	Monitoring the level of government trust, risk perception and intention of the general public to adopt protective measures during the influenza A (H1N1) pandemic in the Netherlands
373	Lwin et al. (2020)	Global sentiments surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic on Twitter: Analysis of Twitter trends
329	Su et al. (2021)	Mental health consequences of COVID-19 media coverage: The need for effective crisis communication practices
285	Liu et al. (2016)	Social media use during disasters: How information form and source influence intended behavioral responses
253	Graham et al. (2015)	The role of social media in local government crisis communications
220	Boin et al. (2021)	Governing the pandemic: The politics of navigating a mega-crisis
209	Jin & Liu (2010)	The blog-mediated crisis communication model: Recommendations for responding to influential external blogs
198	Spence et al. (2015)	Variability in Twitter content across the stages of a natural disaster: Implications for crisis communication
154	Garnett & Kouzmin (2007)	Communicating throughout Katrina: Competing and complementary conceptual lenses on crisis communication

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that research on government crisis communication on social media has evolved from a relatively narrow focus on organizational responses to disasters into a multidisciplinary field connecting communication science, public administration, and public health. The disaster and emergency communication stream is consistent with earlier studies showing that government agencies use social media to disseminate warnings and response information across disaster phases (W. Liu et al., 2018; Wukich, 2016), while the conceptual core builds on models such as the blog-mediated and social-mediated crisis communication frameworks (Jin & Liu, 2010; B. F. Liu et al., 2019). The temporal pattern further suggests that major crises act as catalysts for scholarly attention: natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina shaped the early literature (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2007; Graham et al., 2015), whereas COVID-19 triggered an unprecedented surge of studies that positioned crisis communication as a core instrument of pandemic governance (Boin et al., 2021; Christensen & Lægheid, 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

The recent emphasis on misinformation, disinformation, and survey-based behavioral studies shows that the field is moving from describing what governments communicate toward explaining how citizens receive, trust, and act on that communication (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021). In this regard, trust emerges as the central concept linking the network, overlay, and citation analyses, as highly cited studies consistently show that trust in government shapes risk perception and compliance from the H1N1 pandemic to COVID-19 (Abdelzadeh & Sedelius, 2024; Van Der Weerd et al., 2011), while earlier cases such as SARS in Hong Kong demonstrate how inconsistent communication can erode institutional legitimacy (Lee, 2009). However, the low density of trust, framing, emotions, and disinformation reveals a gap between their practical importance and the research devoted to them, a gap that becomes more pressing as new technologies such as AI-

generated messages begin to shape public perceptions of government crisis responses (B. F. Liu & Mehta, 2021; Zhan et al., 2025).

The collaboration patterns reveal a concentrated and fragmented research community. A few productive scholars, particularly Liu, Jin, and Pang, act as intellectual hubs whose work provides much of the theoretical foundation of the field (Jin & Liu, 2010; B. F. Liu et al., 2016), yet links between research groups remain limited. At the country level, the dominance of the United States reflects its research capacity and frequent exposure to large-scale disasters, while the growing contributions of China, Spain, and the United Kingdom are closely associated with COVID-19 research (Li et al., 2022; Moreno et al., 2020). The peripheral position of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries is noteworthy because governments in emerging democracies face distinct challenges, such as politically motivated online buzzers and fluctuating institutional trust, which are not fully captured by theories developed in high-income contexts (Syahputra et al., 2021).

These findings carry implications for both research and practice. For researchers, the fragmentation of themes and collaboration networks calls for integrative frameworks that link message strategies, institutional capacity, and public behavioral outcomes, as well as comparative studies across political systems and media environments (Zhong et al., 2023). For governments, social media should be treated as a strategic space for dialogue, listening, and trust-building rather than merely a dissemination channel, supported by transparent, consistent, and empathetic messages (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021) and proactive mechanisms to monitor and correct misinformation in collaboration with health authorities, media, and platform providers (Torpan et al., 2021). Local governments in particular require clear protocols, trained personnel, and adequate resources to communicate effectively across all phases of a crisis (Graham et al., 2015; Neely & Collins, 2018), and for countries such as Indonesia these insights can inform the development of integrated and citizen-centered crisis communication systems.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study maps the development of research on government crisis communication on social media based on 753 Scopus-indexed documents published between 1993 and 2026. The analysis shows that the field is anchored in three dominant concepts, namely crisis communication, social media, and COVID-19, and is structured into four thematic streams: disaster and emergency communication through social networking platforms, core crisis communication and public trust, pandemic governance and public behavior, and health communication and misinformation. Research output grew slowly for more than two decades and then accelerated sharply after 2020, with nearly three quarters of all documents published during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The temporal analysis further shows a shift from organizational and disaster-oriented studies toward pandemic governance, information disorder, and survey-based examinations of public responses.

The collaboration analysis reveals that knowledge production is concentrated among a small number of productive scholars, particularly Liu, Jin, and Pang, whose work in public relations and strategic communication provides much of the theoretical foundation of the field. At the country level, the United States leads in both output and connectivity, followed by China, Spain, and the United Kingdom, while countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are increasingly visible but remain at the periphery of the global network. The most cited publications emphasize government trust, message strategy, and the role of social media in local government and pandemic

communication, confirming that credibility and public confidence are the central concerns that connect the different streams of this literature.

Theoretically, this study contributes by showing that government crisis communication on social media sits at the intersection of two research traditions, a communication and public relations tradition focused on message strategy and reputation, and a public health and governance tradition focused on population behavior and policy compliance. Integrating these traditions is essential for building explanatory models that connect what governments communicate with how citizens perceive, trust, and act on that information. Practically, the findings indicate that governments should treat social media not merely as a dissemination channel but as a strategic space for dialogue, listening, and trust-building. Public institutions, especially local governments, need clear communication protocols, trained personnel, and collaborative mechanisms with health authorities, media, and platform providers to respond quickly while countering misinformation.

This study has several limitations. The analysis relies solely on the Scopus database, so relevant publications indexed in other databases or published in local journals may not be captured. Keyword variants such as crisis communication and crisis communications were not merged, which may slightly fragment the thematic clusters, and citation counts naturally favor older publications over recent ones. In addition, publications from 2026 represent only a partial year. Future research should combine multiple databases, apply keyword harmonization, and complement bibliometric mapping with systematic reviews or content analysis. Further studies are also encouraged to examine under-researched themes such as emotions, framing, disinformation, and the use of artificial intelligence in government communication, and to give greater attention to emerging democracies, including Indonesia, where political polarization, online buzzers, and fluctuating institutional trust create distinct challenges for effective and credible government crisis communication.

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