

CONCEPT FIELDS AND CONCEPT RELATIONS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS TERMINOLOGY

VO THI MY HANH*

ABSTRACT: Public relations (PR) terminology plays a crucial role in learning, research, and professional communication. Studying this terminology systematically will make a positive contribution to teaching and research, especially in the field of ESP instruction. This study aims to examine the concept fields and the concept relations within English PR terminology. The study uses a mixed-methods approach to terminology research, combining qualitative concept-based analysis with quantitative descriptive statistics. The dataset includes 2106 English PR terms extracted from academic, professional, and media sources. Twelve concept fields were found, with the majority of terms appearing in the *Marketing & Brand*, *Media & Influencer Relations*, and *Research, Measurement & Analytics* fields. The term bank revealed two broad categories of relations, namely hierarchical and associative. Generic and partitive relations belong to the hierarchical group. Sequential, role-function, activity-resource, evaluation-target, and entity-based relations are grouped under associative relations. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, the research findings have significant implications for the development of ESP materials, translation training, and the compilation of concept-based dictionaries.

KEY WORDS: concept fields; concept relations; Public Relations terminology; hierarchical relations; associative relations.

RECEIVED: March, 26th, 2026.

EDITED: June, 24th, 2026

1. Introduction

Public relations (PR) is considered an interdisciplinary field (McKie & Sriramesh, 2017). Accordingly, it has developed a large specialized lexicon. From a terminology perspective, instead of isolated units, PR terms, as conceptual units, are considered constituent parts within concept fields, forming this terminological system. Each term belongs to a conceptual field and is also linked to other terms through conceptual relations. Therefore, studying the terminological system from a conceptual approach will help to clarify the internal structure of the PR terminology.

Up to now, there have been studies related to the topic of PR terminology. The authors emphasize the importance of PR terminology as part of professional knowledge and communication. However, these studies differ considerably in scope and approach. Hutton (1999) mainly discusses the definition, dimensions, and scope of PR as a field, but he does not examine the PR terminology as a specific conceptual structure. Logar Berginc and Verčič (2013) introduce Slovenian PR terminology as a web-based terminology databank. Their focus is on term compilation and resource organization. Hudeček and Čutuk (2017) examine the Croatian term PR from the perspectives of function, synonymy, and standardization. Kilyeni, Şimon, and Suciú (2015) emphasize the value of terminology management in teaching ESP to PR students. So far, PR terminology has rarely been examined systematically as a conceptual network. This area remains under-researched, particularly in

*Vietnam Youth Academy (VYA); Email: vohanh2@gmail.com

terms of studies that identify its major concept fields and analyze the recurrent concept relations that connect PR concepts. In other words, the field still lacks a concept-oriented mapping of PR terminology that goes beyond term collection or standardization and shows how specialized knowledge is structured within the domain.

By examining concept fields and concept relations, this study aims to provide a more systematic account of how PR knowledge is organized. This is significant not only for terminology studies, but also for ESP teaching as well as communication in the field of PR.

2. Theoretical framework

Terminology as a Concept-based System

Terminology is not understood merely as a list of specialized words used in a professional field. It is a system built around concepts and the terms that designate them. ISO 704 explains the relation between objects, concepts, definitions, and designations. It presents these elements as central to terminology work. Terminology work is carried out across many fields of knowledge. Terminology is concept-based and not limited to word forms alone (ISO, 2022). Similarly, Cabré (1999) places strong emphasis on the nature of concepts, conceptual relations, the relations between terms and concepts, and the assignment of terms to concepts. She also explains that terminology proceeds from concepts to terms.

PR terms do not function as isolated lexical items. Instead, they form part of a specialized body of knowledge that includes activities, roles, tools, processes, outputs, and professional contexts. From this perspective, the study of PR terminology requires more than collecting and defining terms one by one. It also requires examining how those terms reflect the conceptual organization of the field. Thus, from the theory of Cabré (1999) and ISO 704 (2022), a concept-based approach provides a strong foundation for analyzing PR terminology as a structured system of domain knowledge.

Concept Fields

Within a concept-based approach, the concepts of a specialized domain can be grouped into concept fields. ISO 704 includes identifying concepts and concept relations, analysing and structuring concept fields, and modelling concept systems among the main activities of terminology work. ISO 1087 defines a concept field as an unstructured set of concepts belonging to the same domain or subject. A concept field brings related concepts together within the same area of knowledge, even before they are systematically structured into a concept system (ISO 1087, 2019; ISO 704, 2022).

The notion of concept field is useful because it helps make the main knowledge areas of a domain more visible. Cabré (1999) explains that terminologists need to study the content of a subject field and structure its conceptual organization before dealing systematically with terms. Concept fields are not just topic labels for groups of words. They provide a practical way to show the way specialized knowledge is distributed across broader semantic areas and the way the internal structure of a domain can be described in an orderly way.

From a different perspective, Temmerman (2000) argues that many categories have a prototypical structure and blurred boundaries. For that reason, concept fields in PR terminology are best treated as analytically useful categories instead of absolutely fixed ones.

Concept Relations

Concept relations help researchers organize domain knowledge, explain how concepts are connected, and build concept systems that show the internal structure of a field. Nuopponen (2014) notes that ISO 1087 and ISO 704 recognize the importance of concept relations and concept systems in terminology, but their classification of relation types remains rather limited.

A basic distinction in terminology is between hierarchical relations and associative relations. According to Nuopponen (2014), this is the main division used in the ISO standards. Hierarchical

relations mainly include generic relations and partitive relations. A generic relation is a type–subtype relation in which a subordinate concept contains the meaning of a broader concept and adds at least one delimiting characteristic. A partitive relation links a whole and its parts.

However, Nuopponen (2014) argues that this traditional division is not enough for the analysis of real specialized knowledge. In professional domains, many concepts are connected in non-hierarchical ways (associative relations). The ISO standards do not fully describe these links. This is a limitation because important domain knowledge may be based on action, time, cause, interaction, and function, not only on class inclusion or part–whole structure.

Nuopponen (2014) proposes a broader and more flexible typology. In her model, concept relations are divided into generic concept relations and ontological concept relations. The latter includes broader non-hierarchical links such as causal, developmental, activity, origination, transmission and instrumental relations. She also emphasizes that a useful typology should remain open and extendable, since different domains may require different relation types.

This broader view is especially useful for the study of PR terminology. PR is not only a field of categories and subcategories, but also a field of processes, roles, channels, resources, audiences, outcomes, and evaluation. Therefore, PR concepts are likely to be connected through both hierarchical and non-hierarchical relations. In this study, concept relations are understood as semantic and knowledge-organizing links between PR concepts. The study uses the broad distinction between hierarchical and associative relations as its main framework, while also following Nuopponen's view that associative relations may need to be divided into more specific subtypes.

3. Methodology

This study is a concept-based analysis with a dataset of 2106 English PR terms. Sources were selected on the basis of their relevance to the PR domain, their terminological richness, and their ability to reflect both pedagogical and professional usage. The term bank was extracted manually from three main sources: academic sources (an encyclopedia of PR, PR dictionaries, PR textbooks), professional sources (press releases, corporate websites, PR company blogs), and media sources (online newspapers, mass-media texts). Quantitative statistics are used to determine the number and percentage of terms in each concept field of the PR terminology system. Each field was clearly defined. Ambiguous items were classified by using a primary-category rule based on the term's main conceptual function in typical PR use. Additionally, qualitative methods were applied to identify conceptual relations. Relevant examples were then analyzed to clarify these relations.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Concept System of PR Terminology

The dataset comprises 2106 PR terms in English, including 728 single-word terms and 1378 multi-word terms, and is organised into 12 concept fields to represent the conceptual structure of PR:

(1) Profession (spokesperson, account manager, press agent, public relations practitioner, press officer); (2) Publics & Stakeholders (stakeholder, target audience, internal public, key public, primary audience); (3) Strategy & Planning (campaign strategy, PR strategy, strategic plan, communication plan, situation analysis); (4) Messaging & Content (key message, brand message, message strategy, press statement, talking points); (5) Implementation & Tactics (publicity, event promotion, outreach, pre-testing, content rollout); (6) Media & Influencer Relations (press release, press conference, media pitching, press briefing, influencer outreach); (7) Channels & Platforms (blog, corporate blog, broadcast media, social media platform, web page); (8) Research, Measurement & Analytics (media analytics, monitoring, pre-campaign survey, benchmark, evaluation); (9) Issues, Crisis & Reputation (crisis management, risk communication, issue management, brand crisis, reputation risk); (10) Marketing & Brand (brand positioning, marketing campaign, brand value, brand reputation, market

segmentation, branded content); (11) Ethics, Law & Governance (privacy, compliance, code of ethics, data protection, transparency); and (12) Theories & Doctrines (stakeholder theory, persuasion theory, narrative theory, behavioral theory, psychological theory).

To ensure clarity and consistency, each conceptual field is briefly described below.

Table 1. *Concept Fields in PR Terminology and Their Brief Definitional Summaries*

Concept field	Brief definitional summary
<i>Profession</i>	Human actors and occupational roles involved in PR work in organisations and agencies (job titles, professional functions, and role labels used in practice)
<i>Publics & Stakeholders</i>	Groups, audiences, and stakeholder categories identified, prioritised, and engaged in PR (segmentation labels and relationship-based publics)
<i>Strategy & Planning</i>	Decision-level PR thinking (including situation diagnosis, objective setting, strategy selection, and campaign or programme planning)
<i>Messaging & Content</i>	What is communicated in PR (including message types, message components, and content framing used to express organisational meaning)
<i>Implementation & Tactics</i>	Execution-level actions used to carry out PR plans (tactics, outreach activities, and campaign actions)
<i>Media & Influencer Relations</i>	Relationship-building and interaction with journalists, news organisations, and influencers (the standard practices associated with that interaction)
<i>Channels & Platforms</i>	Communication vehicles and platforms through which PR content is delivered (traditional, digital, and hybrid formats)
<i>Research, Measurement & Analytics</i>	Research methods, monitoring, metrics, analytics, and evaluation outputs used to assess PR and generate evidence.
<i>Issues, Crisis & Reputation</i>	Risk-related situations and communication concepts used to manage issues, crises, and reputation outcomes.
<i>Marketing & Brand</i>	Concepts at the interface between PR, branding, and marketing, especially those related to brand meaning, positioning, and market-facing communication coordination.
<i>Ethics, Law & Governance</i>	Concepts related to ethics, regulation, compliance, privacy, and governance, in the boundaries of PR practice.
<i>Theories & Doctrines</i>	Named theories, models, and doctrinal perspectives for explaining or justifying PR practice and research

4.2. Distribution of PR Terminology by Concept Field

The findings indicate an imbalance in the number of English PR terms within the twelve concept fields. *Marketing & Brand* has the highest number of terms, with 443 (21.04%). The second largest is *Media & Influencer Relations* (405 terms, 19.23%). These two fields account for about 40% of all terms. A second group of fields with medium-sized shares includes *Research, Measurement & Analytics* (295 terms, 14.01%), *Publics & Stakeholders* (246 terms, 11.68%), and *Channels & Platforms* (201 terms, 9.54%). Smaller fields include *Strategy & Planning* (153 terms, 7.26%), *Theories & Doctrines* (106 terms, 5.03%), and *Messaging & Content* (97 terms, 4.61%). The least frequent fields are *Implementation & Tactics* (54 terms, 2.56%), *Profession* (51 terms, 2.42%), *Issues, Crisis & Reputation* (35 terms, 1.66%), and especially *Ethics, Law & Governance* (20 terms, 0.95%).

Table 2. Distribution of PR Terminology across 12 Concept Fields

Concept field	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Profession</i>	51	2.42
<i>Publics & Stakeholders</i>	246	11.68
<i>Strategy & Planning</i>	153	7.26
<i>Messaging & Content</i>	97	4.61
<i>Implementation & Tactics</i>	54	2.56
<i>Media & Influencer Relations</i>	405	19.23
<i>Channels & Platforms</i>	201	9.54
<i>Research, Measurement & Analytics</i>	295	14.01
<i>Issues, Crisis & Reputation</i>	35	1.66
<i>Marketing & Brand</i>	443	21.04
<i>Ethics, Law & Governance</i>	20	0.95
<i>Theories & Doctrines</i>	106	5.03
Total	2106	100

It is common to find an uneven distribution in the number of terms across the concept fields of a terminological system. Each terminology domain can be understood through a concept system and clear groups of related concepts. This is the internal organization of specialized knowledge (Cabr , 1999; ISO, 2019; Sager, 1990). The findings indicate that the fields *Marketing & Brand* and *Media & Influencer Relations* make up a substantial proportion. This is due to the strong overlap of marketing and media with public relations. The overlap between different terminology groups blurs the boundaries, thus contributing to lexical expansion. In other words, it is these overlapping terms that enrich the terminology of a disciplinary field. However, the fields with a limited number of terms, such as the *Issues, Crisis & Reputation* group or the *Ethics, Law & Governance* group, are equally important. From a terminology perspective, each field, regardless of size, contributes to the overall structure of this terminological system.

4.3. Concept Relations in PR Terminology

From the results of the study, the identified relations were grouped into two broad categories: hierarchical relations and associative relations. The hierarchical group includes generic relations and partitive relations. The associative group mainly includes sequential relations, role–function relations, activity–resource relations, evaluation–target relations, and entity–based relations.

4.3.1. Hierarchical Relations

Generic relations

Generic relations were one of the clearest patterns in the extracted terminology dataset. In this relation, a narrower concept can be understood as a type of a broader one. This pattern is especially visible in PR terminology because many terms are formed by adding a delimiting element to a more general professional concept. This relation can be seen in terms such as *proactive public relations*, *reactive public relations*, *online public relations*, and *healthcare PR* as more specific types of *public relations*, and in terms such as *cross-sectional survey*, *dipstick survey*, and *email survey* as narrower types of *survey*. A broad domain concept may be specified through naming features such as characteristic, mode, context, or professional setting.

Partitive relations

Partitive relations refer to cases in which one concept forms a component or structural part of a larger whole. In the dataset, this relation is most clearly illustrated by the pairs *brand* and *brand element*, *brand* and *brand asset*, *brand* and *brand mark*, and *brand* and *brand name*, since the latter concepts can be interpreted as components of the broader concept of *brand*. A similar relation can also be observed in the pairs *message* and *message structure* and *message* and *message content*, where *structure* and *content* represent structural and semantic components of a *message*.

4.3.2. Associative Relations

Sequential relations

Sequential relations refer to cases in which one concept denotes a stage that comes before or after another in a professional process. For example, pairs such as *pre-campaign research* and *campaign*, *preproduction research* and *production*, *product development* and *product release* encode the procedural logic in the PR field.

Role-function relations

Role-function relations refer to cases in which one concept denotes a professional role and the other denotes the corresponding function, activity, or area of responsibility. Typical examples include *communication manager* and *communication management*, *community liaison* and *community relations*, *brand manager* and *brand management*, *fundraising manager* and *fundraising*, *publications manager* and *publications management*, and *product manager* and *product management*.

Activity-resource relations

Activity-resource relations connect an activity with the means, tool, channel, document, or operational element through which that activity is carried out. This relation is especially common in PR because PR work depends heavily on communicative resources and practical instruments. This relation can be seen in pairs such as *communication* and *communication tool*, *communication* and *communication channel*, *communication* and *communication material*, *communication* and *communication product*, *publicity* and *publicity manual*, and *publicity* and *publicity outlet*.

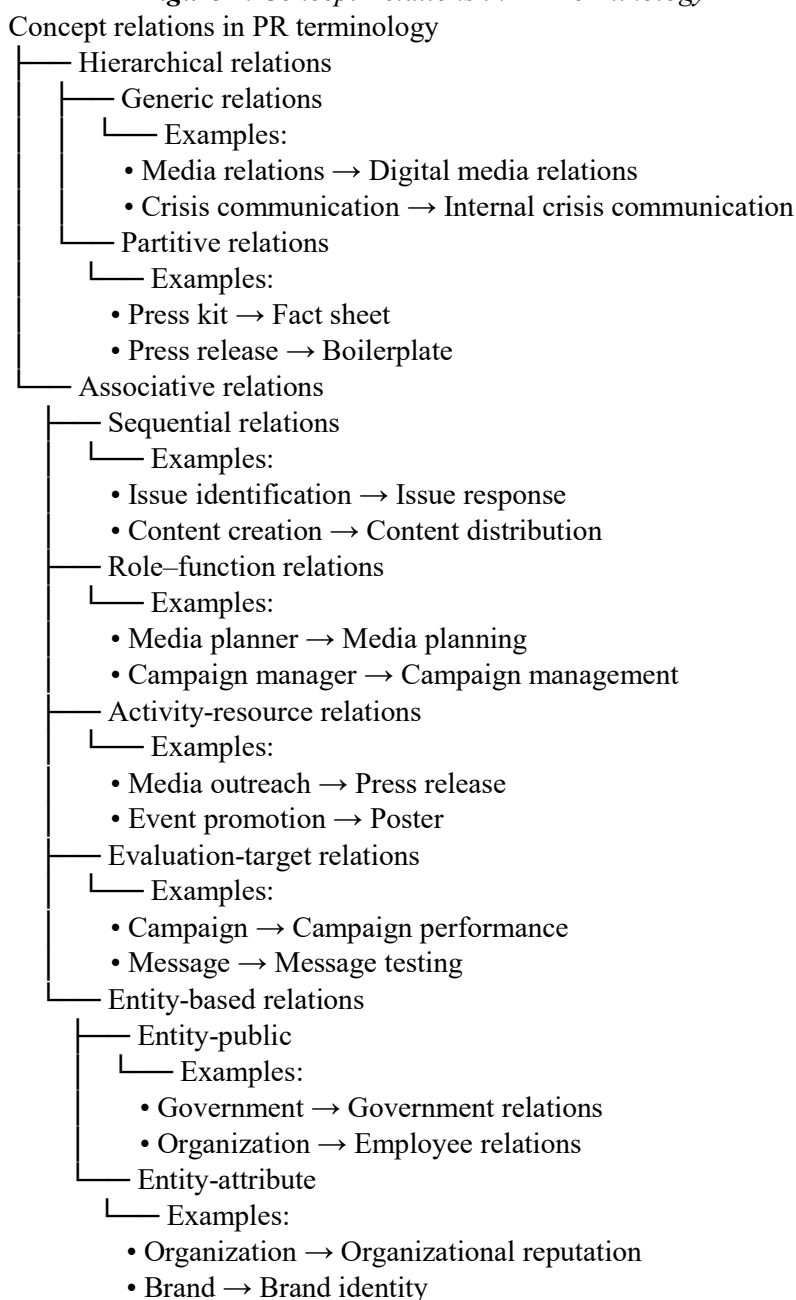
Evaluation-target relations

Evaluation-target relations link an evaluative, research-based, or measurement-oriented concept with the activity, entity, or process being assessed. This is one of the strongest associative patterns in the PR dataset because modern PR relies heavily on monitoring, evaluation, and effectiveness assessment. Representative cases include *communication* and *communication audit*, *brand* and *brand performance*, *company* and *company performance*, *market* and *market performance*, *brand equity* and *brand equity measurement*, and *engagement* and *engagement rate*.

Entity-based relations

Entity-based relations organize concepts around a central entity and connect that entity either to its publics or to its attributes. This relation is particularly important in PR because PR is fundamentally concerned with how organizations or institutions relate to publics and how they are represented symbolically. Typical public-oriented examples are *community relations*, *consumer relations*, *investor relations*, and *stakeholder public relations*. The same relation also appears in an attribute-oriented form, where the central entity is linked to a defining quality or symbolic property. This can be seen in terms such as *brand image*, *corporate image*, *brand attribute*, and *brand archetype*.

Figure 1. *Concept Relations in PR Terminology*



It is clear that PR terminology is structured in more than one way. Viewed through hierarchical relations, including generic and partitive relations, part of the field is organized through classification and internal composition. In addition, the associative relations reveal a wider and more dynamic conceptual structure. Sequence, professional role, operational means, evaluation, and entity-based positioning are the main ways in which PR concepts are connected. Besides conceptual groupings, PR terminology follows procedural, organizational, and communicative logic of PR practice.

Moreover, some relations mainly organize concepts within the same concept field. Other relations connect concepts across different fields. For instance, generic relations often help structure narrower areas within the same field. However, sequential relation and activity–resource relation often link concepts across implementation. In this way, concept relations help explain the internal structure of concept fields.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the main concept fields and the concept relations in PR terminology on a conceptual basis. The term list consists of 2106 English PR terms collected from a range of different sources. The findings reveal that PR terminology is organized as a conceptually structured domain with 12 concept fields. The distribution of terms reveals that PR terminology is especially dense in areas where public relations intersects with branding, media-facing communication, and evaluative practice. Moreover, the results of the study indicate that PR concepts are connected through both hierarchical relations and associative relations. Among the most characteristic relations in the dataset were generic, partitive, sequential, role–function, activity–resource, evaluation–target, and entity-based relations.

Several important implications for ESP teaching can be drawn from the findings of this study. In ESP courses, specialized terms should not be taught as isolated vocabulary items. Instead, they should be introduced as part of a concept system in which terms are linked by field membership and concept relations. The concept-field framework of PR terminology can help teachers organize PR terminology into meaningful teaching units. Students can more easily understand how terms are grouped and how they function in professional contexts. In addition, the analysis of concept relations can support deeper learning because students not only memorize terms but also learn how concepts are connected. ESP learners may benefit in terms of both vocabulary retention and professional understanding. They can also strengthen reading comprehension, writing accuracy, and the ability to use terminology more appropriately in speaking tasks, case analysis, and workplace simulation activities. In translation and interpreting training, a concept-based approach helps learners identify more accurate equivalents and reduce word-for-word translation when terms belong to a larger professional knowledge structure. Finally, based on the concept fields and the concept relations discovered in the research, concept-based dictionaries can be further studied and compiled.

REFERENCES

1. Cabré, M. T. (1999), *Terminology: Theory, methods, and applications* (J. C. Sager, Ed.; J. A. DeCesaris, Trans.). John Benjamins.
2. Hudeček, L., & Čutuk, I. (2017), Croatian public relations terminology: Overview and guidelines for terminological regulation. *Communication Management Review*, 2(2), 30–53. <https://doi.org/10.22522/cmr20170222>
3. Hutton, J. G. (1999), The definition, dimensions, and domain of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 25(2), 199–214. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(99\)80162-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(99)80162-3).
4. International Organization for Standardization. (2019), *ISO 1087:2019, Terminology work and terminology science—Vocabulary*. ISO.

5. International Organization for Standardization. (2022), *ISO 704:2022, Terminology work—Principles and methods*. ISO.
6. Kilyeni, A., Şimon, S., & Suci, L. (2015), Terminology management: Applications in teaching ESP to Public Relations students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, 2254–2260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.262>.
7. Logar Berginc, N., & Verčič, D. (2013), Terminological databanks as the bodies of knowledge: Slovenian public relations terminology. *Public Relations Review*, 39(5), 569–571. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.07.022>.
8. McKie, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2017), Public relations. In C. R. Scott & L. Lewis (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of organizational communication*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118955567.wbieoc171>.
9. Nuopponen, A. (2014), Tangled web of concept relations: Concept relations for ISO 1087-1 and ISO 704. In *Proceedings of Terminology and Knowledge Engineering 2014 Conference, Jun 2014, Berlin, Germany*. 10 p. hal-01005882.
10. Sager, J. C. (1990), *A practical course in terminology processing*. John Benjamins.
11. Temmerman, R. (2000), *Towards new ways of terminology description: The sociocognitive approach*. John Benjamins.

Các trường khái niệm và quan hệ khái niệm trong hệ thuật ngữ quan hệ công chúng

Tóm tắt: Thuật ngữ quan hệ công chúng (PR) giữ vai trò quan trọng trong học tập, nghiên cứu và giao tiếp chuyên môn. Việc nghiên cứu hệ thống thuật ngữ này một cách toàn diện sẽ mang lại những đóng góp tích cực cho công tác giảng dạy và nghiên cứu, đặc biệt trong lĩnh vực tiếng Anh chuyên ngành (ESP). Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm ra các trường khái niệm và các quan hệ khái niệm trong hệ thuật ngữ PR tiếng Anh. Phương pháp hỗn hợp trong nghiên cứu thuật ngữ được áp dụng, kết hợp phân tích định tính dựa trên khái niệm và thống kê mô tả định lượng. Bộ dữ liệu gồm 2106 thuật ngữ PR tiếng Anh được thu thập từ các nguồn học thuật, thực tiễn nghề nghiệp và truyền thông. 12 trường khái niệm được tìm thấy từ kết quả nghiên cứu, trong đó phần lớn thuật ngữ tập trung ở các trường khái niệm *Tiếp thị và Thương hiệu*, *Quan hệ truyền thông và người có ảnh hưởng*, *Nghiên cứu, đo lường và Phân tích dữ liệu*. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng tìm ra hai nhóm quan hệ lớn trong hệ thuật ngữ này, đó là quan hệ thứ bậc và quan hệ liên kết. Quan hệ khái quát và quan hệ bộ phận thuộc nhóm quan hệ thứ bậc. Các quan hệ trình tự, vai trò–chức năng, hoạt động–nguồn lực, đánh giá–đối tượng và các quan hệ dựa trên thực thể được xếp vào nhóm quan hệ liên kết. Xét từ cả phương diện lý thuyết lẫn thực tiễn, các phát hiện của nghiên cứu có ý nghĩa quan trọng đối với việc phát triển tài liệu ESP, giảng dạy dịch thuật và biên soạn từ điển dựa trên khái niệm.

Từ khóa: Trường khái niệm; quan hệ khái niệm; thuật ngữ quan hệ công chúng; quan hệ thứ bậc; quan hệ liên kết.