

Guerrilla Marketing in the Public Sector: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, the public sector organizations required to be more innovative in information and public service delivery. Digitalization era has become a trigger for marketing strategy to be implemented in all sector including the public sector. Guerrilla marketing is one of non-conventional marketing strategy techniques taken as an option applied in the public sector. Limited budget often faced by the public sector institutions can benefit from low promotion cost strategy offers by Guerrilla Marketing. Its techniques in using creative and innovative marketing could result a large output in attracting public attention. Thus, guerrilla marketing can be an alternative marketing approach implemented by public sector institutions. The aim of this research was to review the practical implementation of guerrilla marketing in the public sector. This research also used literature studies from 2015 to 2025 using systematic literature review (SLR) method. Based on the research result, guerrilla marketing could affect positively and significantly on information and public service delivery. However, this topic has not been scientifically explored in recent years.

KEYWORDS: Guerrilla Marketing, Public Sector, Literature Review.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of modern governance and the rapid changes in information and technology today requires public sector organizations to be more responsive to the needs of the community. Digitalization has empowered the people to be able to assess the public sector institutions including the government, not only by administrative compliance, but also by its ability to provide and maximize public value through fast, transparent, and quality services (Matos et al., 2020). This development created the need to apply new managerial approaches, including the use of marketing strategies, that were initially used only in the private sector, into the public sector. Marketing in the public sector plays a key role in building trust, facilitating effective dialogue between citizens and government, and driving socio-economic development (Litovtseva et al., 2022). The adoption of marketing 4.0 models in the public sector can modernize public administration and effectively addresses obstacles such as politicization, fragmentation and lack of transparency in public systems (Fernández-Valleculas Marín, 2021). Marketing in the public sector represents an actively evolving multidisciplinary domain, and that relationship marketing is recognized as the main mechanism to cultivate trust (Matos et al., 2020).

One of the marketing strategies that can be applied in the public sector is Guerrilla Marketing. Guerrilla marketing is an unusual and unconventional marketing technique. The focus of this marketing technique is ideas and creativity in attracting customers and increasing product interest and brand awareness. This marketing technique can generate great attention from customers to the product (McNaughton, 2008). Guerrilla marketing does not depend on the amount of the marketing budget cost, but depends on creativity and imagination (Levinson, 2013) which is suitable for public organizations in general that often face with budget limitation issues.

The aim of this scientific article writing is to conduct a systematic review of the existing literatures on the practical application of guerrilla marketing in the public sector so that it can be used as a reference for stakeholders who want to study and/or to implement guerrilla marketing strategies in the public institutions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing is generally defined as a social and managerial process in which individuals or groups obtain what they need and want through the creation and exchange of value (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Initially, marketing focused on economic transactions

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between producers and consumers, but as the theory developed, the marketing orientation shifted from mere transactions to long-term relationships, the dominant logic of services, and the creation of shared value between providers and users of services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The principles of marketing applied in the private sector provide inspiration for the public sector in managing relationships with the community. However, the adaptation cannot be done directly due to differences in organizational goals, accountability mechanisms, and public service values. If the private sector pursues profitability, then the public sector is oriented towards creating public value and social welfare, so the marketing approach needs to be modified to be in line with the principles of good governance and the interests of the wider community.

Public sector marketing is defined as the use of marketing principles and techniques to improve the effectiveness of services, communication, and relationships with the community (Bueno & Pérez Jara, 2024). The application of marketing concepts in the public sector requires adaptation to complex bureaucratic and governance environments. Governments must balance the diverse needs of society, resource constraints, and political demands that often affect policy priorities (Santos, Ardigo, & Pacheco, 2025). Thus, marketing strategies in the public sector are not only oriented to service products, but also to the management of perceptions, relationships and trust between the government and the public. This approach is known as public relationship marketing, which emphasizes collaboration between government agencies, communities, and the private sector to create shared solutions (Arvidsson, Brighenti, & Grasso, 2024).

Guerrilla marketing was first introduced by Jay Conrad Levinson (1984) in his book *Guerrilla Marketing: Secrets for Making Big Profits from Your Small Business*. Guerrilla marketing is a non-conventional communication strategy that emphasizes creativity, surprise, and emotional impact to attract the attention of people with limited resources (Levinson, 1984). According to Levinson, guerrilla marketing emphasizes low-cost and high-impact strategies, which are using creative ideas to generate a large promotional impact without requiring a large budget like traditional campaigns. The main features of guerrilla marketing such as high creativity by utilizing unique and unexpected ideas, interactivity through direct customer involvement in the marketing experience, virality through the use of social media or word-of-mouth is designed in such a way that the message is easily spread and cost efficiency makes it suitable for organizations with limited budgets, including public institutions. Nuver in his study about Guerrilla marketing – structuring the manifestations and critical evaluation, stated that guerrilla marketing is a strategy involving unconventional marketing activities to achieve significant impact with minimal investment (G. Nufer, 2013)

In contrast to traditional marketing that relies on high-cost media, guerilla marketing focuses on using innovative ideas that can have a viral effect and increase public awareness quickly (Hutter & Hoffmann, 2011). Guerrilla marketing uses unconventional methods to achieve significant impact with minimal investment, leveraging digital tools like social media to complement traditional marketing strategies (G. Nufer, 2021). Guerrilla marketing significantly impacts customer behaviour, particularly through ambient and sensation marketing, affecting purchase intention and brand attitude (G. Nufer, 2013). This strategy not only increases public awareness and participation, but also builds a government image that is creative, innovative, and close to citizens. Thus, the application of guerrilla marketing in the public sector can potentially be an effective tool in promoting public values.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This article is a literature study using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The systematic literature review approach aims to identify, evaluate, and interpret research findings that are relevant to the topic or problem that the researcher focuses on (Kitchenham, 2004). Literature review sources were obtained from various scientific articles, journals, and research documents relevant to this research topic. The literature search process is carried out with the help of Publish or Perish (Pop) application, which allows authors to browse published literature in the expected time span, and then processed and analysed using the VosViewer application.

We use Web of Science (WoS) database to collect articles for observation. Additionally, we use the Publish or Perish (PoP) application to select and obtain statistical information on articles retrieved through Web of Science (WoS). After selecting the article database, we identified the keywords to be input into the PoP application, namely "guerrilla marketing" and "public sector". We limited the scope only to articles published between 2015 to 2025, with a maximum of 100 articles. Afterward, we conducted the screening process by reading abstraction and filtering literatures based on inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1).

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	
	1. The studies discuss about ideas relating to guerrilla marketing.
	2. The studies use empirical data.

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Exclusion Criteria	3. Publication type including only peer-reviewed articles.
	1. The type of data used in study journals is literature review.
	2. Studies not published in English.

Source: Authors (2025)

After the screening process, the data collected as the final sample was saved in RIS format for further processing using the VosViewer application. VosViewer application which has been widely used by previous scholars (Muhammad et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023) generates three types of output: (1) network visualization, which illustrates the relationship between keywords, (2) visual overlay, which depicts study trends, and (3) density visualization, which identifies keywords that have been less frequently studied (Sianipar et al., 2023).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The final sample generated through PoP application consisted of 39 articles (table 2). Among the 39 articles observed, the screening results revealed that the total number of terms/keywords that meet the minimum number of occurrences was 35, and total terms/keywords that are connected to each other and visualized was 35.

Table 2. Screening Results Using the PoP Application

No	Points	Explanation
1.	Observation Years (time span)	2015-2025
2.	Keywords	Guerrilla Marketing, Public Sector
3.	Data Source	Web of Science (WoS)
4.	Final Number of Sample	39 articles
5.	Total terms/keywords that meet the minimum number of occurrences	35
6.	Total terms/keywords that are connected to each other and visualized	35

Source: Authors (2025)

Analysis based on keywords - trending research topics

When seeking to understand a field of research, the characters and terminology involved must be identified. Figure 1 shows the keyword analysis of guerrilla marketing and public sector.

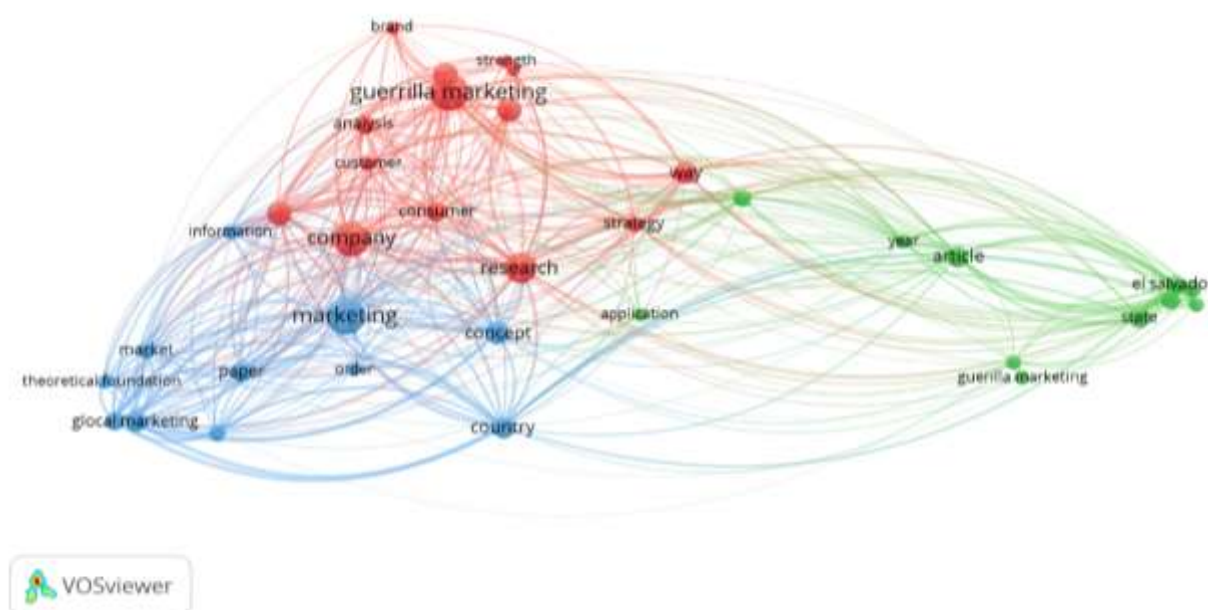


Figure 1. Keyword Network Visualization Map

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The figure displays a network visualization map of keywords related to the topics of guerrilla marketing and public sector, where "guerrilla marketing" is at the centre of the network, signifying its central role in related research. In network visualization, terms/keywords are represented by their labels and by default also by circles. The size of the label and the term/keyword circle is determined by the weight of the term/keyword. The higher the weight of a term/keyword, the larger the label and circle of the term/keyword. For some terms/keywords, labels may not be displayed. This is done to avoid overlapping labels. The color of a term/keyword is determined by the cluster where the term/keyword is located. The lines between the term/keyword represent the link. By default, at most +/-1000 lines are displayed, representing the 1000 strongest links between items. The distance between the two journals in the visualization more or less indicates the relevance of the journal in terms of co-citation links. In general, the closer two journals are located to each other, the stronger their linkage will be. The strongest co-citation links between journals are also represented by dashes.

According to keywords analysis shown in figure 1, we found the relationship between keywords, which were grouped into 3 clusters, including: (1) Cluster 1, consisting of 13 terms, which include: analysis, brand, consumer, customer, company, guerrilla marketing, marketing plan, product, research, service, strategy, strength and study. (2) Cluster 2, consisting of 10 terms, which include: agreement, application, article, El Salvador, guerrilla marketing, liberal peace, model, organization, state and violence. (3) Cluster 3, consisting of 11 keywords, which include: activity, concept, country, global marketing, information, market, marketing, mondelez international, order, paper and theoretical foundation. It also shows that the keyword "guerrilla marketing" is closely related to the following keywords such as company, brand, consumer, customer, research and strategy. This suggests that these keywords have emerged as major focus of scholars. However, it has shown no visualisation for keywords that associated with public sector. Therefore, future study on guerrilla marketing in the public sector can be a research topic to focus on.

Moreover, the results of the VosViewer processing also produced an output in the form of Density Visualization. Density visualization in this case describes the density of a term/keyword, as shown in Figure 2. Each point in the term/keyword density visualization has a color that indicates the term/keyword density at that point. By default, the color varies from blue to green to yellow. The more the number of terms/keywords around a point and the higher the weight of the neighboring term/keyword, the closer the color of the dot to yellow. Conversely, the fewer the number of terms/keywords around a point and the lower the weight of the neighboring term/keyword, the closer the color of the dot to blue.

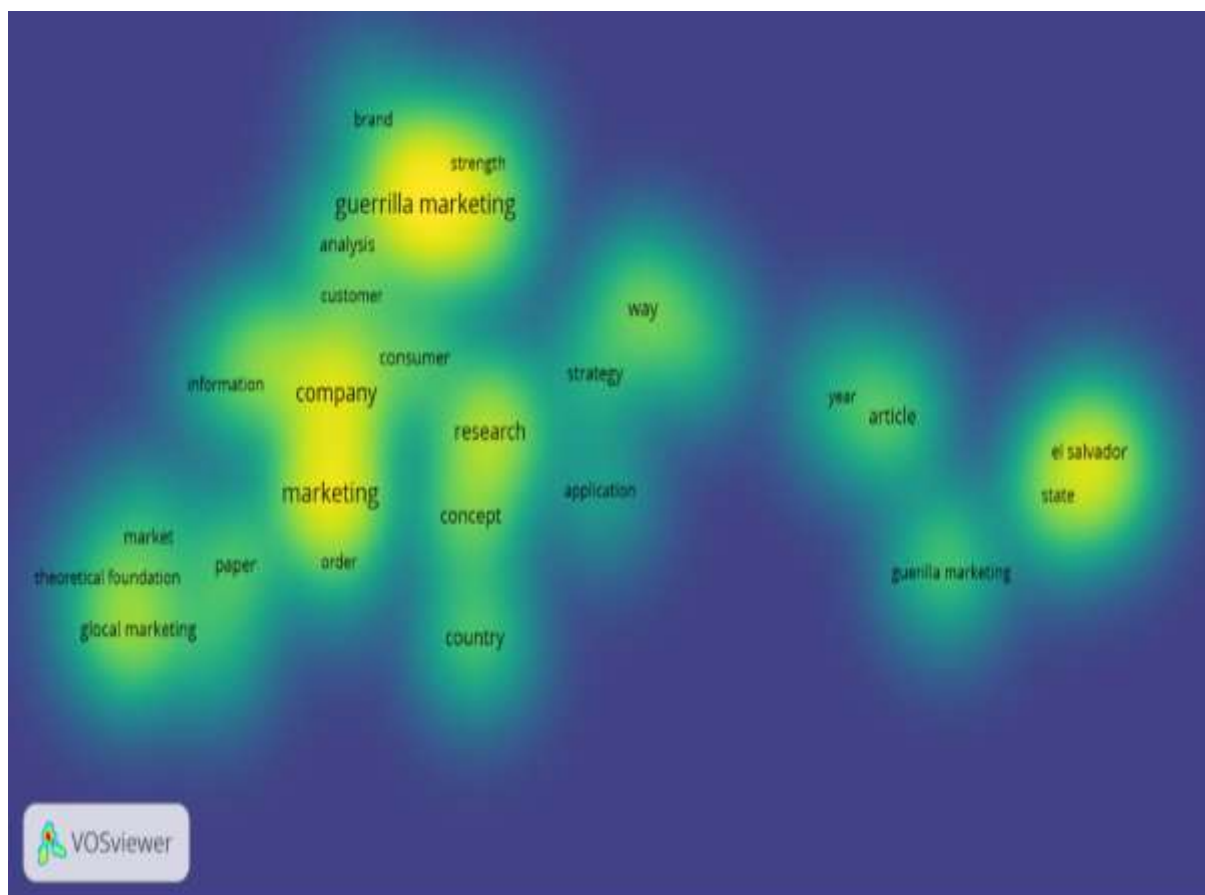


Figure 2. Density Visualization

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Density visualization as shown in figure 2, shows that the most frequently discussed keywords related to the subject of this study are marketing, guerrilla marketing and company. Meanwhile, certain keywords such as public sector are rarely mentioned which indicates that in the last decade empirical study about guerrilla marketing and its implementation in public sector hasn't been done as much. Therefore, in the future, scholars may consider exploring this area for further study.

Analysis based on publication year

The final output from VosViewer is Overlay Visualization as shown in figure 3, describes the average year of publication of the journal.

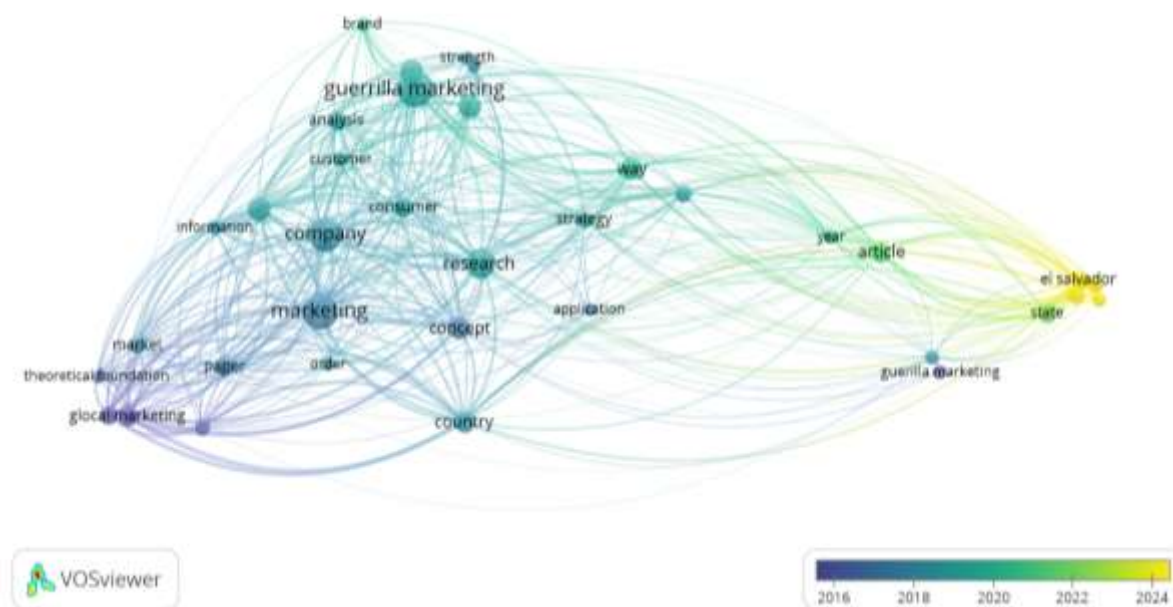


Figure 3. Overlay Visualization

The overlay visualization in this case describes the average number of articles published during the 2015-2025 period. Darker colors indicate an average longer year of publication. Lighter colors indicate the average year of the more recent publication. To see the novelty of research term/keywords, in the table below the term/keyword is sorted based on the average of the most recent publication year (avg. pub. year column), then sorted by term/keyword from the least discussed (occurrences column), then sorted by cluster (cluster column). The order that appears shows terms that have the opportunity to become a research theme that has not been widely researched.

Table 3. Term for Future Research

No	Keywords	Clusters	Occurrences	Avg. pub. Year
1	violence	2	6	2024
2	agreement	2	7	2024
3	el salvador	2	9	2024
4	liberal peace	2	10	2024
5	state	2	11	2022
6	article	2	12	2021
7	brand	1	5	2020
8	year	2	6	2020
9	study	1	15	2019
10	service	1	16	2019
11	guerrilla marketing	1	36	2019
12	customer	1	6	2019
13	analysis	1	10	2018
14	research	1	24	2018
15	consumer	1	11	2018
16	product	1	16	2018

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17	organization	2	8	2018
18	strategy	1	7	2018
19	information	3	6	2018
20	country	3	12	2018
21	marketing plan	1	5	2018
22	strength	1	5	2018
23	order	3	5	2018
24	company	1	32	2018
25	model	2	6	2018
26	market	3	7	2017
27	marketing	3	37	2017
28	paper	3	11	2017
29	concept	3	14	2017
30	application	2	5	2017
31	theoretical foundation	3	5	2016
32	activity	3	7	2016
33	guerilla marketing	2	6	2016
34	mondelez international	3	9	2016
35	global marketing	3	11	2016

Source: Authors (2025)

Based on the overlay visualization, the number of publications related to the topic discussed in this article has shown a declining trend. This indicates that despite the rapid evolution of marketing in the digital era and the rising necessity for public organizations to innovate in providing information and public services, interest in exploring guerrilla marketing and its potential application in the public sector has shown little corresponding growth.

V. CONCLUSION

Digital era has transformed the way of business owners promote their goods or services by utilizing internet and social media platforms. Guerrilla marketing has become more popular due to its innovative and creative perspectives in promotion activities, as well as its ability to reach wider customer with a low-cost approach. Empirical studies from the business sector demonstrate that guerrilla marketing can yield substantial gains in cost efficiency. The effectiveness of guerrilla marketing application on business brings this guerrilla marketing as an alternative of marketing strategy that can be used not only by the business owners, but also in different industrial sectors including the public sectors. This idea has become a driving factor for public sector organizations to implement guerrilla marketing in order to deliver information and public services more effectively and efficiently. However, there is a notable lack of empirical research assessing the effectiveness of guerrilla marketing in the context of public sector organizations. It is recommended for Scholars to focus on this topic in the future.

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