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Research Trends on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness: A Bibliometric Analysis Based on Scopus 2015–2025

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Abstract: This bibliometric analysis examines 716 Scopus publications (2015-2025) with VOSviewer and PRISMA guidelines to visualize the evolution of research on Corporate Social Responsibility-competitiveness. The resaults show a steady increase culminating in 2025, with China and European economies leading the way in geographically distributed, collaborative networks of top-cited sustainability and strategic management journals. Thematic development shows a clear shift from early concerns with stakeholder legitimacy toward performance integration and, more recently, strategic perspectives linking CSR to innovation, Environmental, Social, and Governance, and competitive advantage. Co-citation patterns further indicate the growing convergence of institutional theory, the resource-based view, sustainability science, and corporate finance within an increasingly strategy-oriented research field.

Keywords: Bibliometric ; Competitiveness ; Corporate Social Responsibility ; PRISMA ; VOSviewer .

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility has evolved from marginal charitable activity to a central strategic concern in recent decades. What were once discretionary social and environmental considerations have become prerequisites for competitive survival and long-term viability (Porter & Karmar, 2007). This all reflects fundamental changes which reshaping global business and how global markets function, As stakeholders expectations and demands sharpen, and the growing importance of reputation-based assets have reshaped both business practice and academic inquiry.

The research perspectives have therefore evolved: whereas the CSR was previously conceptualized primarily in terms of ethical obligation or cost, researchers are now examining the ways in which CSR makes a positive contribution to organizational resilience, innovation, and competitive positioning.

Although there is an increasing body of academic literature on CSR and competitiveness, the existing literature is highly dispersed across various fields of study, and there is a lack of understanding of the overall evolution and intellectual dynamics of the research field. In this

regard, this research uses the bibliometric method of analysis of Scopus-indexed publications from 2015 to 2025, in order to map the evolution of research and the underlying themes that define the subject. The Research Problematic is therefore:

How has the academic literature on corporate social responsibility and competitiveness developed during the period 2015–2025 ?

To Answer this Problematic, this study will answer the following sub- questions:

- ✓ RQ1: What are the main publication trends in CSR & competitiveness research during the period 2015–2025?
- ✓ RQ2: Which countries, authors, and journals have contributed most significantly to the development of this research field?
- ✓ RQ3: What are the dominant thematic clusters and how have they evolved over time?
- ✓ RQ4: To what extent has CSR research shifted toward innovation, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), and strategic competitiveness perspectives?

This paper is organized as follows: after the introduction there is Section 2 outlines the methodology, Section 3 presents the bibliometric findings, Section 4 offers the discussion and implications, and Section 5 concludes the study.

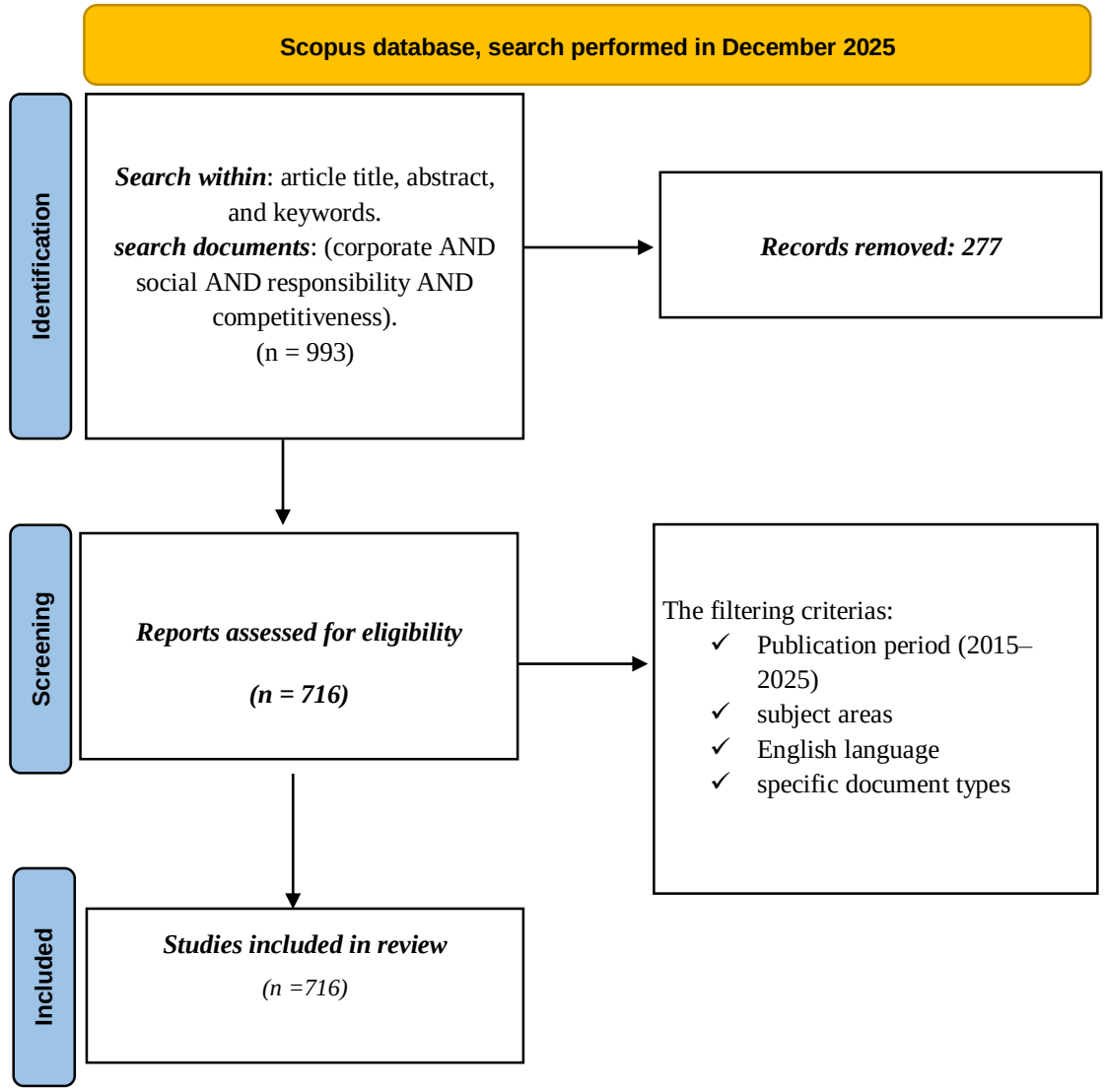
2. Materials and Methods

This bibliometric study analyzes Scopus publications database on CSR and competitiveness following PRISMA2020 guidelines and using VOSviewer for network visualization.

VOSviewer is a bibliometric tool designed for constructing and visualizing knowledge maps. It supports co-authorship, citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks across publications, journals, authors, and countries, while offering network, overlay, and density visualization modes for comprehensive research mapping.(Van Eck & Waltman, 2023, p : 3)

The PRISMA type 2020 flow diagram documents each filtering stage step by step, showing how studies were progressively selected. The figure below illustrates this selection process, demonstrating how the dataset was systematically narrowed from broad initial retrieval to a refined collection of relevant publications. (Page, *et al*., 2021)

Fig.(01): PRISMA flowchart



Source : by the auther based on (Page, *et al*., 2021)

The dataset was extracted from the Scopus database in December 2025 providing clear boundaries regarding data source and timeframe. The figure outlines three stages are :

Identification : This initial stage began with 993 extracting records through predefined keywords, aiming for broad inclusiveness rather than precision by gathering all potentially relevant publications.

Screening : This second stage including the publication period (2015–2025), subject areas, English language restriction, and specific document types, **277 records** were removed due to duplication and obvious irrelevance, **716 reports** remained for further assessment.

Inclusion : the inclusion stage resaulted in a final dataset of 716 articles, which constituted the corpus used for the subsequent bibliometric analysis.

The initial search resaulted in 993 documents. After applying the PRISMA screening and eligibility steps, and removing irrelevant or non-compliant records, a final sample of 716 publications was retained for the bibliometric analysis.

3. Resaults and Discussion

The following section presents bibliometric findings from the systematic analysis of

corporate social responsibility and competitiveness, These resaults deliver a holistic perspective on how the field has developed, its intellectual foundations, and evolving research area. More precisely, The examination focuses on publication trends, international research networks, prominent journals and authors, along with thematic shifts in core research areas over time. Combining bibliometric indicators with visual mapping techniques, the analysis yields an integrated perspective on the evolution and contemporary structure of research examining the relationships : CSR-competitiveness.

3.1 Main information about data

3.1.1 Annual scientific productivity

A cumulative rate curve has been used to illustrate the annual number of research papers that examine the relationship between corporate social responsibility and competitiveness during the period 2015–2025, resaults are illustrating in the figure below.

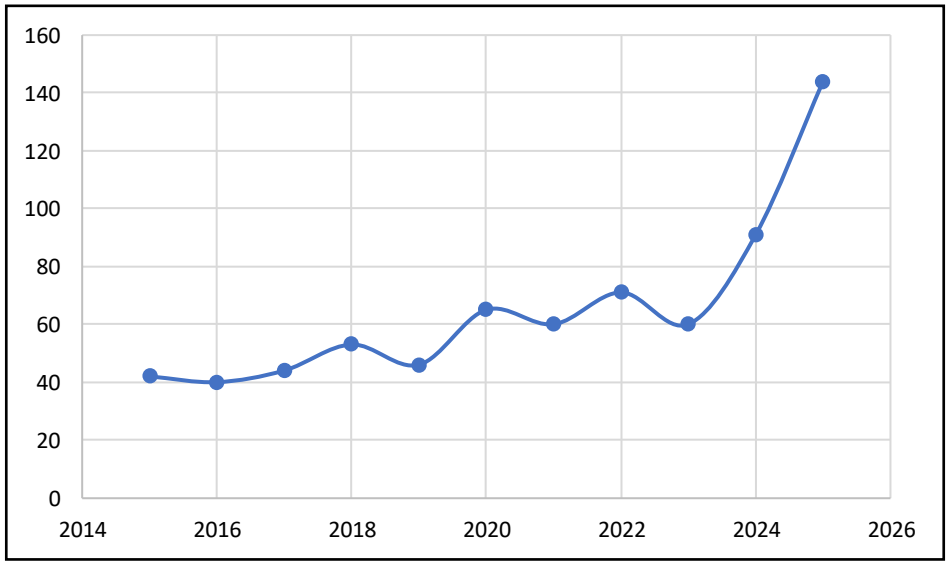


Fig.(02): Evolution of Research on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness (2015–2025)

The graph shows a generally increasing trend in the number of research paper, which about the relationship between corporate social responsibility and competitiveness among the first two years « 2015 and 2017 ».

The next periode during « 2019–2022 » a noticeable growth From the end of 2018 can be observed, with some fluctuations (ups and downs) during that periode, These variations indicate that although interest kept growing, shifting economic and institutional conditions influenced research output.

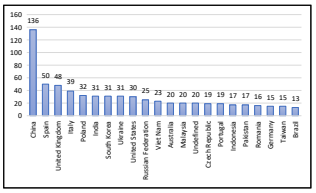
after 2023 the graph reaching its highest level of papers productivity in 2025, This significant growth demonstrates how corporate social responsibility has gained recognition as an effective strategic tool for strengthening competitiveness.

The overview of the graph confirms that the relationship CSR–competitiveness has become an crucial topic in management and economic research.

3.1.2 Distribution of countries' collaboration

The figure below presents Analyzing research output by country by showing the top countries in terms of the number of published papers related to the relationship between corporate social responsibility and competitiveness from the Scopus database.

Fig.(03): Top Contributing Countries in Research on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness



The findings show a clear leadership of China's productivity in the topic of relashionship of corporate social responsibility and competitiveness with the highest number, which signals increasing scholarly and policy focus on CSR in fast-growing, competitive economies.

In European countries Spain and the United Kingdom after Chinaindicating secound level of research, Italy and Poland show a notable contributions.

Other countries, like India, South Korea, Ukraine, and the United States, show moderate consistent research presence productovity reflecting the subject's resonance in both established and developing economies. also the shown results presents even that the countries that have lower publication numbers, their presence among leading contributors signals broad but growing international interest in relationship between CSR and competitiveness.

The superior research productivity of China can be explained by the country's fast economic growth, globalization process, and the increasing understanding of the significance of CSR as a factor that drives competitive advantage. Since Chinese companies have come under international pressure, CSR has become an important topic in both practical management and scientific research. It confirms the theory according to which CSR can help gain competitive advantage if it is properly integrated into business strategy (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

In a similar way, the significant contributions from European nations like Spain, UK, and Italy may be attributed to the historical institutionalization of sustainability and business ethics within Europe. Policy measures undertaken by European institutions have helped businesses adopt social responsibilities within their practices and created an environment conducive to studying their impact on competitiveness. The resaults are aligned with the theory of Creating Shared Value, which stresses the importance of social responsibility in achieving economic success and competitiveness (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

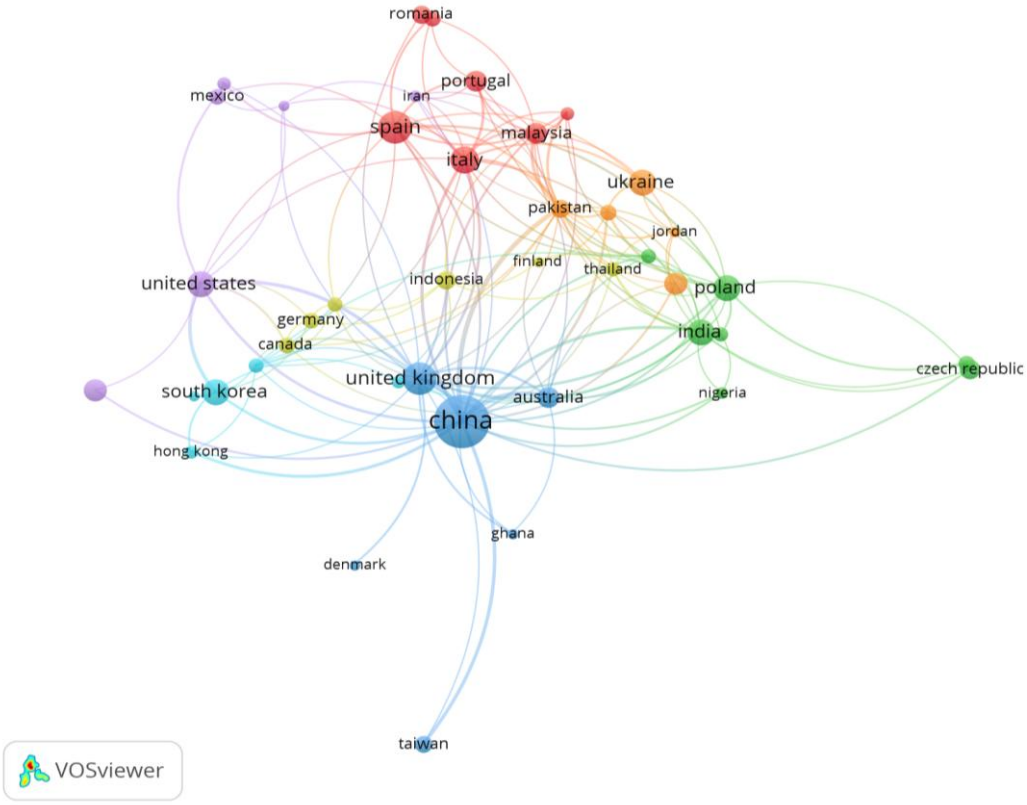
The overview of the Distribution of countries' confirms that research on CSR and competitiveness is geographically diverse, reflecting different institutional, economic, and cultural research contexts.

3.1.3 Country co-authorship

To identifying the most productive countries, Country co-authorship network in CSR

research illustrating international collaboration patterns. Node size represents publication output, while connecting lines indicate collaboration intensity between nations.

Fig.(04): International Research Collaboration Network on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness



The figure displays a country co-authorship network in corporate social responsibility research. Each node represents a country, while the links indicate collaborative relationships based on co-authored publications. The size of the nodes reflects the scientific productivity and collaboration intensity of each country, whereas the thickness of the connecting lines represents the strength of their cooperative ties.

The network reveals a highly interconnected global research structure, with several central hubs playing dominant roles in international collaboration. Large nodes indicate leading contributors that maintain extensive partnerships with both developed and emerging economies. The presence of multiple clusters suggests regional collaboration patterns, where geographically or economically related countries tend to cooperate more frequently.

Additionally, the visualization highlights the growing participation of emerging economies in CSR research, demonstrating a shift toward more globally distributed knowledge production.

Overall, the map reflects an increasingly internationalized research field characterized by strong cross-regional collaboration and knowledge exchange.

3.1.4 Sources of Scientific Production

The table below presents the TOP 5 academic journals that publish research about corporate social responsibility. and It shows the number of publications, citations, CiteScore, and the most cited articles in each journal.

Table(1) : TOP 5 Journals Publishing Research on Corporate Social Responsibility

Journl	N°	Tp	Tc	Cite score	The most cited article	Time cited	Publisher
Sustainability (Switzerland)	67	58 414	450 030	7.7	Recent Advances in the Remediation of Textile-Dye-Containing Wastewater: Prioritizing Human Health and Sustainable Wastewater Treatment	289	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI)
CSR, Sustainability, Ethics and Governance	19	505	492	0.9	Talent Management Facilitates Net-Zero Transition Through Employee Green Behavior	29	Springer Nature
Journal of Cleaner Production	15	332335	16287	20.7	Green and low-carbon matrices for Engineered/Strain-Hardening Cementitious Composites (ECC/SHCC): Toward sustainable and resilient infrastructure	82	Elsevier
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	14	12692	665	14.7	Addressing Sustainability Footprint Disclosure for High Pollutant Firms in China and the US: The Roles of Firms Governance Structure, Financing Decisions, and Eco-Technology	39	John Wiley & Sons
Business Strategy and the Environment	12	34345	1497	22.9	A PRISMA-Based Systematic Review on Economic, Social, and Governance Practices: Insights and Research Agenda	31	John Wiley & Sons

Source: by the author based on Scopus

The table shows that *Sustainability (Switzerland)* is the most productive journal, with 67 published papers related to the main topics *of Corporate Social Responsibility*, this journal also achieves a very high number of citations, which indicats its strong academic presence and multidisciplinary coverage. The most cited article in this journal is about « sustainable wastewater treatment, indicating the strong link between CSR and environmental issues ».

With a high CiteScore (20.7), the table's results show The Journal of Cleaner Production exceptionally reflecting a strong academic impact even if with a smaller number of publishing articles,This indicates that papers appearing in this journal tend to be highly influential and are frequently cited within the academic community.

The journal of *Business Strategy and the Environment* reaches the highest CiteScore (22.9) comparing to the other journals dispite it publishes a limited number of papers, By concentrating on strategic and governance aspects of sustainability gives it significant academic impact.

These two journals « Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management & CSR, Sustainability, Ethics and Governance » are playing a very important role in the development of this topic.

The most cited articles in these journals include governance frameworks, such as tackle governance structures, environmental disclosure, and green workplace behaviors, which demonstrate the scope and dynamic development of the topic of CSR.

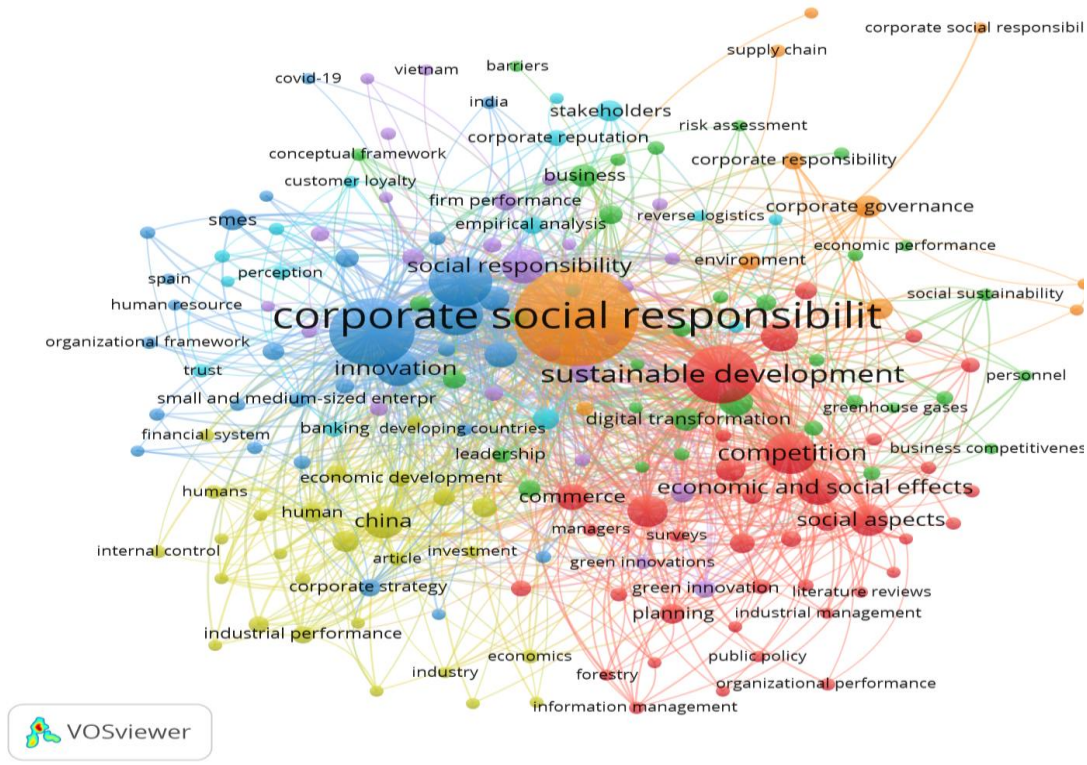
The results of the table In general show that the topic of corporate social responsibility is published in high-impact journals and focuses on sustainability, environmental management, and strategic business practices.

3.2 Thematic Structure of CSR–Competitiveness Research

3.2.1 Overlay Visualization Network

The figure bellow presents an overlay visualization mapping the keyword co-occurrence network of research on corporate social responsibility and competitiveness. The map illustrates how the main keywords related to corporate social responsibility and competitiveness are interconnected and assigns colors to items based on their scores. The size of the nodes reflects the importance of the keywords, while the links indicate the strength of the relationships between them.

Fig.(05): Overlay Visualization Network of Research on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness



The visualization shows corporate social responsibility as the largest and most central node, reflecting its dominant frequency and robust co-occurrence patterns throughout the field. Other prominent nodes « sustainable development, innovation, and competition » similarly indicate high relevance and deep integration within CSR academic researchs.

Blue clusters typically indicate earlier or foundational themes, featuring keywords like SMEs, customer loyalty, trust, organizational framework, and human resources. These topics reveal CSR research's initial emphasis on organizational behavior and firm-level management concerns.

The green nodes signal themes experiencing steady growth—business, firm performance, stakeholders, economic performance, and environment. Their moderate scores point to enduring importance in establishing connections between CSR and both organizational

effectiveness and sustainability performance.

Yellow-colored items represent the most recent or high-scoring research directions, including economic development, corporate strategy, industrial performance, investment, and China. These themes reflect an increasing shift toward macroeconomic, strategic, and regional perspectives in CSR research.

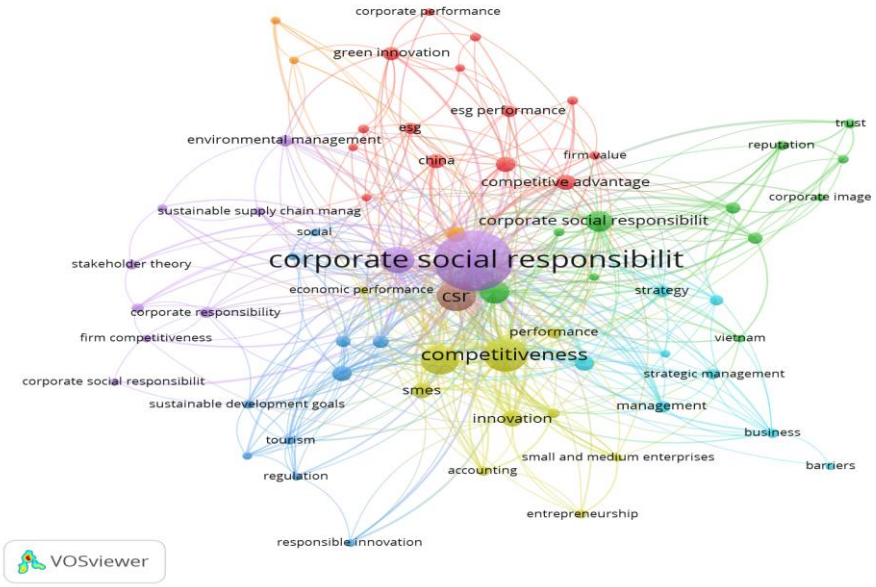
Additionally, the size of nodes offers important interpretive insight. While the larger circles reveal keywords with high frequency and strong co-occurrence, establishing them as foundational concepts, the smaller nodes point to specialized or nascent subtopics garnering limited though growing research attention.

Overall, the overlay visualization shows a clear evolution in CSR research from corporate-level social and organizational concerns toward broader sustainability, competitiveness, and economic impact dimensions. Moreover It shows that the relationship between corporate social responsibility and competitiveness has been studied through economic, social, strategic, and environmental perspectives, confirming the richness and diversity of this topic.

3.2.2 Extended Keyword Co-occurrence Network on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness

This figure shows an advanced Keyword co-occurrence network in corporate social responsibility and competitiveness

Fig.(06): advanced Keyword co-occurrence network



The visualization reveals corporate social responsibility occupying a central position, as shown by its large node and numerous connections to related concepts. This central location confirms that CSR provides the theoretical and empirical foundation forming how the field's literature is structured.

Another significant node, competitiveness, it’s appear strongly interconnected with performance, innovation, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and strategic management. increasingly view it less as a moral imperative and more as a strategic asset for enhancing performance and competitive advantage.

The strategic and managerial perspective shapes another prominent cluster, including keywords like strategy, management, and business. A further cluster highlights environmental and sustainability-oriented themes, characterized by environmental

management, green innovation, ESG performance, and sustainable supply chain management. a fourth cluster centers on economic and organizational outcomes, featuring keywords like economic performance, firm value, and corporate performance.

The presence of keywords such as reputation, customer loyalty, and firm performance highlights the growing interest in market-based outcomes of CSR. These papers confirme the role of CSR in improving firms' image and strengthening relationships with stakeholders.

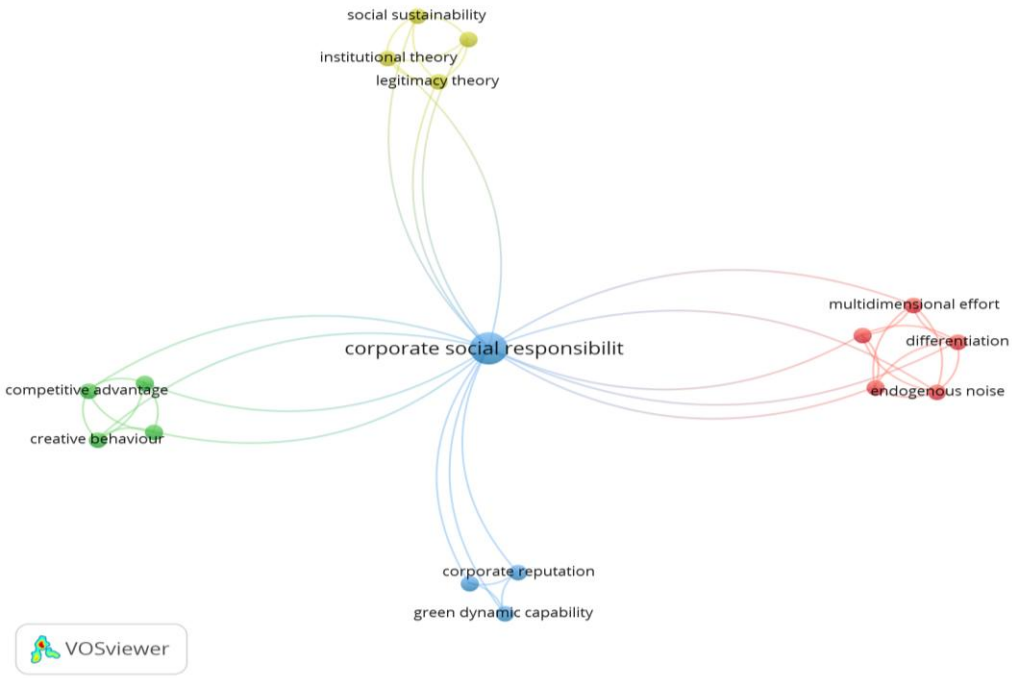
The network findings collectively illustrate an important shift in CSR research, from viewing CSR primarily as a normative obligation to recognizing it as a strategic mechanism for enhancing competitiveness and supporting long-term value creation.

Difference Between This Map and the Previous One: while the previous map presents the foundational structure of CSR and competitiveness research, this map reflects the maturation of the field and its expansion toward innovation, performance measurement, and strategic management perspectives.

3.2.1 Keyword Co-occurrence

Co-citation analysis was applied to identify the intellectual foundations, through examination of journals that appear together frequently or cited in reference lists.

Fig.(07): A Keyword Co-occurrence Network Analysis



The co-occurrence map places CSR at the network's center, surrounded by four interrelated clusters showing main research directions.

The first cluster centers on CSR's theoretical foundations (institutional theory, legitimacy theory, social sustainability), this emphasizes CSR's role in gaining societal legitimacy.

The second cluster brings together the strategic and performance-oriented perspective then linking CSR with corporate reputation and green dynamic capabilities. This reflects a growing academicly focus on CSR as a resource-based and capability-driven mechanism that enhances organizational adaptability and long-term value creation.

The third cluster focuses on competitive advantage and linking with both CSR and creative behavior, This reflects emerging research viewing CSR as a strategic driver of innovation, differentiation, and market positioning.

In contrast, the cluster containing terms such as *multidimensional effort*, *differentiation*, and *endogenous noise* the fourth cluster reflects a more methodological orientation, This reflects growing methodological sophistication in measuring and modeling complex CSR-competitiveness relationships.

Taken together, the map highlights CSR as a multidimensional strategic asset that combines strategic, theoretical, reputational, and methodological dimensions.

3.3 Influential Authors and Highly Cited Publications

3.3.1 Influential Authors

The table presents the most influential authors identified through VOSviewer analysis based on thier publications, citations, and collaboration strength.

Table(2) : Leading Authors in the Literature on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness

Author	Number of Documents	Number of Citations	Total Link Strength
Gallardo-Vázquez, Dolores Amalia	6	146	4
Sánchez-Hernández, M. Isabel	8	133	4
Lu, J. T.	4	162	3
Stremikis, Justas	4	187	3
Popescu, Cristina Raluca Gh.	4	257	0

Source : based on VOSviewer

Overall, the table's findings show that academic influence in this field depends not only on productivity but also on citation impact and collaborative engagement.

- Sánchez-Hernández and Gallardo-Vázquez lead in publication output with strong collaborative networks, as indicated by their high total link strength.
- Popescu, Cristina Raluca Gh. has fewer publications, she holds the highest citation count, indicating strong academic impact despite weaker co-authorship network connections.
- Authors such as Lu, J. T. and Stremikis, Justas also show notable citation indicating that their contributions are recognized and relevant within research area.

This confirms the diversity of impactful contributions in research connecting corporate social responsibility to competitiveness.

3.3.2 Highly Cited Publications

this table presents the TOP 10 highly cited research articles about the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and competitiveness

Table(3) : TOP 10 highly cited Articles on Corporate Social Responsibility and Competitiveness

Document title	Authors	Source	Year	Citations
A literature review and perspectives in reverse logistics	Agrawal, S., Singh, R.K., Murtaza, Q.	Resources Conservation and Recycling, 97, pp. 76–92	2015	471
The Effect of Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility on Environmental Performance and Business Competitiveness: The Mediation of Green Information	Chuang, S.-P., Huang, S.-J.	Journal of Business Ethics, 150(4), pp. 991–1009	2018	408

Technology Capital				
Corporate survival in Industry 4.0 era: the enabling role of lean-digitized manufacturing	Ghobakhloo, M., Fathi, M.	Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management, 31(1), pp. 1–30	2020	384
Does corporate environmental responsibility engagement affect firm value? The mediating role of corporate innovation	Li, Z., Liao, G., Albitar, K.	Business Strategy and the Environment, 29(3), pp. 1045–1055	2020	378
Competing for government procurement contracts: The role of corporate social responsibility	Flammer, C.	Strategic Management Journal, 39(5), pp. 1299–1324	2018	338
Carbon emission reduction: The impact on the financial and operational performance of international companies	Gallego-Álvarez, I., Segura, L., Martínez-Ferrero, J.	Journal of Cleaner Production, 103, pp. 149–160	2015	260
How do corporate social responsibility and green innovation transform corporate green strategy into sustainable firm performance ?	Le, T.T.	Journal of Cleaner Production, 362.	2022	258
Exploring the relationship between corporate social responsibility and firm innovation	Luo, X., Du, S.	Marketing Letters, 26(4), pp. 703–714	2015	255
Corporate social responsibility, green innovation and competitiveness – causality in manufacturing	Padilla-Lozano, C.P., Collazzo, P.	Competitiveness Review, 32(7), pp. 21–39	2022	220
How do corporate environmental policy and corporate reputation affect risk-adjusted financial performance ?	Gangi, F., Daniele, L.M., Varrone, N.	Business Strategy and the Environment, 29(5), pp. 1975–1991	2020	206

Source: Scopus

The results from the pervious table show that a limited number of articles have played a **central role** in developing the CSR–competitiveness literature. The most cited article is *Agrawal et al. (2015) is* focusing on the early importance of sustainability-related operational practices in competitive strategy.

many highly cited papers like *Chuang and Huang (2018)* and *Li et al. (2020)*, underscore the mediating role of innovation, green and technological innovation in particular is strengthening the link between CSR and competitiveness. This points out that CSR practices are increasingly became a strategic resource not only an ethical obligation.

Moreover, journals such as *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, and *Journal of Cleaner Production* are frequently observed, reflecting their significant impact on CSR-related topics, and environmental responsibility, and corporate performance. The prevalence of highly cited post-2020 articles also indicates rising academic interest in CSR within the contexts of industry 4.0, green strategy, and sustainable competitiveness.

in sum, the table demonstrates that impactful research in this topic mainly connects CSR with innovation, environmental performance, and long-term competitive advantage, forming

the intellectual backbone of recent CSR and competitiveness studies.

3.3.3 Co-citation map of Key Authors and Journals related to CSR and Competitiveness Research

This figure displays a co-citation map of relationships among key authors and journals in CSR and competitiveness, this leads to identify the intellectual structure of the main topic.

Fig.(08): co-citation map

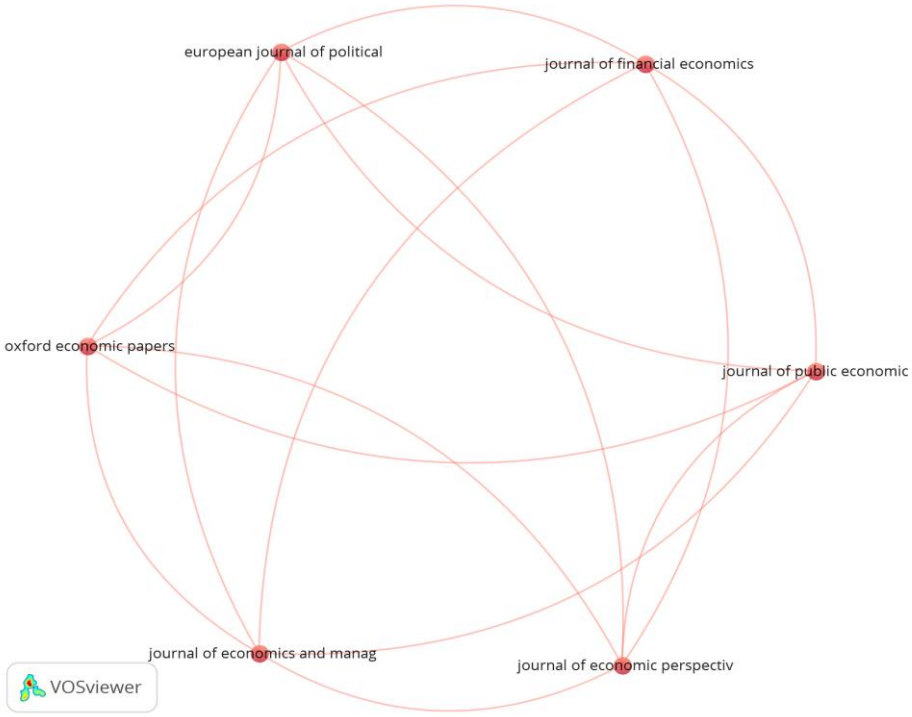


The co-citation map reveals strong intellectual connections between two primary research streams: one examining CSR's economic and financial impacts, the other emphasizing sustainability and management dimensions, the other emphasizing sustainability and management dimensions,This connectivity reflects the progressive convergence of performance-oriented and sustainability-focused concerns in recent academic research. The structure reveals that CSR-competitiveness research builds on integrated foundations across corporate finance, sustainability, and strategic management, reflecting its multidisciplinary nature and CSR's role in sustaining and long-term competitive advantage.

3.3.4 Co-citation Network of Core Academic Journals

Co-citation analysis was applied to identify the intellectual foundations, through examination of journals that appear together frequently or cited in reference lists.

Fig.(09): *Co-citation network of leading academic journals in the field.*



This figure displays a journal co-citation network revealing the intellectual underpinnings of corporate social responsibility research.

Individual journals appear as nodes with links indicating co-citation patterns that reveal the intensity of academicly connections between publications, The network reveals strong integration, characterized by a central grouping of influential economic and policy journals that underscore their pivotal role in shaping the main topic.

The overview of this map shows CSR research resting on firm economic theoretical ground while leveraging complementary insights from finance, public economics, and political economy.

4. Conclusion

The bibliometric study of 716 Scopus-indexed publications (2015-2025) offers a broad perspective on the structural development, intellectual roots, and futurs trends of research studies connecting corporate social responsibility (CSR) and competitiveness.

Sustained Growth and Field Consolidation (RQ1)

The annual average rate of publication output shows steady growth, with a certain stability from 2015 to 2017 and a drastic acceleration thereafter, briefly interrupted by the global pandemic, culminating in 2025. This trend not only shows the maturity and relevance of the subject area but also shows a paradigm shift in the understanding of the concept, as CSR is no longer considered a moral imperative but a resource for resilience and innovation.

Geographical Distribution and International Collaboration (RQ2)

Analysis of the geographical distribution shows that China is the leading contributor, followed by Spain, the UK, and other European countries, then Asian, and North American countries. The co-authorship network shows a highly interconnected global pattern with key collaboration points, regional clusters, and growing participation from emerging economies, thus confirming CSR competitiveness research as an internationalized and collaborative area of research.

Core Publication Outlets and Intellectual Influence (RQ2)

The literature is dominated by high-impact journals on sustainability and strategic management, and the vast majority of cited sources have established a relationship between CSR and innovation, the environment, and sustainable competitive advantage, thus verifying the relationships as the basis of this intellectual field.

Thematic Evolution and Conceptual Shift (RQ3 & RQ4)

Keyword co-occurrence and overlay analyses show different thematic developments in the three phases. The initial studies (blue clusters) focused on company-level and stakeholder issues – SMEs, customer loyalty, trust, and organizational management – indicating a focus on legitimacy. The second phase (green) covered performance issues, connecting CSR with company performance, economic, and environmental outcomes, indicating a focus on performance. The latest studies (yellow) focus on strategic and macroeconomic themes – corporate strategy, industrial performance, investment, economic development, and ESG frameworks – suggesting the evolution of the field to consider CSR as a part of companies' competitive performance.

Cluster Structure of the Knowledge Base

There are four intellectual clusters that define the literature: (1) Theoretical foundations based on institutional and legitimacy theories that conceptualize CSR as a legitimacy-building process; (2) Strategic capabilities that link CSR to resource-based theories and dynamic capabilities for competitive advantage; (3) Innovation pathways that link CSR to green innovation, ESG performance, and sustainable supply chains; and (4) Methodological advances that indicate increasing sophistication in modeling CSR-performance relationships.

These four intellectual clusters illustrate the evolution of the literature from a normative orientation to a more integrated strategic perspective.

Influential Authors and Knowledge Leadership

Author-level analysis shows that there are several different routes to scholarly impact. Sánchez-Hernández and Gallardo-Vázquez illustrate the role of high productivity and strong collaborative networks, while Popescu shows the greatest citation impact with less integration with networks. Authors such as Lu and Stremikis carry out highly cited research that explores the relationship between CSR, innovation, and competitiveness. This suggests that the development of the field is the result of both strongly networked collaborative groups and individual scholarly impact working in a more autonomous fashion.

Analysis over the period 2015-2025 indicates important field-level transformation in a variety of ways. Research output has grown considerably in scope, with a corresponding shift towards a more global and collaborative approach. Knowledge dissemination is concentrated in the top sustainability and strategic management journals, with a shift in thematic emphasis from stakeholder legitimacy issues towards innovation-based, ESG-integrated competitive structures. Most significantly, CSR has emerged to be reframed from a compliance requirement to a strategic resource. Collectively, these trends suggest that the literature has matured from a range of disciplinary-level conversations to a cohesive, strategically oriented field characterized by a high degree of methodological sophistication. The role of CSR in competitiveness has ceased to be conceptualized in terms of a trade-off and has emerged to be conceptualized as a synergistic process.

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Gangi, F., Daniele, L.M., & Varrone, N. (2020). How do corporate environmental policy and corporate reputation affect risk-adjusted financial performance? Business Strategy and the Environment, 29(5), 1975–1991.

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