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Corporate Social Responsibility Research in India: A Bibliometric Review

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Abstract

The primary objective of the present study is to examine the changing landscape of Corporate Social Responsibility scholarship using bibliometric methods and network visualization techniques through VOSviewer. By assessing different subject categories, the paper maps the existing body of CSR literature and pinpoints emerging themes shaping the field. It further adopts a scientific analytical approach to trace the development of central research topics and influential contributions within CSR studies.

The analysis yields meaningful insights by reviewing publication patterns, collaboration structures among authors, journal-wise contributions, keyword co-occurrence patterns, and major CSR works relevant to the Indian scenario. The results also show a noticeable rise in CSR-focused research in India, reflected in the growing number of publications, increased author participation, and higher citation metrics. In addition, the study identifies frequently recurring keywords such as corporate social responsibility, sustainability, mandatory disclosure, and business performance.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Bibliometric, vosviewer, India, review paper, CSR

Introduction

The idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be traced back to the 1930s, when it was framed as the “social responsibility of business.” During this period, companies voluntarily adopted such practices as a way to bring a more humane and ethical dimension to business operations (Skandera et al., 2026). Currently, numerous nations have institutionalized their social responsibilities as "corporate social responsibility" to ensure that this project is mutually beneficial. This also applies to organisations in emerging nations, with Indian organisations leading the way in terms of their innovative CSR activities. India was one of the first nations to introduce legislative regulations in accordance with CSR standards in 2014. Yet stakeholder participation continues to be an obstacle, and a comprehensive adoption of CSR across government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and enterprises is exceptional.

CSR refers to the tendency of an organisation to improve social and environmental welfare by purposefully allocating its resources and investments (John et al., 2026). Scholars in management have shown that CSR initiatives can be highly beneficial for firms, as they contribute to improved business outcomes (Hristov et al., 2022). By strengthening the reputation of a firm, CSR also influences consumer choices in favour of the company’s products and services (Du et al., 2010). Broadly described as “context-specific organisational actions and policies that reflect stakeholder expectations and the

triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance", CSR has increasingly been adopted as a strategic means for gaining competitive advantage and achieving business growth (Chen et al., 2023).

For many years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) was largely viewed as a voluntary undertaking by businesses (Sheehy, 2015). This understanding began to shift when countries such as Indonesia, France, Denmark, and India introduced legal mandates that challenged the idea of CSR as purely discretionary (Jamali et al., 2017). In India, this shift became formalised with the Companies Act of 2013, which made CSR spending and reporting obligatory for certain categories of firms, thereby promoting more standardised corporate practices (Dhanesh, 2015). Before this legislation, CSR activities in India were mostly philanthropic in nature and deeply rooted in cultural norms and social traditions(Panwar et al., 2023).

Studies reveal that much of the CSR work carried out by Indian companies consisted of one-time contributions- such as donating old computers, offering scholarships, supporting infrastructure projects, or providing financial aid—often directed by top management with minimal stakeholder participation (Hadfield-Hill, 2014). Even initiatives aimed at community development lacked adequate research foundations and long-term planning. Furthermore, only eight of the seventeen companies in her sample published CSR reports, and that many firms primarily used CSR for brand-building purposes(Matten & Moon, 2008). The majority of CSR studies in India are associated with sustainability (Chatterjee et al., 2023), sustainable development (Gautam et al., 2023), company value (Panwar et al., 2023), employee engagement (Jha, 2023), brand loyalty (Chakraborty & Das, 2022),innovation(Wu et al., 2018), customer citizenship behaviour (Fatma M et al.,2022), corporate reputation and firm performance (Wu et al., 2018).

Drawing on bibliometric indicators and visualisation tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny, this study aims to present a concise overview of the current landscape of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) research in India by analysing Scopus-indexed publications. Scopus was chosen as the primary source because it offers broader thematic coverage than the Web of Science and includes many areas that remain underexplored (Derviş, 2020). Its extensive database allows researchers to trace trends in annual publication output, identify leading authors and journals, examine keyword networks, and highlight influential studies that have shaped the field.

The goal of this review is to integrate the dispersed strands of CSR scholarship in India and provide a consolidated understanding of its progression. To achieve this, the study examines 870 research documents published between 2013 and 2025 —a period selected due to the richness and relevance of available data. This analysis not only maps the growth of CSR research in India but also identifies gaps and emerging opportunities for future inquiry. To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive bibliometric assessment of CSR-related research in the Indian context, offering a strong platform for subsequent academic work. Accordingly, the following research questions are explored:

RQ1: What are the current publication trends in CSR research in India?

RQ2: Which articles have been the most influential in shaping CSR research in India?

RQ3: What are the key subject areas, leading journals, prominent authors, and patterns of collaboration within CSR research in India?

RQ4: Which CSR-related themes are most dominant and emerging in academic research?

RQ5: What future research directions and opportunities are likely to shape CSR scholarship in India?

The purpose of these research questions is to develop a meaningful reference point for scholars and practitioners engaged in CSR research within the Indian context. This study also contributes to methodological guidance by outlining structured recommendations for conducting bibliometric analyses that can support future investigations. Moreover, by highlighting core research issues, the review can assist other researchers working across related domains, inspire new lines of inquiry, and provide a clearer conceptual outlook.

A systematic approach was adopted for this review, as it is particularly suitable for synthesising an entire research area by identifying all relevant empirical studies that meet predefined inclusion criteria to answer a specific research question (Donthu et al., 2021). The selected literature was then examined and integrated using bibliometric methods. These techniques enable the quantitative assessment of published research outputs

The following constitutes the remainder of this paper: In Section 2, the theoretical background is presented. Part 3 describes the methodology of the research. Part 4 develops the results of the bibliometric analysis. Sections 5 and 6 comprise the discussion, practical and theoretical insights, and conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is widely described in the literature as a set of social and environmental initiatives carried out by companies to support the welfare of the community (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). It embodies the expectations of stakeholders and signifies an organisation's commitment to fostering sustainable and long-term development.CSR disclosure is therefore defined as "the process of disclosing the social and environmental repercussions of an organization's economic actions to specific interest groups within society and society in general" (Vilanova et al., 2009). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) research has grown over time, notably in past few years. Moreover, there is a comparable increase in the number of CSR-related journals and the number of professors who study the subject.

Carroll's (1991)) four-dimensional framework explains CSR as comprising economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Building on this, Visser (2011) argue that a socially responsible organisation aims to generate profit through sustainable practices, comply with legal requirements, uphold ethical standards, and actively contribute to societal well-being. McWilliams & Siegel (2001) further highlights a range of CSR activities that encourage firms to act in ways that benefit the community and move beyond narrow self-interest actions that, in turn, enhance shareholder value. As Morsing (2008) notes, communicating CSR effectively remains a significant challenge for organisations.

CSR is deeply rooted in stakeholder theory. Following the Brundtland Report, Freeman (1999) introduced the stakeholder concept, which has since become one of the foundational and widely applied theories in CSR research. He defined stakeholders as individuals or groups "who can affect or are affected by the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). The theory emphasises that stakeholders are entitled to participate in organisational processes because they hold a legitimate interest in the organisation, rather than being treated merely as instruments for achieving corporate goals. Aras & Crowther (2009) further advanced CSR scholarship by proposing models centered on sustainability. They argue that many sustainability assessments fall short because they overlook financial performance, which is an essential component of achieving true sustainability. Later, Schwartz and Carroll introduced their three-domain CSR model in 2003. Using a Venn diagram framework, they argued that the

economic, legal, and ethical components of CSR hold equal significance and that no single domain is inherently more important or relevant than the others (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003).

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility and India

India is recognised globally as a rising power, marked by its cultural diversity and dynamic socio-economic landscape (Khandelwal & Bakshi, 2014). It is also among the fastest-expanding economies, recording an average annual growth rate of 6.15 percent. As the country progresses, there has been a growing emphasis on socially responsible business conduct rather than purely profit-oriented initiatives, an approach that remains challenging in a developing market environment (Hadfield-Hill, 2014).

Since April 1, 2014, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has implemented the Companies Act, 2013 along with the CSR Policy Rules, making India one of the first countries to legally mandate CSR participation. CSR practices in India follow a multi-dimensional approach inspired by various business traditions. These practices operate under four guiding models—the ethical, statistical, liberal, and stakeholder models—each addressing different organisational and environmental considerations (Bihari & Shajahan, 2023) . Under this legal framework, companies that meet specific thresholds are required to allocate 2 percent of their profits toward socially beneficial activities (Paltasingh & Satapathy, 2026). This mandate applies to firms with revenues above US$200 million or profits exceeding US$1 million, and such firms must establish a two-member CSR committee responsible for deciding project-related expenditures. Importantly, employee-related costs cannot be counted as CSR spending, and penalties exist for non-compliance(Sharma et al., 2026).

India's legally structured approach to CSR serves as a model for other countries seeking to create mechanisms that encourage businesses to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy. Such a framework can help companies understand the cultural and social importance of giving back, while simultaneously fostering economic development and enhancing corporate success (G. Rajan, 2024). Despite these advancements, CSR remains only partially embedded in business strategies in India (Gangopadhyay & Homroy, 2023). Often, CSR tasks are outsourced to contractual staff on minimal wages, and many firms engage in selective CSR that prioritises brand-building over genuine societal benefit.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methods

Bibliometric analysis serves as a statistical approach for measuring and evaluating academic publications (Hassan & Duarte, 2024). (Ellegaard, 2018) describes it as an integration of statistical methods and textual analysis, producing results through the use of interconnected indicators. By applying quantitative techniques, bibliometrics enables a systematic examination of a selected body of literature.

For this study, we adopted the structured bibliometric performance analysis framework proposed by (Donthu et al., 2021). Their guidelines outline the sequential steps and overarching principles for conducting bibliometric research. As illustrated in Figure 1, the analysis begins with clarifying the purpose and scope of the study, which helps establish the boundaries of the topic under review. After defining the scope, we describe the data collected and justify the selection of specific analytical techniques that align with the objectives of the research. The quantitative phase of the process then generates key insights derived from the analysed publication data.

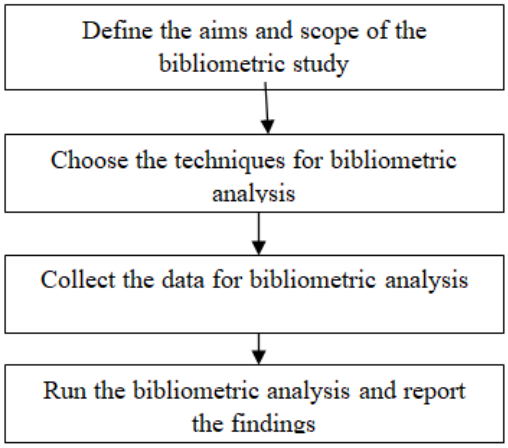


Figure 1: steps in bibliometric analysis
Source : (Donthu et al., 2021)

3.1.1 Define the objectives and scope

We conducted the bibliometric analysis across three levels—production, citations, and collaboration. At the institutional level, the study identifies which organisations have demonstrated the strongest expertise in CSR research. We then shift to the individual level by evaluating the authors who have contributed most significantly to the field.

3.1.2 Strategies for search

Bibliometric techniques generally fall into two categories: performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis evaluates the contributions of various research elements, while science mapping explores the relationships and linkages among those elements (Donthu et al., 2021). On the basis of data, we decided to undertake a performance analysis for the purpose of analysing the productivity and popularity of the various actors in our study (Aria et al., 2020). Performance analysis investigates the contributions of research components to a certain field.

Science mapping investigates the interrelationships of research elements (Kipper et al., 2020). Citation analysis, co citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-word analysis, and co authorship analysis are the approaches utilised in science mapping. When paired with network analysis, these techniques are useful for illustrating the bibliometric and intellectual structure of a study field (Goodell et al., 2023).

3.1.3 Data collection

This stage entails identifying a database appropriate for the research objectives and retrieving data. The data extraction took place on 06/08/2022 using Scopus, the most commonly used database that comprises thousands of scholarly papers (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019). The core emphasis of the study was an examination of corporate social responsibility documents. We selected the period 2013–2022 for collecting all forms of scientific articles on the topic. The Scopus database was queried using the terms "Corporate social responsibility" and "India" to obtain bibliographic information on the published research subjects. Keywords indicate the subject matter of the reviewed papers. Researchers/scholars/practitioners can therefore utilise these terms to examine corporate social responsibility-related topics, drivers, and difficulties in the Indian context.

Data for this study were extracted from Scopus, one of the most extensive indexing platforms for academic publications. The database covers 12,850 journals across disciplines such as the physical sciences, health sciences, life sciences, and the social sciences, and includes publications dating back to 1966. Scopus was selected over the Web of Science for two main reasons. First, Scopus offers approximately 60% wider coverage than WoS, which is an important consideration for researchers balancing the trade-off between breadth and data quality (Dinh et al., 2023). Second, many large-scale quantitative reviews and bibliometric studies in the social sciences rely on a single database, as merging data from multiple sources can lead to inconsistencies and homogenisation challenges.

3.1.4 Analysis and reporting

There exist numerous performance evaluation metrics. Approximately 100 numerical parameters (Zanotto & Carvalho, 2021) that calculate the total number of works and citation parameters have been proposed over the previous two decades.

4. Findings

4.1 publication trends

To address RQ1, we analysed the publication trend in CSR by examining the total number of publications by year, journal, contributing author, and organisation. The earliest publication on CSR in India dates back to 1989. Figure 2 shows how the number of publications on CSR studies in India has grown since 2013. It is important to note that output growth was not uniform. Nonetheless, growth occurred from 2018 to 2019, despite fluctuations. In addition, the quantity of papers has stayed unchanged between 2019 and 2020. This substantial increase over the past few years is indicative of the academic community's heightened interest in corporate social responsibility research.

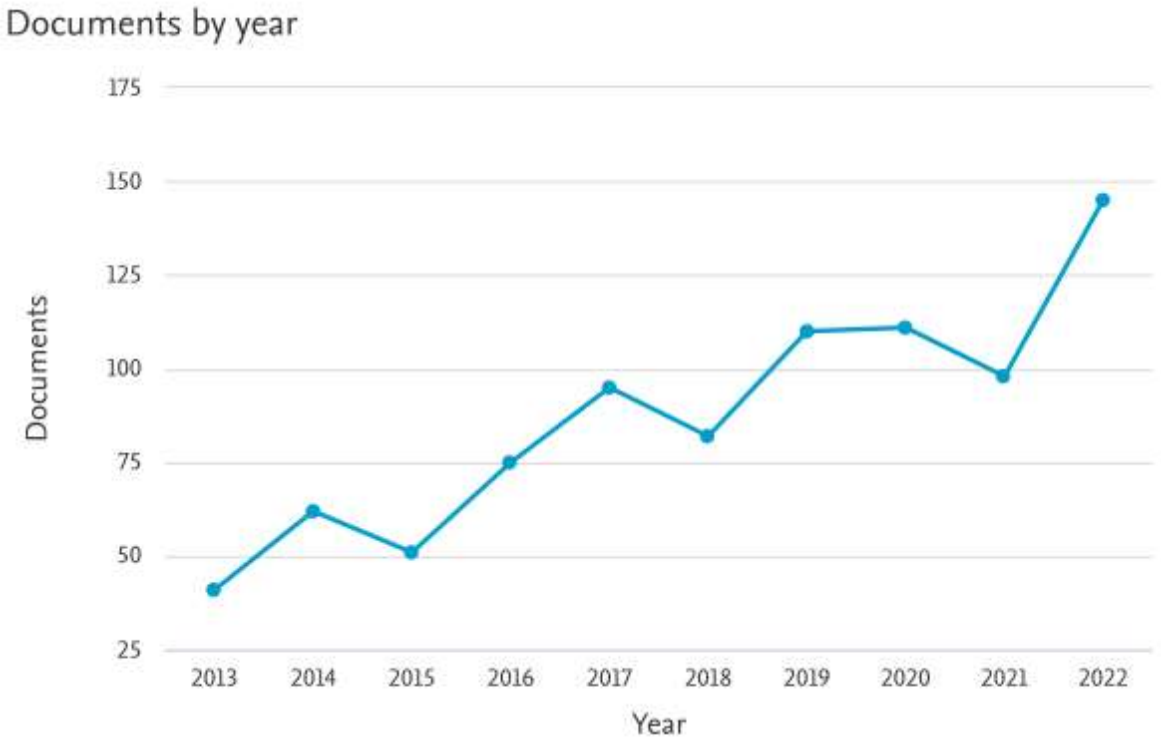


Figure 2: documents by year (2013-2022)

Source: scopus database

Table 1 provides a summary of the leading contributors. As seen in the table, Babu, Shekhar published the greatest number of publications on the subject (18 with 107 citations), followed by Mitra, Nayan. The organisations with the most publications in this topic were the University of Delhi and the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, with 19 and 18 articles, respectively. Third place was held by Symbiosis International Deemed University with 18 documents and 171 citations.

Authors	**Documents**	**Citations**	**Organisations**	**Documents**	**Citations**
Babu, Shekhar	18	107	University of Delhi	19	132
Mitra, Nayan.	10	50	Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee	18	566
Oware Kofi Mintah	10	67	Symbiosis International Deemed University	18	171
Fatma, Mobin	9	979	Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham University, Bangalore	17	45
Kansal, Monika	9	678	Deakin University	14	428
Rahman, Zillur	9	5843	Amity University	13	34
Chaudhary, R.	7	975	Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani	12	105
Joshi, Mahesh	7	764	National Institute of Industrial Engineering	12	250
Arun, K.	6	20	Amrita University, Amritapuri Campus, Kollam, India	11	56
Bhattacharyya Som Sekhar	6	763	RMIT University	10	322

Table 1: Top Ten Authors and Institutions

Source: Authors creation based on Scopus database

Articles published in the Journal of cleaner production, the Journal of Business Ethics, and the Sustainability Switzerland and Social Responsibility Journal have had the most number of citations among the publications where research in this field has been published. The top ten most-cited journals are summarised in Table 2. Notably, other periodicals with fewer documents have had a greater impact.

Journal	**Articles**	**Total number of citations**
Csr Sustainability Ethics And Governance	41	18
Social Responsibility Journal	30	196
Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	18	7
Journal Of Business Ethics	14	625

Journal Of Cleaner Production	12	896
Sustainability Switzerland	12	276
Global Business Review	11	99
Asian Journal Of Business Ethics	9	27
International Journal Of Applied Business And Economic Research	9	0
Journal Of Advanced Research In Dynamical And Control Systems	9	6

Table 2: Top 10 journals by number of articles published.

4.2 Discipline area

As research has grown interdisciplinary, this section studied whether qualitative and quantitative papers incorporate one or more fields. To accomplish this, we pull 873 publications from Scopus, with 34.2% representing Business, Management, and Accounting and 19.0% representing Social Sciences (Figure 3). Interdisciplinary research on corporate social responsibility has been conducted in other academic disciplines, such as Economics, Econometrics, Environmental Science, Agricultural and Biological Sciences, Arts and Humanities, energy, computer science, Decision Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, among others. These fields comprised 45.9 percent of the total number of documents.

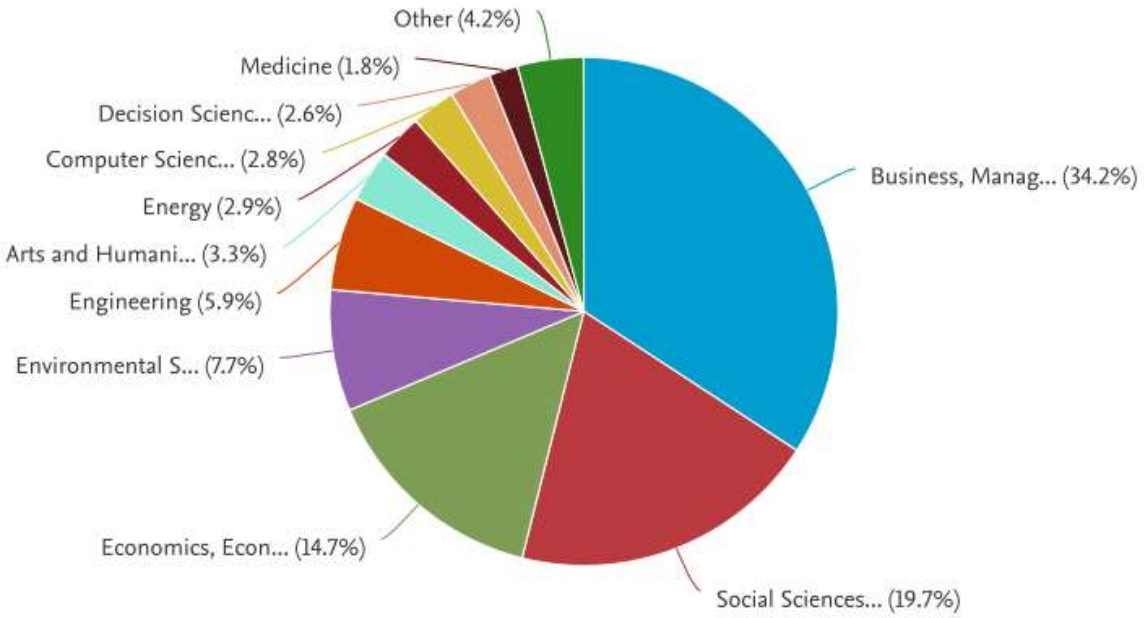


Figure 3 Distribution published by different academic disciplines

Source : scopus

4.3 Author's Collaboration Network

Figure 5 depicts the co-authorship network presented by VOSviewer to illustrate scholarly collaboration among writers. We consider authors who have published a minimum of three articles. The network linkages take into account the total of thirteen authors who meet the criterion for collaboration. In the co-authorship collaboration network, the centrality of each node reflects the level of influence an author

holds. Higher centrality indicates stronger and more frequent collaboration with other researchers. The co-authorship network comprises four clusters and seventeen collaborative links. Each colour on the map represents a distinct collaboration group, with deeper shades indicating stronger relationships among authors.

The green cluster emerges as the most prominent, containing nine referenced items and exhibiting the highest total link strength. Authors with the strongest collaborative ties in this network include Kansal M., Babu S., and Sharma S. The second-largest cluster is represented in yellow and consists of fourteen referenced items, indicating another significant group of interconnected researchers.

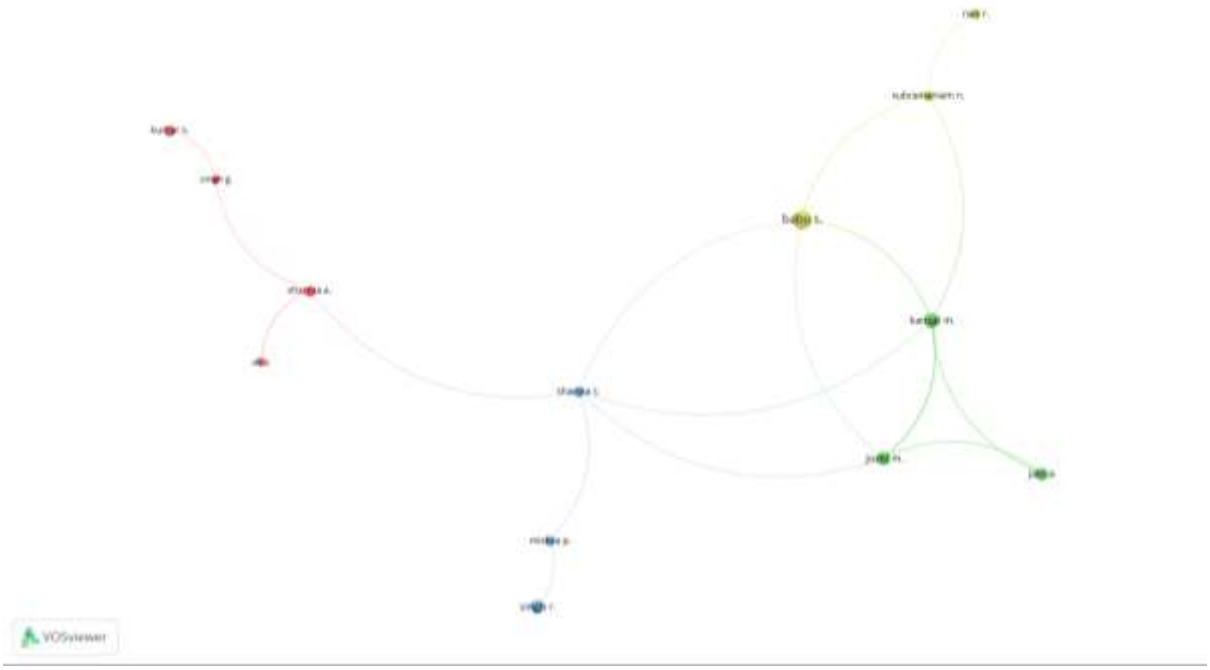


Figure 4: co authorship analysis

4.4 India's most influential articles

To address third research question, we performed a citation network study on 870 publications' citation networks. Citation network analysis permits the evaluation of an article's influence by counting the number of citations it receives from other works. According to the amount of citations, Table 3 displays the top research articles.

Authors	Citations
Kansal, M., Joshi, M., Batra, G.S.(2014)	182
Govindan, K., Kannan, D., Shankar, K.M.(2014)	143
Mani, V., Agarwal, R., Gunasekaran, A., (...), Dubey, R., Childe, S.J(2016)	132
Jamali, D., Karam, C., Yin, J., Soundararajan, V.(2017)	109
Suganthi, L.(2019)	107
Fatma, M., Rahman, Z., Khan, I.(2015)	106
Bae, S.M., Masud, M.A.K., Kim, J.D(2018)	105
Jamali, D., Lund-Thomsen, P., Khara, N.(2017)	104

Muttakin, M.B., Subramaniam, N(2015)	102
Fatma, M., Rahman, Z.(2016)	86
Dhanesh, G.S.(2014)	86
Gatti, L., Vishwanath, B., Seele, P., Cottier, B.(2019)	81
Mohamed Adnan, S., Hay, D., van Staden, C.J.(2018)	78
De Neve, G.(2014)	73
Dey, P.K., Petridis, N.E., Petridis, K., (...), Nixon, J.D., Ghosh, S.K.(2018)	71
Thresh Kumar, D., Palaniappan, M., Kannan, D., Shankar, K.M.(2014)	71
Sardana, D., Gupta, N., Kumar, V., Terziovski, M.(2020)	70
Dolan, C., Rajak, D.(2016)	66
Zhao, M., Tan, J., Park, S.H.(2014)	64
Young, S., Thyil, V.(2014)	63

Table 3: Top research articles

The analysis shows that the study by Kansal et al., (2014), "Determinants of Corporate Social Responsibility Disclosures: Evidence from India", has made a substantial contribution to the CSR literature. Their research examines how various financial and non-financial characteristics of firms relate to the extent of CSR disclosures among a broad sample of major Indian companies. The findings reveal that corporate size and industry type significantly influence the level of CSR reporting. Additionally, corporate reputation—reflected through awards and social ratings—emerges as an important determinant of disclosure practices.

Another influential contribution is the work of Govindan et al., (2014) , which investigates the factors driving CSR adoption in India's mining sector, a key industry within a developing South Asian context. Their study fills an important gap by exploring CSR drivers from the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, media, and civil society organisations. The proposed framework is further illustrated through a case study of an industrial unit in India.

4.4 Existing and emerging topics

Our fourth research question seeks to identify the dominant and emerging themes within CSR scholarship. To address this, we conducted a co-citation analysis to uncover well-established research areas and a keyword co-occurrence analysis to detect newer, developing topics. Co-citation analysis examines how often two references are cited together, thereby revealing conceptual linkages among scholarly works.

From this analysis, we identified five major themes and the key publications that have shaped CSR discourse in India. The results of the co-citation analysis, using cited references as the unit of measurement, are presented in Figure 4. The principal themes that emerged are as follows:

1. Corporate social responsibility and corporate performance
2. CSR and customer satisfaction and market value
3. CSR and competitive advantage
4. CSR in India and mandatory disclosure
5. The impact of CSR on employee performance
6. CSR and sustainability

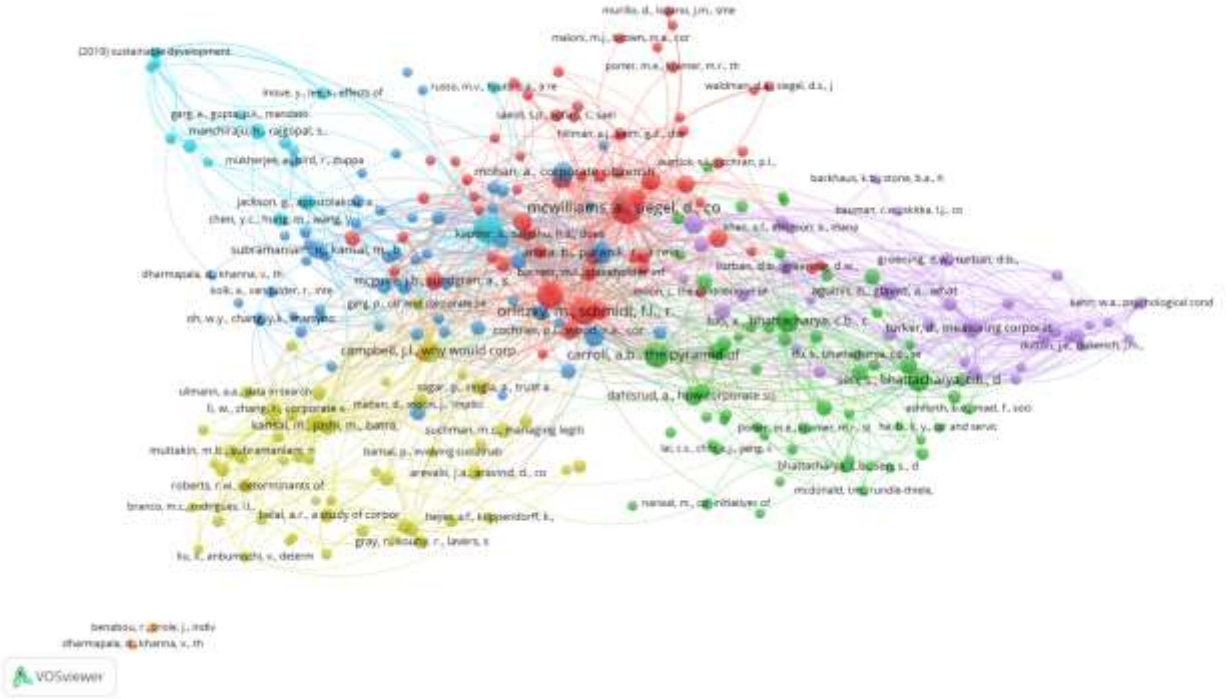


Figure 4: co citation analysis

CSR and corporate performance have the biggest number of nodes, indicating it is the strongest thematic cluster, but CSR studies related to sustainability are a niche topic.

4.5 Emerging themes

When two keywords appear together within the same article, it signals a conceptual link between the underlying ideas. Previous bibliometric studies have used keyword co-occurrence analysis to help identify the thematic content of publications, making it a valuable tool for detecting the main topics within a field of research. As shown in Table 4, the most frequently occurring keywords in CSR research in India are corporate social responsibility, CSR, and sustainability. This pattern is unsurprising, as much of the existing literature focuses on examining how CSR intersects with sustainability-related issues.

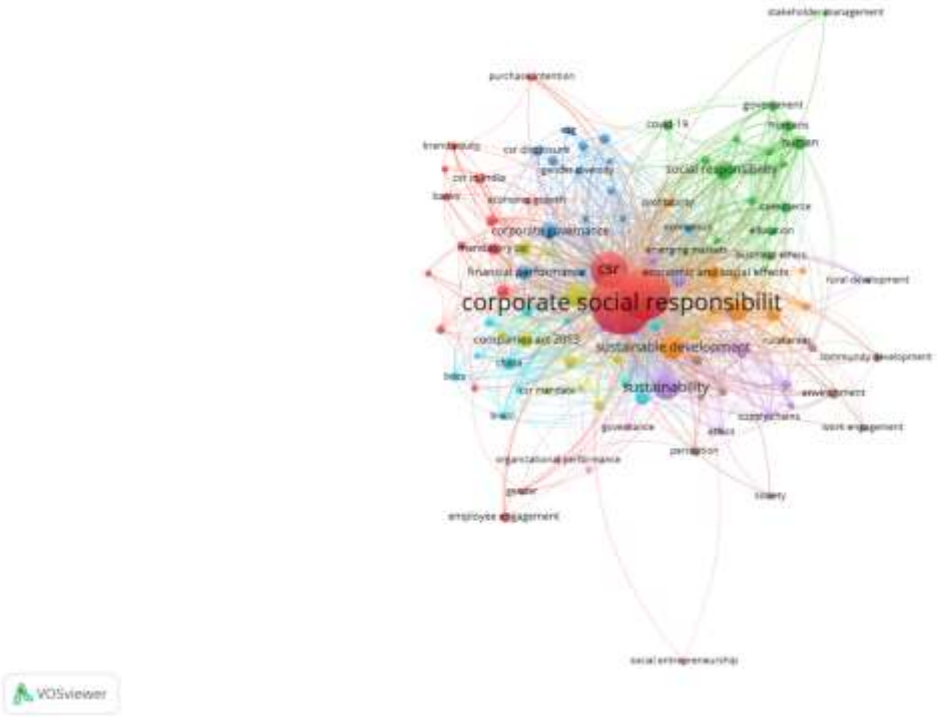


Figure 5: Keyword co-occurrence network on CSR in India over time

Fig. 5 demonstrates how keywords connect each other and the prominence of each of those terms through time. It is noteworthy that topics relating to sustainability and social responsibility are popular early on, but issues relating to stakeholder engagement, social entrepreneurship, and buying intent are emerging.

Keywords	**Occurrence**
Corporate social responsibility	355
CSR	123
Sustainability	59
Sustainable development	49
Corporate social responsibilities (csr)	38
Social responsibility	33
Corporate governance	26
Financial performance	20
Stakeholder	19
Companies act 2013	19
Human	19
Stakeholder	19
Economic and social effects	19
Content analysis	18
China	15
Mandatory csr	14

Corporate reputation	13
Sustainable development goals	11
Covid 19	11
Supply chain management	10
Government	10
Csr disclosure	10
Csr expenditure	10
Business ethics	8
Education	8

Table 4: Top keywords by frequency of their occurrence.

5. Future research directions and Limitations

This section seeks to respond to RQ4. To answer this question, we utilised a bibliometric study of the relevant literature to address the knowledge gaps we observed in this field.

Bibliometric analysis enables researchers to identify academic subfields, related themes, and emerging directions within a discipline. The findings suggest that the CSR research community is likely to become more geographically diverse, with increased international collaboration expected in the future. This study reinforces the view that CSR remains a highly active area of inquiry among Indian scholars. Notably, unlike many other research domains, Indian researchers frequently collaborate with colleagues from Western and Asian countries such as China, Brazil, and Australia to explore CSR-related issues.

Drawing on these insights, the paper offers a broad overview of the CSR landscape. By examining both foundational and contemporary research topics, it enhances understanding of the field's development. The author citation analysis, in particular, highlights the key academic contributors shaping CSR scholarship. Overall, the results provide valuable guidance for researchers seeking to identify relevant topics, set research priorities, understand disciplinary trends, and explore potential collaborative opportunities.

The bibliometric framework adopted here also illustrates how CSR research intersects with finance, management, and other interdisciplinary domains, opening pathways for future inquiry. Based on the patterns and gaps identified, several potential directions for further research emerge. They include:

1. What impact does CSR and stakeholder involvement have?
2. How CSR programmes affect certain constituencies
3. How CSR programmes influence consumers' purchase intent
4. What is the connection between CSR and employee engagement?
5. How CSR impacts social enterprise
6. What influence does CSR have on brand equity?

Like any scholarly investigation, this study has certain limitations. To identify and extract articles from the database, we relied solely on the keywords "corporate social responsibility" and "India." As a result, some relevant publications that did not explicitly use these terms may not have been captured. Furthermore, the review was restricted to English-language articles, meaning that potentially valuable studies published in other languages were not included.

Another limitation lies in the nature of the databases themselves. Platforms such as Scopus and the Web of Science were not originally designed for bibliometric research, and therefore may contain indexing

inconsistencies or errors. Any such inaccuracies can, in turn, affect the reliability of analyses derived from these datasets.

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