

Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Performance: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance research by identifying its knowledge structure, research trends, evolutionary characteristics, and major research hotspots. Using the Web of Science Core Collection (WoSCC) as the data source, this study employs CiteSpace to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the existing literature, including publication trends, institutional collaboration, keyword co-occurrence, keyword clustering, and timeline evolution. Furthermore, a traditional content analysis is conducted to synthesize the major research themes and reveal the theoretical foundations and development trajectory of the field. The results indicate that research on CSR and organizational performance has experienced sustained growth during 2018–2025, with financial performance, corporate governance, stakeholder theory, sustainable development, environmental performance, green innovation, and organizational performance emerging as the dominant research themes. The findings further reveal that the field has gradually evolved from traditional financial performance and corporate governance perspectives toward emerging topics such as stakeholder engagement, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and sustainable value creation. Nevertheless, inconsistencies remain in CSR measurement, organizational performance evaluation, and the underlying mechanisms linking CSR to organizational outcomes, highlighting the need for further theoretical integration and empirical investigation. This study provides a systematic overview of the intellectual structure and evolution of CSR and organizational performance research and provides valuable theoretical and practical implications for future CSR research.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Organizational Performance; Bibliometric Analysis; Knowledge Mapping; Systematic Literature Review

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become one of the most influential research topics in management, business ethics, and sustainability published between 2018 and 2025. As global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, social inequality, and corporate governance failures continue to reshape the business environment, organizations are increasingly expected to create not only economic value but also social and environmental value. Governments, investors, customers, employees, and other stakeholders have placed growing pressure on firms to integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into strategic decision-making and daily business operations. In response, CSR has gradually evolved from a voluntary philanthropic activity into a strategic management approach that contributes to sustainable competitive advantage, organizational legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation (Coelho et al., 2023; Oduro et al., 2025). This transformation has been further accelerated by the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the increasing implementation of mandatory sustainability reporting regulations in many countries, and the growing emphasis on responsible investment worldwide. Consequently, CSR has become an

indispensable component of corporate strategy and organizational development in both developed and emerging economies.

A substantial body of literature has examined the relationship between CSR and organizational performance from multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives. Existing studies have investigated the influence of CSR on financial performance, operational efficiency, innovation capability, employee commitment, customer satisfaction, firm reputation, competitive advantage, and long-term organizational sustainability. Researchers have also explored various theoretical explanations, including stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, institutional theory, the resource-based view, signaling theory, and shared value theory, to explain how CSR contributes to organizational outcomes. Moreover, numerous empirical studies have examined mediating and moderating mechanisms across different industries, countries, ownership structures, and institutional contexts. Despite the rapid expansion of this research field, the existing evidence remains fragmented and inconsistent. While many studies report a positive relationship between CSR and organizational performance, others suggest insignificant, nonlinear, or context-dependent effects. Differences in CSR measurement, organizational performance indicators, research methodologies, industrial characteristics, and institutional environments have resulted in inconsistent findings across the literature. Furthermore, although several review studies have summarized specific aspects of CSR research, comprehensive systematic reviews integrating research trends, intellectual structures, knowledge evolution, and emerging research themes remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of recent sustainability transitions and ESG-driven corporate practices (Yassin & Beckmann, 2025; Inês et al., 2025).

To address these research gaps, this study conducts a systematic literature review of CSR and organizational performance based on articles indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection. In addition, CiteSpace was employed to visualize the knowledge structure, research evolution, collaboration networks, keyword co-occurrence, thematic clusters, and emerging research frontiers within this field. By integrating bibliometric analysis with qualitative content analysis, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual development of CSR and organizational performance research. On the one hand, the findings offer an accessible overview for researchers who are new to this field. On the other hand, they identify major research trends, theoretical foundations, methodological developments, and future research directions, thereby providing valuable references for scholars and practitioners seeking to advance CSR research and promote sustainable organizational performance. This systematic literature review combines bibliometric analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge structure, thematic evolution, and future research directions in CSR and organizational performance research.

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

2.1 Research Methods

Bibliometric analysis has become an important research method in scientometrics and has been widely applied in systematic literature reviews across management, business, sustainability, and social sciences (Donthu et al., 2021). Compared with traditional narrative literature reviews, bibliometric analysis provides a more objective, systematic, and quantitative approach for synthesizing scientific knowledge and identifying the intellectual structure, research hotspots, evolutionary trends, and emerging research frontiers of a specific field. By integrating statistical analysis with knowledge visualization techniques, bibliometric analysis enables researchers to

explore the relationships among publications, keywords, authors, institutions, and cited references, thereby revealing the dynamic evolution of scientific knowledge.

Among the available bibliometric visualization tools, CiteSpace is one of the most widely used software packages for knowledge mapping and scientific literature analysis. Developed by Chaomei Chen, CiteSpace integrates co-citation analysis, co-occurrence analysis, clustering algorithms, burst detection, and the Pathfinder algorithm to identify the knowledge base, thematic evolution, research hotspots, and emerging trends within a research domain (Chen, 2006, 2017). Through a series of visualization maps, CiteSpace provides a comprehensive understanding of the development process and intellectual structure of a discipline and has been extensively applied in systematic literature reviews and bibliometric studies.

In this study, CiteSpace (Version 6.4.R1) was employed to process the bibliographic data. The software was used to analyse annual publication trends, keyword co-occurrence, keyword clustering, timeline visualization. These analyses provide a systematic overview of the knowledge structure, research hotspots, thematic evolution, and future research directions in the field of corporate social responsibility and organizational performance. Accordingly, the findings from the bibliometric analysis are further integrated through qualitative thematic synthesis to construct an integrated knowledge framework of CSR and organizational performance research.

2.2 Data Sources

The bibliographic data were collected from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection, one of the world's most authoritative multidisciplinary academic databases. Web of Science provides standardized bibliographic records and citation information for high-quality international journals and has been widely recognized as one of the most reliable databases for systematic literature reviews and bibliometric studies. Therefore, the Web of Science Core Collection was selected as the sole data source for this study.

To ensure the quality and consistency of the research sample, only journal articles indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) were included in the analysis. The literature was retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection using the Title Search (TI) function with the keywords "corporate social responsibility" (or CSR) and "organizational performance". The publication period was restricted to 2018–2025, and only English-language journal articles were included. Conference proceedings, book chapters, editorial materials, meeting abstracts, corrections, early access publications, and other non-peer-reviewed documents were excluded to ensure the quality and consistency of the dataset.

The literature retrieval was completed in June 2026. A total of 1,094 publications were initially retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection. After removing duplicate records and publications that did not meet the research scope, 1,064 articles were retained for the final analysis. The retrieved records were subsequently imported into CiteSpace (Version 6.4.R1). The time span was set from 2018 to 2025, with a one-year time slice. Knowledge maps of annual publication trends, keyword co-occurrence, keyword clustering, timeline visualization were generated to systematically analyse the knowledge structure, research hotspots, evolutionary patterns, and future research directions in CSR and organizational performance research.

Table 1. Literature Search Strategy

Item	Description
Database	Web of Science Core Collection
Search method	Title Search (TI)
Search keywords	"corporate social responsibility" OR CSR; "organizational performance"
Search query	TI = ("corporate social responsibility" OR CSR) AND TI = ("organizational performance")
Index	Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)
Language	English
Document type	Article
Publication period	2018–2025
Retrieval date	Jun-26
Initial records	1,094
Final records	1,064
Bibliometric software	CiteSpace 6.4.R1

3. BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

3.1 Publication Trends

Figure 1 illustrates the annual publication trend of research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance between 2018 and 2025. A total of 1,064 articles were included in the bibliometric analysis. Overall, the number of publications exhibited a clear upward trend during the study period, indicating growing academic interest in the relationship between CSR and organizational performance.

As shown in Figure 1, only 65 articles were published in 2018. The annual number of publications increased steadily to 96 in 2019 and 121 in 2020, reflecting the increasing attention paid to CSR as organizations faced growing stakeholder expectations and sustainability challenges. A more rapid increase was observed between 2020 and 2022, with the number of publications rising from 121 to 156 in 2021 and reaching a peak of 176 publications in 2022. This remarkable growth coincided with the widespread integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into corporate strategies, increasing sustainability reporting requirements, and the growing recognition of CSR as a strategic driver of organizational performance (Awaysheh et al., 2020; Velte, 2022).

Following the publication peak in 2022, the annual number of publications showed a moderate decline, decreasing to 160 in 2023, 155 in 2024, and 135 in 2025. This downward trend should be interpreted with caution because publications indexed in 2025 may not yet be complete at the time of data collection. Despite this slight decline, publication levels remained substantially higher than those observed at the beginning of the study period, suggesting that CSR and organizational performance continue to represent an active and influential research area.

Overall, the annual publication trend demonstrates that research on CSR and organizational performance has experienced rapid expansion over the past eight years. The positive linear trend line further confirms the continuous growth of this research field and indicates increasing scholarly attention to understanding how responsible business practices contribute to organizational outcomes. The sustained growth also reflects the increasing importance of CSR in addressing contemporary sustainability challenges and achieving long-term organizational competitiveness.

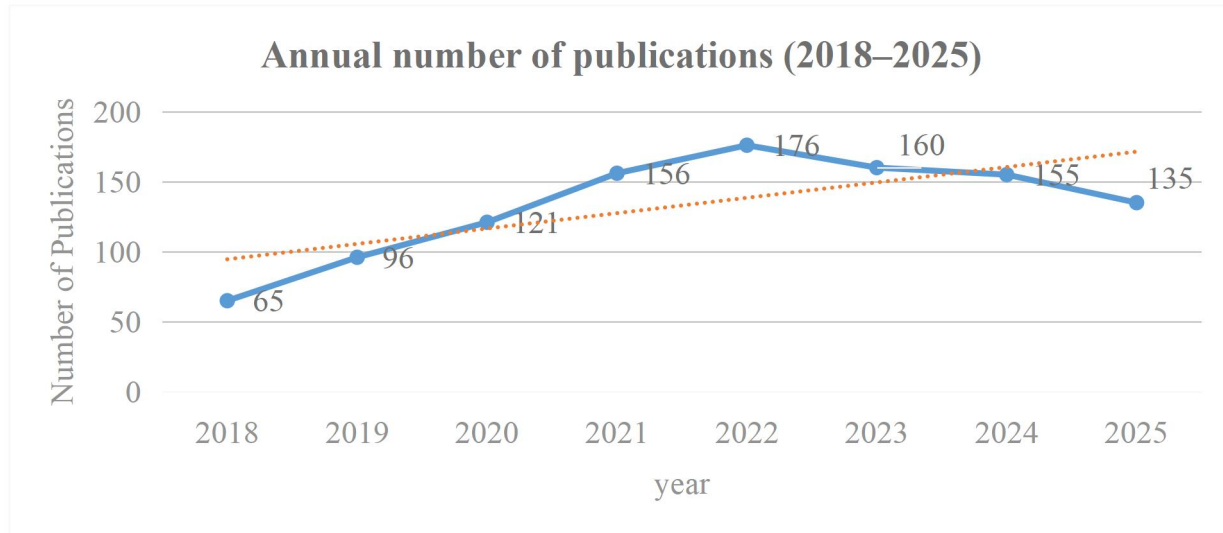


Figure 1. Annual Publication Trends (2018–2025)

3.2 Institutional Collaboration

Figure 2 presents the institutional collaboration network in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance between 2018 and 2025, while Table 2 summarizes the ten most productive institutions based on publication output. In the collaboration network, each node represents a research institution, and the links between nodes indicate collaborative relationships. Larger nodes generally represent institutions with higher publication outputs, whereas denser connections reflect stronger collaborative relationships among institutions. Institution collaboration analysis is widely used in bibliometric studies to identify leading research organizations and reveal the collaborative structure of a research field (Donthu et al., 2021).



Figure 2. Institutional Collaboration Network

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 2, COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) is the most productive institution, contributing 20 publications during the study period. Xi'an Jiaotong University and Hong Kong Polytechnic University rank second with 16 publications each, followed by Shenzhen University

(13 publications), Chongqing University (11 publications), Sichuan University (10 publications), University of Science and Technology Beijing (10 publications), Sejong University (9 publications), University of Turin (9 publications), and Northwestern Polytechnical University (9 publications). These institutions constitute the core research groups in this field and have made important contributions to the development of CSR and organizational performance research.

Table 2. Top 10 Most Productive Institutions in CSR and Organizational Performance Research (2018–2025)

Rank	Institution	Publications
1	COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI)	20
2	Xi'an Jiaotong University	16
2	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	16
4	Shenzhen University	13
5	Chongqing University	11
6	Sichuan University	10
6	University of Science & Technology Beijing	10
8	Sejong University	9
8	University of Turin	9
8	Northwestern Polytechnical University	9
5	Chongqing University	11
6	Sichuan University	10

The collaboration network further indicates that Chinese universities occupy a dominant position in this research field. Among the ten most productive institutions, seven are located in China, reflecting the country's increasing academic influence in CSR, environmental, social and governance (ESG), and sustainable management research. Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Shenzhen University, and the University of Science and Technology Beijing maintain relatively extensive collaborative relationships with other institutions, suggesting that they function as important knowledge hubs within the institutional collaboration network. Such collaboration networks facilitate knowledge exchange, interdisciplinary cooperation, and the dissemination of innovative research outcomes (Donthu et al., 2021).

Despite the presence of several influential institutions, the overall collaboration network remains relatively fragmented. Most institutions collaborate within relatively small research groups, and international collaboration is still limited. Although institutions from Pakistan, Italy, South Korea, Kuwait, and China have established collaborative relationships, stronger cross-national and interdisciplinary cooperation is needed to promote knowledge sharing and improve the global impact of CSR and organizational performance research.

Overall, the institutional collaboration analysis indicates that CSR and organizational performance research has gradually formed a core group of productive institutions. However, expanding international collaboration and strengthening partnerships among universities from different countries may further promote theoretical innovation and sustainable development in this research field.

3.3 High-Frequency Keywords

Keyword analysis is one of the most effective approaches for identifying research hotspots and core themes within a specific research field. High-frequency keywords reflect the primary research topics, whereas betweenness centrality indicates the importance of a keyword in connecting different research themes within the knowledge network (Chen, 2006; Donthu et al., 2021). Table 3

summarizes the top 15 high-frequency keywords and their betweenness centrality in CSR and organizational performance research during 2018–2025, providing an overview of the major research topics and their structural importance within the knowledge network.

Table 3. Top 15 High-Frequency Keywords and Their Betweenness Centrality

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Centrality
1	financial performance	394	0.01
2	firm performance	244	0.01
3	governance	189	0.01
4	environmental performance	91	0.02
5	stakeholder theory	86	0.01
6	sustainable development	74	0.02
7	competitive advantage	55	0.02
8	social responsibility	45	0.04
9	green innovation	42	0.02
10	corporate financial performance	39	0.05
11	CSR performance	35	0.02
12	organizational performance	31	0.01
13	stakeholder engagement	24	0.02
14	technological innovation	11	0.01
15	environmental sustainability	10	0.02

As shown in Table 3, financial performance is the most frequently occurring keyword, with 394 occurrences, followed by firm performance (244), governance (189), environmental performance (91), and stakeholder theory (86). These findings indicate that evaluating the influence of CSR on organizational performance, particularly financial performance, remains the central research focus in this field. Financial performance and firm performance have consistently been adopted as the primary indicators for assessing the effectiveness of CSR initiatives, while stakeholder theory provides an important theoretical foundation for explaining how CSR contributes to organizational outcomes (Freeman et al., 2021).

Beyond performance-related themes, sustainable development (74), competitive advantage (55), social responsibility (45), green innovation (42), and corporate financial performance (39) also appear frequently. These keywords demonstrate that CSR research has gradually expanded from traditional financial outcomes to broader sustainability issues, including environmental responsibility, innovation capability, and long-term competitive advantage. This trend reflects the growing integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into corporate strategic management.

From the perspective of network centrality, corporate financial performance exhibits the highest betweenness centrality (0.05), followed by social responsibility (0.04). High-centrality keywords serve as important bridges connecting different research themes and play a significant role in shaping the intellectual structure of the field (Chen, 2006). Environmental performance, green innovation, stakeholder engagement, and environmental sustainability also present relatively high centrality values (0.02), suggesting that these topics increasingly connect multiple research domains. In contrast, financial performance, firm performance, and stakeholder theory exhibit relatively low centrality despite their high frequencies, indicating that they represent mature and well-established research themes rather than emerging interdisciplinary topics.

Overall, the high-frequency keyword analysis demonstrates that CSR and organizational performance research has gradually evolved from a traditional emphasis on financial performance toward a broader and more multidisciplinary perspective encompassing corporate governance, stakeholder

engagement, environmental sustainability, and innovation. The distribution of high-frequency keywords further indicates that CSR research has become increasingly interdisciplinary, reflecting the growing integration of strategic management, sustainability, and stakeholder theory in explaining long-term organizational value creation.

3.4 Keyword Cluster Analysis

Keyword clustering analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure and thematic distribution of a research field than keyword frequency analysis alone. By grouping closely related keywords into different clusters, CiteSpace identifies the major research themes and reveals the relationships among different knowledge domains, thereby illustrating the evolution of research topics and the overall knowledge structure of a discipline (Chen, 2006; Donthu et al., 2021).

Figure 3 presents the keyword cluster network of CSR and organizational performance research between 2018 and 2025. The clustering results reveal that this research field has developed into several interconnected but distinctive thematic areas. The ten largest clusters are #0 corporate governance, #1 financial performance, #2 job performance, #3 financial constraints, #4 green innovation, #5 technological innovation, #6 financing constraints, #7 corporate social responsibility, #8 corporate performance, and #9 family firms. These clusters represent the major research streams that have shaped the development of CSR and organizational performance research over the past eight years.

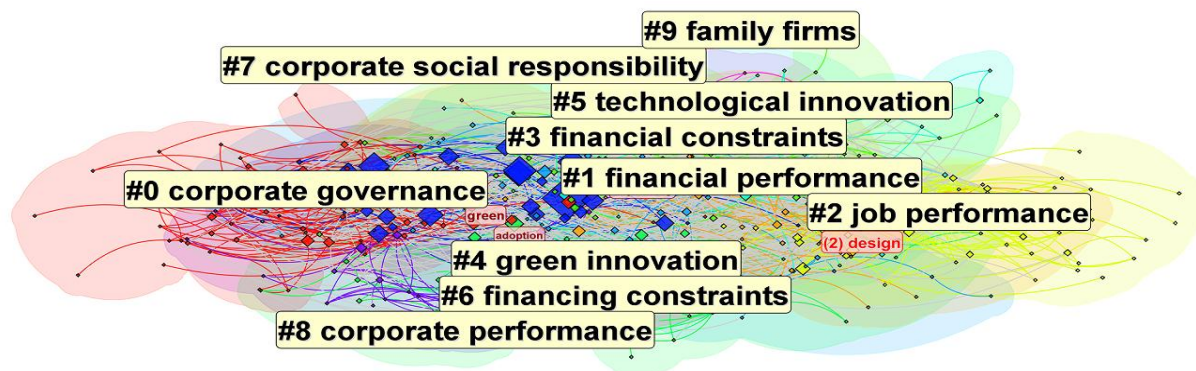


Figure 3. Keyword Cluster Network

The largest cluster, #0 corporate governance, indicates that governance mechanisms remain one of the most influential research topics in explaining how CSR contributes to organizational performance. Effective corporate governance enhances transparency, accountability, stakeholder trust, and strategic decision-making, thereby improving both financial and non-financial organizational outcomes (Velte, 2022). Closely related to this theme, #1 financial performance demonstrates that financial outcomes continue to be the most widely adopted indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of CSR initiatives, reflecting the long-standing interest in examining whether socially responsible practices create economic value for firms.

Several emerging clusters indicate that the research field has gradually expanded beyond traditional financial perspectives. In particular, #4 green innovation and #5 technological innovation highlight the growing importance of innovation capability as a mechanism through which CSR creates sustainable competitive advantages. Likewise, #3 financial constraints and #6 financing constraints suggest increasing scholarly attention to the influence of financial resources on CSR implementation, green investment, and long-term organizational performance. These themes reflect the integration of

sustainability, innovation, and strategic management within contemporary CSR research (Zhang et al., 2019).

The appearance of #2 job performance and #9 family firms further demonstrates the diversification of CSR research. Studies within the job performance cluster primarily examine the effects of CSR on employee attitudes, organizational commitment, work engagement, and individual performance. Meanwhile, the family firms cluster focuses on how ownership structure, family involvement, and governance characteristics influence CSR practices and organizational outcomes. In addition, the independent cluster #7 corporate social responsibility suggests that scholars continue to refine the conceptual framework, measurement approaches, and strategic implications of CSR itself.

Overall, the keyword clustering results indicate that CSR and organizational performance research has evolved from an initial emphasis on corporate governance and financial performance toward a more diversified research framework integrating innovation, sustainability, stakeholder management, employee behaviour, ownership structure, and strategic management. The close relationships among different clusters also demonstrate the multidisciplinary nature of this research field and suggest that future studies are likely to adopt more integrated theoretical perspectives to explain the mechanisms through which CSR influences organizational performance.

3.5 Timeline Analysis

Keyword timeline analysis provides a dynamic perspective on the evolution of research themes by illustrating when specific topics emerged, developed, and continued to attract scholarly attention. Compared with keyword clustering analysis, the timeline view emphasizes the temporal evolution of different research themes and reveals the continuity and transformation of knowledge development within a research field (Chen, 2006; Donthu et al., 2021).

Figure 4 illustrates the keyword timeline view of CSR and organizational performance research from 2018 to 2025. Each horizontal line represents a keyword cluster, while the nodes indicate the occurrence of representative keywords over time. Larger nodes represent keywords with higher frequencies, and the connections among nodes reflect the evolution and knowledge flow of different research themes.

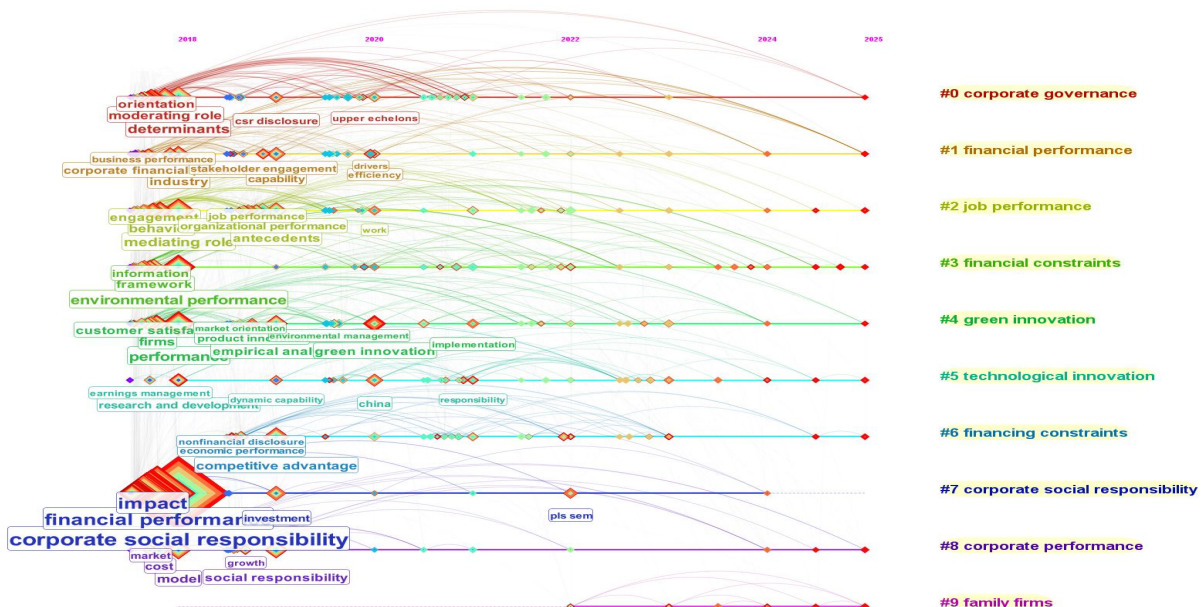


Figure 4. Keyword Timeline View

As shown in Figure 4, corporate governance (#0) and financial performance (#1) constitute the earliest and most persistent research themes throughout the study period. These two clusters remain active from 2018 to 2025, indicating that governance mechanisms and financial outcomes continue to form the theoretical foundation of CSR and organizational performance research. Within these clusters, keywords such as CSR disclosure, stakeholder engagement, corporate financial performance, and business performance appear repeatedly, suggesting sustained scholarly interest in understanding how responsible business practices contribute to organizational success.

Since approximately 2020, the research focus has gradually expanded toward sustainability-oriented topics. Clusters such as green innovation (#4), technological innovation (#5), financial constraints (#3), and financing constraints (#6) became increasingly prominent, reflecting the growing integration of environmental sustainability, innovation capability, and resource allocation into CSR research. These emerging themes indicate that scholars have increasingly examined the mechanisms through which CSR enhances organizational performance by promoting innovation, improving environmental performance, and overcoming financial barriers.

More recent clusters, including job performance (#2) and family firms (#9), demonstrate the continuous diversification of the research field. Studies within the job performance cluster primarily investigate the effects of CSR on employee attitudes, organizational commitment, work engagement, and individual performance. Meanwhile, research on family firms focuses on the influence of ownership structure and family governance on CSR strategies and organizational outcomes. The emergence and continued development of these clusters indicate that CSR research has gradually extended from firm-level financial performance to employee behaviour, governance structures, and organizational sustainability.

Overall, the keyword timeline analysis reveals a clear evolutionary trajectory in CSR and organizational performance research. The research field has gradually shifted from an initial emphasis on corporate governance and financial performance toward a broader multidisciplinary framework integrating sustainability, innovation, stakeholder management, organizational behaviour, and strategic management. The continuity of the major clusters together with the emergence of new themes suggests that CSR research will continue to evolve toward more comprehensive and interdisciplinary perspectives in the future.

3.6 Keyword Burst Analysis

Keyword burst analysis is an effective method for identifying emerging research frontiers by detecting keywords that experience a rapid increase in scholarly attention during specific periods (Chen, 2006; Donthu et al., 2021). Compared with high-frequency keyword analysis, burst detection emphasizes the temporal dynamics of research topics and reveals the evolution of emerging themes over time. Figure 5 presents the top 28 keywords with the strongest citation bursts in CSR and organizational performance research between 2018 and 2025.

Top 28 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

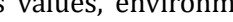
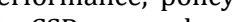
Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	2018 - 2025
values	2018	2.94	2018	2020	
environmental disclosure	2018	2.71	2018	2019	
transformational leadership	2018	2.52	2018	2020	
job satisfaction	2018	2.11	2018	2020	
organizational performance	2019	4.44	2019	2020	
independent directors	2019	2.64	2019	2021	
policy	2019	2.39	2019	2020	
decision	2019	2.39	2019	2020	
social performance	2020	3.38	2020	2021	
entrepreneurship	2020	2.96	2020	2021	
corporate social performance	2020	2.7	2020	2022	
corporate social responsibility disclosure	2020	2.11	2020	2021	
environmental management	2020	2.02	2020	2021	
organizational citizenship behavior	2021	3.68	2021	2022	
board composition	2021	2.21	2021	2022	
balanced scorecard	2021	2.21	2021	2022	
environmental responsibility	2022	2.57	2022	2023	
dimensions	2019	2	2022	2023	
organizations	2023	4.05	2023	2025	
pls sem	2022	3.64	2023	2025	
complexity	2023	3.24	2023	2025	
view	2023	2.83	2023	2025	
loyalty	2018	2.25	2023	2025	
corporate innovation	2023	2.06	2023	2025	
financing constraints	2023	2.06	2023	2025	
economic growth	2023	2.02	2023	2025	
institutional distance	2023	2.02	2023	2025	
green technology innovation	2023	2.02	2023	2025	

Figure 5. Top 28 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts (2018–2025)

As shown in Figure 5, the burst keywords reveal a clear evolution of research interests throughout the study period. During the early stage (2018–2020), keywords such as values, environmental disclosure, transformational leadership, job satisfaction, organizational performance, policy, and decision exhibited strong citation bursts. These topics indicate that early CSR research mainly focused on corporate values, leadership behavior, employee attitudes, environmental information disclosure, and organizational performance evaluation, reflecting an emphasis on the internal mechanisms through which CSR influences organizational effectiveness.

Between 2020 and 2022, new burst keywords, including social performance, entrepreneurship, corporate social performance, corporate social responsibility disclosure, environmental management, organizational citizenship behavior, board composition, balanced scorecard, and environmental responsibility, emerged as prominent research topics. This shift suggests that CSR research gradually expanded beyond financial performance to incorporate sustainability, corporate governance, employee behavior, environmental management, and multidimensional performance evaluation.

More recently, from 2023 to 2025, several keywords remain active, including organizations, PLS-SEM, complexity, corporate innovation, financing constraints, economic growth, institutional distance, and green technology innovation. These burst keywords indicate that current research increasingly emphasizes innovation-driven development, sustainable transformation, organizational capability, and contextual factors influencing CSR implementation. In particular, the emergence of green technology innovation reflects the growing integration of CSR with environmental sustainability and technological innovation, highlighting the increasing importance of green development and ESG-oriented strategies in organizational performance research.

Overall, the keyword burst analysis demonstrates that CSR and organizational performance research has evolved from traditional concerns with organizational values, leadership, and performance evaluation toward broader interdisciplinary themes involving sustainability, innovation, governance, and green transformation. The recent emergence of keywords related to innovation, organizational capability, and environmental sustainability suggests that future research is likely to further explore the mechanisms through which CSR contributes to long-term organizational resilience and sustainable value creation.

4. AN INTEGRATED KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORK OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The bibliometric analysis presented in the previous section provides a comprehensive overview of the knowledge structure, research hotspots, and evolutionary trends of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance research. However, bibliometric techniques mainly reveal quantitative relationships among publications, institutions, and keywords, while providing limited explanation of the theoretical development and conceptual relationships underlying different research themes. Therefore, this section integrates the findings from the keyword co-occurrence analysis, keyword clustering analysis, and timeline analysis to construct an integrated knowledge framework of CSR and organizational performance research. Rather than discussing individual bibliometric results separately, this framework synthesizes the existing literature into a coherent structure that illustrates the knowledge base, major research domains, evolutionary trajectory, and potential future directions of the field.

Table 4 presents the integrated knowledge framework developed from the bibliometric findings. The framework consists of four interconnected components, namely the knowledge base, knowledge domains, knowledge evolution, and future research directions. Together, these components provide a systematic understanding of the intellectual development of CSR and organizational performance research.

Table 4. Summary of the Integrated Knowledge Framework

Component	Main Findings	Bibliometric Evidence
Knowledge Base	Financial performance, firm performance, governance, environmental performance, stakeholder theory, sustainable development, green innovation, competitive advantage, organizational performance, stakeholder engagement	High-frequency keyword analysis
Knowledge Domains	Corporate governance; CSR and financial performance; innovation and sustainable development; stakeholder-oriented perspectives; emerging research themes	Keyword cluster analysis
Knowledge Evolution	2018–2020: Corporate governance, CSR disclosure, financial performance. 2020–2022: Environmental performance, sustainable development, green innovation, stakeholder engagement. 2023–2025: ESG, Technological innovation, financing constraints, green technology innovation, institutional environment.	Timeline analysis
Future Research Directions	AI-enabled CSR, ESG integration, digital governance, cross-country comparison, SMEs, longitudinal studies, multi-level analysis, sustainable organizational development	Integrated bibliometric synthesis

As summarized in Table 4, the knowledge base of CSR and organizational performance research is built upon several fundamental concepts, among which financial performance, firm performance, governance, stakeholder theory, environmental performance, and green innovation are the most influential. These high-frequency keywords indicate that early studies primarily focused on examining whether CSR contributes to organizational performance and identifying the mechanisms through which CSR creates economic and social value. Over time, the research scope has gradually expanded from financial outcomes to broader sustainability-related issues, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the field.

The keyword clustering analysis further reveals five major knowledge domains that collectively constitute the intellectual structure of CSR and organizational performance research. Among them, corporate governance serves as the institutional foundation of CSR implementation by improving transparency, accountability, and stakeholder trust, thereby facilitating long-term organizational development (Velte, 2022). Financial performance remains the dominant research perspective, with most empirical studies evaluating CSR effectiveness through accounting-based and market-based performance indicators. However, recent studies increasingly emphasize that CSR creates sustainable value beyond short-term financial returns.

The integration of innovation and sustainable development has become another prominent characteristic of contemporary CSR research. Green innovation, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and ESG practices are increasingly regarded as important mechanisms through which CSR enhances organizational competitiveness and long-term performance. At the same time, stakeholder-oriented perspectives have broadened the scope of CSR research by emphasizing employee engagement, organizational commitment, customer loyalty, corporate reputation, and stakeholder relationships. These developments demonstrate that organizational performance should be evaluated from economic, environmental, and social dimensions rather than financial indicators alone (Freeman et al., 2021).

The timeline analysis indicates a clear evolutionary trajectory of CSR and organizational performance research. Between 2018 and 2020, studies mainly concentrated on corporate governance, CSR disclosure, and financial performance. During 2020–2022, sustainability-related topics, including environmental performance, sustainable development, and green innovation, became increasingly prominent. Since 2023, emerging topics such as ESG, digital transformation, financing constraints, institutional environments, and green technology innovation have attracted growing scholarly attention. These findings suggest that CSR research is gradually shifting from evaluating direct organizational outcomes toward understanding the underlying mechanisms that generate sustainable organizational value.

Overall, the integrated knowledge framework demonstrates that CSR and organizational performance research has evolved from a relatively narrow performance-oriented perspective into a multidisciplinary research field integrating corporate governance, strategic management, stakeholder theory, innovation, sustainability, and organizational behaviour. The interaction among these research domains not only reflects the increasing maturity of CSR theory but also provides a solid theoretical foundation for identifying future research opportunities. Building upon this integrated framework, the following section proposes a future research agenda to further advance both theoretical development and practical application in CSR and organizational performance research.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Despite the substantial growth of research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance, several important research gaps remain. Based on the bibliometric findings and the integrated knowledge framework developed in this review, future research should focus on four major directions: theoretical advancement, methodological innovation, contextual expansion, and practical application.

First, future studies should continue to broaden the theoretical foundations of CSR research. Although stakeholder theory remains the dominant theoretical perspective, relying on a single theory is insufficient to explain the increasingly complex relationship between CSR and organizational performance. Recent studies have suggested integrating stakeholder theory with the resource-based view, institutional theory, dynamic capability theory, and legitimacy theory to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how CSR generates sustainable competitive advantages and organizational value (Freeman et al., 2021; Velte, 2022). Such theoretical integration would contribute to understanding the interactions among organizational resources, institutional environments, and stakeholder expectations.

Second, future research should place greater emphasis on methodological innovation. Most existing studies continue to rely on cross-sectional datasets and conventional regression techniques. Although these methods have generated valuable findings, they often fail to capture the dynamic and longitudinal effects of CSR on organizational performance. Future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal panel data, multi-level analysis, mixed-methods research, meta-analysis, and advanced analytical approaches such as structural equation modelling and machine learning techniques to investigate the complex mechanisms underlying CSR implementation (Donthu et al., 2021). Furthermore, cross-country comparative studies would improve the generalizability of existing findings by considering institutional and cultural differences.

Third, expanding research contexts represents another important direction for future studies. The bibliometric analysis indicates that recent research has increasingly focused on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, green technology

innovation, financing constraints, and organizational resilience. These emerging themes suggest that CSR research is gradually moving beyond traditional performance evaluation toward broader sustainability and strategic management perspectives. Future studies should therefore examine how digital technologies, ESG strategies, and green innovation jointly influence organizational performance across different industries and institutional environments (Albitar et al., 2024).

Finally, future research should strengthen the practical relevance of CSR studies. Instead of focusing primarily on financial outcomes, scholars should pay greater attention to employee well-being, stakeholder trust, organizational resilience, environmental sustainability, and long-term social value creation. Managers are encouraged to integrate CSR into corporate governance, strategic planning, and innovation management, while policymakers should continue improving ESG disclosure standards and sustainability-related regulatory frameworks. Such efforts will facilitate the transition from compliance-oriented CSR practices to strategically embedded sustainability management (Velte, 2022).

Overall, future CSR and organizational performance research should promote closer integration of interdisciplinary theories, innovative methodologies, emerging organizational contexts, and practical management applications. These directions will not only enrich the theoretical development of CSR research but also provide valuable guidance for organizations seeking sustainable competitive advantages in an increasingly complex business environment.

6. CONCLUSION

This study systematically reviewed the literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance published between 2018 and 2025 by integrating bibliometric analysis with thematic synthesis. Using the Web of Science Core Collection database and CiteSpace software, this study examined publication trends, institutional collaboration, keyword co-occurrence, keyword clustering, and research evolution within the CSR and organizational performance literature. Such an integrated review approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure and development trajectory of this research field (Donthu et al., 2021).

The bibliometric findings indicate that CSR and organizational performance research has experienced continuous growth over the past several years, reflecting the increasing importance of sustainable development and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices in contemporary management research. Corporate governance, financial performance, innovation, stakeholder management, and sustainability have gradually become the dominant research themes. This evolution suggests that CSR is increasingly regarded as a strategic capability for creating long-term organizational value rather than merely a voluntary corporate activity (Velte, 2022).

Based on the bibliometric findings, this study developed an integrated knowledge framework consisting of four dimensions: knowledge base, knowledge domains, knowledge evolution, and future research directions. The framework demonstrates that CSR research has gradually evolved from traditional performance-oriented studies toward a multidisciplinary field integrating corporate governance, strategic management, innovation, sustainability, and stakeholder theory. This development is consistent with the view that organizations create sustainable value by balancing the interests of multiple stakeholder groups while strengthening organizational capabilities (Freeman et al., 2021).

This review also identifies several promising directions for future research. Greater theoretical integration, methodological innovation, cross-country comparative studies, and investigations into emerging topics such as artificial intelligence, digital transformation, ESG governance, and green technology innovation will further enrich the CSR literature. Future studies should also examine how

different institutional environments and organizational characteristics influence the effectiveness of CSR implementation (Velte, 2022).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the bibliometric analysis was limited to the Web of Science Core Collection database and therefore may not include all relevant publications indexed in other academic databases. Second, the search strategy focused on article titles, which may have excluded relevant studies using different terminology. Finally, although bibliometric analysis effectively reveals the overall knowledge structure of a research field, it cannot fully capture the theoretical depth and methodological diversity of individual studies (Donthu et al., 2021).

Overall, this study provides a systematic overview of the knowledge structure, thematic evolution, and future development of CSR and organizational performance research. The integrated knowledge framework proposed in this review contributes to a better understanding of the intellectual development of the field and offers useful implications for researchers, managers, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable organizational development through effective CSR practices.

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