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Corporate social responsibility research in international business journals: An author co-citation analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe the development of research on corporate social responsibility in international business (IB) journals and to suggest future research directions. We conducted a bibliometric study of articles published in twelve leading international business journals over three decades in a longer time frame (1996–2015). Five research trends were found in IB journals: business ethics, integration of stakeholder management, the evolution of the CSR concept, the political and social demands of CSR, and the financial implications of CSR. Our results thus have several implications and suggest numerous opportunities for future research.

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important factor in a multinational company's competitiveness. By addressing social responsibility, enterprises can build long-term employee and consumer trust as a basis for sustainable business models. This in turn helps to create an environment in which enterprises can innovate and grow. Recently, many CSR studies have been conducted in many research fields. As a result of globalization, CSR research in international business has also been increasing (Egri & Ralston, 2008; Kolk, 2016; Rodriguez, Siegel, Hillman, & Eden, 2006). Actually, 271 articles of out of a total of 8465 articles were published in the top twelve international business (IB) journals, accounting for 3.20% of the total number published in these journals. Thus, the total number of publications referring to CSR were increased in the timeframe of 1996–2015 (especially in CGIR), and the ratio of CSR articles in IB also increased. Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) argued that CSR was part of the important environmental dimension in IB studies. The social responsibilities of businesses and their managers have been discussed in the academic literature since at least the 1950s.

We think that CSR became more important in particular IB research fields, given that both the number of articles and the relative proportion of CSR articles in IB journals increased over time. Specifically, the percentage of CSR articles in IB journals increased from 0.5% in 2002 to 5.2% in 2015. This means that the relative importance of CSR as

compared with traditional IB subjects certainly increased. Despite the increasing numbers of research articles on CSR in IB journals, we do not know exactly what kinds of research have been performed or specifically what research should be conducted in the future. This study extends the existing literature in order to better illuminate the main trends of IB research across a longer timeframe (1996–2015). The ratio of CSR articles in IB journals can be compared with those of other traditional IB research subjects including international marketing, international strategy, international finance, and international human resource management.

Our main research questions are the followings: What are the research trends of CSR in IB journals and are they similar to those in non-IB journals? Have the research trends of CSR changed over a period of time? Who are the main researchers producing CSR articles in IB journals?

Our methodological approach, based on a bibliometric study of 271 articles published in the top twelve journals for IB research, permits, deeper analyses of past trends and of the evolution of the literature than can be accomplished through traditional literature reviews (Ferreira, 2011; Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). In the past, scholars have attempted to review the previous literature in order to summarize the body of knowledge related to CSR, and they have used qualitative methods to identify and suggest future directions for research. However, the academic field has grown considerably and there are now numerous academic articles on this topic. Thus, it has become

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impossible to synthesize the wide range of academic publications using qualitative analysis. As the academic field of CSR has developed dramatically in the last three decades, numerous academic publications have appeared in a number of journals in IB and journals in other areas. Consequently, although it is possible, it is difficult and laborious to review and analyze the structures of these CSR publications using qualitative methods. Fortunately, modern technology facilitates both the accumulation and the analysis of data regarding previously published research. Based on the development of bibliometric databases such as ISI Web of Science (WoS), Scopus and Google Scholar (GS), researchers can analyze large-scale datasets efficiently. In particular, co-author citation has often been used to elucidate knowledge structures.

The nature of the current study was exploratory due to the lack of previous research in this area. As a result, the study did not test any hypotheses and did not interpret the results by applying any theoretical bases. However, this study can be viewed as providing the groundwork in the area of determining the knowledge structure of CSR in IB. Given the enormous numbers of publications on CSR in IB, the use of bibliometric research methods enables us to investigate the academic status of the field of CSR in IB field effectively. As far as we know, this study is the first bibliometric analysis on CSR in IB journals. Despite the development of bibliometric databases such as WoS, there have been only rare attempts to extensively analyze large-scale data on CSR in IB publications. Moreover, most studies that have used a bibliometric database have been limited to certain subfields or to a small number of publications. Despite the benefits of bibliometric data and analysis on the topic of sociology of science, there have been only rare attempts to apply the data and techniques within the field of bibliometrics to CSR. Recently, [De Bakker, Groenewegen, and den Hond \(2005\)](#) examined the impact of eight CSR-related research papers published in the top 8 management and business journals by analyzing citation data. However, his study investigated the possible evolution of the epistemological orientation by text analysis. Accordingly, it is difficult to compare the results from his study with those of our study. Most studies using a bibliometric database have been limited to certain subfields or to a small number of publications. For example, [Pinto, Serra, and Ferreira \(2014\)](#) conducted a bibliometric study of articles published in seven leading IB journals over a period of three decades. They analyzed how national culture has been impacting IB research. Through co-citation analysis, they found two main clusters of research, namely, work on the conceptualization of culture and its dimensions, and work on cultural distance. Similarly, [Acedo and Casillas \(2005\)](#) investigated the main research trends by referring to articles published in international management journals. By applying co-citation analysis, they analyzed the articles published in five top journals from 1997 to 2000, identifying the main trends and analyzing their dissemination within those journals.

Recognizing the issues and ongoing debates regarding the legitimacy of the field of CSR in IB, this research aimed to comprehend the evolution of the knowledge structure of the field. First, the study analyzed co-authorships and citations of previous publications to identify influential concepts, paradigms, and theoretical frameworks related to the field of CSR in international business. Secondly, using a social network perspective, the study investigated the structural patterns and relational attributes within the knowledge structure of the field by employing an author co-occurrence network analysis and a co-citation network analysis so that CSR scholars can view a complete picture of the fundamental knowledge structure of the field.

2. Literature review

In a review of previous studies, we summarized the major research streams in terms of themes and methodology. We found six research trends through co-citation analysis: Business ethics, Integration of stakeholder management, Evolution of the CSR concept, Political and

social demands of CSR, Financial implications of CSR, and Reputation and sustainability management.

Additionally, in a review of previous studies, some interesting research subjects that are related with international business were found, including CSR and cultural differences ([Hofman & Newman, 2014](#); [Roy & Goll, 2014](#); [Waldman et al., 2006](#)), CSR in emerging markets ([Ertuna & Tukul, 2010](#)), foreign entry mode ([Meyer, Ding, Li, & Zhang, 2014](#)), CSR in export markets ([Costa, Lages, & Hortinha, 2015](#)), foreign investment decisions ([Driffield, Jones, & Crotty, 2013](#)), and international diversification ([Strike, Gao, & Bansal, 2006](#)).

Specifically, with regard to CSR and cultural differences, [Waldman et al. \(2006\)](#) examined the relationship of culture and leadership with corporate social responsibility. International cultural diversification also has a high correlation with social performance, and a high level of slack financial resources has an impact on corporate social performance ([Garcia-Sanchez, Rodríguez-Ariza, & Frias-Aceituno, 2013](#)). In studies on CSR in emerging markets, [Ertuna and Tukul \(2010\)](#) investigated the CSR activities in an emerging market and found that CSR reporting had been influenced by traditional practices. [Meyer et al. \(2014\)](#) compared State-owned (SO) enterprises and private firms in order to explain differential effects between different entrants. These studies belong to the research trend of foreign entry models and CSR. In addition, [Hutzschenreuter, Pedersen, and Volberda \(2007\)](#) examined the importance of internationalization paths and processes and developed a model to explain heterogeneous outcomes from these. [Filippov \(2012\)](#) examines the relationship between the Russian managerial style (human resource management, CSR and so on) and the process of firm internationalization. [Strike et al. \(2006\)](#) examine the relationship between international diversification and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and find that firms that are socially responsible and those that are socially irresponsible can coexist.

However, the number of papers on these strongly IB-related subjects was small and most of the authors were not included in the co-citation analysis, due to the limited number of known co-citations. Some non-IB-related subjects were also found: human resources ([Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007](#); [Waring & Lewer, 2008](#)), CSR strategy ([Barkemeyer, Preuss, & Lee, 2015](#); [Doh, McGuire, & Ozaki, 2015](#); [Gupta, Czinkota, & Melewar, 2013](#)), risk management ([Sun & Cui, 2014](#)), reputation ([Zhu, Sun, & Leung, 2014](#)), firms' market value ([Husted & Allen, 2009](#)), and CSR in SMEs ([Ryan, O'Malley, & O'Dwyer, 2010](#)). Similarly, the number of papers on these subjects was small and most of the authors were not included in the co-citation analysis, due to the limited number of known co-citations.

Specifically, [Waring and Lewer \(2008\)](#) found that there was a socially responsible investment impact on HRM. [Brammer et al. \(2007\)](#) used the social identity theory model to explain the relationship between employee perceptions and organizational commitment to corporate social responsibility. This is relevant to CSR strategy, brand knowledge, and brand value impact on sustainability ([Gupta et al., 2013](#)). Through a wider range of publicized sustainability reporting and a global reporting initiative, there is an impact on output effectiveness ([Barkemeyer et al., 2015](#)). [Lydenberg \(2007\)](#) explained the relationship between universal and social investors and described differences from rational investors. CSR research in SMEs was also found. New terms and a new typology were used to progress and understand the mainstreaming of RBPs (responsible business practices) among SMEs ([Ryan et al., 2010](#)). With regard to risk management, CSR can greatly reduce the risk of default. In high-dynamism environments, firms have a more energetic relationship than in low-dynamism-environment firms ([Sun & Cui, 2014](#)). [Husted and Allen \(2009\)](#) examine the relationship between CSR and value creation in MNEs, and the results show that visibility, voluntarism, and centrality are related to value creation. In a comparative analysis in CSR, comparing UK and US companies in CSR showed significant differences of corporate governance strategy between these two countries ([Aguilera, Williams, Conley, & Rupp, 2006](#)). [Devinney, Schwalbach, and Williams \(2013\)](#) compared corporate

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