CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNICATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT MARKETING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: *The digital era has fundamentally reshaped how corporations communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, with social media emerging as a dominant channel for stakeholder engagement. This study conducts a systematic literature review to synthesise and map the intellectual structure of CSR communication research through social media content marketing. Utilising bibliometric analysis with VOSviewer software, we analysed a corpus of scholarly works to identify dominant themes, research clusters, and evolutionary trends. The findings reveal a mature and structured research landscape organised around two central, interconnected clusters: (1) the conceptual core of CSR-stakeholder communication via social media and (2) the corporate actor and methodological approaches used in its analysis. The visualisation confirms that the field's paradigm has shifted from one-way reporting to dialogic, relationship-building communication, where authenticity and stakeholder engagement are paramount to success. The study also identifies a growing trend towards employing rigorous bibliometric methods to consolidate the field. This review not only provides a consolidated overview for researchers but also offers practical insights for communication professionals seeking to develop effective and authentic CSR content strategies. This study concludes by delineating gaps in the literature and proposing directions for future research, including longitudinal studies and platform-specific content analyses.*

KEY WORDS: *CSR, social media, content marketing, corporate communication, systematic review*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *M14, M31, M37.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary business landscape, characterised by heightened social and environmental awareness, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a peripheral philanthropic activity to a central strategic imperative for organisations worldwide (Carroll, 2016). Effective communication of CSR initiatives is no longer optional; it is essential for building legitimacy, fostering stakeholder trust, and achieving sustainable competitive advantage. However, traditional one-way CSR communication channels, such as annual sustainability reports, often fail to engage a broad audience and can be perceived as impersonal or lacking authenticity (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The advent and proliferation of social media have fundamentally disrupted corporate communication. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn offer unprecedented opportunities for interactive, dialogic, and real-time engagement with diverse stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 2016). This digital environment has given rise to content marketing as a powerful strategy. Unlike traditional advertising, content marketing focuses on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience with the goal of driving profitable customer actions (Pulizzi, 2014).

The convergence of CSR communication and social media content marketing represents a promising and complex frontier. On the one hand, social media allows companies to humanise their CSR efforts, tell compelling stories, demonstrate impact transparently, and engage in meaningful two-way conversations with their communities (Saxton et al., 2019). However, this approach introduces significant risks, including accusations of "greenwashing" or "woke washing", where communication is perceived as insincere or disconnected from actual corporate practices (Seele & Gatti, 2017).

A substantial and growing body of literature has begun to explore this intersection. Studies have investigated various aspects, such as the impact of different content types (i.e. narratives vs. facts) on stakeholder engagement, the role of influencers in amplifying CSR messages, and the strategic alignment of CSR content with corporate branding on social media (Colleoni, 2013; Lee et al., 2013). Despite this burgeoning interest, the literature remains fragmented across disciplines such as public relations, marketing, and corporate governance. There is a pressing need to synthesise existing findings, identify dominant research themes, and map the intellectual structure of this dynamic field of study.

To address this gap, this study employs a systematic literature review methodology augmented with bibliometric analysis using the VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2023). This dual approach allows for both a qualitative synthesis of key insights and a quantitative and visual mapping of the relationships between key concepts, influential authors, and emerging research clusters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The paradigm of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication has shifted dramatically from a one-way, monologic model to an interactive, dialogic

process, largely driven by the digital revolution. Early CSR communication was predominantly mediated through corporate-controlled channels, such as sustainability reports and press releases, which offered limited scope for stakeholder engagement and feedback (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). This asymmetry often leads to a credibility gap, where stakeholders question the authenticity of corporate social initiatives. The primary challenge for organisations is not just managing their CSR actions but also effectively communicating them in a manner that is perceived as genuine and trustworthy.

The emergence of social media platforms has fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between corporations and their stakeholders, creating a networked public sphere in which communication is instantaneous, interactive, and decentralised. Platforms such as Twitter (now X), Instagram, and LinkedIn have empowered stakeholders to become active participants in the co-creation of corporate meaning and reputation (Castelló et al., 2016). In this environment, stakeholders are no longer passive recipients but "prosumers" of CSR-related content who can amplify, critique, or reframe corporate messages. These dynamics force a strategic shift from mere information dissemination to relationship management. As Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) argue, social media transforms organizational communication from a one-way information flow to a two-way dialogic process, where engagement and responsiveness become the paramount metrics of communicative success.

Within this interactive landscape, content marketing has emerged as a strategic linchpin in effective CSR communication. Content marketing, defined as the creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, aligns perfectly with the need for authentic stakeholder engagement (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). For CSR, this translates into moving beyond factual reporting to storytelling, using multimedia formats - such as employee volunteer videos, impact documentaries, and data visualisations of environmental savings - to build emotional connections and to demonstrate tangible social value. This narrative-driven approach helps embed CSR into the brand's identity, making it more relatable and shareable.

Empirical research has begun to delineate the factors that make CSR content effective on social media. A foundational study by Saxton and Waters (2014) analysed stakeholder engagement on Facebook and Twitter, finding that "call-to-action" posts and those that provided information about the organisation's mission and community impact generated the highest levels of user interaction. Furthermore, the visual nature of platforms such as Instagram has proven particularly potent. Chu and Chen (2019) demonstrated that visual storytelling on image-centric platforms significantly enhances message credibility and emotional appeal. Their findings indicate that posts which foster a sense of community and a "dialogic loop" encouraging user participation and co-creation are perceived as more authentic and less commercially motivated than traditional corporate broadcasts.

However, this new communicative terrain is fraught with the persistent risk of "cosmetic CSR" or greenwashing, where communication outstrips substantive performance. In the age of social media, corporate authenticity is a fragile construct, as stakeholders continuously scrutinise the alignment between a brand's professed values

and its observable actions, a tension that creates a state of "paradoxical transparency" (Schoeneborn et al., 2020). A single misstep can trigger a "networked crisis", where criticism spreads virally, causing severe reputational damage (Coombs, 2007). Therefore, the foundation of any successful CSR content marketing strategy must be substantive action; the content serves as an authentic narrative of that action, not a substitute for it.

Finally, strategically integrating CSR with broader business goals is critical for ensuring message consistency and impact. Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2011) highlight that CSR communication reaches its peak effectiveness when it is aligned with a company's activities and strategy, meaning that the social issue addressed is closely aligned with the company's industry and core business expertise. When this alignment is clearly defined and consistently conveyed across social media channels, it enhances perceived authenticity, bolsters stakeholder trust, and ultimately allows CSR content marketing to contribute significantly to both social and business value.

Therefore, the primary objectives of this study are as follows:
- *Ob1: To systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesise the extant academic literature on CSR communication through social media content marketing.*
- *Ob2: To delineate the evolution of research trends and pinpoint gaps that present opportunities for future scholarly enquiry.*

By achieving these objectives, this review aims to provide a consolidated foundation for researchers and practical guidance for communication professionals seeking to leverage social media content marketing for authentic and effective CSR communication.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Considering the objectives highlighted above, we want to carry out a bibliometric analysis of the research evolution in the published scientific papers under the aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility communication through social media content marketing using the data extracted from the Web of Science platform.

Bibliometric analysis involved two procedures: *performance analysis* and *scientific mapping*. In the first part of the research, a performance analysis was conducted to evaluate groups of scientific researchers and the impact of their activities (types of published documents, fields of research, languages, countries, and number of publications). In the second part of our research, scientific mapping presents the structural and dynamic aspects of science by representing the cognitive structure of the research.

In terms of scientific mapping, our study investigated the structure of networks and the different constituents of research in terms of the research topic, the grouping identified for the research topic, the importance of the identified key issues, and their relation to different contexts (i.e., clusters). The streaming used to perform bibliometric analysis focused first on data extraction, processing, network extraction, mapping, and finally, analysis. To perform the bibliometric analysis, we used the Web of Science Core Collection database and queried the word group through the advanced search: *CSR, social media, marketing, and communication*, in all fields (title, abstract, topic,
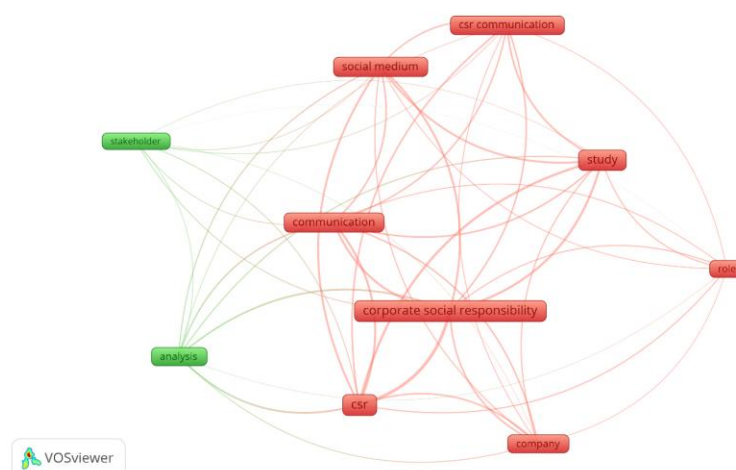
etc.). The search in WOS was conducted without a time limit. The total number of publications analysed was 325, obtained using the keywords highlighted above.

To develop a quantitative analysis of the scientific interest in the research on Corporate Social Responsibility communication through social media content marketing, we used the VOSviewer1.6.20 software to carry out a scientific mapping by visualising the structure and connection of the research field with other fields.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Thematic Network Analysis

The bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer software yielded a network visualisation map (Figure 1) that categorised the literature into two primary, well-defined thematic clusters. This bipartite structure effectively captures the main divisions in the research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication through social media.

Source: Authors representation using VOSviewer 1.6.20

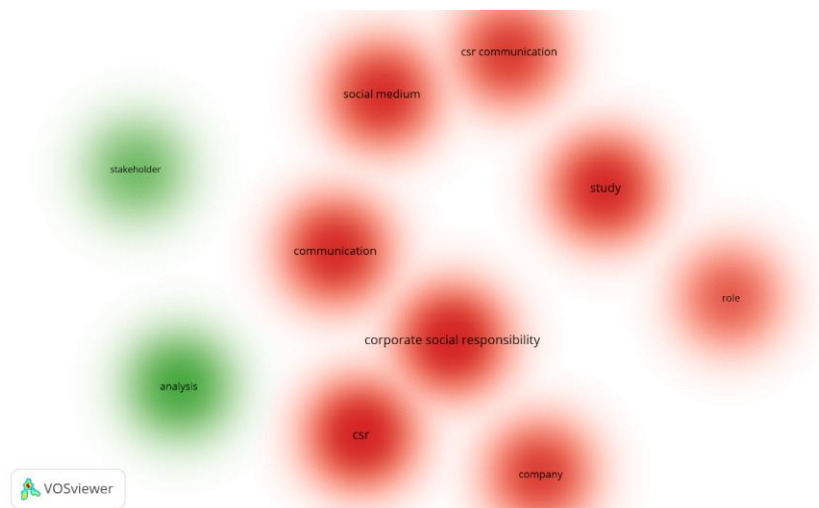**Figure 1. Network visualization map**

The two identified clusters are as follows: *i) Cluster 1 (Red): The Conceptual Core of CSR Communication*. This cluster forms the substantive heart of the research field, grouping key conceptual elements. It is defined by the strong interlinkages between the terms: "corporate social responsibility" / " CSR ", "communication", "social media", and "stakeholder". This cluster represents the fundamental "what" and "who" of the research domain: the study of how CSR is communicated via social media to and with stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). The cohesion of these terms confirms that this conceptual nexus is the central paradigm in literature. *ii) Cluster 2 (Green): Corporate actors and research methodology*. The second cluster integrates the entity responsible for the action with the methods used to analyse it. It brings together the terms: "company", "role", "study", and "analysis". This cluster

addresses the "actor" and the "method." It focuses on the company and its role in CSR communication and highlights how this phenomenon is investigated through empirical studies and analyses (Coombs & Holladay, 2015).

The visual separation and clear proximity between the two clusters illustrate a coherent research dialogue: the Conceptual Core (Cluster 1) defines the phenomenon under investigation, while the Corporate Actor & Methodology cluster (Cluster 2) provides the context of who enacts it and how it is studied. Thus, the network successfully maps the field's structure, distinguishing between the core subject matter and the analytical frameworks applied to it.

4.2. Research Density and Focus Areas

The density visualisation map was generated using VOSviewer (Figure 2) provides a complementary perspective to network analysis, highlighting the concentration and relative prominence of key terms within the research corpus.

Source: Authors representation using VOSviewer 1.6.20

Figure 2. Density visualization map

The density visualisation map generated by VOSviewer complements network analysis by highlighting the concentration and intellectual weight of key research themes. The map clearly delineates two primary areas of high research density, corresponding to the two main clusters identified earlier.

The two dense regions are as follows:

1. *High Density in the Conceptual & Stakeholder Engagement Cluster*: This area shows the highest concentration around core conceptual terms. The most prominent terms were: "corporate social responsibility" (CSR), "social media", "stakeholder", "communication", "role", and "study". This high-density zone confirms that the most concentrated research effort is devoted to understanding the fundamental relationship between CSR, social media as a communication channel, and the
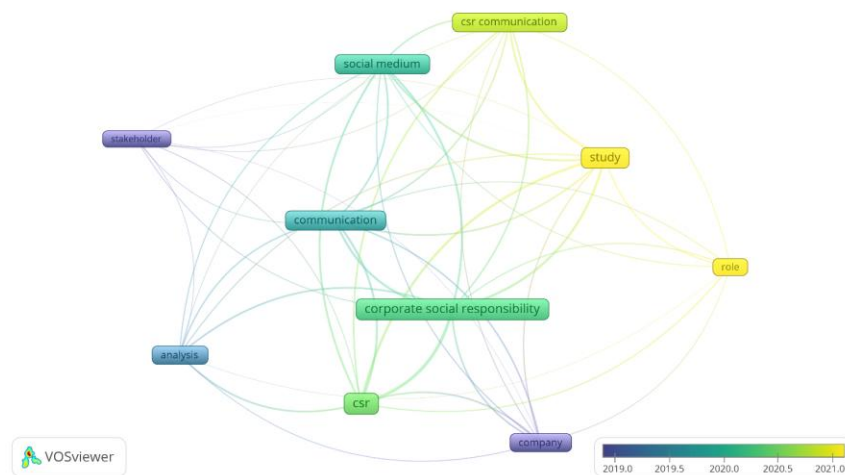
central role of stakeholders in the process (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2013). The intensity here underscores those engaging stakeholders and understanding their expectations is a primary concern in the literature.

2. *High Density in the Corporate & Methodological Analysis Cluster*. A second, distinct area of high density is formed around the terms: "company", "analysis", and "CSR" (as a key term of analysis for the company) (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). This cluster highlights a strong research focus on the corporate entity itself and the analytical methods used to study its behaviour. The density around "company", "analysis", and "CSR" indicates a significant stream of literature employing rigorous methodologies to examine corporate strategy, performance, and communication outcomes (Lock & Seele, 2017).

In summary, the density map vividly illustrates where the field's intellectual energy is most concentrated: first, on the core concepts of stakeholder-focused CSR communication on social media, and second, on the methodological analysis of the company's role and CSR performance.

4.3. Temporal Analysis of the Research Landscape

The overlay visualization generated by VOSviewer (Figure 3) maps both the thematic clusters and the chronological evolution of key concepts in the literature concerning Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. The analysis revealed a coherent intellectual structure composed of two dominant, interconnected clusters, with a clear temporal progression in the research focus from foundational concepts to contemporary methodological trends.

Source: Authors representation using VOSviewer 1.6.20

Figure 3. Overlay visualization map

The colour spectrum, ranging from blue (older) to yellow (newer), reveals a meaningful temporal trajectory.

a) *Foundational Concepts (2019-2020)*. The core concepts of "corporate social responsibility", " CSR ", "social media", and "stakeholder" appear in cooler colours (blue/green), indicating that they were the established foundation upon which the field was built during its earlier phase.

b) *Rise of Analytical Rigor (2020-2021)*. The warmer colours (yellow) associated with "study", "role", and " CSR communication" (lemon) demonstrate a recent and growing trend towards the application of sophisticated bibliometric and computational tools. This shift highlights the maturation of the field, as researchers increasingly employ systematic methods to map and synthesise the expanding body of literature.

In conclusion, the VOSviewer analysis not only confirms the field's dual focus on CSR-stakeholder communication via social media and corporate analysis but also visually captures its evolution from establishing core concepts to embracing advanced methodological approaches for self-reflection and consolidation of the field.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a systematic and bibliometric overview of the academic literature exploring the intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication and social media content marketing. By synthesising existing research and mapping its intellectual structure using VOSviewer, this review offers a consolidated understanding of a dynamic and rapidly evolving field. The analysis confirms that CSR communication has fundamentally shifted from a one-way, report-based paradigm to an interactive, dialogic process centred on social media. The core of the research, as visualised in the bibliometric networks, is firmly anchored in the triad of CSR, social media, and stakeholder engagement, underscoring that effective communication is now synonymous with building and sustaining relationships with diverse stakeholder groups through digital dialogue.

The findings reveal a mature and structured research landscape organised around two dominant, interconnected themes. First, the Conceptual Core of CSR Communication highlights the substantive focus on how companies can leverage the unique affordances of social media - such as interactivity, immediacy, and visual storytelling - to communicate their CSR initiatives authentically and effectively. Second, the Corporate Actor and Research Methodology cluster reflects the field's emphasis on the company's strategic role and its concomitant reliance on rigorous empirical and analytical methods, including the growing use of bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer for self-reflective literature analysis. The temporal overlay of the network further illustrates the field's evolution, showing a progression from establishing foundational concepts to the current emphasis on sophisticated methodological analysis.

The theoretical implications of this study are two-fold. First, it validates and visually maps the central theoretical paradigm that integrates stakeholder theory with dialogic communication in a digital context. Second, it demonstrates the value of bibliometric analysis for taking a "meta-perspective" on the field itself, revealing its structure, key contributors, and evolutionary trends. From a practical perspective, the

findings offer clear guidance for communication professionals: success in CSR communication on social media is not achieved through broadcasting but through authentic engagement with the audience. This requires a content marketing strategy that prioritises transparency, fosters two-way conversation, leverages compelling narratives, and, most critically, is underpinned by substantive CSR actions to avoid significant reputational risks associated with perceived greenwashing.

Despite its contributions, this review has some limitations. The scope of the analysis was constrained by the selection of databases and specific keywords used for the literature search, potentially omitting relevant studies. Furthermore, as a review of the literature, its findings are interpretative and dependent on the quality and focus of the existing body of work.

Future research should address the gaps identified in this study, naming longitudinal studies to track the impact of specific CSR content strategies on stakeholder behaviour over time, exploring the efficacy of emerging platforms (TikTok) and formats (short-form videos) for CSR messaging, and employing advanced natural language processing to perform sentiment and thematic analyses on large-scale corpora of user-generated responses to corporate CSR communication.

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