

CURRENT FOCUSES OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE OF CSR-RESEARCH

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the domestic and international state of CSR research. Using methodology of bibliometrics, we analysed online available CSR articles published in the last 5 years (between 2017 and 2021) by means of the well-known internet search engine, according to relevance for the first 100 results. The content analysis aspects of this article had been developed along the model of Cramer (2005), examining the presence of its 6 phases. We found that in the case of both domestic and international sources, there is a visible need to integrate CSR into business processes, while there is still strong emphasis on the communication aspects of CSR - even if we expected this approach to become already outdated. The relatively small number of case studies underline the opportunity of creation more case studies, compiled with scientific needs, which could be right direction from business and educational point of view, as well.

1. Introduction

The aim of our present study is to review the domestic and international literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in recent years, with the intention that this will help us to update our research aspects and approach. The focus of our latest CSR case studies examined the fit and relationship between CSR activity and corporate strategy (Tessényi - Katona, 2015; Katona - Tessényi, 2015; Tessényi - Katona, 2017). In these research we look for answers to the following questions: (i) What are the pillars of the strategy of the given company or organization?, (ii) Who are their shareholders?, (iii) How do these groups participate in strategy formulation and implementation?, (iv) What organizational and performance expectation structure supports the achievement of CSR goals?, (v) How is this measured and how is it incorporated?, (vi) To what extent do the revealed company-specific results strengthen the outcome of previous research and surveys caught up in the literature or our primer ones?, and finally (vii) What is the direct business and marketing impact of the results? As we see it, CSR research is far from global level, the "mainstream" methodology and direction are still evolving, so we considered it very actual to examine the global nature of CSR research practices and their main results and focuses. More than 322,000 articles in the last five years published on the topic of CSR according to google search engine (retrieved in July 2021), at the same time this number is growing hour by hours, which makes it impossible to undertake a comprehensive review, therefore in our work, we reviewed the most cited 50-50 domestic and international articles.

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2. Conceptual and definitional bases

The fact that CSR turned into a practical requirement has developed in parallel with the theoretical and scientific research needs, so CSR has been evolved a multidisciplinary science in which not only the scientific and business worlds, but also the territory of media, finance, and law, as well as marketing, economics and politics show a deep interest (Hemingway, 2002 in Berkesné 2018. p. 6). Our approach to CSR is in line with the EU definition according to which CSR means that companies voluntarily take social and environmental considerations into account in their day-by-day business activities and in their relationships with partners. According to the 2014 EU Directives, it is also necessary to report on the CSR activities of a given year, furthermore, reactive solutions and philanthropy are not sufficient to carry out truly responsible activities, while proactive, strategic considerations are highly needed, embedding in the social, economic, and environmental spheres (Veres, 2017). As a common pattern of CSR practices of companies, it can be identified that (i) behind responsibility there are business decision-making process made by decision-makers, (ii) activities and actions are guided by voluntary principles, and (iii) their results lead to measurable economic and social value creation (Katona, 2018). In addition to this their direct or indirect impact on social activities, their measurement and continuous evaluation are widely expected, as well (Van Oosterhout et al., 2006). According to our approach, it is critical that the goal and emphasis of responsible behaviour should organically connected to the basic function and activity of the company - so the activities related to responsibility should fit the core competence and key activities of the added organization (Eweje, 2014). As for us the elements of PSR (Public Social Responsibility) and the activities of CSV (Company Shared Value) are also included in the umbrella concept of CSR, even if there is a tendency to separate the concepts of CSR and CSV (Wójcik, 2016). In our opinion, CSV rather means a CSR activity that fits super properly the business activity and is integrated into the activities of the organization, so CSV does mean a real, value-creating responsibility in the case of the given industry or company with a real practical focus and valuable business connection, as well (Tessényi-Katona, 2021). To support this view, we tend to refer to the "CSR House" framework compiled by Cramer (2005), which basically approaches the integration of CSR into the organization along the following 6 main phases: (1) the core business of the company, (2) the analysis of the stakeholders, (3) CSR business goals and value creation (4) CSR business strategy, (5) internal and external communication and finally (6) impact measurement. We highly agree with Aagaard's (2016) approach that although these elements are generic, the content behind each phase should be tailored to the added organization, company, or enterprise, as the phases can be interchanged in unique cases. In close relation to this, our perception is better reflected and supported by interpreting the content of phase (3) and (4) along the following elements: (a) setting business objectives, (b) formulating a business strategy, and then (c) the creation of value, that is doing the business itself. However, we consider Cramer's model to be so relevant and current that we also extend the interpretation of our current literature review along this framework.

3. Material and method

To collect resources, we used Google Scholar as a tool to gather relevant articles published between July 2017 and July 2021. In the first round, we narrowed down the list of results along the keywords of „CSR evaluation”, „CSR research”, „CSR measurement”, „CSR strategy fit” and „CSR company case studies” and analysed 10 articles per topic in terms of content, mainly along the phases described by Cramer's model (2005). In addition to text analysis, we were primarily interested in research directions and qualitative indicators for evaluating corporate CSR strategies. A similar approach was previously used by Low and Siegel (2019), who examined employee-centered CSR research of the 2000s. Using bibliometric data, descriptive analysis, social network analysis and visualization tools, the authors examined employee-centered CSR reports. This research of Low and Siegel was limited to keyword searches within the Scopus database.

3.1. Main domestic results

Of the 50 Hungarian articles first reviewed, only 27 turned out to be truly CSR-related, meaning the search engine was rather inaccurate, which also indicates that even the most accurate-chosen keywords can often mislead the readers. Based on the analysed studies and papers, the majority of CSR research published in Hungarian has a clear-cut theoretical approach. As for our document review, only a third of the papers examined real corporate practices or presented specific and sharp business examples. As we saw, over the years, this approach has been slightly deepened and more and more (mostly) doctoral dissertations turned into studying of CSR practices, while more and more papers have been turning for the examination of CSR activities at SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises). Examining the CSR activities of SMEs has incrementally become as a kind of new trend, while previously large company-focused case studies were rather widespread. At the same time, it was also transparent that sustainability reports still can be considered as the main communication and publication tools for companies at the field of CSR. Anyhow it is at the same time clearly visible, that while during the economic crisis of 2009-2010 many companies stopped issuing such reports, compiling, and publishing of them gained a new momentum when the sustainability report was strictly linked to EU legislation at the end of 2016 as Hungary adopted the directive on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information (2014 / 95 / EU) (Györi et al, 2021). In the **Figure 1** below, we summarize the topics covered by the examined articles in Hungarian, along the indicated keywords. This result also highlighted the marked presence of a communication focus.

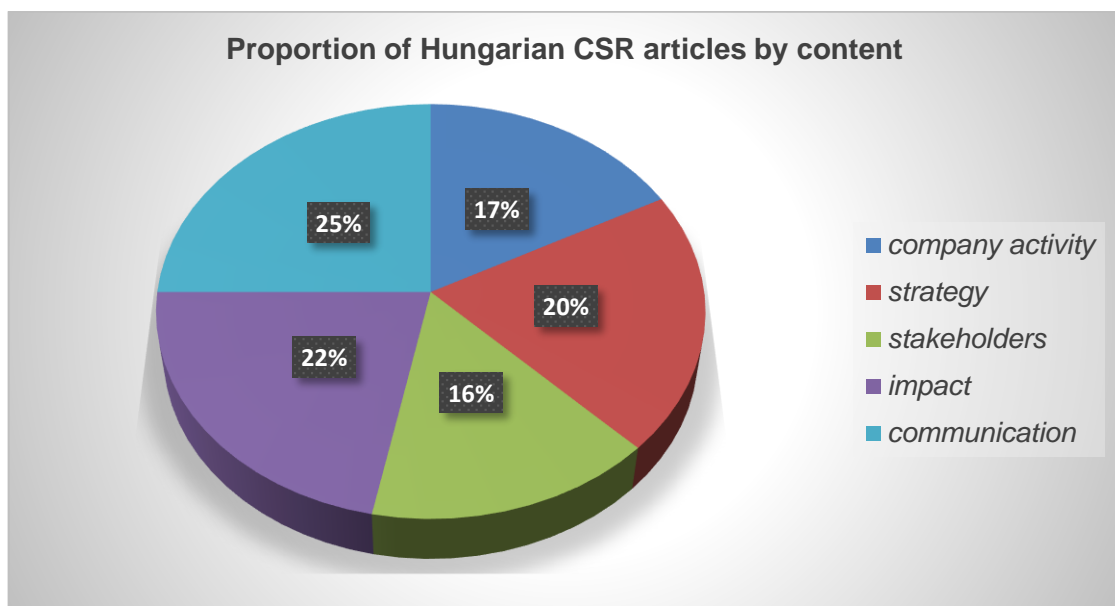


Figure 1: Topics covered by the examined sources published in Hungarian, Own editing (2022)

3.2. Main international results

The international, more precisely English written sources were collected also following the method described above, so this research sample also include 10-10 most cited works including keywords „CSR evaluation”, „CSR research”, „CSR measurement”, „CSR strategy fit” and „CSR company case studies”. The English written papers were gathered on July 22, 2021. The English-language articles examined were written by researchers from a total of 24 countries - UK, USA, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Columbia, Peru, Spain, Slovakia, Peru, Nepal, China, South Korea, Slovenia, Poland, Chile, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Italy, Greece, Denmark, UAE (United Arab Emirates), Pakistan - but most of the publications were written by American (USA), Dutch, or Chinese researcher(s). Right before the content analysis of the sample, we scrutinized how characteristic the international cooperation in the field of CSR research. This valid question also reflects Pisani et al.'s (2017) earlier reference linked to the lack of global research patterns and findings. As for our results, international, comprehensive research collaborations are still not very

typical for the period we reviewed, as papers compiled by collaborative international hubs or groups represented only 20% of the examined publications. One element of bringing global conclusions to the surface was examining of the composition of the research team, the other component was the subject of the research itself. As for the latter, it can be stated that most of the sources did not specify the industry or company - but tended to draw a kind of general conclusions, so the "80-20 rule" applies to the result in this respect, as well. In the case of the articles, chapters and works where the focus was on a given industry or sector, the following were the subjects of the studies: (i) Tourism, Hotel, Restaurant, i.e., the HORECA sector, (ii) IT, (iii) Energy sector, (iv) Gambling, (v) Pharmaceuticals, (vi) Luxury Goods and Clothing, and finally (vii) Small and Medium Enterprises, abbreviated as SMEs. The high-level results of the content analysis are spectacularly summarized in **Figure 2** below.

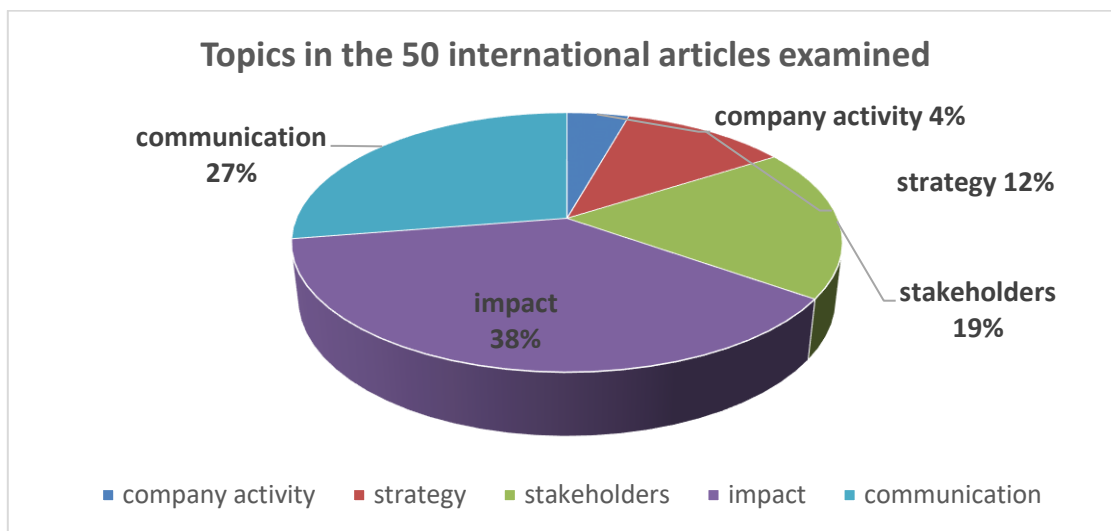


Figure 2: Topics covered in the examined English-written sources, Own editing (2022)

The content classification of the articles along the phases described in Cramer's "CSR House" model revealed that the greatest number of English-written literature sources dealt with value creation, business objectives, impact analysis of CSR activities, and the internal and external aspects of CSR. It should be noted, however, that each article may be classified under several phases, based on their content and results. At the same time, compared to the Hungarian-language results, it is striking that the English-language resources focus much more on the different impacts of CSR than on the mere communication, or pure report aspects of that.

4. Conclusions, summary

Our conclusions are presented in two sections below. At the same time, we would like to point out that the results of our examination will be published in a more detailed-way in Hungarian language (Tessényi-Katona, 2022). This time, at first, we summarize the conclusions of our study in relation to the restrictions of the interpretation and then we draw and show a conclusion along the content and other aspects of the analysis, as well.

- (i) Conclusions regarding to the restrictions:
- This study really has a wide spectrum of sources (see the period, different domestic and international literature sources, etc.), but at the same time this research only can reflect on a purely current state of CSR-focused literature (the survey was conducted in July 2021).
 - Document analysis allowed us to compile only a limited insight or overview of the examined papers, mainly due to length-limitation of this paper.

- Relevance for our method is the same as the number of citations of the added source, but this does not consider the impact factor of the journals and platforms that published the articles itself, and search engines do never not pay attention to the paper-based traditional literature if they do not have any internet reference sources or opportunities.
 - Note, the number of references is not necessarily representing the content or scientific quality of the source, as it is also affected by other factors, such as the focus points of larger nations or communities with high economical or cultural impact and is it also under the influence of the increasingly researched features of the internet as a “democratic media” in general.
- (ii) Conclusions regarding to content and other scientific aspects:
- The subject of the examined sources generally does not focus on added industry, sector, or company - but often aims to draw general conclusions, which reduces the practical interpretability and usability of the results, which we would consider appropriate and necessary at the same time.
 - Among the topics, in addition to focus of traditional CSR research, i.e., harmful sectors such as Energy, Clothing (Fast Fashion), Luxury, Gambling, a completely new field, the examining of CSR activities at SMSs, also stand out - which can be identified as a new area of research.
 - After having analysed the given sources, it appears that a general, widespread analytical methodology for CSR practices still does not seem to be outlined, either domestically or internationally.
 - Regarding the structure of our studies, we strongly believe that Cramer's (2005) model entitled “CSR House” may continue to provide a suitable framework for thematic evaluation of research examining the organizational and strategic fit of CSR.
 - However, as a slight critique of the Cramer model, we point out that its phase (3) and (4), i.e., business goals, value creation and CSR business strategy, can be more realistically managed in the line of the followings: (a) setting business goals, (b) compiling a business strategy, and then (c) creating value, which is the performance of the business itself.
 - More and more projects of examination are being conducted within research communities, which necessarily indicates a multi-faceted, more balanced processing method with much broad theme and pattern-variants. Internationally, this may make research even more capable of generating value beyond the local, regional, and global levels.
 - The relatively small number of case studies falling within the scope of our study underlines the possibility that more case studies, compiled with scientific needs, may emerge, which may be the right direction from a business and educational perspective, as well.

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