

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# How significant is corporate social responsibility to business research?

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## Abstract

Previous studies have established that there is a positive evolution of the quantity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) research output in terms of published papers. So far, however, there has been little discussion about how influential it has become within the business discipline. This article seeks to obtain data which will help to address this research gap. The databases Web of Science and *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) were used to carry out analyses at the journal and article levels. Results confirmed a solid growth in CSR research and revealed that papers on the topic have gained attention from the scientific community. Furthermore, CSR articles are mostly concentrated in a small number of specialized journals, and opting for these journals may be related to the total citations. The conclusions drawn from this study may be especially useful for academic managers and business researchers interested in the evaluation of academic performance.

## KEYWORDS

bibliometric analysis, citations, corporate social performance, corporate social responsibility, CSR

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Bowen (1953) published his landmark book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, considered by many to be the first comprehensive discussion of business ethics and social responsibility. Since then, the debate about the nature and content of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has not stopped. Once admitted the definitional confusion surrounding CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008), it could be interpreted as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” (European Commission, 2011, p. 6) and it has become a field within the business research with an influence that has become stronger over time.

The main interest of the extant works on CSR research has been the evolution of the quantity of research output in terms of published papers as well as the analysis of the content of the field, differentiating related concepts and identifying theoretical frameworks. Additionally, some studies have focused more on classifying journals, papers, and authors. All this literature has been useful to better understand the foundations of CSR research and establish the sources to be used by contributing academics. Our approach here is different. It is our

intention not only to confirm the positive evolution of CSR research quantitatively but also to find out how important it has become within the business discipline. This is a phenomenon that deserves attention but analysis has to first resolve the difficulty of how to objectively assess such an influence.

Thanks to new communication technologies, most researchers can themselves circulate new knowledge outside the traditional procedure of academic journals, through weblogs or social networks. However, in comparison with other ways of disseminating research findings, journal articles are considered the most prestigious among the scientific community. Supervision by editors and the process of blind peer review act as a guarantee of quality. Thus, research works that get past these controls may be considered more reliable than independent individual publications and other more formal alternatives such as papers presented at conferences, book chapters, or books (Thyer, 2008). Although the majority of scholarly journals continue to use traditional methods for conducting peer reviews, electronic communication offers new options in which reviewers' identities are no longer blinded, anyone can contribute by providing



1 comments, and publications evolve over time to reflect new informa- 54  
2 tion and improvements (Solomon, 2007). At the same time, thanks to 55  
3 the Internet, publications in traditional journals have become easily 56  
4 accessible worldwide. 57

5 Having assumed from the prevalence of journal articles that they 58  
6 are the main way to influence and achieve progress in scientific 59  
7 knowledge, they can be used to justify decisions concerning academic 60  
8 management and science policy across various levels. As not all arti- 61  
9 cles are equally important, two factors have mainly been taken into 62  
10 consideration to compare their relative value, namely, the specific 63  
11 journal in which they were published, and the number of citations to 64  
12 them. We will focus on these main characteristics and after a labori- 65  
13 ous process of data work we will be able to quantify the significance 66  
14 of CSR to business research. 67

15 The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, we pro- 68  
16 vide a review of the literature about how CSR research has prog- 69  
17 ressed over time from different perspectives. The following 70  
18 section describes the nature of the empirical work, the methods and 71  
19 results corresponding to various analyses of CSR-related articles, the 72  
20 journals which published them and their citations. In the final section, 73  
21 we conclude and discuss our findings, along with possible limitations 74  
22 and potential directions for future research. 75

## 24 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

25 Lockett, Moon, and Visser (2006) identified CSR as a field of study 76  
26 rather than as a discipline in itself with a distinctive theoretical or 77  
27 methodological approach to study. Their results were consistent with 78  
28 a field in which there is a considerable degree of heterogeneity in 79  
29 terms of research focus, which can still be found in more recent publi- 80  
30 cations (Lulewicz-Sas, 2017). It was also noticed that management lit- 81  
31 erature was the greatest single source of reference, followed by the 82  
32 CSR literature. In general terms, no particular theoretical approach, 83  
33 assumptions, or method dominated, although the field appeared to be 84  
34 well-established. Moreover, the fluctuating salience of CSR research 85  
35 that was detected was attributed to variations in business environ- 86  
36 ment agendas despite continuing scientific engagement. Nevertheless, 87  
37 there has been increasing interest in theorizing CSR and developing 88  
38 empirical models, generating a vast and diverse CSR literature. Aguinis 89  
39 and Glavas (2012) made a comprehensive review where previous 90  
40 works are classified within a theoretical framework that takes into 91  
41 account the level of analysis (institutional, organizational, and individ- 92  
42 ual) and the nature of the relation under analysis (predictors of CSR, 93  
43 mediators/moderators of CSR-outcomes relationship, and outcomes 94  
44 of CSR). Frynas and Yamahaki (2016) carried out a survey and content 95  
45 analysis of CSR-related studies published in top general management 96  
46 journals and journals in the field of CSR and social accounting to 97  
47 explore what theories have been applied (mainly stakeholder, institu- 98  
48 tional, legitimacy, resource-based view, agency, and resource depen- 99  
49 dence theories) and how. Despite the undeniable interest of this 100  
50 content analysis, our main interest here is the quantitative evolution 101  
51 of CSR research. 102  
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The bibliometric analysis of 30 years of CSR research by De 54  
Bakker, Groenewegen, and Den Hond (2005) revealed how the num- 55  
ber of papers remained fairly constant until about 1990, when a 56  
steady increase can be detected, accompanied by a growth in the 57  
number of differentiated concepts associated with the central con- 58  
cepts of CSR and corporate social performance (CSP). They concluded 59  
that the field was vibrant and developing and that CSR had “truly 60  
arrived as a managerial and strategic specialty” (De Bakker et al., 61  
2005, p. 310). Alvarado-Herrera, Bigné-Alcañiz, Currás-Pérez, and 62  
Sánchez-García (2011) updated this research and confirmed the 63  
increase in the number of CSR-focused papers. Taneja, Taneja, and 64  
Gupta (2011) made clear the absence of a precise definitional frame- 65  
work, which was provoking slow progress and wrong interpretation of 66  
results in the CSR area, and contributed to the literature with a biblio- 67  
graphical categorization of CSR research in terms of methodologies, 68  
paradigms, and focus areas. Lu and Liu (2014) explored the knowledge 69  
diffusion paths of CSR literature over 40 years using citation analysis. 70  
The year 2000 was the moment of transition between the emerging 71  
state and the growth stage, and journal statistics showed how impor- 72  
tant the role played by *Journal of Business Ethics* is. The recent 73  
scientometric analysis by Ferramosca and Verona (2019) of the evolu- 74  
tion of CSR research from 1973 to 2018 corroborated this last finding 75  
and although they observed a shift toward more specific subjects 76  
within the CSR debate, they detected four stable clusters of topics 77  
(stakeholder orientation in CSR, the implications of CSR in firm per- 78  
formance, the ethical components of CSR, and the effects and require- 79  
ments of CSR disclosure on reporting). Among the newer topics, they 80  
highlight the focus on CSR in small businesses, as well as the emphasis 81  
placed on assurance and integration with the corporate governance 82  
aspects of CSR. 83

The *Academy of Management Journal* devoted a thematic issue to 84  
CSR and its editors identified the CSR research trends according to 85  
the papers published in this leading management journal (Wang, Tong, 86  
Takeuchi, & George, 2016). They observed an increase in the number 87  
of articles on CSR over recent decades and how works examining a 88  
non-U.S. context or data have gained significance to the point that 89  
they are comparable in scale to those in the U.S. setting. Specifically, 90  
attention to CSR is slowly gaining traction in the Middle East (Al- 91  
Abdin, Roy, & Nicholson, 2018) and is a very highly probable topic in 92  
the literature of transition economies and emerging markets 93  
(Piepenbrink & Nurmammadov, 2015). Amos (2018) reviewed schol- 94  
arly articles focused on CSR in developing countries in international 95  
journals and found that those that applied empirical research method- 96  
ologies increased steadily in the period 2006–2014. Additionally, 97  
there was a noticeable concentration of articles in CSR/sustainability- 98  
related journals, with the *Journal of Business Ethics* publishing as many 99  
articles as the nonspecialized journals. 100

Within the context of international management research, Egri 101  
and Ralston (2008) found that corporate responsibility issues had 102  
been under-represented and, more recently, Zhao, Zhang, and Kwon 103  
(2018) conducted a bibliometric study that shows the increase in pub- 104  
lished articles in the last few years as well as the existence of co- 105  
citation maps that identify five research trends (business ethics, 106

1 stakeholder management, the CSR concept, the political and social  
2 demands of CSR, and the financial implications of CSR).

3 Other systematic reviews of the literature have been carried out  
4 with a focus on certain aspects that have been frequently studied as  
5 part of the CSR field or connected to it. Among them, the topic of  
6 business ethics stands out. Ma, Liang, Yu, and Lee (2012) conducted a  
7 citation and co-citation analysis to find the most important publica-  
8 tions, scholars, and research themes in the business ethics area for the  
9 period 2001–2008. Using the *Business Ethics Quarterly* and the *Journal*  
10 *of Business Ethics* as the core sources of analysis, they looked at the  
11 citations used in their articles as they can be considered the basis for  
12 the development of research on business ethics. The *Journal of Busi-*  
13 *ness Ethics* proved to be the most influential journal in terms of total  
14 citations, followed by *Academy of Management Review*, *Business Ethics*  
15 *Quarterly* and *Academy of Management Journal*. The *Journal of Business*  
16 *Ethics* had already occupied the first position in the ranking based on  
17 citation impact elaborated by Serenko and Bontis (2009), and its cru-  
18 cial role in knowledge creation is partly attributed to the high number  
19 of articles published in it (Köseoglu, Yildiz, & Ciftci, 2018). The co-  
20 citation analysis by Ma et al. (2012) revealed that CSR was one of the  
21 four major research themes around which business ethics studies  
22 cluster.

23 Chan, Fung, Fung, and Yau (2016) continued their previous work  
24 (Chan, Fung, & Yau, 2010) and used a total of 10 business ethics  
25 journals to confirm a diverse distribution of citations both within and  
26 across them. The *Journal of Business Ethics* was again the first source  
27 for citations, followed by *Business & Society* and *Business Ethics Quar-*  
28 *terly*. Additionally, they noticed a growing impact of business ethics  
29 research coming from Europe to be added to that already existing  
30 from the United States.

31 Robertson (2008) and Robertson, Blevins, and Duffy (2013)  
32 assessed the state of business ethics research published in the *Strate-*  
33 *gic Management Journal* for the combined period 1996–2010. They  
34 found that interest in business ethics had increased within the field of  
35 strategy and they highlighted the importance played by the link  
36 between CSP and corporate financial performance (CFP). In fact,  
37 research on this link is the objective of hundreds of studies and has  
38 substantially increased in recent years, with a majority of works  
39 adopting a contingency perspective in which, instead of considering  
40 that CSP directly affects CFP, they acknowledge the potential impact  
41 of context characteristics (moderators) or that the effect may occur  
42 through different means (mediators; Grewatsch & Kleindienst, 2017).

43 The review of the extant works on CSR research provided above  
44 shows that their main interest has been the evolution of the quantity  
45 of research output in terms of published papers as well as the analysis  
46 of the content of the field, differentiating related concepts and identi-  
47 fying theoretical frameworks. Additionally, some studies focused more  
48 on classifying journals, papers, and authors. All this literature has been  
49 useful to better understand the foundations of CSR research and  
50 establish the sources to be used by contributing academics. Our  
51 approach is slightly different. It is our intention not only to confirm  
52 the positive evolution of CSR research quantitatively but also to find  
53 out how significant it has been within the business discipline,

comparing the impact of CSR papers with others and looking at their  
presence in high-ranked journals.

### 3 | EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 | Nature of the analysis and justification of the selected research impact indicators

This research is characterized as descriptive. The use of bibliometric techniques will make it possible to determine not only the evolution of CSR research in terms of its quantity, but also its impact on the academic community devoted to business issues. Thus, in our analysis it will be the content of a paper what matters when it comes to get published in a prestigious journal and be cited, although we admit that other aspects can also be influential. Generally, there have been two competing theoretical perspectives on citation behavior: particularistic and universalistic (Meyer, Waldkirch, Duscher, & Just, 2018). On the one hand, the particularistic perspective focuses on author characteristics such as the author's reputation, affiliation, gender, or nationality to find out why an article is cited (Gilbert, 1977; Moed & Garfield, 2004). On the other hand, according to the universalistic perspective, which focuses on the characteristics of individual articles, an article is cited because of its content and presentation. If we adopt a universalistic perspective, what and how something is said in a paper influences the citations received, and three dimensions within this perspective can be distinguished: domain, quality, and presentation. Regarding domain, general topics attract more interest (King, 1987) but so does the relevance for other domains (Stewart, 1983) and their maturity (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1996; Stremersch, Verniers, & Verhoef, 2007). Corporate executives have struggled with the issue of the firm's responsibility to its society and CSR has been recognized as a useful way to reconcile obligations to shareholders with those to other competing groups claiming legitimacy (Carroll, 1991). This is how CSR has turned into a relatively mature field with potential relevance to several other domains in the business-related world, and the reason why we opted for a universalistic perspective and focus on the domain to try to find some empirical evidence of how CSR research is gaining prestige among scholars.

The empirical analysis will estimate the impact of CSR articles via two major indicators: publication in specific top-ranked journals and number of citations.

There are several lists in which the journals used by researchers to base their work are classified by disciplines. The process of ranking may reflect some kind of context-based biases, such as those derived from institutional, regional, or timeliness preferences, so they should be interpreted with caution (Chan et al., 2016). However, it is widely accepted that the position on the list for a specific journal will depend on the capacity of its publications to impact on other works, and such an impact can be measured by the aggregated citations. This information from journal rankings is usually used to infer the quality of the corresponding articles and weigh publication counts when evaluating academic performance. Moreover, this evaluation is frequently linked

1 to the status of departments, research groups, or universities, access  
 2 to funding, and individual academic careers in terms of promotion and  
 3 pay. Therefore, it is of great interest to know if there are certain char-  
 4 acteristics of publications that vary with journal ratings and which of  
 5 them are particularly prevalent in those top-rated journals so that  
 6 researchers can adjust their work to them (Vogel, Hattke, &  
 7 Petersen, 2017).

8 Identifying top articles would require careful assessment of their  
 9 intrinsic quality and just reviewing a few top journals may not be  
 10 enough (Smith, 2004). Citation counts for individual articles are a  
 11 good alternative or complement to journal rankings as an indicator  
 12 of academic performance (Meyer et al., 2018). A journal impact fac-  
 13 tor is shared by all the articles of the journal while their number of  
 14 citations may vary widely (Baum, 2011). Furthermore, "using cita-  
 15 tions could liberate a field from the oligopolistic power of a few  
 16 journals, their editors and the related networks" (Meyer et al., 2018,  
 17 p. 25). If an article can attract citations independently of the ranking  
 18 position of the corresponding journal, and such citations are the  
 19 main criteria for assessing the researchers' performance, researchers  
 20 will focus their efforts more on the potential users of their academic  
 21 work and less on fulfilling the specific demands established by pow-  
 22 erful journals.

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25 **3.2 | Methods and results**

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27 First, we defined the databases, keywords, search field and the refine-  
 28 ment filters. We used the electronic databases *Web of Science (WoS)*  
 29 *Core Collection* and *Journal Citation Reports (JCR)* of Clarivate Analyt-  
 30 ics. WoS has already been employed to develop bibliometric analysis  
 31 of CSR research (e.g., De Bakker et al., 2005; De Bakker,  
 32 Groenewegen, & Den Hond, 2006). Citations to the selected core of  
 33 journals are aggregated in the JCR database, which is the leading cita-  
 34 tion database and has been widely considered by researchers as a  
 35 good indicator of their impact on other researchers' work.

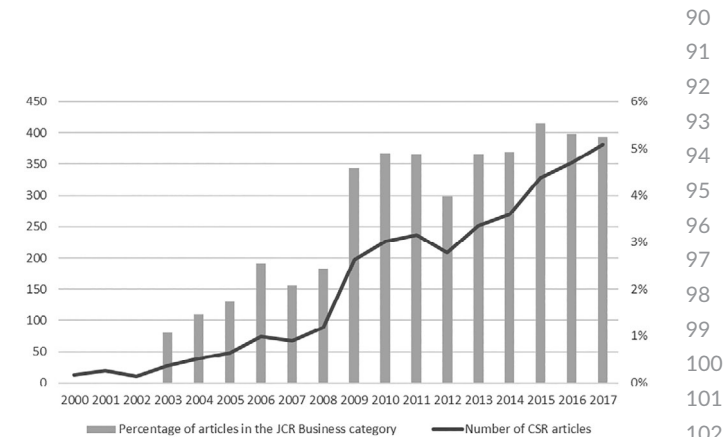
36 The terms used as search criteria were "corporate social responsi-  
 37 bility" or "CSR" or "corporate social performance." They were  
 38 searched in topics, which allowed them to be located in titles, key-  
 39 words, and abstracts. We followed De Bakker et al. (2005) to deter-  
 40 mine these search terms. Thus, although the stakeholder approach  
 41 plays an important role in the CSR/CSP debate, the term stakeholder  
 42 was not considered as it is too broadly applied to be used to decide  
 43 whether a paper retrieved by using it definitely addresses issues of  
 44 CSR, does it slightly or does not do it at all. CSR and CSP are found in  
 45 closely related literature. Whereas CSR has more to do with principles  
 46 and business bearing a responsibility toward society and stakeholders  
 47 beyond shareholders, CSP may be considered as a more general con-  
 48 cept including responsibilities, responsiveness, and policies and action  
 49 in this domain so it can be appropriate to broaden the view from CSR  
 50 to also include work on CSP (De Bakker et al., 2005). Furthermore,  
 51 the CSR abbreviation was kept in the search after confirming that it  
 52 yielded relevant extra results while the CSP abbreviation appeared in  
 53 additional results with a nonrelated content.

The dataset was delimited to 2000–2017 in order to have a quite  
 long period of time for analysis of the recent evolution of the situation  
 in the business literature in which research on CSR has thrived and  
 new specialized journals have become more appealing among aca-  
 demics. Results were filtered by document type and WoS category so  
 that only articles published in the Business category were considered.  
 Among the different categories of journals in the JCR database, our  
 focus was on the business category, under which most of the special-  
 ized journals dealing with CSR fall. According to the category profile  
 given in the database itself (Clarivate Analytics, n.d.), it "covers  
 resources concerned with all aspects of business and the business  
 world. These may include marketing and advertising, forecasting, plan-  
 ning, administration, organizational studies, compensation, strategy,  
 retailing, consumer research, and management. Also covered are  
 resources relating to business history and business ethics." A total of  
 4,069 results were found by following these procedures on the 13th  
 of July, 2018. Articles in journals not included in the JCR database  
 (910) and those published by journals in the database but not in the  
 corresponding year (321) were excluded from the analysis so that this  
 final sample was composed of 2,838 articles.

The evolution in the number of CSR articles (Figure 1) indicates a  
 clear growing trend, and their relative weight considering total articles  
 published in the JCR Business category seems to have stabilized dur-  
 ing the 2010s in a range between 4 and 6%.

The importance of these articles can be derived not only from  
 their growing number but also from the number of times they were  
 cited and from the position of the journals that published them. We  
 carried out several analyses to evaluate both issues.

First, we selected the journals in the JCR Business category  
 that had published any of the CSR articles from the sample and we  
 calculated for the corresponding year the average number of cita-  
 tions received by those articles divided by the years that passed  
 between their publication and 2018 ( $n = 479$ ). We also did the  
 same calculation for those journals and years but considering total  
 citations and total citable items. There was a significant difference  
 in the scores for the citations of CSR-related articles (Mean = 3.20,



**FIGURE 1** Evolution of CSR articles. Data about the number of articles in JCR Business category for the years 2000 and 2001 not available. CSR, corporate social responsibility; JCR, *Journal Citation Reports*

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1 *SD* = 4.29) and those of total citable items [(Mean = 2.32,  
2 *SD* = 2.22);  $t(478) = -5.66, p < .001$ ].

3 Second, we selected for each year in the period 2000–2017 all  
4 the journals in the JCR Business category, registered their quartile  
5 from 1 to 4 (QUARTILE) and calculated what percentage of their cit-  
6 able items corresponded to CSR-related articles. There was a correla-  
7 tion between both variables ( $r_s = -0.1041, n = 1,563, p < .001$ ), which  
8 indicated that higher relative positions of a journal are accompanied  
9 by a stronger presence of these articles among its publications. A fur-  
10 ther analysis was carried out. Specifically, we use the two-step

difference GMM model for dynamic panel data models that was cre-  
ated by Arellano and Bond (1991). The dynamic panel data analysis is  
a more robust methodology that makes it possible to control for indi-  
vidual heterogeneity or unobservable individual effects by considering  
first differences, and for endogeneity. The GMM estimator uses inter-  
nal instruments which are based on lagged values of the explanatory  
variables that may present problems of endogeneity. Thus, the endog-  
enous right-hand side variable of the model is lagged from  $t - 1$  to  
 $t - 4$  for equations in differences. To check the validity of the model  
specification when using GMM, we used Hansen's statistic of over-

12 **TABLE 1** GMM results

Independent variable	Coefficient	$z_1$	$m_2$	Hansen
QUARTILE	-0.015** (-4.02)	16.15**	0.57	57.72

13 Note: Number of observations = 1,403; number of groups = 134 (z-value). Dependent variable = % CSR-related articles in a journal.  $z_1$  is a Wald test for the  
14 reported coefficients of the explanatory variables, asymptotically distributed as  $\chi^2$  under the null of no relationship for all the explanatory variables.  $m_2$  is  
15 the second-order serial correlation relation in the regression residuals, asymptotically distributed as  $N(0, 1)$  under the null of no serial correlation. Hansen  
16 is a test of the over-identifying restrictions, asymptotically distributed as  $\chi^2$  under the null of no correlation between the instruments and the error term.  
17 \*\* $p < .01$ .

22 **TABLE 2** Distribution of CSR articles in journals related to CSR

Journal	CSR articles	Years in JCR Business	CSR articles per year	Rank (volume)	Citable items	CSR articles (%)	Rank (density)
J BUS ETHICS	1,191	18	66.17	1	4,890	24.36	5
CORP SOC RESP ENV MA	163	8	20.38	2	245	66.53	1
BUS SOC	105	8	13.13	3	228	46.05	2
BUS STRATEG ENVIRON	79	7	11.29	4	317	24.92	4
BUS ETHICS	86	8	10.75	5	244	35.25	3

23 Note: Total journals in the JCR Business category with CSR articles: 124. Total CSR articles: 2,838.

24 Abbreviations: CSR, corporate social responsibility; JCR, Journal Citation Reports.

25 JCR Abbreviations: J BUS ETHICS, Journal of Business Ethics; CORP SOC RESP ENV MA, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management; BUS  
26 SOC, Business & Society; BUS STRATEG ENVIRON, Business Strategy and the Environment; and BUS ETHICS, Business Ethics—A European Review.

33 **TABLE 3** Research impact data for selected journals

Journal	First year in JCR Business	JCR year 2017				
		Impact factor	Rank in JCR Business <sup>a</sup>	Citable items	Citations from JCR Business journals <sup>b</sup>	Citing JCR Business journals <sup>c</sup>
BUS ETHICS	2010	3.029	40	31	7	38
BUS SOC	2010	3.214	37	37	44	70
BUS STRATEG ENVIRON	2011	5.355	14	80	49	68
CORP SOC RESP ENV MA	2010	4.981	17	48	26	46
J BUS ETHICS	2000	2.971	42	321	113	119

34 Abbreviation: JCR, Journal Citation Reports.

35 <sup>a</sup>Total journals in the JCR Business category for the year 2017:140.

36 <sup>b</sup>Taking into account articles published and cited in 2017.

37 <sup>c</sup>Considering articles published any year and cited in 2017.

1 identifying restrictions. We also included  $m_2$  statistics to verify the  
 2 lack of second-order serial correlation in the first-difference residuals.  
 3 In addition to these specification contrasts, the following Wald test  
 4 was included in the estimations:  $z_1$  of the joint significance of the  
 5 explanatory variables. Additionally, we corrected the estimations for  
 6 heteroscedasticity problems by using the robust option for the  
 7 `xtabond2` command of the Stata software. As Table 1 shows QUAR-  
 8 TILE variable presents a negative coefficient ( $\beta = -.015$ ;  $p < .01$ ),  
 9 supporting that the proportion of CSR-related articles is higher in bet-  
 10 ter ranked journals.

11 After the above analyses at the article level, we checked to what  
 12 extent each journal in the JCR Business category actually published  
 13 articles dealing with CSR in general or specific topics that were con-  
 14 sidered within the framework of CSR, and therefore met the search  
 15 criteria. As we can see in Table 2, five journals (*Journal of Business*  
 16 *Ethics*, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*,  
 17 *Business & Society*, *Business Strategy and Environment*, and *Business*

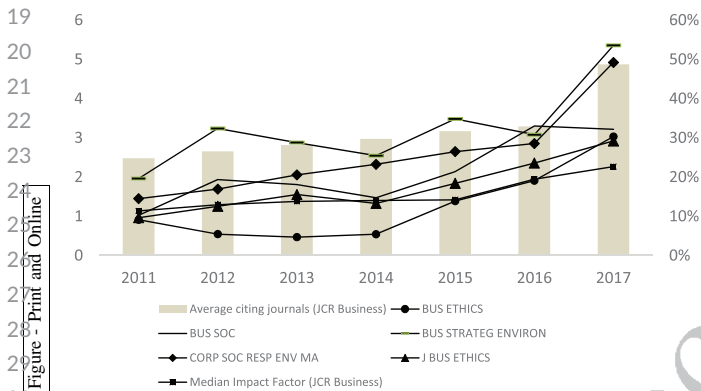


FIGURE 2 Evolution of research impact data for selected journals

11 *Ethics—A European Review*) stand out in terms of volume (number of  
 12 articles) and density of CSR-related articles (percentage of CSR arti-  
 13 cles over the total). These five journals altogether published more  
 14 than half of all the articles (57.22%), and the *Journal of Business Ethics*  
 15 alone is highly responsible for this impact in the literature, with  
 16 41.97% of the papers. The contribution of a journal is obviously  
 17 affected by the time present in the JCR Business category, which is  
 18 why, in order to make a rank, the corresponding totals were divided  
 19 by the number of years. Moreover, the importance that the topic has  
 20 for a journal not only depends on its quantitative contribution in abso-  
 21 lute terms, but also on how much it means compared to the total  
 22 amount of published articles. According to this second criterion, the  
 23 *Journal of Business Ethics* drops to fifth position due to the numerous  
 24 volumes, issues, and articles it publishes, and *Corporate Social Respon-*  
 25 *sibility and Environmental Management* takes its place as first in the  
 26 rank because 66.53% of its citable items were articles from our sam-  
 27 ple. *Business & Society* comes second with 46.05%. Anyway, the com-  
 28 position of the group formed by the first five journals remained the  
 29 same and the journal in sixth position, *Academy of Management Per-*  
 30 *spectives*, was quite distant (15.85%).

31 A first approach to the impact of these journals on other publica-  
 32 tions can be obtained from Table 3. Two of them (*Business Strategy*  
 33 *and the Environment* and *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environ-*  
 34 *mental Management*) are in the first quartile of the JCR Business cate-  
 35 gory. Their influence in the category may be observed by considering  
 36 to what extent their papers are cited by journals from that category.  
 37 According to JCR Year 2017, articles published in 2017 received  
 38 239 citations that same year, that is, 5.63% of the total citations com-  
 39 ing from JCR Business journals. Half of these citations corresponded  
 40 to the *Journal of Business Ethics*, which also has a high number of cit-  
 41 able items. There is evidence of a positive correlation between impact

TABLE 4 Differences in citations of CSR-related articles (JCR Business Category—2011–2017)

Variable	Selected journals <sup>a</sup>			Other journals			U Mann Whitney
	Mean	Median	AR <sup>b</sup>	Mean	Median	AR <sup>b</sup>	
Panel A: total sample							
Citations <sup>c</sup> n = 35 n = 360	2.812	2.700	255.34	2.554	1.354	192.43	4,293.000**
Panel B: quartile 1							
Citations <sup>3</sup> n = 9 n = 115	2.838	2.833	54.50	4.462	3.285	63.13	445
Panel C: quartile 2							
Citations <sup>3</sup> n = 16 n = 83	2.793	2.295	60.53	2.445	1.722	47.97	495.500
Panel D: quartile 3							
Citations <sup>3</sup> n = 7 n = 93	3.307	2.883	83.14	1.615	1.167	48.04	97**
Panel E: quartile 4							
Citations <sup>3</sup> n = 3 n = 69	1.684	1.691	64.00	0.772	0.500	35.30	21*

49 Abbreviations: CSR, corporate social responsibility; JCR, *Journal Citation Reports*.

50 <sup>a</sup>Business Ethics, Business & Society, Business Strategy and the Environment, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, and Journal of Business Ethics.

51 <sup>b</sup>AR denotes average range.

52 <sup>c</sup>Average number of citations for CSR-related articles published by a Journal divided by the years since publication.

53 \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

1 factor and article number in scholarly journals, implying a close posi- 54  
2 tive relationship between quantity and quality and that high-impact 55  
3 journals publish more articles (Huang, 2016). Nevertheless, all the five 56  
4 journals have been in the category since 2011 and a positive evolu- 57  
5 tion in their impact factor compared with the median value can be 58  
6 noted, as well as a rise in their joint appeal to other journals in the cat- 59  
7 egory (see average citing journals in Figure 2). 60

8 Next, for the years 2011–2017, we compared the average cita- 61  
9 tions of the CSR-related articles published by a journal and consider- 62  
10 ing the time passed since their publication. As the data (citations 63  
11 variable) did not approximate a normal distribution, we used the 64  
12 nonparametric Mann–Whitney *U* test to compare groups (Table 4). 65  
13 According to the results, citations were higher for articles published 66  
14 in one of the five selected journals. Additionally, in order to make 67  
15 this comparison more homogeneous, journals were classified attend- 68  
16 ing to their quartile in the JCR Business category for the year when 69  
17 the article was published (Table 4). No significant difference was 70  
18 found among the journals within the top half of the ranking but if 71  
19 the articles had been published in Q3 or Q4 journals, then publishing 72  
20 in the selected specialized journals is related to a higher number of 73  
21 citations. 74

## 24 | 4 CONCLUSIONS

25  
26 Using the Business category of the WoS database as a basis for esti- 75  
27 mating academic production in the field, we conclude that CSR arti- 76  
28 cles were rare at the end of the last century but their number has 77  
29 kept growing since then. Additionally, consolidation of the topic 78  
30 among researchers is detected as from 2009 as the percentage that 79  
31 these articles represent in relation to total production seems to have 80  
32 stabilized. 81

33 Timeliness of the issue may partly explain these figures. Although 82  
34 CSR education within business schools can be traced far back, its 83  
35 salience has been unsteady and largely driven by issues in the social 84  
36 environment of business (e.g., corporate scandals). It can be assumed 85  
37 that there is a relationship between the demand and supply of CSR 86  
38 education, with more professors being brought in to teach the courses 87  
39 who will seek academic promotion through the publication of CSR- 88  
40 related articles (Lockett et al., 2006). The 2008–2009 global financial 89  
41 crisis unearthed serious ethical issues in business practices, which 90  
42 made business institutions renovate their curriculum (Chan, Fung, & 91  
43 Yau, 2013). This change in context might be behind the increase in 92  
44 research on this specific area (Chan et al., 2016). 93

45 Our results also revealed that, for the period 2000–2017, CSR 94  
46 articles got more citations per year than the average for publications 95  
47 in the corresponding JCR Business journal. Thus, we can state that 96  
48 the topic of CSR is highly valued by the scientific community, and 97  
49 researchers in the business field substantially base their work on these 98  
50 articles. Moreover, we found that journals' rank is related to the deci- 99  
51 sion to devote more space to CSR, so these articles are more likely to 100  
52 be found as you move up in the ranking list. CSR seems to be consid- 101  
53 ered by editors and reviewers a fundamental part of the business 102

world and prestigious journals are expected to include works about it 103  
among their publications. 104

105 At the journal level, we found an important concentration of CSR 106  
107 papers in five journals, revealing a scientific journal specialization 108  
109 which according to Ferramosca and Verona (2019) reflects the pat- 109  
110 terns of evolution in terms of topics in the history of CSR research. 110  
111 The *Journal of Business Ethics* stands out as being responsible for more 111  
112 than half of the existing publications, followed by *Corporate and Social 112  
113 Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *Business & Society*, *Busi- 113  
114 ness Strategy and the Environment*, and *Business Ethics—A European 114  
115 Review*. Considering the composition of the total articles published by 115  
116 these journals, we can say that *Corporate and Social Responsibility and 116  
117 Environmental Management* and *Business & Society* are the two journals 117  
118 that are most specialized in this issue. The joint presence of this group 118  
119 of journals in the JCR Business category since 2011 has been accom- 119  
120 panied by a growing trend in their impact factors. Moreover, they are 120  
121 gaining the attention of other journals within the category and there 121  
122 is an increasing number of them with articles citing papers from these 122  
123 journals. Additionally, in the case of JCR business journals in the lower 123  
124 half of the ranking list, we found that publishing CSR articles in spe- 124  
125 cialized journals might be advantageous in terms of citations. A possi- 125  
126 ble explanation for these results could be that researchers working on 126  
127 CSR, when searching for relevant previous literature, turn to top 127  
128 journals no matter how specialized they are as long as they publish 128  
129 CSR-related articles. Nevertheless, they also specifically look for 129  
130 papers in specialized journals even if they are not so high in the rank- 130  
131 ings while other papers in nonspecialized journals with a similar 131  
132 impact stay more unnoticed. 132

133 This study may be helpful for academic management and science 133  
134 policy across various levels of decision making. Specifically, journal 134  
135 publishers, editors, university administrators, and librarians can use 135  
136 the information provided about the growth and impact of CSR litera- 136  
137 ture to support their publishing and subscription decisions. Moreover, 137  
138 researchers in the business discipline may gain greater awareness of 138  
139 the significance of CSR and consider its possible link with their partic- 139  
140 ular field of interest. For their part, academics seeking tenure and pro- 140  
141 motion or doctoral students on the job market who are currently 141  
142 researching on CSR or considering doing so in the near future should 142  
143 be encouraged by its potential for benefitting their indicators of aca- 143  
144 demic performance, thanks to the increased attention paid to this 144  
145 topic by top-ranked journals and the relatively high number of cita- 145  
146 tions of CSR articles. Finally, they can also draw some conclusions 146  
147 when choosing which journal to send their work for evaluation. 147  
148 Although it might be expected that niche discipline journals and their 148  
149 articles would be at a disadvantage as they attract fewer citations 149  
150 compared to their counterparts which appeal to broader academic cir- 150  
151 cles (Serenko & Bontis, 2009), our results do not support this 151  
152 inference. 152

153 If we assume that scientific research determines practitioners' 153  
154 behavior, we can anticipate that business practices will reflect a 154  
155 greater consideration of CSR-related issues. However, this implication 155  
156 should be taken with caution. While there is evidence of the impor- 156  
157 tance of more materialistic interests when it comes to make business 157



1 decisions by those at the top of an organization (e.g., Callan &  
2 Thomas, 2011; Joubert, 2019; Peng, 2019), academic journals are not  
3 very well known among business professionals and there is a gap  
4 between academic research and business people (Perea & Brady,  
5 2017), so its real influence is still quite uncertain.

6 This research is not free of limitations. First, our findings might  
7 be biased because, although the WoS database includes the major-  
8 ity of important journals, some relevant CSR literature is missing  
9 (Lu & Liu, 2014). Further analyses could supplement our data with  
10 other formats such as books, book chapters, and highly cited papers  
11 from journals that can be found through other sources like  
12 ABI/INFORM, Scopus, or Google Scholar. Moreover, even admit-  
13 ting the wide recognition of JCR rankings, journal quality determi-  
14 nation should probably not be limited to citation analysis, and other  
15 methods, such as surveys of active researchers or journal lists inter-  
16 nally developed by business schools to evaluate faculty research,  
17 could be employed (Beets, Lewis, & Brower, 2016). In addition,  
18 bibliometric research frequently resorts to citation analysis, which  
19 is very reliable when data are aggregated (Cronin, 2001; Phelan,  
20 1999). Nevertheless, its accuracy and quality have been doubted by  
21 some scholars (Lindsey, 1989; MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1996).  
22 In this context, excluding author or journal self-citations in the ana-  
23 lyses (Lu & Liu, 2014) would help to overcome the recognized prob-  
24 lem of a likely overestimation of the citation number (Wilhite &  
25 Fong, 2012).

26 Finally, in order to explain the citation rate of CSR articles, the  
27 focus could be placed not only on the domain, as is the case in this  
28 work, but on the other two dimensions within the universalistic per-  
29 spective, those of quality and presentation. The focus could also be  
30 on other characteristics from the particularistic perspective, such as  
31 the visibility of authors, their promotion of the article, their affiliation,  
32 or even their gender (Meyer et al., 2018). Future research in this line  
33 would help explain the reasons for the significance of CSR to  
34 researchers in the business discipline, a phenomenon this article helps  
35 to prove.

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