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## The integration of CSR within communication as a strategic factor of competitiveness: Bibliometric analysis

## La integración de la RSE en la comunicación como factor estratégico de competitividad: análisis bibliométrico

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective.** This document presents the development of the world scientific production of CSR and Corporate Communication.

**Methodology:** Through a bibliometric analysis, using the Scopus platform and the VOSviewer software as a database for the development of networks between authors and publications.

**Findings:** in the last 20 years, CSR and CC are considered relevant variables within the field of strategic management.

**Originality.** The original of the study is the valuable relationship between both variables for the generation of competitive advantage. The study focus of the study evolves to the analysis of mediating variables and/or micro variables.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo.** Este documento presenta el desarrollo de la producción científica mundial de la Responsabilidad Social empresarial (RSE) y la Comunicación Corporativa (CC).

**Metodología.** A través de un análisis bibliométrico, utilizando la plataforma Scopus y el software VOSviewer como base de datos para el desarrollo de redes entre autores y publicaciones.

**Hallazgos:** En los últimos 20 años, la RSE y el CC se consideran variables relevantes dentro del campo de la gestión estratégica.

**Originalidad.** Lo original del estudio es la valiosa relación entre ambas variables para la generación de ventaja competitiva. El enfoque del estudio evoluciona hacia el análisis de variables mediadoras y/o micro variables.

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### 1. Introduction

Despite the valuable role that communication plays in the process of Corporate Social Responsibility in organizations, little attention has been paid to the communication aspects of CSR (Dawkins 2004; Ihlen et al. 2011). Much of the research on CSR has focused on macro-level debates related between business and society or the role of business in CSR (Garriga & Mele 2004; Scherer & Palazzo 2007). Consequently, there have been many theoretical differences in CSR such as instrumental approaches (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004; Porter & Kramer 2006) and political/ethical approaches (Donaldson & Dunfee 2000; Scherer & Palazzo 2007).

Regardless of these different approaches to CSR, previous research on CSR has been limited in terms of providing empirical evidence of CSR communication roles or the CSR communication process to public expectations. For example, the dominant instrumental research current on CSR, which derives mainly from marketing and business administration: tends to treat communication as a mere tool for persuasion, attitude, and behavioral changes of the interested parties (Du et al. 2010; Kim 2014). As a result, a possible relationship between CSR and corporate reputation has been identified, leaving aside the missing link of CSR communication (Brammer & Pavelin 2006;

Dawkins 2004). Corporate reputation for CSR could be related to several conditions of healthy jobs. (Mejía-Trejo, 2021)

Mejía-Trejo (2018) talks about the importance of competitiveness, because it is the basis for the generation of innovation. The academic exploration of the relationships between social enterprises, CSR, and communication has given rise to a distinct subfield of CSR communication research. This has been illustrated in the past decade in the development of specialized conferences on CSR communication (Golob et al., 2017), special issues in academic journals (Podnar, 2008; Schultz et al., 2013), edited volumes and books of text (Coombs & Holladay, 2011; Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011) as well as review articles (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010) that have helped to consolidate and shape this area of research. Within this burgeoning literature, the question of the relationship between CSR communication and CSR practices has been a central concern (see Crane & Glozer, 2016; Wickert et al., 2016). This is often characterized as the relationship between CSR "walking" and CSR "talking", as typically found in the "walk the talk" mandate.

This expression suggests that CSR communication and CSR practices must be aligned. In other words, the organization must be consistent and in tune with what it does and what it communicates to consumers.

There are a variety of perspectives on the walk/talk dichotomy that have typically been explored through two main paradigms of CSR communication research. A clear example is the functionalist approach (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Schultz et al., 2013). Functionalist research is based on the assumption that communication conveys information between two or more parties about an object (in this case, CSR practices) in a way that can accurately represent the nature of the object. Therefore, the purpose of the research regarding the walk/talk relationship is the degree to which companies consistently match their walk and talk in CSR.

Based on the above, the originality of the study focuses on the valuable relationship between CSR and CC, which shows an important contribution at the level of scientific production, generating a new paradigm for the contribution of the explanation of the phenomenon of CSR for strategic management. Therefore, the attention and relevance of analyzing the development of scientific production related to CSR and communication is observed, in order to more clearly identify the trends and approaches of research on both terms.

## **2. Methodology**

According to Broadus (1987), Bibliometric is a research field that quantitatively studies bibliographic material, providing an overview of a research field according to a wide range of indicators (publications, citations, h-index, etc.). Some studies focus on the number of publications since it measures the productivity of the author or the university Trieschmann et al., (2000). Podsakoff et al. (2008) argue that citation analysis is the optimal way to evaluate research because it measures the influence of a set of articles written by an author or a university.

Tranfield et al. (2003) proposed a design for systematic literature reviews in the field of management based on three stages: planning, implementation, and reporting/dissemination of results. Therefore, the present study follows the same methodology.

One of the most important bibliographic databases is chosen, Scopus, which belongs to Elsevier, which, according to Cobo et al. (2011) is a multidisciplinary database (Life Sciences, Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, Health Sciences) which has more than 69 million records, Elsevier Scopus Database (2018). To carry out the search process we used several keywords related to Corporate Social Responsibility and Communication. Both words “Corporate Social Responsibility” and “Communication” could appear in the title exclusively. The search was focused on the title only because using a broader search did not directly retrieve related documents. The search was carried out between the period from 1973 to 2020, obtaining 1568 articles written on CSR and communication. These academic products included all kinds of publications, such as journal articles (articles, reviews, letters, and notes; Van Raan (2003), books, doctoral theses, or conference proceedings, since according to Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz-Navarro (2004) can be considered “certified knowledge” and have been critically reviewed.

To avoid bias in the results obtained through the SCOPUS platform, the keywords "Corporate Social Responsibility" and "Corporate Communication" were additionally searched for the acronyms "CSR" and "CSR" in English. The bibliometric details of the articles were exported to an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Journal title, publication date, author details (name and affiliation), article title, keywords, abstract, and citation count were included.

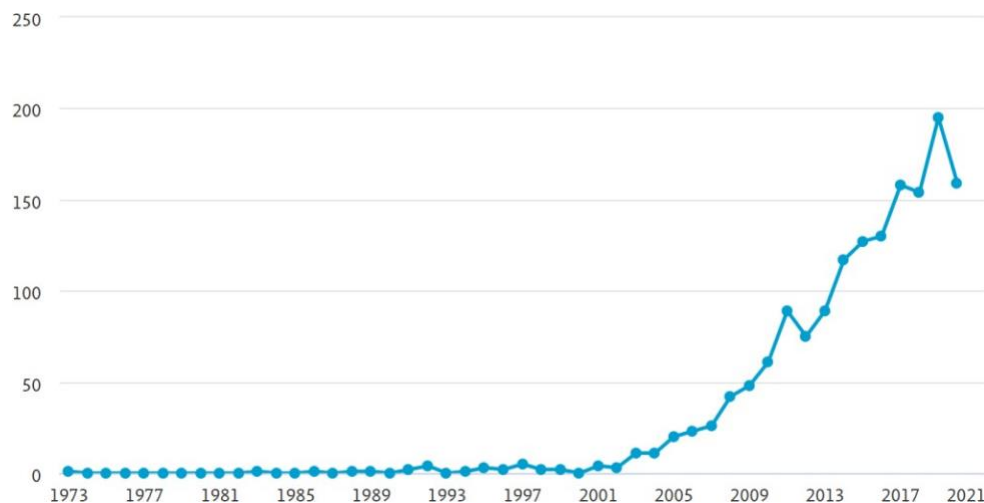
Before beginning the data analysis an initial homogenization step was performed to improve the consistency of the results. The ambiguity of the journal and the names of the authors were eliminated, doing the same with the keywords.

To perform a descriptive data analysis and network analysis, the bibliometric tools provided by VOSviewer were used since, according to Van Eck and Waltman (2010), the software allows for analyzing citations, authorship, distribution, and word frequency (keywords). The figures and tables were prepared with Excel and with the same SCOPUS platform with its adaptation.

### 3. Results

In this section, the results obtained from the search and collection of data from the SCOPUS platform are shown. Starting with the number of publications focused on CSR and business communication. See **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1. Number of publications focused on CSR and Corporate Communication**

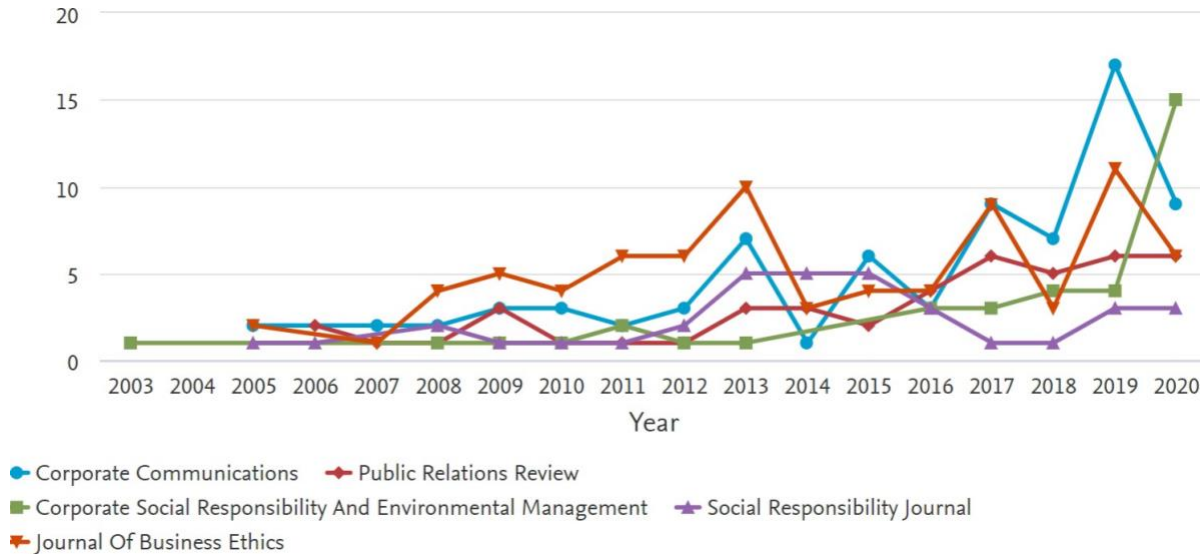


Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

The graph shows a significant growth from the 2000s, the above can be related according to Carroll (2020) with the empirical analysis that became relevant in the last 20 years. Scientific production reached a peak with around 200 publications for the year 2019 and a slowdown in the year 2020, probably due to COVID-19. However, in general terms, the trend over the last 20 years is positive.

The following graph shows the trend of scientific production grouped by the main approaches, allowing to identify the association between CSR and communication with public relations, business ethics and environmental management. See **Figure 2**.

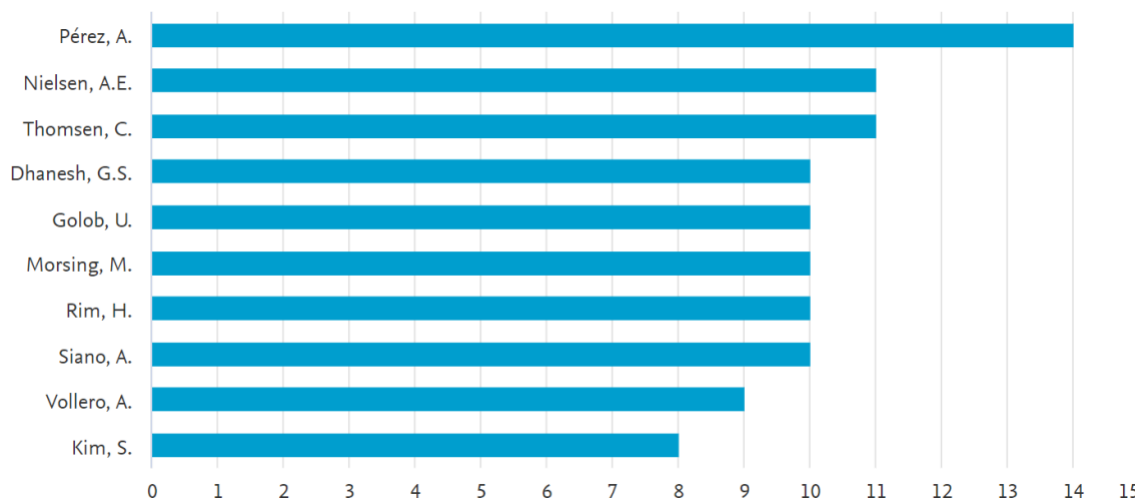
**Figure 2. Comparison between sections of CSR**



Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

It was detected that, in the last 15 years, there was a significant growth of the main approaches associated with CSR and CC, this growth coincides with the general production shown in figure 1. The following graph shows the main authors who have analyzed the phenomenon of CSR and business communication, highlighting Pérez, A.; Nielsen, A.E. and Thomsen, C., as the authors with the highest number of publications. Likewise, the authors with the highest number of citations, highlighting Bhattacharya C.B., and Shuili, Du. (2010) with 866 citations; Maignan I., Ralston D.A. (2002) with 683 citations and Wagner T., Lutz R.J., Weitz B.A. (2009) with 454 citations. See **figure 3**.

**Figure 3. Main Authors**



Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

**Table 1** shows the ratio of the most cited authors to the least cited based on the graph corresponding to figure 3. Where the most cited article was by Bhattacharya C.B., and Shuili, Du., in 2010, entitled “Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR Communication” with 866 citations. And the least cited by Parguel B., Benoît-Moreau F., Larceneux F., in 2011, entitled “How Sustainability Ratings Might Deter Greenwashing”: A Closer Look at Ethical Corporate Communication with 212 citations.

**Table 1. Authors with the highest number of citations**

Author	Title	Year	Number of citations
Bhattacharya C.B., y Shuili, Du	<i>Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication</i>	2010	866
Maignan I., Ralston D.A.	<i>Corporate Social Responsibility in Europe and the U.S.: Insights from Businesses’ Self-presentations</i>	2002	683
Wagner T., Lutz R.J., Weitz B.A.	<i>Corporate hypocrisy: Overcoming the threat of inconsistent corporate social responsibility perceptions</i>	2009	454
Marquis C., Qian C.	<i>Corporate social responsibility reporting in China: Symbol or substance?</i>	2014	401

Tate W.L., Ellram L.M., Kirchoff J.F.	<i>Corporate social responsibility reports: A thematic analysis related to supply chain management</i>	2010	363
Pomeroy A., Dolnicar S.	<i>Assessing the prerequisite of successful CSR implementation: Are consumers aware of CSR initiatives?</i>	2009	271
Vanhamme J., Grobbs B.	<i>"too good to be true!". the Effectiveness of CSR history in countering negative publicity</i>	2009	251
Baumann-Pauly D., Wickert C., Spence L.J., Scherer A.G.	<i>Organizing corporate social responsibility in small and large firms: Size matters</i>	2013	224
Du S., Vieira Jr. E.T.	<i>Striving for Legitimacy Through Corporate Social Responsibility: Insights from Oil Companies</i>	2012	223
Parguel B., Benoît-Moreau F., Larceneux F.	<i>How Sustainability Ratings Might Deter 'Greenwashing': A Closer Look at Ethical Corporate Communication</i>	2011	212

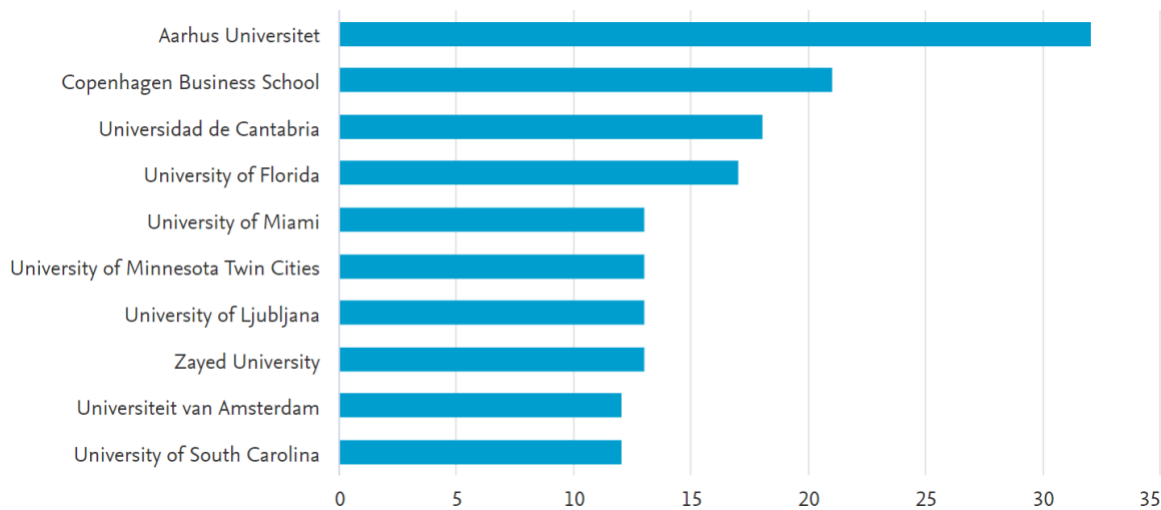
Note: The table shows the most cited authors who have carried out studies on CSR and its relationship with CC. Own elaboration based on SCOPUS.

For its part, **Figure 4** presents the Universities with the greatest scientific production, highlighting the “Aarhus Universitet” in Aarhus, Denmark; the “Copenhagen Business School” in Frederiksberg, Denmark and the “University of Cantabria” in Cantabria, Spain. Identifying the absence of universities belonging to underdeveloped or developing countries, which is to be taken into account, due to the need that is required regarding a better theoretical explanation for developing countries with serious business ethics problems. See **Figure 4**.

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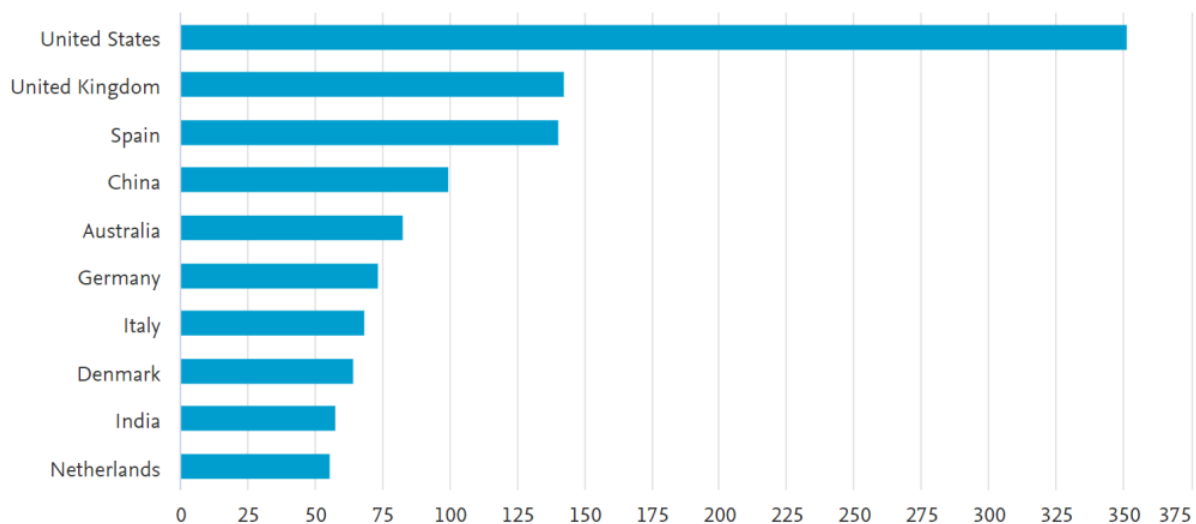
**Figure 4. Universities with the highest production**



Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

In the same way, the absence of Latin American countries is identified, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2004), Latin American countries suffer from a significant lack of corporate social responsibility that could improve the social environment, without the need to become charitable companies, simply taking responsible actions that do not harm society with issues related to corruption and environmental degradation. See **Figure 5**.

**Figure 5. Scientific production by country**

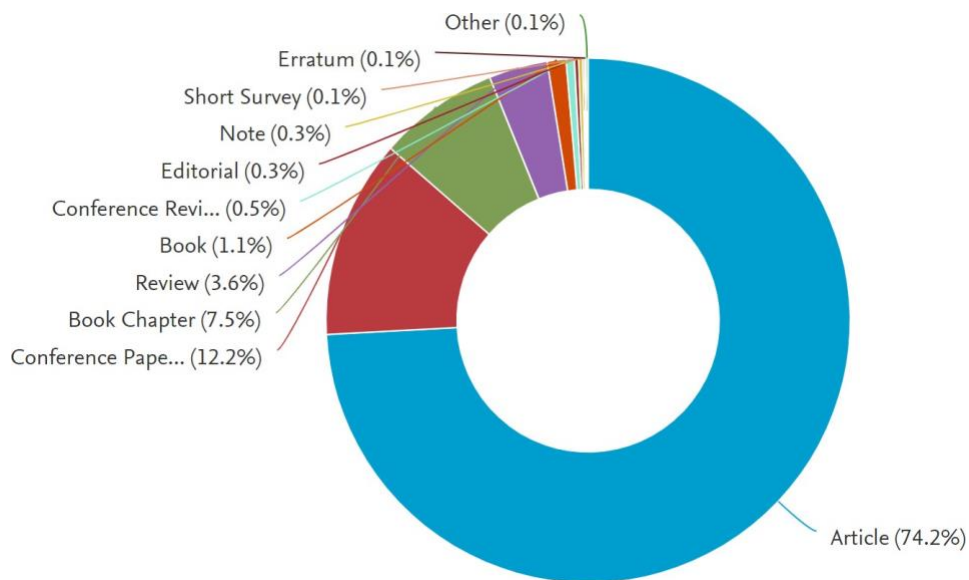


Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

Despite the absence of Latin American countries that lack scientific production regarding this phenomenon that has taken on considerable relevance in the business environment. The participation of Spain (see **figure 5**) can be highlighted as a representative of the Ibero-American community (SEGIB, 2020), occupying third place, among the countries with the highest scientific production in the Spanish language.

The following graph shows the type of document in which the research related to CSR and Communication is developed, identifying that, in most cases, they are publications in magazines, covering 74.2% of the total by type of document. Followed by conference memoirs with 12.2% and in third place with 7.5%, book chapters. See **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6. Document type**

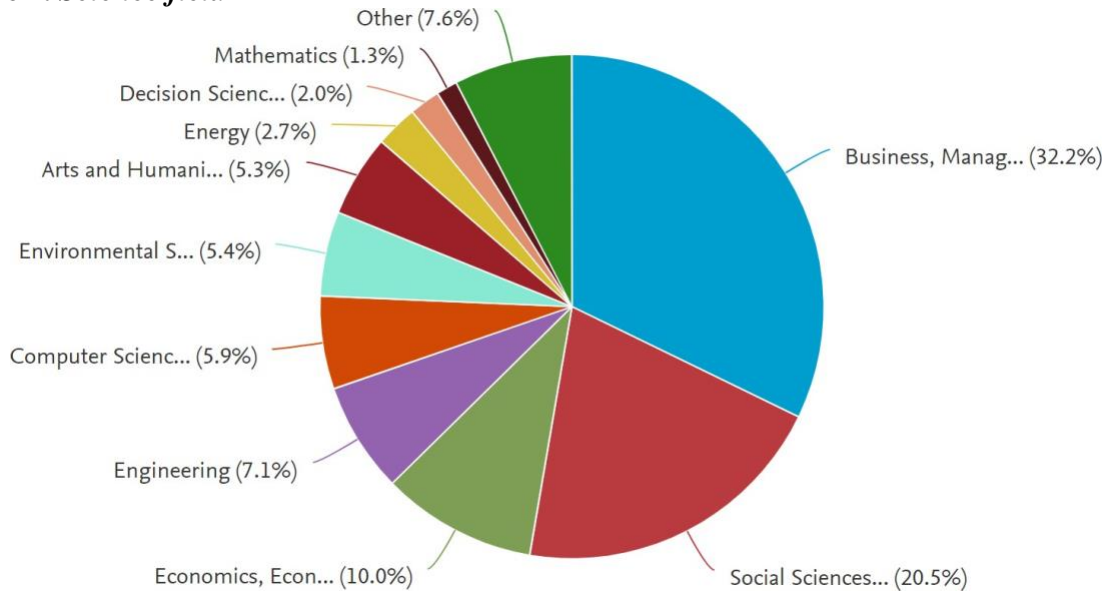


Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

A relevant graph in this document is the one presented in Figure 7 since it shows the field of science where the analysis of CSR and Communication is found. Ranking first, in the field of Business Administration (Business Management) with 32.2%, followed by Social Sciences (Social Sciences) with 20.5% and Economics (Economics) with 10%. This coincides with the theoretical basis of CSR since a large part of the conceptualization and theoretical explanation of the phenomenon comes from Business Administration, which has its origin in Economic Sciences. Also, in most cases and according to Windell (2006), Newell and Frynas (2007), the field of social

sciences seeks to explain the phenomenon of CSR from the point of view of social impact, which, again, is reflected with high participation in the field of study. See **figure 7**.

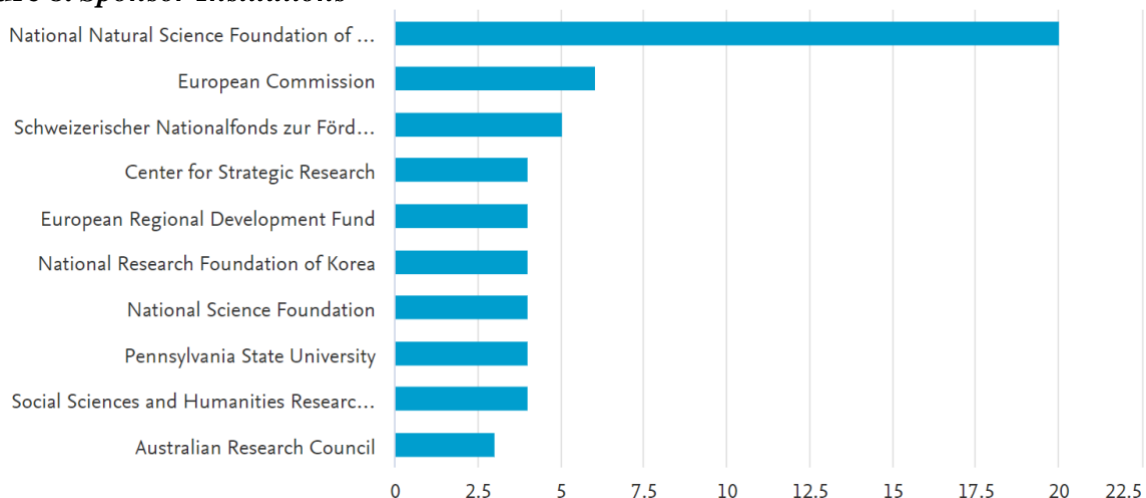
**Figure 7. Science field**



Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

The following graph shows the institutions that have sponsored in greater proportion, studies related to CSR and Corporate Communication. An outstanding contribution is observed from the National Natural Science Foundation of China, with around 20 sponsored investigations, followed by the European Commission and the Swiss National Science Foundation. In general terms, the participation of Asian and European institutions stands out, evidencing the counterpart of developing countries, such as Latin American and African countries (See **Figure 8**).

**Figure 8. Sponsor Institutions**



Source: Own adaptation through SCOPUS

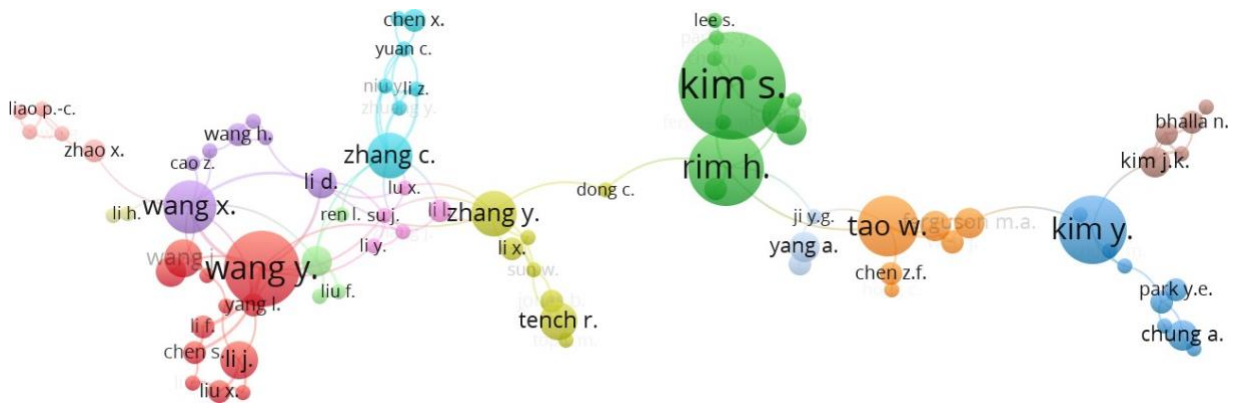
#### **4. Discussion**

According to the results, relevant points are identified that can direct the trends related to the scientific production of CSR and Corporate Communication. In the first place, the absence of developing countries stands out, in relation to the low scientific production they have related to CSR, in the same way, the institutions that sponsor research are concentrated in Asia, Europe, and the United States. This leaves a question mark between low production in developing countries and the level of need or priority in each country. According to what Carroll (2018) exposes regarding the topics and/or lines of research related to CSR, the current trend is the study of the communication of CSR in underdeveloped countries, however, in the bibliometric analysis, a positive trend related to the growth of production in these countries is not identified.

Based on the above, new questions arise, regarding whether scientific production should really focus on developed or underdeveloped countries, where according to the OECD (2009) they are the countries with the lowest quality of life. Where issues such as corruption, care for the environment, and gender equality, are problems that are they can attack by CSR, since although the company is not the one indicated to eradicate or solve said problems, they are part of society, which, from their attributions, can be part of a gradual change in society.

The following figure identifies the relationship of the authors, showing as main authors Kim, S. Rim, H. Tao, W. Kim, Y. Wang, X., and Zhang, C. Asian authors who intertwine as co-authors and between appointments. See **figure 9**.

**Figure 9. Networks between authors**

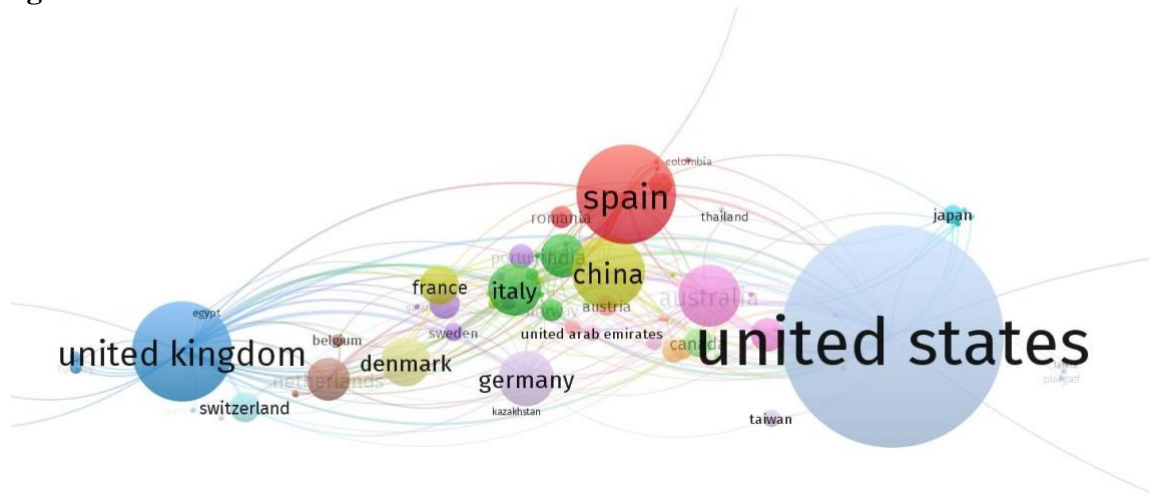


Source: Own adaptation through VOSviewer

The foregoing demonstrates a possible bias between scientific production, due to an exclusive relationship of Asian authors, leaving aside the participation of ideas from different authors throughout the world, which can generate bias, due to the differentiated environments. that the CSR phenomenon offers from the business perspective.

Figure 10 presents the relationships associated with the countries where scientific production is generated, convincingly showing the participation of the United States as the leading country, followed by the United Kingdom and Spain. To a lesser extent is the participation of China, Germany, and Italy (see **Figure 10**). It's important to mention that regardless of the country in which it is published, Asian authors are the most productive, however, productivity is contrasted, with the quality represented in the number of citations, represented in table 1. Although it is difficult to measure the quality of the production, due to the time factor, concerning the propensity to be more cited a document that was published ten years before a recent article, the number of citations is considered an approximation of the quality variable.

**Figure 10. Networks between countries**



Source: Own adaptation through VOSviewer

Figure 11 shows the relationships between keywords and concepts that are used within the production related to CSR and communication, highlighting the word "report", "public relations", "reputation", "trust", and "strategy". The word report is a variable strongly related to communication because it is considered the mechanism by which the company generates communication, such an assertion is reflected in the birth of exclusive communication models such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) or the Global Compact (GC), models that serve as standardized guides, which allow companies to adjust their social practices with adequate communication through annual reports. See **Figure 11**.

For their part, according to Miller (2020), Cowan and Guzman (2018), and Chouthoy and Kazi (2016) ensure that CSR has a positive effect on corporate reputation and within the relationship, communication is identified as a mediating variable, which is a fundamental part for the positive generation of reputation. In such a way that, within the associated words, the word reputation is found. In the same way, words such as strategy and trust are highly related, since, in the same way as in reputation, CSR is associated as part of a strategic approach within the company, Bernal, et al. (2017). For its part, according to Kim (2019), trust is a fundamental part of the CSR communication process with stakeholders.





The research is limited by the database used, because Scopus is not the only database available to compile scientific production, which invites future research to include other complementary databases such as Web of Science, and Google Scholar, among others.

## 5. Conclusions

In the last 20 years, a positive trend was identified in scientific production regarding CSR and CC. science where the analysis of CSR and Communication is found. Additionally, the fields of knowledge that analyze CSR and corporate communication are classified, finding in the first place, the field of business administration with 32.2%, followed by social sciences with 20.5%, and economics with 10%. which coincides with the theoretical bases of the CSR phenomenon. See

### Table 2.

**Table 2. Main findings of the study**

Scopus and VOSviewer charts	Findings
The number of publications focused on CSR and Corporate Communication	Significant growth was found starting in the 2000s. By 2019, scientific output peaked at around 200 publications and slowed in 2020.
Comparison between sections of CSR	It was detected that in the last 15 years, there was a significant growth of the main approaches associated with CSR and CC, this growth coincides with the production in general
Main Authors	The authors with the largest number of publications regarding the phenomenon of CSR and CC are Pérez, A. et al. As well as the authors with the highest number of citations: Bhattacharya C., et al. (2010) with 866 citations; Maignan I., et al. (2002) with 683 citations and Wagner T., et al. (2009) with 454 citations.
Universities with the highest production	Among the universities with the greatest scientific production are the "Aarhus Universitet", in second place: the "Copenhagen Business School", and finally the "University of Cantabria".
Scientific production by country	The countries with the highest scientific production were identified: 1) the United States, 2) the United Kingdom and 3) Spain.
Document type	Most of the studies related to CSR and CC have been published in journals, covering 74.2%, followed by conference proceedings with 12.2% and in third place with 7.5%, book chapters.



Field of science	It was found that the studies on CSR and Corporate Communication are located in the field of Business Administration (Business Management) followed by Social Sciences (Social Sciences) and finally, Economics (Economics).
Sponsoring Institutions	Among the main institutions that have sponsored studies related to CSR and CC, is: "The Natural Science Foundation of China" with around 20 sponsored investigations. In second place is the "European Commission" with 6 investigations.
Networks between Authors	The existence of a relationship between intertwined Asian authors as co-authors and citations was identified. Among the main authors, the following stand out: Kim, S.; Rim, H.; Tao, W.; Kim, Y.; Wang, X.
Networks between countries	The existence of a relationship between countries where a greater scientific production is generated were detected, highlighting the United States as the leading country, followed by the United Kingdom and Spain.
Networks between concepts and keywords	Within the relationships between concepts and keywords, the word "report", "public relations", "reputation", "trust", "strategy" was detected.

Note: The table shows the most cited authors who have carried out studies on CSR and its relationship with CC. Own elaboration through VOSviewer.

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