INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Vol 16, Issue 2, (2026) E-ISSN: 2222-6990

Corporate Sustainability Performance: Reflection and Future Perspective

Nuramalina Ibrahim, Nomahaza Mahadi
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Email: nuramalina82@graduate.utm.my, nomahaza.kl@utm.my

DOI Link: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i2/27759

Published Date: 22 February 2026

Abstract

This study presents a targeted bibliometric analysis of Corporate Sustainability Performance (CSP) research. To ensure thematic precision, a title-based search strategy was employed. The study examined 263 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus between 2008 and 2025. Analytical tools were used to assess publication trends, keyword co-occurrence, citation patterns, and thematic development. The analysis reveals a consistent increase in CSP publications, particularly after 2015, reflecting a rising global emphasis on corporate accountability and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance. Country-level findings show growing contributions from South and Southeast Asia, with notable citation impact from emerging economies, marking a shift from earlier Western-centric patterns. Thematic mapping identifies corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder theory, and corporate governance as dominant research clusters. Meanwhile, topics such as big data analytics, dynamic capabilities, and social aspects related to appear as less developed yet highly-integrated themes. Construct such as information sharing is peripheral, suggesting gaps in theoretical application. Temporal analysis shows a progression from normative CSR narratives toward performance-based sustainability frameworks aligned with institutional and investor demands. This study contributes a focused and conceptually coherent mapping of CSP literature. By identifying mature, fragmented, and underexplored areas, it offers a critical foundation for advancing theoretical development, addressing regional imbalances, and responding to emerging intersections between sustainability and digital transformation. The findings provide researchers, policy makers, and practitioners with evidence to inform future inquiry and sustainability strategy design.

Keywords: Corporate Sustainability Performance, ESG, Bibliometric Analysis, Thematic Mapping, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Corporate Sustainability Performance (CSP) has emerged as a strategic priority in both academic and corporate domains, reflecting its role in promoting environmental, social, and economic resilience. However, the literature remains fragmented across constructs, methods, and theoretical approaches, limiting conceptual integration and clarity (Mal et al., 2023; Kantabutra, 2022). Past reviews relying on broad title-abstract-keyword (TAK) searches often captured tangential studies, reducing thematic precision. This study addresses these gaps through a title-based bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed journal articles from 2008 to 2025. It examines trends in publication volume and impact, influential journals and countries, top-cited documents, and evolving thematic structures to offer a clearer map of the CSP research landscape.

Literature Review

Historical Development

CSP originates from corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable development, and the triple bottom line (Brundtland, 1987; Elkington, 1997). Artiach et al. (2010) and Eccles et al. (2014) established a financial performance link, showing that firms with mature sustainability profiles outperformed peers in risk reduction and stakeholder trust. More recent contributions (e.g., Maia et al., 2020) confirmed CSP's role in organizational resilience, particularly during crises.

Previous Bibliometric Analysis on CSP

Existing CSP-specific bibliometric studies remain limited. Gardazi et al. (2023) analyzed CSP using TAK filters but included reviews and conference papers, diluting thematic focus. Saulick et al. (2023) combined bibliometric and systematic approaches but lacked mapping depth. These studies highlight major challenges: conceptual noise from broad search strategies and the absence of temporal or cluster evolution analysis. To address this, the present study narrows its focus to title-only queries and employs a temporal thematic lens.

Methodology

A total of 263 peer-reviewed CSP journal articles were extracted from Scopus using a title-only query to ensure thematic relevance. The search had no date restriction and was finalized on April 20, 2025. The analysis excluded co-authorship networks and emphasized thematic structure. Bibliometric tools, Biblioshiny and biblioMagika®, were used to generate citation metrics, keyword co-occurrence maps, thematic clusters, and keyword evolution matrices.

Results

Documents Profiles

The dataset spans 2008 to 2025 with 263 publications by 833 authors, yielding an h-index of 46 and 8,812 total citations. The dominant subject areas are Business and Management (55.89%), Environmental Science (44.49%), and Social Sciences (39.92%), reflecting CSP's interdisciplinary scope.

Publication Trends

Publications rose and accelerated from 2015 onward. Growth phase began 2018 and peaked in 2023. Citation averages was highest in 2020 but declined thereafter due to citation lag. "Sustainability (Switzerland)" was the most prolific source, while "Journal of Cleaner Production" had the highest citation-per-paper ratio, signaling concentrated research impact.

Publications by Countries

China leads by volume (61) followed by Pakistan (24) and Malaysia (24). However, Pakistan demonstrates a higher citations-per-paper ratio (36.92) than China (28.54). Notably, emerging economies show growing productivity with impactful outputs.

Highly Cited Document

Analysis of top-cited works revealed four dominant themes: (1) CSP–financial performance (Artiach et al., 2010; Ng & Rezaee, 2015); (2) governance and internal strategic systems (Naciti, 2019; Zaid et al., 2020);
(3) stakeholder, supply chains, and institutional pressures (Wolf, 2014; Dubey et al., 2020); and (4) measurement and conceptual frameworks (Nikolaou et al., 2019; Khaled et al., 2021). These clusters reflect CSP's evolution from normative CSR to institutionalized governance-focused metrics.

Keywords and Co-occurance Analysis

The Word Cloud analysis from 2018 to 2025, identified as the growth phase of CSP, revealed frequent keywords such as corporate sustainability, CSR, corporate governance, green innovation, stakeholder theory, and environmental performance. These reflect a core scholarly focus on non-financial performance dimensions, particularly accountability, regulation, and strategic management. The prominence of terms like ESG performance, GRI, and board of directors suggests a shift toward performance-based, externally responsive models. The emphasis on environmental terms indicates a stronger research focus on ecological aspects, while the continued presence of CSR highlights the enduring relevance of foundational sustainability concepts.

Figure 1. World Cloud
Source: Generated by the author(s) using Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017)

The Three-Field Plot connects countries, authors, and keywords, illustrating the structure of CSP research. Malaysia, India, and France emerged as top contributors, with strong author representation linked to recurring terms such as corporate sustainability, stakeholder theory, and corporate governance. The visualization reinforces the Word Cloud findings, highlighting thematic consistency across geographic and authorial contributions.

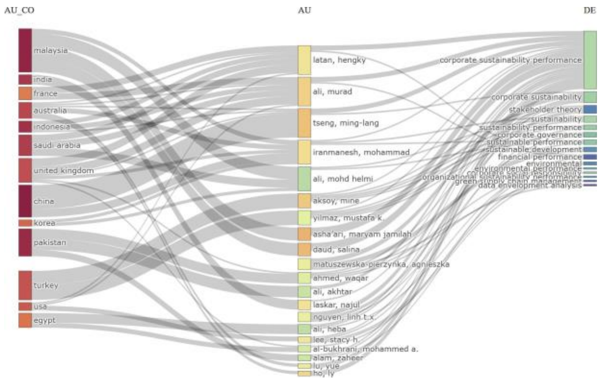

Figure 2. Three-Field Plot of Country-Author-Keyword Relationship
Source: Generated by the author(s) using Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017)

The thematic map reveals CSP research organized into four clusters. Motor themes, such as corporate sustainability performance, CSR, governance, and stakeholder theory, form the conceptual core of the field. Basic themes like triple bottom line, ESG performance, and green HRM are widely cited but theoretically underdeveloped, while constructs such as big data analytics and dynamic capabilities show potential for advancement. Niche themes, including green innovation and diversity, are well-developed but not yet central, whereas emerging themes like information sharing remain weakly integrated despite their relevance. Overall, the map highlights strong foundations in governance and accountability, with opportunities to expand digital and social dimensions.

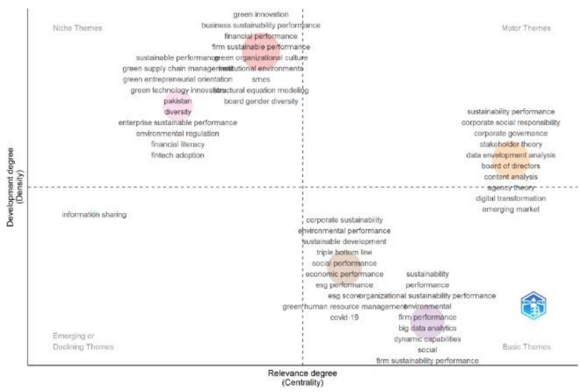

Figure 3. Thematic Map
Source: Generated by the author(s) using Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017)

Discussion

Interpretation of Key Findings

The growth of CSP-related publications between 2008 and 2025 reflects its rising importance in both academic and corporate domains, in alignment with global sustainability movements and the Sustainable Development Goals. This upward trend, accompanied by an expanding base of authors and citations, indicates the field's increasing relevance and interdisciplinary appeal. Notably, there has been a geographic

shift in CSP research, with South and Southeast Asia, particularly China, Malaysia, and Pakistan, emerging as key contributors. This contrasts with earlier reviews that emphasized

Western dominance and highlights the growing impact of scholarship from emerging economies.

The analysis of highly cited articles reveals a dominant emphasis on the "business case" for sustainability, where CSP is linked to improved financial performance, risk mitigation, and strategic value. Four major thematic clusters were identified. The first, aligned with basic themes, includes studies connecting CSP with firm performance, human resource practices, and market valuation, although these remain underdeveloped in theoretical depth. The second cluster, corresponding to motor themes, includes research on governance, stakeholder, and sustainability, areas that are both central and conceptually mature. A third group of studies, focused on diversity, culture, and environmental orientation, falls within niche themes, offering rich insights but limited integration with the broader literature. Finally, emerging themes such as information sharing remain peripheral, yet offer important opportunities for future research on enablers of CSP, especially in the context of digitalization and knowledge management.

Keyword analysis reinforces these patterns, identifying corporate governance, stakeholder theory, and CSR as dominant frameworks, while terms like dynamic capabilities and big data analytics suggest a growing interest in internal capabilities and performance-based models. However, social dimensions, such as employee engagement and community impact, remain underrepresented. The thematic positioning of information sharing reflects its underexplored status despite its strategic relevance, especially amid calls for greater transparency and responsiveness in sustainability practices post-pandemic.

The transition from normative CSR discourse to performance-driven CSP frameworks indicates a maturing field, increasingly concerned with measurable outcomes, digital tools, and strategic alignment. As such, future research must deepen integration across thematic clusters, expand the social and digital dimensions of CSP, and ground analyses in diverse institutional contexts to support more resilient and inclusive sustainability models.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This study reinforces the centrality of governance and stakeholder theory in CSP research while revealing gaps in the literature, particularly the underrepresentation of social themes such as employee engagement, community impact, and social performance. These findings highlight the need to broaden CSP's theoretical base by incorporating perspectives like social capital theory, the resource-based view, and dynamic capabilities to better capture organizational resilience and social sustainability. The analysis also signals a geographic shift in theoretical development, with growing contributions from South and Southeast Asia offering opportunities to develop regionally grounded models that challenge prevailing Western-centric assumptions. Methodologically, this study advances prior reviews by employing a title-based search strategy, enhancing thematic precision and ensuring conceptual coherence. The combined use of Biblioshiny and biblioMagika® enabled robust triangulation of keyword networks, citation metrics, and thematic mapping, offering clearer insights into both dominant and emerging areas of CSP research.

Limitations of the Study
While this study provides valuable insights into the evolution and structure of CSP research, certain limitations remain. Relying solely on Scopus may have excluded other databases. Title-based search, though precise, likely omitted interdisciplinary work where CSP was not explicitly mentioned. The

exclusive use of quantitative mapping tools limits theoretical depth, and the exclusion of co-authorship and sectoral analyses leaves room for further exploration. These were deliberate scope choices, but they highlight opportunities for future research to broaden and deepen the analysis.

Implications for Future Research and Practice
This study identifies key directions to advance CSP research and practice. While governance and financial outcomes are well represented in the literature, social dimensions such as labor rights, equity, and community impact remain underexplored. Future studies should address this gap by integrating robust social performance metrics into CSP frameworks. The growing presence of topics like big data analytics and content analysis signals a need for more interdisciplinary approaches that connect sustainability with digital systems and organizational technologies. As firms embrace advanced reporting tools, research should further examine how digital transformation and dynamic capabilities enhance sustainability performance and accountability.

Geographically, CSP research remains concentrated in developed regions, with limited representation from low-income and African countries. Expanding research into these contexts, through comparative studies that account for institutional, regulatory, and cultural diversity, can enrich the global discourse. The COVID-19 pandemic has also underscored the urgency of resilience-oriented CSP strategies, particularly those that leverage innovation and stakeholder engagement during crises.

For practitioners and policymakers, the findings highlight the need to align governance, innovation, and measurement systems to drive inclusive sustainability outcomes. Addressing information gaps can enable more transparent, stakeholder-responsive performance models. Ultimately, future research must move toward dynamic, data-driven, and contextually grounded models of CSP that reflect evolving global sustainability demands.

Conclusion
This study provides a focused bibliometric analysis of CSP literature from 2008 to 2025, using a title-based search and thematic mapping to trace its intellectual development. It clarifies dominant themes, exposes underexplored areas, and outlines future research directions. As sustainability challenges evolve, these insights support more aligned and impactful academic and strategic responses.

References

Ahmi, A. (2023). OpenRefine: An approachable tool for cleaning and harmonizing bibliographical data. 11th International Conference on Applied Science and Technology 2022 (11th ICAST 2022) AIP Conference Proceedings, 2827, 030006-1-030006–030011. https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0164724

Ahmi, A. (2024) biblioMagika, available from https://bibliomagika.com

Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). bibliometrix : An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. Journal of Informetrics, 11(4), 959–975. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007

Artiach. (2010). *The determinants of corporate sustainability performance*. Accounting and Finance, 50(1), 98-116.

Brundtland, G.H., 1987. Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

De Vries, B., Van Smeden, M., Rosendaal, F., & Groenwold, R. (2020). Title, abstract and keyword searching resulted in poor recovery of articles in systematic reviews of epidemiologic practice. *Journal of clinical epidemiology*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2020.01.009.

Eccles, R. G., Ioannou, I., & Serafeim, G. (2014). *The Impact of Corporate Sustainability on Organizational Processes and Performance*. Management Science, 60(11), 1-20.

Elkington, J. (1997). Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business. Capstone.

Gardazi, S., Hassan, A., & Bello, M. (2023). A Bibliometric Analysis of Corporate Sustainability Performance: Current Status, Development and Future Trends. International Journal of Professional Business Review.HMaia et al. (2020). *Corporate sustainability during a pandemic: Evidence from a global survey*. Sustainability, 12(6), 2273.

HMaia. (2020). Corporate sustainability during a pandemic: Evidence from a global survey. Sustainability, 12(6), 2273.

Kantabutra, S. (2022). Toward a system theory of corporate sustainability: an interim struggle. Sustainability, 14(23), 15931. https://doi.org/10.3390/su142315931

Mal, H., Varma, M., & Vishvakarma, N. K. (2023). An empirical study to prioritize the determinants of corporate sustainability performance using analytic hierarchy process. Measuring Business Excellence, 27(2), 193-210. https://doi.org/10.1108/mbe-10-2021-0133

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D. G., & PRISMA Group. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)*, *339*(jul21 1), b2535. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b2535

Norris, M., & Oppenheim, C. (2007). Comparing alternatives to the Web of Science for coverage of the social sciences' literature. *J. Informetrics*, 1, 161-169. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2006.12.001.

Saulick, P., Bokhoree, C., & Bekaroo, G. (2023). Business sustainability performance: A systematic literature review on assessment approaches, tools and techniques. *Journal of Cleaner Production*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.136837.

van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2014). Visualizing Bibliometric Networks. In *Measuring Scholarly Impact* (pp. 285–320). Springer International Publishing.

Zhu, J., & Liu, W. (2020). A tale of two databases: the use of Web of Science and Scopus in academic papers. *Scientometrics*, 123, 321 - 335. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03387-8.