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Research on Corporate Social Responsibility in Public Relations: A Hybrid Review Through Topic Modeling Analysis and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing significance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in corporate public relations (PR) strategies, there has been a paucity of comprehensive reviews of the extant CSR literature within the PR discipline. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the concept of CSR and the discipline of PR through a hybrid concept-discipline-focused review. We employed latent dirichlet allocation (LDA) via topic modeling as a novel approach for intellectual structure analysis. The dataset for this review comprised 246 peer-reviewed articles on CSR published between 1975 and 2022. Based on the LDA results, five topics were identified and discussed: the political CSR stream, social media-oriented CSR, consumer-oriented CSR, CSR reporting, and business-oriented CSR. Additionally, implications for both academic and practical applications were drawn, along with recommendations for future research. This study is pioneering in its contribution to the literature and practice of CSR-related PR research, offering insights into the intellectual structures and trends within this field.

1 | Introduction

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is gaining recognition as a crucial element of business operations and organizational ethos. A report by Cone Communications (2017) indicated that 87% of consumers expressed a preference for purchasing from companies that champion causes they are passionate about. Moreover, research from the Satell Institute (2018) demonstrated the tangible benefits of robust CSR practices, indicating an impressive 86% average employee retention rate among firms with strong CSR commitments. Although CSR is theoretically rooted in the field of management, it has become an essential component of public relations (PR) and has long attracted the attention of researchers and professionals (Ji, Tao,

and Rim 2020; Logan 2021). From the perspective of PR, CSR is defined as “organizational practice addressing the economic, legal, ethical, environmental, and societal responsibilities of an organization in its relationships with stakeholders and a larger society” (Kim 2022, 12).

The responsibilities of businesses toward society beyond profit-making have frequently been the subject of debate, with a particular focus on PR efforts. Recently, these debates on the roles and responsibilities of firms have been revived (Kumar and Srivastava 2022). In this vein, the increased expectations of stakeholders have led to the integration of CSR efforts into PR, thereby enhancing the significance of CSR for practitioners (Ji, Tao, and Rim 2020). In particular, the personal and business

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ethical beliefs of PR practitioners have been shown to influence their perceptions of their responsibilities in the context of CSR activities (Kim and Park 2011). Similarly, in addition to its practical importance in the field of PR, CSR has also received increasing attention from scholars of PR (Goodwin and Bartlett 2008; Lee 2017). The discourse around CSR in PR literature predominantly revolves around three perspectives: its function as a management tool that intersects with ethical considerations, PR professionalism, and historical context; its role in communication management, particularly in CSR reporting, leveraging new communication technologies, and deploying CSR-centric marketing tactics; and its significance in relationship management, focusing on building brand reputation, fostering trust, and managing stakeholder relations (Goodwin and Bartlett 2008). Kim and Reber (2008) also delineate PR roles in CSR, categorizing them into significant management, philanthropic, value-driven, and communication efforts alongside instances where no specific role is identifiable.

Despite the growing interest and extensive research on CSR in the field of PR, the accumulated knowledge on this topic remains fragmented and lacks a coherent, systematic integration. As Ji, Tao, and Rim (2020) note, given the interdisciplinary nature of CSR, a focused examination of the PR field is essential due to its context-specific nuances. While numerous systematic literature reviews (SLRs) have charted the advancement of CSR knowledge in closely related disciplines such as advertising (Hartmann, Marcos, and Apaolaza 2023) and communication (Golob et al. 2013; Ji, Tao, and Rim 2020, 2022; Verk, Golob, and Podnar 2021), a PR-focused review remains scarce. For example, Goodwin and Bartlett (2008) conducted a non-systematic review of the PR literature through content analysis to explore its treatment of CSR. Their study covered 21 articles from three academic PR journals published between 1998 and 2007. Subsequently, Lee (2017) conducted a content analysis of 113 articles spanning 35 years to elucidate the contemporary state of CSR research in PR. This underscores the imperative for a systematic and up-to-date approach to address the significant gap in CSR research within the PR discipline.

The necessity for further research in the field of SLRs may be identified as a result of the limitations of the methodologies employed in previous studies and the requirement for an updated overview (Kumar and Srivastava 2022). Therefore, although previous efforts, such as those by Goodwin and Bartlett (2008) and Lee (2017), have laid a foundation for further research, they have focused on a relatively narrow corpus of 21 and 113 articles, respectively. This has resulted in the oversight of a significant body of literature, comprising an additional 123 articles published post-2015 (see Figure 3). This oversight demonstrates the dynamic and yet fragmented state of CSR in PR scholarship, which requires a coherent, updated review to integrate recent advancements (Redine et al. 2023). Furthermore, they have utilized a content analysis methodology to examine the literature. However, some scholars have criticized content analysis for its limitations in covering a large corpus of literature and its tendency to focus on surface-level features of topics rather than providing an in-depth analysis (Liu et al. 2023). Accordingly, the objective nature of bibliometric analysis, such as co-citation analysis, can assist in overcoming the primary limitations of content analysis, particularly in the examination

of the concealed intellectual structure through the identification of research trends and developments (Jennifer Liu et al. 2023). The term “intellectual structure” is defined as “identification of the domain’s theme-focused characteristics from its roots to its roof” (Köseoglu 2020, 2170). An examination of the intellectual structure, which encompasses prominent publications, authors, contexts, sources, themes, and ontological stances, can mitigate the prevailing fragmentation and establish a foundation for a more profound comprehension of the domain (Dharmani, Das, and Prashar 2021). Conversely, the conceptual structure identifies the interconnections between concepts and terms, emphasizing their co-occurrences within a body of literature to delineate the scientific fields of study and investigate the diverse themes emerging from the research (Palácios, de Almeida, and Sousa 2021). Conceptual structure analyses are frequently employed as a supplement to enhance the comprehension of thematic clusters that emerge from intellectual structure analyses (Donthu et al. 2021).

While scholars frequently employ co-citation analysis to elucidate intellectual structure, this approach is not without limitations (Arici et al. 2021). In light of limitations, some researchers have recently proposed topic modeling approaches, such as latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), which is viewed as an effective method to uncover hidden topics in the body of knowledge related to a given subject (Khan et al. 2023; Köseoglu 2020; Kumar and Srivastava 2022). LDA has been increasingly utilized in SLRs to examine the organization of unstructured documents by topic (Köseoglu 2020; Zupic and Čater 2015).

In summary, although previous reviews have sought to enrich scholarly discourse, their efficacy has been constrained by factors such as timeliness (e.g., until 2015), scope (e.g., less than 150 articles), rigor (e.g., a non-systematic approach and subjective), coverage (e.g., overlooking the intellectual structure), and review method (e.g., content analysis, lacking depth, and objectivity) (Basu et al. 2023). These shortcomings have impeded our comprehensive understanding of CSR practices in the PR field, underscoring the need for a novel review employing contemporary analytical techniques to enhance our theoretical and intellectual comprehension of CSR. To this end, we seek to elucidate the underlying intellectual structure of CSR research in the PR domain through SLR methodology, utilizing LDA. Consequently, we anticipate addressing the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1. What is the general overview of CSR-related PR research?
- RQ2. What is the hidden intellectual structure in CSR-related PR research?
- RQ3. What are the implications and future recommendations for CSR-related research in PR literature?

This study makes several contributions to the field of CSR research in PR by providing answers to these questions and building upon the findings of earlier reviews. Firstly, this review includes a substantial number of articles pertaining to CSR that have been published in the eight leading peer-reviewed journals in the field of PR between the years 1975 and 2022. Consequently, it complements previous reviews. Secondly, in

contrast to previous research, this study concentrates on the hidden intellectual structure to provide a more profound insight into the subject matter. Third, this SLR makes a methodological contribution by applying the LDA approach to uncover the intellectual structure. By employing a newer methodology, this approach will provide more comprehensive, reliable, and robust results for the state of the art in the field. Fourth, the current study offers recommendations for future research on emerging topics due to the LDA. Lastly, by delving into the hidden intellectual structure of CSR-related PR research, this research delivers valuable contributions and offers implications for practitioners.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | CSR in PR

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as a company's dedication to collaborating with its employees and their families, the local community, and society at large with the objective of enhancing the quality of life for its workforce and their families (Dahlsrud 2008). CSR refers to a firm's pledge to ethically oversee its operations' social, environmental, and economic impacts, which is advantageous to the broader community (Aljarah et al. 2022). Its initiatives may encompass a range of activities, including community engagement, environmental conservation, employee welfare, and philanthropy (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010). It is a crucial element in the development of a company's public reputation and the implementation of concrete strategies to deliver social services (Aljarah et al. 2023).

Investments in social endeavors have the potential to enhance a firm's valuation in the financial market and facilitate access to capital. The motivation behind companies' engagement in CSR initiatives can be attributed to three key factors: the reduction of their environmental impact, the support of their workforce, and the creation of positive community effects (Carroll 1999). Such initiatives have been demonstrated to yield improved employment outcomes, enhanced firm loyalty, increased employee retention, elevated motivation, and augmented productivity (Tsourvakas and Yfantidou 2018). Consequently, in recent decades, CSR has garnered substantial interest within the field of PR, being regarded as a pivotal practice within the discipline (Ji, Tao, and Rim 2020; Logan 2021). The primary objective of PR is to maintain a company's favorable image and cultivate strategic relationships with customers, potential clients, partners, investors, employees, and other key stakeholders (Ferguson 2018). This is accomplished by portraying the company as trustworthy, meaningful, successful, and relevant to the public, thereby projecting a positive image (Kim and Reber 2008). In essence, PR serves as a conduit between the firm and its external environment.

The relationship between CSR and PR is complex and multifaceted (Clark 2000; Kim and Reber 2008). The integration of CSR as a key area of PR practice has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. This integration enables companies to communicate their dedication to social responsibility, showcasing their values and fortifying stakeholder relationships (Clark 2000; Lee 2017). This integration signals a merging of CSR and PR

objectives, where identical endeavors can fulfill dual purposes. Conversely, the distinct aspect of PR lies in its emphasis on employing effective communication strategies to nurture relationships and guide public perceptions.

The interconnection between CSR and PR is clearly demonstrated by the function of PR practitioners in coordinating CSR communication within an organization (Clark 2000; Kim and Park 2011). PR professionals cultivate relationships between the firm and its stakeholders, utilizing CSR as a means of fortifying these connections and substantiating the company's dedication to societal well-being (Tworzydło, Gawroński, and Szuba 2021). In fulfilling these CSR roles, PR practitioners may assume responsibilities that range from managerial and philanthropic to value-driven and communicative tasks (Kim and Park 2011). These roles entail conveying CSR endeavors to stakeholders and developing persuasive narratives about the value and advantages of these initiatives for the company (Lee 2017).

Prior studies on CSR and PR have encompassed a multitude of subject areas. These include the utilization of CSR as a means of cultivating a favorable corporate image (Tworzydło, Gawroński, and Szuba 2021), the deployment of PR to disseminate information about CSR activities (Roth-Cohen and Avidar 2022), and the deployment of CSR to foster relationships with stakeholders (Kim and Reber 2008). Furthermore, studies have examined the influence of PR strategies on the advancement of CSR initiatives, while also elucidating the associated challenges and opportunities (Tworzydło, Gawroński, and Szuba 2021).

2.2 | The Role of CSR Activities in Strengthening PR

CSR is a fundamental aspect of achieving sustainability and preserving the environment and society. Its activities are an essential component of companies' strategies to enhance relationships with all segments of society and stakeholders (Aljarah et al. 2022). By embracing CSR principles and engaging in CSR activities, corporations endeavor to make a meaningful impact on the environmental and social fronts (Aljarah et al. 2023). For example, when firms provide support for ecological programs, such as reducing energy consumption and promoting renewable energy initiatives, they demonstrate a heightened commitment to environmental stewardship for future generations (Hassan et al. 2024). Similarly, supporting educational, healthcare, and poverty alleviation programs signifies a commitment to sustainable development and the enhancement of quality of life in communities served (Aljarah et al. 2022; Wang, Ke, and Sankaran 2024). Furthermore, CSR activities are instrumental in cultivating favorable PR, exemplifying a firm's dedication to ethical conduct and transparency (Logan 2021). This fosters public trust, attracts a larger customer base, investors, and workforce, and fosters a supportive work environment that drives long-term sustainable growth (Bhattacharya, Korschun, and Sen 2009). Consequently, companies tailor their CSR activities to align with societal needs and achieve their strategic objectives.

Ultimately, CSR activities have been demonstrated to improve employee morale, fostering a sense of pride and dedication

among those employed by companies that proactively contribute to societal and environmental betterment (Raza et al. 2021). Such initiatives serve as a crucial instrument for enhancing PR and establishing a favorable corporate reputation (Lee 2017). In conclusion, it can be stated that CSR practices notably bolster a company's PR efforts and solidify its standing as a socially responsible and sustainable entity (Lee 2017; Logan 2021). Notable examples include Apple's engagement in renewable energy, charitable contributions, and promotion of employee volunteerism (Apple 2022), as well as Microsoft's provision of free educational initiatives, economic development support, and poverty reduction efforts (Art and Emejulu 2020).

2.3 | Prior CSR Reviews in PR

Over the last decade, few efforts have made valuable contributions by reviewing the development of CSR research in PR or related disciplines (communication and advertising). Figure 1 provides a summary of these reviews. For example, Goodwin and Bartlett (2008) employed qualitative content analysis to investigate the manner in which CSR was addressed in the PR literature, based on a sample of 21 articles published between 1998 and 2007. The researchers concluded that CSR within PR is predominantly analyzed through the lenses of management function, communication management, and relationship management. Moreover, Lee (2017) conducted a quantitative content analysis of 113 articles published between 1980 and 2015, revealing a notable surge in CSR research following 2006. This expansion in research highlighted stakeholder theory as the dominant framework, with legitimacy and attribution theories emerging as subsequent prominent perspectives. Methodologically, a balance of qualitative and quantitative approaches was observed, with a notable increase

in studies employing a mixed-methods design. Content analysis emerged as the primary methodological tool, followed by experiments, surveys, in-depth literature reviews, and case studies. Additionally, the author revealed that the description of CSR practices and CSR communication, the effects of CSR, the conceptual framework, the role of PR, and stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs represent the most prominent research topics.

Despite the growing inclination toward bibliometric analysis within the field of PR (Roth-Cohen and Avidar 2022), there appears to be a gap in bibliometric studies specifically centered on CSR. Previous reviews that employed only content analysis, without bibliometric analysis, have adopted a relatively static approach to examining research on CSR in PR. Therefore, while they only provide information about the current situation or the overall picture, they need to offer more insight into the development process or its foundations and hidden intellectual structure (Verk, Golob, and Podnar 2021). While recent studies in other fields contribute to understanding the intellectual structure, an investigation into the intellectual development of CSR research in the context of PR is necessary to provide more detailed and richer insights. This is because the theoretical roots of CSR and PR are assumed to be similar and closely related (Ji, Tao, and Rim 2022). Consequently, both the literature and practice need to study the two fields together.

3 | Methodology

In this study, we adopted the SLR approach, as highlighted by Kraus et al. (2022). The SLR is crucial for circumventing “the endless attention to trees at the expense of forests,” a common

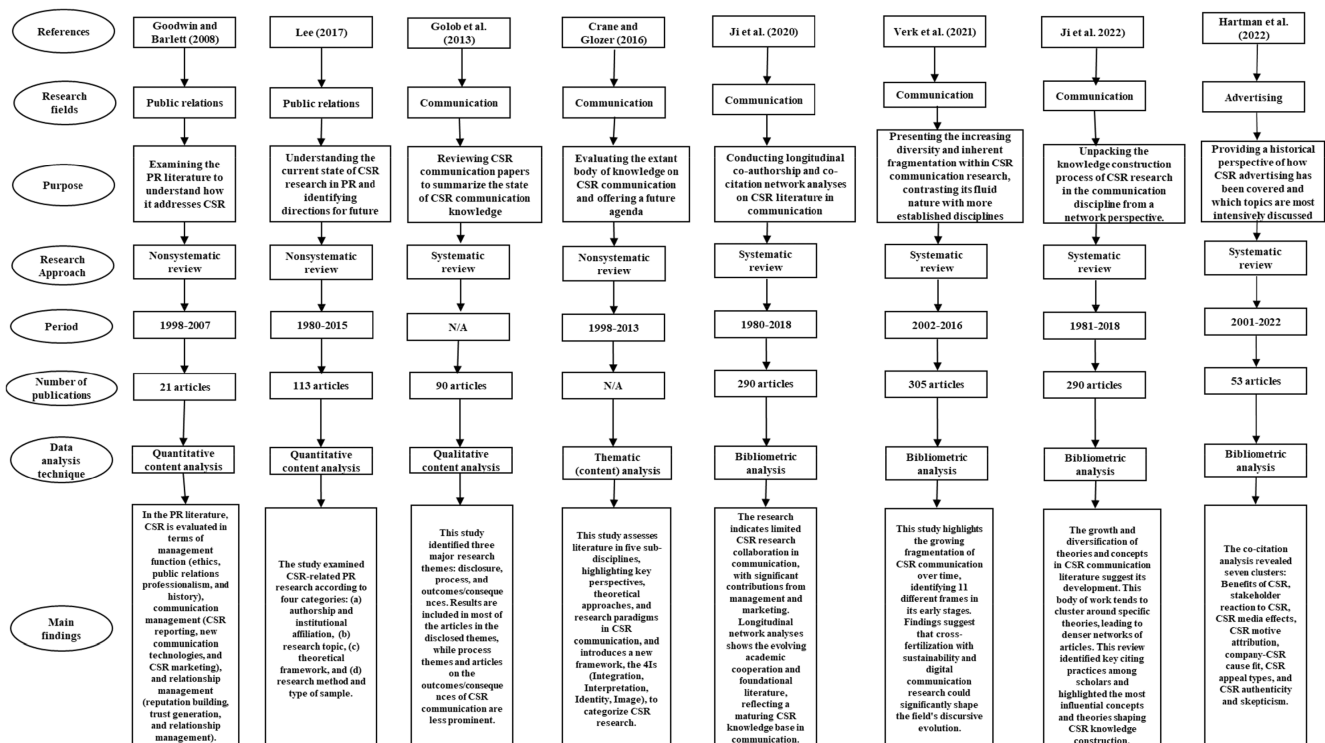


FIGURE 1 | Summary of some review studies on CSR in PR and other disciplines. The figure is adapted from Jain, Sharma, and Devi (2024).

pitfall in traditional literature reviews (Fan et al. 2021, 2). We also conducted a domain-focused hybrid review, choosing a concept-discipline hybrid (i.e., CSR concept and PR discipline) as the focus (Kraus et al. 2022). Furthermore, we employed co-citation analysis, a pervasive bibliometric technique, to examine the relevant body of knowledge. Co-citation analysis is a relational bibliometric technique that identifies thematic similarities between two publications cited in another publication's reference list, thereby revealing the hidden intellectual structure of a subject (Koseoglu et al. 2022).

Despite its widespread usage, traditional co-citation analysis is not without its shortcomings (Köseoglu 2020). One significant limitation pertains to the representativeness of the dataset. The necessity of selecting a specific cut-off point (e.g., 100 citations) often results in a subset of highly cited articles being included in co-citation analysis, which may compromise the breadth of studies considered and impact the review's reliability and validity (Arici et al. 2021; Köseoglu 2020). Furthermore, the inclusion of older articles may not accurately reflect the discipline's most recent intellectual structure (Koseoglu, Wong, and Kim 2022). The relatively recent publication of articles means that they have yet to be cited by other researchers, resulting in a lower number of citations (Koseoglu et al. 2022). Consequently, a traditional co-citation analysis may impede the ability to discern the overarching structure of a field of study. This is due to the tendency to prioritize earlier research, underrepresent more recent studies, and provide only partial coverage and insight (Arici et al. 2021).

Topic modeling analysis, a subset of unsupervised machine learning, autonomously discerns the underlying structure within extensive textual datasets, moving beyond conventional inductive methodologies (Jung, Lee, and Chung 2023). This technique enhances the value of SLRs by providing a more comprehensive and detailed analysis than traditional methods such as bibliometric analysis. Consequently, it uncovers crucial insights that may otherwise be obscured, offering a nuanced understanding of the current state of the field (Beheshti et al. 2024). LDA is the most prominent topic modeling approach among these techniques. As a three-level Bayesian model, it categorizes a wide range of unstructured documents into distinct topics, effectively navigating past the methodological constraints inherent to traditional analyses such as co-citation (Arici et al. 2021; Köseoglu 2020). In contrast to co-citation analysis, it reveals hidden thematic areas within the corpus and employs a relational strategy to evaluate the distribution of topics among documents, highlighting terms that appear together more frequently than would be expected by chance (Ammirato, Felicetti, Linzalone, et al. 2023; Atkinson 2023). Consequently, LDA provides a comprehensive perspective on the intellectual structure, encompassing the full range of the sample and integrating both historical and contemporary publications. This approach offers a sophisticated understanding of the field's evolving landscape (Ammirato, Felicetti, Linzalone, et al. 2023; Koseoglu, Wong, and Kim 2022).

We employed the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) framework (Paul et al. 2021) to guide our approach to searching, selecting, and

critically evaluating scholarly works. This protocol delineates three pivotal phases: "assembling," "arranging," and "assessing" (see Figure 2).

3.1 | Assembling

The assembling phase entails the identification and acquisition of suitable publications for SLR purposes (Paul et al. 2021). Initially, we identified CSR as the primary domain within the PR literature. Subsequently, we addressed the RQs as follows: RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. We selected peer-reviewed journals as the source type due to their status as completed research that has undergone rigorous peer review (Kumar et al. 2022, 3). In the final stage of identification, we opted for the Scopus database and SCImago (Q1) for their source quality. Scopus is favored for its stringent criteria for indexing papers, which provide a broader scope of the scientific literature, and offer detailed coverage of niche research areas (Lim et al. 2022). SCImago, on the other hand, is regarded as a reputable quality metric suitable for review purposes.

In the second stage of the assembling process, which is the acquisition phase, the search mechanism and material acquisition were conducted using Scopus. Scopus is renowned for its extensive coverage and is frequently chosen in bibliometric analyses for its wide accessibility, comprehensive citation data, and ease of facilitating study material downloads (Aznar-Sánchez et al. 2019). To ensure the inclusion of all relevant articles, the search parameters were initially set to an open-ended scope, with a cutoff date of June 8, 2022, marking the conclusion of the search period (Kumar et al. 2022). The selection of keywords for the Scopus database was of critical importance, with a particular focus on terms directly related to the research theme. This approach is fundamental to bibliometric studies, as it allows for the comprehensive coverage of literature relevant to the research topic, thereby ensuring content validity (Köseoglu 2020). Our keyword identification strategy was twofold. Initially, we assessed journals that were significant within the PR domain. Subsequently, we conducted an in-depth review of keywords from targeted studies (Köseoglu 2020). Table 1 shows all keywords derived from prior CSR-focused research. These keywords were then applied to query the Scopus database, searching within titles, abstracts, and keyword fields, utilizing the Boolean OR operator to broaden the search scope.

Lastly, we adopted an academic-focused, journal-driven methodology for identifying CSR-related articles within the field of PR. To guarantee comprehensiveness and focus, it is of the utmost importance to achieve a balance between breadth and depth in review studies. An overly specific approach may limit the scope of the literature reviewed, whereas an excessively broad one may inflate the volume of documents, potentially compromising the quality of the review (Zahoor, Khan, and Shenkar 2023). In accordance with the strategies delineated in a recent review (Zahoor, Khan, and Shenkar 2023), we employed purposive sampling to compile a dataset of CSR-related publications from the eight leading PR journals. Table 2 outlines the eight leading PR journals selected for this analysis.

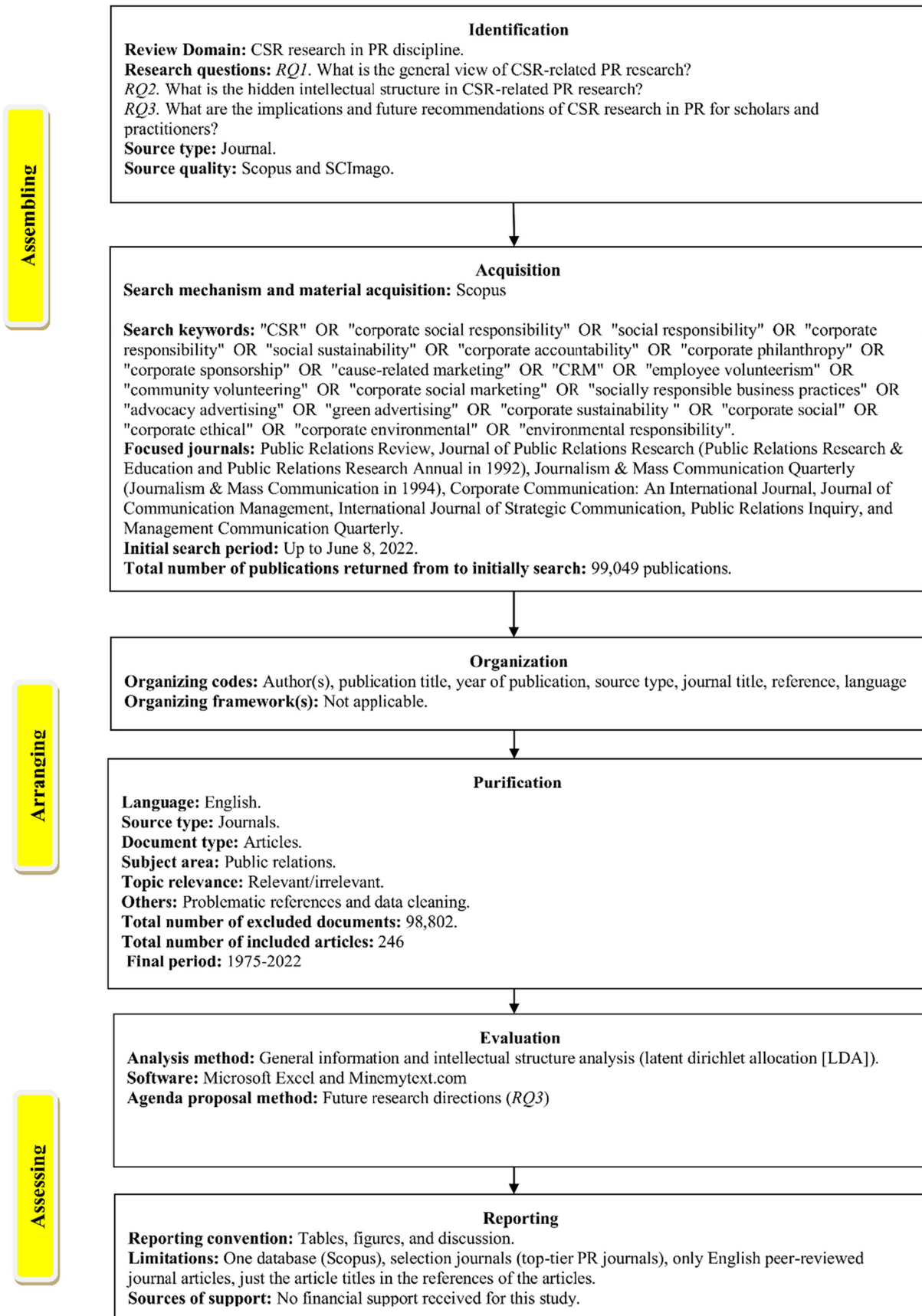


FIGURE 2 | Review procedure using the SPAR-4-SLR protocol. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/beer.12762)]

TABLE 1 | Keywords used to find CSR articles with a PR focus.

Search fields	Search keywords	References
TITLE, ABSTRACT, and KEYWORDS	“CSR” OR “corporate social responsibility” OR “social responsibility” OR “corporate responsibility” OR “social sustainability” OR “corporate accountability” OR “corporate philanthropy” OR “corporate sponsorship” OR “cause-related marketing” OR “CRM” OR “employee volunteerism” OR “community volunteering” OR “corporate social marketing” OR “socially responsible business practices” OR “advocacy advertising” OR “green advertising” OR “corporate sustainability” OR “corporate social” OR “corporate ethical” OR “corporate environmental” OR “environmental responsibility”	Golob et al. (2013); Ji, Tao, and Rim (2020, 2022); Verk, Golob, and Podnar (2021)

TABLE 2 | Selected PR journals and the number of articles.

Journal ^a	Established year	Impact factor ^b	SJR ^{b,c}	CiteScore ^b	H index ^b	No. of articles	Percent
<i>Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly</i> ^d	1955	3.431	1.75	5	86	1	0.4
<i>Journal of Public Relations Research</i> ^e	1956	4.167	2.01	6.3	51	18	7.3
<i>Public Relations Review</i>	1975	4.636	1.825	6	89	135	54.9
<i>Management Communication Quarterly</i>	1987	2.175	0.97	3	67	22	8.9
<i>Journal of Communication Management</i>	1995	2.458	1.03	4	42	31	12.6
<i>Corporate Communication: An International Journal</i>	1996	2.06	0.7	3	60	6	2.4
<i>International Journal of Strategic Communication</i>	2010	3.321	1.389	6	26	26	10.6
<i>Public Relations Inquiry</i>	2012	1.47	0.818	2.5	14	7	2.8

Abbreviation: SJR, scientific journal rankings.

^aJournals are listed according to the established year.

^bAll journal rates belong to 2021.

^cAll journals are included in Q1 in the SJR quartile.

^dJournalism & Mass Communication in 1994.

^ePublic Relations Research & Education and Public Relations Research Annual in 1992.

These journals were selected because they are included in prominent international indices such as the Web of Science and Scopus. Furthermore, they have been repeatedly identified in previous literature as “high impact” and “relevant” within the field of PR (e.g., Goodwin and Bartlett 2008; Ki, Pasadeos, and Ertem-Eray 2019; Lee 2017). Furthermore, they were ranked first on the SCImago list, with their 2021 Scopus CiteScores reaching a minimum of 2.5. At the end of the assembling stage, a total of 99,049 publications were identified through the search using solely CSR-related keywords, including those from 2022.

3.2 | Arranging

The organizing and purifying of documents from the search (Paul et al. 2021) constitute the core of the arranging process. This study employed a multi-faceted categorization strategy, encompassing a range of criteria, including author(s), publication

title, year of publication, source type, and journal title. The categorization scheme was derived from the existing classifications provided by Scopus. With regard to the purification phase, we adopted a two-stage approach. In the initial stage of the process, only articles were included as document types, with other forms of literature, such as books, book chapters, book reviews, editorials, conference papers, and commentaries, excluded on the grounds that they are unlikely to have undergone peer review (Kumar et al. 2022). Subsequently, we limited our focus to articles written in English, which is widely recognized as the primary language utilized in scientific research (Ammirato, Felicetti, Rogano, et al. 2023). Thirdly, articles published or in press in journals were retained as a source type within the PR area (subject area) (Kumar et al. 2022). However, the journal *Prism* was excluded from this review. This decision was based on the observation that its 2021 scientific journal rankings (SJR), CiteScore, and H-index were notably low, at 0.12, 0.1, and 1, respectively. Additionally, the journal was positioned in Q2

on SCImago. As a result of these exclusions, 98,745 publications were removed, leaving 304 articles for further analysis.

In the second stage of the purification process, the remaining articles in the dataset were coded as either “relevant” or “irrelevant.” Only those items deemed directly relevant were considered; those deemed indirectly relevant or completely irrelevant were excluded. The title, abstract, and, on at times, the full text of each article were subjected to manual review (Ammirato, Felicetti, Linzalone, et al. 2023). At the end of this stage, 48 articles were removed from the dataset, leaving 256 articles that were deemed directly relevant to the topic. Subsequently, as this review would perform LDA through references, six articles devoid of references and four articles with only book references were removed from the dataset. Consequently, the final number of journal articles in the dataset was 246. Finally, a manual data cleaning process was undertaken to minimize the potential for errors to impact the analyses. The implementation of this process enhances the validity and reliability of the research, and data cleaning is a crucial step in relational bibliometric studies (Koseoglu et al. 2022). The references of the papers in the dataset were then cleaned so that only articles remained in the references. These articles were made uniform in all references to avoid typographical errors, abbreviations, and discrepancies (Koseoglu et al. 2022; Zupic and Čater 2015).

3.3 | Assessing

Evaluation and reporting form the sub-stages of the assessing phase, the final step in the SPAR-4-SLR protocol (Paul et al. 2021). Regarding evaluation, we first provided a general overview of the papers selected for this review. To achieve this, we conducted a frequency analysis using Microsoft Excel, identifying the leading journals and articles within the field.

Subsequently, we employed the services of minemytext.com for the purpose of conducting an LDA analysis on approximately 6732 articles that were cited in our dataset. As stated by Köseoglu (2020), minemytext.com is a “free and user-friendly cloud application that aids researchers in identifying and visualizing topics within large volumes of unstructured text documents” (2181). The platform employs LDA, an unsupervised machine learning algorithm that is capable of performing

natural language processing tasks, including stemming, lemmatizing, and filtering out common stop words (Koseoglu, Wong, and Kim 2022). In accordance with the methodology proposed by Koseoglu, Wong, and Kim (2022), the dataset was refined by retaining solely the titles of the articles and eliminating meta-data such as author names, publication years, and journal titles. Subsequently, the analysis was constrained to four targeted topics for LDA execution on minemytext.com. Three of these were selected for the series of N-grams, and publication dates were incorporated to trace the evolution of themes. Any abbreviations were expanded to their complete meanings. In accordance with the methodology proposed by Borah et al. (2023), a manual assessment was conducted to determine the optimal number of topics, with a range of three to eight. This process demonstrated that a narrower range of topics omitted central themes, whereas a broader range introduced redundancy. Consequently, five distinct topics were identified as optimal. These topics were named based on the prominence and relevance of the content within the document clusters. Furthermore, the findings from LDA informed the development of a future research agenda aimed at addressing the identified gaps.

Regarding reporting, our findings were presented through a combination of figures and tables, consistent with the conventions of bibliometric research (Arici et al. 2021; Koseoglu, Wong, and Kim 2022; Kumar et al. 2022). We also discussed the limitations of this review in the conclusion section and explained competing interests, ethical standards, and financial interests at the end of the article.

4 | Results and Discussion

4.1 | General Overview of the Selected Articles

In response to RQ1, Figure 3 illustrates the year-on-year expansion of CSR-related PR research, capturing the publication trajectory of 246 peer-reviewed journal articles from 1975 to 2022. The initial phase, spanning from 1975 to 2006, witnessed the publication of a modest 10% of the articles, thus earning the designation “the emergence phase.” Conversely, a notable increase, comprising 90% of the research output, occurred post-2006, marking the “take-off phase.” This considerable increase can be attributed to two important developments. Firstly, the advent of

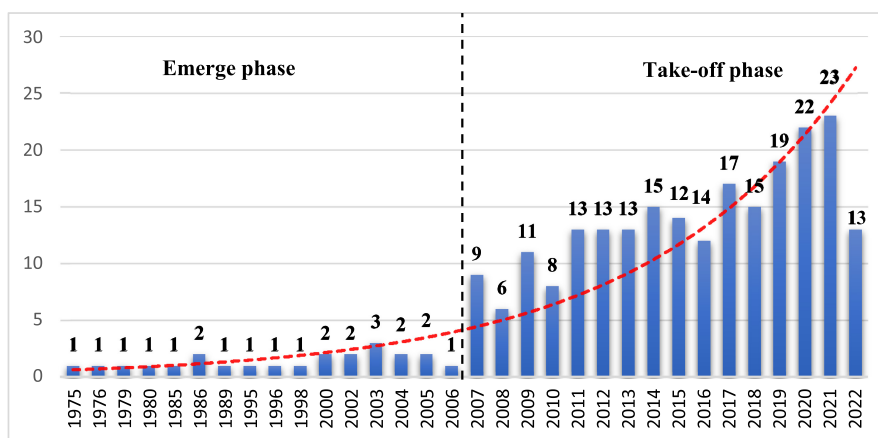


FIGURE 3 | CSR-related PR research annual growth from 1975 to 2022. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

critical publications in the PR domain, notably the *International Journal of Strategic Communication* in 2010 and *Public Relations Inquiry* in 2012, likely spurred the increase in CSR-focused scholarly articles. Secondly, special issues dedicated to CSR by *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* in 2013 and *Public Relations Journal* in 2014 further fueled this growth, as highlighted by Lee (2017).

Moreover, the annual publication counts of articles demonstrated a fluctuating trend between 2007 and 2018. However, from 2019 onward, there has been a consistent upward trajectory in the volume of articles published.¹ The mean annual output of research on CSR in PR is 7.71 articles, with 2021 representing the peak in productivity, with 23 articles published. In conclusion, the past 16 years have seen a notable surge in the number of publications within the field of PR that are focused on the topic of CSR.

Table 2 provides a detailed account of the journal's productivity with respect to CSR-related articles in PR. The *Public Relations Review* is the most prolific journal, contributing over half of the total articles (54.9%), which serves as a testament to its leading role in the field. Additionally, it is the journal with the highest impact factor and H-index (see Table 2). The next most prolific journals are the *Journal of Communication Management*, with 31 articles; the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, with 26 articles; the *Management Communication Quarterly*, with 22 articles; and the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, which has published 18 articles.

4.2 | The Hidden Intellectual Structure in CSR-Related PR Research

According to the LDA results derived from the titles of 6732 papers referenced in the 246 articles—comprising 50,225 words and 2453 unique words—Figure 4 presents a concise enumeration of

the pivotal terms prevalent in CSR research within the PR field. As expected, “CSR,” “communication,” “corporate,” and “PR” stand out as the most frequently cited words, encapsulating the core intellectual structure of this domain. These central terms are complemented by frequently mentioned words such as “effect,” “role,” “strategy,” “theory,” and “consumer.” This shortlist provides valuable insights into the thematic focus and terminology central to CSR research in PR.

First, the prominent appearance of “corporate” and “communication” in the analysis suggests their combination into “corporate communication.” Some previous studies have argued that there is no theoretical difference between PR and corporate communication as they have common overlapping origins (Steyn 2004). Therefore, these two concepts are often used interchangeably (Logan 2021; Steyn 2004). Another perspective posits corporate communication as an umbrella that encompasses PR, marketing communication, and human resource management (Kitchen 1997). Second, the prevalence of quantitative methods in CSR research within PR highlights a focus on impact measurement and theoretical model testing. Third, the analysis points to the influence of marketing and communication themes, including customer and brand, corporate strategy, crisis management, social media, and organizational communication. Finally, the presence of “social” in the analysis underscores its relevance to broader societal concerns, possibly referring to social responsibility, social structures, or the use of social media (Köseoglu 2020).

Figure 5 shows the distribution of topics within the 6732 reference occurrences, each with an average probability of 20%. Notably, topics 4 and 5 have a higher probability of inclusion in the corpus than topics 1, 2, and 3, indicating their predominant relevance in the aggregated dataset (Köseoglu 2020).

Figure 6 shows the topic distribution and temporal evolution discovered by LDA, which illustrates the advanced intellectual

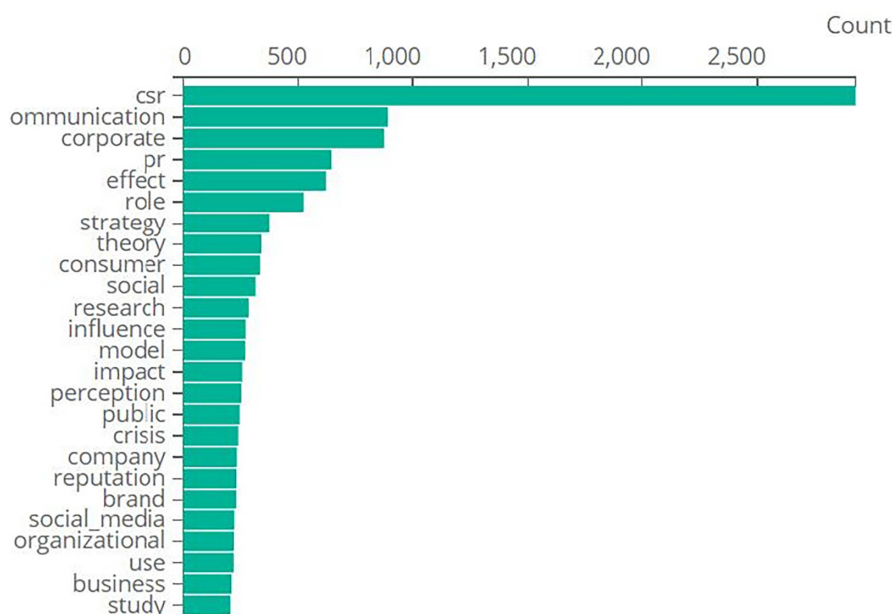


FIGURE 4 | Word frequency determined by LDA for the intellectual structure of CSR research in PR: 1975–2022. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

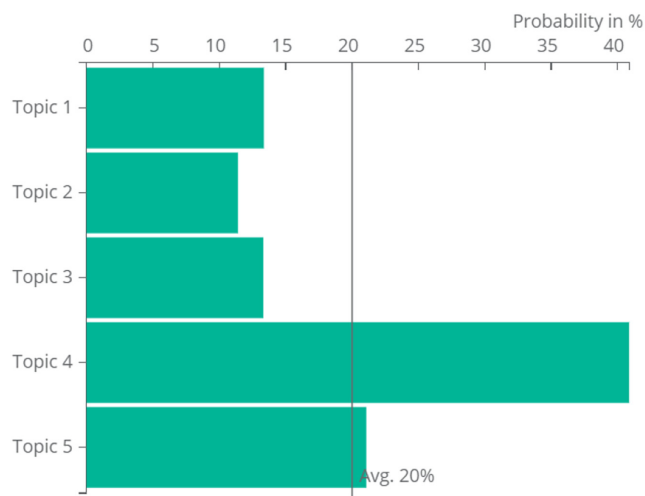


FIGURE 5 | Topic distribution, as determined by LDA for the intellectual structure of CSR research in PR: 1975–2022. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

structure of CSR-related PR research. The size (diameter) and color intensity (shading) of the circles in the diagram represent the probability of specific words' occurrence within a topic. Words that manifest across multiple clusters in this visualization underscore the core terminology that is central to CSR research in the PR domain (Arici et al. 2021).

4.2.1 | Topic 1: Political CSR Stream

As shown in the figure, “political” is the main topic in Topic 1. We postulated that some of the words in this topic, such as “public diplomacy,” “diplomacy,” “politics,” “advocacy,” “activism,” “climate,” and “national,” arise in the political context. We have therefore named this topic the “political CSR stream.” This topic refers to a “global governance in which private actors extend their activities from the economic realm to the political” (Acosta and Pérezts 2019, 425). It highlights the potential of companies to support societal goals and address inequality and injustice. Moreover, the political CSR stream is a dominant theme in the research landscape of 1976, accounting for approximately 84% of all publications. Initially ubiquitous until the late 1990s, its prominence waned in the 2000s, but saw a resurgence after 2004 and 2005, albeit with declining interest.

Recent research by PR scholars on CSR has introduced innovative methods for engaging in socio-political issues. Weber et al. (2023) describe such efforts as an extension of CSR, categorizing them into distinct concepts such as “brand activism, brand political activism, corporate activism, corporate social advocacy (CSA), corporate sociopolitical activism, and corporate political advocacy (CPA).” For example, CSA is used in PR strategies to showcase companies' commitment to social and environmental issues, increase purchase intentions, and promote positive reputation and word-of-mouth recommendations (Dodd and Supa 2014; You and Hon 2022). Similarly, CPA has received increasing scholarly attention, emphasizing overt support for specific causes or values to persuade public alignment (Wettstein and Baur 2016, 200). An illustrative case of CPA

involves companies addressing divisive issues such as immigration or gun control (Weber et al. 2023), which, while reinforcing CSR initiatives, requires a cautious approach due to the potential for consumer alienation in politically charged environments. CPA can also be used to promote CSR initiatives. For example, a renewable energy company can use CPA to advocate for policies that support the transition to clean energy, benefiting both its business and the environment.

In the evolving landscape of international business, companies are taking on new socio-political roles and developing innovative PR strategies such as corporate diplomacy (Ingenhoff and Marschlich 2019). This concept integrates PR with public diplomacy with the aim of fostering favorable business conditions and cultivating influential relationships within the host country's political sphere (Ingenhoff and Marschlich 2019; Molleda 2011; White, Vanc, and Coman 2011). Corporate diplomacy thus represents a strategic effort by multinational corporations to engage with key stakeholders, influence political outcomes, and secure legitimacy in their areas of operation (Ingenhoff and Marschlich 2019; Ordeix-Rigo and Duarte 2009).

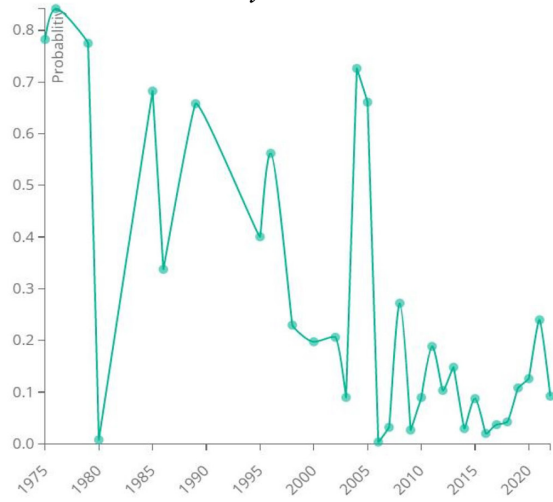
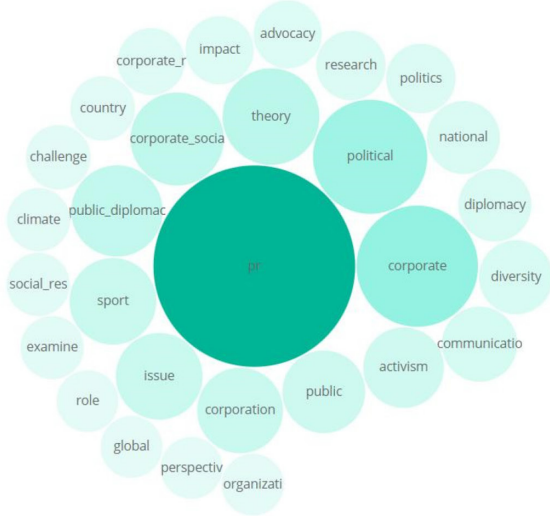
On the other hand, CSR closely aligns with the principles of public diplomacy, which prioritizes communication and interaction between nations and global audiences (Qu and Carpentier 2021). In particular, well-executed CSR initiatives can support a nation's public diplomacy efforts (White 2015). Qu and Carpentier (2021) emphasize that CSR activities enhance a country's public diplomacy by helping to create a positive, socially responsible image in the international community. Furthermore, White (2015) argues that corporate CSR efforts can influence the diplomatic process in a variety of ways, including positively affecting a country's image and reputation, promoting trust, and creating positive public opinion.

4.2.2 | Topic 2: Social Media-Oriented CSR

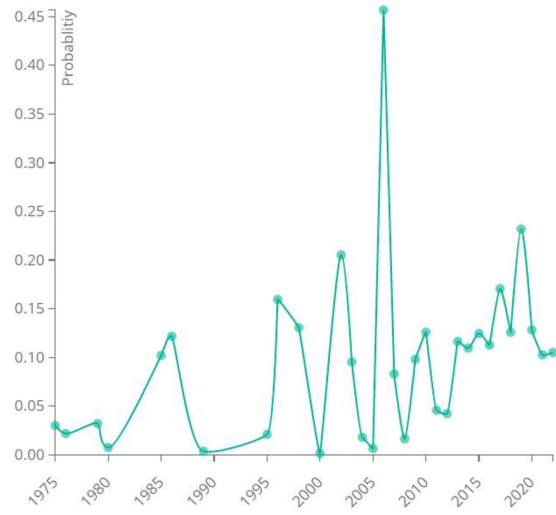
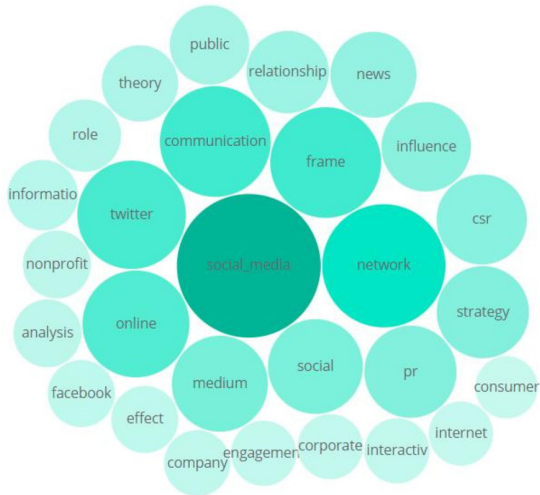
According to Figure 6, “social media” emerges as a central keyword in Topic 2, accompanied by related terms such as “social,” “network,” “Twitter,” “online,” “Facebook,” “internet,” “interactivity,” “medium,” and “communication,” indicating the theme of “social media-oriented CSR.” This topic gained prominence in 2006, accounting for about 46% of total publications, likely spurred by the launch of major social media platforms—Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter (now X) in 2006—highlighting its burgeoning relevance in PR research. Despite fluctuating interest since 2006, 2019 marked a resurgence, with 23% of publications focusing on the topic, possibly due to the increase in social media users and the variety of platforms being explored by researchers. After 2019, however, interest appears to have waned, possibly due to the impact of COVID-19.

Social media-oriented CSR has attracted considerable attention with the advancement of technology and corporate demands for greater transparency and accountability (Jiang and Park 2022; Goodwin and Bartlett 2008). Chu and Chen (2019) describe it as consumer engagement with corporate CSR activities on social media platforms, facilitating instant information exchange and

Topic 1 – Political CSR stream – Probability: 13.4%



Topic 2 – Social media-oriented CSR – Probability: 11.4%



Topic 3 – Consumer-oriented CSR – Probability: 13.3%

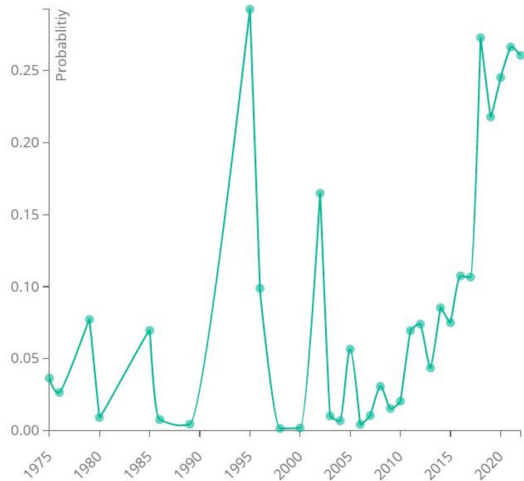
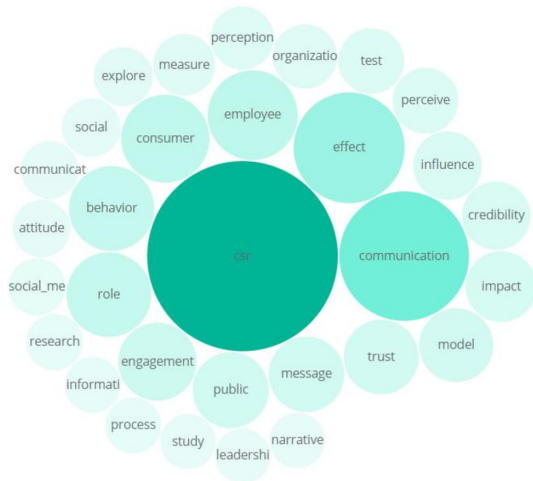
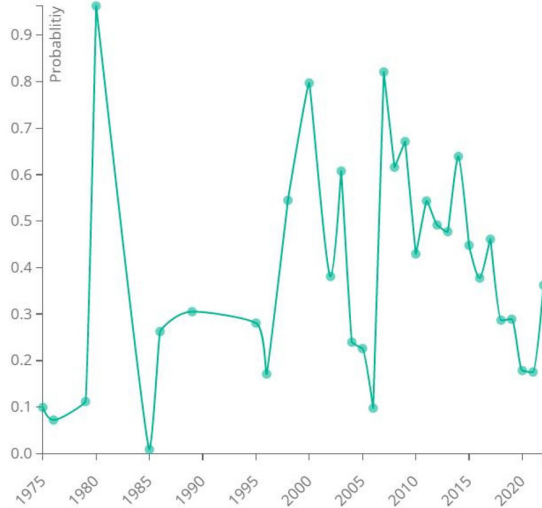
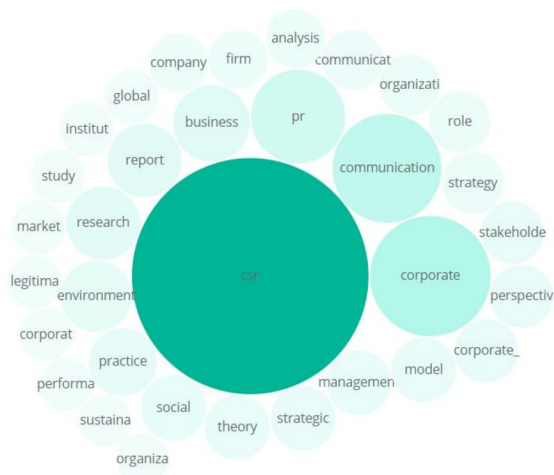


FIGURE 6 | Topic distribution and topic timeline as determined by LDA for the intellectual structure of CSR-related PR research: 1975–2022. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

Topic 4 – CSR reporting – Probability: 40.9%



Topic 5 – Business-oriented CSR – Probability: 21.1%

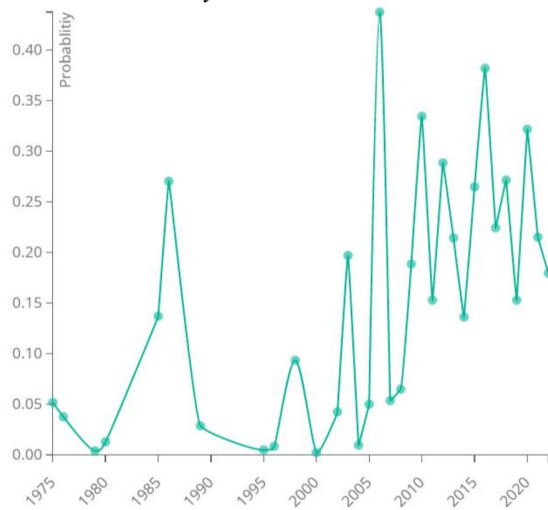
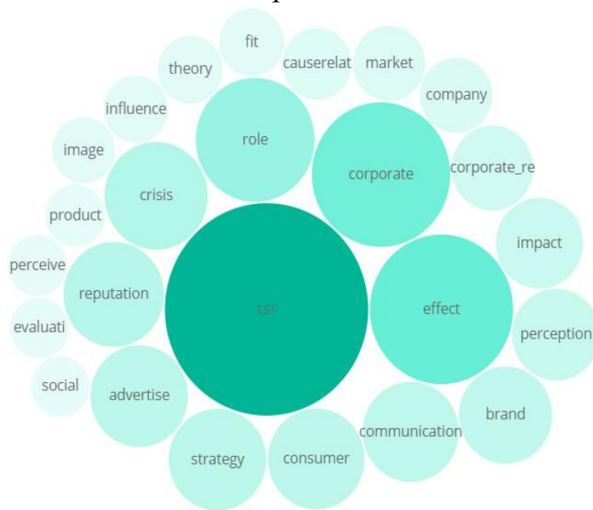


FIGURE 6 | (Continued)

fostering relationships between companies and stakeholders. This new PR domain leverages social media for CSR communication, allowing for extensive interaction and relationship development (Chu and Chen 2019; Reilly and Hynan 2014).

Dong and Rim (2019) highlight the suitability of social media for CSR communication, citing its popularity and the informal, conversational nature of these platforms as advantageous for disseminating CSR messages compared to traditional PR tools. This informal engagement can significantly enhance a company’s image and electronic word-of-mouth.

CSR research focusing on specific social media platforms, particularly Twitter, has drawn attention to social media-oriented CSR topics (Dong and Rim 2019). In this context, based on Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) four PR models (i.e., the press agency/publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model, and the two-way symmetric model), CSR social media communication activities in the context of stakeholder relations are categorized into three types: (i) information, (ii) response, and (iii) involvement. First, information activity

involves informing stakeholders about CSR-related actions and decisions through one-way communication (the public information model). Since information seeking is one of the basic needs of Twitter users, an informative message can satisfy users and thus improve their knowledge about the focal company and its CSR activities. Second, response activity refers to a firm’s CSR-related response to its environment, such as replying and retweeting (two-way asymmetric model). Third, a company participates using the “@” sign. Its purpose is to make it easier for the company and its stakeholders to talk about CSR (two-way symmetric model) (Jiang and Park 2022; Morsing and Schultz 2006).

4.2.3 | Topic 3: Consumer-Oriented CSR

Figure 6 delineates “consumer” as the main topic in topic 3. Terms such as “engagement,” “trust,” “credibility,” “message,” “attitude,” “perception,” “behavior,” and “communication” are encapsulated within a consumer-focused framework, and thus this topic is referred to as “consumer-oriented CSR.”

This theme has received attention in previous reviews (e.g., Golob et al. 2013; He, Yu, and Han 2022) and has also been explored in empirical research on CSR communication (Schmeltz 2012). The highlighted terminology underscores the central role of the consumer in CSR within the PR discipline (He, Yu, and Han 2022), with notable peaks in research output in 1995 and 2018, indicating the evolving interest in the topic over time. Dividing consumer-oriented CSR research into two periods—before and after 2006—reveals an initial fluctuation followed by a steady increase in scholarly focus, possibly spurred by the rise of social media. This digital evolution has facilitated direct business-to-consumer interactions, allowing companies to tailor CSR initiatives based on consumer feedback, thereby increasing research in this domain.

Consumers are one of the most studied stakeholders in the CSR-related PR literature, and many studies focus on consumers as the external public (Lee and Tao 2020). As consumers become more interested in CSR, their expectations of companies regarding CSR are increasing (Schmeltz 2012). While positive CSR perceptions can increase purchase intentions, Sen, Du, and Bhattacharya (2016) emphasize that consumer responses go beyond purchase behavior to include resistance to negative information, which is underpinned by trust in the company's CSR sincerity (Castaldo et al. 2009; Park, Lee, and Kim 2014).

However, excessive promotion of CSR activities can sometimes generate skepticism and undermine the company's credibility and trust (Schmeltz 2012). Therefore, Schmeltz (2012) suggests that companies should carefully select CSR initiatives that are aligned with their core business and transparently communicate these efforts through established and trusted channels, such as annual reports. In addition, the digital age has significantly increased consumer awareness of CSR, positioning CSR as a primary concern in PR strategies (He, Yu, and Han 2022).

4.2.4 | Topic 4: CSR Reporting

Topic 4, termed “CSR reporting,” underscores the role of CSR reports in PR efforts within CSR research in PR (Golob and Bartlett 2007; Bartlett, Tywoniak, and Hatcher 2007). Dominating the field with approximately 90% of the publications in 1980, interest in CSR reporting peaked in 1980, 2000, and 2007, with a recent uptick in 2021, but followed by a decline that may be attributed to the evolving complexity and diversity within the CSR literature (Koseoglu, Wong, and Kim 2022).

As CSR reporting has become a popular topic in PR (Ji, Tao, and Rim 2022), companies use CSR reports as a tool in their PR efforts to increase the public's favorable opinion of them (Hooghiemstra 2000). It can also take the form of corporate identity as a PR practice, which refers to “all the forms of expression that a company uses to offer insight into its nature” (Van Riel 1995, 27). At this point, the right content could make the corporate identity part of the corporate image. This suggests that a company's reputation can be managed by controlling how messages are created and disseminated (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier 2002).

In addition, CSR reporting is a mechanism for companies to inform stakeholders about social and environmental issues. The basic form of CSR reporting can be considered within the ‘public information model’ of PR models (Golob and Bartlett 2007; Grunig and Hunt 1984). At the same time, CSR reporting carries the “one-way communication” characteristic of this model, especially for multinational firms and SMEs (Grunig and Hunt 1984; O'Connor, Parcha, and Tulibaski 2017). However, firms, especially those subject to government regulation, may also wish to use the two-way symmetric model to help them comply with CSR standards set by such authorities (Grunig and Hunt 1984). At this point, online websites are an essential PR tool for companies using both PR models. For two decades, CSR reports have been shared with stakeholders on websites (O'Connor, Parcha, and Tulibaski 2017; O'Connor and Gronewold 2013).

Some bubbles in Figure 6 also show important information about the role of legitimacy and stakeholder theories in CSR reporting. The former emerges as a dominant lens, highlighting the role of CSR reporting in enhancing a firm's legitimacy by addressing social contract expectations (Hooghiemstra 2000; Khan et al. 2020). The latter emphasizes the broad impact of companies on various social groups and advocates for CSR reports to affirm companies' legitimacy claims and align CSR narratives with stakeholder rights (Golob and Bartlett 2007; Ki, Pasadeos, and Ertem-Eray 2019; O'Connor and Gronewold 2013). Thus, CSR reporting is not just a practice of disclosing corporate initiatives, but a strategic PR activity that promotes public dialog, legitimizes corporate actions, and fosters positive stakeholder relationships. It enables organizations to effectively communicate their commitment to societal values and responsibilities and shapes the discourse around CSR in a way that resonates with stakeholder expectations and rights (O'Connor and Gronewold 2013).

4.2.5 | Topic 5: Business-Oriented CSR

As shown in Figure 6, “business” is the central theme of topic 5, which includes terms such as “corporate,” “reputation,” “crisis,” “image,” “company,” “brand,” “market,” “advertise,” “communication,” “strategy,” and “product,” all of which indicate a business-centric approach to CSR. This led to the designation of this cluster as “business-oriented CSR.” This perspective has significantly influenced CSR research in the PR discipline, which has a dominant presence with 44% and 38% of the total publications in 2006 and 2016, respectively. A closer look at the timeline of the topic reveals a fluctuating but generally increasing interest, especially after 2010, despite earlier periods of relatively low engagement in the 1990s and early 2000s. This trend underscores a growing recognition of the role of CSR in shaping business practices, communication strategies, and market positioning.

The emphasis on CSR transcends the traditional focus on products or services and highlights a company's ethical obligations to society (Tao and Song 2020). This broader commitment is central to shaping consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward a company, significantly influencing their overall impression (Kim, Kim, and Cameron 2009; Schmeltz 2012). Building on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned

action, Werder (2008) found that CSR efforts directly affect salient beliefs about a company, with the potential to enhance positive attitudes and images. Such initiatives are integral to the public's evaluation process, contributing significantly to the formation of favorable judgments about a firm (Shim and Yang 2016). This highlights the integral role of CSR in corporate strategy, not only as an ethical obligation but also as a crucial element in building and maintaining a positive corporate (brand) image and reputation (Lee and Lee 2018; Takano 2013).

CSR is an effective PR practice that builds relationships between a company and its stakeholders. Additionally, PR can be used to promote a company's CSR activities, increase public awareness, and help build a positive reputation for the company (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010). Corporate reputation, one of the important application areas of PR, affects public perception of corporate philosophical messages and influences public attitudes toward the business (Bae and Cameron 2006). Bae and Cameron (2006) found that corporate reputation indirectly affects attitudes toward a company through perceived CSR motive. In addition to helping to make the world a better place, a company's CSR efforts help to build and enhance its reputation by receiving positive responses from consumers (Hildebrand et al. 2017).

CSR communication also plays a critical role in crisis mitigation, providing companies with a strategy to mitigate the negative effects of crises and leverage the benefits of CSR (Ham and Kim 2020). Established CSR commitments can protect brands during crises, as consumers are more likely to overlook missteps by socially responsible brands (Vanhamme and Grobbsen 2009). According to Ham and Kim (2020), the use of PR and CSR as a crisis response can significantly reduce potential damage. However, consumer skepticism toward CSR communication may vary depending on the context of the crisis. Experimental evidence suggests that CSR messages may only sometimes generate positive perceptions during crises, and their effectiveness may be compromised or even counterproductive (Ham and Kim 2020; Kim, Kim, and Cameron 2009). The success of using CSR as a crisis mitigation tool depends on situational factors such as the nature of the crisis and the firm's response strategy (Ham and Kim 2020; Kim, Kim, and Cameron 2009). In addition, aligning CSR initiatives with specific crisis issues, such as environmental efforts during ecological crises, can effectively mitigate the impact of the crisis (Ham and Kim 2020; Kim and Choi 2018).

5 | Integration With Business Ethics

These results and discussion contribute to the growing body of research on CSR in PR by offering a novel approach with LDA for uncovering hidden intellectual structures in the literature. The five key topics identified—political CSR, social media-oriented CSR, consumer-oriented CSR, CSR reporting, and business-oriented CSR—each offer unique insights into how CSR is implemented and perceived in the PR discipline. These findings not only enhance our understanding of the role of CSR in PR but also provide important ethical considerations that are critical to the broader field of business ethics.

Each of the five CSR topics identified in this review reveals significant ethical dimensions that have broader implications for business ethics. To illustrate, the practice of political CSR highlights the ethical challenges that businesses encounter when they engage with socio-political issues. This practice, which is often framed as CSA, presents a dilemma: companies must balance their ethical responsibility to contribute to societal good with the risk of alienating stakeholders who may disagree with the company's stance on controversial issues. The ethical considerations involved in this context include transparency, the authenticity of the firm's motives, and the long-term impact on both society and the business.

Similarly, social media-oriented CSR presents ethical issues regarding the authenticity and transparency of CSR communications. The capacity of social media to facilitate real-time dialog with stakeholders also renders companies susceptible to heightened scrutiny. The potential for CSR initiatives to be perceived as mere "virtue signaling" is heightened on social platforms, which may result in reputational harm if companies are deemed to be insincere. In this context, ethical business practices entail the maintenance of honest communication and the assurance that CSR initiatives are genuinely aligned with the company's values and actions.

The consumer-oriented approach to CSR gives rise to ethical questions concerning consumer trust and corporate accountability. In the current climate, consumers are increasingly demanding transparency and ethical behavior from corporations. When executed effectively, CSR efforts can foster trust. However, when companies over-promote their CSR activities or fail to deliver on their promises, it can lead to consumer skepticism. The ethical challenge lies in maintaining consistency between CSR communications and actual business practices to avoid misleading stakeholders.

The practice of CSR reporting represents a crucial avenue through which businesses endeavor to disseminate their ethical commitments to the public. However, this domain is not without its own set of ethical challenges. Although the objective of CSR reports is to provide transparency, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of these reports are frequently called into question. Ethical CSR reporting must extend beyond mere compliance with regulatory requirements. It should reflect a genuine commitment to societal well-being and environmental sustainability, with full disclosure of both successes and shortcomings.

Finally, the business-oriented approach to CSR emphasizes the strategic utilization of CSR as a mechanism to enhance corporate reputation and navigate crises. From the perspective of business ethics, this practice gives rise to concerns regarding the underlying motivations behind the implementation of CSR initiatives. The question thus arises as to whether companies are genuinely motivated to contribute to society through their CSR activities, or whether they are merely employing such initiatives as a strategy to enhance their brand image and mitigate potential crises. The ethical implications of such practices pertain to the veracity of CSR endeavors and the possibility of stakeholder perception manipulation.

6 | Implications and Future Research Agenda

Based on the results of this study, important academic and practical implications and directions for the future emerge, as shown in Figure 7. First, the political CSR stream emerged prominently within the CSR research in PR, focusing on corporate engagement in the political arena, including public diplomacy, CSA, and CPA. The findings suggest that by understanding their impact on the political landscape, companies can make strategic decisions that serve stakeholder interests and broader societal goals. Future studies should explore the psychological effects triggered in audiences when companies take positions on divisive social issues, such as LGBT+ rights, a key area within the political CSR domain (Hartmann, Marcos, and Apaolaza 2023). This research could use multi-group analysis to identify differences in audience responses across different demographic groups. In addition, the use of traditional media for PR purposes warrants further investigation, particularly comparing the dynamics of media coverage when companies publicly support controversial positions versus when they abstain. Furthermore, the impact of political CSR on the formulation and implementation of public policy should be explored. Examining how these CSR initiatives influence policymaking and the resulting implications for both firms and society at large would provide valuable insights into the intersection of corporate action, public policy, and social welfare.

Second, social media-oriented CSR represents a timely and important focus within CSR-related PR research, underscored by social media's expansive reach and capacity for real-time communication. This digital shift allows companies to engage directly with their audiences, transforming CSR from a static initiative to a dynamic, interactive practice that enhances competitiveness and brand differentiation (Aljarah et al. 2023; Golmohammadi, Gauri, and Mirahmad 2023; Zhang and Yang 2021). Companies can articulate their social and environmental responsibilities through social media, fostering a positive image, increasing customer and investor appeal, and strengthening employee loyalty (Martínez-Peláez et al. 2023). Social media platforms provide a direct line to stakeholders, allowing companies to provide regular updates on CSR efforts, fostering trust and transparency, and building a positive reputation as responsible corporate citizens (Aljarah et al. 2023; Khanal, Akhtaruzzaman, and Kularatne 2021).

The use of social media for CSR has several implications for practitioners. For example, it allows for greater transparency and accountability as companies can engage directly with stakeholders and respond to their concerns, leading to improved trust and reputation for the company (Khanal, Akhtaruzzaman, and Kularatne 2021). In addition, integrating CSR programs with social media strategies helps achieve several strategic goals, including building more sustainable communities and promoting sustainable development through collaboration between business and civil society (Martínez-Peláez et al. 2023; Yuen et al. 2023). In addition, social media-focused CSR programs offer multiple benefits to institutions, including enhancing corporate image by disseminating diverse and engaging content about social and environmental efforts, thereby building a positive reputation and attracting the attention of followers and potential customers (Yuen et al. 2023; Zhang and Yang 2021).

These programs increase awareness and interaction between companies and the public by providing educational and interactive content on important social and environmental issues, encouraging participation and interaction to improve the community (Araujo and Kollat 2018; Jiang and Luo 2024). However, social media also exposes companies to increased scrutiny and the potential for negative backlash if their CSR efforts are perceived as inadequate or inauthentic. Such backlash on social media can sometimes go viral and devastate a company's reputation (Zhang and Yang 2021). Therefore, CSR and PR practitioners need to proactively monitor and respond to social media activities and carefully manage their online reputations. In addition, by involving employees in these efforts through social media, the company strengthens team spirit and increases their loyalty to the company and its goals, thus enhancing positive interaction and contribution in all aspects of social and environmental work (Jiang and Luo 2024).

Social media-oriented CSR also has several implications for future scholars. The ease with which stakeholders can express dissatisfaction and spread negative feedback online highlights the need for strategic risk management in CSR communication on social platforms (Zhang and Yang 2021). Future studies should explore strategies that enable firms to manage the dangers of social media backlash while enhancing CSR benefits. Furthermore, despite extensive research on the impact of CSR on customer-brand relationships in social media, gaps remain in understanding customer responses to CSR message framing (i.e., gain vs. loss) (Stadlthanner et al. 2022) and the concept of corporate digital responsibility (Lobschat et al. 2021). Future research is encouraged to explore the effects of CSR message framing on online brand advocacy and engagement on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, examining metrics such as likes, comments, and shares. In addition, future researchers could consider a long-term study of how online CSR dialogs evolve and change and create a quantitative measure of CSR dialog engagement to aid in ongoing research and CSR dialog management. Given the importance of virtual gift donations in customer behavioral decisions (Liu et al. 2021), future studies should examine how CSR communication affects virtual gift donation intentions.

Third, current studies in the PR field on CSR have focused on consumer-oriented CSR, addressing critical aspects such as engagement, trust, credibility, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions. From this perspective, practitioners need to acknowledge the influence of consumer actions and expectations on their CSR initiatives. Studies indicate a growing consumer demand for companies to demonstrate social and environmental responsibility—beyond mere economic gain—and a preference to support companies that align with their personal values (Pomeroy 2011; Schmeltz 2012). As a result, practitioners should be closely aligned with consumer preferences and concerns to effectively communicate the company's CSR commitments and proactively address emerging issues.

Furthermore, exploring consumer-oriented CSR has predominantly employed quantitative and qualitative methods (Lee and Tao 2020; Schmeltz 2012). However, there is a growing call for the use of mixed methods approaches to capture the nuanced realities of consumer behavior in CSR contexts.

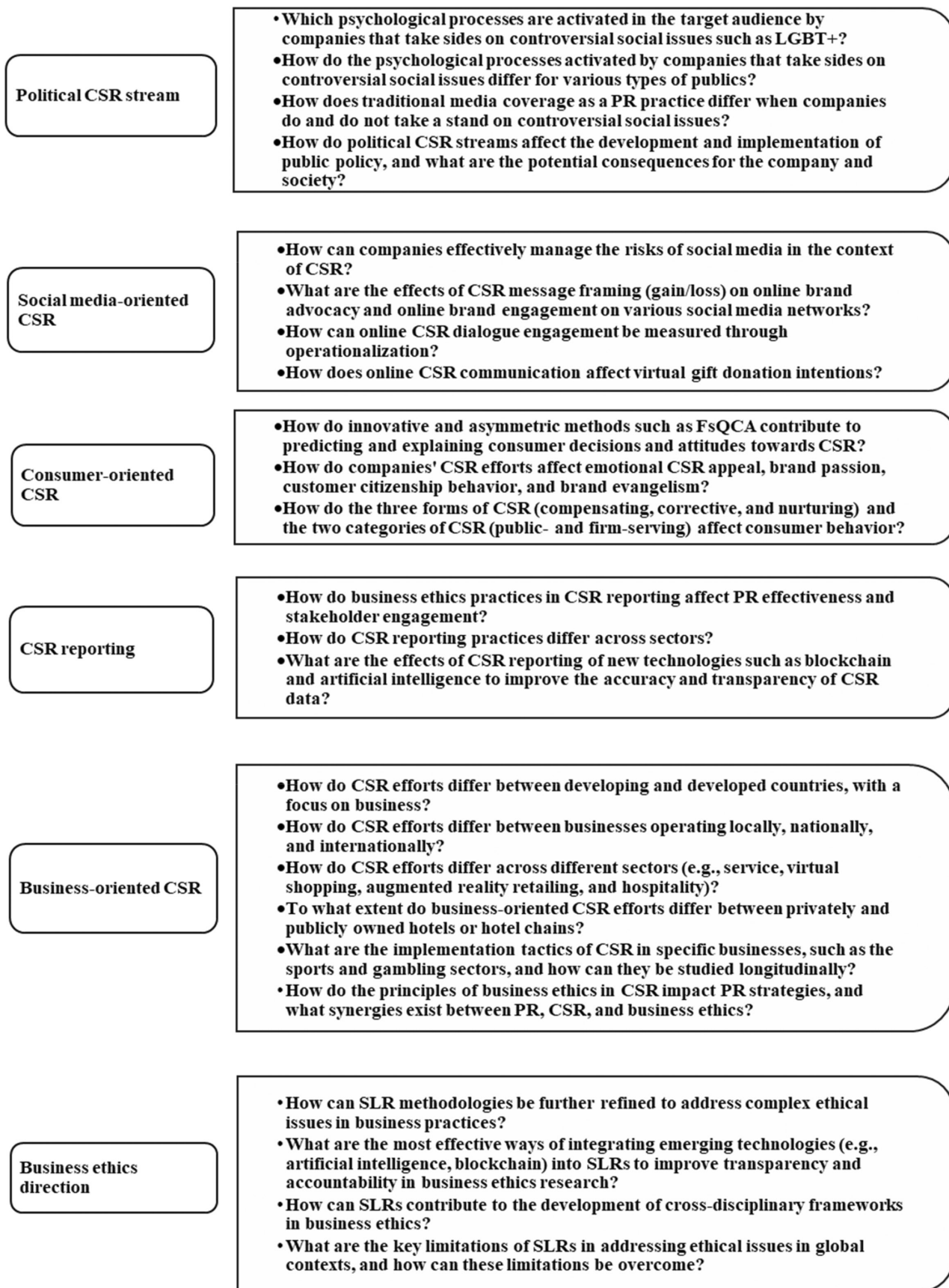


FIGURE 7 | Future research questions about each research topic.

Given the complex interplay of psychological, technological, sociocultural, environmental, and geopolitical factors in consumer behavior, traditional symmetric methods may need to be revised to account for these complexities. The application of Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), which is based on complexity theory and is gaining traction in consumer research, offers an asymmetric approach capable of predicting and explaining consumer attitudes and decisions regarding CSR (Diwanji 2023). Insights from fsQCA could enrich quantitative analyses, such as those using structural equation modeling, and provide a more holistic understanding of consumer responses to CSR (Lim and Rasul 2022). Furthermore, while much discussion has centered on the impact of CSR on consumer responses, areas such as emotional CSR appeals, brand passion, customer citizenship behaviors, and brand evangelism remain to be explored. Future research is encouraged to examine the effects of different forms of CSR (compensatory, corrective, nurturing) and categories (public vs. corporate) on consumer behavior, providing deeper insights into the mechanisms by which CSR influences consumer perceptions and actions (Aljarah et al. 2022, 2023).

Fourth, CSR reporting is pivotal in PR's CSR discourse, serving as an important medium for companies to articulate their values, priorities, and contributions to societal and environmental challenges. For CSR reports to effectively communicate these aspects, practitioners must ensure accuracy and credibility. Misleading or incomplete reports risk damaging a company's reputation (Casey and Grenier 2015). Ethical business practices support this process and ensure that CSR reporting is conducted with integrity, transparency, and accountability. This fosters a genuine dialog between companies and their communities. It can also be an avenue for research. Researchers should examine the impact of business ethics practices in CSR reporting on PR effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. In addition, a comparative analysis of CSR reporting practices across industries could provide insightful findings. Future studies should also explore how emerging technologies, such as blockchain and artificial intelligence, can revolutionize CSR reporting by improving data accuracy and transparency.

Lastly, business-oriented CSR is increasingly recognized in PR studies, which focus on aspects such as corporate reputation, crisis management, branding, and strategic development. This emphasis has practical implications; in particular, CSR initiatives are crucial for attracting and retaining talent, as employees are attracted to organizations that reflect their ethical values (Strandberg 2009). However, a superficial commitment to CSR can trigger a backlash from stakeholders and erode trust (Pomeroy 2011). Therefore, it is critical for practitioners to carefully consider and integrate CSR into their business and PR strategies in a meaningful and authentic way. By integrating CSR into their PR practices and aligning it with business ethics principles, companies can demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental responsibility while enhancing their brand image and reputation (Pal 2023). CSR and PR are central to a company's strategic plan to develop a positive brand reputation based on business ethics. The former underscores a company's commitment to ethical behavior and social contribution. At the same time, the latter is instrumental in shaping the company's

public image and managing its ethical and CSR commitments (Mazumder 2024).

Nevertheless, the research of business-oriented CSR is a rapidly evolving field, and scholars have many opportunities to contribute to our understanding of this important topic. For instance, future research could examine the role of CSR by comparing developing and developed countries; local, national, and international firms; or different industries (e.g., services, virtual shopping, augmented reality retailing, and hospitality). In addition, future studies can use multi-group analysis to empirically examine the extent to which CSR differs between privately and publicly owned hotels or hotel chains. In addition, the implementation tactics of CSR in specific industries, such as sports and gambling, have received little empirical research attention. This opens the door for future field research and longitudinal studies involving practitioners. Ultimately, an in-depth exploration of the interplay between PR, CSR, and business ethics is warranted. This research could elucidate how the ethical underpinnings of CSR influence PR strategies and outcomes, fill theoretical gaps, and guide practical applications.

This study has demonstrated the value of employing SLRs to uncover hidden intellectual structures in CSR-related PR research. However, SLRs not only provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature but also offer a systematic and replicable method for synthesizing research findings across various disciplines. In the field of business ethics, for example, SLRs have the potential to offer valuable insights into evolving ethical dilemmas and provide a roadmap for future inquiry. Based on the findings of this research, we propose the following future research directions for the field of business ethics (see Figure 7).

First, it is crucial to investigate how SLR methodologies can be refined to address the increasingly complex ethical issues that arise in business practices. As ethical concerns in CSR continue to evolve, there is a need to enhance the methodological rigor of SLRs to capture the nuanced and multifaceted nature of ethical decision-making. Future research could examine how SLRs can be adapted to more effectively incorporate ethical dilemmas.

Second, the integration of emerging technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence and blockchain) into SLRs represents a significant opportunity for enhancing transparency and accountability in business ethics research. These technologies offer a promising avenue for enhancing the transparency of CSR reporting and ethical business practices. Future SLRs may investigate the nexus of technology and ethics, identifying optimal strategies for integrating these technologies into business ethics frameworks.

A third avenue of promising research is the exploration of the potential of SLRs to develop cross-disciplinary frameworks in the field of business ethics. Given the interdisciplinary nature of business ethics, there is a need for frameworks that incorporate insights from management, communication, and ethical theory. Future SLRs have the potential to contribute to the development of cross-disciplinary approaches that address the complexity of ethical decision-making in modern businesses.

Finally, it is essential to examine the limitations of SLRs in addressing ethical issues in global contexts and to identify

strategies for overcoming these limitations. Ethical standards vary across cultures and regions, which presents challenges for researchers conducting SLRs on global business ethics. Future research could examine how to adapt SLR methodologies to account for these differences and provide more globally relevant insights.

7 | Conclusion

This study aimed to identify CSR-related PR as a research field, outline its hidden intellectual structure by identifying the main research streams that shape it, and suggest future research directions. Guided by overarching RQs, this study charted the evolution and current state of CSR research within the PR discipline from 1975 to 2022. RQ1 sought an overview of CSR-related PR research and revealed a significant increase in publications, especially post-2006, indicating a recent transition from exploratory studies to a more focused research intensity. This surge is attributed in part to new PR journals and special CSR issues, particularly strengthening the scholarly base of the field (Lee 2017). Consistent with previous review studies (Goodwin and Bartlett 2008; Lee 2017), the *Public Relations Review* is also the leading publisher of CSR in PR, with significant contributions from the *Journal of Communication Management* and the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, among others, shaping the discussions in this area.

RQ2 explored the hidden intellectual structure of CSR research in the PR discipline. To uncover this structure, the study used LDA as a contemporary approach. This methodologically distinguished the study from CSR research in both the PR discipline and other related disciplines (see Figure 1). According to our LDA results, the intellectual structure has five topics: political CSR stream, social media-oriented CSR, consumer-oriented CSR, CSR reporting, and business-oriented CSR. The objective discovery of such knowledge clusters in a particular research area is considered an important theoretical contribution (Mukherjee et al. 2022). On the other hand, considering previous reviews, Lee (2017) focused on descriptive aspects, such as commonly used theories and methodologies and main research topics. Our results go beyond Lee's (2017) findings, focusing on an in-depth discussion of topics related to intellectual structure rather than descriptive results. As mentioned earlier, Goodwin and Bartlett (2008), in their non-systematic review, categorized CSR-related PR research into three main themes. Some of the elements of these themes are similar to those in this study (see Figure 6), but the political CSR stream and social media-oriented CSR emerge as new themes. Our remaining three themes appeared in their study, albeit to a slightly lesser extent. Taken together, these results suggest that as CSR becomes more important and popular in PR, it is essential to have a comprehensive and detailed understanding of its intellectual structure and academic foundations. This information may indicate future intellectual investments in the field, which may help improve the discipline (Shafique 2013). The integration of business ethics in this process will also emerge as a critical element that facilitates the study of the ethical considerations inherent in CSR reporting and business-oriented CSR initiatives in PR, thereby ensuring strategic effectiveness with ethical integrity.

Moreover, we complement previous reviews on the topic by adopting a systematic methodological approach and a contemporary analysis technique, LDA. Thus, this SLR makes a significant methodological contribution to the field using the LDA approach to uncover the intellectual structure of the CSR-related PR literature. This approach allowed us to identify hidden themes and patterns that may have been missed using traditional review methods (Khan et al. 2023; Köseoglu 2020; Kumar and Srivastava 2022). This methodological novelty enriches our understanding of CSR in the PR field and sets a new standard for future SLRs in similar fields. By demonstrating the effectiveness of the LDA approach in synthesizing and analyzing large volumes of research, we provide a valuable template for researchers seeking to conduct comprehensive and insightful reviews.

Lastly, RQ3 focused on the implications of CSR in PR and recommendations for future research. As presented in the previous section, future research directions for academia and practical implications for professionals were considered together in this SLR. In this way, we expected that the future perspectives of the topic would be better understood and the implications for both academia and practice would be more coherent. In addition, our research agenda not only addresses the shortcomings of previous reviews but also makes a further theoretical contribution by highlighting gaps in the literature (Mukherjee et al. 2022).

Consequently, this SLR provides valuable insights for scholars and practitioners working in this area by providing a broad overview of existing CSR-related PR research. We also hope that it will guide future scholarly work and assist practitioners in improving CSR efforts with a focus on business ethics.

8 | Limitations

This study was limited in several ways. First, we collected publications through the Scopus database and only considered CSR research published in eight top-tier PR journals as a sample. It is important to recognize that CSR-related PR research could also appear in a wider range of PR, communication, and business journals. Future research could benefit from exploring additional databases, such as the Web of Science, and including a broader range of PR journals to provide a more comprehensive view of the CSR literature within PR. Second, we focused on peer-reviewed articles published in English, excluding gray literature such as conference proceedings, books, book chapters, and dissertations (Ammirato, Felicetti, Rogano, et al. 2023). Expanding future research to include these sources and to consider works in other languages may provide richer insights. Third, using the minemytext.com algorithm for LDA presented challenges, particularly in the subjective determination of topic numbers. Future research could explore advanced LDA algorithms, such as those available on the MySLR platform, which provide semi-automated tools that could potentially increase the objectivity and reliability of the analysis. Finally, we applied the analyses to the article titles in the article references. Extending LDA to abstracts or keywords could further illuminate the conceptual underpinnings of the CSR field in PR, providing a deeper understanding of its intellectual landscape.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Peer Review

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://www.webofscience.com/api/gateway/wos/peer-review/10.1111/beer.12762>.

Endnotes

¹ Since we conducted the search on June 8, 2022, it is normal that the number of articles from 2022 was lower than the prior few years. The fact that 13 articles have already been published in the first half of this year shows that this number could double by the end of the year.

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