**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
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Corporate social innovation – a structured literature review

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Evidence-Based Management

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to conduct a strategic literature review on corporate social innovation by investigating the evolution of the field together with the identification of both the thematic and theoretical underpinnings. This is achieved by analysing a cross-section of interdisciplinary literature.

Methodology: A structured literature review was conducted on 138 articles by adopting an inductive content analysis. Pertinent studies were identified in three major databases (Scopus, Web of Science and EBSCO).

Findings: The review explores the transition from corporate social responsibility to corporate social innovation and explains the challenges and opportunities that arise when multinational corporations embrace corporate social innovation. Additionally, through the review of the theoretical underpinnings, it identifies the progression of corporate social innovation through four primary themes: the influence of board composition and chief executive officers' role in corporate social innovation, the significance of employee engagement, and the potential effects of corporate social innovation on brand equity.

Limitations: Conducting a literature review in a structured manner by a sole author, utilising inductive content analysis, poses challenges related to inter-coder reliability and introduces an element of subjectivity.

Contribution: This study adds to the body of knowledge by pinpointing the themes linked to the progression of corporate social innovation and the corresponding theoretical foundations.

Keywords: Social innovation, corporate social innovation, multinational corporations (MNCs)

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Evidence-Based Management at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

As part of the dynamic landscape of innovation, groundbreaking ideas often revolve around technological advancements and market-driven solutions. The notion of social innovation (SI) stands apart as a beacon of hope for addressing the pressing, unsolved challenges of our time. The current challenges faced by humanity necessitate innovative and creative solutions from all actors, including community, governments, and businesses. Difficult-to-solve, interconnected problems (also known as "wicked problems"), like poverty, pandemics, and food insecurity require holistic, new, and novel ways to address old issues (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017).

The unpredictable nature of economics not only highlights the significance of innovation, but considers it essential (do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). However, the power of innovation is maximised when it can be institutionalised through organisational processes and structures (Herrera, 2015). Unlike its innovation counterparts, SI is rooted in the fundamental objective of fulfilling social needs and solving complex societal problems. Moreover, "Social innovation implies new ideas that work to address pressing unmet needs and improve people's lives" (Mulgan et al., 2007, p. 7). Embracing a diverse array of dimensions, including public policy, environmental sustainability, entrepreneurship, and organisational dynamics, SI extends beyond the confines of conventional innovation. Existing market-based remedies and available government policies have been shown to be utterly ineffective against these recalcitrant problems. However, several reputable companies are starting to look in unexpected places for inspiration. Recognizing that social challenges are intertwined with economic concerns, these companies have realized that directing their initiatives towards resolving persistent issues in the social sector can significantly enhance the growth of their businesses. Therefore, SI is a dynamic and ever-evolving phenomenon capable of reshaping how we approach critical issues.

Over the last two decades, there has been an upswing in interest regarding the concept of SI within the realms of business and management. This renewed focus by organisations has advanced the concept of SI into corporate social innovation (CSI). Increasingly, entrepreneurs and organisations are expressing discontent with conventional approaches to solving social problems, as this is adversely affecting the environment in which they trade. By challenging the dominance of profit-centric logic, businesses can also harness the full potential of innovative solutions for the greater good. Privately owned businesses, from small to multinational organisations, have the resources and budgets to make a sustainable social difference if they

adopt SI in their strategies and day-to-day operations. Historically, organisations embarked on this journey through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in an attempt to address external pressures.

This research study embarks on a journey to unravel the intricacies of this paradigm shift, where the pursuit of profit is harmonised with a commitment to societal welfare. To explore the multifaceted and multidisciplinary CSI landscape within the business and management context, this study leans on the latest available research by delving into the various dimensions, motivations, and implications of SI. Moreover, given the fragmented state of research in CSI, employing a Structured Literature Review (SLR) with a theoretical systematization aid in organising and mapping the existing information within this area of study. The insights gained provide a deeper understanding of CSI's role in shaping the future of organisations within the broader socio-economic landscape.

1.2. Social innovation

One of the hallmarks of humankind is the capacity for innovation and creating new things. Throughout history, innovation has been viewed as an example of capacity for invention. As a result, humankind's continual efforts to create solutions to improve its general living conditions have led to the statement that "Civilization is the result of human innovations" (Simms, 2006, p. 391). This approach enables innovations to be in direct contact with a society's structure and dynamics. Furthermore, innovations contribute to a new social order due to their overall influence on technological changes.

According to Portales (2019), innovation is "a new or improved product or process (or a combination of them) that differs significantly from an organisation's previous products or processes, available to potential users (as a product) or put into use by the organisation (as a process)" (p. 3). Innovations range from addressing a brand-new need to making minor tweaks to an existing procedure, product, or service. Furthermore, innovation serves as "a synonym for the successful production, assimilation, and exploitation of novelty in the economic and social spheres" (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p. 43). The ultimate goal of SI should be systemic transformation, which can be attained through disruptive innovation. Social movements, rules and laws, business models, information, infrastructure, and technology must work together to bring about this systemic transformation (Portales, 2019; Reinhardt & Gurtner, 2018).

Keynes and Schumpeter, as postmodern economists, asserted that economics should not function as a closed and conservative framework that upholds a balanced and effective level of social welfare (do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). Therefore, an innovative and sustainable approach is required to address these social issues, where various role players are actively involved in making a difference at the bottom of the pyramid, since the demand is not being met by the relevant governmental structures. Although non-profit organisations work tirelessly to address some of these issues, funding and resources are not always available to ensure sustainability. Contrastingly, privately owned businesses – from small to multinational organisations – have both the resources, capabilities and budget to make a sustainable social difference if they adopt SI in their strategies and day-to-day operations.

Several authors characterize SI as a fresh perspective on a social issue that is more sustainable, effective, and efficient than existing approaches. The benefits accrue not just to an individual, but to society as a whole (Holmström Lind et al., 2022; Phills et al., 2008; Rao-Nicholson et al., 2017). Examples of SI include actions for social purposes, changes in social structures, the provision of public goods, or market offerings that attend to unmet needs in society. At the heart of SI lies the intention to address a social problem or fulfil a social need. (Foroudi et al., 2021).

1.3. From social innovation to corporate social innovation

Although SI appears in all sectors, "much of the creative action is occurring at the boundaries between sectors" (Vasallo et al., 2019, p. 744). The term "social" has a very specific meaning and when combined with private enterprise, the field expands considerably to become a rich source that includes social enterprise, social venture, social entrepreneurship, social capitalist, and CSI.

CSI offers a unique blend of business, innovation, and societal impact. This field combines business acumen with a passion for positive social and environmental change. Furthermore, it allows individuals to explore innovative solutions within a business context to some of the globe's most urgent challenges, while also offering promising career prospects and growth in a rapidly evolving field. Consequently, CSI is a strategic investment by applying its full expertise and resources to create new sustainable solutions to the identified social need. The challenge is now to take a well-understood SI concept and pivot this into the sustainable CSI domain (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020), as this will motivate and enable companies to chase both a competitive advantage and a social value.

In the past, companies entered this journey through their CSR programmes. These CSR initiatives were either responsive or strategic in nature, with the bulk being responsive and more focused on generic and philanthropic initiatives to respond to external pressures or aiming to improve reputation (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023; Moon & Parc, 2019). The focus of CSI is on how CSR has evolved strategically and how this revitalised approach may lead to a more resilient and scalable business model.

Weerawardena et al. (2021) argued that "the primary purpose of business firms is to create superior value for customers to gain a competitive advantage" (p. 768). By mitigating tensions and aligning goals, these hybrid business models have the potential to create a competitive edge and open doors to new business opportunities. (Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2021). Accordingly, the objective of CSI can include generating alternative sources of income and simultaneously foster a culture that serves as a distinctive factor and competitive advantage for the company. (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020). One of the best incentives and potential outcomes of embedding CSI through a deliberate systemic approach is the establishment of social value and the development of a competitive advantage (Hagedoorn et al., 2023; Herrera, 2015). Additionally, companies adopting CSI can extend this culture into employee engagement, which may enrich a companies' purpose and retention of employees, add to motivation and personal satisfaction, and enhance leadership and problem-solving skills (Mirvis & Googins, 2018).

Through their 1999 seminal publication, Kanter and Parker introduced the concept of CSI and, over time, multiple definitions have emerged, shaping and refining the understanding of CSI. The various definitions, together with their similarities and differences, are discussed in more detail later in this document. This SLR is anchored in the following definition:

> Social innovation is a measurable, replicable initiative that uses a new concept or a new application of an existing concept to create shareholder and social value. Identifying drivers, enablers, and barriers to idea generation, experimentation, and implementation is critical to understanding CSI institutionalization. (Herrera, 2015, p. 1469)

The various definitions available in the literature for CSI have a few things in common: 1) CSI is seen as a form of innovation; 2) CSI is a business response to a social problem; 3) CSI must form part of a company's strategic intent; and 4) CSI must generate profit. In this SLR, the definition proposed by Herrera (2015) is embraced with an emphasis on the understanding of the value

created by redirecting an old concept towards a new impactful outcome, identifying the role players together with the various aspects involved in the institutionalisation of CSI.

1.4. Creating shared value

CSI assumes a pivotal role in creating shared value (CSV), offering a practical framework for businesses to innovate, address social and environmental challenges, and harmonize their core activities with both social and economic goals. By adopting CSI as part of their strategies and redefining their business models, companies can effectively deliver CSV, where business success can be intertwined with societal progress.

While CSR initiatives primarily target positive impacts on society or the environment without the primary aim of generating direct economic benefits or cost, CSV-focused projects strive to create social and/or environmental value, while also generating revenue or cost savings directly from their activities. Therefore, CSV represents a departure from conventional business thinking, since it does not view social responsibility or sustainability as acts of charity or sacrifice. Instead, it presents a novel business model for attaining economic success and aims for sustainability by simultaneously and collaboratively addressing social and environmental concerns (Khurshid & Snell, 2021).

CSV can be defined "as the strategic process through which corporations can solve a social problem which is aligned to their value chain while pursuing economic profits" (Menghwar & Daood, 2021, p. 469). In contrast to conventional profit-driven business models, enterprises aspiring to attain economic, social, and environmental objectives face additional and distinct challenges. To achieve these interconnected objectives and sometimes incompatible goals, organisations frequently need to incorporate more than one institutional logic ("doing good and doing well"). Selecting values that are strategically significant in addition to economic ones is not just a critical managerial task, but also requires high levels of innovation (Schneider & Clauß, 2020). Both academic and practitioner understanding of business is challenged by combining these two interests.

When two institutional logics are combined (dual logic of charity and commercial), businesses can be seen as hybrid organisations. Hybrid organisations navigate and establish connections between the conventional realms of private, public, and non-profit sectors, with income generation adhering to the logic of the private sector; public benefit as the public-sector logic; and advocacy,

participation, and philanthropy as the non-profit-sector logic (Davies & Doherty, 2019). However, combining these two logics can lead to conflict, also known as hybrid tensions (Vassallo et al., 2019). These challenges or tensions are mostly in the areas of financial resource acquisition, human resources, and mission (Siegner et al., 2018; Tate & Bals, 2018). Another challenge faced by hybrid structures is "mission drift", which may emerge when commercial or social activity takes precedence over the other, resulting in an imbalance between the two foci areas (Siegner et al., 2018).

A hybrid structure shifts its focus from short-term self-interest to a broader spectrum of social and environmental benefits, as well as focusing on the overall advantages for customers, suppliers, and employees (Lee & Raschke, 2020; Schneider & Clauß, 2020). Hence, where a hybrid structure is implemented in a business context, it is crucial to plan and manage effective sustainability and scalability of the various selected projects in an attempt to preserve their relevance and value to stakeholders. Thus, CSV or a blended value is a strategic process and not a once-off event. The conflicts between business and society are ignored by CSV by creating a common framework for achieving social goals (Menghwar & Daood, 2021).

1.5. Research problem

Although CSI terminology holds universal relevance across industries and government institutions (Foroudi et al., 2021), numerous authors have contributed work over the years in an attempt to add structure to this important and ever-evolving concept. This study focuses on post-2018 publications, published in journals rated 3 or higher as per the journal quality rankings (Academic Journal Guide [AJG] 2023), and publications that expand and combine SI with the corporate or organisational domain.

Two authors recently published SLRs to anchor the concept of CSI. Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) completed an SLR on CSI with a focus on the evolution of CSI and if it is similar or dissimilar to other established concepts, such as CSR, CSV, and hybrid business models. Although submitted in 2018 and published in 2020, the authors found that there was limited literature to assist companies on how to fully adopt CSI in their strategies. Furthermore, Holmström Lind et al. (2022) conducted a SLR on the engagement of multinational corporations (MNCs) in SI. The study centred on elucidating the key characteristics of MNCs participating in SI and how they can utilize their distinct position to tackle social challenges. This study was submitted in 2020 and published in 2022 and highlights the fragmented use of theories and that the implementation of CSI is

predominantly strategic and voluntary. Moreover, as MNCs were the focus of investigation and have a presence in multiple countries and continents, the study revealed that specific CSI activities are primarily confined to a local setting. This underscores another observation that expanding these initiatives to a broader scale presents significant challenges.

Yet, in order to achieve the effective institutionalization and integration of CSI into a company's strategy, this SLR aims to bridge the gap between the studies conducted by Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) and Holmström Lind et al. (2022) by: 1) highlighting the evolution of CSI since these two studies; and 2) exploring the theoretical underpinnings of the CSI concept. Lastly, this study will aim to identify the key themes that have subsequently evolved in this domain. This will enable businesses to better understand the potential benefits and impacts this innovation process can deliver. Given this direction, the objective of this research is therefore to respond to the following research questions:

- Research question 1: How has the definition of CSI evolved?
- Research question 2: What are the theoretical underpinnings of the CSI construct?
- Research question 3: What are the key themes evolving?

1.6. Aim of research and potential contribution

While the concept of CSI has undergone changes over the past two decades, this study seeks to contribute both theoretically and in terms of management insights to its exploration. Theoretically, this study highlights through the evolution of the literature why MNCs are well placed to be fast adopters of SI as well as what motivates MNCs to embed SI in their strategies and what mechanisms, processes, and enablers are affecting the outcome of CSI activities. Although a few theoretical anchors exist for CSI, an array of different single theories are used in the latest research. Therefore, this study makes a further contribution through the identification and evolution of the different theoretical underpinnings of CSI.

Contrastingly, the study's management contributions aim to identify the various incentives on offer for businesses by embedding SI into their strategies and how more shareholder and social value can be added. In addition, this study will aim to identify the key stakeholders responsible for the implementation and the impact this can have on brand equity. Furthermore, which elements of the adoption of SI should be considered or prevented when organisations and management redirect or re-orientate themselves. Lastly, the study examines whether the adoption of SI is voluntary or nudged by formal regulations.

1.7.   Methods used to source papers

To improve the overall contribution of a study, quality needs to be embedded in every step of the SLR process (Snyder, 2019). Moreover, SLRs employ a methodical approach to selecting literature characterised by thoroughness and rigour (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003) to ensure replicability of a study. This SLR began by identifying scholarly articles published in prestigious business journals. First, to maintain high-quality standards, only peer-reviewed articles from journals rated as 3, 4 and 4* by the AJG 2023 journal rank were included in the selection process. Second, due to the multidisciplinary nature of this construct and the strong link to corporations and MNCs, only business-related articles were used. Third, to build on the two SLRs of Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) and Holmström Lind et al. (2022) and to ensure recency of the journals analysed, only articles published after 2018 were used. Lastly, some seminal papers were included in this study that provided a solid theoretical foundation to this construct.

1.8.   Directions for future research

The rapid growth of CSI is attributed to its multi-disciplinary nature presenting an opportunity to develop a more detailed theoretical framework. Consumers, employees and shareholders hold significant importance as stakeholders for a company, and their perception, influenced by readily available information, can determine whether they become allies or adversaries on the social innovation journey. The medium, frequency, impact and authenticity of messaging can be guided by future research. Furthermore, the role, adoption and impact of senior leadership and more specifically the board and CEO needs more focus.

Chapter 2 concentrates on detailing the methodology selection and rationale. The subsequent chapter, Chapter 3, introduces the multidisciplinary literature review. Chapter 4, aimed at providing novel insights, scrutinizes the evidence derived from the literature review and synthesizes the findings. The study's conclusions, along with opportunities for further investigation and limitations, are articulated in Chapter 5.

2. Chapter 2: Method and analysis

2.1. Introduction

Staying abreast of cutting-edge research and being able to comprehensively evaluate the collective body of evidence within a specific research domain has become increasingly challenging. Xiao and Watson (2019) posited that "To push the knowledge frontier, we must know where the frontier is" (p. 93). This underscores the relevance of employing the SLR as a research methodology (Snyder, 2019). This methodology is also able to incorporate and cross-pollinate the conclusions and findings of many different studies and is much more powerful than the findings of just one study. By compiling information from a variety of studies, systematic reviews can assist and benefit practitioners and managers in building a solid knowledge base. In addition, to ensure replicability and transparency, SLRs seek to provide an audit trail, which provides a clear road map of reviewers' decisions and actions during the review process (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The choice of employing the SLR methodology for this investigation is driven by two primary reasons. Firstly, there exists a continually expanding body of literature on the intricate and multidisciplinary concept of SI. Secondly, this methodology is especially helpful to locate research gaps when a research topic is disparate and multidisciplinary (Snyder, 2019). Before initiating the evaluation process, a review protocol was formulated to direct the review and ensure a well-organised process from inception to conclusion.

This chapter outlines the methods utilised to get to the study's conclusions. In addition to highlighting the review questions, this chapter is guided by the methodological framework, which encompasses data abstraction and the data analysis process. The chapter concludes by addressing the limitations inherent in the research design and methods.

2.2. Review question and focus for the structured literature review

As the SI research field has grown over the last few years, an SLR can assist in structuring literature. Hence, to further expand the body of existing knowledge, research questions need to be defined. The research questions for this study were framed as:

- Research question 1: How has the definition of CSI evolved?
- Research question 2: What are the theoretical underpinnings of the CSI construct?
- Research question3: What are the key themes evolving?

Building on the published SLRs of Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) and Holmström Lind et al. (2022), addressing the first research question, this study examined the body of knowledge from the past six years to determine the progression of CSI. Through the second question, the theoretical underpinnings of the CSI concept were analysed, as this has been applied in the various studies. Lastly, the third research question aimed to identify the key themes of CSI that evolved over the last six years. The key themes either amplified already-identified CSI themes or identified new potential avenues of investigations and research questions.

2.3.   Methodological framework

To ensure the rigour and effectiveness of a research review, a comprehensive and successful review process entails the meticulous execution of three fundamental phases: the initial planning of the review, the systematic conduct of the review, and the subsequent reporting of the review's findings (Xiao & Watson, 2019). This approach allows the identification of gaps, questions, themes, and areas that might require deeper investigation within the current body of knowledge.

This study aspired to undertake an exhaustive examination of the evolved and current landscape of SI research, delving deep into the distinctive characteristics of available literature. To achieve rigour and coherence of the study's outcomes, a meticulous application of an integrated and systematic methodological framework or protocol was followed as depicted in Figure 1. Starting with planning and drafting the review protocol, conducting the review by analysing the data, and concluding with the synthesis and reporting. Throughout the planning phase, the scaffolding of this framework together with the formulated research questions formed the guiding compass of this investigation. The next five steps in the process were the conducting phase, where literature was explored by reviewing the abstracts and the titles, followed by reviewing the full text of each article. Data were extracted, then analysed and aggregated. The last step in the process was the reporting phase by capturing the insights and findings. Indicative of the dynamic and evolving nature of research, this process was iterative of nature, to be both responsive and flexible to the nuances encountered, allowing for recalibration and refinement of the study (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003).

A combination of content and thematic analysis was used in this SLR, resulting in a more nuanced and holistic understanding of literature by allowing both specific content insights within a broader thematic context. "Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding

and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The incorporation of this integrated approach heightened the depth and richness of the analysis, contributing to a more thorough review of the research topic.
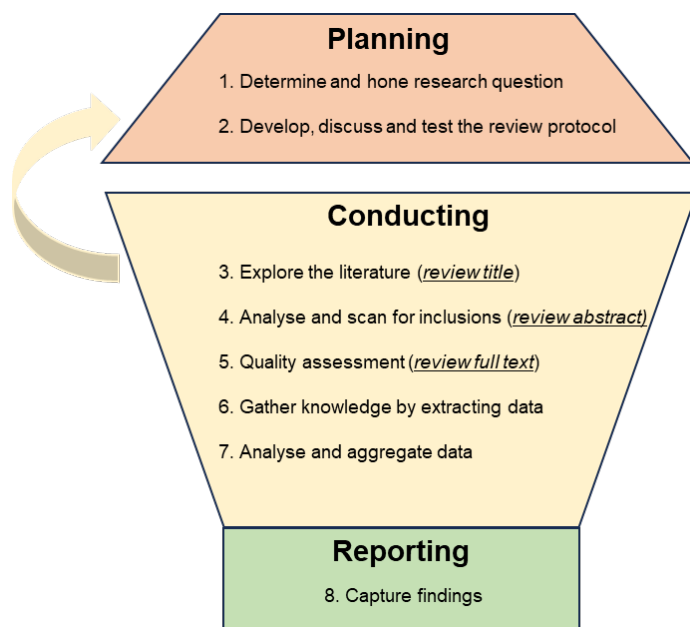
Figure 1: Systematic methodological framework (Source: Adapted from Tranfield et al., 2003; Xiao & Watson, 2019)

2.3.1. Search strategy

The latest SLRs on CSI by Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) and Holmström Lind et al. (2022) were used to identify and refine the terminologies used within their respective studies. This facilitated research question 1 by exploring the evolution of the CSI construct since their respective publications. Prior scoping studies on the subject under examination informed, shaped, and guided these studies (Tranfield et al., 2003). For the purpose of finding relevant articles, words or phrases were used as search terms (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, to explore the evolution of this domain since the publications of Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) and Holmström Lind et al. (2022) and to aim for replicability of these studies, the main search terms and keywords were identified (Tranfield et al., 2003) and aligned with the research questions. The identified terms can be categorized into three sections: 1) social innovation and corporate social innovation 2) social value creation; and 3) corporation and multinational corporations/enterprises. To widen the search further, variations of these terms, including the relevant abbreviations were included in the search string.

In addition, to ensure an extensive range of studies were included by the selected databases, the Boolean term "OR" was used to widen and increase recall within facets and the term "AND" was used to increase precision within the search string (Svarre & Russell-Rose, 2022). The final search string was: social innovation OR SI OR corporate social innovation OR CSI OR creating shared value OR social value creation OR CSV AND multinational corporation OR MNC OR multinational enterprise or MNE. A four-step process was followed across the three databases – Table 1 highlights the number of hits through every addition to the search string – until the full search string was reached as reflected in the final step, when the only "AND" Boolean was used. This last step was done to anchor the concept of SI and value creation within the business domain of corporations and enterprises.

Table 1: Search terms across various databases

Step	Search term	EBSCO	Web of Science	Scopus
1	"Social innovation" OR SI	898	506	6 954
2	Social innovation OR SI *OR "corporate social innovation" OR CSI*	724	2 075	18 110
3	Social innovation OR SI OR corporate social innovation OR CSI *OR "creating shared value" OR "social value creation" OR CSV*	1 594	2 119	16 059
4	Social innovation OR SI OR corporate social innovation OR CSI OR "creating shared value" OR "social value creation" OR CSV AND *"multinational corporation" OR "international corporation" OR MNC OR "multinational enterprise" OR MNE*	3 102	2 079	1 120

Source: Author's own

To respond to the research questions and search terms, relevant information sources had to be singled out. To identify literature objectively and guided by the results of previous searches and reviews, major databases were chosen. Since no one database included the complete set of published materials and to enable a comprehensive search, multiple databases were used for this systematic literature search. Consequently, EBSCO, Web of Science, and Scopus were identified as the preferred databases not only because they encompass the most extensively utilised resources within the realm of business and economics, but also because they grant access to a wealth of scholarly material from leading management journals. Moreover, these databases are used by researchers across various disciplines due to their availability of the most searched field as well as their various types of documentations and filters available (Gusenbauer, 2019; Hiebl, 2023; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Although Google Scholar is the largest database/search engine available, some concerns like lack of quality control, access to filters, and technical deficiencies with complex search strings exist when using this database (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). For this reason, Google Scholar was not used in this study. However, Google Scholar functioned as an additional resource to discover articles that were not identified through the primary database, especially in instances where a downloadable article could not be accessed. In this capacity, Google Scholar served as a backup database, enabling the retrieval of articles that might have been otherwise inaccessible. An article was deemed inaccessible and hence removed from the study if it was unable to be located in the main database or on Google Scholar. Searches were exclusively carried out on the Info Central resource centre of the University of Pretoria.

2.3.2. Search criteria

In the initial phase of the selection process, it is crucial to establish the eligibility criteria. Recognising the customary limitations of time and resources, it becomes imperative to strike a balance through judicious trade-offs. Consequently, the eligibility criteria, encompassing inclusion and exclusion parameters, must be meticulously defined to serve as a decisive framework for identifying and incorporating studies in the conclusive review (Aguinis et al., 2020). The eligibility criteria are significantly influenced and defined by the research questions.

- *Inclusion criteria*

The chosen articles centre around business-related subjects, have undergone peer review, and were sourced from reputable journals. As a quality assurance measure, this study exclusively incorporated peer-reviewed articles (Gupta et al., 2020). Therefore, only peer-reviewed papers in English were considered due to a predominantly English institutional domain. In addition, where search filters were available, searches were limited to management, business, social, and environmental categories. The emphasis was on innovation that enhances social value, together with the involvement of corporations in SI activities. This was done to ensure a strong link between business and SI by including social and environmental initiatives. The search included both empirical and non-empirical research.

To guarantee the recency of articles, only papers that were published between 2018 and 2023 were used. The SLR by Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) was submitted in 2018 with a search frame of 89 articles published between 1999 and 2018, while the SLR of Holmström Lind et al. (2022) was submitted in 2020 with a search frame of 60 papers published between 1987 and 2020.

Therefore, this search aimed to capture the evolution to date from 2018 to September 2023. All articles outside this period were excluded from the search, except for seminal and foundational articles that shaped the construct over the years and shaped the scholarly debate. Seminal papers set the foundation for further research and become reference points for their respective fields. Moreover, they can spark paradigm shifts by challenging established beliefs. In addition, the overall quality of an article is closely linked to the quality rating of the article in the various journals (Rojon et al., 2021), thus only literature published in journals rated 3, 4 and 4* by the AJG (2023) were included.

- *Exclusion criteria*

For the sake of consistency and to control the volume of articles for review, the search excluded books, book reviews, editorials, letters, and all other forms of grey literature (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). In a broad sense, grey literature encompasses knowledge artifacts that have not undergone the peer-review processes typically associated with scientific journal publications (Adams et al., 2017).

Xiao and Watson (2019) stated that omitting grey literature might lead to publication bias, but in reviews aimed at expanding a current body of knowledge, a selective and purposeful approach can be adopted. This selective and purposive approach can be employed to pinpoint shortcomings and gaps in the existing body of work and can also be seen as a valuable tool for advancing scholarly discourse.

Furthermore, the abstract of each article was scrutinized to assess its alignment with the research questions and its potential contribution to theoretical or thematic understanding. Subsequently, articles that did not predominantly centre on the intersection of business and CSI were excluded from consideration (Gupta et al., 2020).

2.3.3. Sample selection

Sample selection in SLRs is crucial. Hiebl (2023) amplified the importance by identifying three reasons, as reflected in Figure 2. First, sample selection facilitates a structured, consistent, and well-defined approach to finding the relevant research studies. Second, it enhances transparency by clearly documenting the criteria and methods used to identify and screen research items. Third, sample selection ensures a wide range of relevant research is included in the review, allowing a more holistic understanding of the topic and capture diverse perspectives. Hiebl (2023) identified

a method or three steps in the sample selection process: identification, screening of the content, and disclosure and publication of the review sample.
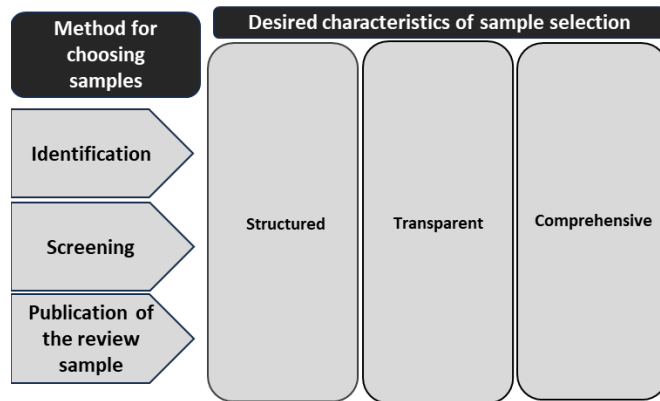
Figure 2: Consistent sample selection process (Source: Adapted from Hiebl, 2023)

Through the identification process and aligned with the research questions, the time frame for the search was limited to 2018–2023 to be able to explore the evolution on the two recently published SLRs. Moreover, an approach driven by database searches was adopted, prioritizing peer-reviewed articles from journals rated 3, 4, and 4* (AJG 2023). This approach aimed to select the most prominent and influential research articles in the field of SI. In the reviewed publications, the screening of selected research items primarily involved examining titles, abstracts, and author-defined keywords to identify content that aligned with the research questions. This was followed by the classification of articles as either "in", "out", or "maybe", based on whether they matched the requirements for inclusion (Aguinis et al., 2018).

The last step to improve the transparency was to capture the steps followed in the review process, as shown in Table 2. From the total number of results across the three databases, the duplicates were eliminated, followed by non-related articles like open innovation, supply chain innovation, religious innovation, or general media innovation. Thereafter, articles not directly linked to SI in the business domain, such as sport as social inclusion or public and private entrepreneurship, were eliminated. The final step was the verification of articles against the AJG (2023) quality standards within the set time horizon, which rendered a final total of 138 articles.

Table 2: Sample selection and search strategy

Stage	Filtering criteria	Eliminated	Accepted
1. Initial results	• *Search string*: "social innovation" OR SI OR "corporate social innovation" OR CSI OR "creating shared value" OR "social value creation" OR CSV AND "multinational corporation" OR MNC OR "multinational enterprise" or MNE • *Time horizon*: January 2018 to September 2023 • *Publication type*: Scholarly, peer-reviewed academic journal articles in English	-	6 301
2. Duplicates	*Elimination* of duplicates	212	6 089
3. Eliminate non-related articles	*Elimination* of articles not related to the main search or that only represent a part of the search (i.e., innovation and open innovation, supply chain innovation or sustainability, social media innovation, financial reporting and taxation, religion, call for papers, MNE or MNCs, but not related to SI, small and medium-sized enterprises, and non-governmental organisations [NGOs])	3 989	2 100
4. CSI (business focus)	*Elimination of* articles not compliant with the research topic and objective (i.e., social and public entrepreneurship; disruptive innovation; environmental, social, and governance; COVID-19 impact; sport as social inclusion)	1 414	686
5. Peer reviewed (AJG > 3)	Compliance with research question and limited to AJG > 3-rated journals together with access to journals; adherence to the period of January 2018 to September 2023	548	138
6. Remainder			**138**

Source: Author's own

2.3.4. *Data quality*

Merely relying on peer-reviewed articles for eligibility criteria is inadequate for assessing the relevance and quality of the identified articles. To mitigate potential bias and address the extensive volume of articles, a data quality assessment matrix (DQAM) was developed. Considering the broad array of articles, this DQAM played a critical role in guiding the selection, data extraction, and reporting processes. In addition, to gauge the quality of each article, the matrix served as a checklist, aligned with the research questions. Therefore, prior to including any of the 138 articles in the final collection, each article was meticulously evaluated and verified against the DQAM to ensure quality and relevance. Table 3 highlights the steps taken during the DQAM to ensure full quality adherence.

Table 3: Data quality assessment matrix

Activity	Quality measure	Activity undertaken	Source	Adherence (Yes [Y]/No [N]/ Moderately [M])
Review motivation	Literature used to identify research gap	Two recently published SLRs together with an array of disjointed literature	Gupta et al. (2020)	Y
Search terms used	Literature selected based on search terms	• SI • CSI • CSV • MNCs	Burton et al. (2020)	Y
Quality of articles reviewed	Methodological and conceptual rigour	Peer reviewed	Gupta et al. (2020); Morse (2015)	Y
Source of data	• Database selection • High-quality journals	• EBSCO, Web of Science and Scopus • AJG > 3-rated journals	Burton et al. (2020); Gupta et al. (2020)	Y
Selection criteria	• Inclusion criteria • Exclusion criteria	• Construct focus • Relevance • Grey literature • Non-business-related innovation	Dembek et al. (2020); Gupta et al. (2020)	Y
Data extraction	Capturing of variables and key data elements	• Detailed Excel spreadsheet to compare, extract, and analyse data • No intercoder validity	Gupta et al. (2020)	Y/N
Reporting	• Methodological consistency • Theory development • Transferability	• Weaving a golden threat • Theory contribution • In-depth and thick reporting	Morse (2015)	Y

Source: Author's own

2.4. Data abstraction

The process of data abstraction involves the identification and capturing of variables and key data elements from the original sources, while omitting extraneous and irrelevant data. A descriptive analysis is employed to understand the fundamental characteristics, patterns, and trends of this emerging topic (Rynes et al., 2007). The specific information and rationale for extracting this level of information are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Information extracted

Information extracted	Reason/Relevance for extracting information
Title	Title gives a good indication if the article aligns with the research question and research objective and provides a focused window on the contents and relevance
Journal name	Journal name associated with AJG quality ensures compliance to quality peer-reviewed articles
Authors	Authoritative authors lean on each other's work and further use and evolve it
Years published	Years of publication allow for a focused review – limited to January 2018 to September 2023
Sample size	Impacts the quality, reliability, and generalisability of research findings; sample size depends on the research objectives, available resources, and specific statistical techniques employed
Keywords	Keywords aligned with the research question and identified search terms
Research method used	Impacts the quality, validity, and reliability of study findings across quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodologies
Geographical area of study	Has spatial, cultural, regional, and interdisciplinary relevance of Global North or South, developing or developed territories
Research philosophy (theory)	Shaping the research design, methodology, and interpretation; provides a foundation for rigorous, systematic, and meaningful academic and scientific investigations across various disciplines
Field of study	Research philosophy contributes to the growth, development, and generation of meaningful insights and solutions within a particular field of study

Source: Author's own

This essential first step of a comprehensive review provided a clear and concise overview of the data characteristics. The results of the descriptive analysis enabled an overall mapping of the whole field, together with visualisations of the relationships within the data. This analysis highlights the immediate trends across the selected publication years (2018–2023), research methods used, geographical spread, and density of certain journals.

To serve as a central repository, this information was captured and organised into an Excel spreadsheet with initial impressions, observations, and comments. To facilitate a comprehensive analysis and an overview of the data, the aggregated information and results are presented in Chapter 3 through tables and images to highlight the key insights drawn from the extensive literature review.

2.5. Data analysis approach

The assessment aimed to identify research gaps for further investigation as well as common methodologies, emerging topics, and theoretical foundations. The data analysis process

compacts the gathered information to reduce the data into smaller fragments that enable the spotting of trends and patterns. Given the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher delved extensively into the literature to explore scholarly perspectives on SI practices by firms (Gaur & Kumar, 2018).

To uncover and formulate themes from the condensed literature, a thematic or content analysis can be employed. This comprehensive approach allows for a rigorous examination of the topic and facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Snyder, 2019). While a deductive approach is employed in a thematic analysis, where segments are coded by aligning them with preexisting themes, the chosen preferred approach was an inductive content analysis. This inductive approach facilitated the emergence of CSI applications in an unbiased manner, while simultaneously revealing new themes and theories (Vears & Gillam, 2022).

2.5.1. Inductive content analysis

An inductive content analysis was appropriate to unpack the various elements of SI in MNCs within the available literature, leaning on the insights gained through previous readings and scanning of the distilled articles. Aligned with the research questions, the objective of this review was to discern prevalent methodologies, emerging themes, and the theoretical foundation of existing studies, and to identify areas of research requiring further investigation. Employing a qualitative methodology was deemed most suitable for extracting pertinent data necessary to address the research inquiries at hand and where an inductive content analysis permits the organic identification and assignment of themes as they emerge through an iterative engagement with literature (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). Inductive content analysis proves highly beneficial when the objective is to provide a thorough description and gain a good understanding of the phenomenon under study (Vears & Gillam, 2022).

The overall aim of the inductive content analysis was to conduct a rigorous and trustworthy process to accurately interpret and represent the data. To deliver a replicable, reliable, and transparent literature review, the abstraction and synthetisation of information was done to minimise bias (Snyder, 2019). However, literature was reviewed by a single reviewer and no cross-referencing, peer reviews or inter-coder validity was possible, which might have resulted in possible researcher bias. Notwithstanding, a detailed documentation process was followed to ensure reproducibility and transparency.

2.5.2. Coding process

The process of data analysis commenced with an initial comprehensive reading of the data to attain a holistic understanding of the content. This detailed examination was done to identify specific words or phrases that encapsulate the key concepts or thoughts. This practice is commonly known as coding (Miles et al., 2014). These initial impressions helped with refining the identified codes and served as the foundation for the initial coding scheme.

"A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Elliott (2018) added that coding is a method for analysing qualitative text data to explore what it can reveal, before rearranging the data in a logical way. Therefore, codes are a very important part of the process and can be seen as labels with symbolic meaning and where categories comprise several codes consisting of broad clusters of information, and finally a theme is made up of a cluster of categories (Elliott, 2018; Gaur & Kumar, 2018). To meet the quality expectations, Atlas.ti was employed to help with the systematic coding process to identify the relevant categories and themes across the CSI domain and be representative of the views of the respective scholars.

Where codes are at the primary level, categories and themes are at the secondary level of data analysis. A category is a thematic or conceptual grouping of data that shares common characteristics or content and therefore "a category is a code, but of a higher order" (Elliott, 2018, p. 2852). Subsequently, the codes were grouped into categories by considering their respective contents as well as their similarity and connection to other codes.

In turn, the last step in the process was to analyse the various categories for recurring patterns, which evolved into meaningful thematic clusters. Themes are patterns or common threads identified in the data, allowing the grouping and categorisation of information around key concepts. Furthermore, themes provide a way to synthesise, interpret, and understand the data more comprehensively, as they highlight the significant elements and insights within the research findings (Elliott, 2018). Therefore, themes serve as a bridge between the raw data and the conceptual framework of the overall study by addressing the specific objectives and answering the research questions. This systematic process from codes to categories to themes not only aided in the organisation and interpretation of the data, but contributed to a deeper understanding of the research subject.

2.6. Limitations of the research design and methods

To choose, abstract, and synthesise material with the least amount of bias, a semi SLR is supposed to provide a repeatable, transparent, and trustworthy method (Snyder, 2019). To achieve this outcome, inter-coder reliability is required to preserve the rigour and accuracy of the study (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). However, while this study was overseen by supervisors, the single authorship and lack of critical components like peer reviews, cross-referencing, and code matching may have introduced bias and subjectivity. Hiebl (2023) stated that screening for the relevant articles to be included in the final sample size is a labour-intensive task and requires sufficient resources. To address the identified shortcomings, all activities carried out during the review process are meticulously documented. This documentation allows others to comprehend the rationale behind each decision, serving as a means to mitigate the absence of peer review (Tranfield et al., 2003).

As a result of the growing CSI domain and the business field's fragmentation, it was difficult to compile the differing opinions of numerous academics, which could have hampered the literature review's thoroughness. Furthermore, to track the evolution of the domain, this study's search criteria were primarily based on two previously published SLRs, which may have omitted additional relevant terms that could have enriched the study. The studies in the final review sample had a range of techniques, levels of quality, and contexts. The decision to include these various publications in the final sample may have incorporated subjectivity, which could have impacted the general validity of the findings and interpretations. Additionally, by concentrating primarily on peer-reviewed articles, some grey literature may have been omitted (Hiebl, 2023) that could have added to the study.

According to Snyder (2019), a semi-systematic review approach aims to include a fair representation of the studies rather than all of them. The inclusion of a wide array of literature in this assessment showcases a successful endeavour to incorporate relevant studies. The chosen articles, along with their respective outcomes and the evolving themes, constitute the foundation of the literature review in the subsequent chapter.

3. Chapter 3: Literature review

3.1. Introduction

To try overcome the world's persistent challenges, it is imperative for businesses to transition from being perceived as part of the problem to becoming integral parts of the solution (Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2021). Contemporary society expects businesses to assume a greater social responsibility, encompassing social and environmental issues. As MNCs grapple with this expanded role, they are exploring inventive strategies and practices to sustain their legitimacy and retain a competitive edge (Mirvis et al., 2016). CSI arises as a method to unearth products and services that not only fulfil consumers' functional needs but also align with their broader societal aspirations (Canestrino et al., 2020). Embracing CSI fundamentally transforms businesses at a systemic level, making them inherently transformative by nature (Turker & Vural, 2017).

Previous academic research serves as the foundation for building and refining new knowledge. Since a literature review entails a thorough analysis, interpretation, and critical evaluation of extant information, it perfectly captures the spirit of scholarly inquiry. The process of knowledge generation is closely linked to the foundation set by earlier efforts (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019). To offer a complete and panoramic view of CSI and to identify the conceptual boundaries of this field, this scoping review mapped out the extent of available evidence, pinpointing areas where research gaps still exist (Xiao & Watson, 2019). By capturing the sheer size and diversity of the pool of research within the CSI domain, the evolution of this domain over the last six years was under review and simultaneously new themes were identified.

To explore this phenomenon, the researcher engaged with existing literature to reveal the current status and evolution of CSI post 2018. As shown in Table 2, a thorough screening process was followed to identify relevant articles for this SLR study. Once the search string was established, guided by the latest two published SLRs, 6 301 articles were identified across three major search engines. Identifying eligibility criteria by following a rigid and transparent process of elimination, 138 articles were identified to form the basis of this study and for full-text review.

These articles were spread across an array of journals, highlighting the importance of CSI across numerous research areas. The *Journal of Business Ethics* (26) and the *Journal of Business Research* (22) drew the highest count of eligible articles, primarily supported by the institutional and stakeholder theories. Although the articles were evenly spread across the six-year period,

most eligible publications were published in 2021 (29), followed by 2020 (27), as shown in Figure 3. Considering the number of articles retracted in 2022 (21) and although 2023 is only represented by 16 articles, the cut-off for this study was September 2023, thus not reflecting a full academic year.
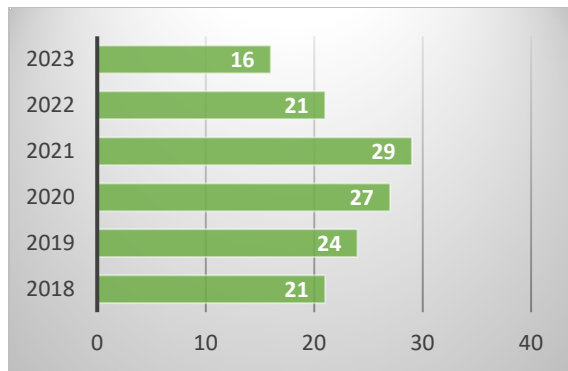
Figure 3: Years of publications (Source: Author's own)

An inductive content analysis process was followed to gain a comprehensive description and understanding of the phenomenon, while Atlas.ti was employed to help with the systematic coding process to identify the relevant categories and themes across the CSI domain. Inductive in this context signifies that the codes used for data labelling are formulated during the coding process and are grounded and discovered in the real content of the data set. This iterative process guarantees the accuracy of the coding and ensures it is reflective of the dataset.

3.2.   Results of literature reviewed

To present a comprehensive overview of literature and identify trends, gaps, and patterns in existing research, a meticulous process (documented in Chapter 2) was conducted to ensure transparency and reliability of the data. This section outlines the sources of publication, geographical representation of the studies, research methodologies used, and finally the theoretical underpinnings of the articles. The results of the analysis process are discussed across these four categories.

3.2.1.   Sources of publications

The 138 identified articles came from 47 journals across diverse fields of management, human resources, strategy, ethics, psychology, and marketing. Table 5 underscores the subject's diversity and serves as a valuable indicator of the array of disciplines that contribute concepts

and theories to CSI research. The *Journal of Business Ethics* (26) and the *Journal of Business Research* (22) represented 35% of the articles, followed by *Business and Society* (12), *Business Strategy and the Environment* (eight), and *Strategic Management Journal* (eight) making up 20% of the eligible articles. The balance were made up of publications representing only one article.

Table 5: Sources of publication

Publication	Quantity	Publication	Quantity
Academy of Management Journal	1	*Journal of Advertising Research*	1
Academy of Management Review	1	*Journal of Business and Psychology*	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Management	1	*Journal of Business Ethics*	26
British Journal of Management	3	*Journal of Business Research*	22
Business & Society	12	*Journal of Business Venturing*	1
Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility	4	*Journal of International Business Studies*	5
Business Strategy and the Environment	8	*Journal of International Marketing*	1
California Management Review	2	*Journal of Management*	3
Contemporary Accounting Research	1	*Journal of Management Studies*	4
Economics. Ecology. Socium	1	*Journal of Marketing Management*	1
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	1	*Journal of Product Innovation Management*	2
European Journal of Operational Research	1	*Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*	1
European Journal of Marketing	1	*Journal of World Business*	1
European Management Journal	1	*The Leadership Quarterly*	1
European Management Review	1	*Long Range Planning*	1
Human Relations	2	*Management International Review*	2
Human Resource Management Review	1	*Organization*	1
Industry and Innovation	1	*Organization Science*	1
International Business Review	5	*Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*	1
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	*Personnel Psychology*	1
International Journal of Human Resource Management	1	*Strategic Management Journal*	8
International Journal of Management Reviews	1	*Strategic Organization*	1
International Marketing Review	1	*Technological Forecasting and Social Change*	1

Source: Author's own

3.2.1. Geographical representation

This analysis offers an insight into the geographical scope of the reviewed articles by identifying certain patterns and trends in the distribution of research across different regions as indicated by Figure 4. Although not all papers were clearly specified, most of the research was in the Global North, with the United States (US) and Europe leading the number of studies. The preponderance of collaborative efforts between institutions based in the US (23) and Europe (32), which accounted for a substantial 40% of all articles in the data set, underscores the pivotal role played

by academics from these countries in advancing research in the field and fostering international connections. The highest number represented in the analysis (28) came from studies conducted across multiple countries, albeit majority of these countries were located in the Global North. The Global South had the lowest number of studies, anchored by China (eight) and India (four), with Africa's only representation coming from Kenya (three) and Ghana (three). This under-representation of the Global South presents an opportunity for future research studies to explore CSI in developing territories. While Figure 4 indicates the global continental geographical spread of the various studies clearly showing the representation in the Global North, Figure 5 attempts to breaks down the continental clusters into detailed individual countries and territories.

Figure 4: Geographical spread (Source: Author's own)
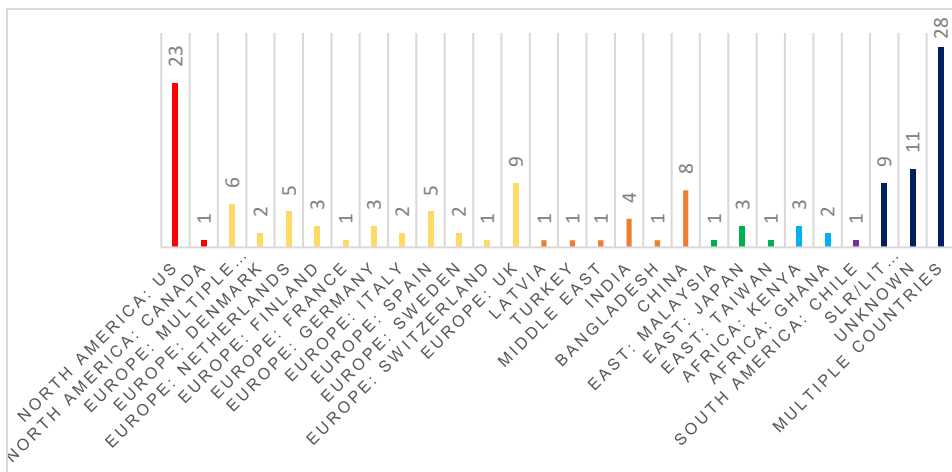
Figure 5: Individual countries and territories (Source: Author's own)

3.2.2. Research methods

Research methods are the foundation of the scientific inquiry process, providing a structured approach to gather, analyse, and interpret data. This facilitates systematic data collection and thorough analysis, ensuring the credibility and validity of research findings. This study follows an interpretive methodology by employing an inductive approach (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) highlighted that although quantitative studies increased after 2015, only 18% of studies reviewed were quantitative. In turn, Holmström Lind et al. (2022) asserted that the limited availability of quantitative research, particularly in the form of survey studies, indicated a significant gap in investigating the operationalisation of concepts and cause-and-effect relationships concerning the engagement of MNCs in SI activities. The research methodologies and their respective percentages identified through the abstraction process are shown in Table 6. This summary indicates a dramatic increase in the use of quantitative studies and a gradual decrease in the number of qualitative studies, which could be an indication of a maturing study field. Mixed methods and the theoretical/empirical studies represented the balance of the studies.

Table 6: Methods used for social innovation

Research methodology	Study and tools	Percentage
Quantitative	Regression analysis, ANOVA, *t*-test, PRISMA, pre- and post-test experiments, questionnaires, web-based experiment, quasi- experimental, descriptive statistics randomised control trials, observations, experimental studies, conjoint experiment	55%
Qualitative	Unstructured and semi-structured interviews, evolution study, empirical, action research ethnography, content analysis, case study and multiple case studies, long-term inductive study, narrative review, focus groups	36%
Mixed methodology	Interviews, bibliometrics, thematic analysis, SLRs, call for papers, questionnaires, focus groups	6%
Theoretical/Empirical	Empirical review, interpretive perspective	3%

Source: Author's own

3.2.3. Theoretical underpinnings

A wide range of theories were employed by the various authors – 54 different theories were used across the identified articles. Therefore, the utilisation of various theories in a disjointed manner presents promising research opportunities for exploring the SI construct within the corporate environment. As shown in Figure 6, the theories most represented in the studies were, first, institutional theory (22), stakeholder theory (16), agency theory (seven), signalling theory (seven), and attribution theory (six); followed by upper echelons theory (four), organisational identity theory

(four), social impact theory (three), grounded theory (three), and dynamic capabilities theory (three). Another major category (11) identified was a consolidation of bibliometric, empirical, and SLR studies that was conducted in this domain.

Theoretical underpinnings influence the choice of research methods and data collection techniques and provide a lens through which data can be analysed and understood. To this end and for the purpose of this study, the various theoretical underpinnings are discussed in more detail in section 3.6.
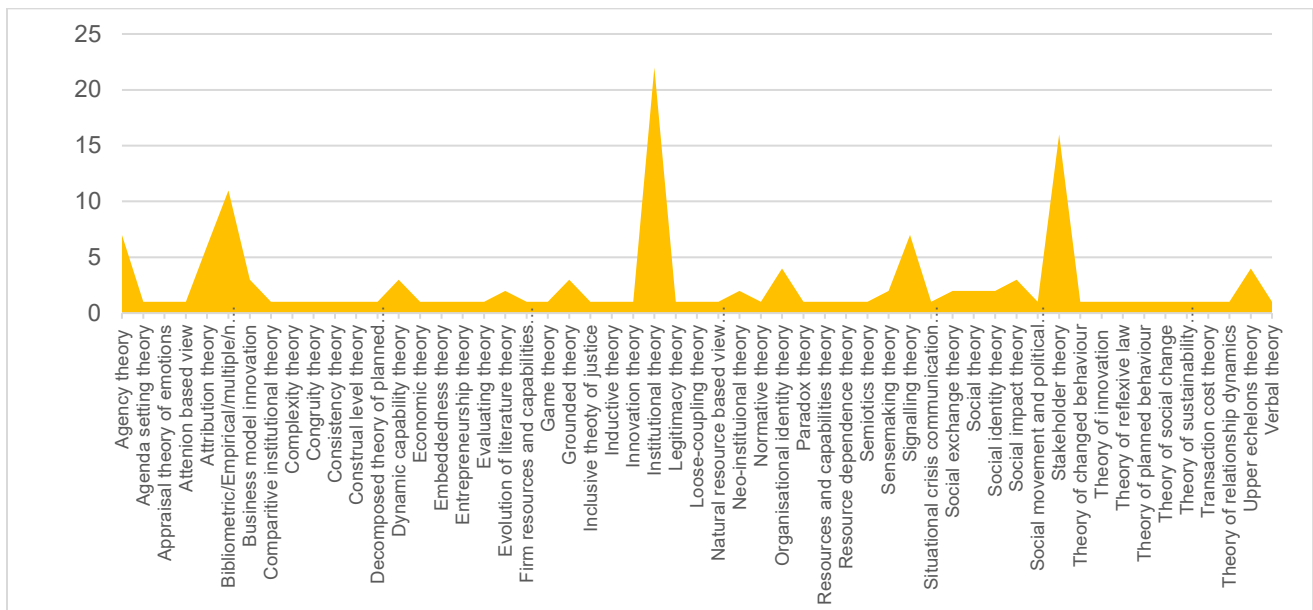
Figure 6: Theories employed (Source: Author's own)

3.3. Thematic analysis of literature

Through their products and services, companies serve many stakeholders inhabiting the bottom of the pyramid. In fact, the majority of human society, consisting of more than four billion people, forms part of this group. These individuals face a multitude of economic, social, and environmental challenges every day (Tate & Bals, 2018). Therefore, businesses can step up to the challenge and offer solutions to these recalcitrant problems as part of their business operations. Furthermore, companies prospering while society and the environment around them suffer can also be negatively affected by outright public rejection.

Sustainable innovation and value creation methods are a rediscovery of an "ancient" management paradigm. Although some companies have adopted CSR in their business operations, a few of these initiatives have not been sustainable in the long term. As a result, CSR has moved away from the paradox that profitability and ethics are mutually exclusive to the idea that both should be given equal weight (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023). Consequently, the concept of CSR has started to evolve towards CSI to allow companies to combine two different focus areas – namely making money and making a difference in the environments they trade in. The concept of CSI emerges as a prominent and multifaceted notion. CSI can be seen as a strategic tool utilised by corporations to bridge the gap between economic objectives and societal value. Furthermore, this strategic investment can innovate in the corporate sphere (Mirvis & Googins, 2018; Tabares, 2020) and reshape corporate identities and strategies.

Although CSI evolved from a well-established CSR concept, CSR is still a frequently encountered concept in this academic discourse aligning with the overarching concept of CSI. CSR is not only about meeting social obligations but underscores the alignment of corporate social and environmental activities with the business purpose and value. The various articles highlight the interplay between CSR and CSI, where both concepts emphasise the strategic integration of social and environmental considerations into corporate strategies and operations. Notwithstanding, CSR still forms an integral part of companies, board structures, nomenclature, and committees. Table 7 summarises the distinctive differences between the two concepts. Over the last two decades, CSI has evolved, going beyond the conventional practices of CSR. It now integrates social impact more seamlessly into corporate strategies, operations, and collaborative endeavours.

Table 7: Why corporate social innovation?

Traditional CSR approach	Evolution to CSI
Charitable purpose or altruistic motive	Strategic purpose or strategic objective
Funding and resources	Research and development, corporate assets
Workforce philanthropy or corporate volunteering	Employee development or workforce growth and advancement
Outsourced/External service providers	Government/NGOs/Other corporates
Focus on social and environmental services	Focus on social and environmental innovations
Community welfare or public benefit	Sustainable societal transformation

Source: Author's own

3.3.1. *The evolution of CSI*

Although SI is not a new idea, it appears to be moving in a new direction, where it is increasingly perceived as a mechanism to provide solutions to not just localised problems, but also to address deeper systemic and structural issues. Consequently, Vasallo et al. (2017) stated that SI can appear in any sector, where "much of the creative action is occurring at the boundaries between sectors" (p. 54).

CSI can be seen as a strategic investment when a company applies its full expertise and resources to create new sustainable solutions to an identified social need. The goal of CSI is to build alternative sources of income and to establish a culture that can also be a company's point of differentiation and competitive advantage (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020). Since the authoritative publication of Kanter and Parker (1999) defining CSI, various definitions have evolved the concept. However, commonalities (Tabares, 2020) can be found across these definitions, namely: 1) CSI is seen as a form and extension of innovation; 2) CSI is seen as a business response to a bigger social problem; 3) CSI must form part of a company's strategic intent; and 4) CSI must generate profit when implementing CSI. Table 8 summarises the several definitions of CSI over time, together with their overlapping commonalities.

Table 8: Definitions of corporate social innovation

Source	Definition	CSI is a form of innovation	CSI is a business response to a social problem	CSI forms part of a company's strategic intent	Generating profit is a critical imperative
Kanter and Parker (1999, p. 124)	"A new paradigm for innovation: a partnership between private enterprise and public interest that produces profitable and sustainable change for both sides…. When companies approach social needs in this way, they have a stake in the problems, and they treat the effort the way they would treat any other project central to the company's operations. They use their best people and their core skills. This is not charity; it is R&D–a strategic business investment."	X	X	X	X
Canestrino et al. (2015, p. 2)	"A way of finding new products and services that meet not only the functional needs of consumers but also their wider aspirations as citizens…. CSI may be interpreted as a way to manage firms' knowledge in order to get not only profits but also social goals. Its	X	X		X

Source	Definition	CSI is a form of innovation	CSI is a business response to a social problem	CSI forms part of a company's strategic intent	Generating profit is a critical imperative
	effectiveness depends on the firms' ability to manage both knowledge for innovation and their propensity to achieve social benefits."				
Mulgan et al. (2007, p. 8)	"Innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social."	X	X		
Herrera (2015, p. 1469)	"Social innovation is a measurable, replicable initiative that uses a new concept or a new application of an existing concept to create shareholder and social value. Identifying drivers, enablers, and barriers to idea generation, experimentation, and implementation is critical to understanding CSI institutionalization."	X	X		
Mirvis and Googins (2017, p. 2)	"Corporate social innovation is a strategy that combines a unique set of corporate assets (innovation capacities, marketing skills, managerial acumen, employee engagement, scale, etc.) in collaboration with other sectors and firms to co-create breakthrough solutions to complex economic, social, and environmental issues that bear on the sustainability of both business and society."	X	X	X	
Dionisio and de Vargas (2020, p.1)	"An initiative that aims to create both shareholder and social value with the potential to alter the structure of innovation systems, improve employee motivation, and change corporate identities and strategies to increase competitive advantage, while at the same time bringing solutions to societal needs."	X	X	X	X
Dionisio and de Vargas (2022, p. 795)	"CSI is a strategy that combines a unique set of corporate assets (innovation capacities, marketing skills, managerial acumen, employee engagement, scale, etc.) in collaboration with other sectors and firms to co-create breakthrough solutions to complex economic, social, and environmental issues that bear on the sustainability of both business and society."	X	X	X	

Source: Author's own

Several aspects within this business domain are also being identified and highlighted by the evolution of these definitions. Some of these include partnerships between private and public, consumer aspirations and demands, shareholder value that is measurable and replicable, employee engagement, communication strategies, and the use of corporate assets. Some of these aspects will be addressed in more detail through the analysis of the identified themes.

3.4. Synthesis of results and further theme identification

To gain insights into the existing knowledge and gaps regarding the construct, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the recent developments within the CSI domain. The first two themes that came under review were the evolution of the CSI construct over the last 6 years, together with the theoretical underpinnings of the various studies as identified through the research questions.

The data were categorised based on their contextual meaning after the identification of diverse codes. These codes were discerned through a thorough examination of literature, as presented by various scholars. The codes were then organised into distinct categories according to their similarities, resulting in the formation of themes rooted in these grouped categories. A further four major themes were identified through this inductive content analysis process: the importance and impact of board composition on CSI; the role chief executive officers (CEOs) play in the success of implementing CSI; the value or benefit company employees get from being involved in CSI initiatives; and the overall brand equity and consumer relationship that can be built by a company through CSI involvement. Table 9 outlines the process followed to ascertain the identified codes, categories, and ultimate themes.

Table 9: Identified codes, categories, and themes

Code	Category	Theme
Partnerships, solutions to a social problem, not localised, can be applied to any sector	Business response to a social problem	
New solution to old problems, different thinking and approach, social innovation	Innovation driven	
Strategic investment, generate alternative sources of income, establish a new culture, sustainability	Part of strategic intent	**Evolution of CSI**
Establish a competitive advantage, point of differentiation	Important to profit generation	
Agency theory, Institutional theory, Stakeholder theory,	Dominant theories	
Neo-institutional theory, Complexity theory, Signalling theory, Attribution theory, Upper echelons theory, Organisational identity theory, Social impact theory, Dynamic capability theory	Intermediate theories	
Agenda setting theory, Appraisal theory of emotions, Attention based view, Bibliometric/Empirical/multiple/narrative/SLR Business model innovation, Comparative institutional theory, Congruity theory, Consistency theory, Construal level theory, Decomposed theory of planned behaviour, Economic theory, Embeddedness theory, Entrepreneurship theory, Evaluating theory, Evolution of literature theory, Firm resources and capabilities theory, Game theory, Grounded theory, Inclusive theory of justice, Inductive theory, Innovation theory, Legitimacy theory, Loose-coupling theory Natural resource-based view theory, Normative theory, Paradox theory, Resources and capabilities theory, Resource dependence theory, Semiotics theory, Sensemaking theory, Situational crisis communication theory, Social exchange theory, Social theory, Social identity theory, Social movement and political theory, Theory of changed behaviour, Theory of innovation, Theory of reflexive law, Theory of planned behaviour, Theory of social change, Theory of sustainability management Transaction cost theory, Theory of relationship dynamics, Verbal theory	Nascent theories	**Theoretical underpinnings of CSI**

Code	Category	Theme
Independence, composition, meetings, minutes, committees, board size, governance, expertise, membership, monitoring, directors, supervision board, independence, stakeholder advisory, mechanisms, duties, more integrative, board decisions, fortune 500 boards, MNC board governance, subcommittees, voluntary disclosure	Board structure	Impact of board composition and corporate governance on CSI
Attributes, member age, attitude, gender, dynamics, traits, diversity, sustainability focus, female board representation, gender diversity, board tenure	Board characteristics	
Reputation, social ties, board chair, board expertise, CSR performance, monitoring capability, board context, directors' typology, human and social capital effect, networking capacity, political connections, political ideology	Board dynamics	
Compensation contracts/schemes/arrangements, monetary incentives, pay structure, personal incentives, stock options/ownership, total/cash compensation, bonus, equity, financial rewards, non-monetary incentives, perks, greed	CEO remuneration	CEO role and impact on CSI
Behaviour, childhood behaviour, social values, responsible leadership style, regulatory focus, overconfidence, narcissism and hubris, transformational leadership, risk-taking tendencies, gender, demographics, ideology, political ideology, motives, benevolence, personal values, power, ownership, attributes, duality, foreignness, tenure, age, academic background, liberal	CEO characteristics	
Future-orientated, owner focus, career horizons, assignment experience, prevention-focused, ability, capability, firm performance, responsibilities, discretionary spending, firm-level and contextual data, opportunistic behaviour, board support, joint participation, liberal-leaning boards	CEO performance	

Code	Category	Theme
Employee volunteering, participation, motivation, volunteerism, commitment, participating employees, engaged employee, mobility programmes, propensity, reciprocity orientation, disengaged employee, pro bono work, volunteering programmes, contribution, awareness, donations	Employee involvement	**Employee engagement in CSI activities**
Perceptions, social expectations, retention, awareness, cynicism, reactions, behaviour, mobility, morale, pride, autonomy, perception, loyalty, expectations, development, communication, benefits, opinions, outlooks, empowerment, attitudes, judgement, attribution, responses, behaviour	Employee behaviour	
Reputation, media reputation, CSR reputation, reputation risk spillover, reputation penalties, social brand, brand value, brand equity, brand attitude, brand loyalty, brand-cause fit, brand differentiation, brand quality, brand trust, brand positioning, brand framing, brand relevance, brand promise, brand perception, brand performance, competitiveness, familiarity, brand awareness	Brand trust	**Brand equity through CSI activities**
Consumer decisions, consumer expectations, consumer perspectives, trust, consumer relationships, consumer values, loyalty, involvement, pressure, perceptions, knowledge, consumer concerns, consumer cyclicals, consumer intentions, consumer reactions, consumer awareness, consumer ethics, beliefs, goodwill, resistance, purchase intentions, gratitude, activism, advocacy	Consumer behaviour	
Information sharing, negative information, information disclosure, funding information, information processing, environmental information, communication, social media, public information, mixed information, voluntary information, annual report, sustainability report	Communication and reporting	

Source: Author's own

3.4.1. The impact of board composition and corporate governance on corporate social innovation

Extensive research in the fields of strategic management and corporate governance has delved into the relationships between corporate board attributes and the overall performance of a company. In the context of agency theory, boards play a pivotal role in monitoring to ensure that managerial choices are made with shareholders' interests in mind. In this context, the majority of studies investigate the interaction between board characteristics and firm performance, with a primary focus on financial metrics. However, a non-financial facet of a firm's performance is the new focus linking board attributes and corporate social involvement (Endrikat et al., 2021). CSR is viewed as a procedural approach, in which companies voluntarily or mandatorily disclose social, environmental, and economic information to investors, stakeholders, and society, depending on the specific regulations of the country (Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2021).

In the realm of corporate governance, there are two categories of directors: insiders and outsiders. Insiders, who are executive directors, actively participate in managing the company, while outside directors, including independent or institutional directors, are driven by distinct interests and incentives in supervising managerial actions. Independent directors, typically professionals from external workplaces, focus on demonstrating responsible behaviour on their companies' part. To preserve their reputation and credibility, they maintain a professional, non-social relationship with their companies, allowing them to fulfil their duties without undue pressure from either the firms, managers, or dominant shareholders. In contrast, institutional directors frequently represent majority shareholders and may possess professional or personal affiliations with their respective companies. These relationships can influence their motivations and actions in the boardroom (Aresu et al., 2023; Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2019)

Through a meta-analytical investigation, Endrikat et al., (2021) discovered a positive correlation between CSR and board independence, board size, female board representation, and that a CSR committee is in place. Moreover, through a systematic review spanning 27 years, Zaman et al. (2022) underscored the positive impact of board independence and the diversity of board gender on social responsibility. However, contrary to Endrikat et al., (2021), board size and the existence of a board CSR committee did not appear to have any discernible effects and therefore show that these two factors might also be contingent on other factors.

The measurement of board independence involves assessing the proportion of independent directors relative to the total board membership (Zhong et al., 2022). Independent board directors can be categorised into three groups: corporate specialists, service and operations specialists, and social impact advocates. Beyond their role in overseeing management, external directors contribute valuable experience and resources for addressing external issues, including connections with external firms, valuable insights, and guidance, as well as legitimacy and support from external entities. A diversified board brings advantages to firms by enhancing their collective experience, strengthening knowledge, fostering business relationships with external stakeholders, and improving overall social responsibility disclosure. Yet, independent board directors with significant political connections exhibit a negative impact on overall board disclosure (Ramón-Llorens et al., 2019).

The board size is measured by calculating the natural algorithm of the count of board members, as suggested by Zhong et al., (2022), and is typically linked to the firm size. The average board size of the companies under review was 10 members (Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2021). Larger boards tend to engage in higher levels of risk-taking. However, this tendency is mitigated when there are significant institutional holdings, indicating that the relatively weaker oversight provided by larger boards can be complemented by external governance mechanisms (Hussain et al., 2023). The considerations of board diversity and board size acknowledge that boards with diversity and a larger composition have an enhanced capability, in comparison to their counterparts, to adeptly address the concerns of diverse stakeholders and integrate discussions on social and environmental matters into their deliberations (Aresu et al., 2023).

Female board representation is central to several studies (Hussain et al., 2023; Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2019; Saridakis et al., 2020). Female directors play a crucial role on boards, potentially influencing CSR disclosure. The inclusion of women on a board enhances effective monitoring, as women often bring a compassionate and community-oriented approach, thereby contributing a wide range of viewpoints and ideas. (Hussain et al., 2023). Pucheta-Martinez et al. (2019) suggested that with an increase in the representation of independent and institutional female directors on boards, there is an improvement in CSR disclosure. However, it is worth noting that beyond a certain threshold (20.47% and 13.32% respectively), when their representation on boards exceeds a certain level, CSR reporting begins to decline due to a higher level of collusion. This emphasizes that the makeup of boards, especially the presence of institutional and independent female directors, significantly influences CSR reporting. Furthermore, female

directors on boards can serve a dual role in the connection between audit committees and CSR disclosure. While they diminish the impact of the audit committee's presence on CSR disclosure, female directors can strengthen the positive effect of financial expertise among audit committee directors and alleviate the negative impact of non-executive directors on CSR reporting (Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2021).

3.4.2. Chief executive officer's role and the impact on corporate social innovation

According to upper echelons theory, differences between corporate executives might explain disparities in company behaviour and results (Sun & Govind, 2022). These differences encompass a range of factors, such as values, motivations, psychological viewpoints, personalities, demographic traits, and individual experiences, which commonly affect people's decisions in the business world. Furthermore, these differences highlight the importance of gaining a deep understanding of CEOs on a personal level as a means to forecast companies' performance. As the most influential figure within a public company, a CEO wields substantial discretionary authority in shaping the firm's strategic choices (Choi et al., 2023).

As manifested in CSR investments, the following factors can positively or negatively influence decision-making: foreign CEOs in a local setting (Bertrand et al., 2021), the incentivising and executive remuneration (Aresu et al., 2023), CEO duality (Endrikat et al., 2021), and CEOs' intrinsic motivations (Velte, 2022), social values (Boone et al., 2022), integrity (Pham & Tran, 2020), childhood and outside of the work place experiences (Choi et al., 2023), and narcissistic personalities or hubris (Tang et al., 2018). According to the attention-based view, individuals tend to focus on matters that resonate with their personal interests, and this allocation of attention is also influenced by their underlying motivations (Wang et al., 2023).

A noteworthy and contemporary development is the inclusion of CSR standards within executive compensation agreements, also known as CSR contracting. These compensation strategies connect executive remuneration with objectives related to social and environmental performance, encompassing goals like reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving employee well-being and satisfaction, and fostering community development (Aresu et al., 2023). These compensation policies indicate companies' recognition of CSR as a crucial component of their corporate strategy, demonstrating their dedication to considering stakeholder interests in strategic decision-making. In addition, organisations opting for voluntary assurance are inclined to be vigilant in

overseeing management conduct and are deeply committed to the realisation of sustainability objectives (Al-Shaer & Zaman, 2019).

In the business world, all decisions and actions are directed to contribute – directly or indirectly – to companies' bottom lines. However, in contemporary business, there is a growing emphasis on balancing financial and social-economic performance, with the firm's return on assets serving as a measure of this combined performance (Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2019). Consequently, CSR disclosure can be positioned as a central tactic to enhance overall corporate performance that underscores the belief that sustainability is a fundamental metric of CEOs' duties and achievements (Al-Shaer & Zaman, 2019). A strong CSR track record elevates companies' attractiveness and garners greater support from stakeholders, which can translate into long-term performance improvements. Given that every company operates within distinct geographic communities, organisations are subject to the social and environmental impacts stemming from their local surroundings (Choi et al., 2023). Firms excelling in CSR performance tend to enjoy a more positive perception among stakeholders and draw heightened media attention, particularly favourable coverage in their business areas.

Another performance measure that can be adopted and applied by the senior leadership is Corporate Social Performance (CSP), which is directed at the specific actions and conditions within organisations. This encompasses areas like environmental conservation, workplace standards, labour practices, product safety, and concerns related to the well-being of women and minorities. CSP strongly emphasises the role of business processes in executing social responsibility, responding to stakeholder expectations, and observing the outcomes resulting from CSR-related activities (Xia et al., 2023). Both researchers and practitioners highlight how crucial it is to understand "not only the 'why' (principles) of CSR, but also the 'who' (stakeholders), the 'what and how' (processes), and the 'what happened' (outcomes) necessary to translate CSR into CSP" (Napier et al., 2023, p. 62). Ultimately, all the principles, stakeholders, processes, performance measures and outcomes are under the control and oversight of the sitting CEO.

3.4.3. Employee engagement in corporate social innovation activities

CSR has proven to have several organisational advantages, particularly in areas relating to staff, such as hiring, retaining, productivity, and general morale. However, many companies face challenges, such as the adoption of CSR practices by all employees. Ng et al. (2019) revealed that a perception-emotion-attitude-behaviour framework may be used to systematically study and

understand employees' reactions to perceptions of CSR. Thus, employees can display a spectrum of levels of involvement and attitudes ranging from active engagement (committed employee) to active disengagement (indifferent employee) to a totally dissident employee (Secchi & Bui, 2018). While there are common factors influencing engagement across the entire employee spectrum, distinctions arise depending on the level to which employees, rather than senior management, champion corporate responsibility within their businesses (Hejjas et al., 2019). Furthermore, employees and their involvement are critical to CSR success, as they participate in several stakeholder groups, such as being involved in the community, participating in a union, managing the company, or any combination of these positions.

A crucial factor driving employee engagement in CSR initiatives stems from the organisational level, where employers increasingly leverage their organisational culture to motivate and inspire their workforce (Napier et al., 2023). In terms of corporate responsibility, research has underscored that robust CSR-orientated cultures can significantly enhance employees' inclination to adopt sustainable practices (Hejjas et al., 2019). The establishment and maintenance of sustainability-focused organisations arguably depend on recruiting employees who are genuinely enthusiastic about participating in CSR efforts, resulting in a heightened focus on hiring criteria that align with the company's core values.

Numerous organisations acknowledge the pivotal importance of their employees and, as part of their CSR initiatives, direct efforts towards enhancing employee contentment with the aim of fostering engaged staff, bolstering overall productivity, and improving employee retention (Harmsone, 2021). Van Dick et al. (2020) posited that, based on social identity theory, strong connections exist between how employees perceive their organisations' CSR efforts and their overall sense of belonging to the organisations, their emotional commitment to their firms, their enthusiasm for work, and their willingness to exhibit positive behaviours within their organisations. This connection leads to employees aligning with and being drawn to organisations that actively endorse and implement policies benefiting both the environment and society.

Qualitative research highlights that the effectiveness of employee engagement is most pronounced when there is a perceptible alignment between CSR initiatives and fundamental aspects of companies, such as their strategies and operational procedures. This alignment cultivates a deep emotional connection between employees and their organisations, stemming from the harmonisation of the firms' strategies with their CSR endeavours (Rodrigo et al., 2019).

The incorporation of CSR practices within companies serves to cultivate stronger employee commitment. When organisations seamlessly integrate CSR into their overarching mission, employee engagement is further enhanced, as employees perceive these actions as being not only morally justifiable, but also purposeful, prompting greater involvement in socially responsible activities (Úbeda-García et al., 2021).

Corporate volunteering is another mechanism employers can use to get employees involved in CSR activities. Engaging in corporate volunteering, often through pro bono assignments, offers employees motivation and personal opportunities for learning, and these benefits can be valuable for organisations. Moreover, enhancing group interaction can encourage people to view their commitment to social responsibility more favourably (Secchi & Bui, 2018). A connection has also been established between corporate volunteering and enhanced employee retention, which can be attributed to the heightened sense of purpose it fosters at work (Dempsey-Brench & Shantz, 2023; Gatignon, 2022).

3.4.4. *Building brand equity through corporate social innovation activities*

The increasing demand for brands to exhibit greater social responsibility is predominantly a consequence of the swift advancement of information technologies. This digital progress has created a highly interconnected and transparent landscape. Consequently, public sentiment and customer consciousness have escalated regarding brands engaging in harmful practices that adversely affect the environment and society. This enhanced consciousness can lead to punitive measures against such brands (Iglesias et al., 2020), a process also known as corporate social irresponsibility (Zhong et al., 2022). Therefore, corporate branding has undergone a transformation, shifting towards a network-orientated viewpoint where brands are perceived as dynamic corporate assets formed collaboratively by companies and their various stakeholders. Within this framework, CSR has emerged as a pivotal element in shaping appealing and sustainable corporate brands.

However, before promoting organisations through the corporate brand, managers must grasp their organisations' character as perceived and experienced by internal and external stakeholders. Achieving this understanding entails engaging in stakeholder dialogue and building relationships to gauge their perceptions (Maon et al., 2021). One of the primary determinants impacting consumer choices in the realm of social enterprise products and services is their attitude. Additionally, when buying from social companies, consumers consider the opinions of

others from their reference circles. Consequently, social enterprises can enhance their offerings and establish stronger connections with their products by emphasising their goodwill-related nature (Tsai et al., 2020).

On the flip side, investing in CSR without taking into account the specific nature of CSR and its alignment with the brand can potentially harm a company's long-term financial performance. Consequently, luxury companies should exercise caution when implementing CSR initiatives, as there is a risk of unintentionally causing customers to perceive these efforts as superficial, potentially diminishing customer loyalty. This can be addressed through an "inside-out" approach by prioritising employees as key stakeholders by creating a positive and secure work environment for their employees, before outwardly promoting CSR initiatives (Sipilä et al., 2021). A company's involvement in CSR can also alleviate retaliatory consumer responses following a product failure. Thus, CSR engagement can serve as a protective factor, primarily attributed to consumers' sense of appreciation for their companies' prior pro-social initiatives and their influence on these companies' perceived trustworthiness (Kim & Park, 2020). Furthermore, in times of economic downturn, it could be argued that this expenditure is an unaffordable luxury. However, the value of CSR activities can be perceived as a potential strategy for augmenting brand value amid economic recessions (Bhattacharya et al., 2020).

A practice referred to as masked marketing has been done for decades across various media platforms when advertisements are disguised as non-commercial messages. This approach is also known as native advertising. Native CSR advertising represents a significant domain that amalgamates the knowledge and principles of advertising and public relations. However, what sets native CSR advertising apart is its primary aim not to promote tangible products or services, but rather to convey a company's commitment to social betterment.

In today's increasingly competitive business environment, a company's performance is contingent on its capacity to effectively oversee intangible assets, specifically its corporate identity (Maon et al., 2021). Corporate identity encompasses the amalgamation of elements that delineate and convey "the organization's essence", "its core values", "its actions", "its methodologies", and "its future direction" (Tourky et al., 2020). Therefore, corporate identity refers to the interrelated attributes that contribute to an organisation's uniqueness, including its culture, values, mission, senior leadership, employee conduct, founder's influence, and communication practices (Tourky et al., 2020). The unique attributes of an organisation can also be expressed through a finely

crafted communication plan. This involves the synchronisation of all internal and external communication within a company to establish a favourable foundation for building relationships with various stakeholders, both internally and externally (Sorour et al., 2021).

3.5. Theoretical underpinnings of corporate social innovation

The link between business and society presents conceptual challenges for scholars by adhering strictly to the traditional CSR or CSI frameworks and their associated bodies of literature. Contrastingly, others use these terms interchangeably, often neglecting their unique origins and paradigms. Numerous scholars believe that both CSR and CSI seek to achieve an equilibrium between economic prosperity, societal welfare, and environmental stewardship, irrespective of whether they regard environmental matters as an integral component of social issues or a distinct facet of sustainability. Over the past few decades, CSR and CSI have been escalated to a strategic level and should be a crucial element of the "business case". CSR can be regarded as a form of investment, with the potential to not only enhance reputation, but also draw in top talent and stimulate innovation.

The studies under consideration utilise diverse theories, with the pursuit of legitimacy by organisations while manifesting in both internal and external dimensions. Moreover, the applied theories can be classified as dominant, intermediate, or nascent based on their prevalence within the sampled articles. Figure 7 is anchored by the identified themes already discussed, together with the matching theories and their respective categorisation and levels of maturity. Furthermore, this figure highlights both the internal and external legitimacy factors across the various themes.

Based on the established theories referred to in the identified papers, the thematic variable or "theoretical foundations" were considered. Eleven papers represented multiple theories through bibliometric, narrative, SLR or empirical studies. However, an array of different theories (54) was represented, pointing to promising research opportunities of the CSI construct. Regarding the specific dominant theoretical frameworks employed, 22 papers anchored their studies to institutional theory, 16 papers incorporated stakeholder theory and 7 employed agency theory.
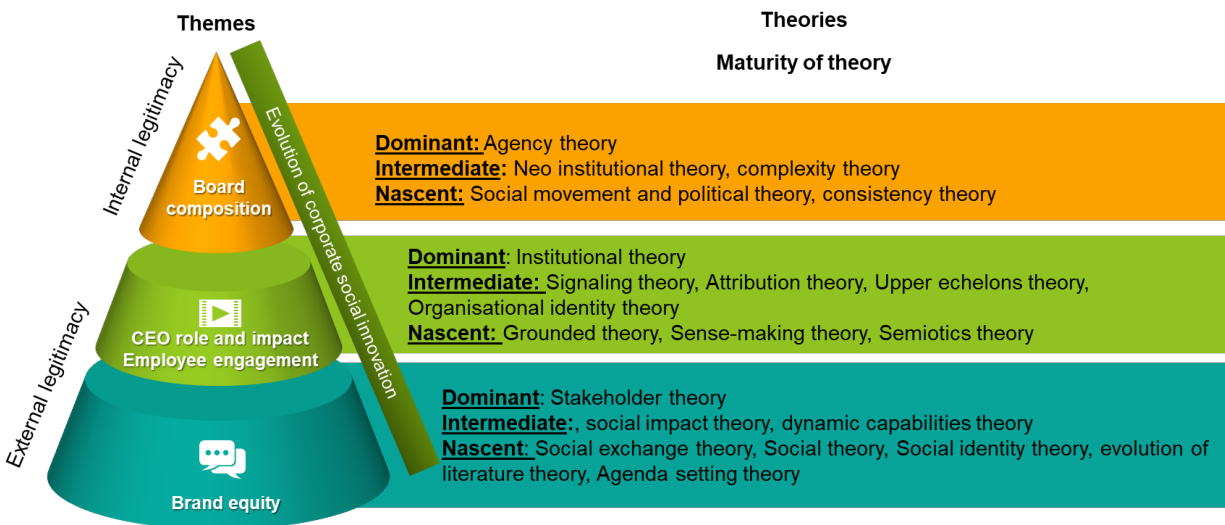
Figure 7: Themes and Theories (Source: Author's own)

3.5.1. Institutional theory

Institutional theory is widely utilised for comprehending how internal and external factors affect organisations. This mature theory posits that organisational behaviour is substantially influenced by the pursuit of organisational legitimacy (Bhuiyan et al., 2023). Furthermore, institutional theory posits that institutional forces have the potential to shape, constrain, or enable the spread and adoption of business practices and innovations within corporate entities (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020).

Based on this institutional theoretical grounding, managers should recognise that engaging in the social sector necessitates acquiring and developing new knowledge and skills. Addressing these issues and introducing novel solutions requires the re-evaluation of established institutions or the creation of entirely new ones (van Wijk et al., 2019). Moreover, it may demand on the implementation of fresh managerial and organisational practices to systematise this knowledge and integrate it in companies for future use. SI projects can provide managers with an expedited means of building relationships with internal and external stakeholders. These relationships that may evolve into strategic resources for businesses and enhance companies' positions within the local community and broader corporate multinational network.

To embed SI in organisations is a complex endeavour. Holmström Lind (2022) suggested that "change-makers" are required to aid this process, namely individuals who are capable of driving

transformational changes and permeating the change at all levels of an organisation. To facilitate this, recruitment strategies and policies need to be reconsidered in an effort to identify potential change-making pioneers who can effectively address social challenges and simultaneously create value for corporations.

3.5.2. Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory was the second highest theory incorporated in 16 papers. This theory views a business as a network of relationships among various groups with vested interests or a stake in the company's activities. This theory posits that the attainment of synergies among stakeholders and CSV depends on how these stakeholders shape their relationships and establish a shared understanding with other participants involved in the organisational value creation process (Iglesias et al., 2020).

Hence, when managing stakeholders with varying motives, it is essential to consider the intricacies of human psychology in cultivating shared values. Stakeholder relations, rather than transactional relationships, are more conducive to collaborative value creation. Furthermore, stakeholder relations are built upon shared understanding derived from principles of shared benefits, fairness, and equity. In contrast, transactional relationships emphasise individual self-interest and financial incentives (Lee & Raschke, 2020).

Given stakeholders' diverse motivations and varying interests, more pressure is placed on management to articulate the desired values in an effort to foster a shared understanding. Adopting this clear communication strategy can enhance not only the stakeholders' organisational identification, but also harness their assistance by increasing the visibility of their connections within the organisational community (Vogler & Eisenegger, 2021).

3.5.3. Agency theory

Agency theory offers a guideline for understanding how to set up relationships so that, even in circumstances when competing interests may arise, agents always behave in the principals' best interests (Endrikat et al., 2021). Furthermore, the agency theory serves as a fundamental framework for comprehending the intricacies of governance structures in organisations. It facilitates an understanding of how potential conflicts of interest can be mitigated through mechanisms that align, monitor, ensure independence, and exercise control (Hussain et al.,

2023). Boards, by incorporating these elements, play a pivotal role in fostering the effective functioning of an organisation while safeguarding the interests of shareholders.

3.5.4. Other intermediate and nascent theories

Following the three dominant theories, the distribution of theories was categorized as either intermediate or nascent judging on the frequency of their application in existing studies. As depicted in Figure 7, 8 studies fell under the classification of intermediate theories, while the remaining 43 studies were categorized as nascent. Some of the exciting new nascent theories employed in the CSI domain is the social identity theory where it is posited that employees exhibit heightened emotional commitment to socially responsible companies they aspire to identify with and are drawn by the allure of this prestigious image (El Akremi et al., 2018). Both the sensemaking and grounded theories anchor CSI by highlighting that cognitive processing doesn't happen in isolation but is intertwined with social contexts, emphasising collaborative meaning and negotiation among individuals. In complex business situations, sensemaking addresses the difficulty of explaining behaviours and facilitating the ongoing creation of collectively constructed understandings (Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022). These nascent theories offer promising future research opportunities and will still contribute to the future evolution of the CSI domain.

3.6. Chapter summary

The literature reviewed revealed some clear trends and valuable insights in the conceptualisation of the CSI construct and the possible new research directions. The evolution from SI to CSI journeys through a well-documented and adopted CSR construct. Therefore, CSR is interchangeably used with CSI by various authors. Apart from the traditional business model clarifications and analysis, the major themes that evolved through this study were the evolution of the CSI construct, the theoretical underpinnings of CSI studies as well as the importance of both the board composition and the CEO's position towards making a lasting difference. In addition, the impact CSI can have on the employee value proposition as well as the underpinning and benefits this can have on the brand equity were analysed.

4. Chapter 4: Discussion of literature review

4.1. Introduction

Over the last decade, SI has increasingly captured the interest of academic researchers, policymakers, and professionals. This heightened curiosity has given rise to a body of academic literature aimed at fostering a better understanding and stimulating the growth of SI initiatives. Over and above the evolution of CSI and the theoretical underpinnings, four key themes were identified in the preceding chapter, which contribute to the current body of knowledge by emphasising businesses' potential in integrating CSI in their overarching strategies. These themes specifically explain the contextual significance of the roles played by senior management and boards in CSI implementation, underscored by the critical aspect of employee engagement and the far-reaching consequences on brand equity.

Although the CSI construct has been well defined, documented and argued over the last two decades, the various strategic aspects underpinning the evolution of the concept, another look through the lens of theory as well as what the future holds for CSI can paint an even more solid backdrop to better understand this construct. While this chapter groups these foundational building blocks by leaning on some seminal papers, it also aims to create some windows for future studies.

4.2. Evolution of corporate social innovation

In the pursuit of a deeper understanding of any subject, it is often beneficial to trace back to its origins. Hence, to enhance comprehension of CSI, it became imperative to delve into the fundamental elements that form the basis of this concept.

4.2.1. Tracing the roots of corporate social innovation

SI has been in the making for a few decades. In the early 20th century, the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation started to engage in philanthropic activities to address societal issues (McCarthy, 2013). Since the 1950s, businesses have traditionally focused on maximising profits in an ethical manner, while businesses recognised their responsibilities to various stakeholders and the concept of CSR was established (Velte, 2022). However, a significant shift occurred in the 1980s, during the Reagan administration in the US, where private institutions and companies were encouraged to address societal issues (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020). Furthermore, during this period, an increase in environmental concerns led to the rise of

environmental sustainability initiatives. The 1990s marked the rise of globalisation for corporations, increasing their global visibility and raising concerns about reputational risk (Post, 2013). During this decade, CSR gained momentum through widespread adoption. In the United Kingdom, under Tony Blair's leadership, there was a stronger emphasis on improving disclosure and publishing social and environmental reports.

A pivotal moment came in 1999, when Kanter and Parker introduced the concept of CSI. This represented a significant evolution from the traditional CSR model. CSI not only focused on providing sustainable solutions to long-standing societal problems, but also aimed to generate profitable changes for businesses (Kanter & Parker, 1999). This evolution continued in the 21st century with the emergence of social entrepreneurship, emphasising the use of business strategies to address social and environmental challenges (Saebi et al., 2019). Subsequently, in 2000, the United Nations (UN) Global Compact was established with the objective of aligning corporate activities with principles encompassing human rights, labour, environmental sustainability, and anti-corruption. (Orzes et al., 2018). In 2015, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals to address global social and environmental issues by setting clear targets and goals to be reached by 2030 (Hák et al., 2016)

Examining the historical roots of CSI yields, a thorough understanding that is beneficial for making strategic decisions, drawing lessons from the past, and coordinating projects with the demands and expectations of the modern society. Underlined by this SLR, CSI continues to evolve with increasing emphasis on sustainability, social responsibility, and innovation.

4.2.2. Adoption of corporate social innovation by corporates

Existing SI literature has shown a noticeable absence of the role of MNCs, despite a growing but fragmented body of work in this area (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Phillips et al., 2015). Ideas such as CSR and corporate citizenship have emerged to signify companies' dedication to tackling social issues; however, the incorporation of MNCs in the discourse on SI remains restricted (Mirvis et al., 2016), even though they possess the potential to significantly scale business and both social and environmental impact.

Nevertheless, the increasing forces of globalisation, marked by the global expansion of MNCs, have brought environmental and social issues to the forefront of corporate responsibility. As a result of social and environmental scandals that have damaged the reputations of several MNCs,

ethical questions have been raised. Corporations are facing heightened expectations from various internal and external stakeholders to demonstrate greater responsibility, particularly in the realms of environmental sustainability and human rights (Holmström Lind et al., 2022).

At the World Economic Forum in Davos Switzerland in 1999, Kofi Annan suggested creating a global compact to humanise the global market. His plea to the global community:

> Globalization is a fact of life. But I believe we have underestimated its fragility. The problem is this. The spread of markets outpaces the ability of societies and their political systems to adjust to them, let alone to guide the course they take. History teaches us that such an imbalance between the economic, social and political realms can never be sustained for very long. (Annan, 1999)

Traditionally, the creation of social value was seen as the domain of non-profit organisations, businesses, or government sectors, with limited involvement from MNCs. However, there is a growing consensus among scholars, practitioners, non-profit organisations, governmental organisations, and even international bodies such as the UN that MNCs should play a more important part in social value creation. This call for involvement stems from the vast reach and abundant resources at the disposal of MNCs, making them central actors in addressing and achieving social value creation (Holmström Lind et al., 2020).

In essence, MNCs have a unique and pivotal role to play in CSI or social value creation due to their global presence and substantial resources. Their involvement is not only driven by external pressures, but also by a recognition of their potential to make a meaningful impact on global issues, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable development outlined by international bodies, such as the UN. Consequently, MNCs are increasingly being called upon to contribute to CSI initiatives, not just for ethical reasons, but also as a means to leverage their capabilities for the benefit of the environment and society.

4.2.3. Corporate social innovation – a strategic business imperative

Businesses are primarily driven by the objective of making a profit and adding value to their stakeholders and shareholders. Although this single profit focus was sufficient a few decades ago, corporations are realising that more needs to be done to operate a long-term sustainable business. While no magic bullet exists to achieve this success, CSI has been identified as a

possible gateway to enhance a company's reputation, access new markets, attract and retain talent, mitigate risks, drive innovation, strengthen stakeholder relationships, ensure regulatory compliance, and promote long-term sustainability. Different levels of intensity, impact, and value are added to the bottom line by these value drivers.

Global corporations face the challenge of harmonising their overarching corporate purpose, reputation, and strategy with the unique dynamics of local contexts. An organisation's capacity to strategically perceive and address emerging opportunities and threats contributes to its competitive edge. A competitive advantage is attained when an organisation outperforms its current and prospective competitors (Bhuiyan et al., 2023). Therefore, CSI involves an ongoing assessment of a company's impact and connections with stakeholders and the environment, enabling senior leadership to recognise and react to ever changing strategic prospects and obstacles. However, the key corporate dilemma lies in effectively integrating CSI initiatives with the pursuit of corporate objectives (Herrera, 2015).

CSI goes beyond internal enhancements achieved through effective management and the integration of internal functions. It also encompasses external transformations such as collaborating with outside parties like governments, non-governmental organisations, and civil society. These partnerships are designed to strategically achieve competitive advantages and realise both economic and social benefits by innovating new concepts, institutions, operational methods, products, services, business models, and processes (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020).

Another debate in literature towards a strategic imperative is whether the implementation of CSI should be voluntary or mandatory (Bernini & La Rosa, 2023; Jackson et al., 2020). This debate revolves around issues of flexibility, alignment with corporate values, reputation, and accountability, as reflected in Table 10. Voluntary CSI through business self-regulation provides organisations with greater flexibility and initiative, but may result in inconsistency, lack of accountability, and complacency. In contrast, mandatory CSI activities ensure uniformity and accountability, but can also reduce an organisation's freedom and lead to tokenistic efforts and irresponsible practices (Jackson et al., 2020). The best approach would be a combination of these two methods. This combination as shown in Table 10, would enable it to serve as both a means of state enforcement or subtle influence and as a form of self-regulation influenced by market forces and interactions between companies and their stakeholders (Bernini & La Rosa, 2023; Sahasranamam et al., 2022).

Table 10: Mandatory, voluntary or a combination

	Strict and traditional government rule	Business self-regulation	Combination model
Scope	Mandatory	Voluntary	Balance between self-regulation and adhering to legislation
Content	Legislation and rules created by government	Enterprise generated	Enterprise generated rules guided by legislation and values
Implementation	Regulatory	Engaging the market and stakeholders	Implementation driven by accredited partnerships and societal and stakeholder interests
Regulatory compromises	• Rigor – minimum requirements • Inflexibility – one-size-fits-all • Avoiding irresponsibility	• Optimal practice for adaptability • Minimum common denominator • Emphasise and promote responsibility	Leading and shaping the social innovation and responsibility landscape by making an impact

Source: Adapted from Jackson et al. (2020)

The trade-offs between voluntary and mandatory implementation of CSI will involve balancing flexibility and standardisation, innovation and compliance as well as engagement and obligation. A further consideration will be the costs, potential benefits, customisation required, and overall motivation within the organisational context. Therefore, organisations need to carefully weigh these trade-offs based on their values, industry dynamics, and the expectations of their stakeholders.

4.2.4. The business model to facilitate social impact

By aiming for commercial success while also desiring to fulfil a social purpose, businesses are increasingly confronted with the challenge of reconciling multiple institutional logics by overseeing two seemingly opposite foci of social and commercial value creation. Thus, apart from operating a responsible business, these competing institutional logics can lead to conflicts and tensions within organisations (Ambos et al., 2020). To address this challenge, the concept of business models has evolved from primarily focusing on commercial value to being recognised as a tool that can accommodate and balance various institutional logics and their distinct goals.

To this end, the literature identifies two concepts flowing from these institutional logics. One is the hybrid business model, which is where organisations combine elements from several institutional logics also known as institutional plurality or ambidextrous organisations (Hota et al., 2023; Weerawardena et al., 2021) and the other is the concept of CSV, where "shared value is based

on mutual, positive economic and societal benefits relative to costs, and hence integral to long term competitiveness" (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020, p. 2). In addition, it was observed that numerous studies were utilising "CSR", "social innovation", "sustainability", and "CSV" interchangeably. Consequently, the term CSV was included in the original search string to ensure a comprehensive search on CSI. Both these concepts of hybrid organisations and CSV warrants further attention.

Hybrid organisations navigate a complex landscape by juggling two or more institutional logics that may be conflicting. These competing logics can lead to conflicts arising from differing objectives and approaches, potentially resulting in competition for limited resources like financial investment and managerial attention (Klein et al., 2021). Moreover, the diversity of objectives and approaches can create ambiguity in performance measurement and necessitate accountability to a wide range of stakeholders. Furthermore, to retain legitimacy, the challenge is to balance these logics in an attempt to avoid drifting too far towards one side at the expense of the other, also referred to as "mission drift" (Esposito et al., 2023; Ramus & Vaccaro, 2017; Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2021). Nevertheless, the simultaneous pursuit of profit and social objectives necessitates a precise alignment of two distinct logics that must integrate every aspect of a company's activities, choices, and policies (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

The term CSV was shaped by a seminal paper of Porter and Kramer (2011) and, at the time, was a significant development in the idea of promoting profitability, while resolving societal issues. More recently, Menghwar and Daood (2021) defined CSV as "the strategic process through which corporations can solve a social problem which is aligned to their value chain while pursuing economic profits" (p. 473). Consequently, CSV can be seen as an evolutionary addition to existing literature, emphasising that business success cannot be sustained at the expense of the broader society it merely serves and represents a strategic approach wherein corporations transform societal challenges into business opportunities (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2022). CSV also provides a comprehensive framework for integrating social objectives strategically, emphasising its ongoing nature and the necessity to align social issues with the core value chain to yield economic profits. In essence, CSV highlights the synergy between profitability and societal impact, stressing that it is not a one-time endeavour, but an enduring and strategic process (Camilleri et al., 2023; Menghwar & Daood, 2021).

Although CSI and CSV recognise the need to address societal issues and seek out strategic solutions while encouraging community involvement, CSV is more frequently associated with being primarily concerned with operational procedures and policies orientated towards financial success. Contrastingly, CSI is a broader concept and more comprehensive notion that aims to meet societal needs through creative projects and services that entail the coordinated creation of fresh thoughts, ideas, and connections (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020). Societal challenges are dynamic and multifaceted. Therefore, this holistic approach positions CSI as a dynamic and evolving concept that can adapt to a wide range of complex societal challenges by fostering innovation and creativity.

4.3. Corporate social innovation through the lens of theory

One objective of this study was to pinpoint the academic disciplines that impact the theoretical underpinnings of CSI. Therefore, this paper examined literature explaining how MNCs are portrayed concerning their participation in SI activities. Through an inductive content analysis of literature, four key characteristics emerged as discussed in Chapter 3. The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of CSI were observed to be frequently fragmented. Across various papers, a total of 54 different theories were employed, with institutional, stakeholder, and agency theories being the mature and prominent theories. The balance of the theories can either be seen as intermediate or nascent, depending on the frequency of use across the identified articles. This pointed towards a need for a more solid theoretical grounding in the study of MNC engagement in SI.

Since the previous two SLRs by Dionisio and de Vargas (2020) and Holmström Lind et al., (2022), the number of studies applying a quantitative research method has increased to more than half (55%) of the literature under review. This surge in quantitative research is a good reflection of the maturation of the field, as it became increasingly grounded in theoretical frameworks. Data for these studies were primarily gathered through surveys and reputable data sources.

With the highest number of papers using institutional theory (22), this mature theory offers a lens through which to view how external institutional forces shape organisations' behaviour, including their dynamic capabilities development. Organisations often adapt their dynamic capabilities in response to these pressures to maintain legitimacy, manage resources, and align with institutional norms. Understanding this relationship is essential for organisations seeking to thrive in changing environments, while maintaining their acceptance through social and regulatory legitimacy

(DesJardine et al., 2023; Haack et al., 2021). With an increased emphasis on external collaborations to enhance impact and promote sustainability, there is an opportunity for deeper exploration of the CSI concept within the framework of dynamic capabilities theory.

Dynamic capabilities, denoting an organisations capacity to incorporate, build, and adjust internal and external skills amidst a rapidly changing environment, are essential to the process of innovating business models (Teece, 2018). Considering this imperative for adaptability and transformation, dynamic capabilities are crucial to empower companies to skilfully design, enhance, and reshape their business models. This is especially critical in the realm of MNCs, where the harmonisation of their approaches with sustainable strategies is paramount so that they can stay competitive within the continually evolving global environment. This points in the direction of promising studies anchored in the dynamic capabilities' theory.

The next three highest represented theories, namely stakeholder, agency, and signalling theories, align well with the four themes identified and discussed in Chapter 3. While signalling and stakeholder theories primarily examine how companies disseminate information to shape or inform the perceptions of stakeholders and shareholders (Jakob et al., 2022), agency theory centres on the principle that investors delegate the responsibility of managing a firm to the company's managers. Consequently, agency theory highlights the need of effective corporate governance in ensuring this delegation is carried out effectively.

A noteworthy evolution in this field is the increasing prominence of the upper echelons' theory. This theory underscores the significance of directors' demographic backgrounds and experiences in influencing their values and conduct. These factors can significantly affect not only the composition and dynamics of the board, but also a company's overall performance (Sun & Govind, 2022; Tang et al., 2018).

Theory selection and evolution play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of a field of study. Therefore, the importance of dynamic capabilities, signalling, agency, and upper echelons theories is anticipated to keep expanding in the future, driven by the heightened focus on external partnerships, the examination of board compositions, the influence CEOs can have on CSI, the role and significance of employees in the CSI process, and CSI's potential impact on enhancing brand equity to gain a competitive edge.

4.4. Bridging corporate social initiatives and responsibility

During the past two decades, both CSR and CSI have seen significant growth. Researchers have accumulated a substantial body of knowledge concerning businesses' role in promoting social and environmental well-being alongside economic prosperity. While some studies have used CSR and CSI interchangeably, others assert that these concepts emerged independently through distinct pathways. Nevertheless, they have evolved to share similar definitions, underlying assumptions, theoretical frameworks, and measurement methods.

The corporate adoption of SI has taken on various conceptual forms, including CSI, CSV, social value creation, and CSR. Defined as the voluntary integration of social and environmental considerations into their operations and engagements with stakeholders (Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2020), CSR primarily centres on harmonising corporate social and environmental initiatives with the core business purpose and values of companies. This concept aligns with the principles of CSI and often leads to discussions about "strategic CSR" (Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2020) and "political CSR" (Ingenhoff & Marschlich, 2019). On an institutional level, CSR has already become deeply ingrained. Consequently, when MNCs introduce new practices, it gradually encourages other companies to follow suit, resulting in a higher degree of consistency in their business practices. Striving for consistency is crucial in establishing productive collaborative relationships with other enterprises or institutions, thereby contributing to a competitive advantage

CSI is also frequently used in studies and assimilated for corporate social irresponsibility. While this CSI has been viewed traditionally as the direct antithesis of CSR, contemporary scholars argue that this CSI permutation should not be perceived as a mere mirror image of CSR. In fact, some suggest that the detrimental consequences of this CSI on a company may outweigh the positive impacts that CSR can have (Hategan et al., 2018; Sun & Govind, 2022).

Therefore, CSR has progressed significantly from its modest origins and has emerged as a pivotal concept that balances sustainability with profit generation. CSI is anchored on the same foundation and the act of reporting these initiatives to stakeholders and the company plays a similar fundamental role in bestowing organisational legitimacy. Hence, the majority of the reviewed papers freely incorporated the concept of CSR, often employing it in conjunction with CSI and using the terms interchangeably with the common objective of achieving both societal benefits and business success.

4.5. Moving the corporate social innovation field forward

The study's findings undeniably demonstrate the ongoing evolution of the field and the emergence of the CSI concept. There is no question regarding whether a company should engage in and or commit to CSI. While some organisations choose to do so voluntarily, others are compelled by legal requirements and peer pressure (Jackson et al., 2020). Furthermore, the evolution of literature has shown that CSI is clearly defined and more readily adopted by companies. Nevertheless, CSI is a multifaceted concept that holds varying interpretations for individuals across different global regions and, as such, it will continue to undergo evolution. The continuous evolution in this field is not only exciting but also holds significant value for the continued advancement of CSI. A few notable developments will be emphasized.

Firstly, the focus and objective have shifted into a transformative phase where CSI is seen as a more integral component of the business model. Accordingly, the renewed focus is shifting to the refinement and enablement of the concept through the scrutiny and analysis of management practices by highlighting the different contributors and detractors. Additionally, attention is directed towards how the adoption and execution of these practices not only yield responsible social and environmental results, but also seamlessly integrate into companies' competitive advantage in an ever-evolving business landscape (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2022).

Secondly, even while some businesses have already incorporated SI into their plans, there is still a good deal of doubt from internal and external stakeholders about the underlying reasons why businesses participate in social efforts. The main aim is to assure all parties involved that the company's actions align with its professed values and principles. Therefore, the goal is to demonstrate a genuine commitment to social and environmental objectives to all stakeholders. Hence, the onus is on leaders to define new terms of engagement and work to persuade employees to embrace them in an effort to ensure a clear alignment between their companies' words and actions (Napier et al., 2023). Although CSI might be part of a company's strategy and supported by senior management, if employees are not fully engaged, the impact of implementation will be diluted (Hejjas et al., 2019). Employees are pivotal as they do not just represent their companies, but are also essential within various other stakeholder groups like communities, management, associations or combinations of these roles. Therefore, the importance of employee engagement is noted in the identified literature, which highlights that this renewed focus on employee engagement is steering research in this direction.

Thirdly, the assimilation of CSI into companies' strategies hinges on the influential qualities of board members and CEOs, which can significantly contribute to the conception, execution, success, and overall impact of CSI (Sun & Govind, 2022). Hence, the upper echelons of companies' organisational structures are currently under extensive scrutiny in literature because they are regarded as the pivotal gateway, conduit, and driving force behind the achievement of effective CSI initiatives. The heightened attention on the upper management structure acknowledges that the effectiveness and origin of any strategy depend on this particular team of individuals.

Lastly, customers are increasingly prioritising socially responsible consumption, and have higher expectations and demands for brands to engage in socially responsible activities. This transition is significantly influenced by the swift progress of information technologies, which have fostered a more interconnected and transparent environment. A brand and its customers can be viewed as collaborative business partners, and the nature of their mutually beneficial interactions is shaped by their individual perceptions of trust. In this context, trust can be described as the belief that all business partners will consistently demonstrate honesty and dependability in their engagements (Iglesias et al., 2020). This trust relationship is fragile, and customers can very quickly become sceptical if a company's practices are perceived as insincere or as being used as a cosmetic tool or even a reputation-repair tactic. Customers are now better informed, highly connected, vocal, possess a range of choices, and seek consistency and authenticity from the brands they support and endorse (Sorour et al., 2021). When executed effectively, CSI can yield significant benefits for a company.

4.6. Chapter summary

This chapter explained how existing literature shaped the CSI landscape and created the backdrop for the research questions. Moreover, this chapter sought to outline the evolution of CSI as a subject of research and methodically provided an analysis of the research results. The chapter also looks at a few notable and exciting developments in this field. The following chapter leans on the study's discoveries, draws conclusions, addresses its limitations, and offers some future recommendations.

5. Chapter 5: Conclusion, recommendations and limitations

5.1. Introduction

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the influence exerted by companies, particularly MNCs, on the global landscape, it was essential to delve into the historical roots and recurring trends. Our world faces increasingly intricate challenges on social and environmental fronts, necessitating the active engagement of more stakeholders to bring about lasting transformation. The private sector might face increasing pressure to step up and address these critical global challenges. This heightened expectation for a more prominent role is not solely driven by advocacy organisations and oversight bodies, but also stems from the expectations of customers, investors, business partners, and employees. Hence, SI emerges as a well-defined and potent mechanism for catalysing change. In this study, a methodical structured literature review was employed to collect and assess the scholarly works and theoretical perspectives concerning CSI over the past six years. The identified research findings were categorised into distinct themes to offer a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of CSI research.

Furthermore, the principal aim of this study was to streamline and amalgamate existing research, establishing a solid basis for future investigations in this field. This SLR was conducted with a specific emphasis on the evolution of CSI over the past six years (2018–2023), following the publication of two SLRs by Dionisio and de Vargas in 2020 and Holmström Lind et al. in 2022. However, seminal papers published prior to this defined period were included to underpin the foundational building blocks of this construct. In accordance with the research questions (i.e., How has the definition of CSI evolved? What are the theoretical underpinnings of the CSI construct? What are the key themes evolving?), this chapter gathers and presents the study's key aspects and insights and highlights the limitations and possible directions for future research.

5.2. Directions for future research

In line with the recognised significance and theme of brand equity, the swiftly changing landscape of today is driven by global connectivity and the ubiquitous rise of digital media. On a global scale, this dynamic shift is transferring information and decision-making authority directly into the hands of consumers. While certain articles within the sample recognised this dynamic trend, there remains variability in terms of the frequency, medium, and authenticity of disseminating corporate messages tailored to the specific nuances of diverse regions where multinational corporations operate. Therefore, effective and transparent communication with stakeholders emerges as a

pivotal component in the planning, execution, and achievement of CSR initiatives. Given the vital importance of this nuanced understanding for businesses' brand equity and success, conducting more comprehensive studies and developing guidelines could prove highly beneficial. This will allow questions like: What are the major differences between internal and external communication messaging? How effective is CSI communication on brand identity? What is the most optimal frequency of communication?

Considering the multidisciplinary nature of CSI, the data presented a multitude of interesting theories, totalling 54, which were not exhaustively explored in this study. While the most prevalent theories were reviewed, numerous fascinating and pioneering new theories were incorporated and tested across the studies. Consequently, to enhance the comprehension and progress in this area, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework could assist in promoting the collaboration and amalgamation of the insights from these diverse disciplines. The dynamic capabilities theory holds a lot of promise for future studies, because this theory emphasizes the pivotal role of collaborative capabilities, asserting that they are essential for acquiring resources from partners and facilitating learning processes. Interesting questions might be: What key organisational capabilities are required to embed and nurture CSI? What skills and training are required for senior management to enable the effective adoption of CSI?

Since MNCs operate in various countries, the highest number of studies were located across multiple countries, majority of which are located in the Global North. Single-territory studies were also predominantly concentrated in the Global North. Although the number of studies in the Global South has increased, there remains potential for further research to concentrate primarily on the developing Global South. Thus, to gain deeper insights into the functioning of CSI within diverse organisations and markets, it would be valuable to conduct thorough in-depth case studies and even longitudinal studies with MNCs that have a presence in both the North and the South. Questions through conducting in-depth case studies that can be considered: Can the implementation of the same CSI project across the North and the South have the same impact? Are there specific initiatives that are better suited and more impactful for specific territories?

Not all studies disclose the specific characteristics and details of their SI projects. An opportunity exists to gain valuable insights by exploring the categorisation of SI types along a spectrum, ranging from minor incremental changes to more profound, disruptive, transformative, and sustainable ones. Given the readiness of a company, this insight can guide decision-making

regarding the choice of SI initiatives and their potential impact. Interesting questions can be: What kind of initiatives have the biggest and most lasting impact? What are the key ingredients for delivering a sustainable CSI project?

While the research indicates a significant increase in the utilisation of quantitative approaches, the primary data sources remained reliable, publicly available databases, rather than specific survey studies. This suggests an avenue for further exploration, including the development of impact and performance measurement tools, the analysis of cause-and-effect relationships, and the potential to further shape the practical implementation of novel concepts. Possible questions can be: How do you quantify the value of impact delivered? How do you quantify the value of communication on brand equity?

5.3. Limitations of the study

Like other research, this study also adheres to the approach outlined by Snyder (2019) for conducting a SLR. As no scientific endeavour is ever devoid of errors, this study is also not excluded from limitations. Although the SLR methodology adheres to a stringent, well-structured, and thorough process, there always remains a possibility that certain significant studies might have been inadvertently omitted. Despite employing a thorough research string and accessing extensive academic databases, it is possible that pertinent literature may have been inadvertently overlooked due to the omission of specific keywords during the search process. Taking the identified themes into account, together with this fast-evolving domain, future studies might find value in widening the search terms with more targeted words from the respective themes.

Furthermore, the study excluded non-peer-reviewed sources, such as grey literature and books, which restricted the breadth of materials available for analysis. Moreover, the inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed articles by applying a quality filter of three-star and higher-rated articles. Several of these studies (410) were published in lower-tier journals and by aiming to encompass a diverse range of interdisciplinary literature, this approach may have led to a compromise in the reliability of certain cited results when seeking broader generalisation. In addition, utilising inductive content analysis to identify themes may not be the most suitable approach for a solitary researcher. Apart from the limited timeframe and volume of papers analysed, the recognition of themes is constrained by an individual perspective and comprehension.

5.4. Conclusion

The merit of the SLR method is its ability to leverage prior CSI research, while also considering recently published studies. This review has presented an updated summary of CSI through literature published between 2018 and 2023. Several significant themes have surfaced from this review, calling for more in-depth and targeted research to make theoretical and practical contributions. In addition, the research revealed emerging CSI theories that demand further attention. This study primarily aimed to gather the most recent literature, identify significant design elements, such as theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and utilise the background information to enhance the understanding of crucial aspects and foundational building blocks within CSI.

This study offers valuable contributions to the field of CSI. First, by linking and comparing it to the traditional concept of CSR, it promotes a more comprehensive understanding and wider acceptance of CSI within various corporations and industries. Second, it advocates for CSI to be integrated into a company's strategy, rather than being viewed as a peripheral activity. Third, this research underscores the interdisciplinary nature of CSI, spanning social and environmental domains, which inspires the development of numerous innovative theoretical approaches. Fourth, the study emphasises the significance of the composition and qualities of top management and the board in enhancing the effectiveness and overall sustainability of CSI. Fifth, it emphasises the pivotal role of employees as important stakeholders in the adoption and implementation of CSI, and how this can influence a company's overall well-being. Sixth, to identify and execute impactful social projects, this research highlights that it is essential to acquire and improve organisational knowledge and skills. To achieve this, this process may entail the adoption of innovative, organisational, and managerial practices, the recognition of individuals capable of driving change, or even the recruitment of professionals with the necessary skill set. Lastly, when implemented and communicated correctly, CSI was found to be a valuable contributor to brand equity and the creation of a competitive benefit.

In retrospect, the value of this SLR lies in its capacity to maintain a structured methodology, while retaining a degree of adaptability. The initial search yielded a substantial 6 301 articles, indicating both the growth of the field and the expanding body of available research. To enhance transparency, it was imperative to maintain a systematic and well-documented approach at every stage of the process. It is important to note that this study did not follow a linear path; instead, it involved iterative considerations, with regular revisions and updates to the review protocol throughout the process.

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