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Consumer Perceptions and Corporate Social Responsibility: A Comprehensive Literature Review

Minhajul Islam¹, Abdullah Al Rian², Irma Yazreen Binti Md Yusoff³ and Sabina Yasmen Semul⁴

¹ Faculty of Economic and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), 94300, Kotasamarahan; linkoonlinkoon100@gmail.com.

² Faculty of Economic and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), 94300, Kotasamarahan; abdullahalrian521@gmail.com.

³ Faculty of Economic and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), 94300, Kotasamarahan; myiyazreen@unimas.my.

⁴ Faculty of Business, International American University, 90010, Los Angeles, CA; sabinabarisal96@gmail.com.

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Address for Correspondence:

Minhajul Islam, Faculty of Economic and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), 94300, Kotasamarahan.
(linkoonlinkoon100@gmail.com)

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to present a classification of literature on consumer perspectives toward corporate social responsibility (CSR) between 2009 to 2020 and providing a comprehensive bibliography and future research guideline. Based on a systematic review, a range of online database was searched to collect research papers from various journals, which were then classified based on different categories. Results have shown that 62 out of 100 journal articles were conducted in developed countries, and 38 of them were in developing countries. This study also shows a growing line of research published from 2009 to 2020 and has identified that 91 out of 100 papers were conducted with empirical while 9 of it were conducted with conceptual method in those studies. In fact, 83 out of 100 CSR research articles have used CSR as an independent variable whereas 6 of it as a dependent variable. The findings are generalized only to a specific population of selected databases for a given period. In fact, academicians can use this paper as a study instrument for analysing the current nature of research in this area.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility, Corporate-credibility, Consumer behaviour, Consumer perception

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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a subjective matter which is now growing in the education and management sector, despite it being an old theory in the business enterprise (Maon et al. 2010; Peloza and Shang 2011). Previously, businesses fundamental criterion to measure their credibility were evaluated based on their financial performances, hence, placing those with higher-margin financially at higher ranks. The focal factor of profit-driven organisations was the maximisation of shareholder's wealth, and this has only dimmed CSR's emphasis. Today, however, has most international firms practicing CSR principles proactively, and researchers are now centralising their focus on the environmental protection or financial performance aspect of it (Yoon and Tello, 2009; Surroca et al., 2010; Hsu, 2011; Yu and Chen, 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2018).

According to Deng (2012), the relationship between CSR and customer responses is no longer an easy logic where, "One good return deserves another, what goes around comes around." Generally, a better commitment to consumers and society can be achieved through socially responsible acts as it enhances the purchasing effectiveness at once. Previously, traditional product elements have morphed consumer's opinion on businesses, but today, consumers are wiser to base their purchasing decision on CSR principles (Dawkins & Lewis, 2003). Hence, social values have been added as an objective into corporate's approach (Dawkins & Fraas, 2013), which not only earns them more purchases but patron's satisfaction and loyalty at the same time.

As aforementioned in the literature, CSR policies were implemented voluntarily for companies to operate while concurrently easing the production outcomes on society. So, another competitor's distinctive aspect would not be represented by its CSR but rather by its business ethics aimed at the mitigation of damage caused by this. However, applying CSR measures will generate a price for the remaining customer because consumers tend to observe businesses action development and based their purchasing decision on these outcomes. Hence, this is the most extensive contribution of this study which is to show that CSR entails competitive differentiation (Servera-Francés, & Fuentes-Blasco, 2016). Predominantly, consumer's behaviour variable is affected by CSR activities because they based their purchasing and consumption decision on the company's CSR's goals (Du et al. 2011; Choi & Ng 2011). In 2011, Peloza and Shang concluded that the relationship shared by the consumers and CSR is directive, hence, prompting that some variables may have played a mediating role.

On a positive note, most companies have started to recognize the significance of CSR recently, especially on societal wellbeing. Hence, companies' performance is now being measured with their CSR efforts rather than their financial performances. According to Lim (2011), these type of scores are being carefully monitored through independent watchdogs such as the Malaysia Stock Exchange (Bursa Malaysia) in a local context. In fact, some nations have already made it compulsory to inculcate it into their domestic business report, as well as, publishing their CSR ratings to public. This reaffirms the relevance of CSR in present-day business and management. Furthermore, a lot of research has been found linking CSR to customers loyalty, especially with its proper application and this was proven by a CSR's related literature contemporary evaluation (Aasad, 2010; Pakseresht, 2010). Nevertheless, CSR initiatives are significantly designed for the business community where the researchers have examined the interactions of its effect on the product types (Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2012).

2. Discover the relationship between CSR with the consumer perspective.

Researchers and companies are now increasingly paying attention to CSR programs to gain feedback from consumers. Despite the companies and researchers attempt on consumers responses to CSR, it remains unclear how consumers discern CSR (Oberseder et al. 2014). In fact, according to Matten and Moon (2004), to further understand consumer behaviorism better, it has been developed as a separate study in the late 1960s where the studies are based on the consumers' cognitive paradigms, and its evaluation was based on consumer's decision-making process, which are need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase behavior. Only a few studies have observed in this order and the few CSR components that were addressed has shown a limited view on the consumers' responses to CSR. Based on the consumer perspective, the decision-making process as deemed by the CSR is as follow.

2.1 Need recognition (perception, awareness, and knowledge)

According to Kim (2019), CSR knowledge is described as an individual's awareness and understanding of a corporation's CSR pursuits, be it directly or indirectly. This stage also highlights that the consumers 'recognition of a

company's CSR pursuits may also nourish them with benefits in a positive manner, customer-company congruence, and purchase intention (Tien et al, 2011; Lee & Shin, 2010). However, there have been thought differences regarding consumers' stages of awareness and knowledge on CSR activities. Hence, Kim (2019) believed that if consumers have enough knowledge of a company's CSR, then it will gain a positive reputation.

2.2 Information search and evaluation (attitude, beliefs)

A consumer's attitude and beliefs are influenced by their research and evaluation of their options, be it implicitly or explicitly. Researchers suggested that there is a positive connection between CSR activities and consumer attitudes towards an organisation (Ellen et al, 2006). Hence, companies that inculcate CSR principles gain more positive reviews, followed by reputation, price, product quality, consumer's organisation identification, company's activities suitability, and CSR proactive and reactive activities (Lu, Wei & Li, 2015; Ferreira & Ribeiro, 2017; Magnusson et al, 2015; Groza et al, 2011).

2.3 Purchase (intention and behaviour)

Purchasing is measured as purchase intention and behaviour and in 2001, Sen and Bhattacharya stated that CSR influences consumers purchase behaviour more than their attitudes and beliefs as it is more complex and flexible. In fact, an increase in CSR activity identification simultaneously increases the brand image on consumer purchase intention (Fang, Koh, Chen, 2017).

2.4 Post-purchase (satisfaction and loyalty)

Customer satisfaction has been described as the customer's standard experience with the company meanwhile, according to Fornell (1992), CSR and perceived value have been proven to be essential antecedents to the customers' satisfaction. In fact, customers tend to be more with socially responsible companies (Servera and Fuentes, 2016). Several researchers have argued that CSR is one of the keys to a company's credibility that can structure customer evaluations on the brand and determine their intention of repurchasing which can lead to the structuring of a long-term relationship with the company (Markovic et al. 2018; Singh et al. 2012).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is 1) to summarize the current research pattern explicitly based on the literature reviews and 2) to discover the primary gaps in the literature and 3) to suggest a future research agenda. This study presents a review of CSR and consumer's research published in academic journals from 2009 to 2020, as well as, conducting an overview of the applied research approach which is given in Figure 1 (Fatma & Rahman, 2015). A systematic research procedure has been followed to identify the research articles from various journals by selecting several keywords as aforementioned in the abstract to which resulted in 120 articles from 51 journals. Cross-checking between the keywords and the content analysis of these articles were done to ensure the alignment of it with this research, hence, leaving behind only 100 articles that are relevant to this study. However, literature reports, working papers, master and doctoral dissertations and textbook are not included as both academicians and practitioners' often resort to journals for information (Ngai, 2005; Nord & Nord, 1995). References quoted in the article was also cross-checked. Nevertheless, it did not yield extra paperwork result demonstrating the study's validity. To serve the objective of this study, finding the most applicable journal articles on consumer's perceptions of CSR was made the central focus. With the aid of 100 articles, this study has been distinguished into three periods (as depicted in Figure 3) to draw the attention of future researchers towards these unexploited areas.

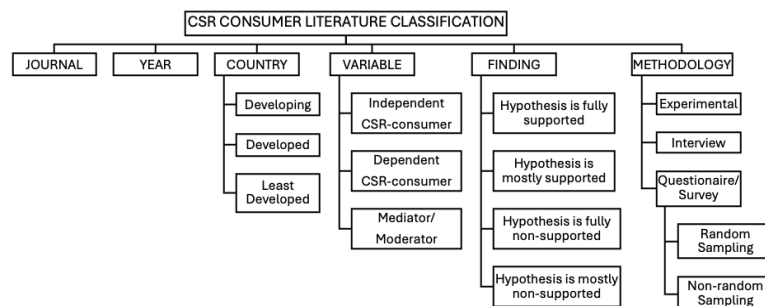


Figure 3: Classification of literature overview

Based on this classification, a growth pattern spanning over the last 12 years (2009-2020) has been identified in the academic literature which is used to analyse the consumers understanding of CSR over the years as illustrated in Figure 2. In this study, the full-text research articles have been analysed and extracted from the following datasets which are:

- EBSCO Hospital Package
- Business Source Complete
- Emerald e-Journal Premier Collection
- ProQuest - Social Sciences
- Springer Link Contemporary
- JSTOR

The selection of these articles is manually screened and based on its publication year, language, and relevance, with a thorough analysis as shown in Figure 3. In fact, Malhotra and Dash (2009) defined this process as “the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. In fact, the content analysis follows five key criteria in a specific research process that includes sampling, reliability, objectivity, quantification, and systemization (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). The contents of the articles were further analysed by a descriptive analysis that includes:

- Distribution of articles across a specific time frame.
- Distribution of articles as country-wise conducted the research.
- Distribution of articles based on journals has published.
- Distribution of articles based on research methodologies was applied.
- Distribution of articles based on finding by hypothesis and
- Distribution of articles based on variable conducted

4. Results and discussion

Based on the analysis that was done on the 100 articles, a few distinctions were made. The majority of the articles spanning the last six years were from developed nations rather than developing, uses empirical methodology rather than conceptual, measured the CSR field as an independent variable meanwhile consumer purchase intention area as a dependent variable, and preferred the usage of research hypotheses rather than non-supported hypotheses. Furthermore, these articles have been published in 51 journals that show the interdisciplinary nature of this area.

4.1 Analysing the articles by basing on the year

As aforementioned, the articles have been categorised up to 12 years (2009-2020), hence, garnering longitudinal samples. This can be seen in Figure 4, which inferred that the first six years (2009-2014) has the highest publications on this research topic, with the highest publications in 2013. Regrettably, the number significantly reduced after that and has not increased for the last six years (2015-2020). Of all the years, 2020 was marked with the second-lowest publication of the year.

4.2 Analysing of the articles in terms of countries and time format

Classification based on the country is important to identify the extent of research issues around the world as it helps navigate further research to unexplored areas (Fatma & Rahman, 2015). Based on the findings from 2009 to 2020, 62% of articles were produced in economically developed countries like the USA, Spain, Italy, Australia, and Germany. This finding also shows that developed countries are more conscious of their CSR pursuits as they are more concern about their consumers' perception since the consumers are known aware and are using their CSR knowledge as their purchase criterion. Another noteworthy point would be the national and cultural differences in developed countries which have shown to have a strong influence on the economy, technology, politics, and social dynamic, which also denotes that further analysis needs to be done to understand this (Beckmann, 2007).

Table 1: Analysing of the articles in terms of developed countries and time format.

Developed Countries	2009-2011	2012-2014	2015-2017	2018-2020	Total
Australia	1	-	2	1	4
Austria	1	1	-	-	2
Canada	-	-	1	1	2
France	-	1	-	-	1
Germany	-	3	-	-	3
Italy	3	3	-	-	6
Netherland	-	1	-	1	2
Portugal	1	-	2	-	3
Spain	3	3	4	4	14
Sweden	-	-	-	1	1
USA	12	1	4	2	19
Taiwan	3	-	2	-	5
Total	24	13	15	10	62

When it comes to developing countries 38% of the articles were produced in economically developing countries, both China and Malaysia have the most published articles, as shown in Table 2. Further analysis has also shown that there is a clear distinction between a developing country and a developed country whereby the consumers in developing countries are not highly conscious of the companies CSR due to their lack of knowledge on the concept itself. Hence, this study also aims to find the correlation between cultural differences and consumer perception towards CSR in developing countries. However, over the last 12 years, there was not even a single article published in the least developed country within selected hundred articles for this study. Hence, this shows that not only information is scarce in developing country but least develop countries as well. Furthermore, Arli and Lasmono (2010) have affirmed that the socioeconomic background of developing countries consists of households that often struggle to afford their necessities, hence, leading them to buy the most affordable product despite a company's CSR principle. Moving on to the next point, it can be inferred from Table 1 and Table 2 that the highest peak of publication which is 24 in developing countries is from 2009 to 2011, meanwhile, 12 in developing countries are from 2018 to 2020.

Table 2: Analysing of the article in terms of developing countries and time format.

Developing Country	2009-2011	2012-2014	2015-2017	2018-2020	Total
Argentina	-	-	-	1	1
Brazil	1	-	-	-	1
China	2	1	2	1	6
India	-	2	1	1	4
Indonesia	2	-	-	2	4
Iran	-	-	1	-	1
Malaysia	1	1	1	2	5
Mexico	-	-	1	-	1
Pakistan	-	-	1	1	2
Peru	1	1	-	-	2
Republic of Korea	1	2	-	2	5
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	1	1

Thailand	1	1	-	-	2
Turkey	-	1	1	-	2
Vietnam	-	-	-	1	1
Total	9	9	8	12	38

4.3 Analysing of articles in terms of journals format

Classification of journal articles based on time is imperative as it clearly shows which journal is with the highest published articles based on consumer perception of CSR (as shown in Table 3), hence, aiding the process of finding further research citation and reference link on this research field. During this time frame, 51 journals have published articles related to this research. Findings have shown that The Journal of Business Ethics and Social Responsibility Journal was with the most published articles.

Table 3: Analysing of articles in terms of journals format.

Journal Name	2009-2011	2012-2014	2015-2017	2018-2020	Total
Asian Academy of Management Journal	1	-	-	-	1
Asian Economic and Financial Review	-	-	1	-	1
Asian Journal of Accounting Research	-	-	1	-	1
British Food Journal	-	1	-	-	1
Business Strategy and the Environment	1	-	-	-	1
Cogent Business & Management	-	-	1	1	2
Corporate Reputation Review	1	-	-	-	1
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	2	-	-	-	2
Economic Research	-	-	1	1	2
European Journal of Management and Business Economic	-	-	-	2	2
Continue...					
European Journal of Marketing	-	1	1	1	3
International Journal Business Excellence	-	-	-	1	1
International Journal of Bank Marketing	1	1	-	-	2
International Journal of Business	-	-	1	-	1
International Journal of Business and Management	-	1	-	-	1
International Journal of Consumer Studies	1	-	-	-	1
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	-	1	-	-	1
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	-	-	1	-	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	-	1	-	-	1
International Marketing Review	-	1	1	-	2
International Journal of Organisational Analysis	-	-	-	1	1
International Review on Public and Non-profit Marketing	-	-	1	1	2
Journal of Brand Management	-	1	-	-	1
Journal of Business Ethics	13	6	5	2	26
Journal of Business Research	-	3	-	-	3

Journal of Cleaner Production	-	1	-	-	1
Journal of Consumer Behaviour	-	-	1	-	1
Journal of Consumer Marketing	1	1	1	-	3
Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal	-	1	-	-	1
Journal of Financial Services Marketing	1	-	-	-	1
Journal of Global Marketing	-	-	-	1	1
Journal of Global Responsibility	-	-	1	-	1
Journal of Malaysian Studies	-	1	-	-	1
Journal of Product and Brand Management	-	-	1	-	1
Journal of Promotion Management	1	-	-	-	1
Journal of Public Relations Research	1	-	-	-	1
Journal of Research for Consumer	-	-	1	-	1
Journal of Service Research	1	-	-	-	1
Journal of Service Theory and Practice	-	-	1	-	1
Journal of Services Marketing	1	-	-	-	1
Journal of Sport Management	1	-	-	-	1
Nankai Business Review International	-	-	1	-	1
NUML International Journal of Business and Management	-	-	-	1	1
Public Relation Journal	1	-	-	-	1
Public Relation Review	2	-	-	-	2
Ramon Llull Journal of Applied Ethics	-	-	1	-	1
Social Behaviour and Personality	-	1	-	2	3
Social Responsibility Journal	1	-	3	2	6
Spanish Journal Marketing	-	-	-	3	3
Sustainability	-	-	-	2	2
The South-East Asian Journal of Management	1	-	-	-	1
Total	32	22	25	21	100

4.4 Analysing of the articles in terms of methodology type (conceptual/empirical)

Analysing and distributing the articles methodologically helps to identify the measurement of the research variable, which is very important for future research, hence, the collected articles were sorted into its methodology type and time phase as depicted in Figure 5. According to Salmone (1993), empirical papers tend to focus more on measurement instrument or statistics, while conceptual papers integrate the idea into a new theory in a specified area, and based on this research itself, 91% of the articles was conducted based on empirical methodology meanwhile the remaining of them used conceptual methodology. Results have also shown that there was a significant fall in the number of empirical papers in the third phase, which indicates that researchers were mostly focused on quantitative analysis, which also denotes that the researchers should focus more on conceptual analyse as it will help to create more theories on this field in future research.

4.5 Analysing empirical paper in term of research approach

Based on the research approach used in this research, which is an empirical paper, a table of it against time has been designed to show the significance of it and Table 4 has shown the drastic change of this approach over the last 12

years. Most articles tend to use survey or questionnaire as their research approach rather than experimental or interview. Papers were then classified based on the dominant research approach to identify the lesser-used approach which can be used in a future study.

Table 4: Analysing empirical paper in term of the research approach.

Method	2009-2011	2012-2014	2015-2017	2018-2020	Total
Experimental	2	2	0	3	7
Survey/Questionnaire	22	16	21	16	75
Interview	4	3	1	1	8
Total	28	21	22	20	91

4.6 Analysing survey/questionnaire papers in terms of sampling method

Findings have shown that there are 75 survey-based papers altogether, which then was dissected based on sampling methods used and as indicated in Table 5, random sampling proportions fares higher than non-random samplings. According to Olken and Rotem (1995), a random sampling query will return a random sample like a random selected relational retrieval query result. Normally, random sampling prefers the sampling method because a sample's behaviour when taken randomly will incur a prohibitive cost when executing survey work (Sweetland, 1972). Hence, using this method in future research is highly encouraged. This is also because, according to Malhotra (2004), the nature of this sampling method is very exploratory, hence, it can be very useful in theory building.

Table 5: Analysing survey/questionnaire papers in terms of the sampling method.

Sampling method	2009-2011	2012-2014	2015-2017	2018-2020	Total
Randomly	12	12	13	11	48
Non-randomly	8	4	8	7	27
Total	20	16	21	18	75

4.7 Analysing of articles findings in term of hypothesis

As shown in Figure 6, all the articles' findings have been distributed according to their hypothesis claim based on the last 12 years. The importance of these classifications is to identify the research objective significance to explore new hypothesis testing in future studies. Furthermore, this study's time frame also shows that most hypothesis tends to support their research objective via hypothesis testing. All paper's significant level was higher than the non-significant level which also indicates that consumers perception of CSR activities is mostly supported.

4.8 Analysing of articles in term of conducted variable

This research discussion focuses on CSR (independent variable) with the consumer's perception (dependent variables). Figure 7 has illustrated that 83% of the CSR research articles have used CSR as an independent variable, 6% has used it as a dependent variable, 7% has used it as a mediator while the remainder of it has used it as a moderator. The findings have also identified that consumer perception has been mostly used as a dependent variable in all 100 of the articles which are around 93% while the remainder of it was set as an independent. In fact, the most used dependent variables are customers loyalty, consumer purchase intention, consumer buying behaviour, corporate reputation, customer word of mouth, customer willingness to pay, customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and perceived value. In these variables, the two variables that were often connected to it were customer loyalty and consumer purchase intention.

Furthermore, this study also shows that the use of moderating and mediating variables is still low which is 62% of the articles. In fact, 42% were conducted with mediators, 20% were conducted with moderator and only 10% were conducted with both. In fact, the analysis of Figure 8 has determined that the moderating and mediating variables application has remained low due to the lack of preliminary studies that provide predicting variables. Findings have shown that research in the consumer perception area was often conducted quantitatively where they tend to repeat

similar variables. Hence, this has caused the creating of moderating and mediating variables more difficult. Furthermore, findings have shown that CSR association with dependent variables, which in this case is the consumer perception, have shown that the CSR research has still yet to shift to nonfinancial outcomes. This has then become the CSR abstract which aims to make a positive contribution to society. In fact, even though findings have shown that there are enough studies on CSR and financial performance, yet there is still less research revolving around CSR's impact on different stakeholder groups (Brammer et al. 2007).

5. Future research agenda and implication of the study

Based on this study's review, future research should be structured on the following guidelines. As aforementioned, most research papers were identified from developed countries rather than its counterpart. In fact, Whitely (1992) has affirmed that every country has its functioning business system. Hence, developing countries can never use the same findings as developed nations without proper validation. Hence why it denotes the urgency for more research in this arena from the developing nations especially in terms of cultural differences. In terms of research methodology, it is obvious that this field has higher empirical study than conceptual, which also means that lack of it signifies a lack of a comprehensive understanding in this area. Apart from that, most of these studies were done experimentally which can only form a theoretical scenario. Hence, this denotes that to gain more generalised findings, more reality-based studies need to improve. The result has also shown that moderating and mediating variables contribution is very low. Hence why high usage of the preliminary studies that provide predicting variables, and moderating and mediating variable for validation and create relation within independent and dependent variables in this study field is highly encouraged.

This research is a comprehensive literature review on consumers perspective on CSR as well as to provide this literature as a study instrument for academicians to analyse this field's current nature, as an information outlet to provide effective insights to readers, and lastly as a business guide to understand the nature of consumers response on CSR pursuits which may give them a competitive advantage. Overall, this research's findings suggest that the consumers' knowledge of CSR activities are very limited which made it difficult to be addressed while providing a narrow view of the consumer responses to CSR. However, CSR has become a growing trend in the international arena, hence showing the need to pursue this research through various contents to gain more insights into it from a wider perspective (Smith and Sharicz, 2011; Lozano, 2011).

6. Conclusion and limitation

This study provides evidence of consumer perception in the CSR activities studies area and includes the published body of CSR literature from 2009 to 2020. Although this is a descriptive approach, the findings of this study also provide important and relevant insights on CSR research of consumer perception while the findings and results aim to contribute towards an improvement on both domestic and global scale. This study also shows that from 2015 to 2020, there has been no significant growth in articles being published in this area and that the most influential journal in this area is the Journal of Business Ethics and Social responsibility Journal. Furthermore, it is important to remember that these studies have been tested in artificial settings, hence, producing inconclusive results, meanwhile, 74 articles that used questionnaire and survey has shown that consumers interest in CSR activities has led to a positive product evaluation and purchase intention. Furthermore, most of these studies were done in a developed country than a developing country and none in the least developed country. Hence, this shows the scarcity of CSR knowledge when it comes to developing and least-developed country. Furthermore, only full-text English articles were selected from the database which was comprehensive dataset rather than exhaustive. Lastly, only academic journals and conference papers were used from the selected database.

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Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Appendix:



Figure 1: Steps of research approach

PHASE 1 → 2009-2011
 PHASE 2 → 2012-2014
 PHASE 3 → 2015-2017
 PHASE 4 → 2018-2020

Figure 2: Time frames of article published

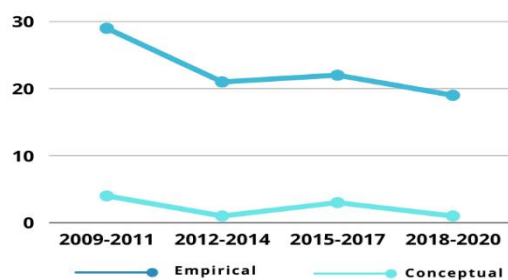


Figure 5: Analysing of the articles in terms of methodology type

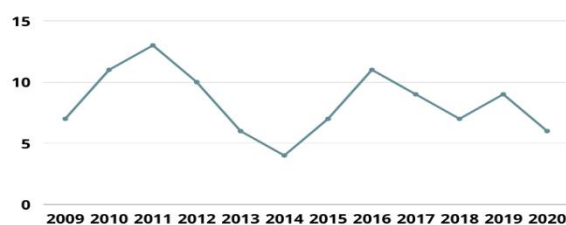


Figure 4: Distribution of articles by year

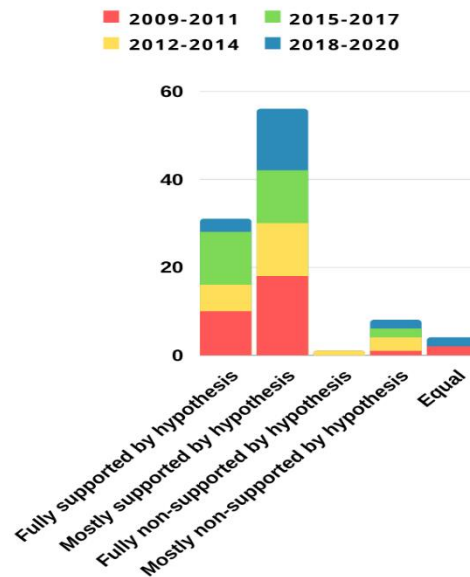


Figure 6: Analysis of the articles findings in terms of hypothesis

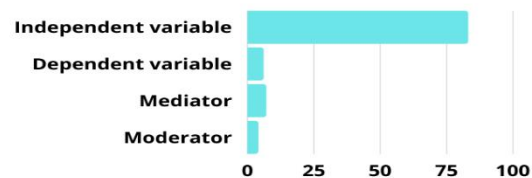


Figure 7: Analysis of articles in terms of CSR variable

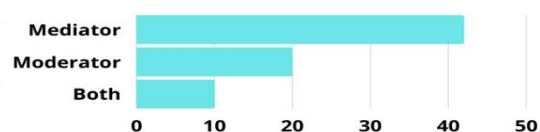


Figure 8: Analysis of articles in terms of mediator & moderator

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