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Social responsibility in micro, small and medium enterprises: a bibliometric analysis from 1972 to 2021

Responsabilidad social en micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas: análisis bibliométrico de 1972 a 2021

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Using a bibliometric methodology of descriptive-comparative scope to analyze a total of 380 research papers, published during the

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period from 1972 to 2021 in several scientific journals. The results show that the scientific publications increased significantly as of 2009; the Journal of Business Ethics stands out for the most significant number of publications; in addition, the journals' countries with the highest scientific production were the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Regarding the authorship criterion, Laura J. Spence resulted with the greater number of contributions on the subject. Finally, the predominance of the quantitative methodology and a non-experimental research design in the publications is noteworthy; furthermore, the most recurrent approach studied was the CSR practices in MSMEs. This bibliometric study contributes to CSR state of the art.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; Systematic Review; Bibliometric Analysis.

Resumen

Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un estudio sobre Responsabilidad Social Empresarial (RSE) en micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas (MIPYMES). Utilizando una metodología bibliométrica de alcance descriptivo-comparativo para analizar un total de 380 trabajos de investigación publicados desde 1972 hasta 2021 en varias revistas científicas. Los resultados muestran que las publicaciones científicas aumentaron significativamente a partir de 2009; el *Journal of Business Ethics* destaca por tener el mayor número de publicaciones; además, los países de mayor producción científica de las revistas fueron el Reino Unido y Estados Unidos de América. En cuanto al criterio de autoría, Laura J. Spence resultó con el mayor número de aportes sobre el tema. Finalmente, destaca el predominio de la metodología cuantitativa y un diseño de investigación no experimental en las publicaciones; además, el enfoque más recurrente estudiado fueron las prácticas de RSE en las MIPYMES. Este estudio bibliométrico contribuye al estado del arte de la RSE.

Palabras Clave: responsabilidad social; micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas; revisión sistemática; análisis bibliométrico.

Introduction

Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) has become a topic of great relevance in the business context (Quezado et al., 2022) as well as in the academic literature (Carroll & Brown, 2018; Fernández-Gago et al., 2020). It has been the subject of analysis for more than six decades (Sharma et al., 2018; Wendlandt et al., 2016). It should be noted that there is still no widely accepted definition of CSR in more than half a century of research and debate (Carroll & Brown, 2018; Rhou & Singal, 2020). This is due to the variant and conflicting perspectives of study (Carroll, 2021b), thus causing it to lose its meaning (Latapí et al., 2019), being an unclear and ambiguous term (Frerichs & Teichert, 2023; Watts et al., 2019), and complicated in its measurement (Latif & Sajjad, 2018).

There is nonetheless a consensus in recognizing Howard Bowen as the precursor of the CSR concept (Carroll & Brown, 2018), defining it as “the obligation of businessmen to follow those policies, make those decisions or pursue those courses of action that are desirable in terms of the objects and values of our society” (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). Although this construct was conceived to involve businesses and managers in the solution of social problems, it was also perceived to encourage the participation of the business community in the resolution of social issues and for managers to seek a balance in multiple interests, and not only in the profits for shareholders (Frederick, 2018).

According to Carroll (2021), the CSR discourse focused mainly on businesspeople going beyond monetary interest (Jiang, 2021) or legal requirements (Mišura et al., 2018) by promoting social activities such as volunteering (Dropulić & Čular, 2019). Over the years, a series of research have been developed to understand the subject from different contexts, thus generating a proliferation of approaches and theories (Prutina, 2016; Torugsa et al., 2012) such as corporate social performance (e.g., Alonso-Martínez et al., 2020; Crişan-Mitra et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2021; Napier et al., 2023); corporate social responsibilities (e.g., Han et al., 2020; Kurt, 2022; Zhou et al., 2021); corporate citizenship (e.g., Akbari & McClelland, 2020; Kruggel et al., 2020); business ethics (e.g., DeTienne et al., 2021; Ermasova, 2021); corporate governance (e.g., Koutoupis et al., 2021; Naciti et al., 2022; Zaman et al., 2022); environmental management or sustainable development (e.g., López-Concepción et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2021; Ruggiero, 2021); among other topics.

Consequently, the evolutionary history of CSR has been firmly rooted in large organizations, particularly in international corporations (Ortiz-Avram et al., 2018); generating a problem expressed by several authors, namely the scarcity of information related to this topic in micro, small and medium-sized companies (Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013). The

authors argue that CSR can be implemented in every organization, regardless of their sector or size (Carroll & Brown, 2018).

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are characterized by having informal structures and control systems, as well as scarce documentation on their transactions and procedures (Sánchez & Benito-Hernández, 2015). In addition, they are usually managed by the company's owner (Stekelorum, 2020). Thus, as it had been previously studied, CSR did not fully respond to the needs of MSMEs.

Therefore, the need arises to analyze and understand MSMEs, which are usually classified according to their number of employees, as well as characterized by being “independent, multitasking, limited cash, based on personal relationships and informality, actively managed by owners, highly personalized, largely local in their area of operation, and largely dependent on internal sources to finance growth” (Soundararajan et al., 2018, p. 2). Despite the above, their relevance lies in that they constitute approximately 90% of organizations worldwide and generate around 50% to 60% of jobs (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2014; Vives, 2014; Zou et al., 2021).

In recent years, CSR in MSMEs has become a relevant area of study (Vo et al., 2015). Producing an increasing number of research papers that discuss the challenges faced by MSMEs in implementing CSR actions (Stekelorum, 2020; Sundström et al., 2020). In addition, high-impact journals have published special issues to promote the study of this phenomenon (e.g., *Business and Society* in 2017, *Business Ethics: A European Review* in 2009 and *Journal of Business Ethics* in 2006; Fitjar, 2011; Soundararajan et al., 2018).

Consequently, CSR in MSMEs has presented a significant growth in scientific publications worldwide. Becoming an area of study of interest for researchers, hence, some authors have conducted systematic literature reviews (e.g., Bikefe et al., 2020; Herrera et al., 2015; Soundararajan et al., 2018; Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013), as well as bibliometric studies (Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2020), which make it possible to identify the evolution, trend and future lines of research in this area. Despite this, the sample size or the description of the inclusion criteria is usually quite scarce; therefore, this analysis aims to update the information available in the existing literature.

Based on the above, this research aims to analyze through a bibliometric study the scientific production of CSR in MSMEs to classify the literature through the following indicators: temporal evolution of publications, leading journals, most productive authors, nature of the publications, methodologies used, and finally the theoretical perspectives of analysis.

1. Methodology

To comprehensively identify, evaluate and synthesize the scientific publications on CSR in MSMEs (Donthu et al., 2021; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), a review of the existing literature was carried out using a descriptive-comparative bibliometric methodology through a quantitative analysis of specific indicators present in the scientific publications on the subject under study; as temporal evolution of publications, leading journals, most productive authors, nature of the publications, among others described below.

1.1. Characteristics of the methodology

Bibliometric studies help explore, organize, and analyze vast amounts of information over time (Zanjirchi et al., 2019), using quantifiable techniques that help establish forecasts and trends in scientific production (Silveira & Petrini, 2017). They are used in such a way that these studies measure the existing information (Deng et al., 2020), characterized by the “application of mathematics and statistical methods to books and other media” (Groos & Pritchard, 1969, p. 349). This methodology makes it possible to analyze the scientific productivity in a specific area or subject in a given period and identify its impact (Donthu et al., 2020; Gómez & Goñi, 2016) by employing descriptive statistics (e.g., Frerichs & Teichert, 2023; Yoopetch et al., 2022).

As previously described, bibliometric studies are helpful to identify and quantify trends and phenomena of the information available on a particular subject, to achieve a better understanding of it (Lim et al., 2022; Pérez, 2002) since, due to the growing number of documents in today’s world, statistical methods are required to categorize the information (Donthu et al., 2021). Through bibliometrics, virtually any type of publication can be analyzed (Ellegaard, 2018). It is important to emphasize that this study was limited to the analysis of scientific articles, excluding book chapters, books, papers, technical reports, monographs, and theses, as well as previous studies (e.g., Bikefe et al., 2020; De Bakker et al., 2005; Fatma & Rahman, 2015; Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2020; Soundararajan et al., 2018).

1.2. Criteria for inclusion, exclusion and analysis of scientific publications

To study the state of the art of CSR in the context of MSMEs, a series of inclusion and exclusion criteria were established (see Table 1). It is important to note that there was no limitation on the articles’ period to obtain the most significant possible number of existing publications.

Table 1

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of publications

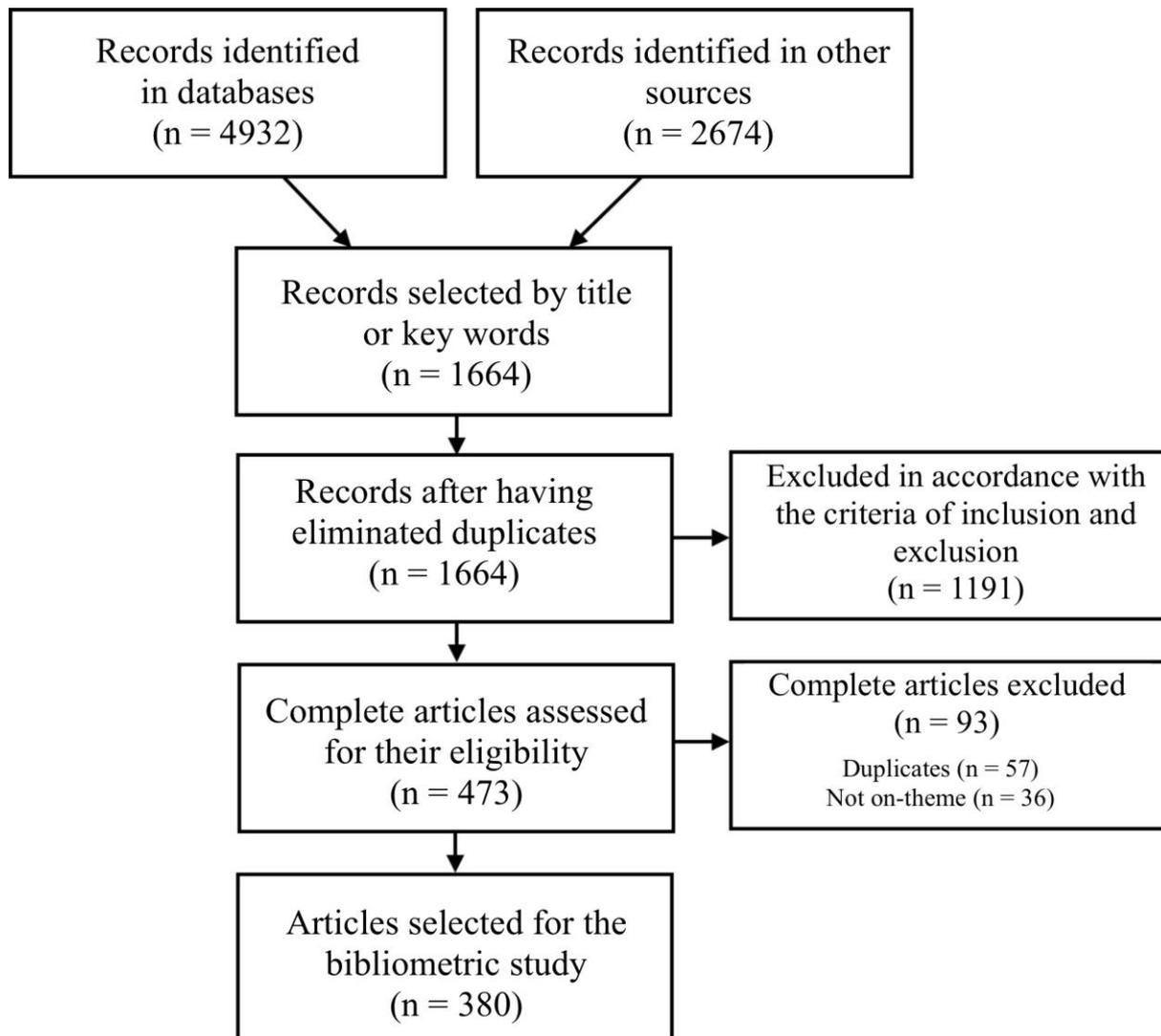
Components	Inclusion criteria
What (topic)	Social Responsibility
Who (population)	Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs)
When (time)	A time filter will not be considered, but the search will be completed by the end of September 2020.
How (methodology)	Through a systematic review of the literature, using a bibliometric methodology
Types of publications to include	Original scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals in both English and Spanish
Time-period	From 1972 to 2021
Keywords	<p>- <u>Spanish</u>: "Responsabilidad Social Empresarial" OR "RSE" OR "Responsabilidad Social Corporativa" OR "RSC" AND "Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas" OR "PYMES" OR "Micro, Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas" OR "MIPYMES."</p> <p>- <u>English</u>: "Corporate Social Responsibility" OR "CSR" OR "Social Responsibility" AND "Small and Medium Enterprises" OR "SMEs" OR "Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises" OR "MSMEs" OR "MSEs. "</p> <p>- <u>Cross-references</u>: its "bibliography or references" section will be reviewed to identify additional publications that could not be identified through the keyword search.</p>
Search tools (search engines)	<p>- <u>Databases</u>: Dialnet; EbscoHost; Emerald Insight; Inderscience; JSTOR; Oxford; ProQuest; Redalyc; SAGE Journals; ScienceDirect (Elsevier); SciELO; Springer; Taylor & Francis; Wiley; INDERSCIENCE online.</p> <p>- <u>Search engines</u>: Google academic; CONRICyT.</p>
Type of publications to be excluded	<p>Books, book chapters, papers, theses, conference proceedings or letters to the editor will not be considered.</p> <p>In addition, if the article is not available for download, or the authors do not respond to e-mails requesting the document.</p>

Note. Own elaboration.

As a result of the systematic search of the literature using keywords, 1,664 articles were collected corresponding to a period between 1972 and September 2020, which comprises a total of 49 years of publications on the subject. According to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the selected articles were imported into the Mendeley reference manager to discard publications (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

PRISMA diagram on the process of inclusion and exclusion of articles.



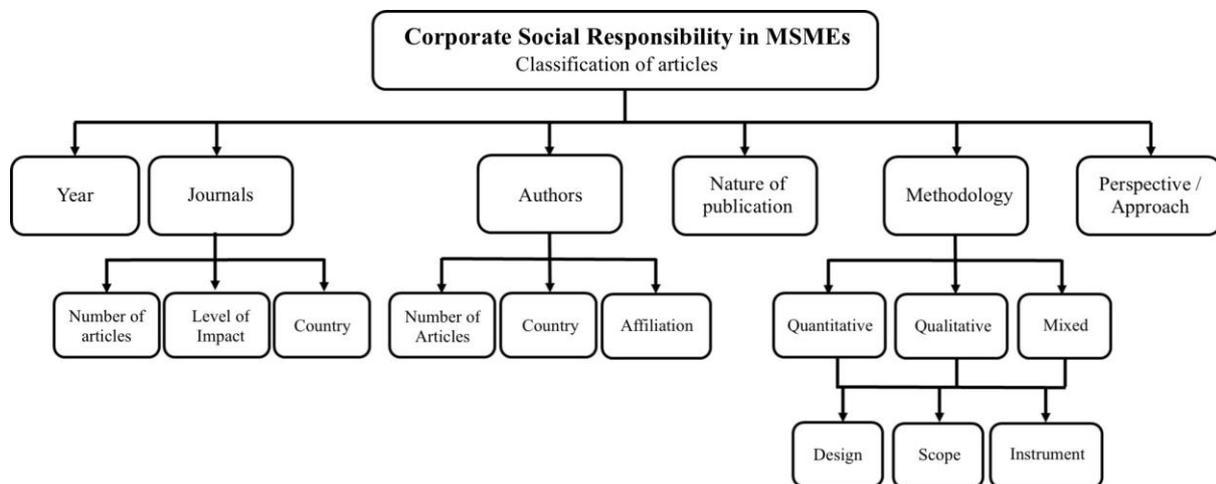
Note. Own elaboration.

Once the articles were downloaded based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, we separated and distinguished the articles, obtaining a final sample of 380 publications. It should be noted that there are criteria to evaluate the quality of the articles for their discarding; however, in order not to discriminate the publications by their quality, it was decided to categorize them considering the journals' indexing since these ensure that they are evaluated by peers, thus guaranteeing their quality.

The statistical software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM Corp, 2017) was used to analyze the information, which served as a support tool for applying the procedures and techniques of descriptive statistics necessary for bibliometrics. For the correct classification of the publications, some previous bibliometric studies were reviewed (e.g., De Bakker et al., 2005; Fatma & Rahman, 2015; Herrera et al., 2015; Jaén et al., 2018; Pacenza & Silva, 2013; Silveira & Petrini, 2017), from which the following analysis criteria were obtained (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Classification of scientific publications



Note. Own elaboration.

As mentioned above, the content analysis technique was used to classify the information in each of the articles collected, which consists according to Weber (1990, p. 5) in “classifying textual material by reducing the most relevant information to manageable data.” Haz clic o

pulse aquí para escribir texto. Thus, the content or text of a document will be codified in several categories according to the selection criteria previously defined by the authors; this requires the systematic application of preset rules to measure the frequencies in which certain elements appear (see Lim et al., 2022). Through this technique, it will be possible to make valid and replicable inferences about the articles (Krippendorff, 2013). The statistical techniques used were descriptive (frequencies) and cross-tables.

It is worthwhile to point out that, despite being a widely accepted quantitative technique, one of the main limitations of the use of content analysis is subjectivity, which makes it challenging to assign specific content to previously defined classifications. Therefore, to prevent this, we sought to minimize subjectivity in the analysis of this work by including three researchers, who reached agreements justified by literature to dissipate differences and discrepancies in the interpretation of the coded information.

2. Results

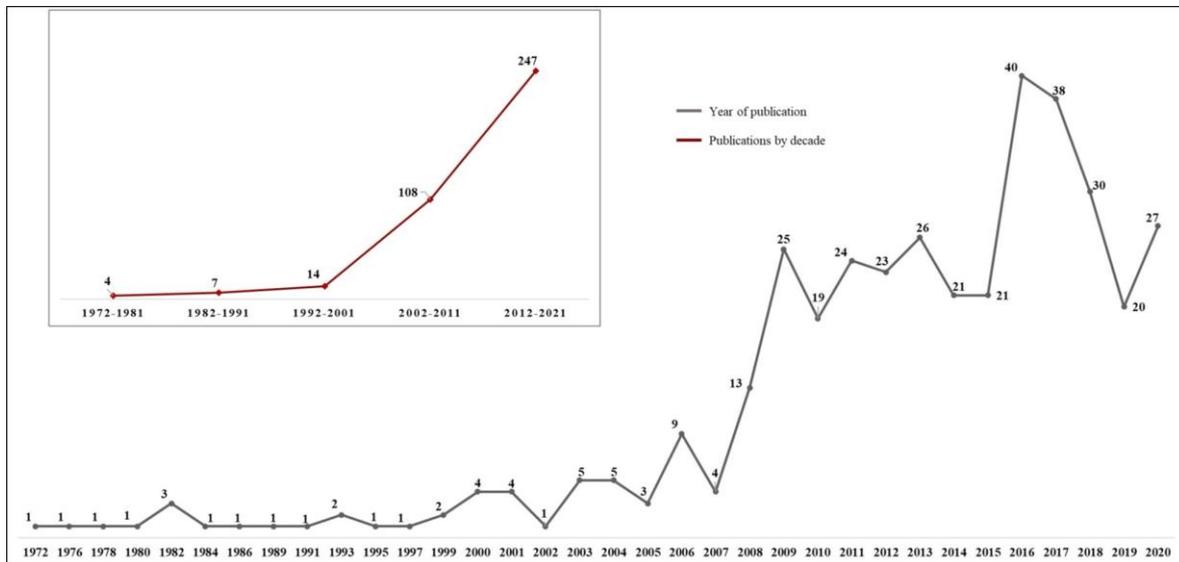
The results obtained are shown below and comprise six sections representing the previously defined categorization criteria.

2.1. Evolution over time of scientific production

To understand the growth and trend of the academic literature on CSR in MSMEs, Figure 3 describes the annual frequency of the analyzed articles and the sum of the publications in five blocks of ten years. As can be seen, there has been a considerable increase over the last two decades, and specifically, from 2009 onwards, there has been an increase in scientific production, which shows the interest of researchers in this area of study. It is important to note that only one publication corresponding to 2021 was identified at the time of the analysis, thus it was excluded from the figure to avoid confusion for the readers.

Figure 3

Scientific production timeline



Note. Own elaboration.

2.2. Journals that collect publications

Regarding the journals that publish on CSR in MSMEs, it is essential to note that there is a great variety and disparity amongst them (Herrera et al., 2015; Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013; see Table 2).

Table 2

Journals with the most publications on the subject (n = 380)

Journal	f	%	Indexing	Impact factor	Quartile SJR	Country
Journal of Business Ethics	65	17.1	SJR	1.972	Q1	Netherlands
Business Ethics: A European Review	16	4.2	SJR	1.146	Q1	United Kingdom
Journal of Small Business Management	15	3.9	SJR	1.561	Q1	United Kingdom
Sustainability	13	3.9	SJR	0.581	Q2	Switzerland
Business & Society	9	2.4	SJR	1.796	Q1	United States
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	9	2.4	SJR	0.974	Q1	United Kingdom
Social Responsibility Journal	9	2.4	SJR	0.429	Q2	United Kingdom
Journal of Cleaner Production	6	1.6	SJR	1.886	Q1	Netherlands
Accounting and Administration	4	1.1	SJR	0.174	Q3	Mexico
Management Studies	4	1.1	ESCI	-	-	Colombia
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	4	1.1	SJR	0.723	Q1	United Kingdom
Accounting Journal	4	1.1	SJR	0.406	Q2	United Kingdom
Business Strategy and the Environment	3	0.8	SJR	1.828	Q1	United States
Global Business Review	3	0.8	SJR	0.445	Q2	India
Intangible Capital	3	0.8	SJR	0.265	Q3	Spain
International Journal of Business Governance and Ethics	3	0.8	SJR	0.238	Q3	United Kingdom
Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship	3	0.8	SJR	0.342	Q3	United Kingdom
Management Decision	3	0.8	SJR	0.862	Q1	United Kingdom
Public Relations Review	3	0.8	SJR	1.159	Q1	United States
Technological Forecasting & Social Change	3	0.8	SJR	1.815	Q1	United States
Two publications ^a	30	7.9	-	-	-	-
Others ^b	138	36.3	-	-	-	-

Note. *f* = frequency; SJR = Scimago Journal Rank; ESCI = Emerging Sources Citation Index; ^aJournals with at least two publications; ^bJournals with only one publication.

Subsequently, all the journals in the sample were classified according to their country of origin (see Appendix 1), where it was found that 86.4% were from a country on the European continent, followed by North America with 17.3%, and to a lesser extent, journals from countries belonging to South America (8.2%), Asia (2.7%) and Africa (0.6%). It should be noted that the most representative countries were the United Kingdom and the United States, with 68 and 22 journals, respectively. Consequently, the predominant language used in the publications on CSR in MSMEs in this study was English (84.2%), followed by Spanish (15.8%); it is worth noting that only publications in these two languages were considered for this analysis.

2.3. Productivity, affiliation and authors' nationality

To know the authors with the highest productivity, we used the classification proposed by Crane (1969), which has been used in previous studies (e.g., Herrera et al., 2015; Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2020; Pacenza & Silva, 2013). According to this categorization, there are three levels which are: (a) high producers, authors who have more than ten articles; (b) moderate producers, researchers who count between four to ten publications; and (c) aspirants, those who have less than four articles.

After analyzing all the authors ($n = 736$), it was possible to see that Laura J. Spence stood out as the only high producer with more than 14 publications (see Table 3). Regarding the country of origin of the authors with two or more publications (see Appendix 2), it was possible to observe that 64.4% of them came from countries on the European continent, followed by 18.8% of authors whose nationality was located on the Asian continent. To a lesser degree, authors born on continents such as North America (7.9%), Africa (5.9%), Oceania (2.0%) and South America (1.0%) were identified.

Table 3

Classification of publications by authorship (n = 736)

Number of articles by author	No. of authors	Percentage over total authors (%)	Classification according to Crane (1969)	Authors' names
14	1	0.1	High ^a	Spence, L.J.
8	3	0.4	Moderate ^b	Gallardo-Vázquez, D.; Herrera, J.; Larrán, M.
7	2	0.3	Moderate ^b	Lechuga, M. P.; Martínez-Martínez, D.
6	1	0.1	Moderate ^b	Laguir, I.
5	5	0.7	Moderate ^b	Amran, A.; Elbaz, J.; Jamali, D.; Perrini, F.; Stekelorum, R.
4	3	0.4	Moderate ^b	Ahmad, N. H.; Benito-Hernandez, S.; Nejati, M.
3	15	2.0	Applicants ^c	Battaglia, M.; Carrigan, M.; Choongo, P.; Esteban-Sanchez, P.; Fassin, Y.; Jenkins, H.; Masurel, E.; Russo, A.; Sánchez-Hernández, M. I.; Tang, J.; Tencati, A.; Valdez-Juárez, L. E.; Vives, A.; von Weltzien Høivik, H.; Wickert, C.
2	71	9.6	Applicants ^c	Altuna, M.; Ansong, A.; Apospori, E.; Aragón, C.; Bernal-Conesa, J. A.; Besser, T. L.; Bianchi, L.; Briones-Peñalver, A. J.; Campopiano, G.; Castán, J. M.; Chrisman, J. J.; Daub, C.-H.; De Massis, A.; de Nieves-Nieto, C.; Del Baldo, M.; Delchet-Cochet, K.; Esparza, J. L.; Fitzgerald, M. A.; Frey, M.; García-Hernández, M. L.; Garriga, E.; Gautam, V.; Gelbmann, U.; Graafland, J.; Habisch, A.; Harwood, I. A.; Hecker, R.; Hilman, H.; Indarti, S.; Jain, P.; Kučerová, R.; Lähdesmäki, M.; León, G.; Lizcano-Álvarez, J. L.; Lozano, J. M.; Lund-Thomsen, P.; Lungu, J.; Lynch-Wood, G.; Martínez-Rodrigo, E.; Moraes, C.; Muñoz-

1	635	86.3	Applicants ^c	<p>Torres, M. J.; Murillo, D.; Nielsen, A. E.; Nurunnabi, M.; O'Donohue, W.; Ortiz-Avram, D.; Ramos-Escobar, E. A.; Reevany, B. M.; Rivera-Lirio, J. M.; Rutherford, R.; Sánchez-Infante, J. P.; Scherer, A. G.; Schmidpeter, R.; Seet, Pi-S.; Signori, S.; Skýpalová, R.; Soundararajan, V.; Sriramesh, K.; Tang, Z.; Thompson, J. K.; Thomsenn, C.; Torugsa, N. A.; Van Burg, E.; Van Rossem, A.; Vancheswaran, A.; Vo, L.-C.; Vyas, V.; Werner, A.; Williamson, D.; Wong, T. A.; Woodward, D. G.</p> <p><i>e.g.</i> Abbas, M.; Bahta, D.; Campin, S.; Dainty, A.; Ede, F. O.; Fayyaz, A.; GaikLan, S.; Hafsi, T.; Iqbal, W.; Jones, R.; Karam, C.; Labelle, F.; Majid, A.; Nath, S. C.; O'Malley, L.; Paas, L. J.; Qun, W.; Ram, M.; Santos, M.; Tse, A. C. B.; Tse, A. C. B.; Nath, S. C.; O'Malley, L.; Paas, L. J.; Qun, W.; Ram, M.; Santos, M.; Tse, A. C. B.; Vitell, S. J.; Wendlandt, T. R.; Xiao, Y.; Yang, S.; Zutshi, A.</p>
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Note. The table represents the classification proposed by Crane (1969) where a high producer has ^a more than 10 publications; a moderate^b between 4 to 10 publications; and an aspiring ^c between 1 to 3 publications.

Concerning authors' affiliations, based on the total sample, it was observed that most of them are linked to universities (95.3%), and a small proportion to companies (3.0%), research centres (1.8%) and non-profit organizations (0.6%). The *University of Cadiz* and the *Universiti Sains Malaysia* were positioned as the higher education institutions with the most productive authors (See Appendix 3).

2.4. Nature of publications

On the other hand, the publications were classified according to their nature, taking as a basis the types of articles of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association in its sixth edition; it should be noted that an additional typology was considered, which is bibliometric studies in order to denote the relevance of the present study. Consequently, the information was outlined by comparing the nature of the publications with their temporal evolution by decade (see Table 4), with empirical research standing out from the sample (71.1%).

Table 4

Comparative analysis of the nature of the articles and decades of publication

Nature	<i>f</i>	%	1972-1981	1982-1991	1992-2001	2002-2011	2012-2021
Empirical studies	270	71.1	2	5	12	63	188
Case studies	44	11.6	0	0	1	17	26
Theoretical articles	46	12.1	2	1	1	23	19
Literature review	12	3.2	0	1	0	1	10
Bibliometrics	3	0.8	0	0	0	0	3
Methodological articles	5	1.3	0	0	0	4	1
Total	380	100	4	7	14	108	247

Note. *Own elaboration.*

2.5. Methodology, designs, and scope of research publications

To codify the research methodology, designs, and scope of research, the following steps were taken based on Creswell and Creswell (2018). Once the information was analyzed, it was observed that the predominant methodology is quantitative with a non-experimental design (46.1%), followed by qualitative studies with a documentary design (16.3%), while the mixed

type of research mainly employs a parallel convergent design (4.2%). The following table classifies the articles according to their methodology and their respective research designs, plus some examples of publications are shown.

Table 5

Descriptive analysis of research designs

Design	<i>f</i>	%	Examples
<i>Quantitative</i>			
Non-experimental	175	46.1	Amran et al. (2019); Herrera et al. (2014); Hoogendoorn et al. (2015); Lin and Lan (2013); Lucky (2018); Magrizos et al. (2021); Peake et al. (2017); Testa et al. (2012)
Experimental	1	0.3	Kulczycki et al. (2017)
<i>Qualitative</i>			
Documentary design	62	16.3	Delchet-Cochet and Arnal (2017); Frisko (2012); Jammulamadaka (2013); Liakh and Spigarelli (2020); Morsing and Spence (2019); Ortiz-Avram et al. (2018); Tang and Tang (2015); Wickert (2016)
Phenomenological	45	11.8	Baden et al. (2011); Battaglia and Frey (2014); Chanakira (2019); Corazza (2017); El Baz et al. (2016); Haron et al. (2015); Hosoda (2018); Martín Fonzar (2013); Muñoz-Torres et al. (2009); Wilson (1980); Wong and Reevany (2019)
Case study	44	11.6	Baldo (2015); Discua (2020); Elford and Daub (2019); Herrera et al. (2014); Meyer et al. (2017); Moneva and Pajares (2018); Upstill-Goddard et al. (2016)
Grounded theory	19	5.0	Aşçigil (2010); Fassin et al. (2015); Jamali & Neville (2011); Looser and Wehrmeyer (2016); Murillo and

			Lozano (2006b); Tran and Jeppesen (2016); Youssef et al. (2018)
Hermeneutic	2	0.5	Martínez (2016); Nkiko (2013)
Ethnographic	2	0.5	Fassin (2008); Spence and Schmidpeter (2003)
Action research	2	0.5	Algarín (2010); Sundström et al. (2020)
<hr/>			
<i>Mixed</i>			
Parallel convergent	16	4.2	Bevan and Yung (2015); Hamann et al. (2017); Lee et al. (2012); Mitchell et al. (2020); Vinsennau and Simonetta (2014)
Exploratory sequential	5	1.3	Ahmad and Seet (2010); Baden et al. (2009); Dey et al. (2018); Hammann et al. (2009b); Spence and Félix (2000)
Design added	4	1.1	Dario et al. (2012); Raza and Majid (2016); Rubio (2016); Zhang et al. (2009)
Explanatory sequential	3	0.8	Chakraborti and Mishra (2018); Hasan (2018); Padhi et al. (2018)

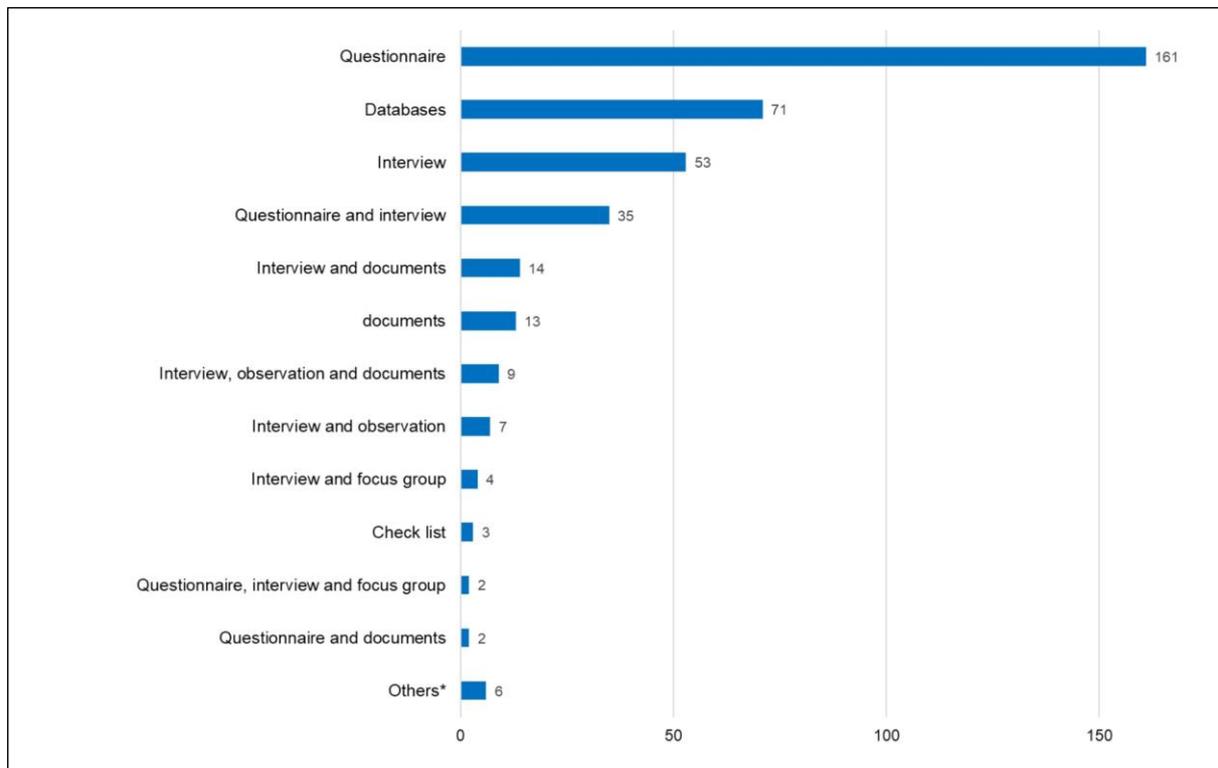
Note. The Table illustrates the result of a frequency analysis of the research designs taking into consideration Creswell and Creswell (2018) classification, as well as some examples of each article.

The second analysis criterion was based on the scopes and methodologies (See Appendix 4), where descriptive and exploratory studies are predominant in qualitative research (38.7%); while quantitative articles tend to use explanatory and descriptive scopes (31.8%); and those that are mixed tend to be interpretative (7.4%).

Finally, the most commonly used data collection methods were coded as described in the article. Thus, the main instruments for obtaining information are questionnaires (42.4%), databases (18.7%) and interviews (13.9%), as well as a combination of two or more techniques (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Data collection methods employed in the study.



Note. There are a mix of statistical techniques utilized on a single occasion, among which are (1) focus group; (2) questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, observation, and documentation; (3) questionnaire and database; verification list and documents; (4) database and documents; (5) interview, focus group and observation.

2.6. Research perspectives or approaches

As mentioned above, there is no clearly defined perspective for CSR study in MSMEs, so the articles were classified according to their theoretical approach (Herrera et al., 2015; Lepoutre & Heene, 2006). Thus, the articles were classified according to their theoretical approach. It is possible to see in Table 6 that there is a significant disparity of perspectives, despite which CSR practices, sustainable development or environmental management and drivers, motivators or barriers to implementing CSR practices represent 31.9% of the sample.

Table 6

Descriptive analysis of research perspectives

Perspective	<i>f</i>	%	Examples
SR Practices	58	15.3	Chakraborti and Mishra (2018); Indarti (2018); Labelle and Navarrete, (2018); León et al. (2017); Stekelorum et al. (2020)
Sustainable development or environmental management	32	8.4	Benito-Hernández et al. (2016); Corazza (2017); Dey et al. (2018); Hamann et al. (2017); Jansson et al. (2017); Yumei et al. (2021)
Drivers, motivators or barriers to implementing SR practices	31	8.2	Campin et al. (2013); Colovic et al. (2019); Herrera et al. (2014); Hoogendoorn et al. (2015); Meyer et al. (2017); Pelegrin et al. (2018)
Perception or awareness of SR activities	25	6.6	Bilankulu et al. (2014); Karam and Jamali (2017); Nejati and Amran (2012); Raza and Majid (2016); Sarfraz et al. (2018); Skýpalová et al. (2016); Tran and Jeppesen (2016)
Management or strategic planning	21	5.5	Biong and Silkoset (2017); Elford and Daub (2019); Fisher et al. (2009); MacGregor and Fontrodona (2011); Pastrana and Sriramesh (2014); Stoian and Gilman (2017)
Ethics and values	19	5.0	Haron et al. (2015); Hilman a Hassan (2013); Low et al. (2017); Ruiz-Lozano et al. (2016); Spence and Félix (2000)
Literature reviews	17	4.5	Bikefe et al. (2020); Herrera et al. (2015); Liakh and Spigarelli (2020); Maldonado-Erazo et al. (2020); Ortiz-Avram et al. (2018); Vázquez-Carrasco and López-Pérez (2013)

RS and its impact on performance using moderating and/or mediating variables	17	4.5	Ansong (2017); Bahta et al. (2020); Courrent et al. (2018); Lu et al. (2020); Lucky (2018); Valdez-Juárez et al. (2019)
Theoretical/conceptual analysis	15	3.9	Benito and Esteban (2012); Fernández and Rajagopal (2018); Jammulamadaka (2013); Spence (2016); Udayasankar (2008)
Management theories (stakeholders, social and institutional capital)	15	3.9	Aragón et al. (2016); Dias et al. (2019); Magrizos et al. (2021); Moneva and Hernández-Pajares (2018); Wong and Reevany (2019)
Socially responsible and ethical orientation	14	3.7	Algarín (2010); Altuna (2013); Choongo et al. (2019); Daub and Scherrer (2009); Spence and Rutherford (2001)
RS Communication	13	3.4	García-Hernández et al. (2016); Morsing & Spence (2019); O'Connor et al. (2017); Parker et al. (2015); Stekelorum et al. (2018)
Family-owned companies	12	3.2	Aragón and Iturrioz (2016); Discua (2020); Esparza (2019); Laguir et al. (2016); Sanchez-Bueno et al. (2020); Yáñez-Araque et al. (2021)
Innovation, quality management or information technologies	10	2.6	Bocquet et al. (2019); Forcadell et al. (2021); Graafland and Noorderhaven (2020)
Supply chain	10	2.6	Huang et al. (2020); Lee et al. (2017); Lin & Lan (2013); Stekelorum et al. (2019)
Human capital (human resources)	10	2.6	Jaramillo (2011); Lechuga et al. (2018); Papsolomou et al. (2018); Sendlhofer (2020)
Socially responsible performance	9	2.4	Choi et al. (2018); Graafland (2018); Thompson and Hood (1993); Yang et al. (2020)

Differences between MSMEs and large companies	8	2.1	De Zoysa and Takaoka (2019); Delchet-Cochet and Arnal (2017); Staber and Schaefer (1986)
Social responsibility policies	8	2.1	Apospori (2018); Sánchez and Benito-Hernández (2015); Skýpalová and Kučerová (2014)
RS Models	8	2.1	Jenkins (2009); Looser and Wehrmeyer (2016); Schlierer et al. (2012); Sundström et al. (2020)
Analysis of methodologies, instruments, or measurement tools	7	1.8	Gallardo-Vázquez et al. (2013); Graafland et al. (2003); Lund-Thomsen et al. (2014); Mitchell et al. (2020); Tencati et al. (2004); Vives (2014)
Governance or public policy	5	1.3	Battaglia and Frey (2014); Del Baldo (2012); ElGammal et al. (2018); Gangi et al. (2018)
Community social responsibility	4	1.1	Besser and Miller (2001); Peake et al. (2017); Schoenberger-Orgad and McKie (2005)
Entrepreneurship	4	1.1	Azmat and Samaratunge (2009); Fuller and Tian (2006); Indarti and Efni (2018)
MSME leadership	3	.8	GaikLan et al. (2019); Jiménez et al. (2018); Manzoor et al. (2019)
Others ^a	5	1.3	Padhi et al. (2018); Xu et al. (2020); Youssef et al. (2018); Yu et al. (2020)

Note. ^aPerspectives with different approaches such as the comparison of economic benefits and social responsibility, investment in innovation and development, company-supplier relationship, among others. SR = Social Responsibility.

3. Future research agenda

This study's findings allow us to observe trends in research on CSR in MSMEs. One of the first lines of research to come is to analyze the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has challenged all existing CSR concepts, assumptions and practices; creating critical areas in

research such as the political economy of CSR, social risk and stakeholders (Crane & Matten, 2021). Also, CSR practices could be studied to help solve the environmental and social labour problems faced by MSMEs (e.g., Kholaf et al., 2022); the impact of the pandemic on the MSMEs supply chain (e.g., Braglia et al., 2022); and others economic aspects of enterprises (e.g., Gashi et al., 2021).

On the other hand, derived from bibliometric analysis, it was found a tendency for comparative studies between national and international companies, developed and developing countries, multinationals and MSMEs (e.g., Bar-Haim & Karassin, 2022; Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2022), as well as family and non-family firms (e.g., Chen & Liu, 2022; Yáñez-Araque et al., 2021). Future studies in these fields could include cultural differences, relationships between companies, CSR practices implemented, communication of results to the various stakeholders between countries, among other topics.

In terms of research perspectives or approaches, the results show a trend to study topics such as socially responsible entrepreneurship (e.g., Brown, 2018; Indarti & Efni, 2018), innovation (e.g., Achi et al., 2022; C.-H. Chen, 2022; Graafland, 2021; Yuan & Cao, 2022), eco-innovation (e.g., Ooi et al., 2020; Sobczak & Głuszczyk, 2022), leadership (e.g. Fernández & Rajagopal, 2018), and circular economy (e.g., Del Baldo & D'Anghela, 2020; Fortunati et al., 2020). From those studies, it could be noted that MSMEs are increasingly required not only to guide their practices to meet their economic objectives but also to be proactive in eliminating corrupt, irresponsible or unethical behaviours that impulse the reduction or elimination of harm to the community, the society or the environment (Križanová et al., 2018).

Moreover, future research could analyze the perspective of the company's various stakeholders (e.g., Nguyen & Adomako, 2022), for instance: consumer behaviours regarding support for MSMEs practising CSR, owners/managers' perception of the challenges, barriers and facilitators they face in adopting CSR in times of crisis, suppliers practices to increase engagement with the socially responsible practices of their buyers, as well as understand the role of employees to implement, promote, practice and communicate CSR in MSMEs, among others.

Finally, there is a trend towards quantitative techniques such as structural equations modeling and mixed studies regarding research methodology designs. Furthermore, because most studies have cross-sectional techniques, performing longitudinal data collection would allow the identification of causal relationships between constructs. Additionally, integrating various disciplines (e.g., psychology, law, marketing, administration, among others) could provide interesting insights to understand other variables that explain the socially responsible behaviour of micro, small and medium enterprises.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This bibliometric study contributes to CSR's state of the art in MSMEs, in six general criteria: the temporal evolution, journals, authors, nature, methodology, and approaches of the publications on this topic. It is important to note some elements to be highlighted in comparison with previous research, the first of which is that the time period for the search for information was not delimited, allowing a more significant number of samples and years of study to be obtained (see Appendix 5). In addition, another aspect to underline is that information was obtained by cross-referencing to compile the most significant possible number of publications in both Spanish and English.

In allusion to the temporal evolution, although an upward trend is observed in general, it is worth noting that after 2016 the number of publications has decreased, evidencing the diversification of perspectives of analysis where there is a tendency to study the various stakeholder groups (e.g., Huang et al., 2020; Sendlhofer, 2020), as well as comparing the differences between MSMEs and large corporations (e.g., Kulczycki et al., 2017; Zoysa & Takaoka, 2019).

As in previous studies, the *Journal of Business Ethics* stood out from the rest of the journals that publish on CSR in MSMEs (e.g., Soundararajan et al., 2018). Despite this, the disparity and plurality of these journals are evident (Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013), having more than 150 journals with at least one article published on the subject. As for the productivity criterion of the authors, as in previous research, Laura J. Spence was the person with the most significant number of publications (e.g., Herrera et al., 2015).

It should be noted that the European continent stands out in the years of research and development invested in various categories such as journals, most productive authors, nationality, and institutions of affiliation. Nonetheless, in the last decade, a larger number of articles have been published by authors from developing countries (e.g., Colombia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa); knowledge of great use to the scientific community since the reality in developed countries do not fully explain the challenges faced by companies in emerging economies.

Regarding the nature of the publications, these tend to be empirical, of quantitative methodology with non-experimental design, where the most used scope is usually descriptive; however, in recent years, there has been an increase in theoretical publications, such as literature reviews or bibliometric studies (e.g., Liakh & Spigarelli, 2020; Morsing & Spence, 2019; Stekelorum, 2020). Consequently, the most commonly used data collection methods tend to be questionnaires and databases, although there has been a tendency to use metadata (e.g., Sanchez-Bueno et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020).

Previous studies have found multiple theoretical perspectives applied to analyze the phenomenon of CSR (Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016; Scherer, 2018), such as institutional, stakeholder, legitimacy, resource-based view, agency, among others theory's. Similar case in this research, where in some studies the theoretical perspective was not defined or used more than once (e.g., Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2019; Sen & Cowley, 2013); making their classification complicated. Therefore, some theoretical studies on CSR and MSMEs have grouped the articles through their approaches (Herrera et al., 2015; Lepoutre & Heene, 2006), consequently the same strategy was used. Taking into consideration the above, although no homogeneous coding was identified for the perspectives or approaches, previous studies agree that CSR practices in MSMEs are the most researched (e.g., Bikefe et al., 2020), as well as environmental management and sustainable development (e.g., Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2020) and the motivators, drivers or barriers (e.g., Herrera et al., 2015; Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013).

As with any research, this one is not free of limitations for subsequent studies, one of which is that only scientific articles were analyzed; it would be convenient to include publications such as book chapters, papers, theses, or grey literature. In this same sense, it is known to the researchers that there are publications on the subject of study that were not included because they could not be downloaded, it would be advisable to contact the authors through their email or other means (e.g., ResearchGate, LinkedIn) to see if they could provide such documents.

Another limitation was that the databases and indexing of the journals (e.g., Emerging Sources Citation Index, SCImago) from which they came were considered as quality criteria for the publications; therefore, it is advisable to apply rigorous criteria to evaluate their quality (e.g., Study Quality Assessment Tools²). Finally, the findings obtained in this study are descriptive comparative in scope, it would be plausible to perform meta-analyses, as well as to use techniques such as co-citations or co-occurrence networks, in addition to software such as VOSviewer, NVivo or CiteSpace that allow visualization and analysis of trends and patterns in the scientific literature.

See appendices at: https://osf.io/42rnf/?view_only=edc9dc27fdbe4848bc9dc5aed5a6dbd2

² National Institutes of Health <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/study-quality-assessment-tools>

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