

Cause-Related Marketing In Csr Strategies: Systematic Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

Since Section 135 of the Companies Act (2013) requires CSR investment in rising economies like India, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has changed from a charitable option to a strategic imperative. In this regard, Cause-Related Marketing has become an important tactic that blends business objectives with social issues, enabling businesses to improve their reputation, foster customer loyalty, and advance society. To investigate the intellectual structure, subject clusters, and new trends in CSR and CRM research, this study performs a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 71 peer-reviewed publications published between 2020 and 2025 that were chosen from the Scopus database and evaluated per PRISMA principles.

According to research, CRM has developed into a crucial extension of CSR and is especially successful in attracting younger consumer segments who place a high value on ethics, openness, and authenticity, such as Generation Z and millennials. According to highly recognized works, skepticism is still a barrier when consumers detect opportunism, but campaign success is contingent upon cause-brand fit, effective communication, and emotional or cultural resonance. CRM has been effectively used by Indian companies like Hindustan Unilever, ITC, and the Tata Group to meet compliance standards and set themselves apart in cutthroat markets.

With CSR acting as the primary link between consumer behavior, corporate value, and ESG disclosures, the bibliometric mapping identifies important themes like governance, sustainability, donation methods, and consumer cynicism. Additionally, there is evidence that required corporate social responsibility (CSR) affects financial strategies by boosting cash holdings, encouraging conservative accounting, and facilitating institutional financing access. CSR improves competitive positioning, employee engagement, and customer retention at the company level while advancing larger sustainability objectives at the societal level.

Notable research gaps still exist despite substantial scholarly efforts. Small and medium-sized businesses, or SMEs, are understudied because most research focuses on giant organizations. The long-term financial effects of CRM programs and the opinions of rural consumers are seldom discussed. Additionally, insufficient research has been done on how internal stakeholders—like employees—can improve CRM performance. There are also a few cross-national comparisons of required versus optional CSR policies.

This study shows that CRM is a strategic tool that helps businesses match purpose-driven branding with regulatory compliance, not just a marketing gimmick.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, Cause Marketing, Cause-related Marketing, India.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility has evolved from a charitable idea to a business need, especially in emerging countries like India. In the meantime, Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) has become a powerful tool that combines business goals with social goals. When CSR and CRM are combined, businesses can link social progress and corporate success, which appeals to stakeholders and customers who value ethics. Businesses are carefully integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) with marketing communications and modifying their brand narratives to reflect purpose-driven capitalism in India as regulations tighten and consumers become more engaged.

According to Section 135 of the Companies Act of 2013, India is a unique player in the global conversation about corporate social responsibility. This regulation says that enterprises that meet certain criteria must give at least 2% of their average net earnings over the last three years to CSR projects. With this law, India became the first nation to impose a legal requirement for CSR compliance. By making organised donations to initiatives that enhance health care, education, the environment, and people's livelihoods, the rule seeks to normalise corporate giving as a part of business and ensure that everyone in society has an equal opportunity to prosper (1). Businesses operating in India are now compelled to reconsider how they contribute to society as a result of these regulations.

The relationship between marketing, particularly CRM, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown as companies use CSR initiatives to increase brand equity. CRM is a type of marketing in which companies promise to give a part of their sales to a good cause. This lets them grow the companies they own while simultaneously doing something to improve society. This method works especially well with Gen Z and millennials, who like companies that are socially responsible and take action (2).

CRM has demonstrated that it can foster customer loyalty and trust in India. A lot of Indian businesses, including Hindustan Unilever, ITC, and Tata Group, have had success with CRM campaigns that incorporate cause-related themes into their brand messaging. In addition to satisfying CSR regulations, these kinds of initiatives help businesses differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market. Cause related marketing or CRM connects purchases to social consequences, which helps build emotional ties with customers. This, to consequently, encourages long-term engagement and brand loyalty.

Additionally, not all industries or demographic groups use CRM in the same way. According to research, a business's reputation for being open and honest is very important for the success of CRM initiatives (3). If people think that a CRM project is dishonest or opportunistic, it could hurt a company's reputation. So, it's very important that the cause and the brand values are the same. This alignment must be sincere and have an effect at the local level in developing nations like India, where there are significant disparities in economic and social needs.

Researchers have also investigated the impact of CSR initiatives on a company's value and financial performance. (4) claim that the requirement that businesses adhere to CSR regulations in India increased their cash holdings. They were preparing to fulfil their legal obligations, as evidenced by this. Additional researchers have discovered that CSR transparency and ESG disclosures improve a company's reputation with investors and increase its worth, particularly when board oversight or climate governance are incorporated into CSR decision-making (2).

Despite growing public interest in CSR and CRM, little is known about how Indian businesses are leveraging these mandated practices to build purposeful brands. The opportunity to develop authentic, cause-based brand identities is lost because many businesses still view corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a compliance issue rather than a crucial business function. Also, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) sometimes have trouble with skills and knowledge, while big companies have the money and strategies to run effective CRM campaigns.

In the digital era, when consumers actively evaluate brands rather than merely passively accepting their actions, the shift from compliance-focused CSR to strategic CRM is particularly crucial. Since social media has made it simpler for consumers to keep a close eye on brands, it's critical that they maintain consistency between their stated and actual practices. In this regard, CRM is a quantitative, market-oriented approach to corporate social responsibility that enables individuals to influence society through their purchasing decisions.

The purpose of this study is to examine how CSR and CRM are evolving in India and how companies strike a balance between their social responsibilities and customer-focused cause campaigns. The impact of cause alignment, perceived authenticity, and consumer demographics on CRM's ability to enhance brand loyalty and company reputation will be examined in this study. The study examines prior business initiatives and customer reactions to determine how CRM can be utilised as a means of both adhering to regulations and building a brand.

This study is even more crucial in light of the growing number of global sustainability goals and India's dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. Businesses in India are increasingly expected to contribute to the country's development. CRM offers businesses a special means of meeting these demands while simultaneously growing. Also, combining CSR with CRM lets companies show that they care about the capitalist system that is good for the environment and society, which is becoming increasingly significant in investment decisions.

This paper adds to the collection of research by offering a comprehensive paradigm that connects CRM strategy, customer interaction, and CSR regulation in India. The study shows how cause-brand congruence, marketing sincerity, and corporate governance may all affect how well CSR and CRM programs work. It does this by applying theoretical frameworks and real-world examples. This bridges the gap between communication and compliance and demonstrates the strategic use of cause-related marketing in an era of conscious capitalism.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Brands that desire to reach out and connect with customers worldwide have started using cause-related marketing (CRM) as a form of corporate social responsibility (CSR). (5) used Schwartz's human values theory to examine the Indian fashion retail sector. They concluded that women who are good at fashion leadership and prefer to be in charge and be kind are more likely to support CRM activities. (6) built on this by showing that the way a message is framed and the size of a gift impact how Generation Z interacts with CRM, especially when the message matches their values, like being eco-friendly or wanting luxury. In the same way, (7) stressed how crucial clear strategy statements are for getting people to buy things. They said that precise donation framing and a big contribution size make people want to buy things. But there are still problems with scepticism. (8) found that while more people in India are becoming aware of CRM, it might sometimes make them more cynical. However, younger and female audiences are more likely to be open to it. (9) said that scepticism makes people less likely to buy anything, but positive emotional appeals and religious cues can lessen it. This is in line with what they said. (10) took this idea further and showed that a nonprofit's excellent reputation and religious alignment can significantly lower doubt and increase readiness to act. (11), on the other hand, used interpretive structural modelling to show that cause proximity and subjective norms are very important for CRM effectiveness. This shows the importance of thinking about relationship hierarchies while developing a campaign.

On a larger scale, the bibliometric studies by (12) and (13) show how the CRM literature has changed over time. (7) found that major research areas include consumer cynicism, donation mechanisms, and corporate-cause fit. (6) focused on five thematic areas, such as consumer behaviour and brand alignment with causes. This shows that more and more academics are interested in CRM, especially in Asian markets. Also, (14) looked into CRM in the pharmaceutical industry and found that brand perceptions and purchase intentions are affected by many things, such as how relevant the cause is, how big the donation is, and why the company wants to help, even in industries where consumers don't usually feel very strongly about the brand.

There have been important changes in the broader CSR conversation, especially regarding how it affects company performance, governance, and stakeholder views. (15) study examined how CSR rules affect working capital management in India. They found that mandatory CSR spending made it easier for companies to get institutional financing, which let them replace expensive trade credits with cheaper debt sources and improve cash conversion cycles. In the same way, (2) stressed how crucial strong climate governance is for reducing the adverse effects of ESG disclosures on valuations, which builds trust among stakeholders and leads to long-term business value. (4) found that mandatory CSR compliance in India led to firms holding more cash. (1) found that this compliance encouraged conservative accounting practices, especially in non-family firms with better governance systems.

(16) looked at sustainable and responsible investment (SRI) in both developed and developing economies worldwide. They found that SRI portfolios did better than benchmarks in developed countries but worse in developing countries like India. This suggests that ESG ecosystems are still growing and investors don't have many options. In line with these findings, (17) showed that India's required CSR laws positively affected enterprises' market value. This supports stakeholder theory's claim that socially responsible actions improve a company's reputation and worth.

Studies that focus on consumers give more proof of CSR's strategic importance. According to (18), CSR activities in hotels helped keep customers by making the business look better and making customers happier. (19) also said that Generation Z customers are more responsive to real CSR activities, which clearly affect brand equity, buying intentions, and willingness to pay. At a micro-foundational level, (20) did a meta-analysis that looked at how CEO traits, such as pay, age, and personality, affected CSR engagement. They found that firm-specific factors played a role in this and that leadership was essential for CSR adoption.

Recent research has also focused on how CSR has changed from voluntary to required actions, especially in developing markets. (21) found that mandated CSR rules increased moral capital, although the results were different depending on the state of the market. On the other hand, (22) warned against using CSR as a cover for behaviours that hurt the environment. This shows how different corporate talk is from reality. (23) criticised the difficulties that Indian companies had with reporting under obligatory CSR frameworks, saying that making compliance too complicated could make the programs less effective. (24) meta-analysis showed that organised sustainability reporting improves a company's performance, especially when taking into account governance and industry characteristics. (25) also focused on the banking sector, showing how legislation CSR makes the link between financial inclusion and bank performance stronger.

METHODOLOGY

Bibliometric literature evaluations are now a vital way to chart scientific knowledge and find new trends across fields. Aria & Cuccurullo (2017) stressed that bibliometrics is an organised, precise, and repeatable way to assemble bits of research scattered across different studies using methods like co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and scientific mapping procedures. In the same way, Ouffa and Elkhamlichi (2024) showed that using PRISMA with bibliometric analysis can help us understand how themes and conceptual frameworks change over time in the corporate sustainability literature. Jabbouri and Hassan (2023) discussed how bibliometric indicators like citation networks and co-authorship patterns might help us understand how knowledge changes over time and find necessary research in sustainable finance. Badr and Zahra (2022) also stressed how vital bibliometrics is in big, changing disciplines because it can discover paradigm shifts, collaborative networks, and research gaps. These studies show that bibliometric reviews make literature synthesis more thorough and rigorous in various academic settings.

PRISMA FREAMEWORK

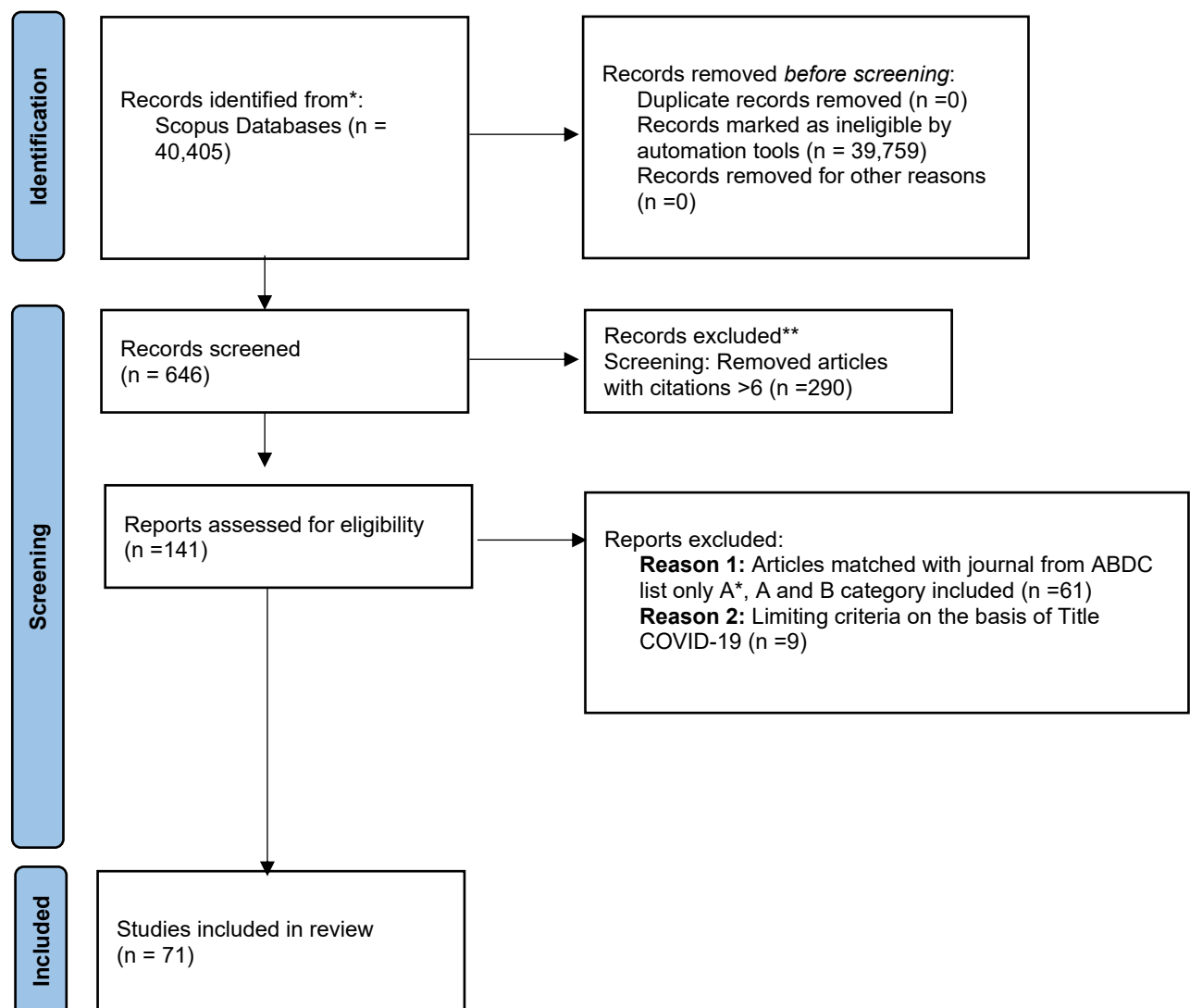


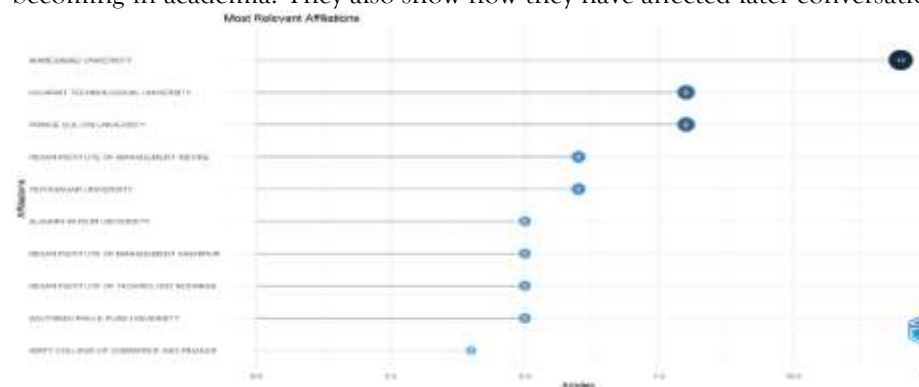
Figure 1

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a widely used set of rules that aims to make systematic literature reviews (SLRs) more open, thorough, and reliable. It gives researchers a formal framework that helps them reduce bias while choosing articles, analysing data, and writing reports. In research methodology, PRISMA is especially useful for making sure that systematic reviews are done and written up in a consistent way. This makes it easier to compare and trust the results of different studies. In this case, PRISMA was used to find Circular Economy (CE) ideas that are important to the construction

In the eligibility stage, **141 full-text reports** were assessed, out of which **61 were excluded** based on journal ranking (only A*, A, and B category journals from the ABDC list were considered), and **nine were excluded** due to relevance issues related to COVID-19. Finally, **71 studies** were included in the systematic review, ensuring methodological rigor and quality control aligned with academic standards such as the PRISMA guidelines.

Author & Document Title	Global Credibility Count
WATSON, D. (2021) J. HOPE TOUR MANAGE	49
FATMA H. (2020) J. J. HOPE MAN.	46
WATSON, D. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	40
THOMAS, S. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	35
WATSON, D. (2021) J. HOPE MAN.	30
WATSON, D. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	30
WATSON, D. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	25
WATSON, D. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	20
FATMA H. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	15
FATMA H. (2020) J. HOPE MAN.	10

The visualization shows how many times the top cited documents in the dataset have been cited around the world. The Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management published Nazir's (2021) study, which has the most citations (108). Fatma's (2020) study in the International Journal of Organizational Analysis (90) and Nazir's (2020) study in Current Issues in Tourism (75) come next. Bansal (2021) and George (2020), both of whom have 56 citations, and Thomas (2020), who has 63 citations, are also important works. These highly cited publications show how important tourism, organizational analysis, and sustainability studies are becoming in academia. They also show how they have affected later conversations in academia.

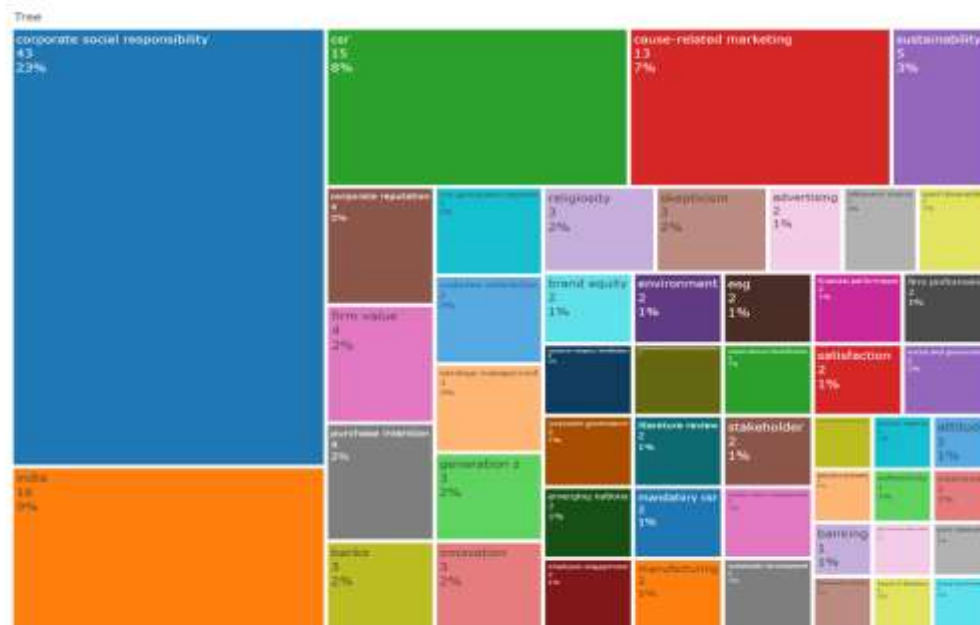


The visualization shows the institutional affiliations that had the largest impact on the study dataset. Ahmedabad University has the most articles (n=12), followed by Gujarat Technological University and Prince Sultan University, each with eight articles. The Indian Institute of Management Indore and Vidyasagar

Sources' Production over Time



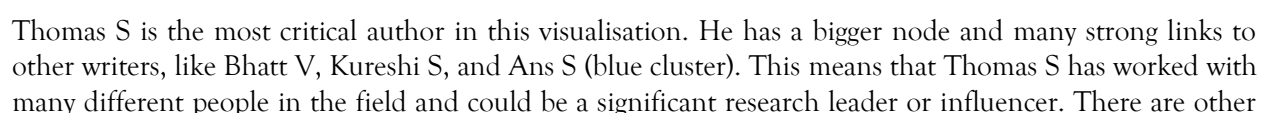
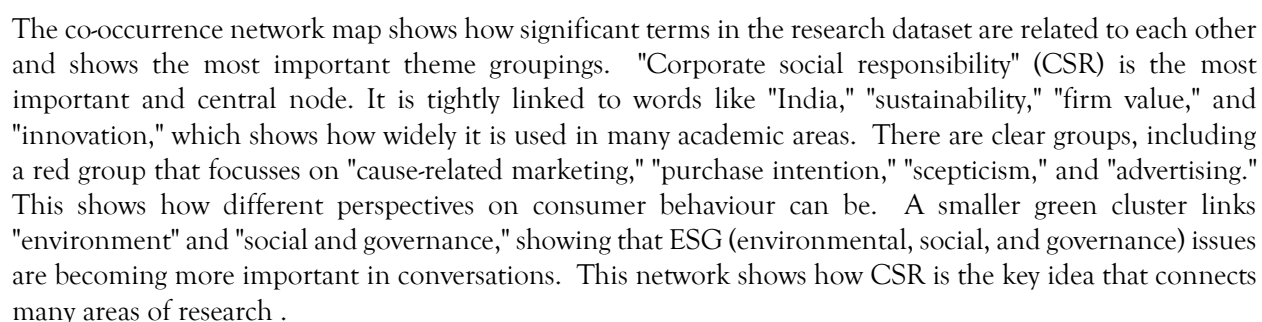
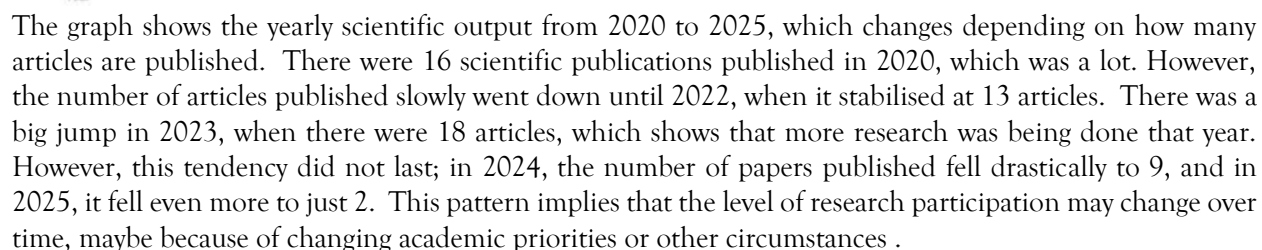
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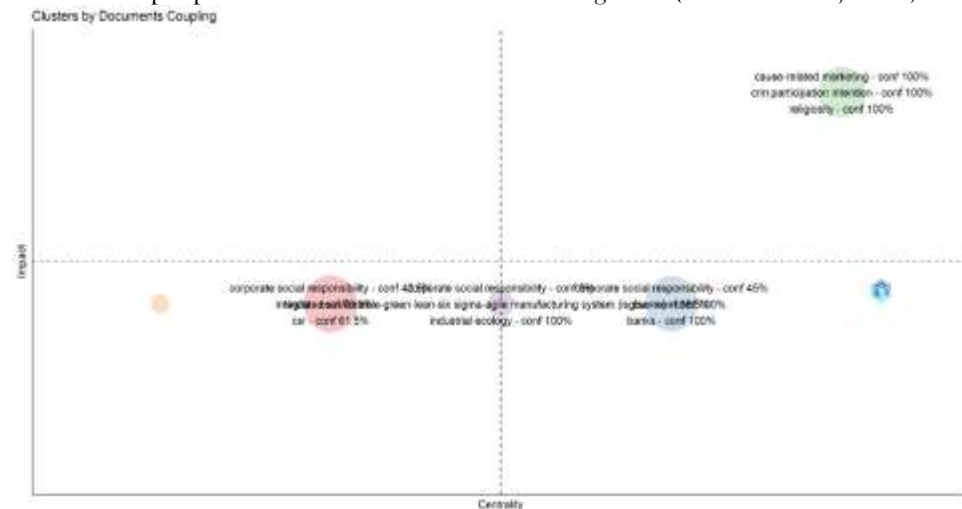
The treemap shows the most important terms in the research collection, which gives us an idea of where the themes are most concentrated. The most common term is "corporate social responsibility" (23%), followed by "India" (9%), "CSR" (8%), "cause-related marketing" (7%), and "sustainability" (3%). "Corporate reputation," "firm value," "purchase intention," and "generation Z" are other important themes that show what CSR research is currently looking at. New ideas like "religiosity," "skepticism," and "environmental, social, and governance (ESG)" show that there are more and more connections between CSR and consumer behavior, ethical issues, and sustainable development. This distribution shows how important CSR is in academic discussions and how it may be used in many different situations



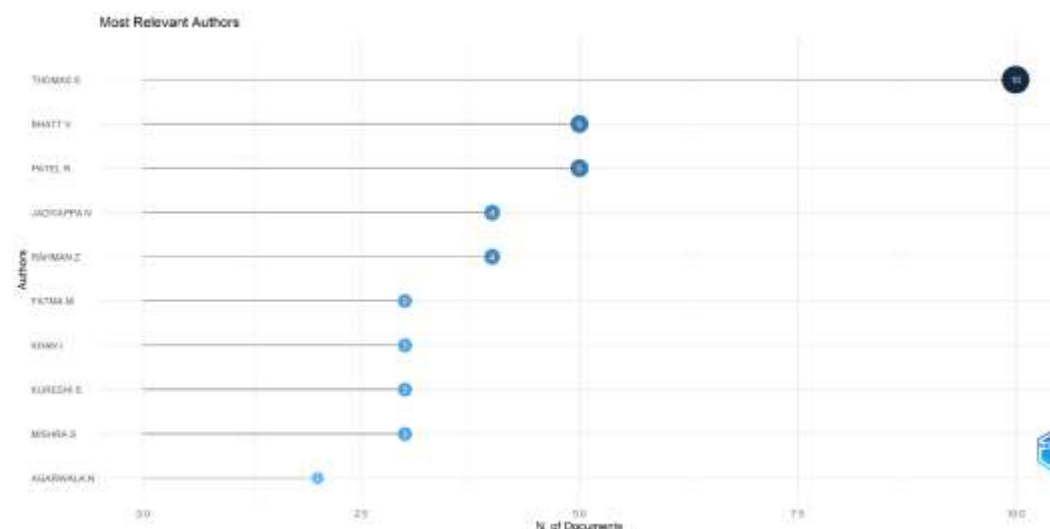
The word cloud shows the most common keywords in the research corpus, giving a visual representation of the main ideas. The most common terms are "cause-related marketing," "India," "CSR," and "sustainability." This shows that there is a lot of research going on around socially responsible marketing methods and how they apply in India. Other important keywords are "purchase intention," "firm value," "innovation," and "customer satisfaction." These show that more and more researchers are interested in finding out how CSR programs affect consumer behaviour and business results. This picture shows how important cause-related marketing and CSR have been in recent academic discussion.



smaller clusters, like the red one with Islam JU, Nazir O, and Rahman Z, and the green one with Mishra S and Hariyani D. These are separate research groups that don't interact much with each other. This network shows how collaboration in the field is broken up, with a few tiny, unrelated groups and one big group that stands out. These kinds of maps are essential for finding major contributors, research silos, and possible chances for people from different fields to work together (Donthu et al., 2021).



The picture called "Clusters by Document Coupling" shows how bibliographic coupling analysis groups similar themes in a corpus of literature. The Y-axis shows how important the papers in that cluster are, while the X-axis shows how linked a theme is to others in the dataset. A cluster in the upper-right quadrant stands out because it has high impact and high centrality. This means that it is a well-integrated and important area of research that includes topics like cause-related marketing, CRM involvement intention, and religion. On the other hand, other clusters, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and industrial ecology, are in the centre but have less of an impact. This could mean that they are foundational or connected to a lot of things but are less current. The size of each bubble shows how many documents are linked to it, and the percentage value shows how consistent the papers are inside the cluster. This picture shows that CSR is still a common topic, but new themes in consumer perception and ethical marketing are becoming more important and having a bigger effect in current writing.



The chart called "Most Relevant Authors" shows the top contributors in the chosen study area based on the number of documents published. It is a horizontal bar graph. Thomas S stands out as the author with the most publications (10 documents), which shows that he is very involved in academic work and is a leader in the field. After Thomas, Bhatt V and Patel R each wrote five documents, and Jadiyappa N and Rahman Z each wrote four. Fatma M, Khan I, Kureshi S, Mishra S, and Agarwala N are further important contributors, with document counts of 3 to 2. This visualisation shows how productive each author is and also helps find important scholars whose work might be used as a starting point or main point of reference for future study in the fields of corporate social responsibility, cause marketing, or other related areas.



The bibliometric summary gives a whole picture of the dataset that was looked at throughout a five-year period (2020–2025). There were 71 documents published from 38 sources, written by 158 individuals. Only 23.94% of these authors worked together with people from other countries. There were only 7 single-authored publications, which shows that most researchers work together. The average number of co-authors per document was 2.89. The field has a negative annual growth rate of -42.57%, which means that the number of publications has been going down during the past year. The research output is still important, though, with an average of 24.07 citations per document and a total of 5612 references used across the dataset. Researchers looked into a wide range of themes, as shown by the 248 unique author keywords. The average document age is 3.07 years, which means that the literature is still very new and growing.

FINDINGS

The report shows that cause-related marketing (CRM) is becoming increasingly part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, especially in developing countries like India. The bibliometric analysis shows that the most cited publications discuss the relationship between CSR and consumer behaviour, especially in tourism, hospitality, and fashion retail. Studies like Thomas et al. (2024) show how important it is to ensure that CRM campaigns match customers' values, especially for younger groups like Generation Z. Also, institutions like Ahmedabad University and the Indian Institutes of Management are becoming major contributors, showing that there are concentrated research hubs in the field of CSR-CRM. The study also shows that the number of scholarly articles published in leading journals like the *Society and Business Review* and the *International Journal of Organisational Analysis* has steadily risen. Some of the most important topics that have come up are how CSR affects brand equity, purchasing intent, and business value. Newer ideas like religiosity and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues are also getting more attention. These results show that CRM is becoming more critical for creating brands with a purpose and building long-term relationships with customers.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that CRM, which is an expansion of CSR, has become an effective tool that allows companies to make money and have a beneficial effect on society at the same time. Regulatory requirements like Section 135 of the Companies Act in India have led to CSR initiatives, leading companies to use CRM to stand out in competitive markets. The bibliometric analysis shows that CSR-CRM scholarship is constantly changing. For example, it shows how CSR has moved away from compliance-focused techniques and towards purpose-driven marketing strategies that appeal to consumers who care about ethics. CRM has much potential to improve a company's reputation and keep customers returning. Still, the results also show that it is not used consistently across industries and demographics. The present literature shows that for CRM to work, there needs to be absolute alignment between the cause and the brand, openness, and an understanding of cultural and geographical differences. CRM is seen as more than just a marketing tool; it's also an essential part of socially responsible and sustainable company models in developing countries.

Literature gap

There are still specific gaps in the literature on CSR and CRM, even though many studies have been done on them. First, most research on customer relationship management (CRM) is done on big businesses, thus small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) don't get enough attention. This leaves a gap in our understanding of the problems and challenges that small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) confront when using CRM with limited resources. Second, there isn't much real-world information about long-term

financial outcomes and stakeholder trust in emerging economies like India, even though many studies examine how consumers respond to CRM efforts. Third, most of the research that has been done so far focuses on urban customers and doesn't look at rural areas where digital adoption and CSR awareness are still growing. Also, the part that internal stakeholders, including employees, play in making CRM work better is still poorly understood. Finally, comparing mandatory CSR systems, like India's, with voluntary ones in other nations could help us understand how different regulatory environments affect CRM efforts. Filling up these gaps would help people understand CRM's strategic function better and help businesses build CSR programs that have a bigger impact and include more people.

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