DETERMINANTS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY DISCLOSURE IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Maria URSU
University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
ursu.98.maria@gmail.com

Olimpia BAN
University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
olimpiaban2008@gmail.com

Abstract
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting has evolved from voluntary disclosure to a strategic component of business practice, shaped by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. This study systematically reviews literature published between 2017 and 2025, applying the PRISMA methodology to identify the determinants of CSR reporting across developed and developing economies. Results highlight that in developed countries, disclosure is driven by regulatory enforcement, strong governance, and stakeholder activism, whereas in developing countries it is shaped by institutional fragility and external pressures from NGOs and multinational partners. Common determinants, including firm size, stakeholder expectations, and financial performance, influence CSR across contexts. However, challenges such as symbolic compliance and greenwashing remain prevalent, particularly in less regulated environments. The paper contributes to academic and policy debates by clarifying cross-contextual differences, emphasizing the need for robust governance and verification tools, and offering practical implications for firms, regulators, and investors seeking to enhance reporting quality and sustainability outcomes.
Keywords: Corporate social responsibility disclosure, CSR, Developed countries, Developing countries, ESG reporting, Bibliometric analysis, PRISMA methodology.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a core element of modern business strategy, evolving from isolated philanthropic initiatives into a strategic imperative. Over the past few decades, CSR reporting has transitioned from a voluntary activity to a critical instrument in corporate governance and sustainability practices (Carroll, 1991; Michelon et al., 2015). This evolution has been driven by heightened stakeholder awareness and growing societal expectations for transparency. Companies increasingly need to align their activities with sustainable development goals (SDGs), which provide a comprehensive global framework for integrating CSR into corporate strategies (United Nations, 2015).

Despite these international efforts, significant disparities in CSR reporting persist between developed and developing countries. These differences are influenced institutional, economic, and cultural factors (Kuo et al., 2012; García-Sánchez et al., 2013). Firms face mounting pressure from both stakeholders and regulatory bodies to disclose CSR activities in a transparent and consistent manner (KPMG, 2022; GRI, 2021). Global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have further incentivized firms to align their CSR initiatives with international reporting standards. Nevertheless, substantial variation remains in how CSR reporting is approached and implemented across different economic contexts. Only a few studies have systematically compared the determinants of CSR reporting across developed and developing countries using a PRISMA-based bibliometric approach. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the main factors influencing CSR disclosure, including regulatory frameworks, stakeholder influence, and cultural dimensions. The findings offer valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners, supporting the design of more effective CSR reporting strategies and helping to mitigate the risks of greenwashing.

2. CSR AS A STRATEGIC INSTRUMENT: STATE INVOLVEMENT AND EUROPEAN REGULATIONS

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved considerably from its origins in basic philanthropic efforts to become a strategic and integral component of modern corporate governance. State intervention, through legislation, policy frameworks, and enforcement mechanisms, plays a critical role in promoting CSR adoption, positioning companies as key drivers of social change (Aguilera et al., 2007). CSR reporting, particularly on the social and environmental impacts of corporate activities, has gained increasing importance for both regulatory bodies and civil society. It is widely regarded as a crucial tool for evaluating corporate performance, disseminating best practices, and fostering continuous improvement. Governments leverage CSR disclosure not only to regulate the negative externalities of economic activity but also to encourage ethical business practices and contribute to broader sustainability objectives (O'Rourke, 2004). A landmark development in this evolution was the adoption of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) by the European Union on November 28, 2022. This directive represents the most significant shift in corporate reporting in over two decades, since the introduction of Romania's first accounting regulations aligned with International Accounting Standards (IAS) (KPMG, 2022). The CSRD reflects a paradigm shift from focusing solely on financial metrics to integrating

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria into corporate reporting practices. Companies are now expected to embed ESG commitments into their strategies aligning them with organizational missions in order to meet regulatory demands and fulfill stakeholder expectations (KPMG, 2022).

The motives behind state involvement in CSR can be categorized as instrumental, relational, or moral. Instrumental motives aim to enhance corporate efficiency or profitability, relational motives seek to strengthen relationships with stakeholders, and moral motives reflect ethical obligations toward society (Aguilera et al., 2007). Understanding these categories provides insight into the conditions under which governments influence corporate behavior and promote socially responsible practices. These regulatory shifts are examined in this study through a PRISMA-based systematic review and bibliometric analysis. This approach allows for the identification of key determinants of CSR disclosure and highlights differences between developed and developing countries. The findings aim to provide actionable insights for companies, policymakers, and NGOs seeking to improve CSR reporting and reduce risks such as greenwashing.

3. DETERMINANTS OF CSR REPORTING: BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Branco and Rodrigues (2008) identify two primary motivations driving companies to engage in CSR activities and disclose them. The first is strategic, based on the idea that cultivating sustainable relationships with stakeholders can generate competitive advantages, arising from intangible assets such as reputation, customer loyalty, and organizational capabilities. The second stems from institutional and societal expectations: companies engage in CSR and disclose related activities to align with stakeholder norms and values regarding acceptable business conduct. CSR thus functions as a legitimizing mechanism, enabling firms to demonstrate conformity with prevailing social standards (Branco & Rodrigues, 2008). Given the often limited public awareness of CSR initiatives, it is crucial for organizations to develop integrated communication strategies that both inform and engage stakeholders. Such strategies not only raise awareness but also maximize the perceived value of CSR activities. Perceived CSR plays a critical role in enhancing a company's brand image, improving customer satisfaction, and fostering loyalty. CSR has a dual impact: it encourages consumer behavior in the short term while contributing to the development of corporate reputation in the long term, both of which are key sources of competitive advantage (Bianchi et al., 2018). A central motivation for companies to comply with the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) is the opportunity to strengthen and maintain their reputation, positioning CSR disclosure as both a strategic and legitimacy-driven endeavor.

Figure 1 is particularly relevant in the context offering a conceptual representation of the relationships between corporate motivations (both instrumental and psychological), CSR-related actions, and their subsequent impact on corporate reputation. This visual model clarifies how different types of motivations translate into strategic behaviors and shape stakeholder perceptions.

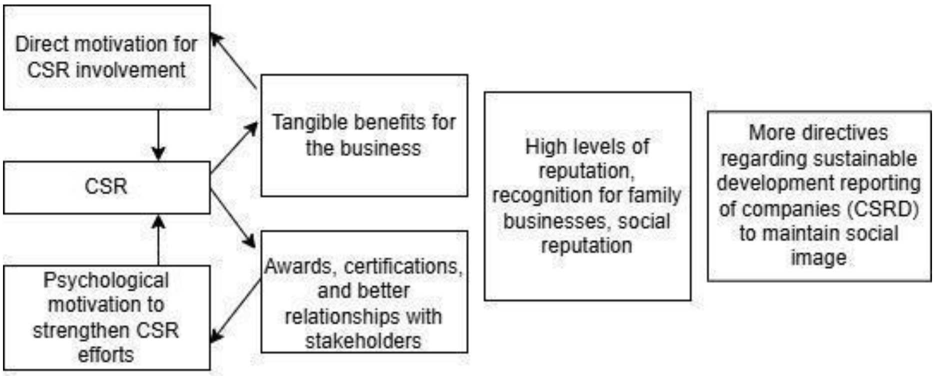

FIGURE 1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CSR, CSRD, AND CORPORATE REPUTATION
Source: Adapted by the author from Kansal et al. (2014, p. 224).

As illustrated in Figure 1, companies engaging in CSR activities gain not only tangible benefits (such as awards, certifications, and stronger stakeholder relationships) but also substantial reputational capital. These benefits arise from both direct strategic motivations and psychological incentives designed to enhance corporate legitimacy and foster stakeholder trust (Branco & Rodrigues, 2008). Simultaneously, external pressures and regulatory frameworks, most notably the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), act as catalysts that formalize and institutionalize CSR reporting practices. Therefore, Figure 1 supports the notion that reputation is not merely a byproduct of CSR engagement but also a key driver motivating companies to initiate and sustain these efforts over time.

Understanding the motivations behind CSR reporting and the role of corporate reputation provides a foundation for analyzing how these practices have evolved, the legitimacy they confer, and the external pressures shaping their adoption. The next section examines the evolution of social responsibility reporting, standardized frameworks, and the growing influence of stakeholders and regulatory bodies.

4. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORTING: EVOLUTION, LEGITIMACY, AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of companies have voluntarily disclosed their social and environmental activities, providing information on policies, progress, and outcomes. Despite these efforts, corporate management continues to face questions regarding the accuracy and credibility of such disclosures, particularly given the complex and multifaceted nature of CSR and the inherent challenges in measuring its outcomes (Fortanier et al., 2011). Corporations operate within a societal context and are influenced by stakeholder expectations. Consequently, their strategic objectives are shaped not only by economic goals but also by social and environmental considerations. Effective sustainability management thus requires addressing both the impacts of corporate operations and the communication of relevant, transparent, and reliable information about CSR practices and responses to stakeholder concerns (Herzig & Schaltegger, 2006). In response to the growing demand for standardized reporting, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) was established. Their strategic objectives are shaped not only by economic goals but also by social and environmental considerations. Effective sustainability management thus requires addressing both the impacts of corporate operations and the communication of relevant, transparent, and reliable information about CSR practices and responses to stakeholder concerns (GRI, 2002, p. 1). The GRI Standards align with key international frameworks on responsible business conduct, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the International Labour Organization Conventions, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. They also allow companies to report on contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (GRI, 2022, p. 2). Governments committed to sustainable development increasingly implement policies that encourage, support, or mandate socially and environmentally responsible practices. Transparency is a central element of these policies, promoted through two main mechanisms: the publication of official inspection and audit reports, and the disclosure of CSR activities, including their impacts on labor standards, environmental protection, economic development, human rights, and governance (O'Rourke, 2004, p. 5). In developed countries, growing public awareness of corporate responsibilities, combined with real-time communication through the internet and social media, adds another layer of external pressure. Citizens increasingly expect companies to act ethically toward society and their customers, and civic actors can quickly expose corporate malpractice. These social expectations, alongside regulatory frameworks and standardized reporting initiatives such as the GRI, reinforce the need for transparency and credible CSR disclosure (Sharma, 2019).

5. TRENDS IN SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING: AN ASSESSMENT OF GLOBAL PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly recognized as a critical mechanism for advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in addressing urgent global challenges such as climate change, energy crises, and social inequality (Lee & Chen, 2018). Sustainability reporting enables companies not only to demonstrate accountability but also to foster global transparency and promote responsible business conduct.

In 2024, KPMG conducted a comprehensive study across 58 member firms, examining ESG, sustainability, integrated, and annual financial reports from the largest 100 companies in each country, territory, or jurisdiction included in the sample. The analysis encompassed a total of 5,800 companies, building on findings from the 2022 KPMG survey to provide a comparative framework for evaluating the evolution of global sustainability reporting practices.

The resulting data offer valuable insight into disclosure trends, highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges. Table 1 presents the changes observed in sustainability reporting rates between 2022 and 2024, providing an empirical perspective on global reporting practices.

TABLE 1. COMPARATIVE NATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING RATES FOR 2022 AND 2024

Country	2022	2024	Country	2022	2024	Country	2022	2024
Angola	27%	34%↑	Netherlands	90%	94%↑	United Arab Emirates	73%	80%↑
Argentina	67%	81%↑	New Zealand	80%	92%↑	Greece	66%	67%↑
Australia	89%	98%↑	Norway	91%	93%↑	Iceland	91%	95%↑
Austria	72%	77%↑	Peru	85%	89%↑	Luxembourg	69%	72%↑
Belgium	84%	88%↑	Poland	82%	89%↑	Malaysia	99%	100%↑
Brazil	86%	93%↑	Romania	74%	78%↑	Mexico	84%	85%↑
Chile	74%	96%↑	Saudi Arabia	31%	53%↑	Sri Lanka	76%	79%↑
Czech Republic	74%	86%↑	South Africa	96%	100%↑	Switzerland	82%	90%↑
Estonia	41%	45%↑	South Korea	99%	100%↑	Taiwan	84%	99%↑
Turkey	44%	57%↑	Thailand	97%	100%↑	Portugal	85%	91%↑
Canada	94%	94% =	Spain	95%	95% =	China	89%	88% ↓
Finland	94%	94% =	Sweden	95%	95% =	Cyprus	36%	28% ↓
India	88%	88% =	United States	100%	100% =	Hungary	79%	78% ↓
Japan	100%	100% =	Singapore	100%	100% =	Germany	100%	94% ↓
Ireland	95%	75% ↓	Italy	94%	93% ↓	Nigeria	78%	77% ↓
Israel	43%	38% ↓	Pakistan	91%	90% ↓	Panama	71%	52% ↓
Philippines	87%	84% ↓	Slovakia	81%	78% ↓	United Kingdom	99%	98% ↓
Uruguay	54%	57% ↓	Venezuela	16%	10% ↓	Vietnam	87%	69% ↓
Ghana		31%	Malta		44%	Colombia	83%	76% ↓
Costa Rica	65%	54%↓						

Legend: The symbols in the table indicate the following: ↑ increase; ↓ decrease; = no change.

Source: Author's adaptation based on KPMG (2024), p. 20.

The data indicate significant trends in sustainability reporting rates over the two-year period. Specifically, 30 countries recorded an increase in reporting activity, 18 countries experienced a decline, and 8 countries maintained stable levels. Particularly noteworthy are Ghana and Malta, where sustainability reporting was introduced for the first time, reaching 31% and 44% respectively, compared to no reporting activity in 2022. These developments reflect the growing global emphasis on transparency and stakeholder engagement, largely driven by heightened expectations from international standards and diverse stakeholder groups. Nevertheless, overall progress remains uneven. Declines observed in countries such as Venezuela (down to 10%), Costa Rica (down to 54%), and Slovakia (down to 78%) indicate persistent challenges including weak regulatory frameworks, limited resources, and political instability. This analysis underscores a rising global commitment to sustainability reporting while highlighting CSR's expanding role in strengthening corporate legitimacy worldwide.

Although regulatory pressures and increasing expectations from governments and international institutions clearly influence the growth of CSR disclosure, not all corporate decisions are shaped exclusively by legal obligations. Some organizations actively and voluntarily engage in CSR, motivated by internal values, strategic objectives, or long-term business interests. The following section examines the main drivers that encourage companies to adopt and publicly communicate their CSR practices.

6. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN DEVELOPED VS. DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: APPROACHES, PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is widely recognized and applied globally, yet its implementation varies significantly depending on cultural, legal, social, and economic contexts (Esteban et al., 2017). Developed countries tend to integrate CSR into their core strategies, moving beyond philanthropy, whereas in developing countries it often remains at a promotional or strictly philanthropic stage (Visser, 2010). In developed countries, CSR has become an essential element of business practice, increasingly embedded into corporate strategies and policies. It no longer represents occasional philanthropic gestures or donations aimed at attracting public attention, but rather reflects the fundamental values and mission of organizations. CSR has thus evolved into a strategic component and is widely perceived as a natural extension of corporate governance principles. Intense competition in advanced markets compels firms to strengthen customer relationships and differentiate themselves. Simultaneously, consumers are increasingly attentive to the ethical and sustainable behavior of the companies from which they purchase, assessing whether these firms fulfill their social and environmental responsibilities (Sharma, 2019).

This consumer pressure drives companies to adopt more transparent and sustainable practices, enhancing both reputational capital and public trust. Accordingly, enterprises must account for the

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objectives and interests of all stakeholders and integrate them effectively into their business strategies (Esteban et al., 2017). Firms that adopt responsible strategies and communicate their sustainability efforts transparently are rewarded with greater reputational capital and consumer confidence (Sharma, 2019). Beyond social expectations, however, a major challenge for developed countries lies in managing and reducing environmental pollution at a global scale. Companies are increasingly motivated to assess and disclose their environmental impacts while seeking greener, more sustainable production methods. In this context, environmentally friendly operations are becoming a necessity in the global fight against climate change. Furthermore, citizens in developed countries are more aware of corporate moral and ethical responsibilities toward society and customers. Easy access to information, particularly through the internet and social media, empowers civic actors to react quickly and hold companies accountable for misconduct (Sharma, 2019). By contrast, in developing countries, CSR activities often adopt more flexible forms, tailored to local socio-economic needs. Socially responsible firms promote sustainable economic development by supporting disadvantaged or local communities and by undertaking environmental protection efforts (Sharma, 2019). In these regions, CSR is frequently shaped by the practical necessity of addressing acute social deficits rather than by a deeply embedded corporate culture of responsibility (Visser, 2010).

Visser (2010) argues that developing countries remain largely locked in a philanthropic or promotional model of CSR, where initiatives are viewed as supplementary measures designed to enhance brand equity and corporate reputation. CSR is often regarded as a marketing tool, intended primarily to strengthen public image. The classical CSR pyramid model proposed by Carroll (1979), comprising economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, is widely acknowledged in academic literature. However, in 2008, Visser introduced an alternative pyramid model, contending that the hierarchy of responsibilities must be adapted to the socio-economic realities of developing countries. In this revised framework, CSR priorities are perceived differently: economic responsibilities form the base of the pyramid, followed by philanthropic, legal, and, ultimately, ethical responsibilities (Visser, 2008).

This contrast between Carroll's original model and Visser's revised framework is most clearly illustrated through a comparative visual representation, presented in Figures 2a and 2b.

The economic dimension in developing countries emphasizes the role of companies in investing, creating jobs, and paying taxes within the host country. The absence of significant foreign direct investment in many of these nations often results in high unemployment, which in turn leads to widespread poverty. For this reason, the economic contribution of companies operating in developing countries is highly valued by both governments and local communities (Visser, 2008). Economic responsibility can be viewed from two perspectives: as economic contribution and as economic dependency. When a community or a country becomes overly reliant on multinational corporations for economic well-being, governments may risk compromising ethical, social, or environmental standards to retain investment, and severe social disruptions may arise if companies decide to relocate.

FIGURE 2A. CARROLL'S PYRAMID OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Source: Adapted by the author according to Carroll (1979, 1991).

FIGURE 2B. VISSER'S CSR PYRAMID FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
Source: Adapted by the author according to Visser (2006).

The philanthropic dimension entails allocating corporate resources to social programs and community projects. Given the considerable socio-economic needs in developing countries, philanthropy is not merely an optional activity but an expected norm, perceived as a practical necessity. In this sense, it becomes a strategy through which companies seek to create an enabling environment for their own operations (Visser, 2008).

The legal dimension is situated at the middle of the pyramid, receiving lower priority compared to developed countries. In many cases, establishing and maintaining good relations with governmental authorities takes precedence over strict compliance. This does not mean that companies disregard the law, but rather that legal pressure is weaker, as in many developing nations the legal framework is underdeveloped and enforcement mechanisms are limited (Visser, 2008). Nevertheless, the legal dimension remains important, and firms are still expected to comply with applicable laws. Christensen and Murphy (2004) argue that in the absence of strong legal systems, practices such as tax evasion become relatively easy to carry out.

The ethical dimension, placed at the top of the pyramid, involves the voluntary adoption of good governance standards and codes of ethics. Companies are expected to act transparently and take measures aimed at reducing corruption within the communities in which they operate (Visser, 2008).

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According to Visser, however, ethical responsibility should be considered fundamental and integrated across all other dimensions, implying a transformation of organizational culture oriented toward transparency, integrity, and long-term sustainability (Visser, 2008).

Building on the understanding of how CSR priorities and practices differ between developed and developing countries, the next step involves a systematic examination of the determinants influencing CSR reporting. To this end, the PRISMA methodology is applied to identify, screen, and analyze empirical studies that shed light on the drivers shaping corporate disclosure practices across diverse economic and institutional contexts.

7. APPLICATION OF THE PRISMA METHOD TO CSR REPORTING: DETERMINANTS IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

7.1 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a pivotal concept in contemporary business practice, reflecting the growing expectations for companies to operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. As CSR reporting becomes more prevalent, the complexity of factors influencing disclosure has also intensified. The effectiveness of transparency and sustainability management depends largely on a clear understanding of these determinants, which vary across economic, institutional and regulatory contexts. This subchapter examines the principal drivers of CSR reporting in both developed and developing countries. To achieve this, the PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was applied to conduct a rigorous bibliometric analysis. The insights derived from this analysis aim to support practitioners, policymakers, and scholars in understanding the dynamics of CSR disclosure and its broader implications for global sustainable development.

7.2 Methodology

The study was conducted using two major databases were selected: Web of Science and Google Scholar. In total, 479 records were initially identified (32 from Web of Science and 447 from Google Scholar). An automated filtering process removed 347 records deemed ineligible prior to screening. The remaining 132 records were reviewed, of which 85 were excluded during the title and abstract screening stage, leaving 47 for full-text assessment. Following this stage, 15 studies were excluded due to irrelevance, and 31 were assessed in detail for eligibility. Of these, 9 were excluded for reasons such as insufficient focus on CSR determinants, incomplete data, or duplication.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows:

Inclusion criteria: articles published between 2017 and 2025; written in English; studies addressing the determinants of CSR reporting in either developed or developing countries; research providing empirical evidence or rigorous theoretical analyses.

Exclusion criteria: studies without clear data on CSR determinants; commentaries, editorials, or non-scientific materials; duplicates across the two databases.

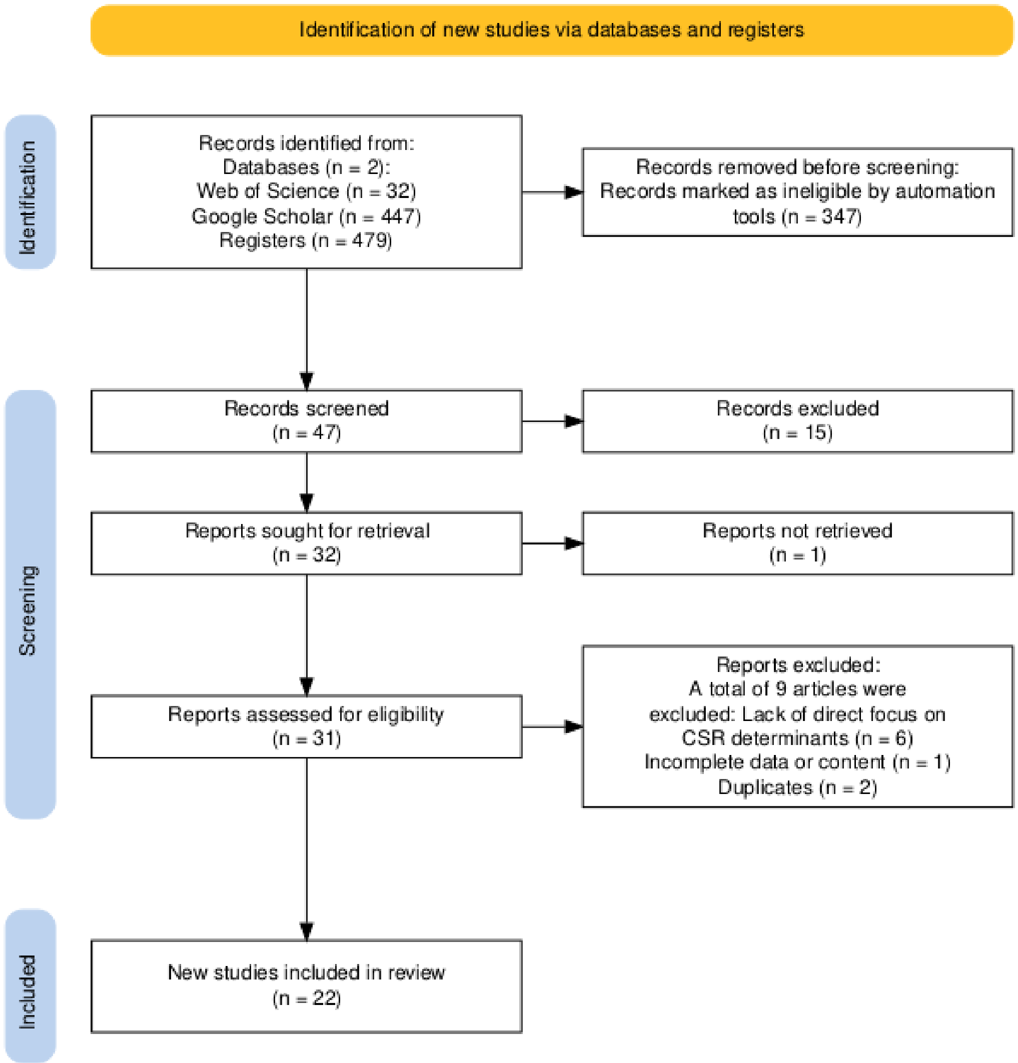

FIGURE 3. PRISMA 2020 FLOW DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING THE STUDY SELECTION PROCESS
Source: Adapted from PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the study selection process (Haddaway, Page, Pritchard, & McGuinness, 2022)

The PRISMA 2020 methodology was adopted to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability throughout the review process. The stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion are illustrated in Figure 3, which presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. This figure depicts the step-by-step selection process of the reviewed studies according to the PRISMA methodology, showing the initial number of records

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identified, screening procedures, eligibility checks, and the final number of studies included in the systematic analysis. This process ensures transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor.

The following section presents a detailed narrative analysis of the 22 studies retained through the PRISMA process, with particular emphasis on the determinants of CSR reporting across diverse economic contexts.

7.3 Analysis of the selected studies

Building on the literature selection process conducted through the PRISMA methodology, this section provides a detailed narrative analysis of the 22 studies retained, with the objective of identifying and categorizing the main determinants of corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting. A central reference within the reviewed body of work is the systematic study by Ali, Wilson, and Husnain (2024), which synthesizes a broad range of research on the motivations and structural drivers shaping CSR disclosure, with particular attention to developing economies.

To strengthen the theoretical foundation of the present analysis, we draw on the classification developed by Ali et al. (2024), which isolates ten of the most influential positive and negative determinants of CSR reporting. These determinants were established based on their empirical recurrence and statistical significance across different studies and contexts.

Table 2a outlines the ten leading factors that positively affect CSR reporting, emphasizing the variables most consistently linked to improved transparency and sustainability communication.

TABLE 2A. TOP 10 FACTORS ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY IN CSR REPORTING

Determinant	Significantly Positive – Developed Economies	Significantly Positive – Developing Economies	Total Significantly Positive	Total Significantly Negative	Total Occurrences
Firm size	34	32	66	0	86
Media pressure	5	2	7	0	8
Financial performance	16	12	28	0	36
Stakeholder interests	13	2	15	1	16
Board size	9	6	15	8	23
Information transparency	7	4	11	0	12
Regulatory pressure	18	15	33	1	34
Gender diversity on the board	9	4	13	2	15
Firm value	2	5	7	0	7
CSR initiatives	1	0	1	0	1

Source: Adapted from Ali, Wilson, and Husnain (2024)

Table 2b presents the ten most significant factors exerting a negative influence on CSR reporting, capturing the barriers that can hinder, limit, or weaken the scope and quality of disclosure.

TABLE 2B. TOP 10 FACTORS LIMITING TRANSPARENCY IN CSR REPORTING

Determinant	Significantly Negative – Developed Economies	Significantly Negative – Developing Economies	Total Significantly Negative	Total Significantly Positive	Total Occurrences
Board independence	5	4	9	10	19
CEO duality	4	2	6	1	7
Financial leverage	1	1	2	5	7
Managerial ownership	0	1	1	4	5
Political instability	1	0	1	0	1
Institutional ownership	1	1	2	3	5
Multiple board mandates	1	0	1	2	3
Institutional pressures	0	1	1	0	1
Systematic risk	2	0	2	0	2
Lack of legal requirements	0	2	2	0	2

Source: Adapted from Ali, Wilson, and Husnain (2024)

A quantitative synthesis of the reviewed studies reveals that certain determinants are consistently highlighted across contexts. Out of the 42 articles analyzed, 68% identified firm size as a positive driver of CSR disclosure, while 54% emphasized stakeholder pressure as a key determinant. Regulatory frameworks were reported as influential in 61% of developed-country studies, compared to only 29% in developing-country contexts. Conversely, political instability and weak legal enforcement were reported as barriers in 47% of developing-country cases, while almost absent in developed economies. Board-related variables, such as independence and CEO duality, showed mixed evidence, being mentioned in 36% of the total studies reviewed. This quantitative snapshot complements the qualitative synthesis and provides a clearer overview of the frequency and distribution of determinants.

This classification offers a structured overview of the mechanisms that either facilitate or constrain CSR disclosure, shaped by both economic context and organizational characteristics. The combined analysis of positive and negative determinants, synthesized from Ali et al. (2024), highlights notable divergences between developed and developing economies, while also underscoring several recurring factors that exert influence across both contexts. These insights provide a balanced foundation for examining the broader dynamics of CSR reporting and for understanding the interplay between enabling conditions and persistent barriers in different institutional settings.

7.3.1 Positive determinants – drivers of CSR reporting

Among the determinants, firm size emerges as the most frequently cited positive factor in both developed and developing countries, with 66 significant cases reported (Ali, Wilson, & Husnain, 2024). Larger firms typically ace greater public scrutiny and operate in more competitive markets, which increases the

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pressure to disclose CSR activities. This finding is consistent with Ali, Frynas, and Mahmood (2017), who emphasize that organizational size enhances visibility and stakeholder expectations, particularly in sectors such as energy and extractives. In addition to firm size, regulatory pressure and financial performance constitute key drivers of CSR reporting (Ali, Frynas, & Mahmood, 2017). In developed economies, strong legal frameworks and mandatory disclosure requirements, such as the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) and the GRI guidelines, play a decisive role in fostering transparency (García-Rivas, Soto-Acosta, & Cegarra-Navarro, 2023).By contrast, in developing economies, although regulatory frameworks are often less mature and enforcement mechanisms weaker, even the presence of formal reporting requirements can stimulate greater CSR disclosure (Ali et al., 2022; El-Bassiouny & El-Bassiouny, 2018).

Stakeholder pressure, particularly from investors, NGOs, and media, further reinforces the role of legitimacy in driving CSR practices. As Khan et al. (2022) argue, companies engage in CSR reporting not only to meet ethical expectations but also to strengthen reputational capital and secure their license to operate. Media scrutiny and civil society activism tend to be more organized (Khan et al., 2022). Against this background, concepts such as social, environmental, sustainability, and integrated reporting have gained increasing relevance. The growing influence of stakeholders concerned with non-financial dimensions of corporate activity has led to a sharp rise in sustainability-oriented disclosures, which now complement (and in some cases substitute) traditional financial reporting (Socoliuc et al., 2018).

Corporate governance also plays a pivotal role in enhancing CSR reporting. Variables such as gender diversity on the board, board size, and transparency in decision-making have been found to correlate positively with CSR disclosure (Nguyen et al., 2023; Velte, 2024). Governance structures that encourage accountability and inclusiveness generate internal pressures that align with responsible reporting practices. Notably, diversity in leadership strengthens not only the quantity but also the thematic relevance of CSR disclosures, particularly with respect to social and ethical issues. Ultimately, CSR reporting serves as a strategic communication channel through which companies articulate their ethical stance, manage stakeholder relationships, and build a favorable organizational reputation (Lubis et al., 2021).

7.3.2 Negative determinants – barriers to CSR reporting

Board independence surprisingly emerges as the most frequently cited negative determinant of CSR reporting. While in theory associated with objectivity and oversight, in practice weak or symbolic board independence often undermines accountability. This is particularly evident in developing countries, where boards may be largely ceremonial or subject to political influence (Ali, Wilson, & Husnain, 2024). This findings are consistent with from Socoliuc et al., (2018), who observe that CSR in emerging economies tends to be reactive and less institutionalized.

CEO duality, in which the chief executive officer simultaneously serves as board chair, represents another significant barrier by concentrating decision-making authority and diminishing incentives for transparency (Velte, 2020). Such governance structures are often correlated with superficial CSR disclosures that emphasize compliance in form rather than substance. While some studies note mixed evidence regarding the impact of CEO duality on CSR, its influence is highly contingent on organizational culture and institutional context (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Political instability and weak legal institutions constitute particularly acute barriers in developing countries. In these settings, firms frequently engage in selective or symbolic CSR disclosure aimed at satisfying external legitimacy needs, rather than from genuine commitment (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Khan et al., 2022).

Other determinants, such as institutional ownership, demonstrate ambivalent effects depending on the orientation of investors Where investors prioritize transparency and long-term sustainability, CSR disclosure tends to be enhanced; conversely, where short-term financial returns dominate, CSR reporting is limited (Ali et al., 2024). This highlights the crucial role of contextual factors in shaping corporate reporting practices. As noted by Sorour et al., (2021) the absence of consistent public pressure, combined with limited organizational resources and weak civil society engagement, significantly restricts both the quality and scope of CSR disclosure.

7.3.3 Comparative observations

A comparative analysis of the selected studies reveals highlights substantial differences in the determinants of CSR reporting between developed and developing countries. In developed economies, disclosure practices are primarily driven by regulatory enforcement, mature stakeholder ecosystems, and robust corporate governance mechanisms. Legal compliance is mandatory, reinforced by reputational pressures arising from active media scrutiny and investor activism (Ali, Frynas, & Mahmood, 2017). Firm size, sector, sectoral characteristics, and stakeholder expectations remain key drivers, reflecting firms' strategic efforts to secure competitive advantages and enhance reputationional standing (Khan et al., 2022).In contrast,, CSR reporting in developing countries is shaped by institutional fragility, external dependencies, and tendencies toward symbolic compliance. Many firms disclose CSR information primarily to satisfy international donor requirements or align with multinational partners, rather than as a result of genuine organizational transformation (Ali et al., 2022; Sorour et al., 2021). External pressures from NGOs and international bodiesoften substitute for weak domestic institutions. Internal determinants such as firm size, financial performance, governance structures, and environmental policies, together with external political, legal, and media pressures, collectively influence CSR practices in these contexts (Ali, Wilson, & Husnain, 2022). The literature further identifies a bidirectional relationship between CSR and financial performance: profitable firms are more capable and motivation to engage in CSR reporting, while CSR initiatives can enhance financial outcomes through reputational capital and long-term value (Rashid, 2018). Firm size and stakeholder expectations emerge as universal determinants, across both developed and developing economies. Large firms with extensive stakeholder engagement face heightened disclosure pressures regardless of regulatory requirements.

A recurring concern across both contexts is the prevalence of greenwashing, whereby CSR disclosures exaggerate or obscure actual performance (Velte, 2024). Cultural and economic differences also contribute to differences in reporting quality. In developed countries, CSR is more often integrated into corporate strategy, whereas in developing economies it tends to be treated as a contextual obligation, resulting in disclosures that are less transparent, less objective, and often lacking external assurance (Bhatia & Makkar, 2020; Khan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, economic responsibilities, such as product quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction, remain foundational across both contexts, consistent with Carroll's (1979) framework.

Finally, the literature highlights the risk of decoupling between CSR reports and actual corporate practices. Disclosures may be symbolic and fail to reflect substantive organizational change, raising questions about the credibility and long-term effectiveness of CSR reporting (Khan et al., 2022).

7.3.4 Synthesis and future implications

The synthesis of current literature underscores that the determinants of CSR reporting are highly context-dependent. Developed and developing economies are shaped by distinct institutional logics and stakeholder pressures. In developed countries, CSR disclosure is primarily driven by established regulatory frameworks, robust corporate governance mechanisms, and active stakeholder engagement. By contrast, in developing economies, CSR reporting tends to be influenced by external actors such as international donors, NGOs, and multinational partners, often leading to symbolic compliance rather than the genuine integration of CSR into corporate strategy (Ali et al., 2022). Future research should explore the complex interplay between institutional environments and CSR practices, adopting mixed-methods designs that integrate qualitative insights with quantitative rigor to better capture context-specific dynamics (Sorour et al., 2021). In particular, there is a pressing need for methodological innovation capable of distinguishing substantive CSR efforts from symbolic disclosures, thereby addressing the risk of greenwashing and enhancing the credibility of sustainability reporting (Velte, 2024). From a policy perspective, interventions in developing contexts should prioritize strengthening institutional frameworks while promoting meaningful stakeholder participation to encourage authentic CSR adoption. Emerging digital technologies, including blockchain, text mining, and AI-driven analytics, hold significant potential for improving transparency, verification, and accountability in CSR reporting processes (Velte, 2024).

Finally, global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic have amplified societal expectations regarding corporate responsibility. Such crises may act as critical junctures, accelerating the shift from symbolic CSR disclosure toward more substantive and integrated approaches that align business strategy with sustainable development objectives (Khan et al., 2022).

7.4 Practical implications and future research directions

Building on the analysis of determinants and contextual variations in CSR reporting, this section outlines the practical implications for key stakeholders and highlights avenues for future research aimed at enhancing both the quality and impact of CSR disclosures.

Implications for businesses: Firms, particularly those in emerging markets, should approach CSR reporting not merely as a regulatory obligation, but as a strategic instrument to build long-term stakeholder trust and enhance corporate value (Ali et al., 2022). Implementing robust governance practices (including clear separation of executive roles, diversified boards, and proactive stakeholder engagement) can significantly strengthen the credibility and transparency of CSR disclosures (Velte, 2024). Ensuring consistency between reported information and actual corporate practices is essential to mitigate greenwashing risks and maintain stakeholder confidence (Khan et al., 2022).

Implications for policymakers and regulators: In developing economies, governments must reinforce institutional capacities by enacting clear, enforceable, and measurable CSR reporting standards. Facilitating access to internationally recognized frameworks, such as the GRI and ESRS, complemented with fiscal incentives or reputational recognition, can enhance disclosure quality, reliability, and comparability (García-Rivas et al., 2023).

Role of investors and civil society: Institutional investors and non-governmental organizations act as critical drivers of transparency and ethical corporate behavior. Their active participation in monitoring and verifying disclosures can encourage firms to move beyond symbolic reporting (Ali et al., 2024). Similarly, raising sustainability awareness among consumers also generates bottom-up demand for higher corporate accountability and more meaningful CSR practices (Sorour et al., 2021).

Directions for future research: Future studies should evaluate the substantive quality, coherence, and real-world impact of CSR disclosures, moving beyond the mere identification of determinants. Advanced analytical tools (including blockchain verification, AI, and machine learning for CSR content analysis) offer promising avenues to detect and reduce symbolic reporting, thereby improving credibility and strategic utility (Velte, 2024).

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Collectively, these implications provide a bridge between theory and practice, highlighting pathways for businesses, regulators, and researchers to foster more meaningful and transparent CSR reporting. This sets the stage for concluding observations on the subchapter's findings.

Practical solutions against greenwashing: Firms and regulators can integrate verifiable tools into the reporting process. For example, blockchain has been successfully piloted in supply chain transparency initiatives, enabling real-time verification of CSR claims. Machine learning models can detect discrepancies between narrative CSR disclosures and actual environmental performance indicators. Quantitative methods, such as ESG scoring models, provide benchmarks to evaluate consistency and credibility of reporting. These approaches reduce symbolic disclosure and enhance stakeholder trust in sustainability practices.

7.5 Conclusions

The analysis in this subchapter shows that CSR reporting is influenced by a combination of contextual, organizational, and governance factors. Comparative evidence reveals clear differences between developed and developing countries: in developed economies, CSR reporting is primarily driven by robust regulatory frameworks, active stakeholder ecosystems, and established corporate governance, whereas in developing countries, external pressures and symbolic compliance often prevail.

A recurring theme is the gap between formal CSR disclosures and actual corporate practices, with symbolic reporting particularly prevalent in transitional or weakly institutionalized contexts. Nonetheless, firm size and stakeholder expectations consistently emerge as universal determinants across all settings. Other barriers, such as political instability, weak legal institutions, and certain governance structures, hinder authentic CSR reporting.

Overall, this subchapter synthesizes the main drivers and obstacles of CSR reporting, offering a comprehensive understanding of how context, governance, and stakeholder pressures shape disclosure practices. These insights provide a foundation for practical applications in corporate strategies and for future research aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability in CSR reporting.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study synthesizes the main findings of the study and highlights its academic and practical contributions. The research analyzed the key determinants influencing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting in both developed and developing countries, using a systematic bibliometric review based on the PRISMA methodology. This approach ensured a transparent, rigorous, and replicable selection of sources published between 2017 and 2025.

The results indicate that CSR reporting is strongly context-dependent. In developed countries, disclosures are shaped by robust regulatory frameworks, mature stakeholder environments, and well-established governance structures. In contrast, developing countries exhibit more variability. External pressures from multinational partners, NGOs, or international donors often outweigh domestic regulatory incentives. Symbolic reporting and greenwashing are more frequent in these less regulated contexts.

Common determinants such as firm size, stakeholder expectations, and financial performance appear across both contexts. However, governance factors like board independence or CEO duality can negatively influence transparency if not embedded in broader governance practices. These insights clarify how institutional, cultural, legal, and economic factors interact to shape CSR reporting behavior.

The study contributes to the literature by providing a comparative perspective across economic contexts and by highlighting practical implications. Companies can enhance credibility by aligning reported CSR information with actual practices and by adopting robust governance and stakeholder engagement strategies. Policymakers in emerging markets should strengthen institutional frameworks, encourage adherence to international reporting standards, and provide incentives for substantive CSR engagement. Investors and civil society can play a key role by verifying disclosures and promoting transparency.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the quality and impact of CSR disclosures rather than merely identifying determinants. Advanced methods, including artificial intelligence, blockchain verification, and mixed qualitative-quantitative analyses, could help assess the authenticity of reported information and detect symbolic reporting. Case studies or cross-country comparative research can further enrich understanding of contextual influences on CSR.

Ultimately, CSR should move beyond formal reporting. It must become a verifiable commitment integrated into corporate strategy. By doing so, it can foster sustainable value creation, ethical practices, and long-term stakeholder trust worldwide.

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