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# Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research

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1 **ASSESSING THE RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL CORPORATE**  
2 **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH**

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1 **ASSESSING THE RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL CORPORATE**  
2 **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH**

3 **ABSTRACT**

4 Should we still use the concept of Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) in  
5 management research? In response to recent and significant challenges in the management  
6 literature regarding the relevance of PCSR as a concept, we conduct a review of the literature  
7 in the field. We combine a bibliometric analysis and a qualitative content analysis to assess the  
8 use of the concept of PCSR between 2005 and 2022. We contribute to the PCSR literature in  
9 four ways: first, we map the field of PCSR in order to develop an objective understanding of  
10 the concept. Second, we demonstrate that PCSR exhibits the features of a concept, and that  
11 current research has begun to address some of the significant challenges that question its  
12 relevance. Third, we identify the four pillars at the base of the concept and uncover a fifth pillar:  
13 the dynamic perspective of PCSR. Last, we propose research directions to strengthen the PCSR  
14 concept and enrich its contributions to theory and practice.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

2 Should we still be using the concept of Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) in  
3 management research? Over the last 20 years, we have observed a rapid development in the  
4 PCSR literature, both conceptually and empirically, to explore the politicisation of firms, given  
5 that this phenomenon has continued to gain in significance. While increasingly more research  
6 has aimed to develop the PCSR concept, significant challenges have arisen regarding its  
7 importance to management research and its real contributions to theory and society (Fooks *et*  
8 *al.*, 2013; Mehrpouya and Willmott, 2018; Rhodes and Fleming, 2020). In fact, the successive  
9 developments of PCSR have participated in reinforcing its various and sometimes competing  
10 definitions (Mehrpouya and Willmott, 2018). Several factors may explain this: the variety of  
11 political ontologies underlying PCSR (Sorsa and Fougère, 2021), the development of a number  
12 of subfields emerging from literature reviews, that become mistaken with the former field of  
13 study (Gond *et al.*, 2023), and uncertainty about the actual scope of the concept (Goodman and  
14 Makinen, 2023).

15 For these reasons, the conceptual development of PCSR has blurred academic understanding  
16 of the concept, thereby impeding its potential to significantly contribute to theory and practice  
17 (Mehrpouya and Willmott, 2018). In addition, the lack of engagement with fundamental critics  
18 of the field – especially those challenging the societal contribution of this literature (see  
19 Banerjee, 2018; Hurst *et al.*, 2019; Roussey *et al.*, 2022) – has impeded the potential of PCSR  
20 to contribute to society (Banerjee, 2021; Mehrpouya and Willmott, 2018). These significant  
21 theoretical and practical challenges have prompted us to assess its relevance for management  
22 research. Indeed, as we note in the next section, the relevance of a concept depends on its  
23 capacity to explain existing phenomena, contribute to theorising them, and influence

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1 managerial or organisational practice in order to have a societal impact. The issues in the field  
2 of PCSR suggested the following question: *Is it still relevant to study PCSR as a concept in*  
3 *management research?*

4 To respond to this question, we investigate how the foundations and current uses of PCSR  
5 inform us about its relevance as a concept in management research. Our objective is therefore  
6 to explore how research can strengthen its theoretical and practical contributions to explain the  
7 phenomenon of the politicisation of firms. In light of the significant challenges about the need  
8 for such a concept (see Mehrpouya and Willmott, 2018; Rhodes and Fleming, 2020), we  
9 contend that an in-depth assessment might well bring to light its present and future value in  
10 management research. Therefore, we conduct a bibliometric analysis of the PCSR literature that  
11 uses both co-citation and bibliographic coupling techniques. These techniques are especially  
12 helpful for mapping a field of research and categorising the main conversations that constitute  
13 it (Zupic and Čater, 2015). This first step enables us to unpack the structure of the field and its  
14 current use. Next, a qualitative analysis of these quantitative findings enables us to identify the  
15 founding, current, and missing pillars of the concept of PCSR, which highlight its contributions.  
16 The combination of these three techniques thus prepares us to go deeper in analysing the  
17 concept and to bring nuance and detail to the categorisation of the literature. To perform these  
18 analyses, we use a broad definition of PCSR that put together distinct schools of thought in the  
19 field and that enables us to gather a variety of articles on the concept. Hence, in this article,  
20 PCSR refers to *initiatives involving private actors taking a political role to govern or address*  
21 *societal issues*.

22 Our study demonstrates that the PCSR concept is still relevant through its contributions to both  
23 management research and society. However, our results also show that there are indeed

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1 significant issues that current research needs to address if academics are to continue to enrich  
2 this literature. We contribute to the PCSR literature in four ways: first, through a quantitative  
3 and qualitative analysis, we map the PCSR literature to provide an objective understanding of  
4 the concept. Second, we demonstrate that PCSR exhibits the features of a relevant concept for  
5 management research. Third, we unpack the characteristics constituting the concept of PCSR  
6 and identify a new pillar at its base. Last, we explore the consequences of this new pillar in  
7 future research to strengthen the concept.

8 The remainder of the article is organised as follows: in the following section, we review the  
9 emergence of PCSR as a concept and the current challenges that it is facing. Next, we describe  
10 the construction of our dataset and present the bibliometric techniques that we used for analysis.  
11 We then present our descriptive and analytical findings. Last, we discuss the contributions that  
12 our study makes to the concept of PCSR and the implications for management research going  
13 forward, proposing some avenues for future research.

## 14 **PCSR AS A CONCEPT**

### 15 **Defining PCSR as a concept**

16 Concepts are critical to make sense of phenomena that researchers seek to explain (Dumez,  
17 2011; Gerring, 1999). Over time, the understanding of what we call a ‘concept’ has evolved  
18 and the conditions for the emergence of a concept have been increasingly questioned (Dumez,  
19 2011). Generally, a concept was considered to be constituted by the combination of three  
20 factors: a word, a thought and a referent (Ogden and Richards, 1923) or by the mediation of a  
21 number of specific criteria, depending on its purpose and functions for research (Gerring, 1999).  
22 From these perspectives, the constituting criteria were theoretically established and then applied

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1 to explain observed phenomena. However, when concepts cannot be clearly circumscribed, a  
2 competing perspective may arise through observation of the phenomenon that needs to be  
3 explained and then it is inductively conceptualised (Dumez, 2011). The concept of PCSR  
4 emerged in the early 2000s to explain the changing role of firms in a globalised context, as this  
5 role notably became increasingly oriented towards governing the social and environmental  
6 issues where the firms were operating (Matten and Crane, 2005; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011).  
7 In a context of increasing globalisation, the traditional division of labour between the economic  
8 and political spheres eroded and businesses responded to their changing context by developing  
9 a new political role (Scherer *et al.*, 2009, 2014). In this case, the concept of PCSR inductively  
10 emerged to explain a phenomenon that was observed in practice.

11 New concepts can be proposed in a process of totalisation: different properties of a phenomenon  
12 are identified and aggregated in order to make sense of it (Mandard, 2021b). Specifically,  
13 emerging concepts should follow three rules: at least one of its constituting properties must be  
14 emerging, some of its properties must be authentically novel, and a novel property should  
15 establish a relationship between the emerging property and its environment (Sartenaer, 2010).  
16 Given that they explain observed phenomena, concepts also need to be embedded in their  
17 context and therefore evolve as their context evolves (Alvesson and Blom, 2022). To explain  
18 the emergence of PCSR, seminal works discuss the influence of globalisation on firms to  
19 engage in societal initiatives (Matten and Crane, 2005; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007, 2011).  
20 Whether they agree or not with the influence of this changing economic and political context  
21 (see Whelan, 2012), these works contextualise PCSR in time – that is, when the  
22 internationalisation of firms accelerates – and in space – that is, where the firms are operating.  
23 In this context of globalisation, these seminal works aggregated several properties (the

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1 internationalisation of firms, the failure of state governance, the increasing pressures from  
2 external stakeholders, and the development of private governance schemes) and they  
3 transcended this aggregation to offer a conceptualisation of the politicisation of firms to  
4 contribute to society (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007, 2011). In addition, this literature aggregated  
5 an emerging property (the political role of firms) and a novel property (globalisation) to  
6 establish a consequentialist relationship between the political role of firms (emerging) and their  
7 environment because of the influence of globalisation (novel).

8 It is clear now that defining and creating new concepts is critical to make sense of existing  
9 phenomena and, therefore, to develop new theories. For example, in the process of theorising,  
10 we observe trends that have come to shape our knowledge in the management literature  
11 (Abrahamson, 1996). We might therefore define our management knowledge as a construct  
12 established through the constant evolution of researchers' propositions to define evolving  
13 observed phenomena (Astley, 1985). Looking back at the concept of PCSR, significant  
14 evolutions can be observed. For instance, seminal works on PCSR have justified the  
15 politicisation of firms by the failure of states to govern social and environmental issues and by  
16 the lack of governance at a global scale (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). The same authors later  
17 nuanced their argument and admitted that state power is in reality more significant than they  
18 had conceptualised (Scherer *et al.*, 2016). Other perspectives on the concept have also  
19 questioned the definition of PCSR and participated in its evolution (Mäkinen and Kourula,  
20 2012; Whelan, 2012). The development of alternative discussions about the conceptualisation  
21 of PCSR has initiated new conversations to specify its definition in a changing context.

22 This review of the literature on 'concepts' demonstrates that PCSR has indeed emerged as a  
23 concept in the management literature to explain the political role of firms for society. However,

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1 the recent literature that we address in this review challenges not only the emergence of PCSR  
2 in the management literature, but also its current relevance as a concept.

### 3 **Questioning the concept of PCSR**

4 Before the concept of PCSR was developed, the main theoretical understanding of the political  
5 role of firms was the concept of Corporate Political Activity (CPA), mainly developed by North  
6 American scholars (Rasche, 2015). CPA, as well as Strategic CSR, is a Non-Market Strategy  
7 (NMS), within which the overlap between the social and the political is also possible (Mellahi  
8 *et al.*, 2016; Sun *et al.*, 2024). The field of NMS explores the actions firms take to improve their  
9 performance through the management of their institutional and societal contexts (Baron, 1995).  
10 For instance, the CPA literature posits that businesses are embedded in a non-market  
11 environment composed of governments and civil society, and they develop political initiatives  
12 to influence policies in ways that favour them (Hillman *et al.*, 2004; Katic and Hillman, 2023).  
13 Therefore, we argue that NMS, through the literature on CPA or strategic CSR, implies that  
14 businesses have strategic or instrumental reasons to engage in political activities. On the  
15 contrary, PCSR engagement does not respond to instrumental or strategic logics (Lock and  
16 Seele, 2018; Sun *et al.*, 2024). In addition, PCSR initiatives aim to govern societal issues. We  
17 find examples of PCSR initiatives involving firms alone (e.g. Morsing and Roepstorff, 2019),  
18 within multi-stakeholder initiatives (e.g. Huber and Schormair, 2021), or within partnerships  
19 with local or national governments (e.g. Schultz and Seele, 2020). These initiatives also differ  
20 from critical CPA, calling for more normative research, as they involve a direct engagement of  
21 firms with societal issues instead of offering ways for governments to do so (see Dahan and  
22 Hadani, 2023).

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1 With this understanding of PCSR, we posit that the concept should contribute to the broader  
2 theorisation of the political role of firms by developing a societal perspective on political  
3 engagement (Mende, 2022; Néron, 2010; Scherer *et al.*, 2014; Schultz and Seele, 2020), as  
4 opposed to CPA. Even though they are different in nature, both concepts contribute to  
5 understanding the engagement of firms in their socio-political environment by enabling a more  
6 holistic perspective on what Sun *et al.* (2024, p.278) call a ‘corporate socio-political  
7 engagement’ that brings together NMS strategies and PCSR. These theorisations respond to the  
8 call to consider businesses not only as economic actors, but also as actors that are part of the  
9 political and social arenas (Matten and Crane, 2005). In addition, taking a political perspective  
10 to study the constitutive elements of businesses offers an original contribution to the  
11 relationship between businesses and external institutions (Néron, 2010). To complement the  
12 instrumental perspective described in the NMS literature, it is critical that scholars continue to  
13 explore the direct engagement of firms for society. By providing these societal and direct  
14 perspectives on the political role of firms, the concept of PCSR can give more nuance to the  
15 political theory of the firm.

16 Yet, although the concept of PCSR has great potential to explore and explain the political role  
17 of firms, its current contributions are increasingly discussed and challenged. Therefore, its  
18 existence as a concept is at stake: if a concept does not provide significant theoretical and  
19 practical contributions, should we still explore and use it? In their essay, Mehrpouya and  
20 Willmott (2018, p. 1) take the example of PCSR to illustrate what they call ‘Knowledge  
21 Branding’ (KB): ‘forms of market-oriented work undertaken when creating, maintaining and  
22 developing niches of research’. They argue that the development and overuse of this KB are  
23 detrimental to management science as it encourages conservatism in the field and results in still

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1 less relevant research. Several reasons are pushed forward to explain this issue: the control of  
2 the field by a small number of scholars, the lack of interest in the social relevance of PCSR, the  
3 perpetuation of dominant ideas instead of posing challenges to them, and the lack of response  
4 to fundamental critics that could help develop the field (Mehrpooya and Willmott, 2018). We  
5 can observe these issues expressed in the PCSR literature: the control of the meaning of PCSR  
6 by only a few authors (Frynas and Stephens, 2015), the lack of guidance provided by the PCSR  
7 literature regarding global governance (Schrage and Gilbert, 2021), the lack of academic  
8 engagement with the negative effects of PCSR (Hamann, 2019; Maher *et al.*, 2022), and the  
9 perpetuation of capitalistic ideals (Rhodes and Fleming, 2020). As an example, when we  
10 examine the literature considered as central in the field, we observe a lack of academic  
11 engagement with such key issues as the place of private actors in global governance and the  
12 democratic deficit associated with the current deliberative democracy perspective on PCSR  
13 (Hussain and Moriarty, 2018; Rhodes and Fleming, 2020; Sabadoz and Singer, 2017). In the  
14 end, the centrality of certain authors in addressing some of the challenges of the PCSR concept  
15 but not other, more fundamental issues, leads us to question the concept itself, the way it  
16 evolved in the literature, and its potential future contributions.

17 The accumulation of these issues undermines the potential of PCSR to significantly contribute  
18 to both theory and practice, and therefore raises questions about the need to study it. Using the  
19 term ‘hembigs’ (contraction of ‘hegemonic’, ‘ambiguous’ and ‘big’), Alvesson and Blom  
20 (2022, p. 59) demonstrate how the overexploitation of hegemonic, ambiguous and big concepts  
21 is problematic. Their wide use by a few researchers in a specific field has led to the development  
22 of ungainly and vague concepts that impede theoretical development (Alvesson and Blom,  
23 2022). Indeed, when the knowledge constituting theories is either too broad or too narrow, the

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1 capacity to theorise a phenomenon is negatively impacted (Krlev, 2023). We think that the  
2 critical challenges noted above assume that the concept of PCSR is, at best, either a KB or one  
3 of these hembigs. We argue that a review of the field is thus needed to identify the potential of  
4 the PCSR concept to open new theoretical conversations and significantly contribute to society.  
5 As the literature does not consider the phenomenon of PCSR itself as problematic, but rather  
6 the concept, we choose to focus on the relevance of the concept of PCSR. Thus, in this review,  
7 we are less interested in the motivations that lead to committing to PCSR than we are in  
8 determining how the reality of the phenomenon is transcribed in the management literature and  
9 how it participates to the production of contributions to theory and practice.

## 10 **METHODOLOGY**

11 We adopted a three-step methodological approach that combines two bibliometric techniques  
12 and qualitative content analysis. The bibliometric approach uses both co-citation analysis to  
13 uncover the foundations of a given field and bibliographic coupling analysis to expose its recent  
14 evolutions. This combination of techniques is particularly fitting as it enables us to analyse how  
15 the concept is used in the management literature and where research could make significant  
16 contributions to theory and practice. In addition, bibliometric techniques ensure the objective  
17 mapping of the field and thus strengthen the research contributions (Zupic and Čater, 2015).  
18 Finally, bibliometric analysis provides a rigorous and replicable mapping of a research field  
19 (Fan *et al.*, 2022). By using these quantitative techniques, we are able to map the literature on  
20 PCSR and its current streams. In addition, as they uncover the foundations and directions of the  
21 literature, these quantitative techniques enable us to identify the elements at the base of the  
22 concept and how current research has built on them. By completing the bibliometric analysis  
23 with a qualitative cluster analysis, we overcome the shortfalls of bibliometric techniques and

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1 provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the field (Allegre *et al.*, 2023; Breslin *et*  
2 *al.*, 2021). Coming back to the objective of the study, these complementary methodologies  
3 enable us to unearth the theoretical foundations of PCSR (through a co-citation analysis) in  
4 order to understand how research can further help theorise it. We intend to identify the current  
5 conversations in PCSR (through a bibliographic coupling), further explore the reality of the  
6 PCSR phenomenon, and propose directions to strengthen its contributions to theory and  
7 managerial practice and encourage the ongoing efforts to understand the evolution of the  
8 phenomenon (through a qualitative analysis). In conclusion, this combined methodology  
9 enables us to assess whether the concept of PCSR respects the three objectives of concepts and  
10 offers ways to reinforce it.

## 11 **Bibliometric analysis**

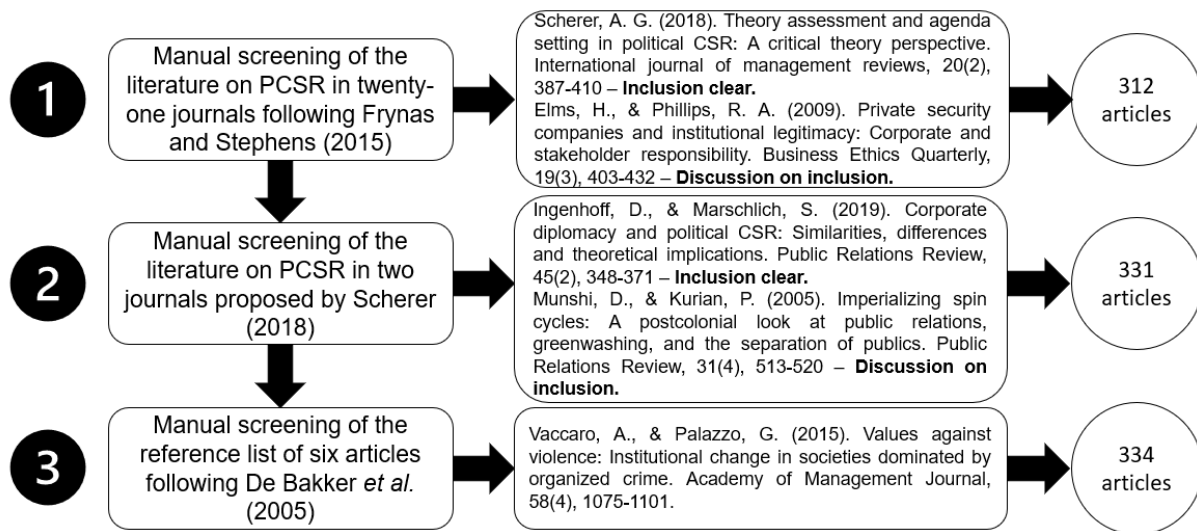
### 12 ***Data-collection protocol***

13 To construct our dataset, we followed a three-step methodology (Figure 1). First, we replicated  
14 and adapted the methodology of the bibliometric analysis published in the *International Journal*  
15 *of Management Reviews* by Frynas and Stephens (2015). Following the argument of Frynas and  
16 Stephens (2015) that the concept of PCSR covers a broad range of issues and perspectives that  
17 are not always labelled as such, we chose not to conduct a keyword search to identify and source  
18 the articles constituting our database. Instead, we manually examined every article and editorial  
19 published in the same academic journals that they used for their own analysis – plus  
20 *International Journal of Management Reviews* – and extracted each one that was related to the  
21 concept of PCSR and published between 2005 and 2022 (see Table 1 for a list). We chose 2005  
22 as one end of our dataset as it is the publication year of the first influential article in the field:

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1 Matten and Crane (2005) (3114 citations on Google Scholar at the time of writing). We  
 2 therefore collected all the articles and editorials published in the field between January 2005  
 3 and December 2022.

4 Figure 1. Data-selection protocol with examples



5

6 One might argue that this method is more subjective than a keyword search. However, manually  
 7 screening journals ensures that no significant work in the field is neglected (Srivastava *et al.*,  
 8 2020). Although we are aware that PCSR research can also be published in monographs and  
 9 book chapters (Scherer, 2018), we consider that the field is sufficiently developed to enable a  
 10 coherent review of the literature. One of the three authors first selected the articles that explicitly  
 11 used the term ‘political corporate social responsibility’ or ‘PCSR’ in the title, abstract or  
 12 keywords. Then, in cases where this specific term was not used in the article but where the  
 13 topic, as presented in the title and abstract, fit our definition of PCSR, as we explain further on,  
 14 two authors went through the main body of the paper to decide whether to include or exclude it  
 15 from the dataset. Following Schätzlein *et al.* (2023), when the two coders were unsure whether

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1 the article should be added to the dataset, they decided to add it to avoid the loss of potentially  
2 relevant information. The third author was consulted when the two authors disagreed in order  
3 to discuss and come to agreement (Seuring and Gold, 2012). Ultimately, we collected a total of  
4 312 articles.

5 In the second step, we read the response to Frynas and Stephens published by Scherer (2018)  
6 and decided to include two more journals that were considered to be missing in the first analysis.  
7 Therefore, the authors added *Organization* and *Public Relations Review* and conducted the  
8 same methodology to include or exclude articles from the dataset. We added 19 articles to the  
9 dataset following this method.

10 Finally, to ensure that no article was missing from the final dataset, we adopted the same method  
11 used by De Bakker *et al.* (2005): we selected six articles that we considered as influential and  
12 focused on PCSR, and we then screened their reference lists to verify whether we should include  
13 other articles published in the journals that we had selected. To perform this analysis, we  
14 screened the reference lists of the following articles: Mäkinen and Kourula (2012); Whelan  
15 (2012); Frynas and Stephens (2015); Scherer *et al.* (2016); Scherer (2018); Reinecke and  
16 Donaghey (2021). This search resulted in the addition of three articles for a final dataset of 334  
17 articles published between 2005 and 2022 in 23 journals.

18 We collected the articles using the SCOPUS database. We chose it for two reasons: it has  
19 broader coverage than other databases, and its data are supported by most bibliometric software  
20 (Bragge *et al.*, 2019; Zupic and Čater, 2015). The data extracted included the main information  
21 (title, authors, year, journal, abstract, cited references) about each article.

22

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Table 1. Sources used to construct the dataset

<b>Category</b>	<b>Journals</b>	<b>Justification</b>
CSR and social accounting	Journal of Business Ethics Business Ethics Quarterly Corporate Governance: An International Review Business & Society Accounting, Organizations and Society	Used by Frynas and Stephens (2015)
Political aspect of business	Business and Politics International Affairs Socio-Economic Review Journal of Economics & Management Strategy	
Management and international business (IB)	Academy of Management Review Academy of Management Journal Administrative Science Quarterly Journal of Management Journal of Management Studies	

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	<p>Organization Science</p> <p>Organization Studies</p> <p>Strategic Management Journal</p> <p>Journal of International Business Studies</p>	
Management and IB	International Journal of Management Reviews	Published Frynas and Stephens (2015) and Scherer (2018)
Management and IB	<p>Organization</p> <p>Public Relations Review</p>	Added in Scherer (2018)

#### 1 ***Inclusion and exclusion parameters***

2 The meaning of PCSR can be plural. Indeed, we saw that seminal works on the concept by  
3 Scherer and Palazzo were later challenged and that the literature has attempted to redefine the  
4 concept's boundaries. For instance, arguing that PCSR is not a consequence of globalisation as  
5 stated by Scherer and Palazzo (2011), but rather one form of it, Whelan (2012) proposes a  
6 pluralistic agenda to study the PCSR concept. Another example is Frynas and Stephens's (2015)  
7 review of the field, in which they reinforced the concept by proposing an inclusive and pluralist  
8 agenda for future research focused on the interactions between private and public actors. To  
9 construct our dataset, we chose a broad definition of PCSR that would include the seminal  
10 perspective on the concept, but also the propositions made by more recent scholars. Therefore,  
11 we define PCSR as *initiatives involving private actors taking a political role to govern or*  
12 *address societal issues*. Although we can consider the notion of governance as central to the  
13 conceptualisation of PCSR, it has not always been emphasised in the literature; hence, it was  
14 not a determinant criterion for selecting the papers. Contrary to Frynas and Stephens (2015),

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1 we did not include only those articles where the application of theories was explicit. Instead, to  
2 address the identified problems with the field, we also included papers that were more  
3 phenomena-oriented. In addition, we did not follow the categorisation proposed by Frynas and  
4 Stephens (2015) to select articles, as we considered it too restrictive. For instance, we chose to  
5 include articles that explored the negative intended or unintended consequences of PCSR (e.g.  
6 Hamann, 2019). Finally, and again contrary to Frynas and Stephens (2015), we excluded  
7 articles that focused on the instrumental reasons to engage for society, as we think they would  
8 better fit the CPA literature.

### 9 ***Selection of the bibliometric techniques***

10 Bibliometric analysis is essential to determine the intellectual structure and research front of a  
11 field when the number of published articles is in constant growth (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017).  
12 We used the bibliometric method known as science mapping, which is based on quantitative  
13 approaches to examine relationships between papers in a given field, thereby limiting the  
14 subjective bias that can occur in literature reviews (Zupic and Čater, 2015). The bibliometric  
15 analysis was conducted using RStudio software and the Bibliometrix package via the  
16 Biblioshiny interface (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017).

17 We used co-citation analysis to measure the similarities between the references cited in the  
18 articles constituting our database (Garfield, 1979; Small, 1973). Measuring similarities between  
19 studies by looking at those papers that are cited together in a source article is acknowledged as  
20 the most valid bibliometric technique (Zupic and Čater, 2015). The assumption behind it is that  
21 the more often two papers are cited together, the more closely related they are (Small, 1973).  
22 This technique is applied to cited articles to identify the knowledge base of a field, also known

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1 as its intellectual structure (Zupic and Čater, 2015). With this analysis of the 20,476 cited  
2 references, we were able to identify the foundations upon which PCSR was constructed, and  
3 therefore, its main constituents.

4 Following the co-citation analysis, a bibliographic coupling analysis, used to identify the  
5 research front in a field (Zupic and Čater, 2015), was performed on the articles published  
6 between 2015 and 2022. The authors chose articles published after 2015 because bibliographic  
7 coupling analysis measures the recent evolution of a field and therefore should be performed  
8 on articles that are about five or six years old (Zupic and Čater, 2015). In addition, choosing  
9 2015 enabled us to understand how the field has evolved since the first bibliometric analysis  
10 performed by Frynas and Stephens (2015) to determine the elements that had become prevalent  
11 to define PCSR. This smaller database comprised 137 articles published in 18 journals with  
12 10,349 references. This analysis relates documents by assessing the frequency with which two  
13 articles cite the same reference (Kessler, 1963). It is complementary to the analysis of the  
14 intellectual structure, and when combined, the two analyses help us understand how a field is  
15 constructed and where it is going (Zupic and Čater, 2015). For these two techniques, the  
16 Louvain method was chosen as it works well with large networks and provides accurate  
17 measures (Zupic and Čater, 2015). To display the results, the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm  
18 was chosen, as advised by Zupic and Čater (2015).

### 19 **Review of the clusters**

20 We complemented this bibliometric analysis of the PCSR literature by analysing the content of  
21 the clusters constituting the field. This second level of analysis enabled us to give nuance to our  
22 results by providing a more in-depth understanding of the articles in each cluster. We also used

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1 this analysis of the constituents and evolution of PCSR to assess the use of the concept, propose  
2 directions to strengthen its contributions to theory and managerial practice, and provide ongoing  
3 insights into the evolution of the phenomenon. Therefore, we read each article included within  
4 our clusters to find their scope, level of analysis, theorisation and contributions. By taking an  
5 extra step in the analysis, bibliometric analysis can go beyond an insufficient descriptive  
6 analysis of the literature and develop conceptual contributions that contribute to our better  
7 understanding of the field of research (Fan *et al.*, 2022).

## 8 **Limitations**

9 This research faces some limitations. First, bibliometric approaches do not take into account  
10 the context in which the authors in our dataset have cited other authors. Therefore, when it  
11 identifies the different clusters founding and extending the literature, bibliometric analyses do  
12 not capture the nuances that might explain why certain references appear in an article or the  
13 intention of the author behind the citations. In addition, because we used reference-based  
14 techniques, works that use few references will appear to a smaller extent in our analyses than  
15 works that reference numerous authors. Therefore, our work may tend to overrepresent  
16 conceptual analyses that often use more references than empirical articles. Finally, even though  
17 the authors established methods to reduce subjectivity as much as possible, not using keywords  
18 and manually selecting articles corresponding to our definition of PCSR might imply some  
19 subjectivity.

## 20 **RESULTS**

### 21 **Descriptive results**

Di Nardo, M., Brulhart, F., & Vieu, M. (2024). Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

1 ***Structure of the sample***

2 Figure 2 shows the small but generally constant growth of the PCSR literature between 2005  
3 and 2022. It is also important to note two peaks in 2012 and 2022, years in which we count  
4 respectively 31 and 35 published articles in the selected journals. If we look at the dataset in  
5 more detail, we observe that the literature constituting our dataset is generally dominated by  
6 conceptual research – with exceptions in 2014, 2016 and 2022 when we observe a majority of  
7 empirical research. Here as well, we can observe a consistency in the distribution of PCSR  
8 research throughout the years (62.5% of conceptual research per year on average). Finally,  
9 within empirical research, we note that the field is highly dominated by qualitative research,  
10 which seeks to explore phenomena (90% of qualitative research on average).

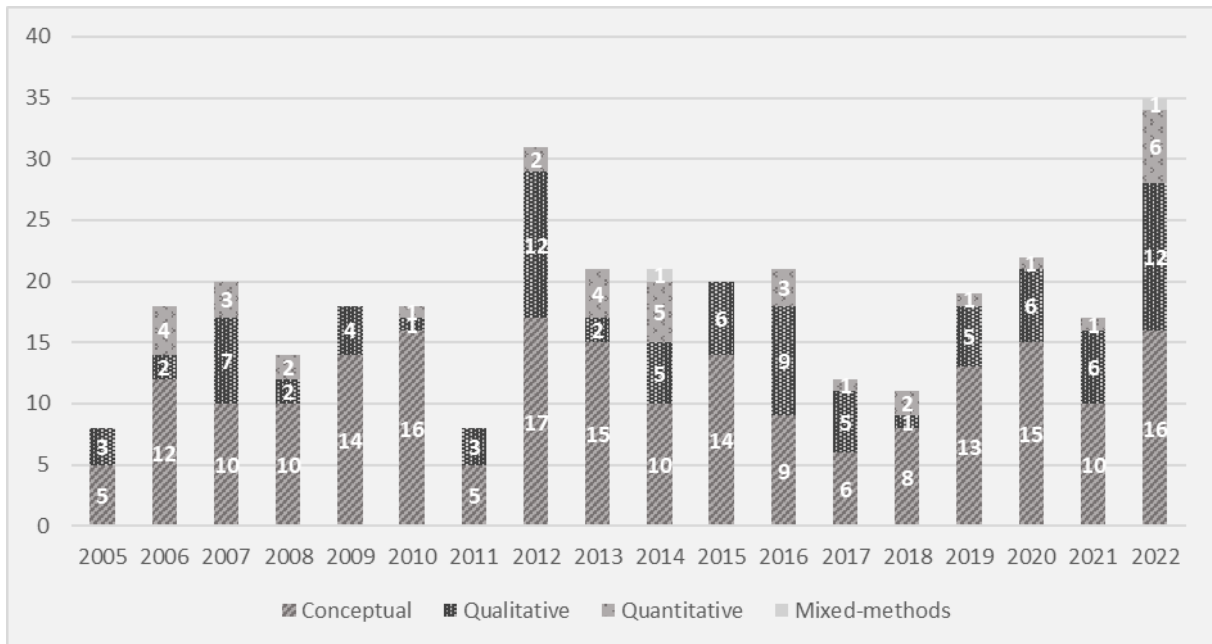
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14 Figure 2: Categorisation of the PCSR research by the nature of the research

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1

## 2 *Most-cited references*

3 Within our dataset, we find that two authors are especially represented: Andreas G. Scherer and  
 4 Guido Palazzo (authors of respectively 13 and 12 articles out of 334). We also find a good  
 5 representation of a few other authors such as Jeremy Moon (8 articles), Andreas Rasche (8  
 6 articles), Dirk Matten (7 articles) and Juliane Reinecke (7 articles). If we turn our attention  
 7 towards the most cited references within our dataset, we notice that some of these authors are  
 8 again highly represented and therefore frequently cited in the PCSR literature. As Table 2  
 9 demonstrates, within the 20 most-cited references by the articles constituting our dataset, five  
 10 of them are articles written by both Andreas G. Scherer and Guido Palazzo.

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Di Nardo, M., Brulhart, F., & Vieu, M. (2024). Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

1 Table 2: Most cited references

Reference	Citations
Scherer, A.G., Palazzo, G., Toward a political conception of corporate responsibility: <i>Business and Society</i> seen from a Habermasian perspective (2007) <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 32 (4), pp. 1096-1120	121
Scherer, A.G., Palazzo, G., The new political role of business in a globalized world: A review of a new perspective on CSR and its implications for the firm, governance, and democracy (2011) <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> , 48 (4), pp. 899-931	109
Matten, D., Crane, A., Corporate Citizenship: Toward an extended theoretical conceptualization (2005) <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 30 (1), pp. 166-179	90
Palazzo, G., Scherer, A.G., Corporate legitimacy as deliberation: A communicative framework (2006) <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 66 (1), pp. 71-88	72
Suchman, M.C., Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches (1995) <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 20 (3), pp. 571-610	63
Freeman, R.E., (1984) <i>Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach</i> , Boston: Pitman	62
Scherer, A.G., Palazzo, G., Baumann, D., global rules and private actors: Toward a new role of the transnational corporation in global governance (2006) <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 16 (4), pp. 505-532	62
Matten, D., Moon, J., 'Implicit' and 'Explicit' CSR: A conceptual framework for a comparative understanding of corporate social responsibility (2008) <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 33 (2), pp. 404-424	60
Friedman, M., the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits (1970) <i>New York Times Magazine</i> , pp. 32-33	53

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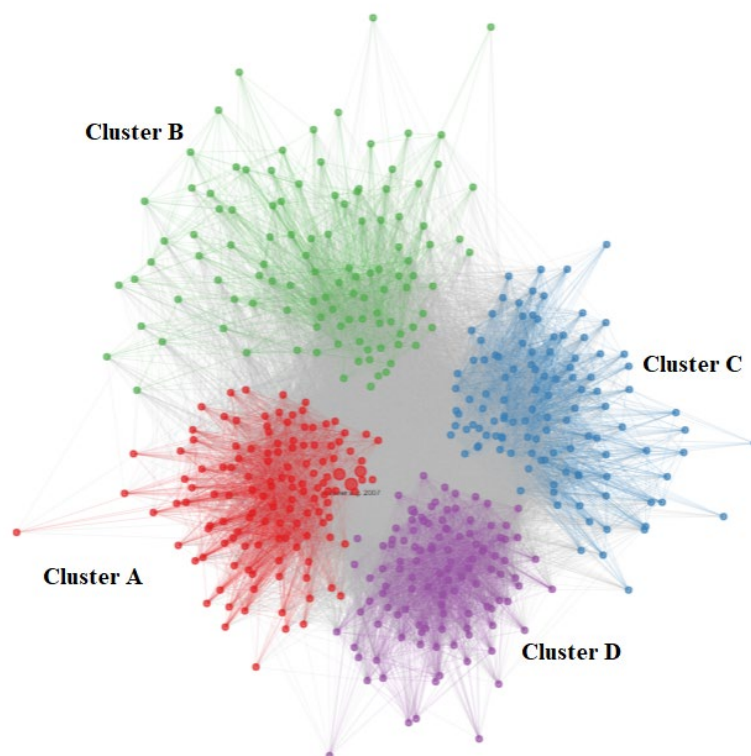
Margolis, J.D., Walsh, J.P., Misery loves companies: Rethinking social initiatives by business (2003) <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> , 48 (2), pp. 268-305	53
Mena, S., Palazzo, G., Input and output legitimacy of multi-stakeholder initiatives (2012) <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 22 (3), pp. 527-556	50
DiMaggio, P.J., Powell, W.W., The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields (1983) <i>American Sociological Review</i> , 48 (2), pp. 147-160	48
Mitchell, R.K., Agle, B.R., Wood, D.J., Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts (1997) <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 22 (4), pp. 853-886	46
Whelan, G., The political perspective of corporate social responsibility: A critical research agenda (2012) <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 22 (4), pp. 709-737	46
Habermas, J., (1996) <i>Between facts and norms</i> , Cambridge, Ma: Mit Press	43
Scherer, A.G., Rasche, A., Palazzo, G., Spicer, A., Managing for political corporate social responsibility: New challenges and directions for PCSR 2.0 (2016) <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> , 53 (3), pp. 273-298	43
McWilliams, A., Siegel, D.S., Corporate social responsibility: A theory of the firm perspective (2001) <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 26 (1), pp. 117-127	41
Mäkinen, J., Kourula, A., Pluralism in political corporate social responsibility (2012) <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 22 (4), pp. 649-678	41
Vogel, D., (2005) <i>The market for virtue: The potential and limits of corporate social responsibility</i> , Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press	41
Banerjee, S.B., Corporate social responsibility: The good, the bad and the ugly (2008) <i>Critical Sociology</i> , 34 (1), pp. 51-79	40

## 1 **Bibliometric results**

1 ***Foundations of the PCSR concept***

2 The results of our co-citation analysis conducted on 20,476 references indicate that the concept  
3 of PCSR as we know it has been constructed at the crossroads of four sets of literature. As  
4 Figure 3 demonstrates, we identify four connected but distinct clusters at the base of the  
5 concept. When we delve into the detail of these clusters, we understand that PCSR has been  
6 constructed by several empirical observations, different theories from different sciences, as well  
7 as different philosophical understandings of the role of firms.

8 Figure 3: Illustration of the clusters identified with the co-citation analysis<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> RStudio does not allow the researchers to make the figure clear to read but they chose to include it to show the different clusters and their dispositions.

Di Nardo, M., Brulhart, F., & Vieu, M. (2024). Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

1 Cluster A (red) contains the literature that looks at the political role of firms and is mainly  
2 focused on developing and strengthening the political theory of the firm. This cluster is  
3 constituted of mostly conceptual research, but we also find a large proportion of qualitative  
4 research. What is striking in this cluster is the presence of methodological articles and books  
5 focused on developing inductive research using original methodologies (e.g. Corbin and  
6 Strauss, 2008; Gioia *et al.*, 2013) and types of data (e.g. Langley, 1999). Regarding the  
7 conceptual frames of these studies, we observe a large variety of concepts that, directly or  
8 indirectly, relate to the political role of firms. These include seminal works on PCSR (Scherer  
9 and Palazzo, 2007), corporate citizenship (Moon *et al.*, 2005), institutional entrepreneurship  
10 (Khan *et al.*, 2007), corporate political strategy (Levy and Egan, 2003), and inclusive  
11 democracy (Young, 2000). Overall, this cluster comprises the literature focused on  
12 understanding the politicisation of firms and how to explore this phenomenon in management  
13 research.

14 In Cluster B (green), we find that the PCSR literature also has roots in moral and political  
15 philosophy to understand how firms balance their economic and societal engagements. In this  
16 cluster, we find a majority of research on the financial impact of CSR initiatives and the  
17 relationship between social and financial performance (e.g. Carroll, 1979; McWilliams and  
18 Siegel, 2001; Porter and Kramer, 2002). Regarding value creation for firms as well as for  
19 society, we find a broad representation of the discussion on the way shareholders (e.g.  
20 Friedman, 1970; Hillman and Keim, 2001) and stakeholders should be managed (e.g. Clarkson,  
21 1995; Jones, 1995). Overall, we find a sizable discussion rooted in economic philosophy –  
22 based itself on moral and political philosophy – to discuss the concept of ‘business ethics’  
23 (Phillips and Margolis, 1999). Besides this discussion on the level of engagement that firms

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1 should have in societies, we observe a substantial literature on the economic, social and political  
2 ideals developed in political philosophy (e.g. Nozick, 1974; Pogge, 2002; Rawls, 1971; Sen,  
3 1999). Generally, this cluster uses political philosophy and corporate strategy literature to  
4 discuss the notion of business ethics and the redefinition of the meaning of ‘value’ when  
5 strategy meets morals.

6 Cluster C (blue) is composed of research mixing both economic theories and political science.  
7 The research within this cluster looks specifically at the influence of external constraints on  
8 firms and how the latter respond. Because of this macro focus of the cluster, it is not surprising  
9 that the main theory is institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan,  
10 1977). Two related arguments are followed in this cluster. First and principally, firms that have  
11 international operations are increasingly pressured to engage in CSR activities (e.g. Aguilera *et*  
12 *al.*, 2007; Campbell, 2007), but the cultural and institutional differences that they face impact  
13 the external expectations and the design of such activities (e.g. Jackson and Apostolakou, 2010;  
14 Kang and Moon, 2012; Matten and Moon, 2008; Valente and Crane, 2010). Related to this first  
15 idea, the literature within Cluster C also explores the impacts that these pressures to engage in  
16 different institutional settings have on firms. Indeed, we find that the notion of ‘collective  
17 action’ to govern societal issues is prominent in the literature exploring firms’ response to  
18 constraints (e.g. Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1990), as well as in the literature questioning the  
19 legitimacy of firms to engage with these issues (e.g. Kostova and Zaheer, 1999; Suchman,  
20 1995).

21 Finally, Cluster D (purple) is composed of the literature oriented towards exploring the  
22 development of private governance mechanisms. To do so, it uses a combination of political  
23 philosophy and law, and here the main theory is corporate governance. Unlike Cluster A that

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1 explores the possibilities of empirically studying the changing role of firms, this cluster  
2 develops a conceptual understanding of the development of private governance and an  
3 assessment of the latter. Indeed, constructed on a discussion about the fragmentation between  
4 politics and law (Habermas, 1996; Kobrin, 2009; Ruggie, 2004), this cluster explores the  
5 construction of corporate responsibility (e.g. Scherer *et al.*, 2006; Young, 2004; Zadek, 2004).  
6 However, to be able to move corporate ethics in political philosophy, two questions are  
7 addressed concerning the legitimacy and the meaning of responsibility. Here, it is argued that  
8 the legitimacy of firms to develop private governance can be ensured by discursive means (e.g.  
9 Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Vaara and Tienari, 2008). Regarding the notion of responsibility,  
10 the cluster shows us that it is not an actual definition that is discussed, but rather the necessity  
11 of contextualising what ‘responsibility’ means for firms in a specific time (Young, 2004) and  
12 institutional context (Hsieh, 2009). This understanding of corporate governance as constructed  
13 and contextualised within political philosophy and law is coherent with the last stream of  
14 literature that we identify in the cluster: the social construction of reality (Berger and  
15 Luckmann, 1966).

16 To summarise, our co-citation analysis reveals that the concept of PCSR in management  
17 research is composed of four major pillars: the politicisation of firms, the redefinition of the  
18 meaning of ‘value’, the organisational response to the institutional environment, and the  
19 development of firms as governance actors. This analysis enables us to better understand the  
20 structure of the concept and how the management literature apprehends it, which offers part of  
21 the answer to one of our research objectives: to determine how the phenomenon is theorised in  
22 management literature, and therefore on what foundations academics build to contribute to  
23 theory. These four pillars seem critical to the concept as the entire body of literature on PCSR

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- 1 was developed around them. Therefore, we expect recent literature to consolidate these pillars
- 2 and extend the concept to enrich its contributions. Table 3 describes these findings.

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1 Table 3: Clusters identified from the co-citation analysis

Name	Colour	Pillars	Main theory	Number	Examples
Cluster A	Red	Politicisation of firms	Political theory of the firm	130	Crane, A., Matten, D., and Moon, J. (2008). <i>Corporations and Citizenship: Business, Responsibility and Society</i> . Cambridge University Press.
					Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 24(4), 691-710.
Cluster B	Green	Redefinition of 'value' in organisations	Corporate social performance	116	Vogel, D. J. (2005). Is There a Market for Virtue?: The Business Case for Corporate Social Responsibility. <i>California Management Review</i> , 47(4), 19-45.
					Phillips, R. A., and Margolis, J. D. (1999). Toward an ethics of organizations. <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 9(4), 619-638.
Cluster C	Blue	Firms' response to institutional environments	Institutional theory	111	Kostova, T., and Zaheer, S. (1999). Organizational legitimacy under conditions of complexity: The case of the multinational enterprise. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 24(1), 64-81.
					Oliver, C. (1991). Strategic responses to institutional processes. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 16(1), 145-179.
Cluster D	Purple	Development of private	Corporate governance	113	Bernstein, S., and Cashore, B. (2007). Can non-state global governance be legitimate? An analytical framework. <i>Regulation &amp; Governance</i> , 1(4), 347-371.

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	governance mechanisms for society		Hsieh, N. H. (2009). Does Global Business Have a Responsibility to Promote Just Institutions? <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> 19(2), 251-273.
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1 ***The current uses of PCSR***

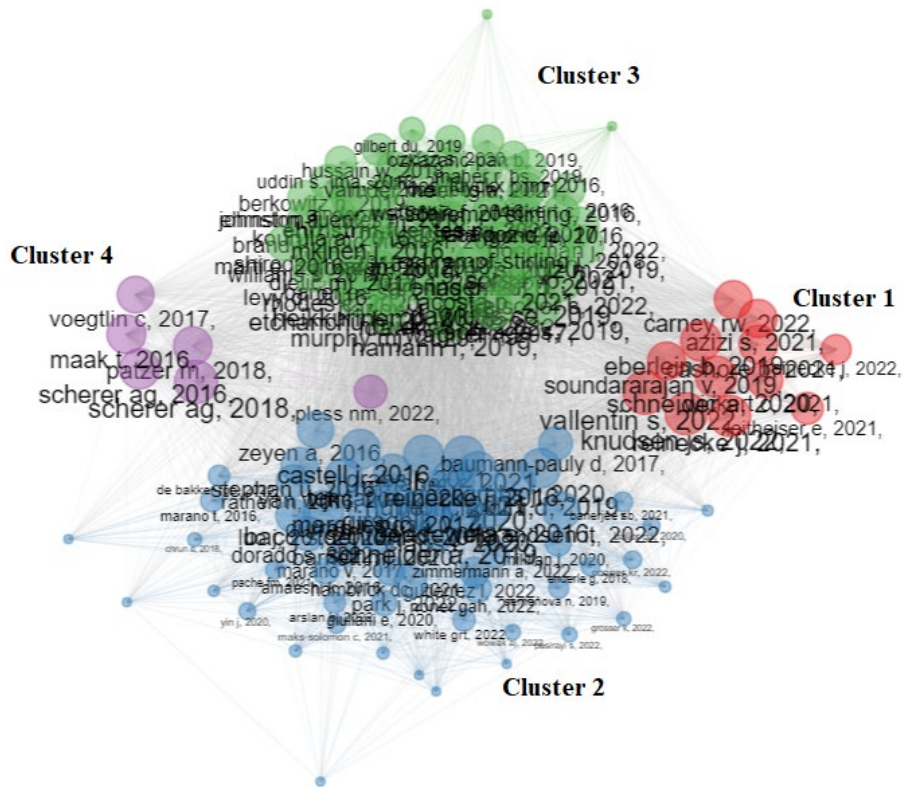
2 We unpacked the foundations of the concept of PCSR. However, to analyse and assess its  
3 relevance, we need to look at how it is currently used. This second step helps us identify the  
4 current use of PCSR, and therefore its novel features. Indeed, as we previously argued, to  
5 contribute to both theory and practice, concepts need to constantly be redefined and create new  
6 conversations.

7 In this step, we describe the results of our bibliographic coupling that analysed the current use,  
8 and therefore understanding, of PCSR between 2016 and 2022. We find four connected but  
9 distinct clusters with different sizes: two main clusters and two smaller ones. Figure 4 shows  
10 the four clusters identified from this analysis.

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Di Nardo, M., Brulhart, F., & Vieu, M. (2024). Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

1 Figure 4: Illustration of the clusters identified with the bibliographic coupling analysis<sup>2</sup>



2

3 Cluster 1 (red) comprises the PCSR research focusing on the relationship between private actors  
 4 and the institutional environment. It is mainly oriented towards contributing to the PCSR  
 5 literature related to corporate governance. This relatively small cluster (12 articles) is  
 6 exclusively composed of very recent literature and addresses several aspects of business-  
 7 government interactions. We find here a discussion on the influence of the external institutional  
 8 and economic environment on the societal engagement of firms (e.g. Knudsen and Moon, 2022;  
 9 Leitheiser, 2021; Schneider, 2020; Vallentin and Murillo, 2022). This literature questions the  
 10 legitimacy, and therefore the potential lack of democracy, of such engagement. Part of the  
 11 solution given within this cluster is to enhance the deliberative capacity of the actors involved

<sup>2</sup> RStudio does not allow the researchers to make the figure clear to read but they chose to include it to show the different clusters and their disposition.

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1 in the societal initiatives, and not only firms, in order to ensure an equal representation of all of  
2 them (Carney *et al.*, 2022; Reinecke and Donaghey, 2021; Soundararajan *et al.*, 2019). Overall,  
3 this cluster explores the development of the private governance of societal issues within a  
4 specific institutional and economic context. Because firms are not expected to take on this state-  
5 like role, this cluster also looks at the negotiation of the roles between firms and governments,  
6 as well as other actors, to ensure legitimate governance and democratic initiatives.

7 Cluster 2 (blue) explores and explains the determinants of PCSR engagement. In this cluster,  
8 research aims to contribute to answering one main question: how should PCSR initiatives be  
9 designed for greater impact on pressing issues? We find literature looking at not only the  
10 external determinants of engagement (e.g. Marano *et al.*, 2017; Yin and Jamali, 2021) but also  
11 the micro-level determinants such as the organisational impact of firms' leaders (e.g. Hambrick  
12 and Wowak, 2021; Krause and Miller, 2020). Different reasons and motivations to design  
13 societal initiatives are described in this cluster but they all converge towards one goal: providing  
14 greater impact to solve complex issues. Indeed, it is striking that having a real impact on society  
15 is central to this cluster, with research looking at ways to reinforce social cohesion (Enderle,  
16 2018), create shared value (Giuliani *et al.*, 2020), enhance social impact (Barnett *et al.*, 2020),  
17 or initiate successful collaborations (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2022). For this reason, we also find a  
18 large amount of research exploring ways to successfully address 'grand challenges' (Bacq and  
19 Aguilera, 2022; van Wijk *et al.*, 2019) or even the activist engagement of firms (Claus and  
20 Tracey, 2020; Gulbrandsen *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this cluster develops an understanding of  
21 the determinants of PCSR that are required in order to successfully tackle such complex issues  
22 as grand challenges.

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1 Cluster 3 (green) is focused on developing a detailed understanding of the conceptual  
2 construction of PCSR and an understanding of the construction of PCSR in reality. Composed  
3 of a balanced number of empirical and conceptual pieces, it explores the different processes by  
4 which firms become political and the characteristics of these processes. For instance,  
5 longitudinal, historical and processual studies explore the temporal embeddedness of PCSR and  
6 look at how these initiatives evolved as a result of evolving economic contexts or changing  
7 expectations of the general public (e.g. Acosta and Pérezts, 2019; Ararat *et al.*, 2018; Lundan  
8 and Cantwell, 2020). In addition, we find that the geographic contextualisation of PCSR is also  
9 a significant feature to consider. Indeed, we find examples of how PCSR initiatives, rather than  
10 doing good, can result in negative outcomes when they are designed without considering the  
11 political and cultural context in which they are embedded. In this case, firms might  
12 underestimate the real power of states and design societal initiatives that could either hamper  
13 the democratic processes of governments (Hussain and Moriarty, 2018; Rhodes and Fleming,  
14 2020) or even result in sustaining a form of neocolonialism in research (Banerjee, 2022;  
15 Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Against this, this literature offers to go beyond deliberation and foster  
16 contestation between firms and external actors such as governments, NGOs or local  
17 communities in order to reach collective, legitimate and democratic solutions to societal issues  
18 (e.g. Arenas *et al.*, 2020; Dawkins, 2021). Therefore, to construct PCSR as a concept, and in  
19 practice, this cluster represents the importance of considering the cultural and political context  
20 in which the actors are embedded.

21 Finally, Cluster 4 (purple) is composed of research that calls for extending the literature on the  
22 role of responsible leadership and responsible innovation to foster social good. This is the  
23 smallest cluster of this analysis (six articles) and is mainly composed of articles published

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1 between 2016 and 2018. In this cluster, we find research on the role of integrative responsible  
2 leadership to fulfil social goals (Maak *et al.*, 2016; Patzer *et al.*, 2018) and the role of  
3 responsible innovation to fulfil the same purpose (Scherer, 2018; Voegtlin and Scherer, 2017).

4 Table 4 summarises the content of the four clusters that we identified with the bibliographic  
5 coupling analysis. From this analysis, we identify how current research trends have influenced  
6 the conceptualisation of PCSR and reinforced its initial pillars. We observe that these four  
7 clusters seem to draw from the four pillars and develop conversations that both reinforce the  
8 pillars and specify the concept. This second analysis enables us to understand how the current  
9 use of the concept informs us on the significance of a combination of pillars to develop a  
10 relevant concept in management research. Therefore, it enables us to explore how the  
11 phenomenon of PCSR is understood and how the concept explains the reality of the  
12 phenomenon, which relates to a second feature that makes concepts relevant in literature.  
13 Finally, in the last section, we analyse the interactions between the pillars of PCSR and its  
14 current research trends to unpack the constituting elements of PCSR as a relevant concept for  
15 management research.

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Di Nardo, M., Brulhart, F., & Vieu, M. (2024). Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

1 Table 4: Clusters identified from the bibliographic coupling analysis

Name	Colour	Content	Main theory	Number	Examples	Influence on the concept
Cluster 1	Red	The interaction between private firms and the political environment	Corporate governance	12	Eberlein, B. (2019). Who Fills the Global Governance Gap? Rethinking the Roles of Business and Government in Global Governance. <i>Organization Studies</i> , 40(8), 1125-1145.	Reinforces the interconnection between private and public governance initiatives
					Reinecke, J., and Donaghey, J. (2022). Transnational representation in global labour governance and the politics of input legitimacy. <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 32(3), 438-474.	
Cluster 2	Blue	Exploring and explaining the determinants of (successful?) PCSR engagement	Organisational behaviour	61	Miklian, J., and Medina Bickel, J. P. (2020). Theorizing business and local peacebuilding through the “Footprints of Peace” coffee project in rural Colombia. <i>Business and Society</i> , 59(4), 676-715.	Expands the need to redefine the meaning of ‘value’ in organisational settings
					Claus, L., and Tracey, P. (2020). Making change from behind a mask: How organizations challenge guarded institutions by sparking grassroots activism. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 63(4), 965-996.	
Cluster 3	Green	The conceptual and practical construction of PCSR	Deliberative democracy	57	Banerjee, S. B. (2022). Decolonizing deliberative democracy: Perspectives from below. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 181(2), 283-299.	Makes explicit the dynamics of the construction of PCSR
					Hamann, R. (2019). Dynamic de-responsibilization in business–government interactions. <i>Organization Studies</i> , 40(8), 1193-1215.	

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<b>Cluster 4</b>	Purple	Providing social good through responsible leadership and responsible innovation	Leadership theory	6	Maak, T., Pless, N. M., and Voegtlin, C. (2016). Business statesman or shareholder advocate? CEO responsible leadership styles and the micro-foundations of political CSR. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> , 53(3), 463-493.	Explores a new dimension of the concept
					Voegtlin, C., and Scherer, A. G. (2017). Responsible innovation and the innovation of responsibility: Governing sustainable development in a globalized world. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 143, 227-243.	

1

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## 1 **The constituting elements of PCSR literature**

2 Combining the co-citation analysis and bibliographic analysis, we can trace how PCSR has  
3 developed as a concept in management literature. Our co-citation analysis shows that the  
4 concept has foundations in multiple disciplines, especially political science and philosophy, that  
5 have been applied to existing management theories to explain an emerging phenomenon.  
6 Taking a closer look at these foundations, we find that the topics addressed in this literature  
7 have established the preliminary pillars of PCSR: the political role of private actors, the  
8 increasing attention towards societal value creation rather than purely economic value, the  
9 organisational response to the institutional environment, and the private governance of society.

10 When we look at the recent and more established literature on PCSR, we see that the main  
11 directions taken in this literature tend to reinforce, and therefore verify, the centrality of the  
12 identified foundations. Indeed, mapping the foundations and current directions of the PCSR  
13 literature and then qualitatively analysing it enables us to assess whether the concept of PCSR  
14 as it is used in the management literature fulfils the three objectives of a concept (explaining an  
15 existing phenomenon, contributing to theory, contributing to practice). Here, the literature on  
16 the interactions between firms establishing private governance and governments (Cluster 1)  
17 seems to draw on the literature concerning the influence of external constraints on firms (Cluster  
18 C) and the literature on the private governance of society (Cluster D). The literature on the  
19 determinants of PCSR (Cluster 2), seems to draw on the literature concerning the redefinition  
20 of the meaning of 'value' (Cluster B) and the literature on the influence of external constraints  
21 on firms (Cluster C). The literature on the construction of the concept and practice of PCSR  
22 (Cluster 3) seems to reinforce all the pillars previously identified. Contrary to the other clusters,

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1 Cluster 4 seems to build only on the literature concerning the redefinition of the meaning of  
2 'value' (Cluster B).

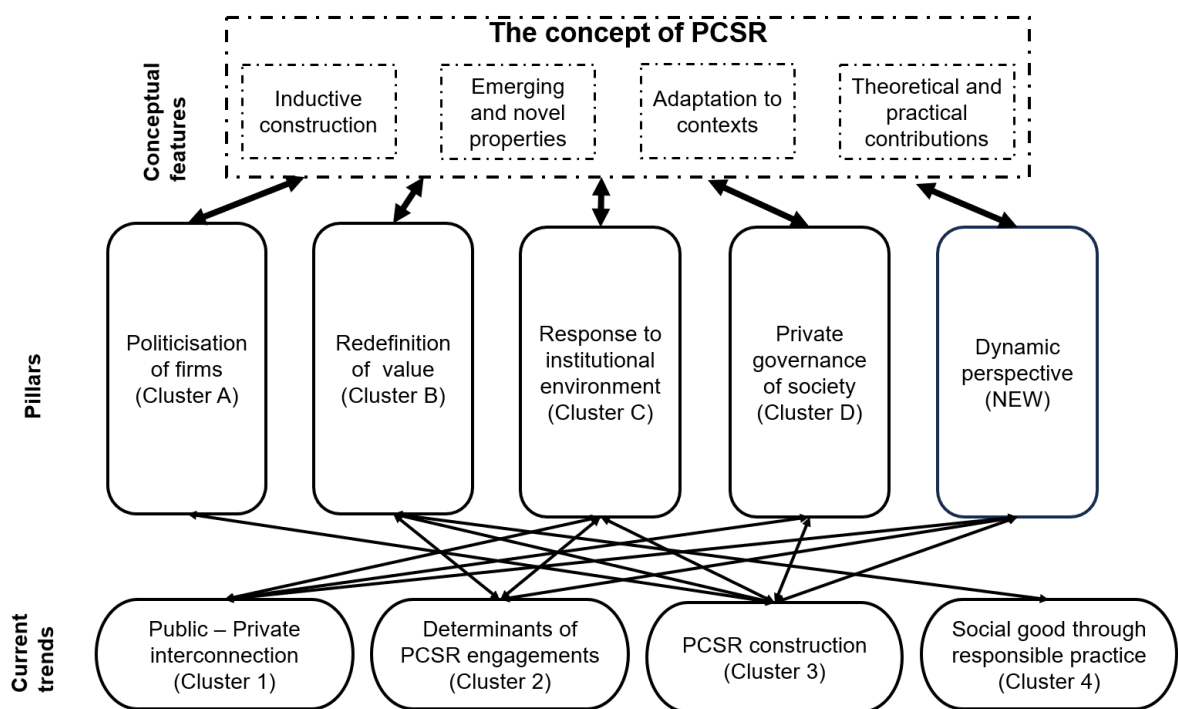
3 Building on the strong pillars uncovered by the co-citation analysis, this literature develops new  
4 conversations about the roles of deliberation and contestation to establish democratic  
5 governance (Cluster 3), the construction of PCSR initiatives (Cluster 3), and the intrinsic  
6 determinants of PCSR engagement (Cluster 2). We also observe a smaller cluster (Cluster 1)  
7 that might seem to develop a literature similar to that already developed in the cluster on the  
8 foundations of PCSR. However, going deeper into the qualitative analysis, we observe that it  
9 goes beyond this to offer an assessment of the roles of firms and governments in the governance  
10 of societal issues and discusses ways to ensure the legitimacy of all actors in such partnerships.  
11 Last, Cluster 4 tends to take an alternative approach to the study of PCSR by building on the  
12 recent literature on responsible leadership and responsible innovation to bring original  
13 contributions to the concept, and therefore to theory. Taken together, these results demonstrate  
14 that distinct conversations have been developed over time. We can therefore assume that it is  
15 still relevant to study this concept by adopting different perspectives on it. However, as we  
16 show, these conversations seem to draw on the foundations of the concept to build a better  
17 understanding of the phenomenon. In the end, by showing how current literature builds on  
18 strong foundations to explain the evolution of the phenomenon of PCSR, we explore a third  
19 feature of concepts: that they evolve over time to produce strong contributions to theory and  
20 practice to influence current managerial decisions.

21 After analysing the relationships between the foundations of PCSR literature and its current  
22 directions in our qualitative analysis, we noticed that one feature of the concept seems to come  
23 up in the current literature, but not as a foundation. Indeed, taking a closer look at what appears

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1 in the current understanding of PCSR, we found something that was missing in the founding  
 2 elements of the concept but which seems to complement these four pillars: the dynamic  
 3 perspective of PCSR. This feature appears in three current directions of the literature on PCSR,  
 4 enabling an understanding of the constant evolution of the relationships between public and  
 5 private actors (Cluster 1), a perspective on the changing determinants of PCSR over time  
 6 (Cluster 2), and an exploration of the construction of PCSR in practice (Cluster 3). In addition,  
 7 we suggest that this new pillar reinforces the existing pillars of PCSR by completing them.  
 8 Although Clusters A and B seem to take a dynamic approach to explaining PCSR, they are  
 9 actually quite static over time as they describe a single change faced by firms but not the  
 10 constant change, which is the ongoing adaptation to the evolving context within which firms  
 11 are embedded. Thus, this new pillar seems critical to explain the concept and the phenomenon  
 12 of PCSR. Figure 5 illustrates our findings.

13 Figure 5: Representation of the concept of PCSR



14

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1 In the following section, we discuss these findings to review the relevance of the concept.

2

3

4

## 5 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### 6 **Discussion**

7 Concepts have three main objectives: to describe existing phenomena and to inform both theory  
8 and practice. When PCSR emerged as a concept, the objective was to describe the phenomenon  
9 of the politicisation of firms addressing global societal issues. At this time, ‘the literature on  
10 “Political” CSR [was] notable for both its conceptual novelty and practical importance’  
11 (Whelan, 2012, p. 709). However, as we saw, the concept of PCSR is increasingly being  
12 contested both theoretically and practically as it has been declared to not significantly contribute  
13 to either field (Fooks *et al.*, 2013; Mehrpouya and Willmott, 2018), and even to fail as a concept  
14 that should do good for society (Banerjee, 2018; Maher *et al.*, 2022; Rhodes and Fleming,  
15 2020). These challenges led us to assess the relevance of the concept in and for management  
16 research, given that the objective of a concept is precisely to strongly contribute to developing  
17 theory and changing practices at the same time that it explores and explains existing phenomena  
18 (Dumez, 2011; Gerring, 1999). Looking at the bigger picture, these challenges echo the same  
19 challenges faced by management research regarding its potential to develop strong theories and  
20 initiate changes within society (Alvesson and Blom, 2022; Krlev, 2023; Mandard, 2021a;  
21 Prasad, 2013; Romme *et al.*, 2015).

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1 The current study offers an assessment of the literature on PCSR that ensures its relevance as a  
2 concept. Through an original study of its constituting literature and its use in management  
3 literature, we offer our contribution to the concept, which is to map it. Mapping the PCSR  
4 concept enabled us to gain an objective understanding of its foundations and its current research  
5 trends. Specifically, we show how current research builds on specific pillars of PCSR to  
6 consolidate and extend the concept. In addition, the identification of the pillars at the base of  
7 the PCSR concept provides objective foundations. These foundations can serve to develop a  
8 novel definition of PCSR that might reunite the competing perspectives on it and broaden the  
9 field to include more conversations, therefore making more significant contributions within  
10 management research. We also explore how this concept is inherently interdisciplinary. For this  
11 reason, political philosophy is major to the concept to justify the necessity of private  
12 engagement for society (Young, 2004) and to set the political and social ideals towards which  
13 society should tend (Nozick, 1974; Pogge, 2002; Rawls, 1971; Sen, 1999). These  
14 interdisciplinary foundations are critical to the PCSR literature as the current research on the  
15 concept uses one or several of them to develop novel conversations and provide a better  
16 understanding of the observed phenomenon of the politicisation of firms. Therefore, to be  
17 relevant in management literature, we argue that the concept of PCSR should be conceptualised  
18 on the basis of these major, interdisciplinary and strengthened characteristics.

19 For the second contribution, this research offers an assessment of the relevance of PCSR as a  
20 concept in management literature that is supported by both quantitative and qualitative analyses.  
21 In the first sections of this study, we demonstrated that PCSR emerged as a concept because it  
22 exhibited the necessary features for a new idea to be considered a 'concept'. However, we  
23 deemed it important to also examine the significant challenges to this concept around its

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1 relevance for management research and its contributions (Mehrpooya and Willmott, 2018;  
2 Rhodes and Fleming, 2020). Our analysis supports some of the arguments put forward by  
3 Mehrpooya and Willmott (2018) regarding the issues surrounding the notion of PCSR as a  
4 concept. Indeed, our results are in line with their assertion that the field is dominated by a small  
5 number of authors. As Table 2 shows, their works are central to the field and tend to perpetuate  
6 claims that may impede the potential contributions of the concept. Our results support the  
7 argument that the lack of contribution of PCSR to theory and practice is due to two main issues:  
8 the centrality of a few authors in the conceptualisation of PCSR (impeding theoretical and  
9 practical contributions from a wider range of authors) and the domination of conceptual works  
10 (Figure 2 and Table 2) in the literature, especially in the most significant references in the field  
11 (impeding practical contributions).

12 Although we show that the works of Scherer and Palazzo are central to PCSR, our results also  
13 suggest that the current directions taken in the field tend to develop alternatives to their  
14 conceptualisation. This is supported by the presence of two significant and frequently cited  
15 works in Cluster 4: Scherer *et al.* (2016), and Scherer (2018). Yet, as compared to the three  
16 other research trends, the direction taken within Cluster 4 seems to have failed to significantly  
17 develop. This observation is also supported by the prominence of Cluster 3 as a current research  
18 trend that is constituted by articles questioning the central claims of PCSR and developing  
19 alternative conversations (e.g. Dawkins, 2021; Hussain and Moriarty, 2018; Schrempf-Stirling,  
20 2018).

21 Our analysis partially supports the observation that PCSR research has lacked engagement with  
22 the significant challenges that the concept is facing (Maher *et al.*, 2021; Mehrpooya and  
23 Willmott, 2018). We also show that, although this literature is still minor, current PCSR

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1 research is now tending to engage with more sensitive issues (e.g. Maher *et al.*, 2022). However,  
2 contrary to Mehrpouya and Willmott (2018) and Rhodes and Fleming (2020), we demonstrate  
3 that the PCSR literature does not perpetuate neoliberal logics but instead looks for ways to  
4 contribute to society in an economic environment that is dominant and established. We show  
5 that the recent literature discusses the engagement of firms obeying logics other than capitalistic  
6 ones (Cluster 2 and 3): the development of activist initiatives (Claus and Tracey, 2020), the role  
7 of internal pressures to engage for society (Maks-Solomon and Drewry, 2021), or the role of  
8 religious principles to design new forms of engagement (Murphy and Smolarski, 2020).  
9 Although our analysis supports some of the arguments against the concept of PCSR, we also  
10 demonstrate that the concept has already started to address these challenges. Therefore, we  
11 show that it is indeed relevant to continue studying the concept of PCSR as a way to provide  
12 more significant contributions to the political theory of the firm and to practice.

13 Our third contribution is the identification of a fifth pillar of the PCSR concept: this pillar might  
14 be termed the dynamic perspective of PCSR. This pillar connects Clusters 1, 2 and 3 and  
15 explains the significance of current research trends; for this reason, we suggest that it should be  
16 considered one of the major pillars to conceptualise PCSR. Indeed, it is critical to strengthen  
17 the contributions of the concept and develop new conversations in management literature. We  
18 show that Clusters 2 and 3 draw on the initial features of PCSR and extend them to provide this  
19 dynamic perspective: the influence of specific determinants of the development of successful  
20 PCSR initiatives (Cluster 2) and the construction of PCSR (Cluster 3). This pillar also explains  
21 the novel development of Cluster 1, which also uses the pillars of PCSR to question the division  
22 of labour between public and private actors by examining their interactions. The centrality of  
23 this pillar seems to explain the significance of research expanding the concept from a dynamic

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1 perspective and the emergence of critical research adopting the same dynamic perspective.  
2 Pillar 5 can also explain the lack of literature in Cluster 4. Indeed, this literature seems to take  
3 a passive perspective on PCSR by focusing on causality instead of construction. For instance,  
4 in their central research, Scherer *et al.* (2016) develop a conceptualisation of PCSR based on  
5 causality (Cluster 4): private firms become political when they develop initiatives to contribute  
6 to society, yet these authors do not explore the construction of this role. For these reasons, a  
7 novel definition of the concept of PCSR should therefore include this fifth pillar. By completing  
8 the original pillars of the concept of PCSR, we reinforce its definition and offer a new space to  
9 make significant contributions to theory and practice and to explaining the phenomenon of  
10 PCSR.

11

## 12 **Avenues for future research**

13 On the basis of this analysis of the PCSR concept, we propose ways to strengthen it and its  
14 future contributions. Returning to the basics, we encourage academics to build on philosophy  
15 to discuss the meaning of ‘political’ and ‘responsibility’ in organisational settings. These  
16 discussions are needed to offer a better conceptualisation of the ‘political’ role of private actors  
17 towards society and to distinguish it from the role of public actors. Regarding the political side,  
18 we propose building on the works of Foucault (1984), particularly the *Aesthetics of Existence*,  
19 which links liberty and power and argues that the use of power can enable the invention of new  
20 ways of living, new identities and new social relationships. Academics can also explore the  
21 work of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), who explore the meaning of politics by exploring the role  
22 of micropolitics as a practice of law contextualised within social arrangements. Whelan (2019)

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1 offers a good example of such an endeavour by exploring how private actors choose to construct  
2 and use their political agency. Hannah Arendt's work on the interconnection between public  
3 and private spheres, and on the role of human action to construct the public spaces where  
4 politics happens, can also broaden our knowledge on the construction of political action  
5 (Arendt, 1958).

6 Regarding responsibility, research should build on Young's work (2011) on the responsibility  
7 for justice. Using this concept, she argues that 'those who participate in the production and  
8 reproduction of structural processes with unjust consequences share a responsibility to  
9 organi[s]e collective action to transform those structures' (Young, 2011, p.184). To go further,  
10 research can also build on Jonas's work (1979) on the *imperative of responsibility* as an  
11 imperative for human existence. Based on environmental arguments, his work links human life  
12 and the environment and argues for the duty of humans to preserve the environment in order to  
13 preserve their own existence (Jonas, 1979). Finally, research might well be inspired by the  
14 works of Lévinas (1985) on the obligation to be responsible towards others that precedes justice.  
15 These works would enable PCSR scholars to explore how private actors make sense of their  
16 responsibility towards society and how they construct their initiatives in that sense and integrate  
17 new stakeholders in their quest for responsible action.

18 Another direction would be to focus research on exploring the engagement of small, even micro  
19 firms towards society. While we know that SMEs have a political responsibility that falls within  
20 the concept of PCSR (Wickert, 2016), the research still lacks empirical evidence of such  
21 phenomena. We think that developing this stream of research would be beneficial for the field  
22 as it would bring critical insights into the contextualised development of PCSR initiatives. One  
23 way would be to build on the literature on Social Capital and Stakeholder theory to investigate

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1 how small and micro private actors engage in political initiatives to address issues faced within  
2 their social network (see Russo and Perrini, 2009). The concept of social proximity would also  
3 provide a strong base to explore the interconnection between owner-managers and local  
4 communities to develop societal initiatives (Lähdesmäki and Suutari, 2012). This type of  
5 research would contribute significantly to understanding how these actors shape tailormade  
6 initiatives to respond to actual issues faced by local communities and what their motivations  
7 are to do so.

8 Yet, because we have examples of the negative effects of the PCSR engagement of large  
9 companies (Maher *et al.*, 2022), we also need to further explore cases of PCSR failure.  
10 Extending critical research on PCSR would therefore allow for significant contributions as it  
11 would uncover the determinants leading to negative impacts and possibly provide solutions (see  
12 Hamann, 2018). Indeed, this conversation has already participated in exploring such negative  
13 effects as the corporate social imperialism associated with Western multinational corporations'  
14 (MNCs) initiatives in their host countries (Banerjee, 2021; Maher *et al.*, 2022). In any case, to  
15 contribute to PCSR, management research should continue to explore the mechanisms leading  
16 to these effects, question the power of MNCs to design such initiatives, and engage with  
17 economic actors to propose and implement solutions. Parentalism would provide a useful lens  
18 to investigate how these firms engage in deliberations with local communities and, at the same  
19 time, remain the sole decisionmakers regarding their engagement towards these communities  
20 (Etchanchu and Djelic, 2019; Maher *et al.*, 2022). To address the negative effects of PCSR,  
21 scholars could draw on the political theory of neocolonialism to explore the determinants of  
22 neocolonialist PCSR engagement and the ways to combat the hegemony of Western-based  
23 initiatives in non-Western contexts (Banerjee, 2021; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Vaara *et al.*, 2021).

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1 Exploring the role of discourse in different contexts can also significantly contribute to  
2 strengthening the concept of PCSR in management research. Indeed, building on the  
3 Communication as Constitutive of Organisation (CCO) literature (Schoeneborn *et al.*, 2020),  
4 academics could offer a novel perspective on the construction of PCSR by looking at how firms'  
5 communication on their societal engagement can shape their political identity and future  
6 engagements. Furthermore, research might explore the discursive construction of firms'  
7 political engagement through the lens of political ideology (Maclean *et al.*, 2018; Maclean *et*  
8 *al.*, 2024). For instance, Maclean *et al.* (2018) examined the development of the hotel industry  
9 and analysed how the political rhetoric of firms mirrors strong political ideologies that serve as  
10 foundations for the industry. Applied to the concept of PCSR, the analysis of political rhetoric  
11 could contribute to a better understanding of the foundations of societal initiatives. Qualitative  
12 studies using organisational reports, press releases or archival data can enable researchers to  
13 explore such topics. The role of discourse can also be explored by looking at how new  
14 deliberative and contestation spaces, such as social networks, can improve the development and  
15 legitimacy of PCSR initiatives. We are aware that the deliberative capacity of businesses is  
16 increasingly challenged in management research as it places discourses within organisational  
17 settings and therefore marginalises external stakeholders (Banerjee, 2022; Roussey *et al.*, 2022;  
18 Soundararajan *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we posit that research should shift its focus towards  
19 contestation spaces and their role to ensure the democratic representation of a majority of  
20 stakeholders involved with a given issue. In fact, contestation spaces are necessary as they  
21 enable different actors to come together and discuss sometimes contradictory perspectives in  
22 order to arrive at more democratic and efficient solutions to address societal issues (Arenas *et*  
23 *al.*, 2020). In the case of social media, these spaces enable forms of non-hierarchical discussions  
24 that rearrange power relations and lead to more legitimate initiatives (Castello *et al.*, 2016).

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1 Therefore, we also argue that PCSR research should shift its focus towards the role of social  
2 networks to communicate PCSR initiatives.

3 On the methodological side, we encourage researchers to develop qualitative studies that focus  
4 on specific political, cultural and historical contexts to gain a broader understanding of the  
5 phenomenon of PCSR and to strengthen the political theory of the firm. We think that inductive  
6 works are required to continue shaping and specifying the concept and that processual and  
7 longitudinal studies, already highly represented, should be continued. However, we also think  
8 that phenomenological and ethnographic methodologies would be useful to bring the role of  
9 context to the forefront of PCSR research. Regarding the issues addressed in the literature, we  
10 find considerable evidence on the environmental and human rights engagements of firms (e.g.  
11 Bacq and Aguilera, 2022; Baumann-Pauly *et al.*, 2017) but we lack research on the specific  
12 social issues such as LGBTQ rights (Wettstein and Baur, 2016) or gender issues (Grosser and  
13 Moon, 2019) that are increasingly discussed in society. Table 5 summarises these directions.

14

15

16

17 Table 5: Directions for future research

<b>Thematic and theoretical perspectives</b>	<b>Methodological perspectives</b>	<b>Expected contributions to the concept of PCSR</b>
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Di Nardo, M., Brulhart, F., & Vieu, M. (2024). Assessing the relevance of the concept of political corporate social responsibility in management research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

<p><b><i>Discussing the meaning of 'political' in PCSR</i></b></p> <p>Aesthetics of existence (Foucault, 1984)</p> <p>Micropolitics (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988)</p> <p>Political action (Arendt, 1958)</p>	<p>Processual analysis</p> <p>Longitudinal analysis</p> <p>Historical / Archival analysis</p>	<p>Understand how the political is constructed in PCSR</p> <p>Enable a better distinction between the political role of private actors and that of public actors</p> <p>Delimit the contours of political actions in PCSR</p>
<p><b><i>Discussing the meaning of 'responsibility' in PCSR</i></b></p> <p>Responsibility for justice (Young, 2011)</p> <p>Imperative of responsibility (Jonas, 1979)</p> <p>Responsibility for others (Lévinas, 1985)</p>	<p>Processual analysis</p> <p>Longitudinal analysis</p> <p>Historical / Archival analysis</p>	<p>Understand what a responsible action is for private actors</p> <p>Prioritise different stakeholders: fringe stakeholders</p> <p>Understand the relationship between politics and responsibility</p>
<p><b><i>Engagement of small and micro businesses</i></b></p> <p>Social capital (Russo and Perrini, 2009)</p> <p>Stakeholder theory (Russo and Perrini, 2009)</p> <p>Social proximity (Lähdesmäki and Suutari, 2012)</p>	<p>Case study</p> <p>Ethnography</p> <p>Processual analysis</p> <p>Participant observation</p>	<p>Explore the phenomenon of politicisation of small and micro businesses that is observed in practice</p> <p>Give a perspective on the role of owner-managers in PCSR</p> <p>Strengthen the contextualisation perspective of PCSR</p>

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<p><b><i>Negative effects of PCSR</i></b></p> <p>Neocolonialism (Banerjee, 2022)</p> <p>Parentalism (Etchanchu and Djelic, 2019)</p> <p>Denunciation (Boltanski <i>et al.</i>, 1984)</p>	<p>Case study</p> <p>Phenomenological analysis</p> <p>Ethnography</p>	<p>Explore the determinants of negative PCSR outcomes</p> <p>Explore cases of non-Western-based initiatives of PCSR as compared to Western ones</p> <p>Question the role of MNCs and their power in such initiatives</p>
<p><b><i>Role of discourse to construct PCSR</i></b></p> <p>Communication as constitutive of organisations (Schoeneborn <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p> <p>Political ideology (Maclean <i>et al.</i>, 2018)</p> <p>Contestatory deliberation (Arenas <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p> <p>Storytelling (Jorgensen, 2022)</p>	<p>Critical discourse analysis</p> <p>Processual analysis</p> <p>Phenomenology</p> <p>Ethnography</p>	<p>Understand the performative role of communication on the development of PCSR initiatives</p> <p>Explore how spaces for discourse are enabled and constructed on social media</p> <p>Explore how communication enables the legitimacy of PCSR</p>

1

## 2 **Conclusion**

3 We review the literature on PCSR to answer a critical question: Is it still relevant to study PCSR  
 4 as a concept in management research? Combining bibliometric analysis and qualitative content  
 5 analysis, we respond to recent challenges regarding the relevance of the concept of PCSR. We  
 6 assess whether PCSR meets the criteria for relevance in explaining the phenomenon of PCSR,  
 7 significantly contributing to theorising it, and influencing future managerial decisions. Our  
 8 research contributes to the PCSR literature in four ways: first, we map the field of PCSR in

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1 order to develop an objective understanding of the concept. Second, our analysis demonstrates  
2 that PCSR exhibits the features of a concept, and that current research is now beginning to  
3 address significant challenges to the assumption of its relevance for the management literature.  
4 Third, we identify the four pillars at the base of the concept and uncover a fifth pillar: the  
5 dynamic perspective of PCSR. Finally, our last contribution is to propose research directions to  
6 strengthen the PCSR concept and to enrich its contributions to theory and practice.

7 Through an original study of the literature on PCSR that combines quantitative and qualitative  
8 techniques, we are able to offer an assessment on the use of PCSR as a concept. We show that  
9 PCSR exhibits the critical features that compose a relevant concept that can further contribute  
10 to producing strong theories to explain the phenomenon of PCSR and enable businesses to do  
11 better for society. Therefore, our answer to the research question is ‘yes’, we should continue  
12 to study the concept of PCSR in management research. But, as for all management research,  
13 we urge academics to increasingly engage with firms, civil society and political institutions to  
14 put their findings into practice and make a significant contribution to changing the world for  
15 the better.

## 16 **REFERENCES**

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