# Knowledge Management Impact on Corporate Social Responsibility: A Systematic Literature Review

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**Abstract:** In the past few years, in the current organisational context, the impact of Knowledge Management (KM) on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important for companies in all sectors, as many of them are acting on a larger scale to be competitive in the global marketplace. In fact, KM helps generate sustainable innovation through inclusive CSR implementation practices (Shih, 2024). Companies are required to have a correct approach to Sustainable Knowledge Management (SKM) in order to practice the CSR model. SKM practices promote responsible and ethical knowledge sharing between different stakeholders (Alghamdi et al, 2023) and include several benefits. Promoting innovation and facilitating continuous learning, they ensure the effective and efficient use of KM. That is why this trend focuses on the development and application of innovative technologies. Based on that, this study aims to understand how KM influences CSR considering the role of Technology. The methodological approach is based on a systematic literature review (Tranfield et al, 2003). Particularly, this research was conducted in the three international and multidisciplinary databases – Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science – using query strings given by combinations of the keywords: "Knowledge Management", "Corporate Social Responsibility," "CSR," and "Tech*". Subsequently, the resulting scientific documents were selected following the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al, 2015; Xiao and Watson, 2019), and the data were examined using inductive content analysis. In this article, the authors draw on current literature to identify plausible gaps and discuss future implications of a new perspective. Although the topic is relevant, the findings suggest that academics have many opportunities to examine it.

**Keywords**: Knowledge Management, Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, Tech*

## 1. Introduction

In the past few years, in the current organisational context, the impact of Knowledge Management (KM) on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important for companies in all sectors. Many of them are acting on a larger scale to be competitive in the global marketplace and are including the principles of sustainable development in their business strategies.

In fact, KM helps generate sustainable innovation through inclusive CSR implementation practices (Shih, 2024).

Following the most relevant studies on KM, it is possible to describe it as the process through which an organisation generates, shares, and utilizes knowledge to achieve its objective (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The importance of this essential classification underscores the dynamic and interactive nature of KM, highlighting the ongoing process of knowledge creation and application in an organizational context.

More specifically, it is also possible to theorize that KM involves the creation, storage, transfer and application of knowledge within organisations (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). This approach captures the entire spectrum of KM activities, from the initial knowledge generation to its eventual use in decision-making and innovation process. A more comprehensive view identifies KM as a systematic practice of acquiring, organising, and communicating employee knowledge to make it available, actionable, and useful (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). This outlook outlines the structured and methodical approach required for effective KM practices, assuring that valuable insights are available within the organization.

On the contrary, defining CSR is more complex because CSR concept has evolved over the decades, changing its defining boundaries (Carroll, 1999). Using a modernized formulation, it could be defined as the summation of "organizational actions and policies that consider several types of stakeholders and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (Aguinis, 2011). Simplifying, as a management orientation integrating an organisation's desire to eliminate or reduce the negative effects of its activities on the environment and society through ethically sound strategic visions.

According to these theoretical premises, companies are required to have a correct approach to Sustainable Knowledge Management (SKM) in order to practice the CSR model. SKM practices promote responsible and

ethical knowledge sharing between different stakeholders (Alghamdi et al, 2023) and include several benefits. They ensure that KM is being used efficiently and effectively, promoting innovation and facilitating continuous learning. That is why this trend focuses on developing and applying new technologies.

Understood in this way, Technology includes practical applications of scientific knowledge to improve organisational and operational processes (Daft and Armstrong, 2021). This definition includes a wide range of technological tools and systems that can optimize efficiency and effectiveness in different organizational areas. As described by Drucker (1999), Technology is seen as the set of tools, machinery and procedures used to solve specific problems and improve operational efficiency.

Additionally, it is possible to reveal the transformative potential of digital technology in business models and innovation: digital advancements are not only enhancing existing processes but also creating new opportunities for business growth and competitive advantage through innovative applications. Therefore, Technology, especially digital technology, is essential for transforming business models and driving innovation (Porter and Heppelmann, 2014).

Nowadays, “global economic development based on sustainability is only possible through broadly understood knowledge” (Krawczyk, 2022) and understanding how KM practices are more relevant to CSR is a new critical challenge. The challenges faced by current organisations have changed significantly compared to the past due to global processes, new environmental and ethical issues, and the advent of new technologies in organisational functioning. Therefore, the public interest that governmental and institutional pressures promote leads organisations to adopt a sustainable economic development model that can satisfy the needs of current stakeholders without compromising the needs of future generations.

Combined with the concept of innovation, sustainability is part of a binomial supporting corporate competitive advantages. In fact, companies adopting a CSR model with the goal of creating sustainable value cannot ignore technological innovation processes: to pursue a sustainable competitive advantage, increasing both productivity and environmental protection, enterprises continuously apply new technologies and their ability to transform knowledge into new technologies is relevant (Krawczyk and Kokot-Stępień, 2023).

Related to this, KM is crucial because it is capable of encouraging the development of innovation and facilitates continuous learning. Its relevance for organisational success is widely recognized in literature (Drucker, 1993; Grant, 1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

Despite the acknowledged intensity of the connection between KM and CSR, recent studies have argued that "there is a paucity of management programmes on CSR, which creates a knowledge gap in the implementation of CSR by modern organisations" (Krawczyk, 2022).

Moving from these considerations and considering this gap, this research aims to understand KM's influence on CSR and discover the role of Technology in this relationship.

After this brief introduction and the identification of the research purpose (1), the authors develop the remainder of this study into the following paragraphs: “Methodological design” sets out the theoretical backgrounds and the methodological steps followed in the systematic literature review and data collection process (2); "Findings and discussions” presents the most relevant results obtained during research activity (3); “Stimuli and implications, limitations and future research directions” discusses the results, main limitations and implications for future research (4).

## 2. Methodological Design

This study offers a theoretical framework on the topic above, applying a methodological approach based on a systematic literature review (Tranfield et al, 2003).

Specifically, the main methodological goal of this article is to review and systemize available academic information to answer the following questions:

1. What Is The Impact Of KM On CSR?
2. What Is The Role Of Technology In The KM-CSR Relationship?

A frame of reference to the theoretical background used for the systematic literature review is helpful in achieving this specific objective. Of the various types of literature reviews that could be referred to for the methodological design of this study, the systematic review was preferred to the other typologies as it is more suitable for its compliance with defined methodological criteria (Xiao and Watson, 2019) and it is coherent with

the need to understand the progress of studies on this topic. Indeed, it outlines possible new directions for further research, which could lead to a broader understanding of the phenomenon and an innovative framework.

Moreover, it is a very businesslike methodology for academics and researchers, managers, business professionals and entrepreneurs. In fact, according to Tranfield et al (2003), "a good systematic review should make it easier for the practitioner to understand the research by synthesizing extensive primary research papers from which it was derived" and also “systematic review can be argued to lie at the heart of a pragmatic management research, which aims to serve both academic and practitioner communities”.

Against this background, the following two sub-sections illustrate the systematic approach used to outline the collected academic contributions, which proves a reliable and repeatable process.

## 2.1 Methodological Steps

Before investigating the state of the literature on the defined research questions and evaluating the studies included in the selection, the authors developed an inclusive review protocol of the criteria and strategies for searching, evaluating and synthesizing the data. During this phase, they identified keywords based on the search questions and they chose reference databases; subsequently, they designated selection criteria.

The research was conducted in the three international and multidisciplinary databases: Google Scholar (GS), Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS), using query strings given by combinations of the following keywords: "Knowledge Management", "Corporate Social Responsibility", "CSR", and "Tech*".

In particular, the choice of the databases GS, Scopus and WoS depended on several factors: 1) they are the databases widely used by academic scholars; 2) they are international and multidisciplinary sources of data and knowledge (in particular, the multidisciplinary allows the researcher to easily search outside of his discipline); 3) neither database is inclusive but each complements the other (Burnham J., 2006). Particularly, the specific choice to also use the GS database was due to its more extensive numerical availability of contributions on the topic researched. In fact, according to Walters (2007), “GS might be expected to provide especially good coverage of the literature due to its size and interdisciplinary scope”, despite its lack of possibility to filter results with regard to subject area.

Instead, in relation to the choice of keywords, the authors preferred to filter the keyword "Knowledge Management" instead of other knowledge management classifications in order to include all KM practices in the search. With the aim of amplifying the results relating to the Corporate Social Responsibility, the expression was considered both in its extension "Corporate Social Responsibility" and in its acronym "CSR". In addition, the keyword “Tech*” was chosen as the root of the term “Technology” with the intention of including all declinations of the term without altering its meaning.

Scientific documents were extracted in April 2024 and a subsequent follow-up update was carried out in July 2024 in order not to exclude additional contributions and new evidence that could have influenced the research results.

Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were incorporated in each database. More particularly, in the WoS database (www.webofknowledge.com), the scientific documents were selected for the first time using the following string: "Knowledge Management" (Topic) AND "CSR" (All Fields) AND "Tech*" while, afterward, using a combination of the keywords: "Knowledge Management" (Topic) AND "Corporate Social Responsibility" (All Fields) AND "Tech*"(All Fields). In both cases, the Web of Science categories – “Management”, “Business”, “Economics”, and “Social Science Interdisciplinary” – were filtered out, and only articles written in English were considered. The first research generated 21 results, while 38 papers emerged from the second research, for a total of 59 papers.

In the Scopus database (www.scopus.com), the same two strings were repeated: 1. (TITLE-ABS KEY ("knowledge management") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("CSR") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Tech*")) and 2. (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("knowledge management") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("corporate social responsibility") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("tech*")). Also, for the investigation of the study through this second database, filters were also applied, and these were defined according to the subject areas “Business, Management and Accounting”, “Social Sciences” and “Economic, Econometrics and Finance” and limited to “article” type articles written in English. In total, 18 papers were collected: 7 articles with the first search string and 11 papers using the second keyword combination.

Lastly, also in the GS database (https://scholar.google.com/), the strings given by the combination of keywords – "Knowledge Management" and "CSR" and "Tech*" – and by the combination of keywords – "Knowledge Management" and "Corporate Social Responsibility" and "Tech*" – were included. As in previous research, the criteria selected have included scientific documents written in English. Both search strings generated significantly higher results than the other two databases: while 589 articles were derived from the first search string, 807 articles were derived from the second combination, for a total of 1396 articles.

Overall, 1473 results were obtained. All data were saved in CSV format and all records were extracted, exported, and coded into Microsoft Excel documents, combining the two strings for each database, sorting the titles alphabetically, and eliminating 451 duplicate items both, at first, within each database and, subsequently, among the three databases.

Therefore, 1022 articles were screened. After this step, the titles and abstracts of the articles found were reviewed and those that were not pertinent to the research questions were also excluded. From the total number of studies admitted for retrieval, 106 of them were admitted to the eligibility phase. They were all read to examine the coherence with the objective of this research and 37 studies were considered in the final survey and included in the systematic review.

## 2.2 Data Collection Process

Throughout the data collection process, the resulting scientific documents were selected following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) Guidelines (Moher et al, 2015; Xiao and Watson, 2019) and the data were examined using inductive content analysis.

The authors opted to use the PRISMA checklist because it guarantees the survey's transparency and replicability. In fact, they could aggregate all data from the obtained findings and select them through three phases: 1) identification, 2) screening & eligibility and 3) included. The methodological steps described in the previous paragraph have been included in each phase.

*Figure 1* shows the PRISMA flow diagram used during the systematic literature review process.

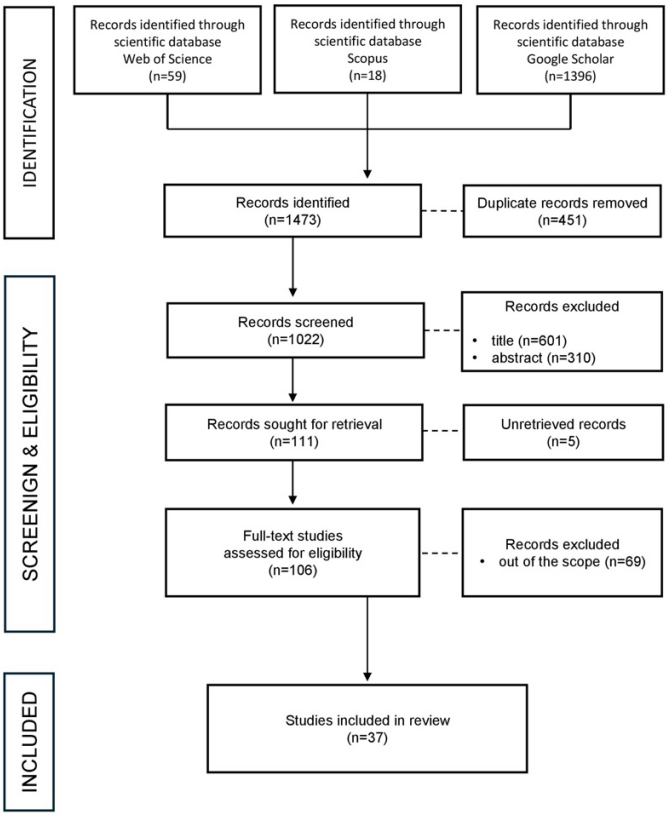


**Figure 1: Systematic literature review process adopting PRISMA Guidelines**

The studies included in the synthesis discovered different study variables, revealing the presence of various currents of thought in the existing literature.

## 3. Findings and Discussions

This section highlights the most relevant research findings and spaces for discussion on the topic. On the one hand, it confirms that the CSR-KM relationship is relevant and that technology plays a decisive role in it. On the other hand, it emphasizes a gap in the literature on the topic, resulting in the need for further investigation.

Concerning the CSR-KM relationship, KM practices can enhance the innovation and sustainability variables underlying CSR (Guadamillas-Gómez and Donate-Manzanares 2011) and KM can be a moderator of the influence of CSR on organisational performance (Ling, Y.H., 2019). For example, knowledge improvement inspires employees' sense of responsibility for corporate ESG goals (Solaimani, 2024). The ability of an organisation to implement sustainable innovation, closely related to its CSR and green entrepreneurial orientation, is influenced by KM practices, Technology, and Innovation (Acevedo et al, 2024, Tuncer and Korchagina, 2024, Martínez-Falcó et al 2023; Newaz 2022).

KM practices, in particular knowledge creation (Batista et al, 2017) and knowledge sharing (Areed et al, 2020), have an effect on CSR orientations because of their sustainable competitive advantage (Mahdi et al, 2011) and related studies have confirmed that benefits can be derived from this (Mayarni et al, 2023).

However, integrating the survey with the role of technology and considering the integration of sustainable business models with the prospects of digital technology (Brenner, 2018), it is necessary to consider that technology can improve knowledge management processes (De Bernardi et al, 2020) and that an intelligent organisation with a correct ethical approach, maximising continuous learning processes, use technology to pursue competitive advantage (Godlewska-Majkowska, 2019; Direction, 2011). Technological evolution has made knowledge a key determinant of innovation, contemplating new production and consumption systems that are environmentally friendly, economically sustainable, and socially responsible among the long-term goals (Buchmeister, 2013).

Integrating KM strategies with CSR improves corporate innovation capacity, especially in the renewable energy sector, where technological innovation is particularly important (Gonzáles-Ramos et al, 2023). Some studies have shown that in other sectors technology and knowledge are also important in terms of sustainability. For example, in the agribusiness sector, which is technologically dynamic (Morea, D. et al, 2023), CSR is recognized as a catalyst for the development of the circular economy (Depetris et al, 2023) and also in the health-hospital sector both KM practices and the application of new technologies have been considered relevant to sustainable policies (Borges de Oliveira and De Oliveira, 2022).

Another important result concerns the technological implications on corporate sustainability following the Covid-19 pandemic as the need for digital transformation has emerged (Su et al, 2022), given also the importance of technologies in meeting the demand for sustainable products (Cegarra-Navarro et al, 2021) and its ability to shape human action during a pandemic crisis (Hysa et al, 2024). Both technology and a proper approach to CSR policies can help organisations to deal with complex situations, such as an epidemic, by facilitating knowledge exchanges (Jain et al, 2022).

In addition, Industry 4.0, characterized by artificial intelligence (Panu, 2021) and inclusive of major technological changes, could also support corporate sustainability. In order to achieve greater levels of eco-sustainability, organizations are also resorting to digital platforms (Nemilentseva et al, 2024), as well as the adoption of blockchain technology (Sun et al, 2022). However, few studies deal with sustainable Industry 4.0. These include the study by Anshari et al. (2022), which states that its impact has yet to relate to KM practices.

Affecting CSR orientation positively on technological innovation performance (Anzola-Román, 2024), technology plays a decisive role in sustainable innovation, dominated by KM practices. Presently, managers' perceptions of rapidly changing factors such as technology induce companies to increase their investments in CSR (González-Ramos et al., 2023) while investments in ICT and the recruitment of specialized employees in its use contribute to greater innovation in organisations (Ayestarán Echeberría et al, 2023). Finally, SMEs, which compose most of the industrial fabric of developed and developing countries, can benefit from technology transfer in innovation processes (Scanlan, 2017).

Therefore, new research spaces are configured in the CSR-technological innovation relationship (Yang et al, 2024) and it is clear that there is a need to explore this issue further, better defining the SDGs Research Gap Technology, Innovation and Knowledge (Castro et al, 2021).

## 4. Stimuli and Implications, Limitations and Future Research Directions

This systematic literature review does not aim to complete the gaps in the state of the art on the investigated subject but its goal is to define them to allow researchers to explore them more thoroughly in the future and discuss new perspectives. In fact, it offers new stimuli for academics and researchers in the sector and similarly raises relevant implications for managers, practitioners, entrepreneurs, and policymakers engaged in developing new business directions and strategies.

The topic is relevant and there might be more opportunities to examine it. Actually, the results of this study open up different lines of multidisciplinary research as they outline possible new directions for further research, which in turn could lead to a broader understanding of the phenomenon and an innovative framework.

In terms of practice, both implicitly and explicitly with reference to the KM and ecodesign relationship (Lima et al, 2024), it has emerged that technology plays a decisive role in the relationship KM-CSR and, consequently, that it would be appropriate to explore it in depth.

Regarding its limitations, our article mentions several constraining factors. Firstly, it is based on the analysis of articles contained only in three scientific databases and in specific sub-areas. On the other hand, the choice of keywords and the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined ex-ante in the search strings may have also influenced the results. Therefore, additional studies should be conducted using other databases, sub-areas and inclusion or exclusion criteria or expanding the keywords and their combinations.

Consequently, the authors believe that this research does not exhaust the investigated topic but could serve as a starting point for future research development, whose directions could be oriented towards the interception of further relevant contributions in the literature concerning the impact of KM on CSR and the role of Technology in the relationship between these two concepts. The specificity of the two research questions and the dependency of the second from the first have conditioned the transition from the "eligibility" to the "included" phases, determining a substantial number of studies excluded as unrelated to the research aim.

In conclusion, on the assumption that literature review knowledge is an essential feature of academic research and knowledge advancement must be built on prior existing work (Xiao and Watson, 2019), future research should investigate the topic, extending the state of the art regarding the challenges approached in this study and exploring which KM practices and the further technological advancements could have the greatest impact on organisational sustainability processes.

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