

Full Length Research Paper

Epistemological evolution of corporate social responsibility in management: An empirical analysis of 35 years of research

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The epistemological evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the management literature is analyzed from 1972 to 2006 to update and extend previous state-of-the-art research by de Bakker, Groenewegen and Den Hond (2005 and 2006). Results of the content analysis of 1082 featured articles published in indexed journals reveal that, in the first place, CSR construct has evolved from vagueness to testing of the theory fitting to a progressive view and allow discarding both suppositional stances attributed to CSR literature, Variegational and Normativist. Secondly, findings also show that, in quantitative terms, there has been a significant growing in the total number of papers amongst the whole studied period. Finally, the findings confirm that, epistemologically speaking, CSR and Corporate Social Performance (CSP) literatures mainly deal with the same core construct.

Key words: Corporate social responsibility, corporate social performance, epistemological evolution, state-of-the-art, content analysis, theory development.

INTRODUCTION

Since Bowen's (1953) seminal piece on social responsibility inaugurated the modern thinking period (Carroll, 1999) on corporate social responsibility (CSR), a large debate on the nature of topic has been developed in management academic literature (Carroll, 1979, 1999; Moir, 2001; Pinkston and Carroll, 1996; van Marrewijk, 2003; Wartick and Cochran, 1985); academics and practitioners seem to have renewed their interest on the topic (Fassin, 2005; Joyner and Payne, 2002; Maignan and Ralston, 2002; McWilliams et al., 2006; Tixier, 2004; Smith, 2003) propitiating a plethora of theories, perspectives and terminology (Garriga and Melé, 2004) which cause confusion (Lantos, 2001) when attempting to deeply understand the notion. Within a bibliometric analysis of a 30 year period of research on CSR encompassing

encompassing from 1972 to 2002, de Bakker et al., 2005 developed and applied an specific methodology based in Content Analysis (CA) seeking to clarify the direction of CSR epistemological evolution. Even when their results allowed them to discard that the epistemological evolutionary sense of CSR had a normativist orientation, they were not able to discriminate which of two remaining possible perspectives, Progressive or Variegational, prevailed over the other, calling to replicate their research within some distance future to provide evidence on this issue (de Bakker et al., 2005, 2006). This paper represents a response to these calls.

Thus, while emerged doubts about the sense of the epistemological evolution of CSR within management literature persist, the main objective of this research is to determine this evolutionary sense from 1972 to 2006; complementary, this paper seeks to analyze the quantitative evolution of CSR papers among time, and finally, it is intended to externally validate the method developed by de Bakker et al. (2005). To achieve these objectives, an

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empirical research was conducted and four hypotheses were developed and tested after the required literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of CSR epistemological evolution sense through content analysis

To evaluate the symbolic content of communications in a quantitative, objective, systematic and reliable manner (Berelson, 1952; Kolbe and Burnett, 1991; Krippendorff, 1990) the use of CA has been widely recognized in the literature (Perreault and Leigh, 1989). This technique allows transforming the texts to be analyzed in data via judgmental processes based in specifically classification schemes (Holsti, 1969). Literature expose some requirements that must be fulfilled to develop a high quality CA, these are (Bigné, 1999; Kolbe and Burnett, 1991): To account with clear rules and classification procedures, to perform a proper selection and training of judges, to carry out pilot testing of the analysis categories to be used, to preserve judges' independence and autonomy, and to use ad hoc reliability indexes such as Holsti's (1969), Scott's (1955), Cohen's (1960), Krippendorff's (1990) and Perreault and Leigh's (1989). Likewise, if the intended use of CA is replication and broadening of previous studies, Stern and Resnik (1991) suggest using the same procedure and classification scheme as the original research.

CA is a valuable tool to analyze different evolutionary aspects (Fraguas, 2000), as demonstrated by its use in analyzing the evolution of: (a) Advertising informative contents (Vila et al., 2005); (b) Marketing literature (Sollberger and Furrer, 2004); (c) Sustainable development (Gladwin et al., 1995), and (d) The epistemological evolution of CSR itself (de Bakker et al., 2005; de Bakker, Groenewegen and Den Hond, 2006; Lockett et al., 2006). In fact, this last issue has been tackled both directly (de Bakker et al., 2005, 2006; Lockett et al., 2006) and indirectly through the stakeholders approach (Stoney and Winstanley, 2001).

Yet, relevant issues on CSR evolution have been revealed by Lockett et al. (2006), their paper has not enough methodological information regarding the reliability nor the validity of the executed analysis, and it only covers a ten year period of time (1992 to 2002). Hence, due to these limitations, considering the longer lapse studied in de Bakker et al.'s (2005) research, and attending to the suggestion of Stern and Resnik (1991) about applying the same process as the original, including the classification system, when conducting replication and/or extension studies, it was decided to analyze the last four years of academic production and to integrate the results with those previously obtained by de Bakker et al. (2005) to create a full time length database susceptible to be analyzed according to the research objectives sought by

this research.

De Bakker et al. (2005) followed an specific methodology to determine the epistemological evolution of CSR consisting of the subsequent steps: (a) Searching for CSR and corporate social performance (CSP) focused articles published in business academic journals indexed both in ABI/Inform Archive Complete, Global, and Trade and Industry (ABI/Inform) and ISI Web of Science Social Science Citation Index (WoS/SSCI); (b) Creating of a database with the papers identified as part of CSR or CSP fields (in the referred research, the initial number of articles was 549); (c) Manually deparating of the resulting database looking for duplicated, non related, not refereed¹ or non English written documents; (d) classifying of the selected articles attending to six specific types of work (conceptual, exploratory, predictive, instrumental, normative and descriptive) via the established judgmental process and classification scheme; (e) Once established the reliability of the analysis, solving disagreements through coders meetings and discussion; (f) Eliminating those papers where the disagreement persisted; and (g) Statistically analyzing the final database (composed by 512 featured papers).

The six types of works used to judge the papers, support three epistemological orientations (Barley et al., 1988; de Bakker et al., 2005): A theoretical one, composed by the conceptual, exploratory and predictive papers, a prescriptive one, composed by the instrumental and normative articles, and a descriptive one, composed by the descriptive papers. The classification scheme of the articles' epistemological orientation used by de Bakker et al. (2005) and the specific types of work definitions are reproduced in Table 1.

Consequently, according to de Bakker et al.'s (2005) proposals, it is possible to distinguish three alternative epistemological evolution senses of CSR called progressive, variegational and normativist view respectively. Firstly, as said by de Bakker et al. (2005), the progressive view designates an evolutionary sense such as the epistemological orientation of CSR literature has developed from conceptual vagueness to theory testing through the clarification of core constructs and their relationships, and by the use of gradually more sophisticated methods of research (de Bakker et al., 2005; Gerde and Wokutch, 1998; Rowley and Berman, 2000). In the second place, consistently with Carroll's (1999) and Mohan's (2003) inferences, the variegational view depicts a hampered or obscured evolution of CSR literature due to the constant introduction of new conceptions. Finally, the normativist view refers to such scenario where a dominant normative character of CSR literature (Matten et al., 2003) would have impeded the progress of the construct. Table 2 synthesizes, based in the research by de Bakker et al. (2005), the expected characteristics of CSR literature through time relative to each proposed

¹Including Book reviews, Dissertation abstracts, Advertising, Conference alerts

Table 1. Classification scheme and types of work definitions.

Epistemological orientation	Specific type of work	Definition
Theoretical	Conceptual	Major focus is on developing propositions, hypotheses, or (cor)relations between theoretical constructs, based on a discussion of state-of-the-art literature; no new empirical material has been collected for this work.
	Exploratory	Major focus is on developing propositions, hypotheses, and (cor)relations between theoretical constructs, based on the examination of extensive, new empirical data
	Predictive	Major focus is on testing (refutation, confirmation) of propositions, hypotheses, or (cor)relations between theoretical constructs, based on the examination of extensive, new empirical data
Prescriptive	Instrumental	Major focus is on providing prescription (means, ideas, recipes for action) to practitioners and professionals, that are instrumental in the realization of some desired end, such as improved performance along some dimension
	Normative	Major focus is on providing prescription (means, ideas, recipes for action) to practitioners and professionals, that are valuable in themselves when considered from some ethical, moral, or religious point of view
Descriptive	Descriptive	Major focus is on reporting fact or opinion; no intention of a theoretical or prescriptive contribution

Source: Adapted from de Bakker et al. (2005: 294).

evolutional view by type of work.

Hence, each of the three possible evolutional views are illustrated in Figure 1 attending to de Bakker et al.'s (2005) considerations described as well as to the number of papers by epistemological nature that would be found amongst years within each of those evolutional senses.

Results obtained by de Bakker et al. (2005: 297) permitted them to discard that, during the period comprised among 1972 and 2002, CSR's epistemological evolution was fitted to the normativist view, and to detect an important increase on the number of CSR/CSP articles published in management indexed journals after 1990. However, due to the unfeasibility to discriminate which one of the remaining evolutional views prevailed over the other, and because of the detected increment in the number of CSR focused papers could be explained either as a consequence of a real change due to the increased interest on CSR or as an effect derived of their data selection, "since WoS/SSCI and ABI/Inform are more comprehensive for the 1990s than before" de Bakker et al. (2005, 2006) called for new research, explaining that "follow-up and maybe replications studies with in a few years time are appropriate to see where the field of CSR/CSP research comes from and where it is going"

(de Bakker et al., 2006: 16).

Hypotheses development

Therefore, to determine the epistemological evolutional sense of CSR literature from 1972 to 2006, and to analyze the quantitative evolution of CSR papers amongst that 35 year period, four hypotheses are introduced in such a way that allows: (a) Determining which one of the three considered evolutional views better fits to the studied knowledge field, and (b) Determining if the number of papers focused on CSR published in management journals has significantly grown.

In the first place, it is proposed to contrast alternative hypotheses related to each studied evolutional view; consequently, hypothesis H₁ have to do with the progressive view, H₂ is compatible to the variegational view, and H₃ concerns to the normativist view. Hence, if the epistemological evolution of CSR literature were better fitted to the progressive view, the next hypothesis would be satisfied:

H₁: The number of theoretical CSR papers published

Table 2. CSR literature expected characteristics by evolutionary view.

Evolutional view	CSR literature expected characteristics amongst time	As a consequence / reflect of...
	In an initial stage, conceptual or descriptive papers would prevail.	The definition and development of firsts few core constructs as well as the attempts to obtain the required academic legitimacy for the study of the relationships between business and society
Progressive	In a second phase, exploratory and predictive papers would become increasing in number	Core construct's operationalization and the subsequent study of the relationship between the construct and the financial performance of the firm.
	Finally, the number of conceptual would reemerge.	Possible discrepancies resulting from exploratory and predictive research findings.
	In this case, anyway, the number of instrumental, normative and descriptive papers would be relatively low	Previous described characteristics
Variiegational	The curve drawn by the number of CSR theoretical papers through time would have an inverted U shape	The unproductive confusion of terms and the inherent impossibility of theory testing
	In comparison to the progressive view, the number prescriptive papers (most of them normative) would be greater than theoretical papers	The need to justify, from a moral point of view, the implication of the firms in socially responsible activities and issues
Normativist	The number of prescriptive articles from both instrumental and normative veins would prevail	The inherently ethical, moral or religious nature of research
	Few articles theoretically discuss the constructs and even less tackled its exploration and/or its empirical contrasting.	

Source: Own elaboration based on de Bakker et al. (2005).

amongst the last 35 years in relevant literature of management is significantly higher than the number of descriptive and prescriptive papers contained by the same literature.

By the opposite, if that evolution were better fitted to the Variiegational view, the endorsed hypothesis would be:

H₂: The number of theoretical CSR papers published amongst the last 35 years in relevant literature of management is significantly lower than the number of descriptive and prescriptive papers contained by the same literature.

And finally, if the epistemological evolution of CSR were better fitted to the Normativist view, the supported hypothesis would be:

H₃: The number of prescriptive CSR papers published amongst the last 35 years in relevant literature of management is significantly higher than the number of theoretical and descriptive papers contained by the same literature.

In addition, seeking for the achievement of the second research objective, as CSR literature seems to have a quantitative evolution from its origins to the present (de

Bakker et al., 2005), a specific hypothesis is proposed to confirm this:

H₄: The number of CSR focused papers within management literature has significantly increased through the last thirty-five years.

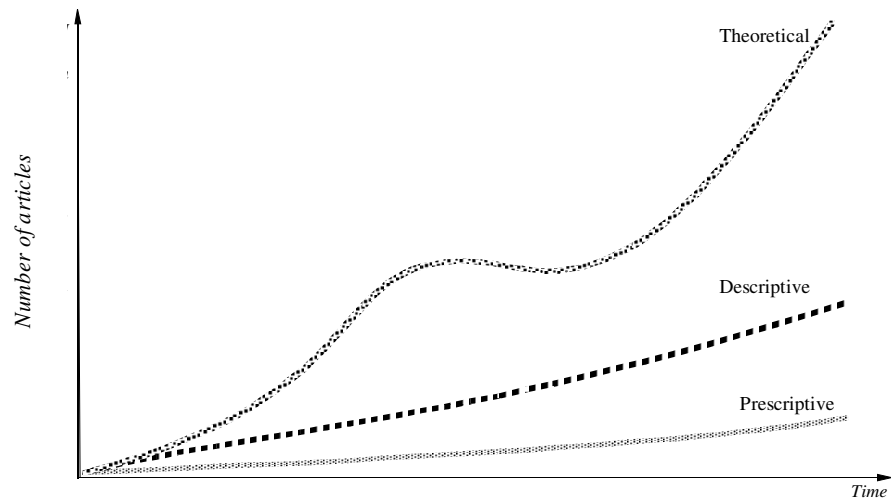
METHODOLOGY

As CA is particularly helpful when objective systematic evaluation of too much voluminous material is required (Kassarjian, 1977) allowing to obtain variables and measures from bibliographic material (Bigné, 1999), and it permits getting a panoramic sight of the intellectual structure of a field (de Bakker et al., 2005; Dobers, Strannegard and Wolff, 2000) due to its usefulness to build theoretical syntheses (Bunge, 2004); a quantitative empirical research based in CA was performed to contrast the established hypotheses and to achieve this research proposed objectives. Royo (1995), based on the ideas by Bardin (1986) and by Fletcher and Bowers (1988), distinguishes two main phases in the development of a CA, preliminary and analysis phases, which were seized to assist the process followed within this investigation.

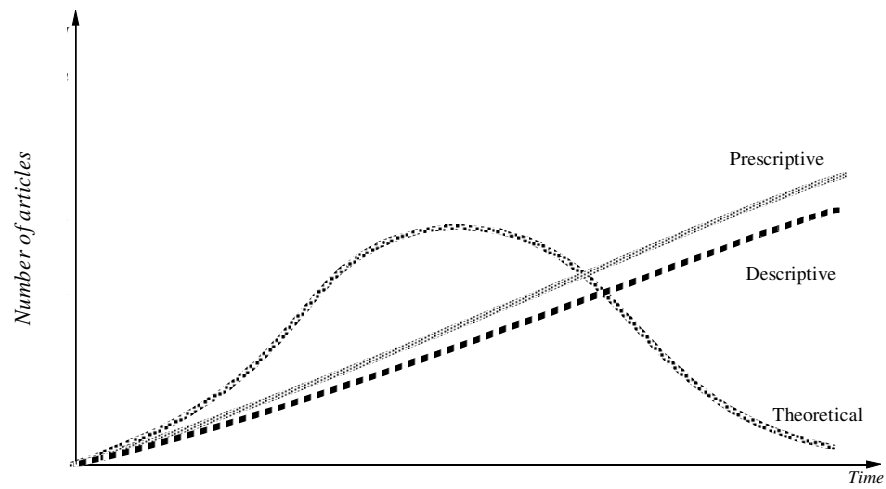
Content analysis preliminary phase

Since 1972 to 2002 period was already studied by de Bakker et al. (2005; 2006), to extend their findings, it was decided to strictly

PROGRESSIVE view



VARIEGATIONAL view



NORMATIVIST view

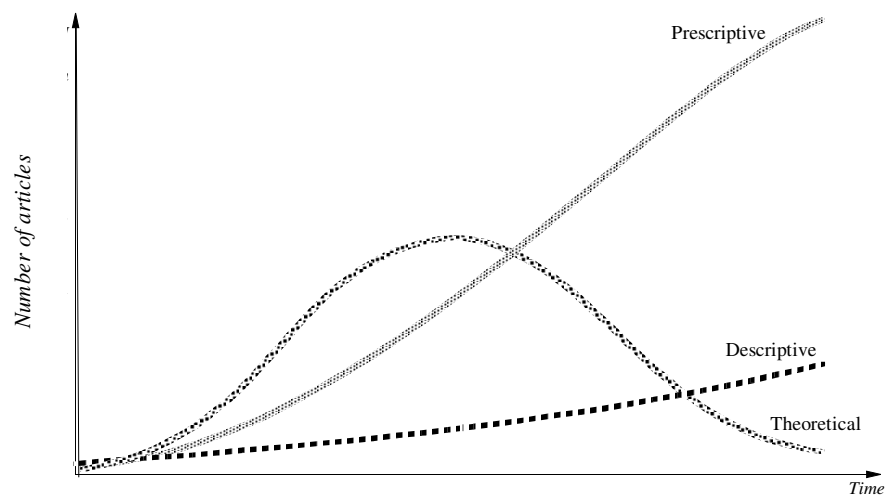


Figure 1. Epistemological evolutionary views' CSR literature expected behaviors by papers epistemological orientation. Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Operationalized variables.

Variable	Type	Measured issue	Applicable value
Year	Interval	Article's publication year	2003 – 2006
Type of work	Nominal	Judgment on the article's specific type of work	1 = 'Conceptual' 2 = 'Exploratory' 3 = 'Predictive' 4 = 'Instrumental' 5 = 'Normative' 6 = 'Descriptive'
Epistemological orientation	Nominal	Judgment on the article's overall epistemological orientation	1 = 'Theoretical' 2 = 'Prescriptive' 3 = 'Descriptive'

Source: Own elaboration partially based on de Bakker et al. (2005).

follow the data collection procedure described in the referred articles warranting the integrity of the sample units contained by the 2003 to 2006 period formerly resulting database. In this fashion, the analysis units composing the 2003 to 2006 population were obtained from searching² all CSR and CSP focused scientific peer reviewed papers published from 2003 to 2006, indexed both in the WoS/SSCI and in the ABI/Inform databases. The final search for articles' selection was done on October 4th, 2006. While de Bakker et al.'s (2005) paper included all the CSR/CSP papers published up to December, 2002; the search performed within this research was restricted to academic publications issued after that date. The initial obtained results were 1020 CSR and 138 CSP articles.

Following the procedure, each resulting dataset was manually and independently examined and depurated looking for duplicated, non related, not refereed or non English written documents, obtaining 553 useful articles to the CSR dataset and 51 to the CSP dataset. Both datasets were then integrated into a single one called CSRCSPP_{post2002} comprised by 585 items to start the data analysis, since during the integration process there were detected 19 overlapped articles (37.2% of the cases belonging to the CSP dataset).

To preserve item's codification at its' best possible, two decisions were adopted conducive to reduce the associated subjectivity to the judges' selection process attending to Bigné's (1999), Kolbe and Burnett's (1991), Krippendorff's (1990) and Perreault and Leigh's (1989) suggestions. The first decision was to use three coders and to ask each one to codify the totality of the items contained in the CSRCSPP_{post2002} dataset (Perreault and Leigh, 1989); the second, due to the specialized nature of the material to be analyzed, was to establish a precise profile of the judges. Thus, there were established four mandatory aspects to be fulfilled by the selected coders. In the first place, each coder must be postgraduate in a Business Sciences domain area; secondly, he (she) must be specialist in CSR related aspects; thirdly, the judge has to possess enough research experience and knowledge about the scientific method; and lastly, the coder must have higher English skills.

In addition, to preserve the independency of the judges, their training was done by the use of individualized working sessions. Besides the training itself, each coder was informed that there was no timing limitation at all to do the job, so, as recommended by Stern and Resnik (1991), the judge could use as much time as he (she) needed. Also, it was clearly indicated to each coder that the number of times he (she) could access each article and its

associated questionnaire was neither limited, making it feasible to review, and even to reconsider, any judgment at any time.

Additionally, to the six specific types of works defined in the categorization and quantification systems used by de Bakker et al. (2005), an 'operative category' named "non CSR/CSP paper" was introduced to coders' questionnaire, in such a way that they could discriminate those papers that, despite previous datasets' depuration, had remained in the database even when they were not pertinent to this research due to their poor relation with CSR or CSP constructs, or because of their abstracts or texts were written in a different language other than English. Finally, no pilot testing was required (Stern and Resnik, 1991) since the classification scheme was already defined and its' reliability had been previously tested (de Bakker et al., 2005, 2006). The operationalized variables are shown in Table 3.

Content analysis: Data analysis phase

Once coders' judgments ended, their results were checked for missing data and it was decided to eliminate twelve items (2.05%) from the CSRCSPP_{post2002} initial database while they were classified by the three judges as "non CSR/CSP paper". Similarly to de Bakker et al.'s (2005) case, coders' disagreements where more evident at the specific type of work level, however, at the superior categorical level of epistemological orientation, the inter-coders agreements were better.

As recommended by Perreault and Leigh (1989), the solution of discrepancies was carried out based on a majority rules procedure enabling the determination of the reliability of the performed procedure. The agreement indexes proposed by Holsti (1969), Scott (1955) and Perreault and Leigh³ (1989) are shown in Table 4. As it can be noted, the level of agreement achieved following Holsti's equation (78.0%) is somewhat smaller than 80.0%, considered by some authors as the minimum acceptable level (Bigné, 1999; Riffe et al., 2005). Nevertheless, as values obtained to Scott's pi coefficient (75.5%) and to Perreault and Leigh's Ir

² The specific search terms used to this research were exactly the same as those specified by de Bakker et al. (2005).

³ Cohen's kappa (1960) and Krippendorff's alpha (1990) were not determined since Perreault & Leigh's (1989) solution of discrepancies procedure cancels the possibility to estimate them. However, Perreault & Leigh's (1989) Index of Reliability (Ir) is a highly sensitive tool to detect weaknesses in the coding process.

Table 4. CA reliability indicators.

Index / coefficient	95% confidence intervals
$Holsti = 78.01\%$	Not applicable
$\rho_i = 75.53\%$	Not applicable
$I_r = 0.858$	Superior = 0.878 Inferior = 0.838

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5. Relative and absolute frequencies by epistemological orientation.

Epistemological orientation	N	%
Theoretical	571	52.8
Descriptive	206	19.0
Prescriptive	305	28.2

$\chi^2 = 197.58$; $p < 0,001$; $N = 1020$. Source: own elaboration

(0.858) exceed their respective critical levels⁴ of acceptance, the obtained results permit to verify the reliability of the executed CA.

As the performed analysis was reliable, and following the selected procedure, it was necessary to reach coders' agreement on the 126 articles where discrepancies continued after the first round. Hence, it was possible to categorize, through inter-coders discussion and debate, 123 of them. The three remaining were deleted from the 573 papers still contained by CSRCSPP_{post2002}, resulting in a final amount of 570 (97.44%) useful judged papers within the dataset.

Once the CA second phase is finished, data from the 512 items contained by de Bakker et al.'s (2005) original database, referent to the 1972 to 2002 period⁵, were integrated with data from the 570 papers comprised within CSRCSPP_{post2002}, to obtain the final database CSRCSPP₁₉₇₂₋₂₀₀₆ constituted by 1082 judged articles, which was used as base for the hypotheses' contrast.

RESULTS

As established to determine the epistemological evolutionary sense of CSR within management literature, it is necessary to tackle the hypotheses H_1 to H_3 comprising the three alternative epistemological views described in the literature review.

To contrast them, a c^2 test was fulfilled comparing observed and expected values of the variable 'Epistemological orientation'. Findings demonstrate that differences in the number of papers, attending the analyzed variable, are significant ($p < 0.001$). As shown in Table 5, the total number of CSR/CSP theoretical articles ($N_T = 571$) published amongst 1972 and 2006, is

significantly higher than the number of CSR/CSP descriptive ($N_D = 206$) and prescriptive ($N_P = 305$) papers, as hypothesized in H_1 . Therefore, being H_2 and H_3 alternative hypotheses referred to the variegational and normativist view respectively, both were rejected.

The observed relative number of CSR published papers amongst years is graphically described in Figure 2 by epistemological orientation and on lustrum basis. As it is easy to note when comparing with Figure 1, the observed behavior of CSR literature among 1972 and 2006 has a better fit with the progressive view.

The second specific objective of this research was accomplished through contrasting H_4 , which posits that a quantitative evolution of CSR papers has been real from 1972 to the present. To contrast it, two c^2 tests were performed; one relative to the 'Epistemological orientation' variable, and the other regarding the 'Specific type of work variable'. The number of CSR/CSP articles comprised among 1972 and 2006 published in management literature has significantly grown, either the analysis is based on Epistemological orientation ($c^2 = 139.195$; $p < 0.001$) as if it is based on specific type of work ($c^2 = 267.788$; $p < 0.001$). Consequently, H_4 is accepted, making possible to assert that, besides the qualitative evolution formerly explained, there is also a positive quantitative evolution in the number of CSR/CSP focused papers during the analyzed period. Figure 3 illustrates this quantitative evolution on lustrum basis.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While CSR/CSP epistemological evolution does not fit with the normativist view, the already noted minor role of normative articles on the overall epistemological evolutionary sense of CSR/CSP management literature amongst

⁴ Riffe et al. (2005) consider 66.7% as an acceptable value to Scott's pi (when working with nominal data and big sample sizes) while Bigné (1999) indicates a more cautious value of 75% regarding the same indicator. The interpretation of Perreault and Leigh's I_r is similar as other reliability measures used in quantitative analysis, thus, values higher than 0.8 are enough within confirmatory research (Perreault and Leigh, 1989).

⁵ De Bakker et al. (2005) reported inter-coders agreements of 77.5 and 81.7% to their CSP and their CSR datasets respectively.

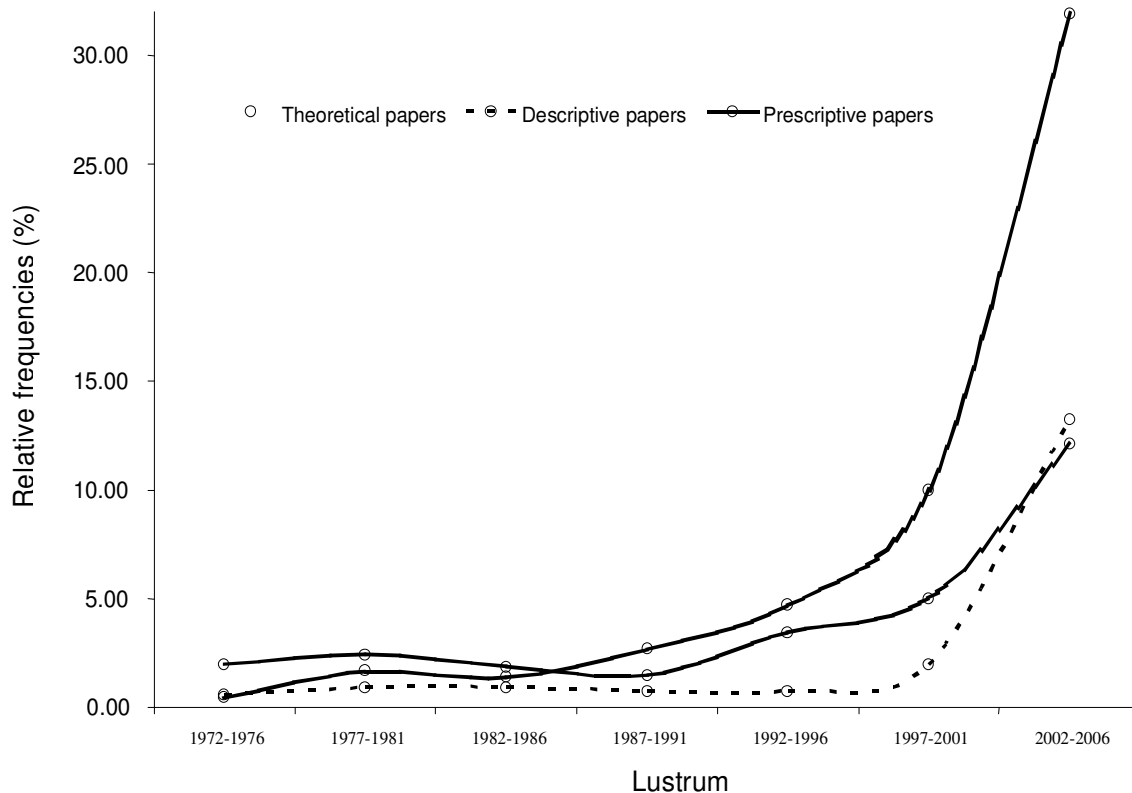


Figure 2. CSR literature observed behavior by papers epistemological orientation Source: Own elaboration partially based on data from de Bakker et al. (2005).

1972 and 2002 (de Bakker et al., 2005) has been confirmed by this research findings, in concordance with de Bakker et al.'s (2005; 2006) findings, when broadening the period up to 2006. This similarity provides some external validity to the methodology proposed by de Bakker et al. (2005), because when two or more cases support a same theory, it is possible to postulate its external validity through a second level inference (Yin, 2003). Consequently, it can be posit that, for the last 35 years, the progress of CSR core construct' has not been hampered by a suppositional normative character of CSR literature (Matten, et al., 2003).

Furthermore, this research has allow discarding that CSR epistemological evolutionary sense fits, for the whole studied period, within a Variegational view originated from a said continued introduction of new constructs (Carroll, 1999; Mohan, 2003). This extends de Bakker et al.'s (2005) findings related to the clarification of which of the two remaining perspectives, progressive or variegational, prevailed over the other. These conclusions opposite the idea that CSR study should be abandoned favoring 'better established frameworks' (van Oosterhout and Heugens, 2006) because its illness (Baron, 2001).

Most important, as the number of theoretical CSR/CSP papers significantly exceeds the number of articles with prescriptive and descriptive natures, this research support that the epistemological evolution of CSR better fits within

the progressive view postulates depicted by de Bakker et al. (2005) for the whole period.

Finally, quantitatively speaking, additionally to the significant grown of the number of published CSR/CSP papers through the 35 year period, it is interesting to observe that the total number of CSR focused papers published in management journals during the last four years (N = 570) is larger than the amount of similarly oriented articles issued during the previous 30 years (N = 512), corroborating the renewed interest shown by academics and practitioners on the topic (Fassin, 2005; Joyner and Payne, 2002; Maignan and Ralston, 2002; McWilliams et al., 2006; Tixier, 2004; Smith, 2003).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH LINES

Three main aspects limit the generalizations of the results of this research, in the first place, as recognized by de Bakker et al. (2005; 2006), judgments were based in the meticulous reading of the abstracts, titles and keywords contained in each selected article while the use of article's full content was left to attend only the cases where there were doubts about the classification settled by the coder. Consequently, some judgments could be different if the analyzed unit were the full text contained in the papers.

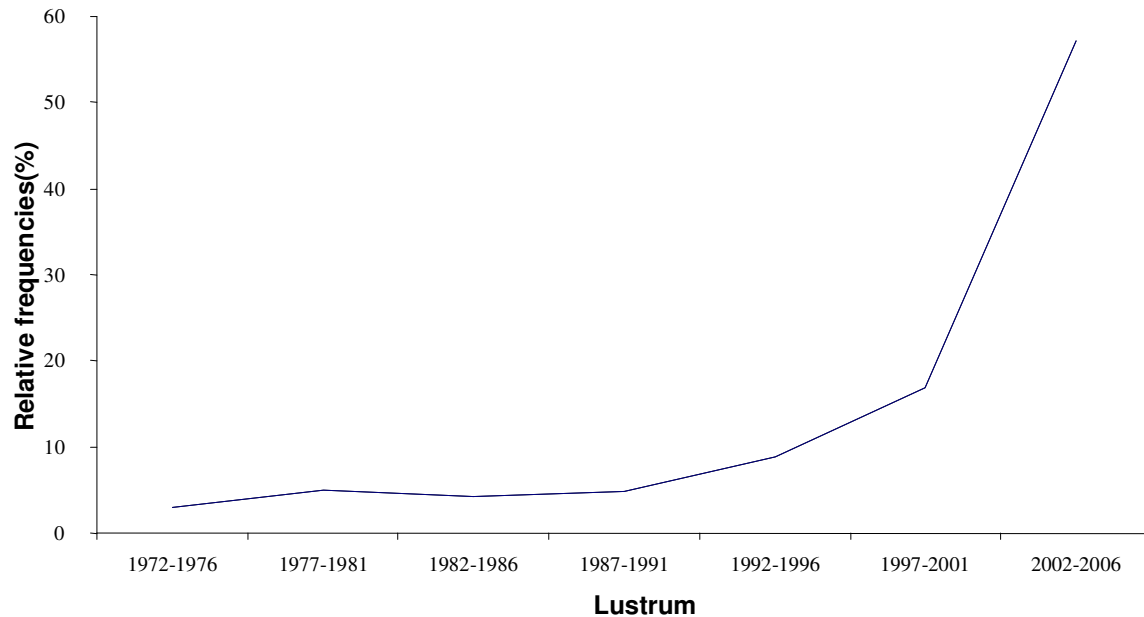


Figure 3. Quantitative evolution of CSR papers within management literature. Source: Own elaboration partially based on data from de Bakker et al. (2005).

In the second place, some elements considered by de Bakker et al. (2005) to define the specific types of work seem to be difficult to assess. Effectively, even when none of the coders reported structural deficiencies on the classification scheme, it is hard to objectively decide how much data are enough to be considered “extensive data”. While conceptual, exploratory and predictive papers pertain to the theoretical epistemological orientation category; this appears to be a minor limitation. However, it may be a source of inter-coders disagreement, which was smaller within this specific type of work level.

Finally, being English the prevailing used language on CSR papers cataloged in ABI/Inform and WoS/SSCI, and being an Anglo-Saxon cultural context the dominant one within the same articles, there is a natural bias which hampers the realization of other hypothetical CSR epistemological evolutionary directions that could arise from articles written in different languages and cultures.

The conclusions and limitations of this research, and the nature of the phenomenon object of study, invite to outline some future research lines which could extend and contrast the findings.

To research about the existence of possible sub-views and their expected characteristics within the progressive view related to the specific type of works, could be beneficial to having a better understanding on CSR epistemological evolutionary issues. Because of the plethora of theories and theoretical approaches used to develop CSR construct (Garriga and Melé, 2004) and the consequent confusion (Lantos, 2001), it also would be desirable researching on the influence each has had on CSR overall epistemological evolution.

Finally, because of CSR constructs’ troubles to fluidly travel across social frontiers (Boxenbaum, 2006; Rowley and Berman, 2000), it is suggested to look for potential dissimilar CSR evolutionary directions emerged from different cultural context of the authors or publication origins.

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