Research Article

A New Concept in Public Relations: A Systematic Review on "Corporate Social Advocacy"

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Abstract: The increasing public demand for brands to contribute to the creation of a 'more livable world' has played a critical role in shaping the transformation of corporate strategies centered around corporate social advocacy. This shift has also necessitated further academic inquiry into the subject. In this context, this study aims to offer both a conceptual evaluation of corporate social advocacy and a systematic review of academic research conducted in this field. The findings suggest that corporate social advocacy is gaining substantial prominence in both corporate and academic contexts. However, the review also identifies notable methodological gaps within the existing body of literature. Furthermore, an important observation is that the majority of studies focus predominantly on U.S. corporations and societal issues, leading to a body of literature that is largely constrained to the U.S. context.

Keywords: Corporate Social Advocacy, Public Relations, Systematic Review, Corporate Social Responsibility

1. Introduction

In 2012, Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, stated that the company stands in support of LGBTQ rights and marriage equality. During the Starbucks Annual Shareholders Meeting in 2013, in response to a shareholder's criticism that the company's support for same-sex marriage could lead to customer losses, Schultz remarked that not every decision is based on economic factors and suggested that the shareholder could sell their Starbucks shares and invest in another company if they disagreed (Starbucks, 2015).

In 2019, Ben & Jerry's changed the name of its popular "Chubby Hubby" ice cream to "Hubby Hubby" to show support for Vermont's legalization of same-sex marriage, featuring an image of two men in tuxedos getting married on the packaging (Huffpost, 2009). In contrast, the Chick-Fil-A brand took a different stance, openly declaring its opposition to same-sex marriage (CNN US, 2012). Dick's Sporting Goods, one of the largest gun retailers in the U.S., removed certain firearms from its stores following a school shooting in 2012, thus demonstrating its position on gun control (Davis, 2016). Airbnb announced its opposition to Trump's immigration policies, stating, "It is not right to prevent refugees from entering the U.S." (The Hill, 2018). The proliferation of such examples, particularly over the last decade, is noteworthy. Whereas "no comment" was once a standard response for brands regarding controversial social and political issues (Sprout Social, 2019), an increasing number of brands are now taking a public stance.

In recent years, brands, particularly in the U.S., have begun to express their positions on socially contentious issues. The stances taken by brands have garnered praise and approval from some groups while facing criticism and even boycotts from others. The increasing number of brands taking a stance on controversial social and political issues has prompted the search for new concepts in academia. Due to the inability to fully explain the examples through concepts such as corporate social responsibility, corporate activism, corporate advocacy, and corporate political activism, Dodd and Supa, introduced the term "corporate social advocacy" in 2014. This term is defined as "a public statement or stance taken by an organization on controversial social and political issues" (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

It has long been recognized that companies are responsible to society and strive to meet societal expectations to legitimize their existence (Overton et al., 2020, p. 696). In this context, companies have been engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives for many years, supporting social issues to meet public expectations. Corporate social responsibility is used as an umbrella term that describes voluntary activities undertaken by companies to fulfill their obligations to stakeholders and society (Coombs & Holladay, 2013, p. 212). However, it is also acknowledged that until recent years, companies traditionally employed a strategy of silence on controversial issues (Overton et al., 2020, p. 696).

Although the communication of companies with the public on controversial issues is not entirely a new concept (Bateman, 1973), there has been a noticeable increase in the number of companies taking stances on such issues compared to the past. Companies are increasingly feeling the pressure to engage with controversial social issues and are taking on the responsibility to serve as a moral compass for society (Parcha & Westerman, 2020, p. 351). One of the primary reasons for this shift is the changing expectations of consumers towards brands.

Edelman's 2017 "Earned Brand" study revealed a significant increase in the proportion of "belief-driven consumers." This term is used to describe individuals who prefer, purchase, or boycott brands based on their political and social stances. According to the study, more than half of the participants indicated they prefer brands that align with their values, and 65% stated they would not choose brands that remain silent when they should take a stand. The research demonstrates that brand loyalty increases when brands communicate shared values with consumers (Edelman, 2017). The 2018 data from this annual study showed a 13% increase in the proportion of belief-driven consumers. Participants also noted that brands possess significant power to address social issues and drive change.

The 2019 study titled "Brands Creating Change in the Conscious Consumer Era" produced similar findings. Seventy percent of participants expressed that it is important for brands to take a public stance on social and political issues (Edelman, 2018). A study conducted by Austin et al. (2019) in the U.S. revealed that despite the conservative tendencies of the population, people believe companies should address significant social issues.

The 2020 "Trust Barometer" report published by Edelman indicated that 80% of consumers expect brands to address social issues. The stances taken by brands on social issues and their actions play a critical role in building consumer trust (Edelman, 2020). The 2024 report further showed that brands' open and consistent stances on social and political issues have a positive impact on building trust. According to the research, brands experience a loss of consumer trust when they remain silent or exhibit inconsistent behavior on such issues. The report emphasizes that while brands' active participation in social and political matters presents both opportunities and challenges, managing this balance is crucial for building trust (Edelman, 2024).

Recent studies show that consumers expect companies to be active on social issues and to take a stance. In line with these research findings, an increasing number of companies, particularly in the U.S., are taking sides on controversial issues. This stance, defined as corporate social advocacy, meets the expectations of some groups while drawing criticism from others. Thus, it can be said that such positions carry risks for companies.

Research on "corporate social advocacy," a relatively new concept in the public relations literature, is of great importance for the development of this field in academia as well as for providing guidance to companies. In the international literature, there is a growing trend in the number of articles addressing the topic of CSA. In addition to studies examining the impact of CSA on areas such as purchasing behavior, word of mouth, and corporate reputation, research exploring perceptions of CSA is also increasing. However, in the Turkish literature, only two articles focus on this subject. Akçay (2023)

analyzes the statements made by Koç Holding, Borusan Holding, and the Sabancı Foundation regarding Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Similarly, Ekmekçi and Akdağ (2024) argue that organizations should advocate for social, political, and economic issues, emphasizing that efforts on matters impacting rights and freedoms are crucial for societal well-being. Additionally, there is no existing research that compiles studies on CSA or identifies the trends in the body of research conducted to date. In this context, the aim of this paper is to conduct a systematic analysis of research on "corporate social advocacy," a concept first introduced in 2014. Within this framework, the distribution of studies on corporate social advocacy by year and journal, the research methods and theories employed, the countries in which the research was conducted, and the topics covered in the studies will be examined. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will benefit both academia and practitioners by shedding light on the trends in this field.

2. Corporate Social Advocacy

The concept of "Corporate Social Advocacy" was first introduced in an article published by Dodd and Supa in 2014 in the *Public Relations Journal*. With an increasing number of companies in the U.S. taking bolder stances on contentious issues such as same-sex marriage, immigration, social justice, and police violence, it has become evident that research in the field of public relations is beginning to focus on corporate social advocacy (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Rim et al., 2024, p. 2).

Etymologically, the term "advocacy" is derived from the Latin verb "advocare," which means to call for help. It also contains the Latin word "vox," meaning voice. Therefore, advocacy can be defined as providing support for an individual, organization, or idea and "voicing" that support, attempting to persuade the target audience to adopt that individual, organization, or idea (Edgett, 2002, p. 1). Corporate Social Advocacy is defined as "a public function in which companies or CEOs position themselves on a controversial socio-political issue outside their corporate social responsibility interests" (Dodd & Supa, 2015, p. 288). In other words, it refers to companies taking a stance on a controversial issue outside their area of operations, indicating their position, and making a public statement on the matter.

It has long been recognized that companies must meet consumer expectations regarding contributions to the "common good" to legitimize their existence. This expectation is generally addressed through corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. However, as expectations regarding the role of companies in society have evolved, firms have begun to adopt active positions not only on topics related to social responsibility but also on socially and politically contentious issues (Overton et al., 2021, p. 1). This approach stands in contrast to traditional business thinking, which advises companies to remain neutral on controversial topics out of fear of alienating customers (Austin et al., 2019, p. 7).

Based on the theoretical explanations of corporate social advocacy developed by Dodd and Supa (2015) and Wettstein and Baur (2016), Fröhlich and Knobloch (2021) assert that corporate social advocacy possesses the following characteristics: Positioning on a controversial socio-political issue, a clear stance taken by a company or its official representative on the issue, the issue being a social event not initiated by the company, and the subject and content of the communicated message lacking a connection to the company's main business or area of operation (2021, p. 2).

How controversial socio-political issues are defined is also important for delineating the boundaries of corporate social advocacy. Since controversial issues change over time, with some becoming less or more contentious, there is no exhaustive list of issues considered falling under corporate social advocacy. However, for an issue to qualify as corporate social advocacy, it must be current (i.e., it must be a matter of ongoing debate), involve conflicting parties with opposing views, and not relate to the company's area of operation or its profit enhancement (Parcha, 2022, p. 917).

Companies can employ various types of communication for corporate social advocacy. These include statements or speeches by the company's primary representative or CEO (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Hong & Li, 2020; Logan, 2021), official statements made by the company (Parcha & Westerman, 2020; Lee & Chung, 2023), advertisements published by the company (Lim et al., 2024), and social media posts made by the company (Rim et al., 2020).

While taking a public stance on contentious issues and sharing this stance with the public carries' significant risks for companies, numerous studies demonstrate the positive effects of corporate social advocacy on consumer attitudes and behaviors. Some research (Austin et al., 2019) indicates that consumers believe companies should address significant issues, while other studies have shown that corporate social advocacy can positively influence purchase behavior (Dodd & Supa, 2015), the credibility and reputation of the company (Vasquez, 2022), and word-of-mouth communication (Xiao & Overton, 2022). Furthermore, corporate social advocacy practices can create a legitimacy gap among stakeholders, potentially negatively impacting the resources and power held by the company (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Some studies (Hong & Li, 2020) suggest that corporate social advocacy practices can lead to outcomes such as boycotts, protests, and alienation.

3. Differences Between Corporate Social Advocacy and Neighboring Concepts

Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) is a relatively new concept, having only recently completed its tenth year, and it is often used synonymously with neighboring concepts, leading to a lack of consensus in academia. In this context, discussing the differences between CSA and related terms such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Corporate Activism, Corporate Advocacy, and Corporate Political Activism is essential for delineating the concept's boundaries.

Some authors (Park, 2022, p. 893; Austin et al., 2019, p. 6) view corporate social advocacy as a form of corporate social responsibility activity or a subset thereof. Both practices concern companies fulfilling their responsibilities and obligations to society beyond short-term economic profits (Rim et al., 2024; Xu & Xiong, 2020). Despite this similarity, some researchers argue that CSA should be treated as a distinct area (Zhou & Dong, 2022; DiRusso et al., 2022) and express that it significantly diverges from CSR. The broader term CSR encompasses economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll, 1991) and includes corporate activities that benefit the general welfare of society (Rim et al., 2022). These activities typically support uncontroversial issues, such as pollution control, education, and poverty alleviation, with the additional aim of enhancing the company's image (Austin et al., 2019).

Corporate social advocacy, however, differs from social responsibility in terms of the nature of its objectives, the degree of extremism involved, and the risks taken (DiRusso, 2022, p. 2). In CSA, companies take a public stance on controversial issues that may not be positively received by all stakeholders, thus risking alienation of certain groups (Dodd & Supa, 2014). This means CSA has the potential for both support and boycotts. Unlike CSR, the statements and actions in CSA are unrelated to the company's business area (Austin et al., 2019). For example, a company selling wooden products engaging in reforestation efforts would be evaluated within the framework of CSR, whereas making a statement on women's rights would fall under CSA (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Similarly, a retail company specializing in women's clothing might offer a scholarship program for women as part of its CSR initiative. However, if the CEO makes a statement for or against immigration, same-sex marriage, abortion, or racial inequality, it would be considered an act of corporate social advocacy (Vasquez, 2022, p. 3).

While CSA bears similarities to philanthropy-focused CSR, the latter supports social issues like education, culture, health, and housing—issues generally accepted by society—whereas advocacy practices focus on controversial topics that may lead to social conflict (Park, 2022). For instance, Starbucks' activities aimed at forest conservation, although outside its primary business, are evaluated

within the context of CSR because environmental protection is generally non-controversial and does not provoke stakeholder outrage or boycotts (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Similarly, CSA should be distinguished from political corporate social responsibility. The fundamental difference between these two concepts lies in the aim of "establishing the legitimacy of corporate political activities" versus "creating functional benefits." For example, when evaluating Starbucks' CEO's efforts to achieve consensus among internal stakeholders regarding statements on race, this is framed within political corporate social responsibility. In contrast, legitimacy is not a requirement for CSA (Lee & Young, 2021, p. 2; Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 179).

Another concept that is often confused with CSA is "corporate activism." According to DiRusso and others, corporate social advocacy should be viewed as a softer extension of activism. CSA features a less aggressive communication style compared to corporate activism, which mobilizes and channels resources toward social and individual change. In CSA, the aim remains to protect the company's profits and define its identity, while corporate activism seeks to exert pressure for change on institutions (DiRusso et al., 2022, p. 2). For example, Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" campaign, which critiques toxic masculinity, is considered corporate social advocacy because it promotes change without pressuring any institution, whereas Dick's Sporting Goods' decision to stop selling assault weapons after pressuring the National Rifle Association is regarded as corporate activism (Austin et al., 2019).

Authors have also identified distinctions between CSA and "corporate advocacy." Gaither and Austin consider corporate social advocacy an evolved form of traditional corporate advocacy. Unlike CSA, corporate advocacy has existed since the early stages of corporate advertising in the 1900s. For instance, German textile companies campaigned to reclaim seized properties during World War I, and during the Great Depression in the 1930s, organizations campaigned to defend the free enterprise system to combat unemployment. However, CSA differs from corporate advocacy in terms of its objectives and strategies. While corporate advocacy aims to protect an organization's products and market position, corporate social advocacy addresses social issues affecting specific stakeholder groups through corporate statements and actions. Unlike corporate advocacy, CSA does not provide direct benefits to the company; rather, it may provoke polarized public reactions (Gaither & Austin, 2022).

Another neighboring concept to corporate social advocacy is "corporate political activism." Wettstein and Baur (2016) as well as Hydock et al. (2020) often use this term interchangeably with CSA. Wettstein and Baur define it as "public support for specific individuals, groups, and values, persuading others to do the same" (2016, p. 201), while Hydock et al. describe it as "a form of brand activism where a brand takes a public stance on controversial social issues" (2020, p. 1135). Vasquez notes that the fundamental distinction between these two concepts lies in "action." Unlike corporate social advocacy, corporate political activism is defined as "a company taking action in response to controversial political and social issues" (2022, p. 4). For example, a statement made by DICK's Sporting Goods CEO in favor of gun reform would be viewed as corporate social advocacy, whereas the decision to stop selling assault rifles to consumers under the age of 21 would be considered corporate political activism (Vasquez, 2022, p. 4).

4. Research Method

This study aims to reveal the trends in research related to the emerging concept of "corporate social advocacy" within public relations. In this context, the following questions are explored:

RQ1: What is the distribution of corporate social advocacy articles by year and journal?

RQ2: What are the trends in theoretical approaches and methodological preferences in corporate social advocacy articles?

RQ3: What are the trends related to core research themes and the research context (the country where the research was conducted, the brands studied) in corporate social advocacy articles?

To answer these questions, databases Web of Science and Scopus were searched on March 15, 2024, using the keyword "corporate social advocacy," based on the work of Verčič et al. (2024). A total of 75 items were identified from this search. Full-length articles were chosen as the unit of analysis, excluding book reviews, editorial writings, commentaries, theses, and conference papers. Seven of the 70 full-length articles were not included in the study, as they did not directly focus on the topic. As a result, 63 of the examined articles were found suitable for analysis.

Based on previous systematic review studies on public relations, coding protocol and coding manual were developed. An Excel spreadsheet was created for the research, including the following headings: (1) general information such as authors, title, journal name, publication year, and keywords; (2) theoretical approaches and methodology information; (3) contextual information such as the country where the research was conducted and the brands studied.

The first version of the coding manual was prepared by two researchers, each reviewing five articles. Subsequently, ten randomly selected articles were used to improve the coding manual. After this process, a new random sample (n = 15) was created and coded independently by two coders. The reliability between the coders was evaluated using Krippendorff's Alpha scores, yielding satisfactory results ranging from 0.88 to 1.00 (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Inconsistencies between coders were resolved through discussions, and necessary adjustments were made to the coding manual before coding the remaining dataset.

Additionally, to analyze research themes, a co-occurrence analysis of article abstracts was conducted using the VosViewer tool. This process revealed distinct clusters of frequently co-occurring keywords. Each word used in the abstracts is considered a node. It is assumed that the clusters formed from frequently co-occurring words share similar core research interests (Dong & Morehouse, 2023). Based on this assumption, main headings for research themes were created from the words in the clusters.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it focuses exclusively on academic research related to CSA. This means that practical applications of CSA have been excluded from the scope of the study. Additionally, the analysis is limited to articles retrieved from the Web of Science and Scopus databases. Only articles written in English were included in the sample, which resulted in the exclusion of studies available in other databases and those conducted in languages other than English. Moreover, the reliance on these databases has led to a predominant focus on U.S.-based research. Consequently, the study is limited in its ability to provide insights into how CSA is perceived, implemented, and evaluated in other countries and cultural contexts.

5. Findings

Figure 1 illustrates the annual distribution of academic research articles on CSA between 2015 and 2024. It aims to highlight the growth trajectory of research in this field. The first CSA-related research appeared in 2015, but no articles were published until 2019. From 2020 onwards, there has been a gradual increase in publications, reaching a peak of 16 articles in 2023. This indicates a growing academic interest in the field. A total of 63 articles have been published over the ten-year period since CSA was first conceptualized in 2014. Notably, the most significant growth occurred after 2020, reflecting the increasing recognition of CSA as an important research area. The lack of publications before 2020 suggests a delay in academic engagement with the concept, despite its introduction in 2014. The rapid increase post-2020 aligns with the increasing CSA activities of companies and global emphasis on corporate accountability in social issues.
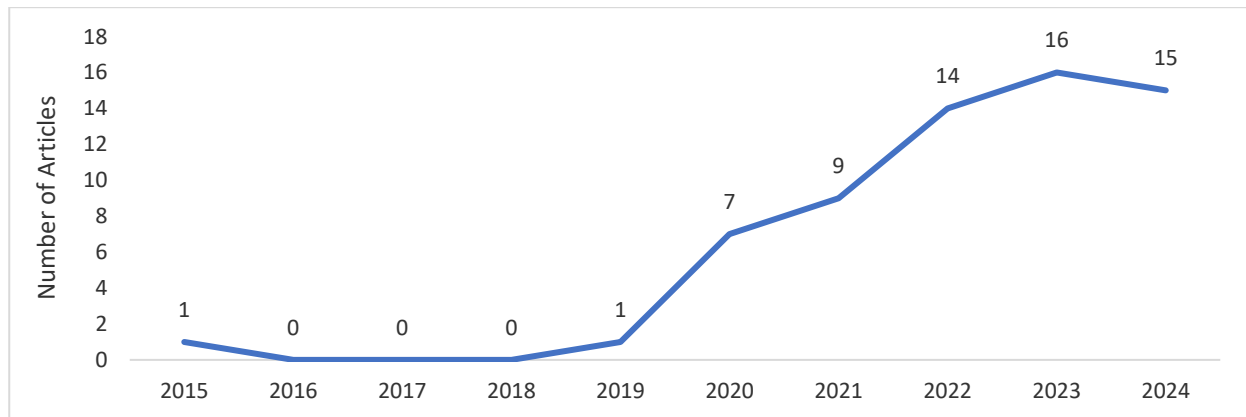
Figure 1

Distribution of Articles by Year

Table 1 categorizes the 63 articles on CSA by journal field and identifies the journals with the highest publication rates. It aims to show the disciplinary focus of CSA research. Public relations journals account for 36.5% of all CSA articles, with Public Relations Review contributing the highest number (23.8%). The communication field follows, with 27 articles (42.9%) published across 15 journals. The top journals include Public Relations Review (n=15) and Journal of Public Relations Research (n=8). Other notable fields include marketing (6.3%), sustainability (6.3%), and advertising (1.6%).
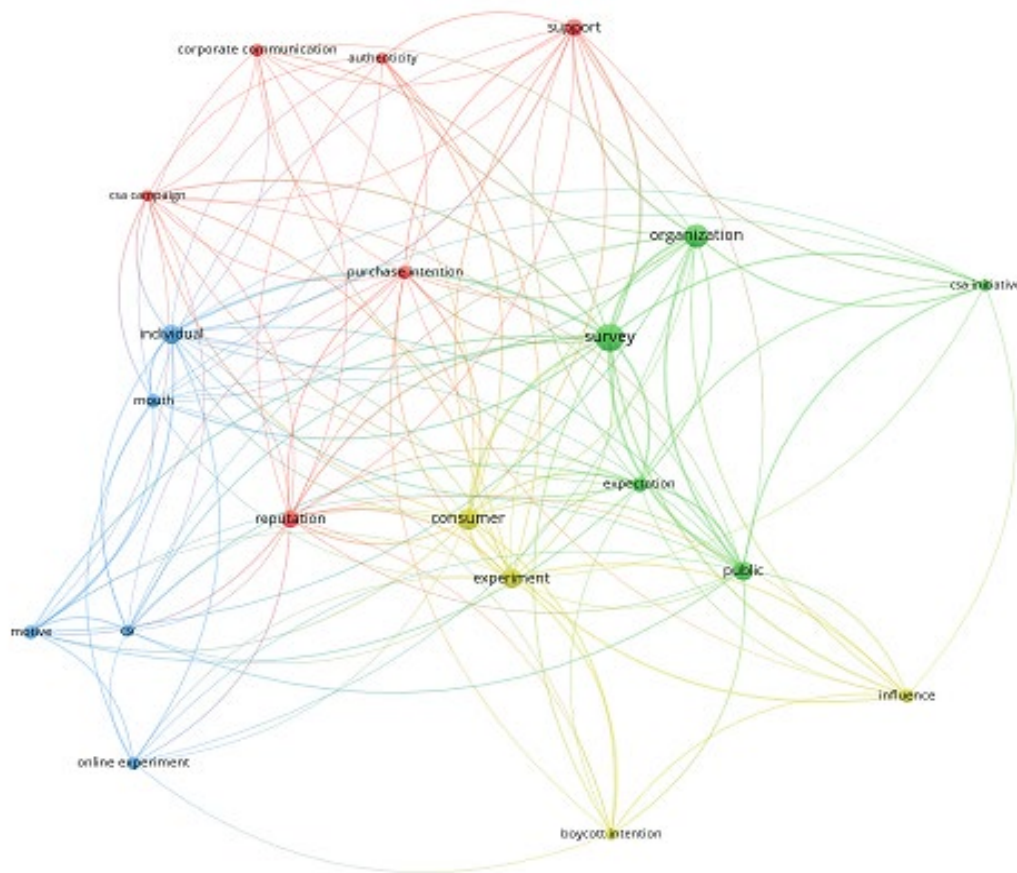
Table 1

Distribution of Articles by Journal

Journal Area	Journal Name	Number of Articles	Percentage (%)
Public Relations	Public Relations Review	15	23,8
	Journal of Public Relations Research	8	12,7
	Corporate Communications	7	11,1
	International Journal of Strategic Communication	4	6,3
	International Journal of Business Communication	2	3,2
	Journal of Communication Management	2	3,2
	Management Communication Quarterly	2	3,2
	Asian Journal of Communication	1	1,6
	Business and Professional Communication Quarterly	1	1,6
Communication	Communication and Sport	1	1,6
	Communication Research Reports	1	1,6
	Frontiers in Communication	1	1,6
	International Journal of Communication	1	1,6
	International Journal of Sport Communication	1	1,6
	Journal of Applied Communication Research	1	1,6
	Journal of Public Interest Communications	1	1,6
	Mass Communication and Society	1	1,6
Marketing	Journal of Marketing Communications	4	6,3
Sustainability	Sustainability (Switzerland)	4	6,3
Advertaising	International Journal of Advertising	1	1,6
	Business and Society Review	1	1,6
	Internet Research	1	1,6
Other	Journal of Capital Markets Studies	1	1,6
	Journal of Homosexuality	1	1,6
	Total	63	100

Figure 2 visualizes the co-occurrence of key terms in CSA-related abstracts, revealing thematic clusters in the literature. The Vosviewer program analyzed 1,425 words from article abstracts to identify research themes. Using a threshold of 5 co-occurring words and consolidating variations (e.g., "CSA" & "corporate social responsibility"), irrelevant terms like purpose and methodology were excluded. The resulting network (Figure 2) revealed four clusters with 20 key terms. The network contains four distinct clusters: Positive Effects of CSA on attitudes and behaviors, expectations of CSA, CSA and Word-of-Mouth intention, negative effects of CSA practices. Each cluster reflects a unique research theme. For instance, the first cluster emphasizes authenticity and reputation, while the fourth focuses on boycott intentions and consumer reactions. The balance between positive and negative themes suggests a nuanced understanding of CSA, addressing both opportunities and risks.

Figure 2

Abstract Co-occurrence Network

In this context, Table 2 has been created. By examining the words in each cluster, the research themes have been qualitatively identified. The four clusters correspond to four distinct themes.

Table 2

Research Themes and Descriptions

Research Theme	Words in the Cluster	Description	Example Articles
Positive Effects of Corporate Social Advocacy on Attitudes and Behaviors	authenticity, corporate communication, corporate social advocacy campaign, purchase intention, reputation, support	This theme encompasses research measuring the effects of the authenticity of corporate social advocacy campaigns and related factors on consumer attitudes and behaviors, such as purchase intention, trust, and reputation.	Dodd ve Supa (2015) Overton vd. (2020)
Expectation of Corporate Social Advocacy	corporate social advocacy, expectation, organization, public, survey	This theme includes studies that examine consumer expectations of companies regarding corporate social responsibility issues.	Song ve Lan (2022) Xu vd. (2022)
Corporate Social Advocacy and Word-of-Mouth Communication Intention	corporate social advocacy, individual, motive, word-of-mouth communication, experience	This theme encompasses studies that investigate the positive and negative effects of corporate social advocacy practices on word-of-mouth communication.	Kim vd. (2023) Kim vd. (2024)
Negative Effects of Corporate Social Advocacy Practices	Boycott intention, consumer, experience, impact	This theme addresses studies that examine the effects of corporate social advocacy initiatives on consumers' intentions to boycott.	Rim vd. (2020)

Table 3 identifies the theoretical frameworks used in CSA research, emphasizing their diversity and frequency. Attribution theory is the most frequently cited (9.9%), followed by social identity theory (7%). Attribution theory, developed in psychology to explain behavior, focuses on how individuals infer the motivations behind others' actions (Calder & Burnkrant, 1977; Weiner, 1995). It provides a broad framework for exploring how corporate social advocacy (CSA) influences societal and audience behaviors, which explains its frequent use in the reviewed studies (Overton et al., 2021). Social identity theory, employed in 7% of the studies, examines group membership, intergroup relations, and the perceptual processes of group identity (Demirtaş, 2003; Turner, 1987). It reveals the connection between individuals' identification with groups and their attitudes toward CSA practices, making it particularly relevant in field studies.

A variety of other theories, each cited in less than 5% of the articles, highlight the interdisciplinary nature of CSA research. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (4.2%) and Theory of Planned Behavior (4.2%) reflect a focus on consumer attitudes and decision-making processes. Overall, the preference for

attribution and social identity theories aligns with the emphasis on understanding consumer perceptions and group dynamics in CSA.

Table 3

Theories in Articles

Theory Used	Number of Theories	Percentage (%)
Attribution Theory	7	9,9
Social Identity Theory	5	7
Elaboration Likelihood Model	3	4,2
Theory of Planned Behavior	3	4,2
Cognitive Dissonance Theory	2	2,8
Corporate Social Responsibility Theory for Race	2	2,8
Moral Disengagement Theory	1	1,4
Moral Foundations Theory	1	1,4
Expectancy Violation Theory	1	1,4
Value Consistency	1	1,4
Theoretical Structures of Value Alignment	1	1,4
Balance Theory	1	1,4
Dialogic Communication Theory	1	1,4
Transformational Leadership Theory	1	1,4
Emotional Contagion Theory	1	1,4
Visual Framing Theory	1	1,4
Intergroup Threat Theory	1	1,4
Agenda-Setting Theory	1	1,4
Persuasion Knowledge Model	1	1,4
Social Identity Model of Collective Action	1	1,4
Ownership Theory	1	1,4
Framing Theory	1	1,4
Belief-Centered Public Relations Theory on Corporate Social Responsibility	1	1,4
Motivated Media Message Processing	1	1,4
Niche Theory	1	1,4
Stakeholder Theory	1	1,4
Signal Theory	1	1,4
Limited Capacity Model	1	1,4
Issue Management	1	1,4
Consumer Participation Theory	1	1,4
Consumer-Brand Relationship Theory	1	1,4
Third-Person Effect Theory	1	1,4
Incongruence Motifs Model	1	1,4
Judgment Theory	1	1,4
None	21	29,6
Total	71	100

Table 4 categorizes the research methodologies used in CSA studies, emphasizing the dominance of quantitative approaches. Surveys (41.8%) and experimental methods (26.9%) dominate the methodologies, while qualitative approaches account for only 14.3%. Content analysis (11.9%) is the most common qualitative method. Mixed methods are used in only 6.3% of the studies, indicating limited methodological integration. The emphasis on quantitative methods reflects a focus on generalizable results. However, the limited use of qualitative methods suggests a gap in exploring the depth and complexity of CSA phenomena.

Table 4

Methods Used in the Articles

Research Methodology	Number of Methods	Percentage (%)
Survey	28	41,8
Experimental	18	26,9
Content analysis	8	11,9
Theory construction	4	6
Critical analysis	2	3
Case study	2	3
Semantic network analysis	1	1,5
Text analytic approach	1	1,5
Thematic analysis	1	1,5
Inductive topic modeling	1	1,5
Semi-structured interview	1	1,5
Total	67	100

In articles focused on corporate social advocacy, an analysis of the samples examined in the studies reveals that 81% of existing research is conducted on individuals and brands residing in the United States. This is followed by China at 3.2%, and Germany and Switzerland at 1.6% each. Additionally, 12.7% of the studies did not focus on a specific country sample.

Table 5 lists the brands frequently studied in CSA research, showcasing the focus on prominent U.S.-based companies. Nike (n=6) and Starbucks (n=4) are the most frequently studied brands. These brands notably exemplify corporate social advocacy compared to others. For instance, Nike's Colin Kaepernick campaign, which highlights racial discrimination against Black citizens in the United States, underscores its focus on anti-racism across all communication strategies. Similarly, Starbucks consistently adopts a clear stance on LGBTQ rights and same-sex marriage in its communication strategies. This engagement with contentious social issues has led to increased interest in both brands within research contexts.

Brands that are not listed in Table 5 but have been the subject of only one article include Amazon, Applebee's, Armani, AT&T, Bank of America, Barilla, Budweiser, Burger King, Chase, Denny's, DICK's Sporting Goods, Dior, Facebook, Ford, Girls Who Code, Hallmark Cards, Johnson & Johnson, Levi Strauss & Co, McDonald's, NNT Corporation, Olay, Oreo, Papa John's, Pepsi, T-Mall, T-Mobile, Target, Verizon, Walmart, Wells Fargo, WNBA, Xiaomi, and Youku. Of the 57 brands analyzed, 49 are U.S.-based. Brands like Gillette, Microsoft, and Ben & Jerry's are also prominent, reflecting their active engagement in CSA campaigns. The predominance of U.S. brands highlights the American-centric nature of CSA research, leaving other cultural and regional contexts underexplored.

Table 5

Brands Featured in Research

Brand	Number	Percentage (%)
Nike	6	6,2
Starbucks	4	4,1
Gillette	3	3,1
Microsoft	3	3,1
Ben and Jerry's	2	2,1
Chick Fil A	2	2,1
Coca-Cola	2	2,1
NBA	2	2,1

6. Conclusion

The emergence of the concept of "corporate social advocacy" can be viewed as an example of the simultaneous development of practice and theory in public relations. While brands taking a stance on contentious issues is not entirely new, it has become increasingly evident, particularly in the United States, that many brands are moving away from the traditional approach of "remaining silent" in conflict situations. Instead, they are employing various methods to communicate their views on controversial topics. For a long time, brands have engaged in corporate social responsibility initiatives in response to societal pressures to address social issues. These initiatives typically focus on areas such as environmental pollution, education, and poverty alleviation, which pose minimal risk to the organizations involved. However, as consumer expectations have evolved, brands have also begun to express their positions on divisive social issues that lack broad societal consensus, such as racial discrimination, same-sex marriage, and gun control.

These practices extend beyond the boundaries of corporate social responsibility and differentiate themselves in terms of implementation and content, aligning more with corporate activism, corporate advocacy, and corporate political activism. This shift prompted the search for a new conceptual framework, leading Dodd and Supa to define these practices as "corporate social advocacy" in 2014. Following the introduction of this concept, there has been a rapid increase in academic research on the subject.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive framework for the relatively new concept of "corporate social advocacy" while systematically analyzing the distribution of articles on this topic on the Web of Science and Scopus databases by year and journal, as well as the theories and research methods employed, the countries and brands studied, and the main research themes.

Distribution of CSA articles by year and journal (RQ1):

After analyzing academic studies focused on corporate social advocacy, it is evident that both researchers and companies have developed an awareness of societal expectations regarding brands. Following the introduction of the term by Dodd and Supa in 2014, the number of research articles has gradually increased, particularly after 2000. The total number of CSA-related articles between 2015 and 2024 is 63, with the most substantial growth occurring in 2023. This growth reflects heightened corporate and societal emphasis on advocacy. However, the initial years following the introduction of the concept (2014–2019) demonstrate minimal engagement, possibly due to a delay in recognizing its significance or the academic community's lag in keeping pace with CSA practice.

Public relations dominates the CSA discourse, reflecting its roots in this field. In contrast, fields like marketing and sustainability contribute significantly fewer studies, indicating an opportunity for cross-disciplinary exploration. The predominance of public relations journals suggests that CSA research is closely tied to communication strategies. Expanding into fields like sustainability and marketing could provide a broader understanding of CSA's impact.

In terms of journals, public relations journals dominate the landscape, with *Public Relations Review* contributing 23.8% of the articles and *Journal of Public Relations Research* contributing 12.7%. Together, these account for 36.5% of all publications. Communication journals follow, making up 42.9% of the total, with notable contributions from *Corporate Communications* and *International Journal of Strategic Communication*. Other fields, including marketing, sustainability, and advertising, contribute significantly fewer articles, collectively accounting for less than 15% of the total. This distribution underscores CSA's strong association with the field of public relations. The limited representation in other disciplines highlights a significant opportunity for interdisciplinary studies, particularly in marketing and sustainability, which could provide broader perspectives on CSA's impact beyond communication strategies.

Theoretical Approaches and Methodological Preferences (RQ2):

A wide array of theoretical frameworks is used to analyze CSA, reflecting its interdisciplinary nature. The most frequently cited theories are attribution theory (9.9%) and social identitiy theory (7%). Other theories, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (4.2%), Theory of Planned Behavior (4.2%), and Cognitive Dissonance Theory (2.8%), highlight a focus on consumer attitudes, decision-making, and behavioral intentions. Despite this theoretical diversity, 29.6% of studies do not employ any specific theory, suggesting room for conceptual development.A review of the conducted studies indicates a richness in theoretical perspectives; however, there is a notable preference for quantitative methods (n=50) compared to qualitative (n=9) and mixed methods (n=4), with a total of 13 studies employing qualitative approaches being deemed insufficient. This situation is seen as a limitation in terms of excluding subjectivity and in-depth knowledge regarding individuals' perspectives on corporate social advocacy practices.

Research Themes and the Research Context (RQ3):

The analysis conducted using co-occurrence frequency of words in the abstracts reveals that research on corporate social advocacy is categorized into four themes: the impact of corporate social advocacy practices on attitudes and behaviors, expectations of corporate social advocacy, word-of-mouth communication intentions, and the negative effects of corporate social advocacy practices. These themes provide a balanced perspective on the opportunities and challenges of CSA, highlighting both its benefits and potential pitfalls.

The geographical focus of CSA research is overwhelmingly U.S.-centric, with 81% of studies conducted on U.S. brands and contexts. Prominent examples include Nike, Starbucks, and Gillette, which are frequently cited for their high-profile advocacy campaigns. Non-U.S. studies are sparse, with only a few conducted in countries like China (3.2%) and Germany (1.6%). The limited representation of non-U.S. contexts and brands indicates a significant research gap. Similarly, less well-known or regional brands receive minimal attention, leaving their CSA strategies and impacts underexplored.

Recommendations For Further Research:

CSA research is heavily skewed toward the U.S., leaving significant gaps in understanding how advocacy functions in diverse cultural and political contexts. Future studies should explore, non-Western settings, including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, where cultural norms and consumer expectations may differ significantly. Additionally, they should explore comparative studies analyze variations in CSA effectiveness across countries or regions.

The dominance of quantitative methods limits the exploration of nuanced and subjective aspects of CSA. Researchers should utilize qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnographic studies, to capture in-depth consumer and stakeholder perspectives. In other words, while quantitative methods focus on obtaining generalizable and explanatory results based on numerical and statistical data, qualitative methods emphasize data richness and depth, aiming to provide comprehensive perspectives on the ever-changing social phenomena. In qualitative research, subjectivity and contextuality take precedence, aiming to gather rich, in-depth data about the object of study, thereby presenting a comprehensive view of social phenomena that are continuously evolving. From a corporate social advocacy perspective, it is evident that there is a need for qualitative research that assesses how organizations' behaviors, attitudes, and practices related to the subject are interpreted by their target audiences, the societal roles of corporate social advocacy practices, and the types of changes they create in individual behaviors and attitudes. The use of mixed methods can reduce the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative approaches while allowing research questions to be addressed from a broader perspective, enriching the analysis. In other words, mixed methods enable the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the analysis that might be overlooked in single-method studies while facilitating the exploration of much broader and complex research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 21). Nonetheless, it has been noted that the use of both qualitative and mixed methods remains insufficient, indicating a need for further research of this kind in the field.

Moreover, most of the research has focused on prominent brands like Nike and Starbucks, there is a need to study smaller and regional companies to understand how CSA operates in less visible contexts. And also, there is a need to investigate sector-specific CSA practices, such as in technology, healthcare, and manufacturing, to identify industry-level trends. In summary, analyzing corporate social advocacy practices across different country contexts and increasing qualitative analyses are deemed essential for the development of the field.

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