

Sustainability: A 56-Year Review of Management Decision



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This study conducts a systematic analysis of sustainability literature in the Management Decision journal from inception to November 2023. Using bibliometric and thematic analysis on 311 records, it tracks the evolution of sustainability themes, noting a shift from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to concepts like the circular economy and green innovation. The findings reveal a 12.58% annual growth in sustainability publications and an average of 42.85 citations per document, highlighting the journal's global impact, particularly in emerging economies like India and China. This review provides a unique, comprehensive perspective on sustainability's progression within the journal.

Keywords: Review, Sustainability Themes, Circular Economy, Journal Trends, Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Business Practices.

1. Introduction

Sustainability has emerged as a pivotal aspect of modern management practices, addressing the pressing need to strike a harmonious balance between organizational growth and environmental responsibility. As organizations worldwide confront the challenges of sustainability, a wealth of research has been published in esteemed journals, contributing valuable insights to this critical domain. Among these journals, Management Decision (MD) stands out as a leading platform, distinguished by its rich history, international focus, and commitment to fostering impactful managerial interventions (Randolph-Seng, 2022).

In light of the burgeoning interest in sustainability, the present article presents a comprehensive review of papers published in Management Decision up to November 16th, 2023, with a particular focus on sustainability-related research, as there is evidence of Management decision journal publishing articles related to the sustainability aspects (Caputo *et al.*, 2022). Hence this review aims to shed light on the advancements made in the field of sustainability related articles published in MD and identify potential areas for future exploration.

This study embarks on an explorative journey through the sustainability narrative within the Management Decision journal, driven by research questions aimed at discerning the breadth, major themes, and the journal's pivotal role in advancing sustainability knowledge and practices. Objectively, we aim to systematically review sustainability articles, identify shared themes, theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, and evaluate their implications on managerial practices and organizational choices. Notably, our work presents a novel approach in consolidating the fragmented sustainability research within Management Decision. By emphasizing the journal's rich, global, and practical legacy, we aspire to deepen the understanding of the current sustainability academic landscape. Our findings aim to enlighten both academia and industry, facilitating enhanced sustainability practices and bridging theoretical paradigms with practical implementations in response to the pressing sustainability demands of our evolving global context.

In essence, this review is designed to be a cornerstone for those at the forefront of sustainability in management, igniting insightful dialogues and fostering actions that champion sustainable growth and commendable corporate stewardship.

2. Methodology

This section details the rigorous methodology used for reviewing articles on sustainability in the Management Decision Journal up to November 16, 2023. A systematic approach combined keyword searches with manual techniques to identify relevant papers. The PRISMA flowchart is provided to demonstrate our meticulous article selection process, ensuring transparency and adherence to standard protocols.

Data was sourced from Scopus, a leading multidisciplinary citation database. The search conducted on November 16, 2023, utilized keywords such as "sustainab*," "circular*," "green," "corporate social responsibility," "CSR," and "triple bottom line" to gather a wide range of sustainability-themed articles. This initial search yielded 2,402,137 records. Focusing on Management Decision reduced this to 373 articles. After excluding review papers and editorials, 347 original research papers remained. We further applied an exclusion criterion for in-press articles, leading to the removal of 37 papers. This process, including a detailed review of abstracts, resulted in 310 articles. To ensure inclusion of seminal works from 1967 to 1999, a manual search added 5 relevant articles out of 7 found, bringing the total to 311 articles over a 56-year span (1967 to November 2023).

For a comprehensive analysis, we applied the TCCM (Theory, Context, Characteristics, Methodology) framework as suggested by Paul *et al.*, (2023) and Paul and Rosado-Serrano, (2019). An accompanying Supplementary File provides detailed insights into 311 MD literatures, following this framework with specific findings and contributions of each document.

Additionally, we included a Supplementary Table showcasing the top 10 MD articles based on citation count, their thematic cluster classification, and their aims and key contributions.

Our step-wise filtration process is visually represented in the PRISMA flowchart, based on guidelines by Page et al., (2021), as shown in Figure 1. The review utilizes Biblioshiny, an R-language application for bibliometric analysis, to assess theme evolution and conceptual structure (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). Additionally, advanced AI tools, including ChatGPT-4 and Quillbot, were employed for fine-tuning and copy-editing.

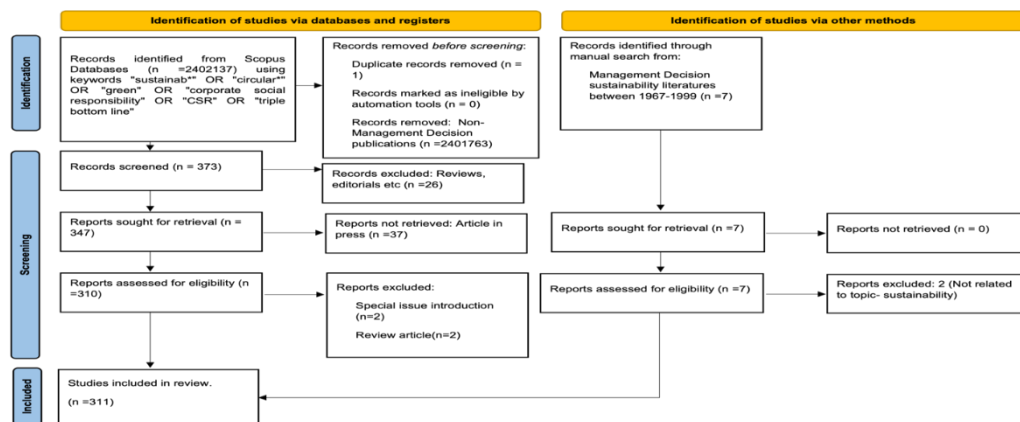


Figure 1 PRISMA Flowchart Depicting the Article Selection Process
Source: Adapted from (Page et al., 2021).

3. Findings

In our extensive study of Management Decision (MD) journal articles spanning from its inception to November,2023, we analyzed 311 documents. This deep dive into MD’s history revealed a significant shift in focus towards sustainability themes beginning in 1993. Our thematic analysis, facilitated by biblioshiny, identifies pivotal thematic evolutions and its transformations in the sustainability discourse across three distinct time periods as we have taken 2 cutting points for the time slices one being 2015 and 2019, the reason being that sustainability has been said to be evolved over time wherein it gained popularity in 1987 when the sustainable development definition has been given in the report – “Our Common Future” and its been redefined in 2019 (Hajian and Kashani, 2021), henceforth we assume that there might be some changes occurred in the researches due to the covid 19 pandemic aswell. Hence our timeslices are totally divided into three slices such as 1993-2015, 2016-2019, and 2020-2023 which is showcased in Figure 2.

Key data points from our research include an annual growth rate of 12.58% in sustainability-related publications, with these documents having an average age of 7.22 years and receiving an average of 42.85 citations each. The total number of references cited across these articles is 19,423. In terms of content, 1,091 author keywords were identified, reflecting the diverse range of sustainability topics covered.

The authorship patterns in these articles reveal the involvement of 758 authors, with 50 of them having contributed to single-authored documents. The average co-authorship rate stands at 2.75 authors per document. Notably, international collaborations form a significant part of this body of work, accounting for 31.1% of the co-authorships.

3.1 Thematic Evolution

Our analysis of the Management Decision journal's sustainability research reveals significant thematic shifts and enduring focuses over time. From 1993-2015, we observed a transition from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to a range of interconnected themes. This period is marked by the integration of CSR with business strategy, as indicated by a high Weighted Inclusion Index and frequent occurrences(based on values associated with figure 2 in biblioshiny), reflecting CSR's evolution into areas like corporate governance and financial performance.

Firm performance and sustainable development maintained consistent importance throughout the periods studied, with the latter achieving a steady focus from 2016-2023. Geographically, the growing role of sustainability in India and China is evident, with a sustained focus on China and evolving attention to India.

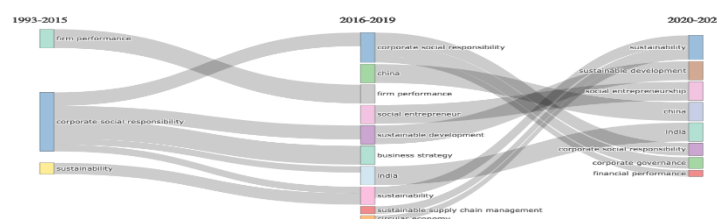


Figure 2 Thematic Evolution based on Author Keywords of 311 MD Literatures
(Source: R Studio(Biblioshiny))

The 2016-2019 to 2020-2023 transition highlights emerging themes like the circular economy, indicating a shift towards more sustainable economic models. This phase also shows increased recognition of the financial and governance aspects of CSR and sustainability. Additionally, social entrepreneurship has evolved from focusing on individual entrepreneurs to a broader analysis of its practices and concepts.

In summary, sustainability research within the Management Decision journal is dynamic and evolving, increasingly intersecting with business strategy, governance, and financial performance, and adapting to new concepts and geographies.

In the following section, we present thematic maps for each time slice within the MD studies. These maps visually depict prominent clusters and relationships, categorizing themes into 'Motor Themes' (dominant, persistent topics), 'Basic Themes' (foundational topics that serve as building blocks), 'Emerging/Declining Themes' and 'Niche Themes' (specialized topics catering to specific interests). The clusters in these respective themes has been named after the most occurred author keyword

3.1.1 Thematic Map : 1993-2015

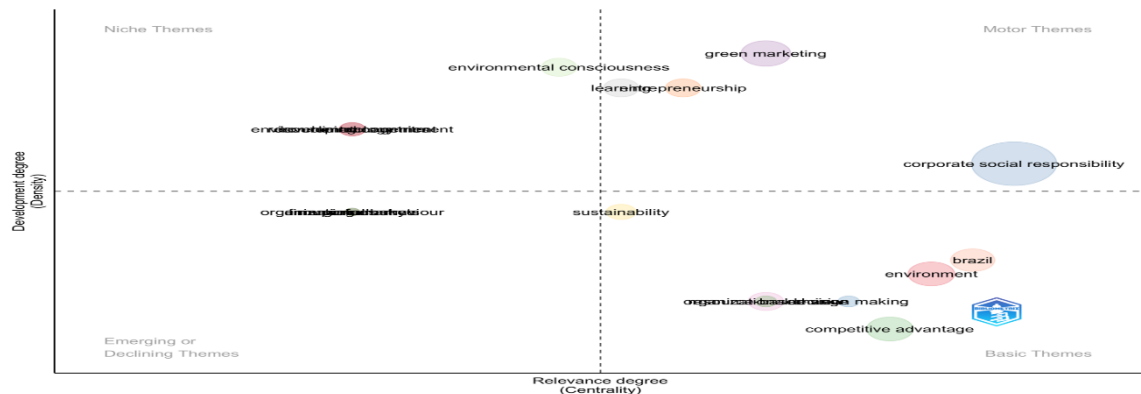


Figure 3 Thematic map based on author keywords between 1993-2015

As per the results, there are 115 articles which falls under this timeline 1993-2015, wherein its clustered into four major quadrants as shown in Figure 3.

Motor Themes

- **'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)'**: This theme encapsulates the evolution of CSR's influence on sustainability. Key studies include Moisander and Pesonen, (2002) on green consumerism, Quazi, (2003) on managerial attitudes towards CSR, and Aras and Crowther, (2008) linking corporate governance with sustainability. Further, Mittal et al., (2008) explore CSR's financial implications, while Huang and Jim Wu, (2010) investigate green product development in high-tech industries. Arendt and Brettel, (2010) focus on CSR's impact on corporate image and stakeholder engagement, and Chen, (2011) links environmental culture with green competitive advantage. Collectively, these studies advance understanding of CSR in sustainable practices.
- **'Green Marketing'**: Studies like Chen and Chang, (2012) introduce "green perceived value" and its influence on consumer behaviour. Akehurst et al., (2012) re-examine green consumer profiles, stressing the role of psychographic variables. Chen and Chang, (2013) propose a model connecting green perceived quality, risk, and satisfaction to green trust. These works underscore the importance of consumer perceptions in green marketing.
- **'Entrepreneurship'**: Javier Maqueda Lafuente et al., (2013) examine the relationship between entrepreneurial actions and business success. Anderson and Ullah, (2014) introduce the "condition of smallness" affecting small firm growth. Bodolica and Spraggon, (2015) focus on female entrepreneurship in the UAE, highlighting sustainable business models.
- **'Learning'**: This theme underlines the significance of knowledge development in sustainability. Key studies include Kletz, (2009) on integrating CSR in management education, and Chen et al., (2013) emphasizing sustainable collaborative dialogues.

Basic Themes

- **'Brazil' and 'Environment'**: Among these clusters, studies like Zhuang and Synodinos, (1997) discuss the UK chemical industry's response to environmental regulations. Ahmed et al., (1998) find a positive correlation between environmental strategy and organizational performance. Chaharbaghi and Lynch, (1999) propose a new resource-based strategy for sustainable competitive advantage.
- **'Competitive Advantage' and 'Decision Making'**: Caldwell, (1996) emphasizes energy efficiency for competitive advantage. Lee and Asllani, (1997) integrate BPR with TQM for continuous improvement. Rijamampianina et al., (2003) offer a framework for strategic diversification decisions, and Duke and Long, (2007) highlight trust-building in sustainable agricultural systems.

- **'Resource-Based View' and 'Organizational Change'**: Dennis et al., (1998) scrutinize CSR initiatives at Body Shop International. Cruz et al., (2006) apply complexity theory to sustainable development, and Moura-Leite et al., (2012) focus on CSR performance indicators.
- **'Sustainability', 'Environmental Commitment', and 'Firm Performance'**: Huang and Kung, (2011) show the role of green intellectual capital in Taiwan's manufacturing industry. Chen et al., (2012) distinguish between proactive and reactive green innovations. Walker, (2013) explores green management's effect on donor behaviour in university athletics.

Niche Themes

- **'Developing Countries', 'Resource Management', 'Environmental Consciousness' and 'Values'**: Seifert and Hadida, (2006) integrate strategic decision-making in the music industry. Oliver, (2010) proposes a model for self-sufficiency in local music scenes. Tang et al., (2011) categorize corporate sustainability managers, emphasizing the role of values in sustainability management.

Emerging and Declining Themes

- **'Emerging Markets'**: Moraes and da Rocha, (2014) highlight AlphaTech's strategy in sustainable international operations. Roy and Karna, (2015) discuss competitive advantages in social entrepreneurship firms in emerging markets.
- **'Organizational Behaviour'**: Emiliani, (1998) presents a model linking lean production to economic growth. Cormier et al., (2011) investigate the impact of social and environmental disclosures on stock market perceptions.
- **'Climatology'**: Svensson, (2008) proposes a planet-oriented approach for business practices. Prado-Lorenzo et al., (2009) analyze factors influencing corporate greenhouse gas emissions disclosure.

3.1.2 Thematic Map : 2016-2019

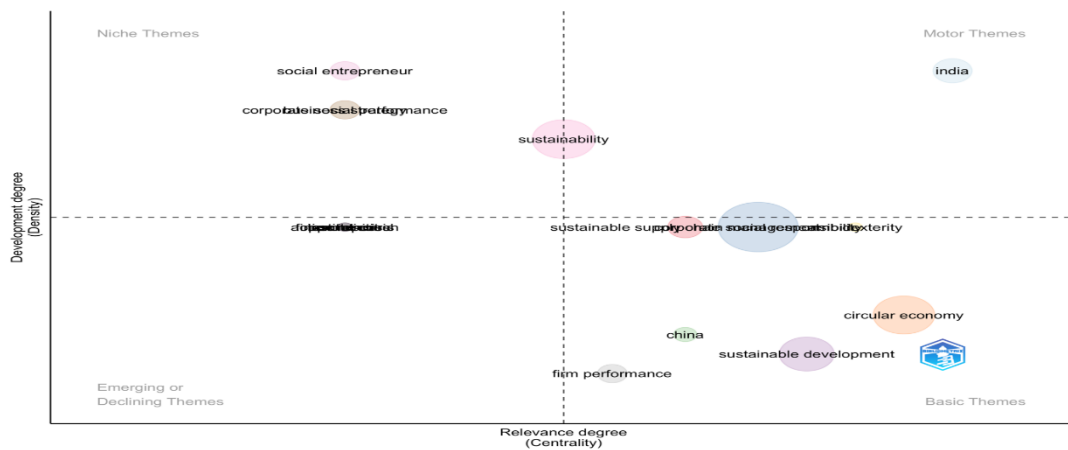


Figure 4 Thematic Map based on Author keywords between 2016-2019

The thematic map, based on the 2016-2019 time slice, categorizes 95 articles from MD into thematic clusters, reflecting the evolving landscape of sustainability research. This period showcases overlapping themes, with each article categorized based on its relevance and ranking within these clusters, which is shown in figure 4.

Motor Themes

- **'India' and 'Sustainability'**: This period marks a notable increase in sustainability studies from India. Key works include Jitmaneroj, (2016) on corporate sustainability reform, Lee and Jung, (2016) examining CSR's impact on profitability, and Tamimi and Sebastianelli, (2017) on ESG disclosure in S&P 500 companies. Movahedipour et al., (2017) explore sustainable supply chain barriers, while Bodhanwala and Bodhanwala, (2018) link corporate sustainability to firm profitability in India. Quaye and Mensah, (2019) propose a resource capability-based view for SMEs in Ghana, and Singh and Singh, (2019) examine organizational justice in the context of India's circular economy.

Basic Themes

- **'Circular Economy'**: Significant research in 2019 includes Yazdani et al., (2019) on flooding risks in agriculture, Sehnem et al., (2019) assessing Brazilian companies' circular business models, and Kumar et al., (2019) reviewing circular economy challenges in the UK and EU manufacturing sector. Other studies focus on cross-cultural consumer behaviour (Gaur et al., 2019), international manufacturing network management (Mishra et al., 2019), and implementing circular economy in Pakistan's automobile industry (Agyemang et al., 2019).
- **'Sustainable Development'**: Chen et al., (2018) highlight green initiatives' varying impacts on financial performance. Vié et al., (2019) develop a model for the Europe 2020 strategy, and Jakhar et al., (2019) emphasize exploratory innovation in circular economy adoption. Sharma et al., (2019) explore challenges in sustainable food supply chains, while Shin and Ki,

(2019) study consumer responses to green advertising. Kapuria and Singh, (2019) focus on sustainable Foreign Direct Investment determinants.

- **'Sustainable Supply Chain Management'**: Key studies include Neumüller et al., (2016) on sustainable supplier selection, Azimifard et al., (2018) developing a green supply chain model for the steel industry, and Roy, (2019) emphasizing the importance of sustainability policies in supply chain performance.
- **'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)'**: Verbeeten et al., (2016) assess CSR disclosures' impact on firm value, Dutot et al., (2016) explore CSR communication via social media, and Gao and He, (2017) demonstrate the link between CSR and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. Halkos and Skouloudis, (2017) delve into national culture's influence on CSR, while Laguir et al., (2018) investigate corporate financial and environmental performance in banking. Lin et al., (2018) examine decision-making styles in ethical investments, and Dubey et al., (2019) propose a framework for sustainable supply chain management.
- **'Firm Performance', 'China' & 'Ambidexterity'**: Lichtenthaler, (2016) proposes an innovation-based perspective on company performance. Zheng et al., (2017) explore counterproductive work behaviours in Chinese family businesses. Ng and Kee, (2018) focus on SMEs' sustainable performance, and Ferraris et al., (2018) discuss multinational enterprises in smart city projects. Zhu et al., (2019) examine circular agriculture in China, and Al-Dah, (2019) studies the strategic pacing of CSR activities.

Niche Themes

- **'Social Entrepreneur', 'Corporate Social Performance', 'Business Strategy'**: Bonfanti et al., (2016) explore social value creation in Italian industrial companies. Ma et al., (2016) study international diversification's impact on CSR in Chinese contractors. Loi, (2016) highlights stakeholder management in sustainable business strategy. Goyal et al., (2016) propose a challenge-action framework for social entrepreneurs, while Pündrich, (2017) examines proactive CSP postures in oil companies. Abebe and Cha, (2018) analyze corporate strategic orientations on philanthropy, and Fernandez-Feijoo et al., (2019) investigate global sustainability assurance markets.

Emerging and Declining Themes

- **'Action Research', 'Financial Crisis', 'Opportunities'**: Martín et al., (2018) analyze the Spanish banking system's restructuring, and Al-Dah et al., (2018) examine CSR disclosures during economic downturns. Cezarino et al., (2019) explore the relationship between Industry 4.0 and the circular economy in Brazil. Townsend et al., (2019) develop a sustainable fashion methodology, and Naulleau, (2019) contributes to talent management literature.

This thematic map reflects the dynamic nature of sustainability research during this period, highlighting India's emergence as a major focus and the integration of themes like firm performance, sustainable supply chain management, and CSR in the broader sustainability discourse.

3.1.3 Thematic Map : 2020-2023

This thematic map represents the 2020-2023 timeline in Management Decision, based on 101 records till November 2023 which is shown in figure 5. It highlights key motor, basic and specialized niche themes in sustainability research, with no emerging or declining themes noted, suggesting a consolidation of existing research areas.

Motor Themes

- **'Sustainability'**: This period showcases diverse approaches to sustainable practices. Biloslavo et al., (2020) explore digital technologies for sustainable business models, and Sannino et al., (2020) focus on CEO characteristics in financial institutions. Tiscini et al., (2020) discuss blockchain in the agri-food industry, while Lardo et al., (2020) and De Angelis, (2020) emphasize Industry 4.0 and the circular economy. Fiorentino et al., (2020) and Carmela Annosi et al., (2020) highlight smart technologies and digitalization challenges, respectively. Dal Mas et al., (2020) examine blockchain's impact on business models. Greco et al., (2021) propose identity reflexivity in hybrid organizations, and Gromis di Trana et al., (2022) focus on stakeholder engagement during crises. Zameer et al., (2022) investigate green innovation, and Dwivedi et al., (2022) propose a product recovery system for circular economies. Oliveira-Dias et al., (2022) analyze dynamic capabilities, while Choi et al., (2023) and Oh et al., (2023) explore CSR's role in firm value and marketing strategies in fintech.
- **'Neutrosophic Set'**: The 2023 studies introduce neutrosophic sets in sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) and insurance. Aytakin et al., (2023) apply this approach in the textile industry, while Noorkhah, (2023) introduces a hybrid model for insurance company performance evaluation.
- **'Corporate Governance'**: Jabnoun, (2020) integrates sustainable business principles into a model for global corporate governance. Elmassri et al., (2023) examine CSR's integration into cost leadership strategies, and Menicucci and Paolucci, (2023) focus on board diversity's impact on ESG performance in Italian banking.

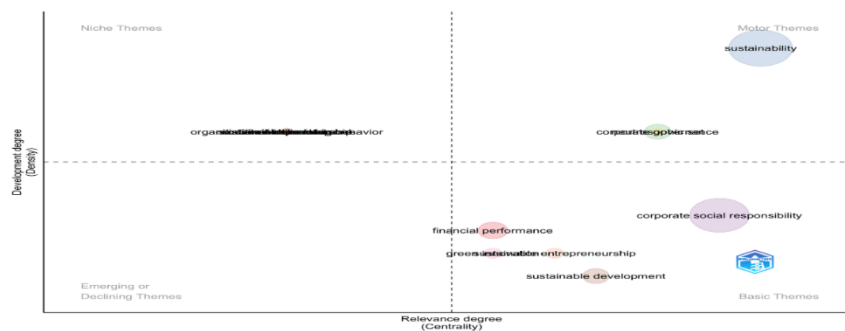


Figure 5 Thematic map based on author keywords between 2020-2023

Basic Themes

- **'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)'**: Muhammad Muneeb et al., (2020) identify factors for sustainable entrepreneurship, and Chaudhary, (2020) emphasizes authentic leadership's role in CSR. Asiaei et al., (2022) and Ho et al., (2021) explore CSR's alignment with firm risks and sustainability management control systems. Thelisson and Meier, (2022) highlight CSR in mergers, while Mohammed et al., (2022) investigate CSR's impact on creativity. Al-Shammari et al., (2023) and Peng and Zhang, (2023) examine CSR's multifaceted effects on employee engagement and firm performance.
- **'Financial Performance'**: Stefanelli et al., (2020) show how knowledge translation boosts productivity in university spin-offs. Ye and Li, (2020) study CSR activities in Chinese ventures, and Jansson, (2022) finds pollution prevention improves financial performance in manufacturing firms. Ilyas et al., (2022) observe increased CSR investments in large firms, and Khanchel et al., (2023) link green innovation to financial performance.
- **'Sustainable Development'**: León et al., (2020) develop a Fuzzy Logic model for impact investing in vaccines, and Shahid and Reynaud, (2022) explore sustainability orientation in entrepreneurship. Nandha Gopan and Balaji, (2023) identify barriers in the Indian automotive industry's circular economy practices.
- **'Sustainable Entrepreneurship' and 'Green Innovation'**: Lang et al., (2022) study sustainable agribusiness entrepreneurship, while Isensee et al., (2023) develop a typology for sustainable digital entrepreneurs. Shah and Soomro, (2023) examine green HRM practices in Pakistan's automobile industry, and Fang and Lv, (2023) explore urban housing prices' impact on corporate green innovation.

Niche Themes

- **'Decision Making', 'Organizational Citizenship Behaviour', 'India', 'China', 'Social Entrepreneurship', 'Environmental', 'Discrimination Measure'**: This category covers a wide range of sustainability aspects. Wu et al., (2020) define social entrepreneurship, Hamrouni et al., (2020) discuss CSR disclosures' impact, and Lee, (2021) focuses on CSR and employee advocacy. Si et al., (2021) highlight strategic decision-making in China's sharing economy. Bratianu et al., (2021) integrate emotional and spiritual knowledge in decision-making. Morrar and Baba, (2022) examine social innovation in Palestine, and Fatima and Elbanna, (2023) develop performance models for India's hospitality industry. Bodhanwala and Bodhanwala, (2023) introduce "ESG irrelevance" during crises, and Hezam et al., (2023) propose frameworks for sustainable transport investment projects.

This thematic map for 2020-2023 demonstrates the consolidation and expansion of sustainability research in Management Decision, highlighting key developments in areas like digitalization, corporate governance, CSR, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

4. Discussions

Uniqueness of MD's Sustainability Literature

Management Decision (MD) has long stood at the forefront of integrating sustainability within the broader discourse of management practices, distinguishing itself through a pioneering emphasis on the practical implications of sustainability research. Historically, MD has been instrumental in ushering in a paradigm shift that views sustainability not merely as an ethical consideration but as a core component of strategic management and organizational innovation. This unique positioning is evident in the journal's editorial strategy, which has actively promoted interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability, bridging the gap between theoretical research and practical application.

Comparatively, MD's thematic evolution in sustainability research reveals a distinct trajectory. Early contributions, such as those by Dennis et al. (1998), who scrutinized CSR initiatives at Body Shop International, and Cruz et al. (2006), who applied complexity theory to sustainable development, underscore MD's early adoption of interdisciplinary perspectives. Furthermore, Moura-Leite et al. (2012)'s focus on CSR performance indicators exemplifies the journal's commitment to operationalizing sustainability in measurable terms. Such contributions highlight MD's unique approach to sustainability, combining rigorous academic inquiry with a clear focus on actionable outcomes.

In contrast to other journals that may prioritize theoretical contributions, MD's sustainability literature is characterized by its emphasis on empirical research and case studies that offer tangible insights for management practitioners. This practical

orientation ensures that sustainability is not just a theoretical construct but a viable element of business strategy and organizational change. As a result, MD has made a significant contribution to advancing the understanding of sustainability in management practices, offering a wealth of knowledge that continues to influence both academia and industry.

Difference from other Journals

Management Decision (MD) distinguishes itself from other academic journals through its methodological diversity and pragmatic orientation towards sustainability research. Unlike journals that focus predominantly on theoretical frameworks, MD embraces a wide array of research methodologies, ranging from case studies and empirical research to quantitative analyses. This methodological pluralism ensures a rich and varied exploration of sustainability challenges and solutions. For example, MD's exploration of digital technologies for sustainable business models (Lee and Asllani, 1997) and the emphasis on Industry 4.0 (Cezarino *et al.*, 2019) showcase the journal's commitment to cutting-edge research that has direct implications for practice. Furthermore, MD's thematic focus areas such as the circular economy, green innovation, and social entrepreneurship provide fresh perspectives that are often underrepresented in the academic literature. Studies like those on the application of neutrosophic sets in sustainable supply chain management (Aytekin *et al.*, 2023) represent innovative approaches to addressing the complexity and uncertainty inherent in sustainability issues, setting MD apart from its peers.

Implications for Practitioners and Policymakers

The practical orientation of MD's sustainability research offers valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers alike. The journal's coverage of topics such as smart technologies, digitalization, and circular economy models provides actionable knowledge that can inform the development of sustainable business strategies and policy formulation (Caputo *et al.*, 2022). For instance, the integration of blockchain technology in the agri-food industry (Carmela Annosi *et al.*, 2020) not only enhances transparency and efficiency but also opens up new avenues for sustainable practices that policymakers can encourage through supportive regulatory frameworks.

Moreover, MD's research on corporate governance (Al-Shammari *et al.*, 2023; Aras and Crowther, 2008) and sustainable supply chain management (Kalantary and Farzipoor Saen, 2022; Nandha Gopan and Balaji, 2023) has tangible implications for business practice, suggesting ways in which organizations can embed sustainability into their core operations. The emphasis on stakeholder engagement and the role of leadership in navigating sustainability challenges are particularly relevant in the context of global crises, offering guidance for both businesses and policymakers in fostering a resilient and sustainable future.

Altogether our systematic review of Management Decision from 1967 to 2023 underscores a dynamic evolution of sustainability themes, marking a transition from corporate social responsibility (CSR) to broader concepts like the circular economy and green innovation. This shift highlights the field's interdisciplinary nature, expanding beyond the traditional confines of CSR and environmental management. Notably, the journal's thematic evolution aligns with global sustainability trends, evolving from a focus on CSR to encompassing complex themes such as sustainable supply chain management and green innovation. In between 2015-2019, a notable correlation emerged between firm performance and CSR activities, and by 2023, sustainability had become embedded in organizational strategies rather than being viewed as a separate business strategy. This integration underlines the importance of sustainability in core business metrics.

The geographical emphasis on regions like India and China in the later periods of our study points to the growing significance of emerging economies in global sustainability efforts (Dahiya *et al.*, 2023; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023; Song and Wang, 2018; Zhu *et al.*, 2019). This focus enriches our understanding of sustainability practices in diverse socio-economic contexts, offering valuable insights into localized challenges and solutions.

Furthermore, our analysis reveals the increasing traction of articles related to sustainability, sustainable development, social entrepreneurship, CSR, corporate governance, and financial performance in Management Decision. This trend indicates a broadening of the sustainability area within the journal's scope. Our review also highlighted the significance of niche and emerging categories such as neutrosophic sets, introduced by Florentin Smarandache in 1998, neutrosophic sets offer innovative tools for performance assessment in various sectors, as demonstrated in recent studies (Amm Palanisamy *et al.*, 2019).

4.1 Limitations of the Study

This review is confined to Management Decision Journal articles until November 2023, potentially missing rich contributions from other sources. The selection bias inherent in systematic reviews and the lack of sustainability articles before 1993 in MD indicate possible gaps in early research coverage.

4.2 Implications of the Study

This study not only charts the thematic evolution of sustainability in Management Decision but also underscores the multidimensional impact of sustainability in management practice and policy formulation. For academics, it provides a rich tapestry of sustainability research, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary curriculum development that integrates technological innovations and local context adaptations. Business practitioners are urged to view sustainability as a strategic imperative, deeply embedded in core business strategies and operations. This approach is essential for long-term competitiveness and aligning with global sustainability trends. The study also offers policymakers a grounded understanding of sustainability's progression, aiding in the creation of policies that are responsive to both global trends and regional specifics. The increasing role of technologies like blockchain and digitalization in sustainability indicates a need for policy frameworks that support technological integration in sustainable business practices.

4.3 Future Scope for Researchers

The future research landscape in sustainability is ripe with opportunities for both breadth and depth. Researchers could expand their scope to include diverse journals and interdisciplinary studies, capturing a more holistic view of global sustainability research. The growing emphasis on regions like India and China invites comparative studies in sustainability practices across various emerging economies. The integration of digital technologies in sustainability, particularly the application of blockchain, smart contracts, and the emerging field of neutrosophic sets, presents new avenues for exploration. These technologies could be examined for their impact on sustainable business models, supply chain management, and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the role of leadership and stakeholder engagement in navigating sustainability challenges, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, warrants detailed investigation. Studies could also explore the longitudinal impact of sustainability initiatives, tracking their evolution and effectiveness over time. This approach could provide valuable insights into the long-term trends, challenges, and opportunities in sustainability research and practice.

5. Conclusion

The evolution of sustainability research, as delineated through our comprehensive systematic literature review of Emerald's Management Decision Journal spanning over three decades, provides profound insights into the shifting paradigms and expanding horizons of the field. This review not only reflects the journal's significant role in shaping the sustainability discourse but also offers invaluable insights for both academia and the industry. The thematic evolution highlighted in our study underscores the dynamic nature of sustainability research and its growing integration across various business and management spheres. Serving as a foundational resource, this comprehensive analysis guides scholars and practitioners, steering future explorations and applications in the ever-evolving domain of sustainability.

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