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Research on corporate social responsibility in the construction context: a critical review and future directions

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ABSTRACT

Research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the construction context needs to be updated to keep pace with the frontier in the mainstream CSR research because of the low research commitment to CSR and the unsatisfactory social performance of the industry. This paper traces the evolution of the CSR research in general management field through analysing 231 sources in the literature (203 journal articles and 28 conference papers). The review concentrates on two main areas: the transitions of research perspectives and focuses. The results suggest that CSR research moves towards the relational perspective to focus on communication, coordination and collaboration among stakeholders. Considering the complex stakeholder environment in the construction industry, a research agenda integrating stakeholder management and power theory is proposed as guidance for future CSR research in the construction context.

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming widely embraced that businesses are expected to respond to emerging social and environmental issues (Schultz Castello, and Morsing 2013). It has become a dominant topic, drawing increasing attentions from scholars and managers in all sectors (Vilanova, Lozano, and Arenas 2008; Spena & Chiara 2012). Especially in the construction industry, which is publicly viewed as irresponsible because of the adverse social effects of high carbon emissions, resource exploitation and disturbance on environments (Moodley et al. 2008; Barthorpe 2010;). The construction industry is considered to lag behind many other business sectors in regard to CSR practice. Governments and environmentalists have placed considerable pressures on construction companies to implement socially responsibility while also improving the quality of their services (Petrovic Lazarevic 2008). Therefore, it is essential to set a research agenda on the promotion and improvement of CSR implementation in the construction industry.

Although under the pressures to improve the social performance, very few construction companies have successfully transformed their businesses to become socially responsible because of the fragmented and diverse nature of the industry (Myers 2005). Accordingly, Othman (2009) suggests that innovative and value-added solutions to improve CSR implementation in the construction industry should be explored. Thus, despite the increasing popularity of this topic, CSR research focused on the construction industry remains at the initial stages and tends to use outdated research perspectives due to the failure to absorb the new research findings from the latest CSR research in general management field (Zeng et al. 2015). The lack of innovative CSR research is one of the main reasons for the current unsatisfactory situations (Huang & Lien 2012). Therefore, to catch the frontier of CSR research, this paper aims to identify the potential research perspectives and focuses of on CSR, and the current research gaps in construction management research.

For decades that the concept has been introduced, no predominant and exclusive definition has been agreed because of its vague and intangible nature (Frankental 2001; Jamali & Mirshak 2007). Friedman (1970) and his followers advocate that companies are deemed to making profit under conditions of obeying laws and regulations. Nevertheless, it is argued that social responsibility extends businesses' duties to engage in social issues beyond the conventional legal and economic requirements (Davis 1967, 1973; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Godfrey & Hatch 2007) and to be responsible for the broader stakeholders in society other than shareholders and beyond those prescribed by law or contract (Jones 1980; Epstein 1987; Frankental 2001; Sacconi 2004; Doh & Guay 2006). Instead of proposing a definition

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that 'works for all', a better solution is to retain the diversity to meet different organizational and social requirements (van Marrewijk 2003). The inclusiveness of CSR can be depicted in a continuum ranging from basic conformance to the law and obligations to shareholders, to the discretionary and altruistic contributions to society beyond what is required by regulation (Bhimani & Soonawalla 2005; Munilla & Miles 2005; Pirsch et al. 2007).

Since the concept of CSR entered the research field, many scholars have devoted efforts to review the literatures in this field. For example, Carroll (1999) and Dahlsrud (2008) systematically reviewed the controversial CSR definitions used in the literature. Garriga and Melé (2004) identified four CSR theory and approach domains, comprising instrumental theories, political theories, integrative theories and ethical theories. Although these reviews addressed different aspects of CSR research, it is still puzzled that what are the future direction and how to achieve the best CSR performance. Therefore, systematic reviews are needed to reveal the prior development and current challenges to prepare a structural knowledge to ones who want to study this concept. Hence, this paper offers a coherent review to trace the evolution of the research perspectives and focuses of CSR literatures, identify the current research gaps and provide a promising research direction for CSR in the construction context.

Scope of the review

The search of the literatures followed three steps: first, to identify the most influential journal articles in CSR field over years using Web of Science search engine; second, to eliminate the articles those are not directly relevant or focused on the concept; third, track the cited references of the articles and add important prior research by searching from Google Scholar. The detailed process is described as follows.

Using the topic search of 'Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR', 10,084 journal articles were searched from 1970 to 2016 from the database of 'Web of Science Core Collection'. Ranked by the cited times, the first 500 most cited articles were extracted as the initial collection. Before starting to read these articles, the authors eliminated some irrelevant ones, such as medical and clinical research (due to the similar abbreviation) and some literatures on sustainability, ethics and environment etc. The left 176 articles form the target collection. The authors read these articles in depth and recorded the important references and scholars those were frequently cited. Afterwards, the authors searched the titles and authors of these tracked references in Google Scholar and included them in the target collection. These tracked

references were from different types of sources, such as journals, proceedings and books. At last, the target collection contained 231 references, which were used as the database for tracing the evolution of the CSR research. After using this search process, the literatures in the target collection represent the master pieces in CSR field over years, which could be used to identify the development footprint.

The core collection consisted of 203 journal articles and 28 conference papers. Table 1 summarizes the key sources of the target collection literatures. It shows that most literatures were from journals on society and the environment, business and management, while only several of them were construction and engineering journals. Most of the journals are indexed in Web of Science as part of the SCI and SCCI. From the impact factors of the journals, it shows the sources of the literatures are leading journals within different fields with wide reputations and influences.

Because no review is fully inclusive, different intentions can lead to different analyses and findings (Aguinis & Glavas 2012). It is important to clarify the review strategy before starting to read the literatures. In this research, there were two critical issues that the authors aimed to target on. The first one is what perspectives

Table 1. Summary of the literature sources.

Categories	Sources	N	Impact factor[*]
Society and Environment	Journal of Business Ethics	56	1.837
	CSR and Environmental Management	7	2.647
	Accounting Organizations and Society	4	2.464
	Journal of Cleaner Production	4	4.959
	Business Ethics – a European Review	2	1.386
	Public Relations Review	2	1.249
Business and Management	California Management Review	16	1.109
	Academy of Management Journal	11	6.233
	Academy of Management Review	8	7.288
	Corporate Governance	8	2.753
	Journal of Management Studies	5	4.131
	Baltic Journal of Management	3	0.457
	Business & Society	3	2.135
	Business Horizons	3	1.008
	Journal of Business Research	4	2.129
	Academy of Management Executive	3	1.610
	Asian Business & Management	2	0.850
	Management Decision	2	1.134
Construction and Engineering	Inzinerine Ekonomika-Engineering Economics	4	0.806
	Construction Management and Economics	3	N/A
	Architectural Engineering and Design Management	2	N/A

[*]Source from Journal Citation Reports 2015 by Thomson Reuters.

that the references use to approach CSR. Perspective refers to the inherent values, attitudes, preferences and experiences that condition how people perceive and apprehend the world around them (Peshkin 2001). Because CSR is a multifaceted concept, various approaches to the adoption of CSR have been taken by scholars. The perspective of a reference can be deduced from the many observations, including the definition of CSR, propositions and hypothesis, arguments and conclusions. The second issue is the main focuses of the references. The wide ranging literatures reveal various research issues (Lockett et al., 2006). The research focuses of the references were identified from the title, keywords, research aims and objectives. By focusing on these two review targets, the identification of the perspectives and focuses on CSR enables the evolution of CSR research to be traced, and the trends identified.

Three perspectives on CSR

In this section, three perspectives on CSR research identified from the references in the target collection are discussed. CSR is usually perceived and valued by people based on one of the following three underlying perspectives: profit, value and relationship. Although this classification may not cover all CSR studies, it helps to systematically understand the evolution process of CSR research.

The profit perspective

The profit perspective means the references have underlying perception that the ultimate responsibility of businesses is earning profits. As the representative of this doctrine, Friedman (1970) stated that the only social responsibility of a business is to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits as long as it stays within the rules of the game. According to this argument, as long as companies survive in the competitive marketplace, they demonstrate their responsibility to society by providing the high-quality productions, job opportunities, profits shares and tax payments.

Although, businesses' social efforts are supported and advocated under profit perspective, the motivation and purpose of CSR is regarded as means to the pursuit of profit (Aupperle et al. 1985). Businesses commit to social issues because it is economically feasible to incorporate social goals without compromising profits (Carroll 1974). Alterations in executives' and managers' perceptions and attitudes towards CSR result from the positive profitable expectations from social efforts (Holmes 1976; Ostlund 1977). Porter and Kramer (2006) view CSR as a strategy to enhance companies' competitiveness in the

market that ultimately leads to the achievement of the ultimate objective, the accumulation of benefits.

A large body of CSR research using this profit orientation has investigated whether CSR efforts does, in fact, improve the financial performance of companies. Some researchers find that companies' social responsibilities do not improve economic gain (Aupperle et al. 1985; Spencer & Taylor 1987; Davidson & Worrell 1990; Hamid et al. 2011). Contradictory evidences are also numerous, which indicate behaviours and activities about CSR are positively correlated with companies financial performance. (Spencer & Taylor 1987; Zahra & Latour 1987; McGuire et al. 1988; Klassen & McLaughlin 1996; Husted & Salazar 2006; Huang & Lien 2012; Flammer 2015). Besides, some scholars also examine the mediating effects of various factors between CSR and financial performance, such as politics, competitiveness, reputation, customer satisfaction, etc. (Di Giuli & Kostovetsky 2014; Chernev & Blair 2015; Saeidi et al., 2015).

Although the profit perspective of CSR has contributed significantly to the application and spread of CSR in management and academia, it neglects the nature of altruism and morality. Taking CSR as a strategy to enhance profitability sometimes can cause confusion to managers when face business-society dilemma. Therefore, it is not comprehensive to think that the promotion of CSR simply relies on profit-driven mechanism (van Marrewijk, 2003; Doane, 2005).

The value perspective

The value perspective assumes that the social responsibility of companies is not only profit-seeking, but also to produce different kinds of values to the society (Juscius & Jonikas 2013). From this perspective, the goals of companies go beyond minimum requirements of profit maximization, but to embrace and produce various social values such as 'ethics, transparency, rigor, safety, social development, protection of the environment, flow of information to stakeholders, commitment to safeguarding the local economies' (Centrone et al. 2008).

In view of the increasing numbers of business ethical scandals that have had harmful effects on society (Tievino & Blown 2004), the balance between economic and social responsibility has become an indispensable agenda for sustainable development (Garriga & Melé 2004). From value perspective, business and society are mutually dependent, so it is unsustainable for companies to pursue economic targets at the expenses of society and nature that companies' existences are dependent on (Joyner & Payne 2002). Therefore, companies are expected to accept their responsibilities to society as a whole, rather than only to shareholders (Jones 1980;

Juscius & Jonikas 2013). Dilemma inevitably arises when investments in social issues may require the sacrifice of shareholders' benefits (Munilla & Miles 2005). The value perspective uses a holistic way to evaluate the values that companies produce for society as a whole rather than using profitability as the only criteria.

Unlike the profit perspective, the value perspective of CSR represents a moral and sustainable way to conduct business (Joyner & Payne 2002). It shifts the philosophy of companies from pursuing money to long-term value creation to the society, which is a proactive and strategic approach to survive in the competitive international market.

The relational perspective

In the relational perspective, companies' survivals rely on their relationships with multiple primary stakeholders (Freeman & Velamuri 2008). The profit and value perspectives suggest that businesses aim to achieve profit gains or value creations to society. In contrast, the relational perspective begins to address the mutual relationships between organizations and stakeholders, such as consumers (Korschun et al. 2014), employees (Jones et al. 2014), suppliers (Rahim 2016) and neighbouring communities (Boehm 2002). This relational perspective implies (1) that the objective of CSR is to build and maintain good stakeholder relationships, and (2) that the implementation of CSR needs interaction among multiple stakeholders.

Freeman and Velamuri (2008) claim that CSR should be redefined as 'company stakeholder responsibility'. Clarkson (1995) also advocate that stakeholder analysis is the key to CSR because companies are embedded within complicated stakeholder relationships. Building

and maintaining favourable stakeholder relationships is main goal that companies should pursue (Zhuang & Wheale 2004). As long as companies improve their social performance, they can reinforce their stakeholder relationships and increase their network capitals (Thornton & Leahy 2011; Jones et al. 2014). Because of the vague boundary, CSR is regarded as an indeterminate, disintegrative and conflictual concept (Schultz et al. 2013). As Jamali (2007) indicated, stakeholder relationships solve this problem and offer a practical way to implement CSR through managing relationships with key stakeholder groups.

Another valuable implication of the relational perspective is that the implementation of CSR need interactions and resources exchanges among multiple stakeholders (Airike, Rotter and Mark-Herbert, 2016). Due to the increasing integration of industry, CSR has been extended to upper and lower echelons of the supply chains (Spena & Chiara 2012; Airike et al. 2016;). Hsueh (2014) points out that through revenue sharing contract, supply chain companies can all enhance their social performance, simultaneously improve their profits. Therefore, CSR is no longer the objective of individual companies, but becomes a collective responsibility of all companies in the whole supply chain (Spena & Chiara 2012). This relationship perspective is attached with significance by the increasing attentions on CSR communications (Arvidsson 2010), relationship-driven (Kim & Reber 2008), and network management (Akiyama 2010).

Comparing the three perspectives

Graph 1 displays the fluctuation of references in the target collection that use the three perspectives. From the overall numbers over decades, it shows that the
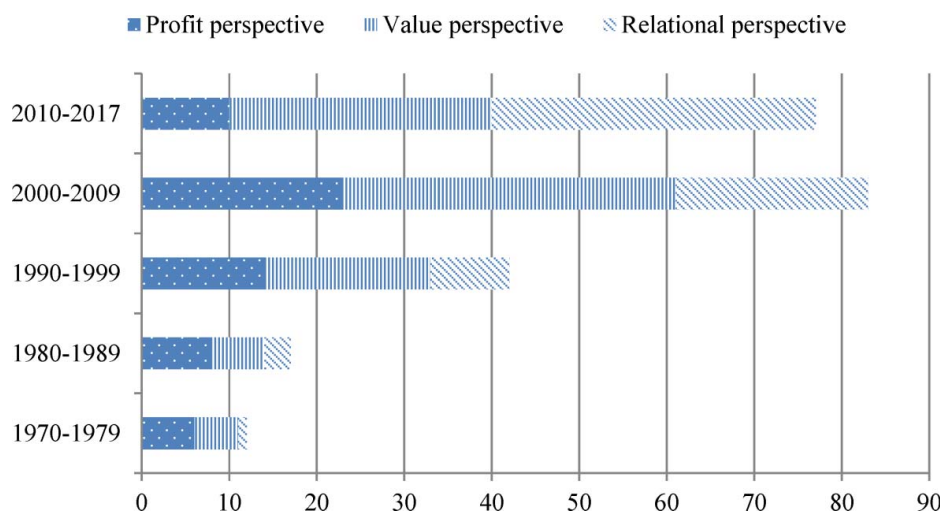
Graph 1. The changes of numbers of references using the three perspectives.

explosion of CSR research starts from the 1990s. Large amount of studies bursting since then, during which lots of new directions and themes appears in this research field (Carroll 1999). After the millennium, CSR has still been a hot topic and kept receiving increasing research attentions. From the distributions of the three perspectives, profit perspective received its reputation before 2010, but in the latest decade, the research interests have transformed into value and relational perspective. More importantly, a significant increase can be observed on the adoption of relational approach after 2010. Comparing the three perspectives, the profit perspective is limited by its self-interest orientation, while value perspective has little implications on CSR practices. The relational perspective has its merits by clarifying that CSR is to build relationships with stakeholders, both primary and secondary ones, to achieve social performance through interacting with these stakeholders. All three perspectives can explain different facets of CSR from their corresponding views. Nevertheless, the relational perspective shows more adaptability to the complicated and dynamic environment in current networked society. Because collaboration and win-win become the dominated theme in current global market, it is important that CSR theories are prepared for this transformation.

Research focuses on CSR

Along with the development process, the research focuses of the targeted references have also changed along the evolution of research perspectives. From the review, it is found that the focuses of the earlier CSR research are 3Ps (principles, processes and performance), which address three fundamental elements of CSR. Later, as the issue of social responsibility began to take root in academia and industry, CSR research focuses changed from discussing whether or not the concept should be accepted towards how to improve the effectiveness of CSR practices. In response to the new demands, the research focuses are shifted to 3Cs (communication, coordination and collaboration), which emphasize on information sharing, resource exchange and collective implementation.

The 3Ps: principle, process and performance

Principles are the boundary to identify what are the social responsibilities of companies and what are not. Because of the vagueness and intangibility of the CSR, different principles can lead to ambiguity in interpreting and implementing CSR. Carroll (1979) categorizes CSR into four groups: economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and discretionary

responsibility. The renowned pyramid model is proposed by Carroll (1991) to interpret the hierarchical relationships between these four responsibilities. Schwartz and Carroll (2003) point out that discretionary category is encompassed in the ethical responsibility, so they amend the pyramid model into a three domain CSR theory. In practice, the simple way of 'triple bottom line' and 'people planet profit' principles are also broadly used in companies' CSR disclosure. Further, detailed managerial principles are developed by many international organizations, such as ISO 26,000, the KLD400 Social Index and Social Accountability International (SA8000). This focus on CSR principles offers benchmarks for managers to make practical plans to implement their responsibilities.

Process stands for the procedures that companies use to implement their social responsibilities. CSR does not simply mean a slogan, the process by which social good is achieved is vital (Jones 1980). According to the definition, companies that only have the motivation or willingness to 'do good things' is far from socially responsible businesses. Therefore, as a significant guide to becoming a good corporate citizen, companies should actively incorporate procedural strategies to implement CSR plans (Castka et al. 2004). Wood (1991a) develop a model of social performance to address that CSR only stands for the principles, while social responsiveness is the process to put the plans into practices by environmental management or stakeholder management. Social responsiveness is a significant body of research that emphasize on the process of CSR (Sturdivant & Ginter 1977; Nasi et al. 1997; Azzam 2010). In this case, management methods, such as environmental assessment, stakeholder management and issue management, are used in the implementation processes of CSR (Wood 1991a). The focus on processes spontaneously leads to requirements for measuring the outcomes of CSR to provide feedback to support the continuous improvements.

Performance is the way to assess the outcomes of CSR efforts. Much attention has been put on the development of measurement tools for the evaluation of CSR performance (Gjolberg 2009; Fernandes et al. 2013). The two main difficulties in evaluating CSR are 'the unavailability of detailed information in quantitative (monetary and other forms) terms on the social activities' and 'a methodology to measure the full impact on society of known corporate activities'. In general, there are two types of approach for the evaluation: self-disclosure and objective ratings. There are increasing numbers of companies around the world are publishing annual CSR reports to disclose their social efforts. Content analysis of these textual self-reflections has become a conventional and effective means of evaluating CSR (Abbott & Monsen 1979;

Bhatia 2012; Li et al. 2013). However, these reports are based on self-evaluation, which may inevitably lead to biases in reliability. Several subjective measurements, including CSR scales (Isa & Reast 2012), balance sheets (Saez-Moran et al. 2008), scorecards (Spiller 2000) and indicator systems (Tong & Wu 2008; Gjolberg 2009; Zhao et al. 2012; Fernandes et al. 2013), have been developed to enhance the reliability of the CSR performance evaluation tools.

The 3Ps cover the practical issues of managers to understand and implement CSR. However, along with the increasing specialization and complex market interactions, new demands on have emerged with respect to addressing the interrelations of different organizations (Schultz et al. 2013). The proliferation of the relational perspective also implies a much wider scope for CSR research.

## The 3Cs: communication, coordination, and collaboration

Communication means information exchange and transmission about companies' CSR behaviours and outcomes. It plays an important role in building relationships with stakeholders to maximize the returns of CSR efforts (Manheim & Pratt 1986). An increasing number of companies have realized that the significance to disclose information about their social efforts to their stakeholders (Brown & Parry 2009). Inefficient or incomplete communication may reduce positive effects that CSR brings because of the lack of awareness by stakeholders. However, some studies report the failures of CSR communication with stakeholders, such as the public (Grunig 1979), communities (Manheim & Pratt 1986), peers (Grafstrom & Windell 2011), investors (Teoh & Shiu 1990). Capriotti and Moreno (2007) point out that a lack of communication channels is one of the reasons for the failures of communication. Developing stakeholder communication platforms and facilitating communication climates may improve the effective information exchange and transmission about CSR practices. Therefore, how to improve stakeholder communication should be a significant focus of future research on CSR.

Coordination refers to the optimal allocation of resources and the strategic management of different parties in the implementation of CSR based on the analysis of the current situation. Under conditions of finite resources and the conflicting interests of stakeholders, management measures are required to assist decision makings of resources allocations on different CSR issues, such as management systems (Zwetsloot 2003), issue management (Wood 1991b), corporate strategies

(Bowman & Haire 1975) and organizational policies (Wood 1991a). Although these measures use different terms and strategies, they aim to achieve the same target, which is to distribute organizational resources strategically to maximize the overall outcomes. The adoption of coordination methods would amplify the level of social welfare delivered (Graafland et al. 2003; Zwetsloot 2003; Jamali et al. 2008; Katavic & Kovacevic 2011). However, debate continues over whether an internal management system within a single organization is sufficient, especially in a complicated networked society (Akiyama 2010).

Collaboration means different organizations working jointly with each other towards a common goal (Dean 1996). Because resources are finite and there is functional specialization (Cook et al. 1983), organizations have varying abilities to undertake different social issues. Each business could make its own unique contribution, which is then pooled with those of other organizations to promote sustainable social development in a united manner. Numerous practical business cases have shown that CSR initiatives are often executed in collaboration with other firms or multiple NGOs (Peloza & Falkenberg 2009). Because many CSR issues are 'meta-problems', such as community poverty, environmental pollution and public safety, these broad issues call for an expanded framework of collaboration involving various organizations with specific types of expertise (Peloza & Falkenberg 2009). In short, collaboration provides a holistic approach to implement CSR issues with the share of resources and power from different individuals, organizations and sectors. Further steps, therefore, should be taken to explore the ways to enhance collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders and, thereby, implement CSR more effectively and efficiently.

The expansion of the research focuses from the 3Ps to the broader scope of the 3Cs (Figure 1) reflects the progress being made towards developing a more effective, systematic and collective understanding of CSR. The 3Ps provide the theoretical foundations for the conceptualization of CSR, while the 3Cs highlight the optimization of CSR outcomes through building relationships with multiple stakeholders. The impetus to shift the focus to the 3Cs relies on the evolution of the three CSR perspectives. According to Figure 1, the profit perspective provides only limited power for the development of CSR research because of the precondition of profit-maximization. The value perspective promotes progress by including the ideology of social value. The relational perspective is driving the CSR research to a new stage concerned with how to facilitate value through multiple organizations acting together.
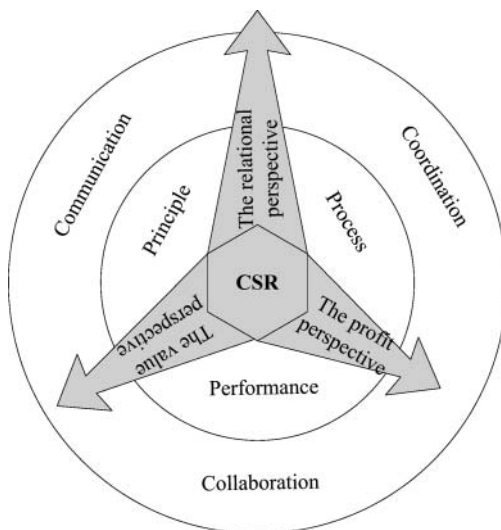
*Developed by the authors

Figure 1. The evolution of the research perspectives and focuses on CSR.

Research gaps and future agenda in the construction context

Based on the findings from tracing the evolution of CSR research, the relational perspective and the 3Cs are distilled as the future direction. This direction has its potential to drive the development of more innovative studies to CSR. It is suggested that the construction industry, which under great pressures to improve its CSR implementation, should catch up with this promising trend. In order to adapting this new direction, there are two theories that can be of use to CSR research in the construction industry: stakeholder management and power theory.

Stakeholder management

First, the complexity and diversity of the stakeholder environment in the construction industry is the primary difficulty for the implementation of CSR (Karlsen 2002). Because most CSR initiatives and activities are under-taken in project environment (such as using green materials and waste management), some stakeholders may be reluctant to cooperate and have different levels of interests. It may cause conflicts because each stakeholder may take different actions based on their own interpretations of CSR (Li et al. 2012; Shauki 2011). As suggested by this review, relational perspective to improve communication, coordination and collaboration among stakeholders can be used as a key strategy to facilitate CSR implementation. Stakeholder management is a useful method for planning for this strategy. Stakeholder

management was originally introduced as a component of strategic management (Freeman 1984) through which companies allocate limited resources based on an evaluation of the influence of various stakeholders in reaching their objectives (Frooman 1999). Stakeholder management is an approach that is applicable to numerous social and managerial issues, and is especially valuable for dealing with non-profit issues such as sustainability (Bal et al. 2013), environmental management (Onkila 2011), ethical conduct (Moodley et al. 2008) and social responsibility (Clarkson 1995; Xun 2013). The applicability of the principles of stakeholder management to the redefinition of a company's role and the identification of practical ways for companies to optimize their resource allocation is strikingly clear. In addition, companies are more likely to voluntarily share information and resources with other stakeholders regarding CSR because these are non-competitive and win-win practices. Consequently, incorporating stakeholder management is a potential way to realize the new CSR research direction to resolve the problem of the complicated stakeholders' environment in the construction context.

Power theory

Another problem is how to get stakeholders with different areas of expertise and resources to collaborate to implement CSR. Because different stakeholders have different abilities on resolving social problems, the unclear stakeholder power to respond to different social issues may reduce the efficiency of their social efforts (Cook 1977). Thus, a method needs to be developed to 'help all project participants working in a consistent and cooperative environment towards the same goal for achieving better project sustainability performance' (Shen et al. 2007). Therefore, power theory should be incorporated in future CSR research agenda to facilitate collaboration by evaluating the most capable stakeholder to take responsibility for the CSR issues. Power theory is derived from sociology (McGuirk 2001), and can be used to describe the ability of stakeholder A to pressure stakeholder B to act in a manner that suits A's own interests (Gaski 1984; Turner 2005). This ability is based on A's control of resources that are crucial to stakeholder B, and the impossibility of substituting these resources from others (Emerson 1962). Powerful stakeholders are more able to utilize their resources and relationships with other stakeholders to fulfil their own social and environmental initiatives (Prado-Lorenzo et al. 2009). Based on this assumption, different CSR issues should be led by different stakeholders who have the greatest power to accomplish them. Conversely, if stakeholder organizations with relatively little power tackle social
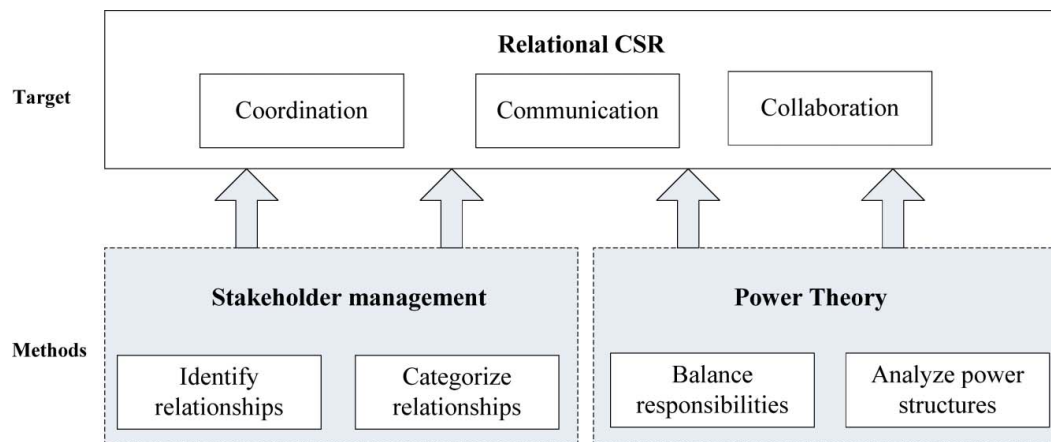
Figure 2. The framework for future CSR research in the construction context.

issues far beyond their ability, this may cause financial strain and have negative effects (Loosemore 1999). Therefore, the incorporation of power theory to future CSR research in the construction context could help to analyse the power of different stakeholders and balance multiple responsibilities to achieve better overall CSR implementation efficiency.

The framework for future research agenda

Figure 2 shows the framework integrating stakeholder management and power theory for future CSR research agenda. Stakeholder management activities should be used to devise CSR implementation strategies suited to the complicated stakeholder environment. Using theories in stakeholder management, dynamic stakeholder relationships can be identified, analysed and categorized for making corresponding stakeholder strategies. Moreover, power theory provides a means of evaluating stakeholders roles on implementing CSR issues, for example, as the dominant role, the intermediate role, or the subordinate role (Cook 1977). By incorporating power theory, the balance between stakeholder power and their responsibilities can be managed. In addition, power is also an important attribute to describe stakeholder interactions and structural networks, for the purpose of improving collaboration. Following the framework, future studies can concentrate on how to integrate these two important concepts in the CSR research in the construction industry.

Concluding remarks

To accelerate the development of CSR research in the construction industry, this review reviews the influential CSR literatures in general management, and identifies the frontier research direction to be embedded in future agenda for CSR in the construction context. This research reveals that the relational perspective with the 3Cs focuses should be more addressed in future CSR studies. Considering the complicated and dynamic stakeholder environment in the construction industry, this research proposes a framework by integrating stakeholder management and power theory as future research agenda. This framework is the result of adaption to the current networked society and globalization. It draws on the advantages that different organizations have in making concerted efforts towards improving social outcomes as a whole. Although the concept of CSR has been studied for decades, the current implementation performance is not satisfactory and varies significantly in different sectors and environment. The research could prepare the CSR researcher with a clear knowledge of the development progress, current gaps and future agendas to be compatible with the ongoing transformation of modern society through the rapid growth of networking.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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