

SUMMARY

The amount of research conducted on social responsibility varies significantly between developed and developing countries. More precisely, researchers focus more frequently on developed countries, while developing ones receive less attention. In addition, since 2018, they have been more interested in understanding the phenomenon of social responsibility in the Romanian business context. As a result, motivations that drive managers to implement responsible business practices remain a topic of keen interest among scholars. Moreover, the primary goal of the studies conducted in the Romanian business context was to evaluate how multinational corporations or small and medium-sized enterprises implement social responsibility. Few of these studies focused on comparing the relationship between social responsibility and the size of firms.

The results of this paper entitled “Strategic social responsibility in businesses: A comparative analysis” highlight the differences and similarities between corporations and SMEs operating in Romania in terms of their approach to the concept of social responsibility and its applicability in business, substantiated based on the perceptions and attitudes identified among managers, corporatists, and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these findings provide significant insights into managers' intentions to integrate social responsibility practices, identifying the factors that might influence their responsible business behavior.

Keywords: *social responsibility, multinational companies, small and medium enterprises, managers, perceptions, attitudes*

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of social responsibility (SR) has captured the attention of the academic community, particularly in recent years, due to its potential to create opportunities for the development of a sustainable economic and social partnership. In this regard, SR has provided numerous insights into how the actions of companies can produce effects on socio-professional groups (shareholders/investors/owners, employees, customers/consumers/beneficiaries, suppliers, creditors, business partners, authorities, non-governmental entities, local communities, society and the environment) (Dmytriyev et al., 2021). Nowadays, the concept is implemented in numerous companies, regardless of their main field of activity, due to the influence of factors such as: the pressure of social norms (especially from government, society, environment, employees, consumers, local communities and competition) or the possible benefits for companies (e.g. good reputation, employee or consumer loyalty, competitive advantage, economic and social development can be perceived as effects of the strategic approach to SR in a company) (Simionescu, 2018). Therefore, it can be seen that adopting a strategic position in relation to SR has become both a need and an economic and social trend in today's business environment (Siltaloppi et al., 2021). The strategic approach to SR in business involves balancing economic interests with social and environmental ones (Vishwanathan et al., 2021). This is made possible by formulating and implicitly meeting diverse economic, social and environmental objectives to create economic and social value for companies and their stakeholders (Palazzo et al., 2020).

In the literature, the topic of SR in business has been researched mainly from the perspective of the firms' size, the management model practiced and the stakeholder theory. More specifically, numerous research studies have been designed and conducted to study how either corporations or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) adopt, develop and implement responsible practices in relation to their stakeholders. Thus, it has been found that in general, multinational companies own and play an important role in promoting the concept of SR, as they are the ones who usually implement a wide range of such initiatives and strive to integrate SR into their strategy and implicitly into their core actions and operations (Jamali et al., 2020). As far as SMEs are concerned, it has been noted that SR in business is an emerging concept (Oduro et al., 2021). That is, steps towards empowering entrepreneurial business models have been taken and as a result, responsible principles and practices are being implemented at the SME level, but often their approach to SR is ad hoc, involving the launching of initiatives without being grounded in a strategic purpose (Das and Rangarajan,

2020). In contrast to initiating ad-hoc SR actions, the strategic approach involves, among other things, making a long-term commitment to develop the business responsibly (Chandler, 2020). Implicitly, a strategic SR approach provides the necessary prerequisites for achieving benefits that can contribute to business success, i.e. to the survival and profitability of companies (Vishwanathan et al., 2020)

The SR phenomenon originated in the United States of America (USA) and subsequently spread to other developed countries such as the UK (Phillips et al., 2020). Firms have played and continue to play a key role in grounding the concept of SR (Bouslah et al., 2023). Although significant efforts have been made to identify an efficient manner in which SR principles and practices could be mainstreamed in developing countries, this has not yet been elucidated (Simionescu, 2018). One possible explanation for the above situation is that there are certain gaps and gaps between developing and developed countries regarding the study of SR in the business context (Bhatia and Makkar, 2020). Specifically, most of the research conducted analyses the situation of corporate SR in developed countries (Khan et al., 2020). It is also important to note that responsible practices need to be adapted to the local specificities and context. It is therefore unlikely that SR practices will not differ from one country to another and even within the same country, as the needs of each region are in turn diverse and specific to the economic, social, technological and political framework.

The literature reveals that entities such as the European Union have contributed significantly to stimulating the implementation of SR in business and in developing country contexts (Cassely et al., 2020). The few studies conducted on the latter highlight that managers lack sufficient knowledge about SR and/or the benefits associated with its applicability (Mahmood et al., 2021). This impediment to the implementation of responsible initiatives is also relevant for Romania (Grigore et al., 2021). The present paper aims to investigate the perception and attitudes of managers, entrepreneurs or corporate managers, towards the concept of corporate SR and their intention to implement responsible practices. Accordingly, the overall research aim is to develop a theoretical framework of SR for economic enterprises operating in Romania, based on an examination of managers' familiarity with and understanding of the concept of SR and an assessment of the extent to which it is integrated into business practice.

Therefore, the main objective of the study is to analyse the relationship between SR and firm size in the context of the Romanian business environment. The following secondary objectives derive from this:

- clarify current approaches to the possibility of integrating the concept of social

responsibility into business strategy;

- identify strategic approaches to social responsibility in multinational corporations and SMEs;
- analysis of the impact of the strategic approach to corporate social responsibility by, company size;
- creating an integrative model of social responsibility in companies' business strategy. Based on the objectives of the study, the expected results are as follows:

Based on the objectives of the study, the expected results are as follows:

- building a secondary database on the concept of SR in business;
- building a secondary database on the strategy concept;
- conducting exploratory as well as conclusive research on the implementation of SR activities by enterprises (multinational companies and SMEs) operating in Romania;
- building a primary database using a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods on the concept of SR and its applicability in the Romanian business environment;
- to develop a theoretical model of SR in relation to the perception, attitude and behavioural intention of managers, operating in Romania, to implement SR practices, and to validate it.

In order to obtain the expected results, the specific stages of the research projects were completed. Initially, the aim was to consult available secondary databases in order to collect the theoretical information needed to carry out the research. Thus, the concepts relevant to the present study, namely SR and strategy, have been deepened. The following theoretical aspects have been synthesised to deepen the concept of SR (**Chapter 1**):

- **History and evolution of the concept of social responsibility**- presentation of the evolutionary stages of the concept of SR in business;
- **Conceptual approaches to social responsibility**- presentation and interpretation of 29 definitions of SR from 1953 to 2020;
- **Terms associated with the concept of social responsibility**- examining the relationship between the concept of SR and the following terms: corporate philanthropy, marketing (environmental and social), social entrepreneurship, corporate governance, sustainability and sustainable development.

The following theoretical aspects are summarised in the following chapter (**Chapter 2**):

- **Origins of strategy**- highlighting three perspectives, namely, Greek and Chinese

military thinking with Taoist influences, and German military thinking;

- **Evolution of the conceptual framework of strategy**- presentation of the five evolutionary stages of the concept of strategy, starting from the analysis of the following strategic tools: Growth Vector Matrix (Ansoff's Matrix); SWOT Strategic Analysis Matrix; Boston Consulting Group Matrix; General Electric (GE)-McKinsey Matrix; Porter's Five Competitive Forces Model; Resource-Based Organization Model (RBV Theory) and Balanced Scorecard Model.
- **Definitions of strategy**- presentation and interpretation of 40 definitions of strategy from 1962 to 2022.
- **Typology of business strategy**- presentation and analysis of the following types of business strategy: functional division strategy, business unit strategy, corporate strategy and global strategy.
- **Basic components of strategy**- presenting and explaining the following specific aspects of strategy: company mission, organizational objectives, strategic options, organizational resources, timelines and competitive advantage;
- **Main business approaches to SR**- strategic approach to SR versus launching ad-hoc SR initiatives.

The documentary research presented above was followed by qualitative research that involved designing and conducting four focus group discussion sessions (**Chapter 3**). In this qualitative stage of the research, the aim was to study managers' perceptions and attitudes towards the concept of corporate SR by identifying:

- the respondent's familiarity with the concept of SR;
- responsible practices integrated into the business strategy of economic organisations, depending on the size of the enterprise;
- the obstacles companies face in the process of strategic implementation of the concept of social responsibility;
- the motivations of corporate managers (low and middle level) and entrepreneurs (executive managers) to engage in responsible practices.

The data obtained from the focus group research were processed using the Nvivo software (version 14) and content analysis. Furthermore, following the exploratory research conducted, i.e. the documentary and qualitative focus group discussion research, 5 study hypotheses were established in order to meet the research objectives. Firstly, the hypotheses were developed taking into account previous studies and current research needs in the field of responsible

business, and secondly, the information collected through the focus groups organised and conducted was used with the aim of validating or invalidating the study hypotheses.

For the conclusive research conducted, a quantitative research method was chosen, namely the online web survey (**Chapter 4**). Thus, a questionnaire with closed questions was designed, based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), in order to determine the intention of managers to act responsibly in business and, implicitly, to achieve responsible behaviour. The data obtained in this way were processed using the specialist software program WarpPLS, version 8, using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PSL-SEM). Subsequently, conclusive research results were compared with those obtained from the exploratory research (**Chapter 5**).

Considering that SR in the Romanian business domain is currently a subject at an early stage of development, the results obtained and presented in this scientific work could make a significant contribution to the literature relevant to this concept and to the understanding of the necessary premises for stimulating the adoption of responsible behaviour in business and implicitly among managers, whether corporate or entrepreneurs.