J Bus Ethics (2017) 141:621–643
DOI 10.1007/s10551-015-2719-9

Management of Social Issues in Supply Chains: A Literature Review Exploring Social Issues, Actions and Performance Outcomes

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Received: 1 July 2014 / Accepted: 8 June 2015 / Published online: 16 June 2015
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Abstract The social dimension of sustainable development and its impact on supply chains have so far received less attention than the environmental dimension. The aim of the research is to explore the intersection between social issues, corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions and performance outcomes. A structured literature review of social issues in supply chains is presented, analysing the research published so far in peer-reviewed publications. Linking CSR and supply chain management allows the exploration of strategies and performance outcomes with a focus on social issues. The corresponding responsible supply chain actions adopted by firms to address these issues are grouped into communication, compliance and supplier development strategies. Social and economic as well as buyer and supplier performance are identified as the key outcomes, but the interactions among these constructs would require further research. This paper contributes to the understanding of managing social issues in supply chains by linking social issues, responsible supply chain actions and performance outcomes. The paper consolidates related research by offering an overarching conceptual framework and points to future research directions and simultaneously provides insights into the management of social issues in supply chains.

Keywords Supply chain management · Social issues · Corporate social responsibility · Communication and compliance · Supplier development · Performance outcomes

Introduction

Recent years have shown a gradual increase in the amount of literature linking social issues with economic performance and the sustainability of firms (Carter and Rogers 2008; Krause et al. 2009). Carroll (1979), Wartick and Cochran (1985) and Wood (1991) emphasised that the identification of social issues and tackling them is an important dimension of corporate social performance. Recent attempts have been made addressing this intersection (Awaysheh and Klassen 2010; Morali and Searcy 2013), but which core constructs are used in the field and how they relate to each other remains unclear. Related literature reviews (Ashby et al. 2012; Searcy 2013) now mention the social dimension but do not put this concept into the centre of their analysis. Research on CSR in supply chains rarely gives insights into the intersection among social issues, supply chain actions and performance outcomes (exceptions are Preuss and Brown 2012; Hoejmose et al. 2013a, b). This gap indicates that the management of social issues in supply chains needs to be analysed systematically in order to gain insights into the impacts of responsible supply chain actions on the firms when

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implementing CSR in supply chains. The research question of this paper is: How are social issues managed across supply chains and how can they be conceptualised based on the previous findings in the literature? A literature review seems a promising approach for addressing this research question as it allows a systematic analysis of the research on the topic so far, thereby providing the backbone for such a conceptualisation.

Firstly, drawing on the findings of the literature review at the intersection of CSR and supply chain management (SCM), we identify a set of social issues that firms are confronted with in their supply chains. Secondly, the paper highlights responsible supply chain actions taken up by firms when dealing with social issues in their supply chains. Finally, the paper demonstrates how the management of social issue affects the performance in the supply chains.

The paper begins by introducing the development of CSR in SCM which serves as the background to the proposed conceptual framework. This is followed by presenting a literature review based on a structured content analysis, capturing both formal (descriptive) and content aspects. The paper concludes by discussing the contributions, limitations and future research directions of this research.

Development of CSR in SCM and the Relevance of Social Issues in Supply Chains

As a starting point, we take up several definitions which lay the ground for the subsequent parts of the paper. Sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) is defined as the "management of material, information and capital flows as well as cooperation among the companies along the supply chain while taking goals from all three dimensions of sustainable development i.e., economic, environmental and social into account which are derived from customers and the stakeholders' requirements" (Seuring and Müller 2008, p. 1700). Searcy and Ahi (2013) offer a detailed analysis of related definitions, where the social focus is included. They confirm that the social dimension of sustainability is still much less researched than the environmental one (Seuring and Müller 2008). While there is a considerable debate on what constitutes social sustainability, much of the debate is restricted to the typical buyer–supplier level without much focus on supply chains (Awaysheh and Klassen 2010, Gimenez and Tachizawa 2012). Social issues become relevant in supply chains because of the involvement of multiple suppliers who directly affect the reputation of the buying firm (Hoejmose et al. 2014; Roberts 2003). Additionally, an enlightened stakeholder (both internal and external) holding the firm accountable for social issues in supply chains forces the firm to take responsible supply chain actions (Klassen and Vereecke 2012). Further, several authors (Hoejmose et al. 2014; Ashby et al. 2012) argue that the effective management of social issues can lead to performance improvements across the supply chain. According to Hutchins and Sutherland (2008), CSR and social responsibility are used interchangeably to address social sustainability. The earliest and most comprehensive definition of CSR dates back to Davis (1973, p. 312) who defined it as "the firm's consideration of and response to issues beyond the narrow economic, technical and legal requirements of the firm which results in accomplishing social benefits along with the traditional economic gains which the firms seek". Stakeholders are frequently holding firms responsible for unethical behaviour in their supply chains (Park-Poaps and Rees 2010; Jenkins 2006). The emergence of electronic media, NGOs and an active civil society are effectively highlighting the issues of unethical behaviour by companies and prompting firms to take more stringent actions in curbing socially irresponsible activities. Several attempts have been made by researchers (like Maloni and Brown 2006; Andersen and Skojett-Larsen 2009; Schneider and Schwerk 2010) to integrate CSR into a supply chain context with a focus on social issues. Spence and Bourlakis (2009, p. 291) superimpose the definition of CSR from Davis (1973) onto supply chains and define CSR in supply chains as "chain wide consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical and legal requirements of the supply chain to accomplish social (and environmental) benefits along with the traditional economic gains which every member in that supply chain seeks". This definition underlines the relevance of understanding responsible strategies adopted by supply chains to address social issues. The striking feature of implementing CSR in order to manage social issues in supply chains is that it helps the firm in fulfilling any expectations of stakeholders while aiming for performance improvements. Studies assessing single business functions, such as Carter and Jennings (2002, 2004) regarding purchasing social responsibility (PSR) and Murphy and Poist (2002) relating to logistics social responsibility (LSR) in a standalone manner, identify social issues and reiterate the positive link between social and economic performance. Searcy (2013) mentions that social performance is difficult to measure. This difficulty in measuring the social performance can be attributed to the challenges in understanding the dynamic and complex nature of most of the relevant social and societal issues in supply chains. Some indicators like employment of minority groups, reduction in pollution, improved health and safety are suggested across the literature (Awaysheh and Klassen 2010; Hassini et al. 2012). However, there are no comprehensive indicators that can measure social performance in the supply chains.

The subsequent sections aim at conceptualising the management of social issues and putting social issues in line with supply chain-related actions, and link it to performance. It remains open to interpretation as to which ones the key constructs in this context are and how they relate to each other, which justifies the research question addressed in this paper.

Conceptual Development

A starting point for this research is the debates on corporate social performance models, such as Carroll (1979, 1991), Wartick and Cochran (1985) and Wood (1991), where social concerns are integrated into economic performance. They propose the inclusion or identification of social issues, corporate social responsiveness, here interpreted as supply chain actions, and any other interaction, which is here comprehended as performance outcome. Previous research has emphasised social issues but has rarely mentioned the actions taken by firms to tackling them. Further, a number of studies in the extant literature establish a relationship between social and financial performance (e.g. Orlitzky et al. 2003; Margolis and Walsh 2003), but it is not clear if these studies are also applicable to supply chains and supply chain management. The proposed framework applies the concept of corporate social performance (CSP) in a supply chain context and identifies a set of social issues, responsible supply chain actions and their outcome throughout the supply chain by focusing mainly on the literature at the intersection of CSR and SCM. This framework is a logical extension to the third dimension of CSP, namely social issue management, proposed by Wartick and Cochran (1985) and Wood (1991), which deals with identifying corporate behaviour and strategies for managing social issues.

Based on the above arguments, a framework (shown in Fig. 1) is proposed. This is introduced here upfront and explained in detail subsequently. This allows structuring the paper in a more conventional and easier-to-read manner. However, the development of the framework was a process taking several month and intensive debates at workshops and conferences. Hence, instead of the rather positivistic stance taken in this paper, the process of developing a framework was one, where interpretative elements also played a role and several loops were taken for reaching the framework.

If a firm is confronted with social issues in the supply chain, it initiates certain responsible supply chain actions which then lead to performance outcomes reflecting a Principle–Process–Outcomes approach. This assumption is similar to the arguments already made by Wood (1991, 2010) that social performance is a part of financial performance, and addressing stakeholder requirements lies implicitly at the core of CSR and CSP (Wood and Jones 1995; Clarkson 1995). The stakeholder view (Freeman 1984) is considered important because it determines what is expected from firms in terms of performance and also affects the types of strategies adopted by the firms to meet stakeholders' demands (Wood and Jones 1995). Elaborating further on the relationship between stakeholder involvement and corporate social performance, Wood and Jones (1995) contend that internal and external stakeholders influence the strategies adopted by firms because the ultimate goal of an organisation is to satisfy the needs of the stakeholder. Donaldson and Preston (1995) further argue that financial performance can be achieved by addressing multi-stakeholder concerns which support the firm in efficient management practices. Maignan et al. (2002) argue that stakeholders are agents of social change since they possess different forms of power and are the ones that highlight social issues in a supply chain and are therefore at the centre of the social responsibility debate. Moreover, Waddock et al. (2002) found that by addressing social issues, businesses meet (internal and external) stakeholder expectations and reach certain standards of social and economic performance through total responsibility management. Further, by addressing social issues in the supply chains, firms gain legitimacy (Müller et al. 2009) and accountability among stakeholders and establish reputation (Hoejmose et al. 2014) thereby creating markets leading to performance improvements. Further, Klassen and Vereecke (2012) contend that management of social issues in supply chains should answer who (stakeholders), which (social concerns or social issues) and how (by invoking supply chain actions) to achieve performance improvements. Based on the arguments above, we identify social issues and supply chain actions adopted by companies and linked them as key constituents of the framework, which are addressed to fulfil different stakeholder expectations and to achieve (social and economic) performance outcomes. The proposed framework (see Fig. 1) can help in understanding and managing social issues and implementing CSR in supply chains. We distinguish among measures addressing external stakeholder demands, thereby aiming for legitimacy and accountability (Müller et al. 2009), as well as supply chain-internal measures for performance.

Communication strategies act both inside the supply chain as well as outside of it. Addressing stakeholder concerns in an active manner is one such way, which is frequently enacted via e.g. corporate reports. Yet, communicating social demands to suppliers is well in line with this, too (Ciliberti et al. 2008b; Halldorsson et al. 2009). Compliance strategies, which are somewhat more reactive, are geared towards both internal and external stakeholders.

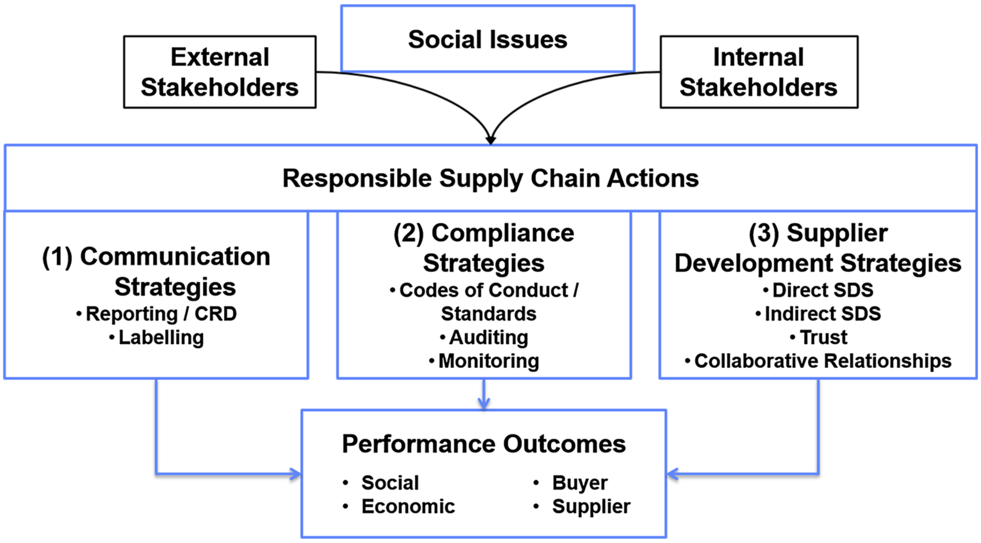


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework for managing social issues in supply chains

External stakeholders such as NGOs, who demand focal companies to react on social issues (Asif et al. 2013; Kolk and Van Tulder 2002b; Gallear et al. 2012) and internal stakeholders like top management who pursue the performance objectives by meeting social issues in supply chain drive the adoption of compliance strategies (Pedersen 2009; Mamic 2005). The most active part of managing social issues in supply chains would then be taken by applying supplier development strategies. This aims at improving suppliers' conduct towards meeting respective requirements, which is in line with the approach of "supplier management for risk and performance" put forward by Seuring and Müller (2008). Next, we define these single dimensions used in the conceptual framework.

Social Issues

Social issues in supply chains are defined by Klassen and Vereecke (2012, p. 103) as "product or process related aspects of operations that affect human safety, welfare and community development". The management of social issues includes decisions that prevent a firm from taking up unethical practices and indulging in socially unacceptable practices. However, what constitutes a social issue greatly differs among different stakeholders because they constantly change and are dependent on conditions under which a firm is operating (Hoejmose et al. 2013b, 2014; Clarkson 1995). The emergence of external stakeholders like the media, NGOs and civil society actors has effectively highlighted the unethical behaviour of firms, encouraging them to take up effective strategies against social issues. Further, the mismanagement of social issues can lead to a consumer backlash if stakeholder expectations are not met. Within the CSR and sustainability performance literature, the management of social issues is seen as a potential way of reducing risk (Klassen and Vereecke 2012) and improving financial performance which depends on various factors like power, trust and monitoring between buyers and suppliers. (Hoejmose et al. 2013a, b). Further, new regulations and laws dealing with human health and safety which encourage firms to look at societal and social issues also highlight the relevance of social issues in supply chains. It is worth noting that the social issues as put forward in Table 1 are not the only ones, which firms may encounter in their supply chains. Their relevance results from the fact that researchers and practitioners have highlighted them as the social challenges frequently faced by a firm.

Labour conditions, which deal with the issues of wages, working hours, health and safety and child labour were deductively derived (Welford and Frost 2006; Zutshi et al. 2009; Preuss 2009). Items like human rights, minority development, gender and the inclusion of disabled and marginalised people were inductively integrated based on thoroughly scanning the literature as will be explained below. Some of these items are overlapping, i.e. labour conditions are linked to health and safety and human rights, which in its wider interpretation encompasses discrimination, child labour and inclusion of the disabled and marginalised. The definition for each item is adopted from various sources like the International Labour Organisation and other United Nations organisations and from relevant literature within CSR and supply chain management. We define each construct of the social issues dimension and give general and specific references from SCM-related literature that focused on these issues in Table 1. Addressing these social issues serves as a starting point for the measures summarised in the conceptual framework.

Table 1 Construct definition and related references

Social issue	Definition	General reference	SCM-related reference
Labour conditions	Working conditions of the employees includes low wages, extended hours of working, right to form unions, contract labour and exploitation of the employee	International Labour Organisation	Leire and Mont (2009), Burchielli et al. (2009), Park-Poaps and Rees (2010), Preuss (2009), Klassen and Vereecke (2012), Lindgreen and Swaen (2010)
Child labour	Child labour concerns work by children under the age of 15 that prevents school attendance and work by children under the age of 18 that is hazardous to the physical or mental health of the child	International Labour Organisation	Zutshi et al. (2009), Lund-Thomsen et al. (2012), Nadvi (2008), Kolk and Van Tulder (2002a)
Human rights	Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, irrespective of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language or any other status. Equal rights entitlement without discrimination is the core of human rights	United Nations Human Rights Commission	Preuss and Brown (2012), Welford (2002), Carter and Jennings (2002b), Mena et al. (2010)
Health and safety	It includes physical and mental health which are directly related to safety and hygiene at work. It also describes hazardous working conditions which could leave long-term effects on the personal health of the worker	International Labour Organisation	Carter and Jennings (2002b), Jorgensen and Knudsen (2006), Ciliberti et al. (2009), Klassen and Vereecke (2012), Welford and Frost (2006)
Minority development	Minority development is the development of those populations who are considered minorities in terms of population by the virtue of their religion, race and ethnicity	United Nations Human Rights Commission, ILO	Krause et al. (1999), Carter (2006a), Carter and Jennings (2002b), Maignan et al. (2002), Carter et al. (1999)
Disabled/marginalised people inclusion	Those groups who are mostly neglected in the societies due to physical inabilities and those who are left out or neglected by the government. Population living below the poverty line is considered marginal	United Nations Development Program United Nations	Carter and Jennings (2002a, 2002b, 2004), Hall and Matos (2010)
Gender	Gender equality refers to the equal treatment of women and transgender, catering to their special needs and assigning equal rights at the work place	International Labour Organisation	Preito-Carron (2008), Barrientos (2008), Tallontire et al. (2005)

Responsible Supply Chain Actions

In the present research, responsible supply chain actions are defined as actions that a firm initiates to address social issues that are subsequently accepted, adopted and implemented by other supply chain members. The observation is that different stakeholders invoke various demands, and the firm has to make decisions accordingly to fulfil the expectations of actors in the supply chain. While internal stakeholders like top management, employees and managers are aiming for performance improvements, external stakeholders pressurise firms to adopt certain responsible supply chain actions that can mitigate social dilemmas along the supply chain. The underlying motivation to implement these actions is to satisfy the firm's external and internal stakeholders who are directly and indirectly affected by social concerns (Waddock et al. 2002; Hoejmose et al. 2013a). Further, gaining competitive advantage and avoiding risks in the market is at the core of implementing such actions (Harms et al. 2013; Seuring and Müller, 2008; Hoejmose et al. 2013a). The present research has identified three different strategies or responsible supply chain actions implemented by firms in their supply chain to address social concerns, which are classified as (1) compliance strategies (CmS), communication strategies (CoS) and (3) supplier development strategies (SDS).

Communication Strategies

Communication strategies are necessary to convey legitimacy and accountability to the firm's socially responsible behaviour (Amaeshi et al. 2008). Communication strategies are important to fend off stakeholder concerns, create a loyal customer base, attract socially responsible investments and reap benefits from CSR initiatives (Bhattacharya et al. 2010). Further, it is emphasised within the literature that the business case for CSR should be clearly communicated to stakeholders and address concerns like working conditions and risk avoidance in their supply chains, encouraging improved financial performance in the long run.

According to Shabana and Carroll (2010, p. 99), corporate responsibility documents or sustainability reporting is defined as "reports that provide information regarding a company's economic, environmental and social performance". A corporate responsibility document is a proactive stance taken up by firms to communicate how sustainability concerns of stakeholders are best integrated into the firm's operations (Tate et al. 2010). They are generally published separately as sustainability report or as a subsection within the annual report of the company. Sustainability reporting helps the firm in communicating responsible actions thereby encouraging suppliers and other stakeholders to act ethically. Sustainability reporting leads to value creation by addressing and communicating stakeholder and firms expectations (Perrini et al. 2007; Esrock and Leichty 1998) simultaneously, creating a reputation which in turn leads to performance improvements.

Labelling is defined as a direct way of conveying product characteristics and a step towards gaining legitimacy in the eyes of external stakeholders (Nadvi and Wältring 2004). Labelling social initiatives convey CSR attempts of a firm and directly influence the perception of consumers by communicating firms' involvement in social causes at the supplier level (McWilliams and Siegel 2000). It increases the transparency of products and can be used in commercializing ethical aspects by capturing niche markets (Hartleib and Jones 2009). Thus, communication strategies through their visibility and transparency can have an impact on consumer behaviour by creating reputation and capturing new markets, adding to the financial performance of the firm.

Compliance Strategies

Compliance strategies are frequently based on codes of conduct (CoC) or standards, auditing and monitoring. These measures are initiated internally by a firm and instigated externally by stakeholders and are assumed to be a responsible supply chain action in the present research. Compliance strategies are mechanism or actions taken up by firms through which the implementation of stakeholder expectations across their supply chain partners is ensured. CoCs and standards are identified by the researchers as the most commonly adopted action by firms to deal with social issues (Van Tulder et al. 2009). Codes of conduct act as initiatives for building partnerships with shared values and commitment (Leigh and Waddock 2006). Auditing verifies the implementation and measures the degree of compliance with codes and standards initiated by the firms (Kortelainen 2008). According to Klassen and Vereecke (2012), auditing helps in implementing monitoring mechanisms within supply chains especially at the supplier level which is weakly geared towards implementing codes and standards. Auditing acts as a measure of firms' expectations against the standards initiated by the buying firms (Maon et al. 2009). Monitoring is defined as an act of controlling the behaviour of suppliers against the expectations of the firm (Boyd et al. 2007). Asif et al. (2013) argue that monitoring is an effective way of measuring the firms' expectations and conveying the same to the stakeholders. While codes of conduct and standards are instruments introduced by firms to deal with social issues, auditing and monitoring ensure their implementation and are instruments to gauge supplier performance. Compliance strategies are therefore seen as a source of avoiding stakeholder criticism and legitimizing socially responsible behaviour of firms leading to economic performance. Thus, these three items are mutually non-exclusive.

Supplier Development Strategies

Supplier development strategies can be defined as actions taken up by firms to upgrade, help and train suppliers directly and indirectly to fulfil the demands of stakeholders (Wagner et al. 2005; Bai and Sarkis 2011). Supplier development strategies are responses that satisfy the demands of internal stakeholders and address the concerns of external stakeholders (Hoejmose et al. 2014). Increasingly, external stakeholders are demanding legitimacy and accountability of the firm's practices at the supplier level, thereby creating pressure on internal stakeholders to adopt strategies that can address their concerns. Direct and indirect SDS help in evaluating the supplier status in dealing with social issues in supply chains as well as taking up related responsible supply chain actions to overcome them (Harms et al. 2013; Parmigiani et al. 2011; Beske et al. 2008). This should minimise related risks but also achieve and improve related performance in all three dimensions of sustainability (Seuring and Muller 2008). Supplier development strategies capture the attempt of firms to seek solutions to social concerns in supply chains through collaborations, training, asset-specific investments, offering technical and financial assistance, educating the suppliers, etc. (Krause et al. 2007). The type of relationship between buyers and suppliers determines the extent to which social issues are managed in supply chains. Incorporating social criteria into supply chains at the supplier level would require high amounts of trust and commitment. Carter and Jennings (2002a) argue that value is created along the supply chain if the relationship between buyers and suppliers prospers under trust and commitment. Trust and commitment leads to increased information sharing among the supply chain members resulting in cost reduction which are otherwise incurred due to opportunism (Boyd et al. 2007). According to Vachon and Klassen (2006), collaborations which are a result of supplier development strategies can replace or at least reduce auditing and monitoring activities thereby reducing costs. Further, SDS also help in creating a sustainable supplier base, avoiding supplier switching and supplier selection costs, and they reduce costs for auditing and monitoring (Krueger 2008; Pagell and Wu 2009), resulting in improving economic performance of firms. However, trust and commitment should act as antecedents to achieve collaborative relationships in the supply chain which in turn act as precursors for the firms to take up SDS in their supply chains.

The above-mentioned strategies are derived from the literature inductively and may not be the only ones that firms adopt to counter social issues in their supply chains. However, to the best of our understanding, these three strategies and their respective sub-categories stand out to be effective means to managing social issues in supply chains.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive and considerable differences exist in their implementation across supply chains, i.e. the implementation of (some) compliance strategies may require a third-party certification, whereas supplier development strategies do not (Schneider and Schwerk 2010). They all cater for risk management and financial prosperity across the supply chain while meeting the demands of stakeholders. Further, items within the supply chain action category are interrelated. For example, supplier development strategies drive the implementation of codes of conduct and standards and also help in carrying out auditing and monitoring activities (Klassen and Vereecke 2012). However, communication strategies like reporting and labelling help in disseminating the information on codes of conduct and standards taken up by firms. Thus, each dimension is distinguishable yet incomplete without another one.

Performance Outcomes

Performance outcomes refer to the final outcomes, in fact the accomplished goals, which buyers and suppliers aim for when implementing different supply chain actions to counter all kinds of risks, including social ones, in the supply chain. Thus, economic performance of an organisation is an increase in the net shareholder value that is a result of improving market performance. The basic indicators used in measuring economic outcomes are shareholder net value, return on investments and return on net assets (Mefford 2012). Performance in a conventional supply chain is measured in terms of quality, dependability, flexibility and costs (White 1996). Social performance in a broader sense can be viewed as the measurement of social issues concerning society. The social indicators used to measure performance outcomes are mostly indirect, non-economic activities like fair and equal treatment of employees, improving the health and safety of workers which generates goodwill and loyalty to the firm in a narrow sense (Schwartz and Carroll 2003). Carter (2005) argues that focusing on social issues in supply chains can lead to an improvement in supplier performance and subsequently reduce costs through organisational learning. Further, Cramer (2008) emphasises that adherence to the norms specified by the focal firm in form of codes of conduct and standards improves loyalty, which can lead to better buyer–supplier relationships, resulting in long-term relationships which are financially beneficial. However, measuring performance using social indicators is difficult because of the dynamic nature of social issues and the lack of composite indicators that are enforceable across the supply chain (Searcy 2013). Further, a supply chain consists of multiple firms with multiple strategies where trust, transparency and cultural issues play a crucial role in managing social issues (Hassini et al. 2012; Awaysheh and Klassen 2010). Thus, while it is challenging for firms to measure the impact of managing social issues in supply chains, they are still aiming for social and economic performance when investing into and addressing social issues.

While the previous sections laid the conceptual foundation, we will now move to the research methodology employed for conducting the literature review.

Methodology

A literature review is a "systematic, explicit, and reproducible design for identifying, evaluating and interpreting the existing body of recorded documents" (Fink 2005, p. 3). It helps in finding research gaps (Bryman and Bell 2011), bringing scattered pieces of literature together and refining the research to an understandable level. In fact, literature reviews can be an effective way in theory development (Seuring and Gold 2012). The purpose of a literature review is to provide an in-depth account of research conducted in a certain field, which is the first step in the theory development process. Here, a literature review of published papers was carried out applying content analysis, which is a method through which rigorous and sound literature reviews can be produced (Mayring 2008; Seuring and Gold 2012). Berelson (1952, p. 489) defines content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". Applying content analysis should minimise the research bias and improve the reliability and replicability of the constructs in question.

The content analysis for the present research was carried out over a period of 6 months from November 2013 to April 2014. It serves as an analytic instrument for filling the construct with details on the level of the individual items. Answering the question how often a certain item has been mentioned in the analysed papers serves as an indication of the perceived relevance as was already pointed to in the section on "social issues". This kind of analysis not only allows identifying the most important issues but also shows which issues have been rather neglected so far. The findings of the content analysis are expressed in percentages and are calculated using the formula mentioned below:

$$\text{Percentage of papers} = \frac{\text{No. of papers in which the construct is identified}}{\text{Total no. of papers}} \times 100.$$

Overall, the instrumental contribution of content analysis is thereby to substantiate the single items and their relevance for the research topic of social issues in supply chains as addressed in this paper. Thereby, the crafting of arguments finds support. Mayring (2008) emphasises that content analysis helps in moving from qualitative arguments to quantitative indicators and back to the qualitative interpretation of findings.

We briefly outline the four steps of the research process based on Mayring (2008) in the next sections.

Material Collection

The material to be reviewed was collected, defined and delimited and the unit of analysis, i.e. a single paper, was defined. Only publications in English and appearing in peer-reviewed journals were considered for this research. The search for publications was mainly done using a structured keyword search ("CSR in supply chains", "social issues in supply chain", "CSR, social issues and supply chains", "sustainability, social issues and supply chains", "CSR, supply chains and performance") in major databases, like Elsevier (http://www.sciencedirect.com), Emerald (http://www.emeraldinsight.com), Springer (http://www.springerlink.com), Wiley (http://www.wiley.com) and library services like EBSCO (http://www.ebsco.com) and JSTOR (http://www.jstor.org). The initial screening of papers was done by looking at the articles' keywords, and subsequently, a complete scan of the abstracts was carried out to ensure that most relevant papers were not left out from the sample. A total of 142 articles were selected for the review and for further analysis. Cross-referencing was employed to check if there were any additional related and relevant papers that could be included in the review process.

Descriptive Analysis

An initial evaluation of the literature was carried out to gain insights into formal aspects of the publications under examination. This included the (1) distribution of the publication across a time period, (2) the number of articles published across different journals, (3) the categorization of papers according to the research methods used in the publications and (4) the geographical distribution of the papers. This approach offers first insights into the analysed material on a descriptive basis.

Category Selection

The constructs for the literature review were derived both deductively and inductively. Some dimensions and categories were selected before the material was reviewed, indicating a deductive approach. A few categories were derived inductively through generalization of the literature review. Respective categories of the constructs were refined during the process of the literature review. For example, the items for the construct "social issues" were derived deductively, whereas the items of the construct "supply chain actions" and "performance outcomes" were derived inductively from refining the constructs stepwise. This ensured that both established categories and the ones that did not receive much attention within the literature were included in the review process. Moreover, these constructs are relevant because they are frequently explored by researchers and employed by practitioners to manage social issues in supply chains.

Material Evaluation

The papers were analysed against the derived categories. Each paper was coded against multiple categories or one single category depending on the focus of the paper. A frequency count of the categories was carried out and relevant issues were interpreted accordingly. Descriptive analysis was carried out to get a snapshot of the present status of CSR in supply chains. A detailed content analysis identified relevant issues in CSR in supply chains and the results were interpreted accordingly to propose a conceptual framework, addressing the research gaps and summarising the findings.

Validity and Reliability

The internal validity of the research was obtained by repeated presentation of the conceptual framework and related constructs in conferences and seminars and discussing it with fellow researchers. The major critique of the content analysis is that it is reliant on the multiple judgements of a single analyst who is keen to support a particular view of the data (Brewerton and Millward 2001). Therefore, to avoid this bias, two researchers coded for the derived categories to ensure inter-coder reliability. Involvement of two coders can lead to subjective interpretations depending on the mental schemes of the coders which call for inter-subjectivity (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein 1999). Where differences in judging a particular code occurred, it was solved through mutual consultations, agreeing upon a common coding. Categories were clearly defined to ensure the reliability of the coding process. Kolbe and Burnett (1991) argue that replicability of the content analysis is also important apart from the reliability and validity of the content analysis process. We documented the entire research process to render transparency which allows replication and ensures the quality and usefulness of content analysis studies, such as this one here at hand.

Descriptive Analysis

A descriptive analysis helped in capturing the formal aspects of the literature and serves as the background for a detailed analysis. A brief description of aspects like the number of publications across journals, the methodology adopted by researchers to study CSR in SCM, the type of journals in which the publications appeared and the authors' affiliation of the reviewed papers is described in brief in the following paragraphs.

Distribution Across the Years

This type of analysis gives insights into the evolution of the research topic over the years. The time period was chosen because of its relevance to the emergence of various concepts like sustainability, the triple bottom line and sustainable supply chain management which were increasingly finding their application in academia in the reviewed time period. The distribution of the publications as indicated in Fig. 2 can be divided into two phases which are (1) the initial growth phase, lasting from 2000 to 2007 and (2) the consolidation phase, which lasted from 2008 to 2013. There has been a constant increase in the number of publications until 2006 and a sudden spurt in the number of publications focusing on sustainability issues (both environmental and social) during the last 5 years. The high peaks in 2008 and 2009 are due to the special calls for CSR in the Journal of Business Ethics. The increasing number of publications indicates that researchers are aiming to integrate concepts like CSR and SCM and that the focus on social issues in supply chains will increase in the years to come. Within the last 5 years (2008–2013), 79 % of the papers have been published.

Top 10 Journals Representing CSR in SCM

The scanned literature identified 142 publications which focused on social issues in SCM. The JBE containing 27 % of the review articles leads as the journal with the highest number of publications, which can be attributed to a number of special calls by the JBE on CSR over the past few years. The results show that journals concentrating on ethical, developmental and environmental issues contribute for 65 % if publications in the journals, like the CSR and EM, CG, JCLP, SD, D and C and BSE and other related journals, are aggregated. This indicates that CSR is still more perceived as an ethical issue and put on the side line rather than the mainstream business agenda by both researchers and practitioners (see Table 2). This is further reflected in the lower number of publications in main stream SCM journals, which in this case constitutes the SCMIJ and the IJPE. All in all, the latter category of journals contributed for roughly 13 % of the total sample. Interestingly, there are more than 30 other journals in which CSR and supply chains topics have appeared, reflecting that the topic is spanning boundaries and encompasses different streams of research including human resource, logistics, purchasing, operations, etc. However, this trend is recent and signifies a shift in the perceptions of researchers and practitioners, also indicating that the topic of management of social issues in supply chains is increasingly applied in various fields.

Research Methods Applied

This kind of analysis gives insights into the type of methodology and study that has been carried out in a particular field of research (see Fig. 3). This classification was adopted from the studies of Halldorsson and Arlbjorn (2005) on sustainable supply chain management. Seuring and Müller (2008) and Ashby et al. (2012) have used similar classifications in their studies to conduct literature reviews. Case studies, including single and multiple case studies, dominate with 43 % and surveys contribute 25 % of all papers. The high number of empirical studies indicates that the field has left the state of mere reasoning and has engaged in empirical investigations. These empirical investigations further helped in coming up with new concepts and theory development which is indicated by the share of 25 % of papers being conceptual and theoretical. Thus, it can be said that conceptual reasoning complemented empirical research. This indicates that both empirical research and conceptual development go hand in hand, which is a sign of the consolidation and maturation

Fig. 2 Distribution of papers across the period reviewed

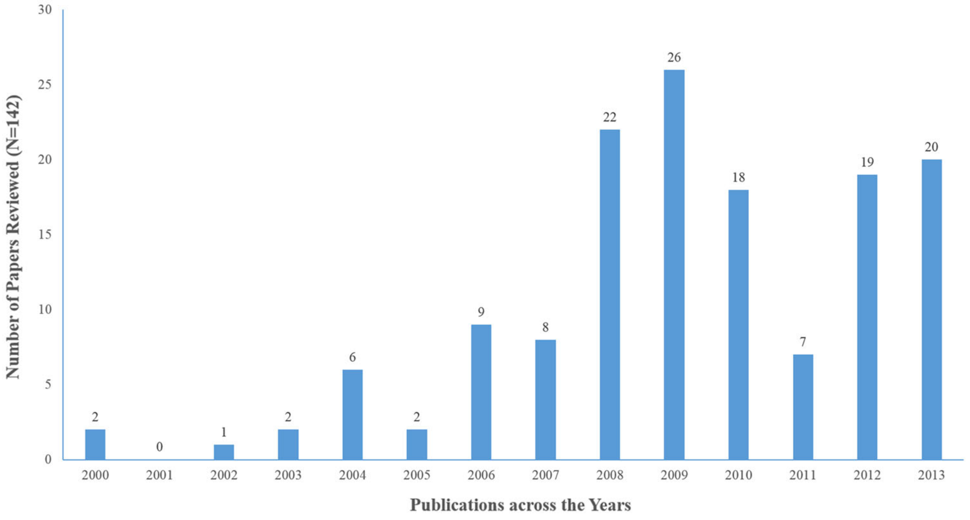
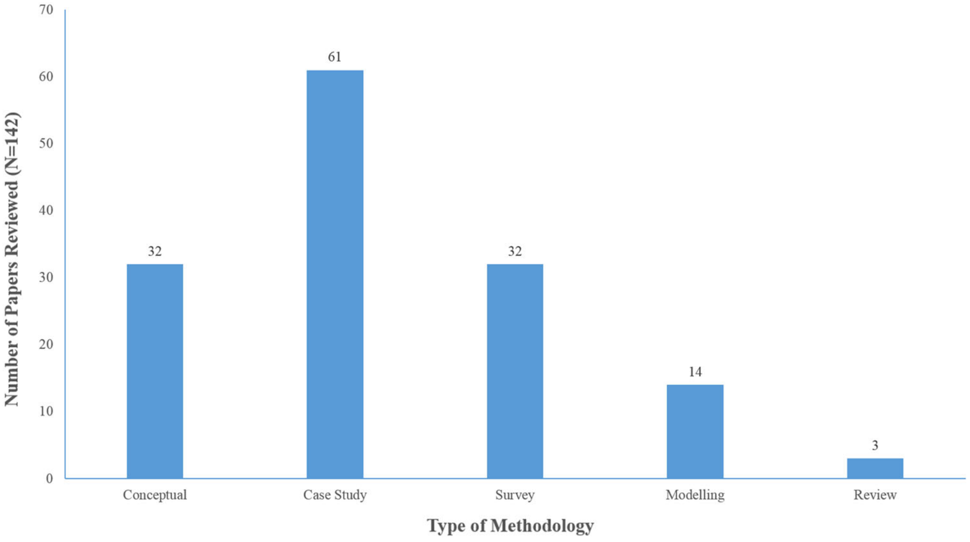


Table 2 Top 10 journals representing CSR in SCM

Journal title	Number of papers ($N = 142$)
Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)	38
International Journal of Production Economics (IJPE)	10
Supply Chain Management: an international journal (SCMIJ)	9
Journal of Cleaner Production (JCLP)	8
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management (CSR and EM)	7
Sustainable Development (SD)	5
Corporate Governance (CG)	4
Global Social Policy (GSP)	4
Development and Change (D and C)	4
Business Strategy and the Environment (BSE)	3

Fig. 3 Research methods applied for the papers reviewed



phase of a certain domain of research. Modelling papers are few in number, making up 14 %, and started appearing from the year 2008 until 2012, indicating that this type of methodology will pick up in the coming years, addressing a shortcoming identified in previous reviews (Seuring 2013). Literature reviews are few and have only started to appear during the last couple of years (e.g. Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby 2012; Gimenez and Tachizawa 2012; Ashby et al. 2012). The emergence of modelling and literature reviews indicates that new methods of theory testing and theory development are taken up by researchers.

Geographical Distribution of the Papers

Figure 4 shows the affiliations of the authors who contributed for the social dimension of sustainability. The findings show that 75 % of the studies were conducted by European and Northern American scholars, indicating a predominantly Western perspective in understanding the management of social issues in supply chains. Asia contributes for only 19 % of the total papers published. The others, which include collaborations of authors from continents like Africa, Asia and other continents, contribute for only 8 % of the total number of papers published. This is in line with the arguments made by many authors (Blowfield 2005; Locke et al. 2009), namely that the understanding and implementation of CSR and related responsible supply chain actions against the social issues is mainly carried out from a Western perspective (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen 2014; Gugler and Shi 2009). Further, a biased understanding of social issues in supply chains hampers the critical assessment of the most relevant social issues at the supplier level and is contrary to the stakeholder view that is often argued for when implementing responsible supply chain actions. It is interesting to see that despite many firms outsourcing their supplies to Asia and other developing countries, there have been very few efforts to explore the perceptions of suppliers in these countries. In the future, researchers can focus more on investigating the impacts on suppliers in developing countries where the relevant social issues need to be tackled.

Findings from the Structured Content Analysis

A detailed analysis of the papers will be presented below that justifies the conceptual framework proposed above in the "Development of CSR in SCM and the Relevance of Social Issues in Supply Chains" section. Each construct and the respective items will be explained, thereby providing in-depth insights.

Social Issues

Table 3 shows the social issues identified in the literature review at the intersection of CSR and SCM. The analysis shows some interesting patterns.

Labour conditions are the most debated social issue along the supply chain and are discussed in 82 % of the papers reviewed. This high number can be attributed to papers focusing on issues of labour from a focal firm perspective at its supplier plants. Labour lies at the heart of the social dimension of sustainability for firms, which is most often addressed in terms of adopting supply chain actions like CSR (Preuss 2009). Looking at the positive impact of managing labour rights, Lee et al. (2013) found that ensuring labour rights at the workplace helps retaining skilled labour and building a positive perception among both internal and external stakeholders. This links into the performance outcome dimension. However, a critical analysis of issues like contract labour, the impact of living and decent wages on the performance in supply chains is either missing or rarely discussed in the literature. Future investigations should include these significant labour issues to understand the role of labour in supply chain performance.

Health and safety is mentioned in 68 % of the papers indicating it as an important social issue that firms frequently deal in their supply chains. Welford et al. 2008 and Torugsa et al. 2013 found that health and safety of the employees is an important social issue identified by both internal and external stakeholders. They argue that unhealthy and unsafe conditions at work place can create difficulties for the firms to attract and retain employees in the long run influencing firm's economic performance. It is worth mentioning that the change in the business practices (like just in time production, lead time reduction) of global and local firms will contribute to high vulnerability of the employees to health and safety issues. Future research can focus on exploring the effects of these practices on the health and safety of the workers and its implications on supply chain performance.

Human rights are mentioned in 59 % of the reviewed papers. Most of the publications do not directly employ the term "human rights" but refer to the adoption of standards like SA8000, fair trade, ethical trade, etc. instead (e.g. Blowfield and Dolan 2010; Ciliberti et al. 2009). Welford (2002) emphasises that globalised businesses have the potential of addressing the issues of human rights through CSR, and he argues that businesses should implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights wherever rights to social security, dignity, decent work and other fundamental rights are respected. However, Preuss and Brown (2012) and Mena et al. (2010) are the only paper which exclusively deals with issues of human rights in supply chains,

Fig. 4 Regional distribution of the authorship for the papers reviewed

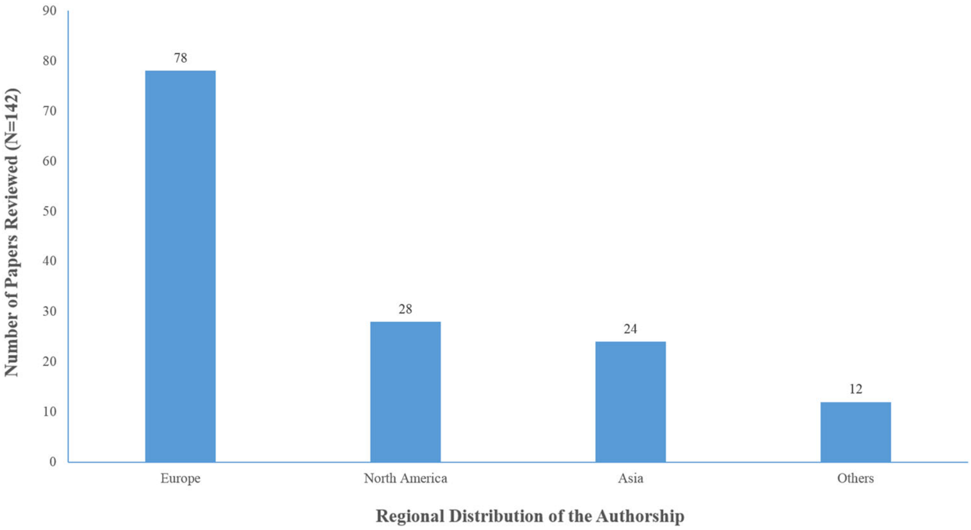


Table 3 Social issues in supply chains identified through a literature review

Social issue	Number of papers (*N* = 142)
Labour conditions	117 (82 %)
Health and safety	96 (68 %)
Human rights	84 (59 %)
Child labour	73 (51 %)
Gender	55 (39 %)
Disabled and marginalised people inclusion	22 (15 %)
Minority development	21 (15 %)

mentioning discrimination and other related issues along with achieving performance in the supply chains through the involvement of all stakeholders. Human rights issues will become more relevant due to the rapid socio-political and economic changes taking place every day and on a global scale. Future research on socially sustainable supply chains could focus on exploring the impact of social issues like racial, regional and religious discrimination and its link to supply chain performance. Addressing social issues like the inclusion of displaced populations due to various economic and socio-political reasons and the ways to incorporate them into supply chains could also be the focus of future sustainable supply chain research. A high number of papers (51 %) refer to child labour but the definition and specificities of child labour are not mentioned or this is done only cursorily. Child labour as a social issue is tricky to deal with due to cultural, societal and economical sensitivities attached to it. Despite child labour being used as an effective tool by external stakeholders to target the supply chain of companies, an in-depth discussion is missing in a supply chain context. Few exceptions (Zutshi et al. 2009; Lund-Thomsen et al. 2012; Nadvi 2008; Kolk and Van Tulder 2002a) emphasise the need to bring changes in the functioning of supply chains by involving both internal and external stakeholders in the process of managing social issues. These changes are brought about by incorporating a wider stakeholder involvement into supply chains, adopting a collaborative approach and installing mechanisms of communication that can build the capacities of suppliers. Kolk and Van Tulder (2002a) note that the numbers of codes of conduct addressing child labour have increased over the years, indicating awareness among the firms, yet there is no recent update on their data. Future investigations could explore the role of stakeholders along with the possible changes in supply chain strategies in order to deal with child labour.

Gender issues are discussed in 39 % of the reviewed papers. Many papers define gender sensitivity and discrimination in terms of equal pay and fair treatment as a social issue along the supply chain (Prieto-Carron 2008). This author argues further that the globalised economy will increase employment opportunities to women but will also make them vulnerable to exploitation. Further, with women constituting for 50–70 % of the total workforce globally without social security nets, yet contributing to the economic performance of the company (Tallontire et al. 2005; Burchielli et al. 2009) can be a major social issues and calls for further research in this area.

Only 15 % of papers describe the inclusion of marginalised and disabled people into supply chains as a social concern offering a few arbitrary references in the literature (e.g. Baumgartner and Ebner 2010; Spence and Bourlakis 2009; Lee and Kim 2009) but none of the publications offers an in-depth study of this topic. Considering the fact that studies are carried out in developing countries where the alleviation of poverty is the biggest social issue, researchers fail to highlight the same in supply chain studies. The only exception is an empirical study by Hall and Matos (2010) that explores the possible ways of incorporating poverty alleviation strategies in sustainable supply chains. They emphasise that the integration of economically weaker sections of the population into supply chains can be achieved if firms engage in educating small farmers about economic opportunities that are available to them. Similar studies with poverty eradication as the key CSR agenda can give interesting insights into managing social and base-of-the-pyramid issues in supply chain management (Gold et al. 2013).

Minority development includes issues like providing jobs to the minority community and purchasing from minority-owned entrepreneurs (Carter and Jennings 2004; Krause et al. 1999). Only 15 % of the publications refer to this issue, indicating that firms despite operating on a global and local level do not consider this to be an important aspect of their social responsibility. Most of the papers that included minority issues in their studies are US-based where this could be an issue (e.g. Carter and Jennings 2004) because of the presence of a number of ethnic groups who can contribute positively to the firm's social and economic performance. Carter et al. (1999) argue that the changing demographic scene calls for the inclusion of minorities in creating value and innovation to the supply base, bringing financial benefits to the business. However, with the increasing migration of labour and demographic changes both globally and locally, minority development will emerge as an important social issue that business will have to deal with.

Overall, many social issues have been taken up in related research, but the level of details leaves much space for delving deeper at the interface of social issues and supply chain management.

Responsible Supply Chain Actions

Table 4 summarises the strategies adopted by firms to address social issues in supply chains.

Communication Strategies

Corporate reporting, which is otherwise referred to as sustainability reporting or corporate responsibility documents (CRD), and labelling are identified as frequently mentioned supply chain actions to communicate social concerns to the internal and external stakeholders. CRD or reporting is mentioned in 32 % of the reviewed papers. Moon (2007) argues that reporting has helped in disseminating information to potential socially responsible investors encouraging investments into sustainable practices of the businesses. However, Asif et al. (2013) operationalise reporting as a reactive stance taken up by firms towards stakeholders' demands for more accountability and transparency in firm operations. Further, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) describe reporting as an important pillar of the economic dimension in their proposed sustainability strategies. Perrini et al. (2007) focus their discussion on responsible reporting and emphasise that firms should voluntarily disclose CSR practices to stakeholders across the supply chain for long-term value creation. Some authors point to the rise of reporting being based on the introduction of sustainability indexes like the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, the FTSE4Good and the Global 100 which benchmark firms who have integrated economic, environmental and social criteria (Lee and Kim 2009). Literature on sustainability reporting has emphasised the need to take a holistic approach when conveying sustainability initiatives to both internal and external stakeholders (Tate et al. 2010). However, there is not a single paper that dedicates attention to the role of reporting as an effective information disseminator across the supply chain and that links reporting to the social and financial performance of firms, hence establishing a further research gap.

Labelling as a supply chain action is mentioned in 29 % of the papers. Many of the papers which mentioned labelling refer to labels of fair trade, eco-labelling, etc. (e.g. Andersen and Skojett-Larsen 2009; Hartleib and Jones 2009). The legitimacy aspect of labelling is mentioned briefly in a few papers like Müller et al. (2009) and Ganesan et al. (2009) while this seems to be a core aspect for the use of respective instruments (Smith et al. 2010). Bezencon and Blili (2009) argue that labelling is used by firms for product differentiation and creates economic opportunities by capturing niche markets, which hold for, e.g. fair trade products (Hartleib and Jones 2009). Nadvi and Wältring (2004) argue that labels' communication power has the ability to create an image for the firms, increase the turnover of the product as well as contribute to the economic performance of the firm. Ganesan et al. (2009) mention how private retailers increasingly use their power in the markets through labels and inform customers about the responsible initiatives adopted by them. Further, Bezencon and Blili (2009) state that Max Havelaar like other fair trade labels helps the diversification of the company without actually modifying business processes. Further, a number of authors have emphasised the role of retailers in using private labels in mainstream businesses (Ganesan et al. 2009). However, labels are often criticised

Table 4 Supply chain actions/strategies against social issues ($N = 142$)

Supply chain actions	Number of papers ($N = 142$)
1. Communication strategies	
Reporting/corporate responsible documents	52 (37 %)
Labelling	42 (30 %)
2. Compliance strategies	
Codes of conduct/standards	89 (63 %)
Auditing	81 (57 %)
Monitoring	86 (61 %)
3. Supplier development strategies	
Direct supplier development	65 (44 %)
Indirect supplier development	56 (39 %)
Trust	52 (37 %)
Collaborative relationship	73 (52 %)

as a means to selling socially responsible products without conveying the relevant practices taken up by the firms in their supply chains to customers (Bezencon and Blili 2009). With the recent disasters in the textile industry of Bangladesh and other industries elsewhere, there is a serious need to critically evaluate the role of labelling and sustainable reporting in managing social issues in supply chains. Future investigations should not only focus on exploring the issues of accountability between the focal firms and its immediate suppliers but also include multiple tiers of suppliers across supply chains.

Compliance Strategies

Compliance strategies which consist of codes of conduct and standards are the single most important supply chain action adopted to counter social issues in supply chains. These strategies are mostly implemented as CSR strategies where issues pertaining to labour, health and safety, wages, etc. are addressed. Almost 63 % of the papers indicate that firms come up with their own codes or standards to be implemented in their supply chains to ensure compliance. However, a number of researchers point to the drafting and implementation discrepancies of the codes of conduct (Leigh and Waddock 2006; Welford and Frost 2006). Similarly, the voluntary nature of codes and standards, cultural insensitivity and the importance of stakeholder involvement are often discussed in the literature (Müller et al. 2009; Nijhof et al. 2008; Pedersen and Andersen 2006; Tencati et al. 2008). The criticism for codes of conduct and standards is that right from their inception, they are neither inclusive nor broad and do not take important social and societal concerns and their implications for suppliers into consideration. These limitations of the codes are attributed to the exclusion of major stakeholders like suppliers and supplier communities which are not a part of the preparation and development of these standards and codes. Almost 70 % of the papers speak about the failure of stakeholder involvement in addressing social issues and most of them do this in the context of implementing codes and standards. This would call for more research on respective stakeholder involvement, where particularly the high degree of case study research in the field would offer a suitable research approach.

It is worth mentioning that many researchers mention the distribution of power across the supply chain as an important mechanism to understand the implementation of codes and standards (e.g. Gallear et al. 2012; Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby 2012; Kogg and Mont 2012). However, there is little understanding of the power dynamics among stakeholders in supply chains which calls for future investigations into this area. These investigations would give a better understanding of the implementation of codes and standards. The power issue is sometimes explicitly (Locke et al. 2009; Preuss 2009; Roberts 2003) and often implicitly mentioned (Preuss 2009; Gugler and Shi 2009; Gallear et al. 2012). Despite the criticism, codes and standards are used as a way of avoiding legal tangles and enhancing the image of the focal company, creating economic opportunities to the firms in supply chains (Klassen and Vereecke 2012).

Auditing is mentioned in 57 % of the reviewed papers, indicating that these strategies are important to the effective implementation of CoC and standards. Auditing is important for firms operating nationally and globally (especially in multi-cultural environments) due to their engagement with multiple local and international suppliers. Mamic (2005) describes auditing as the classical way of assessing supplier performance with regard to the implementation of codes and standards. The concept of social auditing, the role of auditors and the emergence of third-party auditing in the implementation of codes and standards are frequently mentioned (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen 2014; Kortelainen 2008). Issues like the insensitivity of auditors and lack of cultural knowledge impeding the auditing process as well as the commercialisation of third-party auditing systems which encourage double book-keeping methods are frequently mentioned (Awaysheh and Klassen 2010; Jiang 2009; Krueger 2008). However, further research is required to understand the supply chain performance implications of social auditing, competence of social auditors, and the use of self- or third-party auditing systems. Such investigations can help in understanding the role of auditing by bringing more transparency and accountability to the management of social issues in supply chains. In 61 % of the reviewed papers, monitoring is mentioned as an important strategy to implementing codes and standards across supply chains. However, in order to effectively monitor the performance, firms will have to invest in new technologies for data gathering from partner firms (Mamic 2005). Boyd et al. (2007) argue that excessive monitoring can be counterproductive, and deteriorate buyer–supplier relationships and in fact will not increase compliance; instead, transparency, trust and commitment lead to supply chain performance improvements. The role of auditing and monitoring becomes more prominent and complex with the lengthening of the supply chain, and parameters like trust and commitment might become difficult to achieve due to supply chain complexities (Awaysheh and Klassen 2010). Thus, including variables like trust and commitment, the role of power and information technology into future investigations can give insights into the effective management of socially sustainable supply chains. While the implementation of these strategies can be contentious, they nevertheless serve in mitigating the social concerns in supply chains. Finally, both monitoring and auditing strategies are used to measure supplier performance against the codes and standards demanded by the parent firm where economic performance is the actual motivation (Boyd et al. 2007; Roberts 2003).

Supplier Development Strategies

Supplier development strategies are mentioned in 54 % of the papers which emphasises the role of firms implicitly or explicitly developing their supplier to improve performance across the supply chain. Both direct and indirect supplier development strategies are mentioned 44 and 39 % percent, respectively, indicating that both strategies are assumed to be helpful in developing the capacities of the suppliers. Direct SDS in the form of training and education can help suppliers in understanding and dealing with social issues by enhancing their capacities (Welford and Frost 2006; Mamic 2005). Further, direct SDS like financial and technical investments at the supplier level can build the capacities of suppliers to manage social issues in their supply chains (Harms et al. 2013; Jorgensen and Knudsen 2006; Parmigiani et al. 2011). Becker et al. (2010) integrate SCM, CSR and Human Resource Management and argue that investing into training and knowledge sharing with supply chain partners helps enhance skills and employee retention which leads to the improvement of economic performance. Apart from direct SDS, indirect SDS like supplier evaluation and informal auditing can support suppliers in realising their potentials and encourage them to take initiatives to manage social issues in their supply chains (Beske et al. 2008; Harms et al. 2013). A number of researchers have mentioned the significance of developing suppliers to improve performance levels in supply chains (Gallear et al. 2012; Harms et al. 2013; Klassen and Vereecke 2012). Preuss (2009) argues that collaboration and integration is achieved through supplier development which should be adopted to successfully implement CSR in supply chains. Collaboration and synonyms like long-term relationships and supply chain integration are mentioned in 52 % of the papers when talking about supplier development initiatives taken up by buying firms. Most of the collaborations mentioned in the literature are between suppliers and focal firms (Morali and Searcy 2013; Nijhof et al. 2008). Few researchers (Perrini et al. 2007) mention collaboration between firms and local communities. Tencati et al. (2008) discuss collaborations between firms and civil society actors as well as NGOs. Through these collaborations, firms willingly address different social issues apart from the labour, gender and health and safety issues that are highlighted by pressure groups and take up responsible supply chain actions. However, long-term and collaborative relationships between firms and their stakeholders are achieved by building trust and commitment (Gimenez and Tachizawa 2012; Locke et al. 2009). Further, the collaborations mentioned become more relevant in supply chains because of the complexities involved in dealing with multiple suppliers.

Trust and commitment are mentioned in 37 % of the papers as necessary antecedents for collaborations in the light of supplier development strategies. In their study on purchasing, Carter and Jennings (2004) show that the economic performance of suppliers and the buying firm can increase through organisational learning which can be attained only when trust and commitment exist. Stakeholder involvement helps in creating trust and in addressing the relevant social and societal issues concerning supply chain partners (Spence and Bourlakis 2009; Lee and Kim 2009). Supplier development strategies that lead to collaboration based on trust and commitment can be used for capacity building of suppliers which then helps in implementing codes and standards across the supply chain.

Many researchers have pointed out that SDS through capacity building can achieve improvements in social and economic performance for the firm (Lee and Kim 2009; Leire and Mont 2009). Further, researchers rarely mention about other direct SDS like technical and financial investments except a few like Parmigiani et al. (2011) and Asif et al. (2013). They argue that technical enhancement and financial investments at the stakeholder level, including suppliers, avoid risks occurring in supply chains and help in improving performance. Further, most of the studies mentioning supplier development strategies and their role in managing social issues in supply chains do not discuss anything regarding the firm size despite being a determinant of the social and economic performance (Knudsen 2013). Future studies can explore the barriers and antecedents of small firms to taking up SDS (Jenkins 2006) and their impact on supplier performance. Supplier development forms the core construct particularly for bringing about social improvements to workers in global supply chains.

Performance Outcomes

The performance outcomes achieved by firms implementing CSR in their supply chains are summarised in Table 5.

Performance outcome is the final aim of firms when taking up social issues in supply chains. The literature review supports this viewpoint with 88 % of papers mentioning performance as the key factor to take up CSR issues. Out of the 142 reviewed papers, 43 % of the papers make implicit and explicit reference to economic performance, whereas the term social performance is used in 80 % of the papers. This indicates that most of the papers that actually mention social performance also mention economic performance, corroborating the arguments of Carroll (1979, 1991) and Wood (1991) that social and economic activities of a firm cannot be segregated. However, few papers (Mefford 2012; Torugsa et al. 2013) directly mention economic performance gained through increasing market share and profits. Further, economic performance is linked to the prevention of reputational loss and the gaining of competitive advantage (e.g. Parmigiani et al. 2011; Pedersen and Andersen 2006; Roberts 2003). However, preventing reputational loss and improving performance by adopting responsible supply chain actions in the form of CSR can be achieved through collaboration among stakeholders (e.g. Lee and Kim 2009; Perrini et al. 2007; Roberts 2003). Some researchers have studied the interaction between CSR implementation and financial performance of companies (e.g. Jiang 2009; Klassen and Vereecke 2012; Parmigiani et al. 2011; Torugsa et al. 2013). While these papers discuss the role of CSR adoption in enhancing the reputation of the firm and gaining competitive advantage, there are hardly any empirical investigations into such a connection (except for Hoejmose et al. 2014). Researchers rarely use specific financial indicators like net share value or return on net assets to assess the financial performance of firms when engaging in the management of social issues. In the reviewed papers, the social performance mostly refers to indicators like improvement in health and safety of workers, fair treatment of employees and better working conditions. Apart from these indicators, there are no comprehensive social indicators that have been used or tested to measure the social performance of the firm, which in turn can lead to economic performance (Searcy 2013). References to community-related issues that have direct and indirect impact on the performance of the company are rare. More research is needed to understand the interaction between social and financial performance by employing relevant and concrete indicators of financial and social performance. Such research initiatives in a supply chain context will give a better understanding into the attitude and behaviour about the management of social issues by firms. Almost 46 % of the papers explore economic performance from a focal firm (buyer) perspective but only 19 % mention supplier performance and only 11 % explore economic and social performance from a supplier perspective. Further, as is the case for economic performance, very few studies explore the social performance from the supplier's perspective. This is an interesting finding because stakeholder involvement is almost a norm for the management of social issues in supply chains; yet, the perceptions of upstream actors like suppliers have not been explored by researchers. This is a research gap that needs more attention in the near future.

Table 5 Performance outcomes of firms engaging in responsible supply chain actions

Performance outcomes	Number of papers ($N = 142$)
Social performance	113 (80 %)
Economic performance	60 (43 %)
Buyer performance	65 (46 %)
Supplier performance	27 (19 %)

Discussion

No previous review on the topic of managing social issues has been presented at the intersection of the CSR and SCM literature. Therefore, the overall contribution of the paper is that it reviews the literature at the intersection of CSR and supply chain management and provides an in-depth understanding into the management of social issues in supply chains. Therefore, the first contribution of this research is the collection and review of all related papers in a systematic manner. This serves as a basis for summarising the arguments within this field of research into a conceptual framework (see Fig. 1). This framework builds on contributions of Carroll (1979, 1991) and Wood (1991) on CSP but extends these contributions by linking the framework to supply chain management. The proposed framework is then used for a systematic evaluation of the respective literature, offering the second contribution of the paper. The framework is linked to the body of literature analysed based on a quantitative content analysis approach. Even though this is presented here in a descriptive manner, it allows identifying key topics as well as research gaps, which were already mentioned in the previous sections.

The findings from the literature review indicate that managing social issues in supply chains is rapidly gaining importance among researchers. Further, the complementarity of theory testing and theory development in the field of social issue management indicates that the social dimension of sustainability is reaching a theory consolidation phase. However, the findings indicate that studies so far on the management of social issues in supply chains are typically driven and explored from a Western perspective. With the rise of the globalisation and outsourcing phenomenon, it would be interesting to see future studies exploring the perspectives of the Global South to get a broader understanding of the management of social issues in supply chains (Gugler and Shi 2009). The findings indicate that firms are more concerned about social issues that immediately affect their performance and tend to overlook societal issues that can have damaging effects on society in the long run. Incorporating societal issues that are typically associated with low-income countries like poverty alleviation, the inclusion of marginalised populations, integrating small-scale suppliers and their community's welfare into the effective management of supply chains need further research (Preuss and Brown 2012; Blowfield 2005). While many pieces of research offer hints on the links between social and financial performance, there is still a research gap linking these two performance aspects in a supply chain-wide comprehension.

The literature review shows that codes of conduct and standards are the most common safeguards against social issues occurring in supply chains and can be a means to achieve social performance which eventually leads to economic performance (Pedersen and Andersen 2006; Jiang 2009). However, it is worth mentioning here that most of the codes of conduct and standards represent a Western perspective when dealing with issues in the global South (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen 2014). However, the social issues as mentioned are not static but change depending on a number of factors like culture, trust among stakeholders, strategies of the firms, etc. Thus, social issues including the societal ones can be effectively managed through continuous stakeholder dialogue and mutual understanding of the most relevant social issues in supply chains (Park-Poaps and Rees 2010). Further, there is very little discussion on the effectiveness of compliance strategies like auditing and monitoring which are mostly coercive strategies adopted by firms (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen 2014) and their ability to improve the social and economic performance of suppliers. Perhaps, the role of power among stakeholders and the rise of new information and communication technologies can provide more explanations on the auditing and monitoring procedures and their role in the management of social issues in supply chains.

Collaborative relationships through direct supplier development strategies (Krause et al. 2007), such as training and education, are often mentioned as mechanisms to implement codes and standards. However, studies rarely link the capabilities and strength of suppliers and their impact on the implementation of codes of conduct. Future studies could focus on exploring ways to manage social issues by building the capacities of supply chain partners through technical and financial investments taken up by the buying firms and especially involving relevant internal and external stakeholders (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen 2014). However, in order to reap economic benefits, capacity building should be carried out at the most basic level, i.e. the workers' level in supplier plants, where encouragement, empowerment and involvement of the upstream actors in supply chains play a vital role. It would be interesting to see empirical evidence linking supplier development strategies with improvements in social and economic performance across supply chains. Further, trust and commitment, which can cut costs through risk assessment and risk management (Klassen and Vereecke 2012; Seuring and Müller 2008), are prerequisites that help in implementing supplier development initiatives and building capacities. Achieving trust and commitment along the supply chains is tricky and can be attained only through stakeholder involvement (Strand 2009; Tsoi 2010). It would be interesting to see future investigations focusing on the ways to reduce trust deficiencies among supply chain members to achieve a socially sustainable supply chain.

The findings indicate that supplier development along with other strategies like communication and compliance strategies have emerged as an important way of addressing social issues in supply chains. Managing social issues in supply chains is driven by supplier development strategies which are complemented by communication and compliance strategies to exactly resolve these social issues. These strategies at least provide an initial understanding of the management of social issues and lay the foundations for future research. Interestingly, the literature has thoroughly investigated each one of these strategies before but bringing them together in a single framework and establishing a link between stakeholder concerns and individual strategies allows a more in-depth comprehension of the management of social issues in supply chains.

The underlying motivation for the adoption of supply chain strategies to counter social issues is to attain social and economic performance. While financial performance is mostly mentioned in the context of reputation loss and gaining competitive advantage (Hoejmose et al. 2014), social performance is exemplified through better managing labour issues in supply chains. The use of indicators for measuring both social and financial performance is hardly done within the CSR literature, especially in a supply chain context (e.g. Torugsa et al. 2013; Searcy 2013; Hutchins and Sutherland 2008) and needs further research. Researchers and practitioners should embrace and include the dynamic and emerging social issues that are contextual and time-dependent as potential indicators in measuring the supply chain performance, and adopt strategies accordingly to effectively manage social issues in supply chains.

Conclusion

The topic of managing social issues in supply chains is slowly gaining attention. There are a number of issues in social sustainability that need urgent attention from both practitioners and researchers to understand the complexities of managing social issues in supply chains. This literature review at the intersection of CSR in SCM has contributed to the understanding of some of the gaps existing in the management of social issues in supply chains. The conceptual model (Fig. 1) proposes strategies and highlights the role of stakeholders in driving these strategies to counter social issues in supply chains. However, the successful management of social issues in supply chains requires antecedents like trust and commitment which require collaborative efforts and development strategies to achieve performance improvements across the supply chains. Against the existing frameworks on CSP which provide limited theoretical contribution from other disciplines and scholarly domains, the framework proposed in this paper applies a supply chain perspective, thereby providing more insights into the management of social issues and its linkage to financial performance. Further, analysing the management of social issues from a supply chains perspective adds to the theory that connects various measures of corporate social performance and financial performance. Finally, this study summarises the current fragmented arguments in the literature into one framework which has not been done in the literature so far.

Limitations and Future Research

The major limitation of the research is that it is comprehensive but not exhaustive and reading every existent piece of literature in a vast field like CSR and SCM is impossible. Another limitation of this paper is the selection of keywords which might have limited the inclusion of potential papers contributing to the topic. Such conceptualizations based on a literature review are burdened with previous research thinking and might not be forward-looking (enough). Hence, some reasoning beyond the research findings was presented, which aims at moving the discussion in the field further. Finally, this review analyses the single reviewed paper only against criteria that are relevant to this topic. Also, future research can include in-depth analyses of the constructs proposed in the framework. The role of power, information exchange in-depth understanding of mechanisms of trust and commitment among supply chain stakeholders to address social issues and their impact on performance outcomes would also be viable research directions. The proposed framework needs to be improved and revised, opening up some of the constructs for a more detailed analysis, where empirical research would enable developing and testing respective hypotheses. Such investigations can determine the robustness of the framework and help further theory consolidation.

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