DIJEFA: Dinasti International Journal of Economics, Finance & Accounting
E-ISSN: 2721-303X
P-ISSN: 2721-3021
https://dinastipub.org/DIJEFA dinasti.info@gmail.com +62 811 7404 455
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38035/dijefa.v6i4.4770
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Received: 23 May 2025 | **Revised:** 27 July 2025 | **Accepted:** 09 August 2025

An Exploration of Sustainability Reports via Systematic Literature Review: An Analysis of Progress in Promoting Sustainability

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the development of sustainability reports and the factors that influence them. The research method employed is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This study presents 30 research articles obtained from the Scopus, Emerald, and Sinta databases, which were then classified according to specific criteria. The articles reviewed span from 2021 to early 2025. The development of research on sustainability reports has become an increasingly important topic. The findings indicate that research trends on sustainability reports have continued to grow each year. This suggests that both the public and the government are beginning to recognize the importance of environmental sustainability. The analysis reveals that several factors influence sustainability reports, such as leverage, firm size, and profitability. This study is expected to make an academic contribution by providing a comprehensive understanding of sustainability reports and offering directions for future research.

Keywords: Sustainability Report, Systematic Literature Review, Environmental Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), sustainability reporting is a reporting system that can be applied by all companies and organizations to measure, understand, and communicate information related to economic, environmental, and social aspects. Its purpose is to demonstrate organizational accountability to both internal and external stakeholders, as well as to evaluate performance in achieving sustainable development goals. GRI identifies that sustainability reporting covers three main categories: economic, environmental, and social indicators, each of which is analyzed through its content to obtain disclosure scores (Farisyi et al., 2022). Sustainability reports also reflect values and corporate governance frameworks and demonstrate the connection between business strategy and the commitment to sustainable development (Gunawan et al., 2022).

Currently, the practice of sustainability reporting is showing an upward trend, as evidenced by the increasing number of studies examining this issue. In recent decades,

academics have become more aware of the importance of sustainability reports in the context of both national and international companies and organizations (Benvenuto et al., 2023). As a result, various frameworks and procedures have been developed to help companies disclose social, environmental, and governance issues. Some of these include the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) (Doggart et al., 2020).

The topic of "sustainability reporting" has also become increasingly popular in academic circles. In recent years, the adoption of sustainability reports has risen, both as a response to stakeholder demands concerning social and environmental performance and due to investor considerations, as non-financial data are used as indicators of risk and future financial prospects (Benvenuto et al., 2023). These reports aim to integrate environmental and social management into business strategies, enabling organizations to make both positive and negative contributions to the achievement of sustainable development goals (Farisyi et al., 2022). The issue of sustainability now holds urgency on par with environmental and social issues. Several countries in Asia, such as China, India, Singapore, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, have implemented sustainability reporting (Meutia et al., 2022). In Indonesia, for instance, PT ANTAM consistently publishes sustainability reports annually. In Malaysia, Malaysia Airlines also routinely reports its sustainability initiatives (Farisyi et al., 2022). These reports enable organizations to communicate their commitment to environmentally friendly practices to consumers, investors, and employees (Agama & Zubairu, 2022). Nevertheless, several studies have shown that the level of sustainability report disclosure in developing countries is still relatively low (Farisyi et al., 2022).

Previous studies have been conducted to identify the direction and development of sustainability reporting research. Therefore, studying and analyzing research trends in this field is essential to provide an outlook for the future of sustainability reporting. The practice of sustainability reporting reflects growing public awareness of the importance of sustainability, as well as increasing stakeholder expectations for companies to transparently disclose the impacts of their operational activities on the environment and society (Moodaley & Telukdarie, 2023). In-depth studies on sustainability research trends are expected to contribute to resolving global issues and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Various institutions around the world have responded to stakeholder needs by establishing standards and frameworks for sustainability reporting. This includes the development of various disclosure documents relevant to sustainability issues (Moodaley & Telukdarie, 2023). Several studies, such as those by Agama & Zubairu (2022) and Benvenuto et al. (2023), have focused on sustainability reporting in European countries. Meanwhile, more localized studies, such as those by Hidayati (2023) and Yani et al. (2024), have examined the practice of sustainability reporting in Indonesia. The objective of this study is to provide an overview of the development of research related to sustainability reporting. This research is motivated by the existence of several similar studies conducted in developed countries such as the United States, Germany, Turkey, Sri Lanka, and India. Therefore, this study is expected to provide relevant comparisons and enrich the literature in the context of developing countries. In addition, this study focuses on the last five years, from 2021 to 2025. The choice of 2021 as the starting point is based on the issuance of new standards by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), namely the GRI Standards, which have become an important reference in sustainability reporting. Thus, this study aims to evaluate and map the development of scientific research on sustainability reporting during this period.

METHODS

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which is a systematic approach used to examine and analyze a collection of scientific literature with the

aim of identifying research trends and formulating directions for future studies. The SLR method has been widely used in various previous studies, particularly in the field of accounting, because it provides a comprehensive and structured synthesis of previous research findings.

Data for this study were obtained from three main databases: Scopus, Emerald, and SINTA, using the following keywords: "Sustainability Report," "Pengungkapan Sustainability Report," and "Disclosure of Sustainability Report." The period covered in this review is from 2021 to 2025, with 2021 selected as the starting point due to the issuance of the latest GRI Standards in that year, which have become an important reference in sustainability reporting.

The SLR method requires a logical and systematic analytical structure. Therefore, in this study, the processes of data collection and categorization were conducted meticulously to identify relevant sources. The steps involved in this process include: (1) searching for articles from accredited and indexed journals; and (2) grouping the articles based on predetermined criteria, such as topic relevance, keywords, and publication period. The classified data were then further analyzed based on variables such as journal name, research theme/topic, author name, and keywords used. The results are presented systematically to facilitate the review, evaluation, and critical assessment of the literature examined.

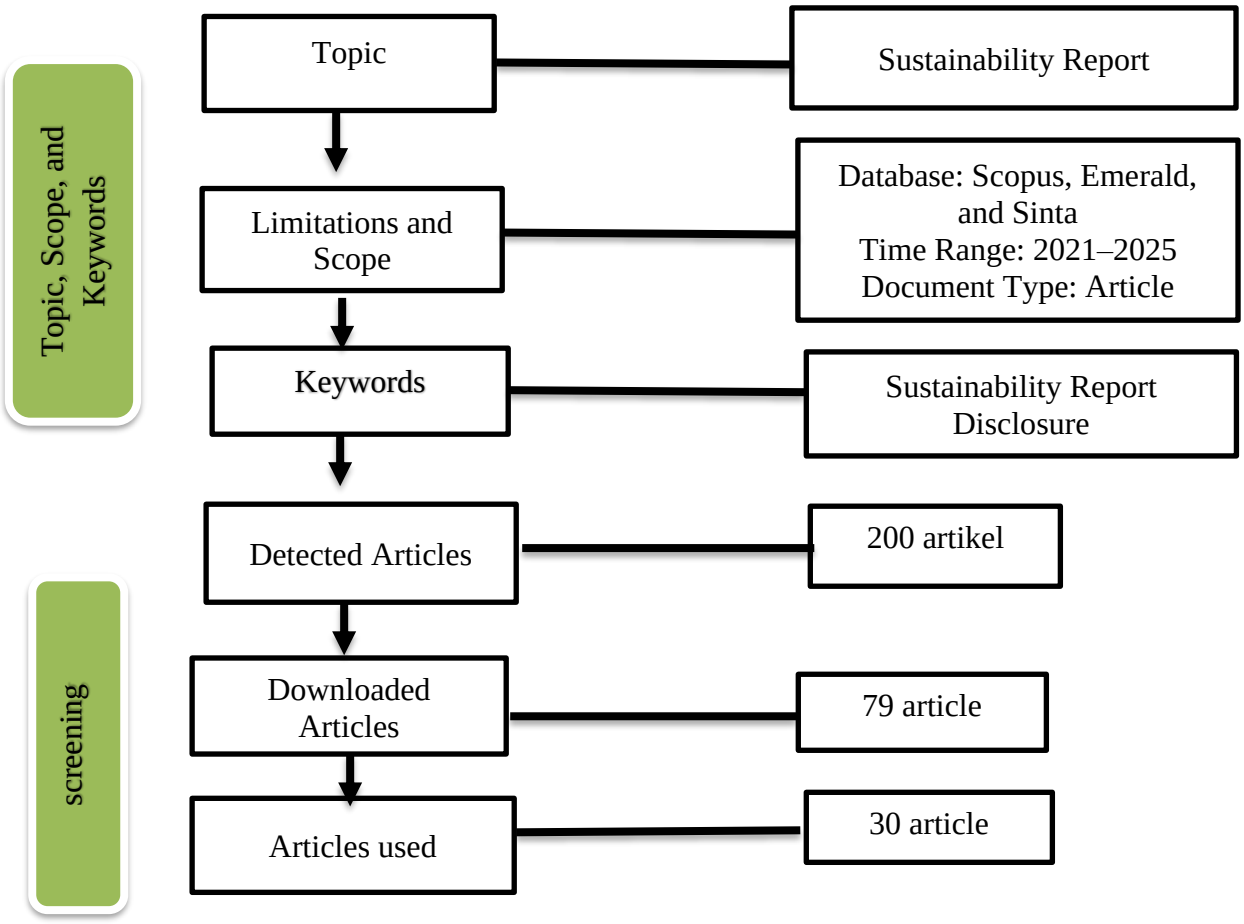


Figure 1. research diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the initial stage of the literature search using the specified keywords and time frame, a total of 200 articles were obtained. However, after the initial identification process, the number of articles meeting the selection criteria was reduced to 79. This reduction was due to several constraints, such as articles not being available via open access and a lack of relevance to the research topic. The selection process was then continued with a more in-depth

identification of topic suitability and substantive relevance to the focus of this study. The final result of this process produced 30 articles deemed appropriate and relevant for further analysis. Table 1 presents the classification results of the articles based on journal index to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data sources used in this research.

Table 1. Article Journal Index Used

No	Journal Index	Number of Articles	Percentage
1	Q1	5	17%
2	Q2	11	37%
3	Q3	2	7%
4	Q4	1	3%
5	SINTA 2	5	17%
6	SINTA 3	2	7%
7	SINTA 4	4	12%

Based on the data in Table 1, it can be seen that the articles analyzed in this study come from indexed journals, both from international databases (Scopus) and national databases (SINTA). Of the total 30 selected articles published in the period 2021–2025, 5 articles (17%) are from Scopus Q1-indexed journals, 11 articles (37%) from Q2, 2 articles (7%) from Q3, and 1 article (3%) from Q4. Meanwhile, from SINTA-indexed journals, there are 5 articles (17%) from SINTA 2, 2 articles (7%) from SINTA 3, and 4 articles (12%) from SINTA 4. This distribution reflects that this study prioritizes the quality of literature by selecting articles from officially indexed and credible sources.

Time Scale

The time scale in this study covers the last five-year period, namely from 2021 to 2025. This time frame was selected considering that the latest standards from the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI Standards), which serve as an important reference in sustainability reporting, were issued in 2021. Thus, this period is relevant for comprehensively reviewing the development of research on sustainability reports based on the most up-to-date standards.

The identification results show that the number of publications discussing sustainability reports has exhibited an increasing trend year by year, with the highest number of publications occurring in 2024. This phenomenon indicates that although the topic of sustainability reporting had previously received little attention, in the last five years it has begun to attract greater interest from academics and researchers. Figure 2 below presents the number of articles on sustainability reports published each year during the period 2021 to 2025

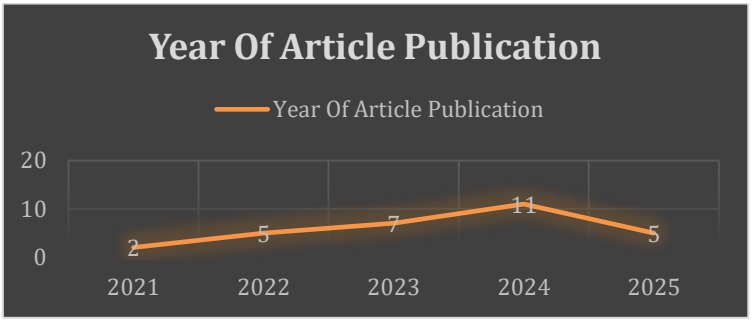


Figure 2. Number of Articles Published by Year (2021–2025)

Research Methodology

This study aims to identify and examine scientific articles that provide an in-depth understanding of the principles and methodologies of sustainability reporting, in order to obtain

relevant data for a comprehensive evaluation. To achieve this objective, this research specifically selects a combination of methodological and conceptual articles. This selection is intended to obtain a comprehensive overview of the trends in sustainability reporting that have developed in various countries.

During the identification process, the articles were classified according to their methodological approach. The results show that the majority of articles use a qualitative approach, totaling 18 articles or 60% of the analyzed articles. Meanwhile, a quantitative approach was used in 12 articles, or approximately 40%. This distribution indicates that qualitative approaches are more dominant in the study of sustainability reporting, reflecting a research tendency to explore the narrative, contextual, and interpretative aspects of sustainability reporting practices in various organizational and national contexts. Figure 3 below presents the proportion of methodological approaches used in the articles analyzed in this study.

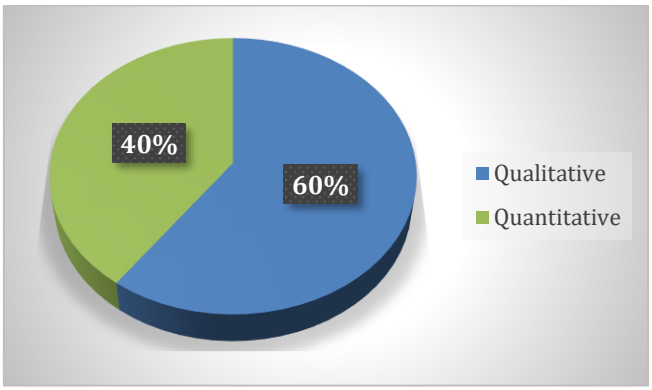


Figure 3. Distribution of Research Methodologies in the Analyzed Articles

Theoretical Framework

This study identifies the theories employed in previous articles discussing sustainability reporting. The results show that there are several main theories that have served as the foundation for earlier research. The details of these theories and the authors who used them are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Theories Used in Previous Studies

Theory	Authors
Teori Stakeholder	(Alimbudiono dkk., 2023; Benvenuto dkk., 2023; Endiana & Suryandari, 2021)
Teori Signalling	(Apriyani & Widoretno, 2024; Dewi & Rustiarini, 2024; Rahim, 2024)
Teori Enterprise	(Handoko & Lindawati, 2020)
Teori Agency	(Amalia & Triwacananingrum, 2022; Chairina & Tjahjadi, 2023; Daud dkk., 2023)
Teori Legitimacy	(Agung dkk., 2023)

From the table, it can be concluded that the most widely used theories in sustainability reporting research from 2021 to 2025 are Stakeholder Theory, Signalling Theory, and Agency Theory. These three theories are considered the most relevant for explaining the motivations and mechanisms underlying corporate sustainability reporting. Stakeholder Theory is employed to emphasize the importance of fulfilling stakeholder expectations and demands in order to gain support and ensure the continuity of company operations. Signalling Theory explains that sustainability reports serve as positive signals to external parties regarding the company's commitment to sustainability. Agency Theory is used to analyze the relationship between principals and agents, as well as how sustainability reporting can serve as a tool to reduce information asymmetry and conflicts of interest. The use of these theories indicates that

sustainability reporting is not merely administrative, but also strategic and communicative in the context of a company's relationships with both its external and internal environments.

Influential Articles on Sustainability Issues

Based on the identification of previous articles used in this study, it was found that several articles have had a significant impact on the development of sustainability issues, particularly in the context of sustainability reporting. This influence can be seen from the high citation rates as well as their publication in reputable and Scopus-indexed journals. The most cited article is by Traxler et al. (2020), titled "Sustainability Reporting and Management Control: A Systematic Exploratory Literature Review," published in the Journal of Cleaner Production, with a total of 140 citations. This article serves as a primary reference as it provides a comprehensive systematic review related to management control and sustainability reporting, thereby becoming an important foundation for subsequent research. The details of the most influential articles are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Most Influential Articles on Sustainability Issues

Rank	Title	Authors	Number of Citations	Journal
1	Sustainability Reporting and Management Control: A Systematic Exploratory Literature Review	(Traxler dkk., 2020)	140	*Journal of Cleaner Production*
2	A Framework for Sustainability Reporting	(Traxler dkk., 2020)	102	*Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*
3	A Systematic Literature Review on the Determinants of Sustainability Reporting Systems	(Benvenuto dkk., 2023)	37	*Heliyon*
4	Sustainability Report and Financial Performance: Evidence from Mining Companies in Indonesia	(Benvenuto dkk., 2023)	12	*International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*
5	Evolution of Sustainability Reporting Research: Evidence from Indonesia (A Systematic Literature Review)	(Meutia dkk., 2022)	9	*Indonesian Journal of Sustainability Accounting and Management*
6	Environmental Sustainability Disclosure in Sustainability Reports: Mining, Oil, and Gas Companies	(Agung dkk., 2023)	8	*International Journal of Management and Sustainability*
7	Sustainability Reporting and Firm Value: Systematic Literature Review	(Dewi & Rustiarini, 2024)	5	*Scientific Journal of Economics, Management, Business, and Accounting*

From the table, it can be concluded that the articles with the highest number of citations generally come from reputable international journals, such as the Journal of Cleaner Production and the Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal. This demonstrates that sustainability issues and their reporting have gained increasing global attention and have become important topics in contemporary scientific literature.

Based on a review of 30 previous research articles on the topic of sustainability reports, this study concludes that there are still many research gaps that can serve as guidance for future research in the field of sustainability. Various factors influence sustainability report disclosure, including the indicators and measurement methods used. So far, there is no uniformity in the measurement of sustainability reports. Most researchers use the disclosure completeness approach based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) indicator score items. The GRI indicators themselves have evolved from GRI G3, GRI G4, to the latest GRI Standards, which have been widely adopted since 2021.

This study also reveals that the trend of scientific publication related to sustainability reports has continued to increase significantly from 2021 to 2024. The research development chart shown in Figure 2 demonstrates an upward trend each year. Although only five articles were found for 2025, this is understandable given that the year is still in its early period, so the number of publications is expected to increase by the end of the year. This upward trend is also supported by previous research, such as Agama & Zubairu (2022), who conducted a systematic review of sustainability report disclosures in Nigeria from 2011 to 2020 and concluded there was an increasing trend in reporting practices. Another study by Sayuti & Aprianto (2023), using a bibliometric analysis approach to the literature in the ASEAN region from 2010 to 2023, also confirmed significant growth in publications on sustainability topics. In Indonesia, Hidayati (2023) used the PRISMA systematic review approach on 30 articles published between 2018 and 2022, which also demonstrated a similar trend.

The analysis of the theories used in previous literature shows that research on sustainability is supported by various theories, such as Stakeholder Theory, Signalling Theory, Enterprise Theory, Agency Theory, and Legitimacy Theory. Of these five theories, the most dominant are Stakeholder, Signalling, and Agency Theory. For example, Benvenuto et al. (2023) used Stakeholder Theory, arguing that organizations should be responsible to all parties affected by their business activities, not just shareholders. Meanwhile, Rahim (2024) used Signalling Theory to explain that corporate transparency in disclosing sustainability information can enhance the company's reputation, encouraging companies to publish sustainability reports as a positive signal to stakeholders.

The results also show that the combination of sustainability reporting and management control variables is a highly interesting research topic. The study by Traxler et al. (2020), published in the Journal of Cleaner Production, is the most cited article (140 times), indicating that the relationship between sustainability reporting and managerial control is a key area of interest in academic studies. In addition, the topic of sustainability reporting frameworks has also received considerable attention. This is evidenced by the research of Abeysekera (2022), published in the Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal, which has been cited 102 times. This fact shows that understanding the frameworks used is essential before preparing sustainability reports.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal the existence of gaps in various aspects, including the coverage of research years, the theories used, research methods, and the most influential sustainability issues. The qualitative method is the most widely used approach, in line with the large number of articles adopting the systematic review approach. This study provides important insights into the trends and developments in sustainability reporting; however, it still has limitations, particularly regarding the number and scope of the literature used. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the database and the research period to produce more comprehensive and in-depth findings.

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