

Does Going Digital Matter In Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility To The Public? A Systematic Review Approach

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Abstract

The way companies communicate their CSR commitment is critical for organisational success and legitimacy, particularly in the age of new media. Corporate websites, social media accounts, and other interactive platforms are just a few of the ways that businesses are embracing the new digital technologies and communicating their policies and responsible initiatives. To comprehend the justification for utilising digital media to communicate corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, digital media theory was adopted to aid comprehension of the changing dynamic between society and technology. The results from systematic reviews have indicated that stakeholder engagement and the perceived usability and ease of use of online media for CSR disclosures are important for business development. More so, the ability and benefits of new media to have two-way, participatory interactions with stakeholders, and thereby create additional value for firms and stakeholders, makes it essential. These findings suggest that companies should prioritize transparency and interactivity in their digital communications to foster trust among stakeholders. By effectively harnessing online platforms, organizations can enhance their reputation and demonstrate a genuine commitment to social responsibility, ultimately leading to stronger relationships with their audience. This study concludes by suggesting that CSR communication is more effective when it is easily accessible online.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility, corporate governance, digital media, Stakeholder engagement, organisation reputation.*

Introduction

How businesses convey their commitment to corporate social responsibility is essential for both organizational success and legitimacy, particularly in the era of new media, where information manipulation and dissemination can have a significant impact (Jansen et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2024; Dalla-Pria and Rodriguez-de-Dios, 2022). Since stakeholders' opinions are taken into account for mutual sense-making toward sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication is essential in an era where a company's capacity to survive is mainly dependent on how stakeholders perceive its CSR commitment. Stakeholders frequently respond strongly when CSR and corporate performance are discussed, claiming that businesses are either not meeting expectations or are overstating their social contributions (Adanlawo and Chaka, 2021). Organisational success essentially depends on rethinking CSR communication and stakeholder communication strategies in light of the rapidly evolving business culture, the rapid acceleration of technological development, and the transformative pressures of globalisation (Herath and Herath, 2024; Wang and Huang, 2018).

CSR communication, then, is the process by which businesses convey their dedication to social and environmental issues. CSR and communication are the two facets of the notion of CSR communication. As new media provide quick, varied, and creative means for businesses to interact with other stakeholders more effectively, the monopoly of traditional media is progressively being undermined (Xaba et al., 2025; Villi and Picard, 2019). Therefore, it is important to examine how this changing communications environment is influencing corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. Additionally, for sustainability and successful stakeholder involvement, new media is changing CSR communication (Troise and Camilleri, 2021; Pizzi et al., 2021). Given its reach and extent, the emergence of digital and new media has caused a rethinking of the role of business in society (Adanlawo and Chaka, 2024; Agostinelli, 2020). The legitimacy of the channels and tactics used by organisations to convey their CSR initiatives is one of

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the main ways they may manage their reputation, capitalize on their business investments, and open up new markets and prospects.

Sustainable communication and improved stakeholder participation are possible with new media (De Luca, 2022; Nielsen and Thomsen, 2018). This is because sustainability communication is shaped by new media, which democratizes and diversifies CSR communication and engagement processes for legitimacy and credibility. Accordingly, companies' CSR communication strategies may be a powerful tool for boosting stakeholders' trust and a way to maximize sustainability initiatives (Emeka-Okoli et al., 2024; Mncwango et al. 2025). Indicators of social media usage are thought to offer online communities, prompt updates, individualised communication, and extensive information tracking (Adanlawo and Chaka, 2025; Salvatore et al., 2021). Social media is another component that can easily organise relationships between people and corporations because of its significant impact on communication tactics. According to Mahoney and Tang (2024), digital media has become a crucial component of business plans due to the fact that it has expanded the options for contact between businesses and their clientele.

Theoretical Framework

Digital media theory

Digital media theory looks at how media and digital technology affect society, culture, and communication (Schroeder, 2018). It looks at how we produce, distribute, and use information in relation to the internet, social media, and other online platforms. This idea aids in our comprehension of the changing dynamic between society and technology (Casero-Ripollés and Micó-Sanz, 2022; Szabo, 2021). By examining these interactions, digital media theory helps us understand the implications of digital engagement on social behaviour and cultural norms. As technology continues to evolve, so too does the need to reassess our approaches to communication and information sharing in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

Media theory has historically focused on a variety of topics, such as communication, and media content. As a result, it also drew from other fields, including literary theory, sociology, psychology, and philosophy, among others (Mehmet et al., 2022; Chaka and Adanlawo, 2022). At first, it was situated within the framework of mass media, including books, radio, television, movies, newspapers, public relations, and advertising. Generally, this was any form of communication where it was one source to many recipients. This one-to-many communication model highlights the traditional understanding of media as a tool for disseminating information to a large audience. Over time, however, media theory has evolved to include more interactive and participatory forms of communication, reflecting changes in technology and audience engagement.

Because of their respective histories and contemporary social contexts, these various communication channels may also have an impact on how the content was interpreted. As a result, media theory encompasses many different elements and is not limited to merely analysing content and its form (Nyeleti and Maphela, 2024; Riffe et al., 2023). Instead, it explores the interplay between technology, audience reception, and cultural influences that shape understanding. This multifaceted approach allows researchers to better grasp the complexities of communication in today's diverse media landscape. Traditional media has been supplemented and enhanced by digital media.

Digital media lessens the authority and sway that traditional media companies once held, claim Lata (2024) and Adanlawo and Chaka (2021). According to Mehmet et al. (2022), digital media will guarantee unrestricted communication, which is essential for preserving ties between an organization and its major stakeholders. This shift empowers individuals to share information more freely and fosters a more direct connection between organizations and their audiences. As a result, organizations can engage with stakeholders more effectively, enhancing transparency and collaboration. Organizational management must provide a two-way, free-flowing information channel that its key stakeholders may access in order to guarantee an effective CSR communication. In order for businesses to engage stakeholders in the CSR process, it is crucial to establish and encourage two-way symmetric and asymmetric communication procedures.

Literature Review

Digital/new media

Social technologies in the era of new media have put businesses under an unprecedented amount of stakeholder pressure and sustainability campaigns (Jha and Verma, 2023; Adanlawo and Reddy, 2018). As a result, businesses use the web environment (business websites, social media, and mobile applications) to promote their CSR-related initiatives in addition to communicating their own values, missions, and goods and services (Thottoli and Thomas, 2023; Yang et al., 2020). Businesses are embracing web-based technologies to engage and communicate with stakeholders, and their use is growing annually. Web-based technologies are today's primary means of communication (Yuan, 2024). In the era of new media, businesses can promote their sustainability initiatives through digital media to increase the visibility of their CSR commitment. This approach not only enhances brand reputation but also fosters stronger relationships with consumers who prioritize corporate responsibility. As a result, businesses are better positioned to attract a loyal customer base that aligns with their sustainability goals. On the one hand, new media allow for greater audience differentiation, while on the other, consumers can engage with media more actively (Adanlawo, 2017; Schröder, 2015). This duality enables companies to tailor their messages to specific demographics, ensuring that their CSR efforts resonate more deeply. Consequently, consumers feel a sense of connection and empowerment, reinforcing their loyalty to brands that reflect their values.

More visibility and a chance for stakeholders to interact and communicate directly about social concerns are provided by new media (Yang et al., 2020). By establishing connections with various stakeholders, organizations can expand their business potential and avoid criticism and unsustainable practices. This collaborative approach not only enhances transparency but also fosters a sense of community engagement, which can lead to more responsible decision-making. As a result, organizations are better positioned to address societal issues and adapt to changing expectations. New media's advantages and capacity for two-way, participatory interactions generate value for both businesses and customers. It is obvious that brands must share their CSR initiatives with important stakeholder groups, such as customers and workers, if they hope to reap the reputational rewards (Tomaselli et al., 2016). This sharing fosters transparency and trust, which are essential for building strong relationships with stakeholders. Ultimately, effective communication of CSR efforts enhances a brand's reputation and encourages greater loyalty among its audience. Sustainability communication is a crucial management strategy for controlling stakeholders' expectations for corporate social responsibility (CSR), going beyond simple corporate exposure. Additionally, it is a powerful instrument for assessing how committed sustainable businesses are to socio-environmental concerns (Birim, 2016). This is because it makes it easier and less expensive (in comparison to traditional media) for other stakeholders to voice their opinions regarding corporate social responsibility.

Opening up a variety of avenues for organizations to further their CSR agenda for sustainability is one of the main ways that communication channels can impact CSR (Jansen et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2020). Building relationships between businesses and stakeholders depends heavily on corporate communications strategy and channels. By using a variety of media that stakeholders can read, comprehend, and interpret, organizations can use corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication to manage their image (Ajayi and Mmutle, 2021). As a result, this reimagined CSR communication provides a way for businesses to interact with the public, support legitimacy claims, and foster goodwill among stakeholders (Lin et al., 2024; Wang and Huang, 2018). Accordingly, the usage of social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter is increasing annually (Stone et al., 2019). It's true that businesses are increasingly using social media. Furthermore, social media platforms have drawn a lot of interest from academics and professionals. This has been made possible by their capacity to engage in bilateral dialogues with customers in addition to broadcasting for them, for instance, by coming up with ideas, getting their input, and asking for their involvement.

Social media

Every day, millions of people utilize social networking platforms to create a public profile (Reddy and Adanlawo, 2018; Shah and Shah, 2017). Within their personal networks, people can exchange ideas, events, activities, and hobbies thanks to social networking services. Social networking sites can encourage interaction, learning, and idea sharing (Ahmad, 2024). Building a robust social media presence may encourage and enable stakeholders to interact with the business and exchange ideas. Businesses can profit greatly from social media communication in a number of ways, including public relations, real-time communication, and low-cost collaboration (Manyanga et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024). This enhanced engagement not only fosters a sense of community but also allows businesses to gather valuable feedback and insights directly from their audience. As a result, companies can tailor their strategies to better meet consumer needs and preferences, ultimately driving growth and innovation. According to Chen and Wei (2020), social media is more efficient than traditional communication methods, resulting in increased productivity and speedy performance. This efficiency stems from the ability to quickly share information and receive real-time responses, which accelerates decision-making processes. Consequently, businesses can adapt more swiftly to market changes and consumer demands. Additionally, social media offers businesses great benefits, including credibility, image repute, and minimal implementation costs (Nisar et al., 2019). Social media's advantages have led to the development of dynamic and interactive systems for public and organizational activity.

The public has a voice on social media platforms and wants to know more about the goods and services offered by businesses. Ahmad (2024) asserts that compared to more conventional corporate communication methods, social media appears to be a more reliable source of information about CSR. Social media is crucial to how businesses report on and discuss CSR. It gives organizations excellent chances to communicate with stakeholders and keep genuine, long-lasting relationships with them. According to studies on CSR and social media, social media engagement for stakeholders is a useful tool for CSR communication since it allows for two-way dialogue between the business and its stakeholders (Shah and Shah, 2017). Compared to one-way communication, two-way communication is said to be more stimulating for stakeholder participation and has greater credibility. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that social media, with its interactive and collaborative nature, is recommended and expected as a suitable persuasion technique. Practically speaking, our results suggest that if an organization wants to become more legitimate, it could be advantageous to work with local and international actors and stakeholders to build its CSR communication strategies and practices

Internet

Internet accessibility is a key feature (Van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2015; Napoli and Obar, 2014). Without the usage of the internet, an attempt to comprehend CSR communication and the legitimization process through the annual reports alone would seem insufficient. The paper copy of the annual report has essentially been supplanted by the internet as the primary means of communication with the stakeholders of businesses, according to Weil and Winter-Watson (2018). The internet has the ability to influence a company's reputation and image in order to help businesses accomplish their goals. In order to address their legitimacy gaps, businesses will probably use the internet as a key legitimization tool (Weber, 2024). This would imply that they ought to improve the online accessibility of their CSR messages. Companies in high-impact industries are more motivated than those in low-impact industries, claim Hiller and Raffin (2020). By doing this, they could manage the expectations of their stakeholders and lessen the legitimacy gap. Furthermore, corporate businesses use their websites to inform their stakeholders about CSR.

Corporate websites

According to Stone et al. (2018) and Pang et al. (2018), corporate websites have developed into a powerful medium for communication and a platform for interaction between stakeholders and organizations. Corporate websites have taken on a greater role in the last few decades as a tool and conduit for controlling target audience perceptions (Chaka and Adanlawo, 2024). CSR is increasingly being communicated on business websites, according to recent studies (Baniya and Thapa, 2021; Troise and Camilleri, 2021).

According to Maphela (2021), companies can use official papers, such press releases or an annual corporate responsibility report, to convey their CSR practices. They can also dedicate a section of their official company website to CSR.

According to earlier research, businesses have not adequately utilized websites as interactive and engaging tools for communicating about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Troise and Camilleri, 2021; Pang et al., 2018). The absence of a trained team to develop more interactive websites may have been the cause of this. However, social media's introduction has eliminated any justifications. In contrast to websites, social media platforms are free to use and have built-in interaction. Furthermore, social media has changed how businesses interact with their customers (Mahoney and Tang, 2024; Stone et al., 2018). A company website is thought to be a useful tool for informing stakeholders about CSR and related activities. Businesses are increasingly embracing interactive technology like social media and mobile applications for communication, in addition to the topics and connections shared through corporate websites.

Discussion

The landscape of CSR communication is being restructured by digital media for sustainability and efficient stakeholder interaction (Dundua, 2023). The majority of research indicates that CSR communication can influence stakeholders' perceptions of an organization and their interactions with it. These shifts are driving companies to adopt more transparent and engaging communication strategies, fostering trust and collaboration. As a result, organizations are increasingly integrating social media platforms and digital storytelling to convey their sustainability efforts effectively. Moreover, consistent engagement between stakeholders and organizations on a company's website has been shown to improve stakeholders' perceptions (Weil and Winter-Watson, 2018; Guillory and Sundar, 2014). This enhanced interaction not only elevates the organization's image but also encourages a sense of community among stakeholders, who feel more invested in the organization's goals. Ultimately, by prioritizing open dialogue and authentic communication, companies can create a more resilient and supportive network that drives long-term success. It is clear that digital communication and distribution of various CSR projects are still in their infancy states. To claim that a company has a genuine CSR presence in new/digital media channels, more dedication, care, and attention are required for more successful CSR communication. Organizations should have faith in the vast potential that Web 2.0 technologies may offer to the business in order to support the entire CSR scenario, given the immense benefits that digital media offers for CSR communication.

Based on the theoretical foundation for this study, digital media theory aids in our comprehension of the changing dynamic between society and technology. The theory helps us understand the implications of digital engagement on social behaviour and cultural norms. The theory proposes that individuals and organisations need to reassess their approaches to information sharing in a rapidly changing digital landscape. This reassessment is crucial as it allows both individuals and organizations to adapt to new communication methods and social interactions shaped by digital advancements. By doing so, they can more effectively navigate the complexities of modern information exchange and its impact on society.

Businesses use the web environment (company websites, social media, and mobile applications) to promote their CSR-related initiatives in addition to communicating their values, missions, and goods and services. These platforms allow companies to engage with their audience more effectively, fostering a sense of community and transparency. By sharing their CSR efforts online, businesses can also attract socially conscious consumers who prioritize ethical practices in their purchasing decisions. As we can see, businesses are embracing web-based technologies to communicate with stakeholders, and their use is growing annually. Benefits of these technologies include improved customer loyalty, reputation development, information and feedback collection, and the attraction and retention of skilled workers. According to Hiller and Raffin (2020) and Tajvidi et al. (2020), digital media "enabled consumers to engage with corporate information by creating, sharing, or exchanging information." Given the rise in CSR communication on social media, companies must be able to effectively convey their organization's CSR initiatives.

Conclusions

Based on the study's findings, a company can better understand the value of CSR initiatives with the use of digital media, which could encourage further participation in CSR initiatives. Through digital media, CSR practices must be shared with stakeholders and the public to improve reputation and foster a positive business image. This approach not only enhances transparency but also builds trust among stakeholders, ultimately leading to increased engagement in CSR efforts. By effectively communicating these initiatives, companies can cultivate a stronger connection with their audience and reinforce their commitment to social responsibility. It can therefore be rightly said that the transformative impact of digital media on CSR communication is undeniable.

As organizations increasingly turn to social platforms, they not only enhance the visibility of their CSR initiatives but also provide stakeholders with a clearer understanding of the value these projects bring to communities and the environment. This transparency not only encourages greater participation in CSR efforts but also cultivates a sense of shared responsibility among consumers and businesses alike. Furthermore, by effectively sharing their CSR practices, companies can foster trust and strengthen their reputations, leading to a more positive business image overall. Ultimately, digital media serves as a powerful tool that bridges the gap between corporations and society, paving the way for a more engaged and responsible business landscape. As the landscape of corporate social responsibility continues to evolve, the pivotal role of digital media emerges as a transformative force.

By encouraging transparency in CSR initiatives, digital platforms not only allow businesses to showcase their commitments but also invite consumers to actively participate in these efforts, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. This collaborative approach cultivates trust and strengthens corporate reputations, creating a bridge between businesses and the communities they serve. Ultimately, the integration of digital media into CSR strategies promotes an engaged and responsible business environment where companies and consumers work hand in hand toward common goals, paving the way for a more sustainable future. Future research could focus on the role of AI in CSR communication. This exploration could reveal how artificial intelligence enhances transparency, engagement, and efficiency in conveying corporate social responsibility initiatives to stakeholders.

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