

# Role of Digital News Media in Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility in India

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## I. ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility can be summarized as a contribution of few percentage of its profit a firm towards its social obligation and public welfare. Though CSR was mandated under Companies Act, 2013, till date there is no mechanism for public scrutiny of CSR activities. To fill the voids, media can step up to bring the necessary transparency and accountability in the CSR funding and spending in the priority sectors. Media being the fourth pillar of democracy can very well bridge the gap and help to bring both community and corporates to a single platform. The paper primarily focused on the coverage of CSR topics in India, how much media space is provided to CSR activities and its scrutiny in public sphere. Along with this, paper also focuses on how media coverage can influence the corporate behavior in CSR spending. Coverage of CSR activities can affect the business attitude in a positive manner and eventually boost the socio-economic condition of society. Paper also include content analysis of articles from different national newspapers which predominantly cover business news, which helps us to reach the conclusion that how free media can actually bring the change in corporate spending for public and social welfare.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Media, Media Scrutiny, Companies Act

## II. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility is not a new concept for promoting business good will among the consumer base. Corporates with various methods target audiences and tries to persuade their consuming behavior. In the era of mass production and mass consumption, businesses have to design their approach to promote their rapport in diverse manner and among all one of the method is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR can be defined as self-operating corporate strategy that enables an organisation to be socially accountable to its customers, employees, and stakeholders. Companies may be aware of their influence on the economic, social, and environmental elements of society by engaging in corporate social responsibility, often known as corporate citizenship (Fernando, 2023). Corporate social responsibility is essentially an action that a corporation does to demonstrate its commitment for society as a whole in relation to sustainability and development. CSR is essentially a company's moral and ethical behaviour towards society at large. In India, Companies Act of 2013, under section 135 mandated that companies have to comply with the CSR norms. Every company having a net worth of minimum 500 crore, turnover more than 1000 crore and profit of 5 crore have to spend 2% of their net profit in the preceding three financial years on CSR activities (Radhika, n.d.). Many Indian companies like – Tata, Birla, Reliance, Wipro, Infosys, ITC etc. were involved in CSR voluntarily prior to 2013 but, after 2013 legal sanction has been provided to CSR activities, which set a minimum limit of CSR spending in various sectors which includes education, public health, gender equality, job creation and skills development, and environment. In India, CSR has a long history that is rooted in spirituality, religion, and cultural customs. The logic behind the long history of CSR activities in India is based on the theory of 'dharma' and 'karma' which defines the right duties and action leads to right benefit and prosperity. There are four major CSR mindsets in India: the ethical duty to society, the compliance with rules, the economic responsibility to increase profits, and the responsibility for stakeholders (Jain & Moya, 2016).



Fig 1: Various fields of investment in Corporate Social Responsibility

India being one of the rapidly growing economy of the world with \$ 3.75 trillion its GDP, high performing manufacturing and service sector, there was a need felt to increase the collaboration between various stakeholders like corporates, government and citizens. Considering its regional characteristics and interests, India also offers a perfect setting for considering the prospect of indigenous CSR. Since 2013, CSR spending in India has risen from ₹10,065 crore in 2014 - 15 to ₹24,865 crore in 2020 - 21. There was a high jump has been observed in CSR spending till 2015-16 and soon a reverse trend started to get visible in spending. Corporates started cutting the CSR spending and by 2017-18 CSR spending started recording a decline trend. Additionally, there were 2,926 businesses that spent nothing on CSR in 2020–21, while the number of businesses paying less than the mandated cap of 2% increased from 3,078 in 2015–16 to 3,290 in 2020–21. Additionally, there was a decrease in the number of businesses engaging in CSR, from 25,103 in FY2019 to 17,007 in FY2021 (Patnaik, 2022). There were no provisions of external audit in Companies Act, 2013. The spending of CSR is also limited to sectors like education and health (as visibility of corporate as well as community participation is quite high), whereas other sectors like – environment, job creation, skill development etc. got a little attention from the firms. Another major issue is a geographical bias. Corporates tries to spend their CSR amount to places nearby to their offices so that they can build their brand image more stronger, which makes the major percentage of spending in southern states (54%, as major corporate hubs are located in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai, Pune etc.), ignoring the bimaru states like – Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, which actually need more sustainable and social spending. To bridge all these existing gaps and making CSR spending more effective, media can play a critical role in promoting CSR activity coverage and making it more visible among the community. Companies which are more visible to the public are more scrutinized by the public. Positive criticism of CSR spending of a corporate can in return put the pressure on the firms to spend more on CSR with more transparency and accountability. Media, being a fourth pillar of democracy, it become important for media to bring social pressure on the firms to bring the benefit of CSR to the most needed community. According to academics, the media have a critical role in forming public opinion on significant social issues and ultimately influencing company behaviour and corporate social responsibility practices. However, there is still limited research on the role of news media as CSR stakeholders, especially in the context of India.

### **III. OBJECTIVE**

1. To study how does Indian media elaborate Corporate Social Responsibility
2. To investigate priority topics covered by the Indian media related to Corporate Social Responsibility
3. To study how media coverage does influences corporate CSR behavior.

### **IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In a paper ‘Media Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility’, author Craig E. Carroll focuses on the link between media relations and CSR. The interaction between a company and the news media is managed by media relations specialists. The link between business and society is frequently materialised via the media, which serves as both a venue for and essential agent in the public realm. The public's understanding of what CSR is, what it should be, and how business responds to external pressures depends heavily on the news media. A considerably larger number of sources are used by the news media in articles about CSR than they are in stories about more mainstream news issues, according to research on stakeholders in stories about CSR. Companies could take use of this to identify potential CSR partners while putting an emphasis on developing symmetrical partnerships. Companies that receive more media attention are more likely to be concerned about their reputations and to engage more in CSR initiatives. But frequently, rather than adjustments to laws or actual behaviour, communication efforts are made to manage public expectations. Then, we see a recursive link between companies and public scrutiny, allowing enterprises with lesser media presence to avoid being seen by the public.

In a paper ‘New Evidence on the Role of the Media in Corporate Social Responsibility’ author Sadok El Ghouli, Omrane Guedhami, Robert Nash and Ajay Patel focused on the media's impact on businesses CSR initiatives. Recent data indicates that the media may be crucial in identifying and propagating negligent business behaviour. We suggest that a free media can encourage corporate investment in CSR by drawing from both research streams. A free media may influence the reputations of businesses, managers, politicians, and regulators by looking into and reporting on corporate irresponsibility. This is predicted to strengthen the incentives for businesses to participate in CSR. Free media may impact the reputations of not just a company but also its leaders and directors (Vogel, 2006). A disproportionate amount of the wealth and human capital of executives and directors is connected to the company. They are therefore more susceptible to damaging shocks to their reputations. For instance, executives and directors embroiled in controversy may lose their present positions and income from future employment as well as see a decline in the value of their portfolios of stocks and stock options as a result of media expose of unethical business practises. Therefore, CEOs and directors are likely to order their companies to operate in socially acceptable ways in reaction to the possibility of media exposures of corporate wrongdoing. The urgency of controlling stakeholder views of the firm's CSR profile was intensified by the increased public awareness and quickness of information dissemination. An increase in social media usage speeds up the communication of knowledge about organisational procedures and makes it easier for stakeholders and activists to coordinate. By gathering, examining, and disseminating data on business activity, the media plays a significant role in the financial markets. If investors, analysts, and other stakeholders get access to this information, it may have an impact on a company's reputation and consequently its worth. In this study, we look at how the media affects businesses' worries about their reputations as shown by their participation in CSR initiatives. Through enhanced media incentives to serve as an information middleman and higher corporate sensitivity to reputational risks, we contend that more media independence encourages investment in CSR initiatives.

In a web article, 'Role of media in championing CSR', author focused on the media's role in promoting CSR. In fact, the media have a significant influence in how CSR is communicated to the general public. Simply put, corporate contributions to social causes are insufficient. In order to inspire people and serve as a role model for others, they must also share their story with the world. By regularly reminding firms of the need to give back to society and consider factors other than money, the media may also serve as a conscience keeper. The Guardian Newspaper has led the charge in calling for corporate responsibility and transparency on a global scale. The Hindu performs a superb job of producing editorials and articles in India urging businesses to be socially responsible.

In a paper, 'Corporate social responsibility and media coverage' author Steven F. Cahan, Chen Chen, Li Chen, Nhut H. Nguyen tried to examine whether companies that practise more social responsibility obtain more positive press coverage and if companies actively control their media image through CSR. We feel it more socially responsible to concentrate on all news articles about a company rather than simply those that highlight particular CSR activities. Responsible businesses have a better reputation in the media because they often receive more favourable news coverage. After accounting for any endogeneity, these results are solid. Additionally, in line with firms actively managing their media image, we discover a stronger relationship between CSR and media favorability when incentives to do so are high, such as among businesses in sin industries, during downturns in investor sentiment, and before experienced equity offerings. In this study, they concluded that media coverage of businesses is often more positive when they perform well in CSR areas. Economically speaking, media favorability rises by 8% when CSR performance is moved from being one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean. After adjusting for endogeneity problems and removing any temporal overlap between our media favorability and CSR metrics, these results are strong. Along with this, enterprises that do well in CSR only benefit from better firm value or reduced cost of capital if they receive positive media attention, which is consistent with these enterprises taking advantage of the favourable tone in the media's general reporting on the firm.

In a paper, 'News Media and corporate representation of CSR', author Rajul Jain and Maria De Moya focused media from the stakeholder's perspective for businesses because it may have an impact on their standing and profitability. In reality, despite the development of social media and other channels of media that enable businesses to communicate directly with the public, media relations has remained to be and continue to be a crucial business communication role. The media can have a significant impact on corporate behaviour in the context of CSR because news coverage can raise concerns about a company's impact. Additionally, high media attention may cause social pressures, which may prompt a company to respond through CSR, as stated by the statement that "by making some business firms more visible than others, the media also affect the level of public scrutiny that different firms receive, with firms receiving higher levels of visibility also receiving high level of scrutiny. Companies, like other stakeholders, have the power to influence the media, in this case through influencing how CSR concerns are handled in coverage. News coverage exhibits a forward-thinking perspective on CSR, but it is largely descriptive and devoid of specific recommendations for how firms might push past convention and reimagine their CSR initiatives. The news media are important informants who draw attention to social concerns that are embedded in a society's particular sociocultural environment. The study also discovered some signs of sociocultural effect on India's perception of CSR. Philanthropy was frequently mentioned in the news media's coverage of CSR as a method for corporations to give back to society. This focus on altruism is a manifestation of a native model of CSR with roots in spiritual and religious ideals like Dharma, or virtuous obligation.

## **V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research approach used in this paper is qualitative content analysis method. In this study, random articles published from March – June, 2023 related to Corporate Social Responsibility from one of the leading and the most circulated English newspaper of the country – 'Times of India' and one Mumbai based digital and print news publication – 'The CSR Journal'. The reason behind choosing 'The CSR journal' is that the organization is dedicatedly work for CSR and related issues and along with this work with decision-makers, non-profit groups, governmental agencies, prestigious business houses, and a variety of stakeholders, which helps us to collect more accurate and firsthand information about CSR to conduct our study. Both the media has been randomly selected for content analysis. To understand the pattern of media coverage of CSR, it is important to study, how frequent media has covered the topic of CSR related to any particular firms and how the coverage of the media has influenced the behavior of the firms. To complete the study, secondary data has been used to analyze the coverage pattern and scrutinizing the CSR spending of the company.

## **VI OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION**

According to Press Report India 2021-22, there are around 1 lakh newspapers in India (Press in India report 2021-22, 2023), 230 news channels in India (Current Affairs & News TV Channels in India, n.d.). Though media disseminates news in numerous languages and genres, media is concentrated in the hands of few corporates, which creates an atmosphere of corporates controlling media business and promote their own interest which is dangerous for the free press. For example, Zee News is often criticized for promoting right wing propaganda (as the owner of Zee media group is a right wing political leader). The newspaper sector has similar ownership patterns, with family-owned companies controlling the vast majority of the national and local publications. In addition, there are many claims that journalists are paid for the coverage, including business firms. A qualitative analysis was conducted to understand how Indian media defined the term corporate social responsibility. Total of 44 articles based on CSR has been analyzed from the above stated media which focuses on making a long term road map for CSR in India. The focus of Indian news media's coverage of CSR was on planning these initiatives to match the societal context of the nation and the results of CSR initiatives. Several news pieces mentioned the necessity for an effective CSR strategy in light of the new laws, even if not all of them went in-depth on the subject.

The news media advocated for a more comprehensive and long-term approach to CSR, one in which it is to synergies the business plan and CSR spending to make it more effective so that the regional disparities can be bridged in a better way, as there is a huge gap in CSR spending between southern states and 'BIMARU' states. For example, an article from CSR Journal stated –

*'With the advent of digitalization and interconnectedness, defining local areas of operations has become increasingly complex. Therefore, companies should consider the broader impact of their initiatives and avoid concentrating CSR funds in specific regions.'* (Unleashing the Potential of CSR Funds: Ministry of Corporate Affairs Calls for Enhanced Impact and Sustainability, 2023)

For long term approach, the following points has been mentioned –

*'To yield productive results, it is crucial for companies to view CSR as a long-term commitment rather than a mere compliance exercise. By adopting a strategic approach, companies can align their CSR initiatives with their business objectives and societal needs.'*

Another point highlighted by the news media is the use of CSR initiatives in social as well as environmental development. With increasing focus of the government on climate change, new field of spending has been opened for businesses to contribute. Businesses can play a role in promoting local communities, promote the government's objective of all-encompassing growth, and maximize the welfare impact on environmental related issues. The recommendations will aid in ensuring that CSR efforts result in sustainable development, improved livelihoods, and a brighter future for all concerned parties through efficient implementation and ongoing monitoring.

Following quote illustrates the role of CSR in environment conservation –

*'It is crucial to connect environment conservation initiatives with a company's broader GHG reduction strategy. Planting trees is not enough; actual reduction of the carbon footprint should be the primary goal. By making environmental initiatives an integral part of the GHG strategy, we can nudge more corporates to actively support these efforts.'* (Vengurlekar, 2023)

Another way, a business can spend on CSR on those issues which are either traditionally ignored or issues which were not considered as a field to spend for CSR. In a recent times, there were few amendments were done in CSR laws and no businesses are focusing on various issues like skill development, cultural preservation, disaster management etc.

*'Monument Mitras' will be responsible for the development, operation and maintenance of amenities and facilities of the adopted site, such as cleanliness, drinking water, accessibility, signage, lavatories, tourist multi-purpose centres, surveillance, illumination and other upkeep work. It will also take care of the site under its Corporate Social Responsibility activity.'* (Thacker, 2023)

Innovative ways are adopted in order to promote CSR by the businesses to create awareness and contribute towards better cause of the society. Following quote illustrates the role of CSR in designing innovative ways –

*'Company celebrates the festival of 'Joy of Giving' with its annual DaanUtsav initiative, where employees are encouraged to donate to fulfil small joys of underprivileged children living in child care homes.'* (Corporate Social Responsibility: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance makes 'Giving' – a way of Life through CSR initiatives, 2023)

In conclusion, the Indian news media conceptualized corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a strategic and profitable economic activity with the capacity to address a broad variety of social concerns that the country faces. The media's definition of CSR differs from the law's, which merely offers descriptive advice on how to invest in CSR pushes for a broader perspective that deviates from conventional thinking and considers what this role may entail for Indian enterprises and society.

By analyzing all 44 articles in a given period by two publication our second objective - priority topics of concern regarding corporate social responsibility for Indian news media for the coverage of are **Environment, Health, Education, Art and Culture and Skill development.**

#### **A. Environment**

Climate change is being discussed at global level, and India is enthusiastically taking part in mitigating climate change at different global organizations. Govt. has issued various guidelines related to strategize CSR spending in environment. As the role of media is to create awareness regarding climate change among the citizens, media has to focus on environmental issues and covers the topic related to CSR spending in Environmental and Social Governance (ESG). There were twelve articles were published on environment or related issues in the given time period.

#### **B. Education**

CSR related to education is the second most priority area by the media coverage in India. In the given period total of nine articles has been published related to education and related issues. Education is one of the sector which attracts the highest investments by the businesses in their CSR funds. Quality and inclusive education being the 4<sup>th</sup> goal of Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations, attracts the spending by the corporates. Govt. also encourage the firms to spend in quality education so that the set targets can be achieved.

#### **C. Health**

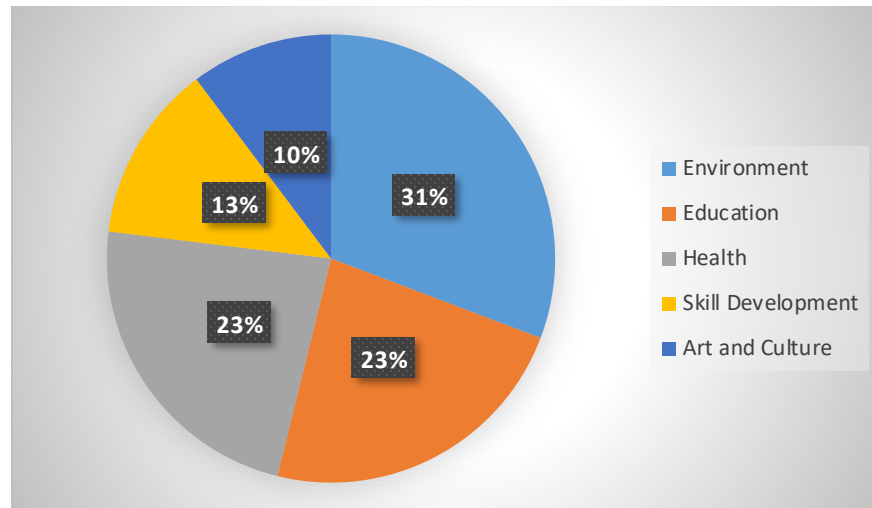
After education, health attracts the highest sum in CSR spending by the firms. Health is goal number 3 of SDG set by UN. Especially after the devastating effects of pandemic, govt. has continuously motivated the firms to invest more in health sector to upgrade the health infrastructure in the country. Total of 9 articles has been published on the issues related to health and wellness in the given period.

#### D. Employee and skill development

Corporates also invest in employee and skill development for enhancing the human resources. Total of five articles have been published in a given period which focuses on skill development. Corporates spend their CSR in upliftment of marginalized community like women, scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, poor etc. in the society.

#### E. Art and culture

Media has now started focusing on the art and culture aspect of CSR funding. Govt. has encouraged the firms to invest in the maintenance of monuments of national importance. Govt. is aiming to boost the tourism sector of India and the national monuments can play a significant role in giving a push to this sector. This is the reason that media is also giving attention to art and culture promotion and coverage of corporates who are spending their CSR funds in this sector.



**Graph 2: Priority topics covered by the Indian media related to Corporate Social Responsibility**

Regarding our third objectives - news media have a significant impact on how businesses behave, and one area where this effect may be felt is in CSR practices. Companies rely on the media to enlighten audiences who would not otherwise contact directly with them, especially when it comes to characteristics that are hard to physically witness, like CSR. The media has the ability to sway the perceptions of several stakeholders, including employees, since they serve as "vehicles for advertising and mirrors of reality reflecting firms' actions," in addition to being "active agents shaping information through editorials and feature articles." In addition, for many stakeholders, the media serve as their main source for reducing information imbalance. Businesses that receive a lot of media attention could be more concerned about how that media attention will affect their reputation and try to influence or offset that by raising their CSR spending. A company's media reputation is a crucial strategic asset, thus companies that receive more media attention may aim to attract favorable media attention by participating in CSR, which will result in "positive" news. Media has the power to influence the decision making by bringing them to public scrutiny. The media may also serve as a conscience-keeper by continually reminding businesses of the need of giving back to society and of considering factors other than profitability. The media may also be critical of the CSR initiatives that a company claims to support, and it can make sure that the company is not engaging in "green washing," which occurs when a company professes to support CSR but in fact does not.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an insight over the role of Indian news media studying the corporate social responsibility of various Indian firms, focusing on different field of investment/spending and how media can influence the spending behavior. The study's findings revealed that the two publication under examination directed a comprehensive understanding of CSR and urged corporations to look beyond the conventional boundaries of CSR spending in order to strategically incorporate this role into company strategy. This is an indication that CSR understanding is developing in a nation where charity and philanthropy have historically dominated talks about CSR. In India, CSR is moulded by both inner motivation to do what is right and extrinsic economic motivations to produce long-term value for the organization. The news media is framing CSR as a strategic, values-driven activity. The news media are important informants who draw attention to social concerns that are embedded in a society's particular sociocultural environment. However, the news media merely repeated common worldwide themes like the environment and health with localizing them, and refining CSR discourse to reflect on the reality of Indian society. Media plays a role in bringing the attention of public towards the corporates who are spending CSR for the society. Companies that receive more media attention are more likely to be concerned about their reputations and to engage more in CSR initiatives. But frequently, rather than adjustments to laws or actual behaviour, communication efforts are

made to manage public expectations. Then, we see a recursive link between companies and public scrutiny, allowing enterprises with lesser media presence to avoid being seen by the public. In recent years, there were reports has been published that CSR spending has been remain unchanged in last 2 years, and at the same time profits of these firms has been increased by many fold. These public scrutiny of business firms has added an extra pressure of proper CSR spending.

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