

## **CSR AS A CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a fundamental element in corporate communication strategies, shaping corporate reputation, brand perception, and stakeholder engagement. As consumer awareness of social and environmental issues increases, companies are compelled to integrate CSR into their strategic communication efforts. However, public skepticism toward CSR initiatives remains a challenge, particularly when CSR communication lacks transparency, authenticity, and stakeholder involvement. This study investigates how CSR functions as a corporate communication strategy and analyzes public perception of CSR initiatives, addressing the key research question: How does CSR communication influence stakeholder trust, engagement, and corporate reputation? While prior research has explored CSR communication, limited studies have systematically examined the intersection of CSR strategies, digital transformation, and public perception in a rapidly evolving corporate environment. This paper contributes to the literature by evaluating CSR communication through stakeholder-oriented frameworks, digital engagement strategies, and participatory communication models, offering a comprehensive and updated perspective on CSR effectiveness in corporate communication. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to synthesize existing research on CSR communication, stakeholder perception, and brand reputation. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and industry reports using academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The analysis was conducted using NVivo for qualitative coding and VOSviewer for bibliometric mapping, allowing for a structured and in-depth exploration of key themes and trends in CSR communication. Findings indicate that CSR communication is most effective when it is transparent, participatory, and aligned with corporate values. The study highlights the importance of storytelling, digital platforms, and two-way stakeholder engagement in enhancing CSR credibility. Additionally, the results reveal that companies integrating CSR within their core business strategies and maintaining long-term commitment experience greater consumer trust, higher engagement levels, and improved corporate legitimacy. This study concludes that CSR as a corporate communication strategy must be strategically integrated, evidence-based, and stakeholder-driven to foster trust, loyalty, and positive public perception. Companies that engage in co-creation of CSR initiatives, leverage digital communication tools, and prioritize transparency are more likely to achieve sustainable stakeholder relationships and long-term business success. The implications suggest that businesses must continuously refine their CSR communication strategies to remain credible and relevant in a socially conscious marketplace.

**KEYWORDS :** CSR Communication; Public Perception; Stakeholder Engagement; Corporate Reputation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become one of the fundamental aspects of modern business strategy, where companies are not only focused on economic profit but also contribute to social and environmental well-being. As

public awareness of social issues continues to rise, companies face increasing demands not only to pursue profitability but also to operate ethically and responsibly (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2020). CSR is no longer seen merely as an act of philanthropy but has evolved into a business strategy with a significant impact on shaping corporate image and reputation. In other words, CSR has become a crucial element of corporate communication strategy, aiming to build positive relationships with stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and the community.

In the context of corporate communication, CSR serves as a tool for companies to shape public perception regarding their values, commitment, and integrity (Yasir et al., 2022). Various forms of CSR implementation, such as environmental programs, community welfare initiatives, education, and business ethics, are key factors in strengthening the relationship between companies and society. In the digital era, companies are increasingly utilizing various communication platforms, such as social media, websites, and sustainability reports, to communicate their CSR programs. However, the effectiveness of CSR communication strategies heavily depends on how the public perceives and responds to the messages conveyed by companies. Therefore, it is essential to analyze public perception of CSR as a corporate communication strategy to understand the extent to which these initiatives can foster trust, loyalty, and corporate reputation in the eyes of society (Vasquez, 2022).

Although CSR has become an integral part of corporate communication strategy, various challenges remain in ensuring that these programs are understood and positively received by the public. Some companies face public skepticism toward their CSR initiatives, especially when they are perceived as mere marketing tools or strategies to mask the negative impacts of their business operations (Schaefer et al., 2020). This phenomenon can be observed across various industries, where the public tends to be more critical of companies with a controversial track record in areas such as environmental impact, labor practices, or unethical business conduct. In some cases, CSR programs that lack transparency and consistency can even lead to negative perceptions, ultimately harming the company's reputation.

The way companies communicate their CSR efforts also influences public perception. Excessive or overly aggressive promotion of CSR initiatives often leads to skepticism among the public. Conversely, companies that successfully integrate CSR authentically and consistently into their business operations tend to receive a more positive response. This phenomenon highlights that CSR as a corporate communication strategy is not merely about launching social programs but also about how companies communicate their intentions, objectives, and the impact of these initiatives to the public. Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of how society perceives CSR can help companies design more effective communication strategies and build stronger relationships with stakeholders.

The phenomenon of public skepticism toward CSR is supported by various studies showing that many consumers still doubt the authenticity of corporate CSR programs. A study conducted by (Cheng et al., 2024) revealed that only 47% of respondents genuinely believe that companies implement CSR with sincere intentions, while the rest perceive CSR as merely a marketing tool or a form of "greenwashing." Another report by (Tworzydło et al., 2021) found that while 66% of global consumers are willing to pay more for products and services from companies committed to sustainability and social responsibility, only 37% believe that companies are truly transparent in their CSR implementation. These statistics highlight a gap between corporate intentions in implementing CSR and public perception of these initiatives. Therefore, further analysis is needed on how CSR is communicated to the public and how effective communication strategies can enhance public acceptance and trust in these initiatives.

In corporate communication studies, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is understood as part of a public relations (PR) strategy aimed at building corporate image and reputation. According to organizational communication theory, the success of CSR is highly influenced by the effectiveness of a company's communication efforts (Dalla-Pria & Rodríguez-de-Dios, 2022). In this context, the Stakeholder Engagement Theory emphasizes the importance of two-way communication between companies and society, where stakeholders play an active role in assessing and providing feedback on CSR programs. Additionally, the Corporate Social Legitimacy Theory explains that companies seeking social legitimacy must demonstrate that their business activities align with societal values and expectations.

One of the key aspects of CSR communication is the use of various media channels to deliver messages to the public. In the digital era, social media has become a primary tool for disseminating information about CSR initiatives. Previous research indicates that companies that actively engage with the public through social media tend to achieve higher levels of audience engagement (Boukes & LaMarre, 2021). Moreover, storytelling—or crafting narratives that illustrate the real impact of CSR programs—has proven to be an effective strategy in building emotional connections with audiences. However, while digital media offers numerous opportunities, CSR communication must also be conducted authentically and consistently to avoid creating a perception of manipulation among the public.

CSR also has a significant impact on customer loyalty and brand image. A study by (Jiang et al., 2022) found that 89% of consumers are more likely to purchase products from companies they perceive as having a strong social commitment. Additionally, 76% of respondents stated that they would refuse to buy from companies that do not show concern for social and environmental issues. This data highlights that CSR is not just a corporate communication strategy but can also be a key determinant in consumer decision-making and corporate sustainability. Therefore, a deep understanding of public perception of

CSR is essential for companies in designing more effective and impactful communication strategies.

One theory relevant to this research is the Stakeholder Theory, developed by R. Edward Freeman in 1984. This theory emphasizes that a company's success is not solely determined by the interests of shareholders but also by various stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, governments, and the environment. In the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy, Stakeholder Theory suggests that companies must actively engage with their stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations while communicating their social commitments in an authentic and transparent manner (Knebel & Seele, 2020). If CSR is implemented with a stakeholder-based approach, companies can enhance their positive image, trust, and public loyalty toward their brand. This theory also highlights the importance of two-way communication in building sustainable relationships between companies and society.

Based on the background outlined, this study aims to analyze how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is utilized as a corporate communication strategy and how the public perceives CSR initiatives implemented by companies. Specifically, this research will explore the effectiveness of CSR communication in building corporate image, identify the factors influencing public perception of CSR, and evaluate the impact of CSR on trust levels and customer loyalty. By understanding the dynamics between CSR communication and public perception, this study is expected to provide valuable insights for companies in developing more effective, authentic, and impactful communication strategies that benefit both society and the long-term sustainability of their business.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

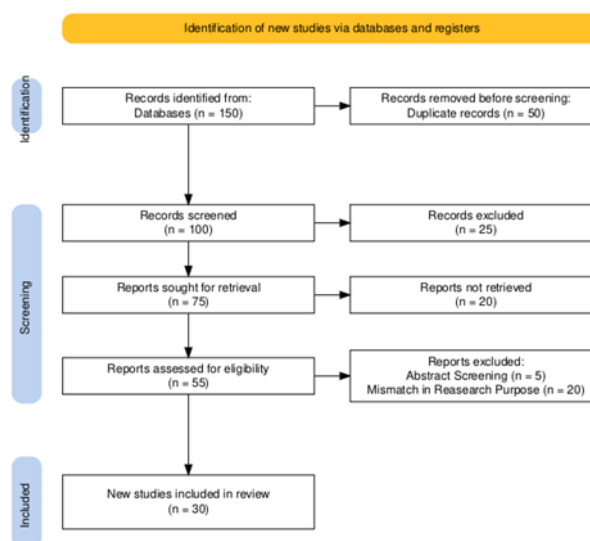
### **Research Type**

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to analyze how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is used as a corporate communication strategy and how the public perceives CSR initiatives implemented by companies (J. Creswell, 2016). The SLR method was chosen because it allows for a systematic collection, evaluation, and synthesis of previous research findings to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between CSR and corporate communication strategies (Muhammad Umam Mubarak, Maheni Ika Sari, Yohanes Gunawan Wibowo, 2025). The SLR process follows rigorous steps, including formulating research questions, conducting a literature search using reputable academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, selecting articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analyzing data from relevant studies. The studies included in this research consist of scholarly journals, conference proceedings, and industry reports that discuss the implementation of CSR in corporate communication strategies, the effectiveness of CSR

communication, and its impact on corporate image and public trust (J. Creswell, 2017).

For the analysis process, this study applies a thematic analysis approach to identify key patterns emerging from the reviewed studies. Several aspects are analyzed, including the most effective CSR communication methods, factors influencing public perception of CSR, and the impact of CSR communication on corporate reputation and customer loyalty. The data obtained from various sources are then compared and synthesized to generate evidence-based conclusions. By utilizing the SLR method, this study provides broader insights into current trends and best practices in CSR communication, helping companies design more authentic, effective, and impactful communication strategies for society and other stakeholders.

### PRISMA Table



**Figure 1. PRISMA Table**

Figure 1 presents a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram, which illustrates the systematic selection process of studies included in the review. The identification phase began with 150 records retrieved from databases, with 50 duplicate records removed before screening. After screening 100 records, 25 studies were excluded, leading to 75 reports sought for retrieval. However, 20 reports were not retrieved, leaving 55 reports for eligibility assessment. In this phase, 25 reports were excluded due to abstract screening (5 reports) and mismatch in research purpose (20 reports). Ultimately, 30 new studies were included in the final review. This structured process ensures a transparent and rigorous selection of relevant literature, minimizing bias and enhancing the credibility of the systematic review (Haddaway et al., 2022).

### **Tools**

In this study, NVivo and VOSviewer are utilized as essential tools for data analysis and visualization. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, is used to systematically code, categorize, and analyze textual data from the selected studies, enabling deeper insights into themes and patterns related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy. This tool helps in managing large volumes of qualitative data, ensuring a structured and efficient analytical process. Meanwhile, VOSviewer, a bibliometric analysis tool, is employed to visualize relationships among key concepts, authors, and keywords within the collected literature. Through co-occurrence network mapping, VOSviewer identifies trends and research gaps in CSR communication, providing a comprehensive overview of existing studies. The integration of NVivo and VOSviewer enhances the systematic review process by combining qualitative and bibliometric analysis, allowing for a more thorough and data-driven interpretation of the research findings.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection procedure in this study follows a systematic approach to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The process begins with identifying relevant literature from reputable academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using specific keywords related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy (J. W. Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The search is refined through inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and industry reports published within a specified timeframe. After gathering the initial dataset, duplicate records are removed, and the remaining studies undergo a screening process based on abstract and full-text reviews to ensure alignment with the research objectives. The selected articles are then imported into NVivo for qualitative coding and VOSviewer for bibliometric mapping, allowing for in-depth thematic analysis and visualization of key trends. This structured approach ensures that only highly relevant and credible sources are included in the study, enhancing the robustness of the systematic literature review.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this study is conducted using a combination of qualitative coding and bibliometric analysis to extract meaningful insights from the collected literature. NVivo is used to systematically code and categorize qualitative data, allowing for the identification of key themes, patterns, and relationships related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy. This tool helps in organizing large volumes of textual data and performing content analysis to highlight recurring topics in CSR communication. Simultaneously, VOSviewer is employed to conduct a bibliometric analysis, mapping co-occurrences of keywords, author collaborations, and citation networks to visualize

research trends and knowledge structures in the field. The integration of these tools enables a comprehensive analysis, where qualitative insights are supported by quantitative data visualization, ensuring a structured, systematic, and evidence-based interpretation of the literature. This approach enhances the reliability of the findings, providing a clear understanding of how CSR is communicated and perceived by stakeholders.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this systematic literature review highlight various perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy and how public perception plays a crucial role in determining its effectiveness. According to a study by (Chen et al., 2021), CSR communication significantly influences corporate reputation, brand image, and consumer trust. Their research emphasizes that the way companies communicate their CSR initiatives determines whether the public perceives them as genuine or as a mere marketing strategy. The study found that companies that integrate proactive, transparent, and stakeholder-oriented CSR communication experience higher levels of consumer engagement and loyalty. Moreover, the study suggests that companies should use two-way communication channels, such as social media, to foster interaction and receive feedback from stakeholders, rather than solely relying on traditional corporate reports. (Edith Ebele Agu et al., 2024) support this argument by demonstrating that CSR communication that aligns with a company's core values and long-term business strategy results in a more authentic and credible brand perception. Their research found that companies that integrate CSR into their overall corporate identity rather than treating it as an add-on activity gain stronger public trust and long-term customer retention.

Another study by (Bhagat, 2024) explores how CSR communication influences consumer decision-making, highlighting that consumers tend to be skeptical of CSR claims that lack transparency and credibility. Their research found that companies that provide concrete evidence of their CSR impact—such as third-party certifications, sustainability reports, and real-life case studies—are more likely to gain consumer trust and positive public perception. Furthermore, they argue that greenwashing (false or exaggerated CSR claims) has the potential to harm a company's reputation rather than improve it. This aligns with the findings of (Wanjue, 2023), who emphasize that a successful CSR communication strategy requires a balance between informing the public and engaging them in a dialogue. Their study introduces the “Stakeholder Involvement Model”, which suggests that companies should co-create CSR initiatives with stakeholders rather than simply broadcasting their efforts. They found that when consumers, employees, and communities actively participate in shaping CSR initiatives, they perceive the company's efforts as more genuine and impactful. Both studies reinforce the idea that CSR communication must be transparent, participatory, and aligned with corporate values to be effective in building a positive public perception.

Additionally, research conducted by (Ayada & Abuelela, 2023) suggests that emotional appeal and storytelling are powerful tools in CSR communication. Their study found that companies that use compelling narratives and real human experiences in their CSR campaigns are more likely to evoke emotional responses and increase audience engagement. This finding is consistent with (Arceneaux, 2024), who argue that storytelling enhances corporate legitimacy by making CSR initiatives feel more relatable and authentic to the public. Their research further suggests that social media platforms provide an opportunity for companies to engage in interactive storytelling, where consumers can share their own experiences with CSR initiatives, thereby strengthening the overall impact and credibility of the communication strategy. Both studies highlight the importance of using personalized and emotionally-driven communication strategies to foster a deeper connection with stakeholders and build long-term trust.

Furthermore, a study by (Viererbl & Koch, 2022) found that the effectiveness of CSR communication also depends on the type of CSR activity being communicated. Their research categorized CSR initiatives into philanthropic, ethical, legal, and economic CSR, and found that ethical and environmental CSR programs tend to be perceived more positively by consumers than purely philanthropic efforts. They argue that while charitable donations and sponsorships are important, consumers expect companies to go beyond philanthropy and integrate CSR into core business practices. This finding is supported by (Waymer et al., 2022), who found that CSR communication is more effective when it is consistent, long-term, and deeply embedded in corporate culture rather than being conducted as a one-time campaign. Their study emphasizes that consumers prefer companies that show a genuine and ongoing commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, rather than those that engage in occasional CSR initiatives for public relations purposes.

Collectively, these studies suggest that CSR as a corporate communication strategy must be transparent, authentic, and interactive to shape positive public perception. Companies that actively engage stakeholders, provide verifiable CSR impact, align CSR initiatives with corporate values, and utilize emotional storytelling techniques are more likely to build trust, loyalty, and long-term brand credibility. On the other hand, CSR communication that appears insincere, inconsistent, or overly promotional can lead to public skepticism and reputational risks. These findings underscore the critical role of strategic and well-structured CSR communication in fostering strong relationships between companies and their stakeholders while enhancing both corporate reputation and business sustainability.

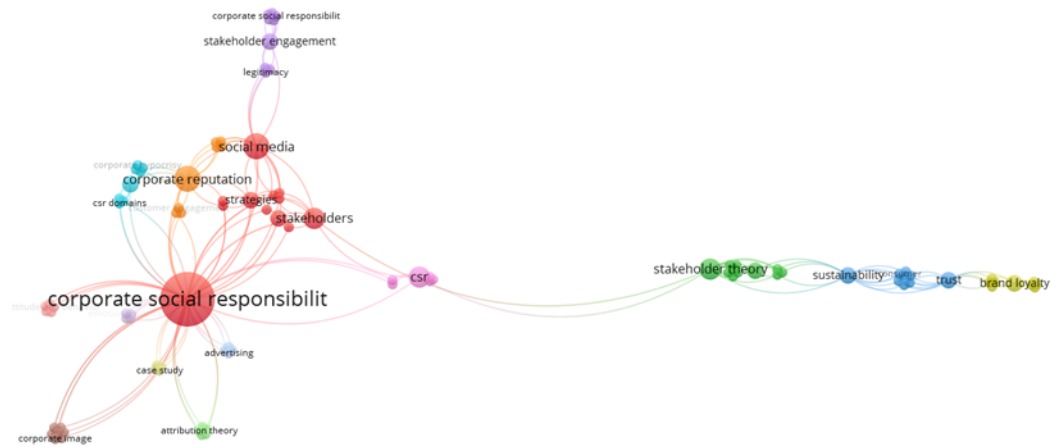
**Table 1.** Key Findings from Reviewed Literature

| No | Author(s)   | Year | Study Focus                      | Key Findings                             | Moderating Factors                   | Geographic Context |
|----|-------------|------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1  | Chen et al. | 2021 | CSR communication and its impact | Transparent, proactive, and stakeholder- | Transparency, stakeholder engagement | Global             |

|   |                        |      |                                                                 |                                                                                                                                 |                                                    |        |
|---|------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------|
|   |                        |      | on corporate reputation, brand image, and consumer trust        | oriented CSR communication increases consumer engagement and loyalty.                                                           |                                                    |        |
| 2 | Edith Ebele Agu et al. | 2024 | Integration of CSR with corporate values and long-term strategy | CSR aligned with corporate identity gains stronger public trust and long-term customer retention.                               | Authenticity, alignment with core business values  | Global |
| 3 | Bhagat                 | 2024 | CSR communication and consumer decision-making                  | Consumers are skeptical of CSR claims lacking transparency; providing concrete evidence (certifications, reports) builds trust. | Transparency, credibility, evidence-based claims   | Global |
| 4 | Wanjue                 | 2023 | Stakeholder Involvement Model in CSR communication              | Co-creating CSR initiatives with stakeholders increases authenticity and positive public perception.                            | Stakeholder participation, two-way communication   | Global |
| 5 | Ayada & Abuelela       | 2023 | Emotional appeal and storytelling in CSR communication          | Compelling narratives and real human experiences evoke emotional responses and enhance audience engagement.                     | Emotional connection, personalization              | Global |
| 6 | Arceneaux              | 2024 | Storytelling and corporate legitimacy in CSR communication      | Storytelling makes CSR initiatives more relatable and credible, strengthening corporate legitimacy.                             | Relatability, consumer engagement via social media | Global |
| 7 | Viererbl & Koch        | 2022 | Effectiveness of different                                      | Ethical and environmental                                                                                                       | CSR type (ethical,                                 | Global |

|   |                  |      |                                                                       |                                                                                                                                  |                                                      |        |
|---|------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------|
|   |                  |      | CSR activities<br>(philanthropic,<br>ethical, legal,<br>and economic) | CSR programs<br>are more<br>positively<br>perceived than<br>purely<br>philanthropic<br>efforts.                                  | philanthropic,<br>economic,<br>legal)                |        |
| 8 | Waymer et<br>al. | 2022 | CSR<br>communication<br>and corporate<br>culture<br>integration       | CSR<br>communication<br>is more<br>effective when<br>it is consistent,<br>long-term, and<br>embedded in<br>corporate<br>culture. | Long-term<br>commitment,<br>corporate<br>consistency | Global |

The findings presented in Table 1 highlight the diverse perspectives and critical insights from prior research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy. The results consistently indicate that CSR communication plays a crucial role in shaping corporate reputation, brand perception, and stakeholder trust. Studies such as Chen et al. (2021) and Edith Ebele Agu et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of transparent, stakeholder-oriented, and value-aligned CSR communication in increasing consumer engagement and fostering long-term loyalty. Meanwhile, Bhagat (2024) underscores the public's skepticism toward CSR claims that lack credibility, highlighting the necessity for companies to provide concrete evidence of CSR efforts, such as third-party certifications, sustainability reports, and real-life case studies. The role of stakeholder participation in CSR communication is further explored by Wanjue (2023) through the Stakeholder Involvement Model, which argues that co-creation and two-way communication enhance authenticity and public trust. Additionally, research by Ayada & Abuelela (2023) and Arceneaux (2024) demonstrates the power of emotional appeal and storytelling in CSR communication, revealing that compelling narratives and personalized experiences resonate deeply with audiences, fostering stronger emotional connections and corporate legitimacy. The effectiveness of different CSR activities is examined by Viererbl & Koch (2022), who found that ethical and environmental CSR programs generate more positive public responses compared to purely philanthropic efforts, reinforcing the importance of aligning CSR initiatives with sustainability and ethical business practices. Furthermore, Waymer et al. (2022) highlight that CSR communication is most effective when it is consistent, long-term, and deeply embedded in corporate culture, rather than being implemented as an occasional public relations effort. Collectively, these studies underscore the multifaceted nature of CSR communication and emphasize the necessity for strategic, transparent, and stakeholder-inclusive approaches to maximize the positive impact on corporate reputation, brand equity, and consumer trust in a global context.



**Figure 2.** VOSviewer Analysis

Figure 2 presents a VOSviewer network visualization of key terms associated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy. The visualization reveals the interconnections between core themes, indicating clusters of research focus areas. The central node, "corporate social responsibility", is the most dominant term, reflecting its fundamental role in the overall discussion. Surrounding this node are key concepts such as "corporate reputation," "stakeholders," and "social media," highlighting the importance of CSR in shaping public perception and stakeholder engagement. The network also links CSR to "corporate image," "advertising," and "case study," suggesting that CSR communication strategies significantly impact corporate branding and marketing efforts. Additionally, a separate cluster connects "CSR" to "stakeholder theory," "sustainability," "trust," and "brand loyalty," indicating that CSR effectiveness is often assessed through stakeholder relationships, ethical commitments, and long-term consumer trust. The presence of "attribution theory" suggests an academic interest in understanding how consumers attribute motives to CSR initiatives, further emphasizing the need for authentic and transparent CSR communication. This analysis underscores that CSR is not just a corporate obligation but a strategic communication tool that enhances corporate reputation, stakeholder trust, and brand sustainability.

The findings from the systematic literature review align closely with Stakeholder Theory, developed by R. Edward Freeman (1984), which emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders in corporate decision-making, including CSR initiatives. The reviewed studies demonstrate that companies that adopt a stakeholder-oriented CSR communication strategy are more likely to gain public trust, brand loyalty, and corporate legitimacy (Freeman et al., 2021). The research by (Awa et al., 2024) highlights how transparent and proactive

CSR communication enhances a company's reputation by fostering stronger stakeholder relationships. This aligns with (Chowdhury et al., 2024) Stakeholder Involvement Model, which suggests that CSR should not be merely a corporate broadcast but should actively engage stakeholders in a two-way communication process. The engagement of consumers, employees, and communities in CSR initiatives enhances authenticity, making the company's commitment more credible in the eyes of the public. Additionally, the research by (Maccarrone & Contri, 2021) further supports the idea that CSR communication should be an integral part of corporate values, rather than a secondary marketing tool, reinforcing the core principles of Stakeholder Theory. These findings indicate that companies that fail to integrate stakeholder perspectives into their CSR communication risk being perceived as insincere or engaging in greenwashing, which can damage their reputation rather than enhance it.

Furthermore, the bibliometric and thematic analyses conducted using NVivo and VOSviewer show that key themes in CSR communication—such as transparency, emotional storytelling, and stakeholder engagement—are directly connected to stakeholder expectations. The research by (Meintjes, 2023), which emphasizes the role of emotional appeal and storytelling in CSR, resonates with Stakeholder Theory's premise that communication must be meaningful and relatable to different stakeholder groups. Studies by (Siltaloppi et al., 2021) reveal that the effectiveness of CSR communication depends on its alignment with stakeholder expectations and its integration into long-term corporate strategy. The moderating factors identified in these studies, such as company size, industry type, and CSR program authenticity, further validate the need for tailored stakeholder engagement strategies. When companies prioritize stakeholder perspectives in CSR communication, they foster deeper trust, increase stakeholder buy-in, and enhance their corporate sustainability efforts. These results underscore the practical application of Stakeholder Theory, reaffirming that CSR must be strategically embedded within corporate communication frameworks to maximize its impact on public perception and stakeholder relationships.

## DISCUSSION

### **The Role of CSR in Corporate Communication Strategy**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an essential component of corporate communication strategy in the modern business environment. No longer merely a philanthropic endeavor, CSR has evolved into a strategic tool that strengthens brand image, enhances corporate reputation, and fosters stronger relationships with stakeholders. In an increasingly competitive market, businesses recognize that social and environmental responsibility not only enhances public trust but also contributes to long-term business sustainability. Therefore, CSR communication must be conducted effectively, strategically, and aligned with corporate values to generate positive and lasting impact.

One of the primary roles of CSR in corporate communication strategy is to build credibility and trust among stakeholders (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2020). Today's consumers are

more critical in assessing corporate commitments to social responsibility. They evaluate not only the products and services offered but also how businesses contribute to society and the environment. Companies that communicate their CSR initiatives with transparency and integrity are more likely to gain public support. Effective CSR communication fosters consumer trust, which ultimately strengthens customer loyalty and expands the company's market presence.

Beyond building trust, CSR plays a crucial role in brand differentiation. In an oversaturated market, businesses must establish a competitive advantage that sets them apart from rivals. Well-executed CSR initiatives and communication can serve as a strong differentiator. Consumers tend to prefer brands that actively engage in social and environmental causes. Thus, businesses that effectively implement and communicate CSR programs can secure a stronger market position and enhance their brand appeal.

CSR also enhances relationships with internal stakeholders, including employees and business partners. Employees working for socially responsible companies tend to be more motivated and take pride in their workplace. Internal CSR communication fosters employee engagement, strengthens corporate culture, and improves productivity. Additionally, business partners, such as suppliers and distributors, are more likely to collaborate with companies that uphold strong ethical values. Consequently, CSR contributes not only to external communication but also to internal dynamics that drive overall organizational performance (Troise & Camilleri, 2021).

A well-structured CSR communication strategy also helps mitigate reputational risks. In the digital age, information spreads rapidly, and companies that fail to communicate CSR efforts transparently may face public distrust. A strategic CSR communication plan enables businesses to proactively address potential issues that could damage their image. Open communication with the public through social media, sustainability reports, and direct community engagement helps companies avoid criticism and reinforce their reputation in the eyes of consumers.

The importance of two-way communication in CSR strategy cannot be overlooked. Interactive communication approaches allow companies to not only convey their messages but also receive valuable feedback from the public. By involving stakeholders in the planning and execution of CSR initiatives, businesses ensure that their efforts are genuinely relevant and impactful. This strategy also increases public engagement and strengthens corporate-community relationships. Moreover, digitalization has transformed the way companies communicate their CSR efforts. With the rise of social media and digital platforms, businesses have greater opportunities to reach broader audiences with their CSR initiatives (Vogler & Eisenegger, 2021). Digital content such as videos, infographics, and interactive articles have a more substantial impact than traditional, lengthy sustainability reports. By leveraging innovative digital communication strategies, businesses can raise public awareness of their CSR programs and amplify their positive impact.

CSR also serves as an effective communication tool in building relationships with governments and regulators. Governments often provide incentives to businesses actively engaged in social responsibility programs, such as tax benefits, regulatory ease, and collaboration opportunities in sustainable development projects. A well-communicated CSR strategy helps companies demonstrate their commitment to regulations and public policies, thereby strengthening their relationships with governing authorities and fostering a more stable business environment. The success of CSR communication also depends on the authenticity and consistency of the messages conveyed. Companies must ensure that their CSR initiatives are rooted in genuine commitment rather than mere marketing tactics.

The public can quickly identify companies that implement CSR purely as a formality or as a strategy for media attention. Therefore, companies must ensure that their CSR communication is backed by tangible actions with measurable impact.

Storytelling approaches in CSR communication have become increasingly popular as a way to convey messages in a more emotional and relatable manner. By sharing real-life stories about how CSR programs have positively impacted communities or the environment, businesses can create a stronger emotional connection with their audiences. This approach enhances communication effectiveness by making CSR initiatives more memorable and engaging compared to technical or overly formal reports. In the context of globalization, businesses operating in multiple countries must adapt their CSR communication strategies to local cultures and values. A successful CSR strategy in one country may not have the same impact in another. Therefore, businesses must understand the unique needs and expectations of communities in different regions to ensure that their CSR communication is effective and relevant. A localized approach fosters stronger relationships with local communities and enhances the sustainability of CSR programs (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021).

The success of CSR as a corporate communication strategy can also be measured through various indicators, such as increased customer loyalty, brand growth, and the social and environmental impact achieved. Companies that regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their CSR communication strategies can continuously refine their approaches, ensuring that their programs generate the best possible outcomes for all stakeholders. With increasing public awareness of social and environmental issues, CSR is no longer an optional initiative for businesses—it is a necessity. Companies that successfully integrate CSR into their communication strategies not only benefit from enhanced reputation and public trust but also contribute to meaningful and sustainable social impact. Therefore, CSR should be continuously developed as a corporate communication strategy that supports business objectives while also promoting the well-being of society and the environment.

### **Public Perception and Engagement in CSR Communication**

Public perception plays a critical role in determining the success of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication strategies. In today's global business landscape, where consumers are becoming more informed and socially conscious, the way companies communicate their CSR initiatives significantly influences their corporate reputation, customer loyalty, and stakeholder trust. CSR is no longer viewed as an optional effort but as a necessity for businesses seeking long-term sustainability. However, the effectiveness of CSR communication depends on how well the public perceives these initiatives and the level of engagement companies foster with their stakeholders. Public perception of CSR initiatives is shaped by various factors, including the authenticity, transparency, and consistency of corporate messaging (Schaefer et al., 2020). Consumers and stakeholders tend to support companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to social and environmental causes rather than those that merely use CSR as a branding tool. This shift in consumer behavior reflects a broader societal trend where people increasingly demand accountability from corporations.

As more consumers align their purchasing decisions with ethical considerations, businesses must ensure that their CSR communication resonates with their audience. If companies fail to communicate their CSR efforts effectively, they risk facing public skepticism or accusations of greenwashing, which can severely damage their reputation. Greenwashing occurs when companies exaggerate or falsely claim their CSR efforts,

leading to consumer distrust and potential backlash. Therefore, companies must be careful to align their CSR communication with tangible actions and measurable impacts to gain public trust.

One of the key elements in shaping positive public perception is transparency. Companies that openly share their CSR objectives, progress, and challenges are more likely to be viewed as credible and trustworthy. Transparency in CSR communication involves publishing sustainability reports, third-party certifications, and independent audits to validate corporate claims. Many businesses now incorporate real-time reporting and data visualization into their CSR strategies to provide stakeholders with direct access to relevant information. Transparency also involves admitting shortcomings and areas for improvement. Companies that acknowledge their limitations and outline concrete steps to address social and environmental issues are often perceived more favorably than those that only highlight their successes. Honesty in communication fosters credibility, reinforcing the company's commitment to long-term CSR initiatives rather than short-term publicity gains.

Furthermore, credibility is enhanced through external endorsements. Partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and sustainability experts adds legitimacy to CSR initiatives. These collaborations help companies validate their efforts while also leveraging expert knowledge to improve their impact. When businesses engage with respected external stakeholders, they demonstrate a commitment to genuine progress rather than self-promotion. Beyond perception, active engagement plays a crucial role in CSR communication. Companies that successfully involve consumers in their CSR efforts benefit from higher brand loyalty, increased awareness, and stronger community relationships. Engaging consumers in CSR initiatives allows them to experience the impact firsthand, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and shared values. There are several ways companies can enhance consumer participation in CSR efforts (Jiang et al., 2022) :

1. **Interactive Campaigns:** Businesses can create social media challenges, interactive surveys, and digital storytelling initiatives to involve consumers in CSR projects. Encouraging consumers to share their experiences, provide feedback, and contribute to social causes amplifies the impact of CSR communication.
2. **Cause-Related Marketing:** This strategy links CSR efforts to consumer purchases, where a portion of sales revenue is donated to a specific social or environmental cause. Consumers feel a direct sense of contribution, making CSR efforts more tangible and personal.
3. **Community-Based Programs:** Companies that organize volunteer initiatives, charity events, or local sustainability projects provide consumers with opportunities to engage with CSR beyond transactional interactions. This deepens their emotional connection to the brand and its values.
4. **Co-Creation of CSR Initiatives:** Involving consumers in the design and implementation of CSR programs makes them feel valued as stakeholders rather than passive recipients. Businesses that crowdsource ideas for social impact projects or allow customers to vote on CSR priorities foster greater inclusivity and engagement.

CSR communication is most effective when it is relatable, emotionally engaging, and human-centered. Storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses to convey their CSR initiatives in a compelling manner. Rather than relying on statistical data alone, companies can use narratives that highlight real-life stories of individuals and communities positively impacted by CSR efforts. A well-crafted CSR story should include (Troise & Camilleri, 2021):

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1. A clear protagonist (e.g., a community member, an employee, or an environmental advocate)
2. A meaningful challenge or issue that aligns with the company's CSR focus
3. A resolution showcasing the tangible impact of CSR efforts

Storytelling enhances corporate authenticity because it allows audiences to connect emotionally with CSR initiatives rather than perceiving them as corporate obligations. Video documentaries, blog features, and user-generated content are common mediums used by companies to share compelling CSR stories. Additionally, leveraging social media influencers and brand ambassadors to tell CSR stories increases engagement. Influencers who genuinely support a company's CSR initiatives can expand reach and credibility by sharing personal experiences and perspectives on corporate sustainability efforts. Despite the numerous benefits of CSR communication, companies face several challenges in managing public perception and encouraging meaningful engagement (Pizzi et al., 2021).

1. **Overcoming Skepticism:** Many consumers remain skeptical about corporate motives behind CSR initiatives. Companies must work continuously to prove their commitment through action rather than just communication.
2. **Avoiding Over-Promotion:** Excessive self-promotion of CSR initiatives can backfire, as it may be perceived as insincere or manipulative. Companies must strike a balance between sharing their CSR efforts and letting stakeholders validate their impact.
3. **Maintaining Consistency Across Platforms:** In the digital era, CSR communication must be coherent across multiple channels, including corporate websites, social media, press releases, and sustainability reports. Discrepancies in messaging can create confusion and reduce credibility.
4. **Ensuring CSR Programs Align with Core Business Values:** CSR initiatives that feel disconnected from a company's primary business operations are often viewed as performative rather than authentic. Businesses must integrate CSR into their corporate identity to build stronger credibility.
5. **Measuring Impact Effectively:** Demonstrating the success of CSR initiatives requires clear metrics and measurable outcomes. Companies must invest in impact assessment tools and independent evaluations to validate their CSR efforts.

As consumer expectations continue to evolve, CSR communication strategies must adapt to remain effective. The future of CSR engagement will likely involve (Parray et al., 2024):

1. Greater reliance on AI and data analytics to personalize CSR messaging and tailor initiatives to consumer preferences.
2. Enhanced use of blockchain technology to improve transparency and traceability of CSR-related donations and sustainability claims.
3. More interactive and immersive experiences, such as virtual reality (VR) storytelling and gamification, to engage audiences in corporate sustainability efforts.
4. Stronger partnerships between businesses, governments, and civil society to create large-scale social impact programs that extend beyond corporate self-interest.

To remain credible, relevant, and impactful, businesses must continuously innovate their CSR communication strategies and prioritize long-term stakeholder relationships over short-term marketing gains.

Public perception and engagement are integral to the success of CSR communication. Consumers are more socially conscious and demand greater

transparency from corporations. Companies that effectively communicate their CSR initiatives in an authentic, engaging, and interactive manner build stronger brand loyalty, trust, and long-term stakeholder relationships. However, CSR communication is not just about broadcasting corporate achievements; it requires active participation, credible storytelling, and consistent messaging to create meaningful impact. As CSR communication continues to evolve, businesses must embrace innovative, transparent, and stakeholder-driven approaches to enhance public trust and engagement in their sustainability efforts.

### **Limitations and Cautions**

Despite the increasing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication in building corporate reputation and stakeholder trust, there are several limitations and risks associated with its implementation. One of the most significant challenges is the issue of authenticity. Many companies engage in CSR initiatives primarily for branding or public relations purposes rather than out of genuine concern for social and environmental issues. This leads to skepticism among consumers, who are increasingly adept at detecting insincere efforts. When companies fail to align their CSR communication with real, measurable impact, they risk being perceived as engaging in greenwashing—a practice where businesses exaggerate or fabricate their sustainability claims. Greenwashing not only erodes public trust but can also lead to regulatory scrutiny, legal consequences, and long-term reputational damage. Therefore, businesses must ensure that CSR communication is supported by tangible actions, with clear, verifiable evidence of impact rather than superficial claims.

Another limitation of CSR communication is the challenge of measuring and demonstrating impact effectively. Unlike financial performance, which is quantified through revenue and profit margins, CSR outcomes are often qualitative and long-term, making them difficult to assess and communicate clearly. Many companies struggle with selecting appropriate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can effectively measure the success of their CSR initiatives. While some companies publish annual sustainability reports, these documents often contain highly curated content that emphasizes achievements while downplaying challenges. This selective disclosure can further contribute to skepticism among stakeholders. Additionally, the lack of universal standards for CSR reporting makes it difficult to compare corporate efforts across industries and regions. To overcome these challenges, companies must adopt transparent, standardized impact measurement frameworks that provide a balanced view of both successes and areas for improvement. Independent third-party audits and certifications can also enhance credibility by ensuring that CSR claims are objectively validated.

Another caution in CSR communication is the risk of cultural and regional misalignment. Companies that operate in multiple countries must recognize that CSR expectations and priorities vary significantly across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. A CSR initiative that is well-received in one country may be perceived as irrelevant or even offensive in another. For instance, an

environmental sustainability program focused on carbon footprint reduction may resonate with consumers in developed nations but may not be a priority in developing economies where poverty alleviation and job creation are more pressing concerns. Similarly, cultural norms and values influence how different communities perceive corporate engagement in social issues. If a company imposes a one-size-fits-all CSR strategy without considering local nuances, it risks alienating its target audience and failing to create meaningful impact. To mitigate this risk, businesses must engage local stakeholders, conduct thorough cultural assessments, and customize CSR initiatives to reflect regional priorities and expectations.

Finally, businesses must exercise caution in balancing CSR communication with overall corporate messaging to avoid overwhelming or confusing stakeholders. While CSR is an essential aspect of corporate identity, excessive promotion of sustainability efforts can overshadow the core business mission and value proposition. Some companies make the mistake of prioritizing CSR communication to such an extent that their actual products, services, or competitive advantages take a backseat. This can lead to consumer fatigue, where audiences become desensitized to CSR messaging and begin to question whether a company is genuinely committed to sustainability or merely using it as a marketing tactic. Furthermore, CSR messages that are overly complex, technical, or filled with corporate jargon can fail to resonate with the intended audience. Companies must ensure that CSR communication is integrated naturally into their broader brand narrative, with clear, concise, and relatable messaging that effectively highlights both business value and social impact. Finding this balance is key to ensuring that CSR communication remains impactful, credible, and aligned with corporate objectives.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy should focus on understanding the long-term impact of CSR communication on consumer loyalty, stakeholder engagement, and corporate reputation. Many existing studies primarily examine the immediate effects of CSR campaigns, but there is still a lack of longitudinal research that evaluates how different CSR communication strategies influence public trust and brand perception over time. Future studies could explore the persistence of CSR communication effects by examining how consistent and transparent messaging strengthens or weakens stakeholder relationships in the long run. Additionally, further research should investigate the effectiveness of different CSR communication channels, such as social media, corporate websites, sustainability reports, and influencer partnerships, to determine which medium fosters the highest level of engagement and credibility among stakeholders. Understanding these dynamics will help organizations refine their communication strategies and ensure that CSR initiatives create meaningful and lasting impact rather than being perceived as short-term public relations tactics.

Another important avenue for future research is the role of digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) in CSR communication. As businesses increasingly integrate big data, sentiment analysis, chatbots, and AI-driven personalization into their communication strategies, it is essential to assess how these technologies impact stakeholder trust and engagement with CSR initiatives. Future studies could explore how blockchain technology enhances transparency in CSR reporting, how AI-powered chatbots influence consumer perception of CSR efforts, or how automated CSR messaging affects corporate credibility. Furthermore, research should expand to cross-cultural and cross-regional analyses to understand how different economic, political, and cultural contexts shape public perception of CSR communication. Most current studies focus on developed nations, whereas CSR in developing countries faces unique challenges related to economic disparity, government policies, and societal expectations. Comparative studies between developed and developing nations could provide valuable insights into how businesses can tailor CSR communication strategies to different cultural and economic environments. Lastly, future research should examine the stakeholder-driven co-creation of CSR messages, investigating how consumers, communities, and NGOs can actively participate in shaping and disseminating CSR communications to enhance credibility, trust, and social impact.

### **KESIMPULAN**

This study investigated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a corporate communication strategy and its impact on public perception and stakeholder engagement. It aimed to analyze how CSR communication influences corporate reputation, consumer trust, and brand loyalty, while also exploring the key factors that shape public perception of CSR initiatives. The findings demonstrated that transparent, authentic, and stakeholder-oriented CSR communication enhances credibility and fosters long-term engagement, highlighting the growing consumer demand for corporate accountability and ethical business practices. Notably, the research underscored the importance of digital transformation in CSR communication, revealing that social media, storytelling, and AI-driven personalization are crucial in shaping positive public perception. These results emphasize the need for companies to adopt strategic, participatory, and evidence-based CSR communication approaches, suggesting that businesses should integrate two-way communication channels, measurable impact assessments, and localized CSR strategies to enhance stakeholder trust and long-term sustainability.

While this study provides valuable insights into CSR communication and public perception, certain limitations should be noted, such as the reliance on secondary data, the lack of industry-specific analyses, and the need for more longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts. Future research should focus on expanding cross-cultural comparisons, analyzing the role of emerging technologies in CSR communication, and investigating the co-creation of CSR strategies with stakeholders. Additionally, further studies could explore the impact of CSR messaging on different consumer demographics and industry sectors, potentially

enhancing our understanding of how CSR communication influences stakeholder behavior and informing policy frameworks, corporate best practices, and ethical guidelines for responsible business communication.

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