Tampere University

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The Role of Digital Media in Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates how companies utilize digital media platforms to communicate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability initiatives, examining the impact on stakeholder trust, public perception, and brand reputation. With the shift from traditional CSR reporting to interactive, real-time communication, digital media now serves as a vital channel for transparency and stakeholder engagement. The study adopts an interpretivist philosophy and inductive qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with seven digital media users to explore audience responses to CSR messaging. Findings reveal that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube significantly shape public awareness and sentiment. Authenticity, consistency, and evidence-based storytelling emerged as key elements in fostering trust, while superficial or seasonal campaigns risked backlash and greenwashing accusations. Preferred content formats included short videos, infographics, and behind-the-scenes narratives. Thematic analysis identified six core themes, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in digital CSR communication. The study concludes that effective CSR strategies must prioritize interactive engagement, credible partnerships, and platform-specific content tailored to diverse audiences. These insights offer practical implications for businesses, NGOs, and communication professionals seeking to improve the credibility and impact of digital CSR campaigns in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainability, Digital Media, Stakeholder Engagement, Brand Perception, Authenticity, Social Media Communication, Greenwashing, Visual Storytelling, Trust Building

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the contemporary business landscape, the convergence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and digital media has become increasingly significant. Companies are leveraging digital platforms to communicate their CSR initiatives, aiming to enhance transparency, engage stakeholders, and bolster brand reputation (Etikan, 2024). Traditionally, CSR efforts were disseminated through annual reports and press releases. However, the advent of digital media has transformed this landscape, enabling real-time, interactive, and widespread communication. Social media platforms, corporate websites, blogs, and other digital channels have become pivotal in sharing CSR activities, allowing companies to reach a broader audience and foster immediate engagement (Troise and Camilleri, 2020). Kvasničková Stanislavská et al. (2020) examined 113,628 Instagram messages from 38,590 worldwide unique users to demonstrate how social media aids corporate engagement with stakeholders, which strengthens CSR policies. The effective digital transmission of CSR initiatives holds primary importance because it determines stakeholder trust and public understanding of company actions (Ekpebu, 2024). Today's consumers view corporate ethics as essential information during their buying decisions since many people consider both the social responsibility and environmental protection efforts of companies before purchasing. Research conducted by Rehan, Bukhari, and Adeel Ahmad Aamir (2024) with 200 social media users who buy products and use social media found a strong positive connection between digital CSR impact and brand perception.

Digitization enables stakeholders to engage in conversations with companies through their platforms by offering interactive features that allow responses and feedback submission. Through interactive features, companies enhance their transparency while developing stronger community connections with stakeholders. The continuous oversight of businesses by stakeholders often leads to negative consequences when organizational CSR practices do not match the claims made in their statements (Mu and Lee, 2023). CSR communication through digital media delivers various beneficial aspects, but companies must handle specific challenges simultaneously. Quick information spread ensures that negative perceptions about a company can travel fast enough to damage its reputation. The findings of Kang and Kim (2013) established that firms increase their

CSR activities through higher philanthropic spending as public criticism toward their CSR initiatives intensifies under media scrutiny.

The practice known as blue washing represents another issue when companies create false claims about their social responsibility efforts. Consumer doubts regarding the trustworthiness of firms in the marketplace result from deceptive marketing practices. According to Adewole (2022), a poor or misleading CSR approach would lead to 68% of US and UK consumers to cease the use of brands. CSR Communications are impossible to be effective unless authenticity is there. Digital media integration in CSR and sustainability communications offers organizations opportunities as well as several challenges to be addressed. The growing digital engagement gives more chances to talk with a spectrum of consumers. However, companies must carry out credible actions or be straightforward with audiences to retain a trusting public.

1.2 Problem Statement

The recent focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability brings difficulties for companies to express their initiatives effectively, which builds transparency and stakeholder trust while generating positive public opinion. With robust digital tools for engaging their audiences with media, companies are also dealing with the misinformation, consumer doubt and of artificial environmental efforts. It seems, however, that corporations were to start taking responsibility during the last two decades, CSR narratives have not gained attention from those issuing research about the effects of various digital platforms, thus purposefully doubting the sustainability messaging, authenticity and impact of corporations. But it is essential for business organizations to possess digital communication systems, therefore, they should control them so that they prove to stakeholders that they're honest and their CSR programs are beneficial to society. Like digital media, standards for using digital media effectively in CSR communication also remain undefined, posing more challenges for this problem. In the meantime this research explores the digital media effects on CSR communication and compares and contrasts the pros and cons of the digital platforms used by companies as they encounter difficulties in preserving stakeholder relations as well as promoting public trust.

1.3 Research Aim

This study aims to analyze how companies utilize digital media to communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability initiatives and assess the impact of these efforts on public perception. The research seeks to explore the effectiveness of digital platforms in fostering transparency, stakeholder engagement, and brand reputation in the context of CSR and sustainability.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To examine the role of digital media in shaping corporate CSR and sustainability narratives.
- To evaluate the impact of digital CSR communication on public perception and stakeholder trust.
- To identify best practices and challenges in digital CSR communication.

1.5 Research Questions

- **How do companies utilize digital media to communicate their CSR and sustainability initiatives?**
- **What impact does digital CSR communication have on public perception, stakeholder trust, and brand reputation?**
- **What are the best practices and key challenges companies face in effectively communicating CSR and sustainability efforts through digital platforms?**

1.6 Rationale of the Study

Today's growing corporate dependence on digital media to share information has changed the way businesses interact with stakeholders about CSR and sustainability programs. Digital platforms provide organizations with the chance to establish real-time connections as well as achieve transparency and access broader audiences. However, these platforms present difficulties for companies to deliver credible CSR messages without being dismissed as fraudulent. Business operators must build sustainable digital CSR approaches with real value to avoid skeptical scrutiny from consumers and investors. The absence of standardized evaluation frameworks for digital CSR communication proves problematic since it requires additional study about effective practices and

identification of challenges. Research justifies its investigation because Corporate Social Responsibility now plays a crucial role in building reputation, stakeholder trust, and consumer behavior. This study will generate essential findings that help organizations improve their digital sustainability communication while building trust with audiences during the present digital era.

1.7 Significance and overview of the study

This research is relevant because it attempts to fill the gap in knowledge on the use of digital media for communicating CSR and sustainability. We see companies more often using social networks, websites, and web pages with advertisements and promotions to communicate with their stakeholders; this is so because it is through the media that people's perceptions are formed. This research will be helpful for those companies that are interested in increasing the level of transparency in their environmental communication, making consumers trust them, and avoiding cases of greenwashing or skepticism. At the same time, this work enriches the academic discourse by pointing out the practices of digital CSR communication as well as the obstacles in maintaining the credibility of the companies. Policymakers and managers of companies can employ it to formulate ideal concepts of ethical and result-oriented CSR communication. Thus, this research contributes to closing the gap between companies' online operations and managing obligations and advancing Topoi's digital sustainability aims while facilitating more significant relations between businesses, consumers, investors, and other stakeholders.

The convergence of CSR, sustainability, and digital media has redefined how companies engage with stakeholders, emphasizing transparency and trust through interactive platforms. While digital tools offer real-time communication and broader outreach, they also pose challenges such as misinformation, skepticism, and risks of blue washing. This study explores how companies use digital media to convey CSR initiatives, evaluates their influence on public perception, and identifies best practices and challenges in digital CSR communication. It aims to fill knowledge gaps and support organizations in developing credible, impactful sustainability messaging in the digital age.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will provide a thorough analysis of current literature on *"the role of digital media in promoting corporate social responsibility and sustainability"*. However, the main aim of this chapter is to discuss crucial theoretical models, scholarly discussions, and empirical results about how companies leverage digital platforms to engage every stakeholder, share CSR efforts, and impact brand reputation and public opinion. Meanwhile, the analysis will start with the definition of key concepts like digital media communication, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility. Afterwards, it will look at how CSR communication has changed over time, shifting from conventional techniques to modern digital media, especially the role of digital platforms, including blogs, social media, multimedia tools, and websites, to strengthen accountability, transparency, and stakeholder relations. Additionally, it will also assess the efficacy of digital corporate social responsibility communication in developing customer behavior and promoting trust, along with managing potential obstacles such as misinformation, audience mistrust, and greenwashing. Furthermore, the chapter will determine gaps in existing literature and examine the best approaches in digital corporate social responsibility engagement by drawing on both regional and global viewpoints. Lastly, it will also incorporate theoretical viewpoints that shape organizational behavior in digital environments, which will also lay the groundwork for the empirical analysis that will be demonstrated in the upcoming chapters.

2.1 Conceptualizing CSR and sustainability

According to Vargas-Merino et al. (2023, corporate social responsibility and sustainability are fundamental ideas that drive current organizational governance, stakeholder engagement, and business ethics, although they are usually employed interchangeably. However, they all cover overlapping but different aspects of ethical business practice and investigate how digital media impacts their perception and communication, which requires a comprehensive understanding of these ideas. Meanwhile, Khizar et al. (2022 emphasized that corporate social responsibility is extensively discussed as an organization's commitment to promoting economic growth, operating its business ethically, and improving the standard of living for its families, employees, and the atmosphere in which it functions and the wider community. Additionally, the model of Carroll's four parts of CSR encompasses legal, economic, philanthropic, and ethical commitments, such as the philanthropic and moral responsibilities, which focus on ethical leadership and corporate

citizenship, whereas the legal and financial responsibilities function as foundational responsibilities. Therefore, this multidimensional technique of CSR has achieved vast acceptance in both business practice and scholarly literature, highlighting its essential role in developing reliable business behavior, as demonstrated by Rehan et al. (2024.

Sustainability is usually considered as the long-term care of approaches that take economic, social, and environmental aspects into account. Stemming from the groundbreaking work of Troise and Camilleri (2020, sustainability has been traditionally referred to as *"fulfilling the necessities of the present without compromising the capacity of upcoming generations to satisfy their necessities"*. Meanwhile, sustainability focuses on the extent of fostering equal labor practices, promoting inclusive economic development, and minimizing ecological footprints in the case of corporate commitment. Therefore, these doctrines are crucial to maintaining the long-term sustainability of communities and businesses and are vital for promoting a healthier world. However, sustainability claims particular pursuits with CSR; it is differentiated by its emphasis on longstanding intergenerational equity and ecological stewardship, as argued by Sharma and Singh (2022. On the contrary, the initiatives of CSR, usually incorporated with sustainability objectives, manage to focus on more diverse and immediate ethical and social responsibilities, including the engagement of the community, ethical business behavior, and the rights of labor.

According to Topor et al. (2022, the convergence of sustainability and corporate social responsibility is a strategic direction where organizations pursue profitability, along with making a positive impact on the environment and society. Contemporary businesses increasingly acknowledge that sustainability and CSR are integral to strategic business planning, risk management, and brand differentiation, rather than being secondary considerations. Therefore, this transition incorporates pivotal societal values that have achieved superiority, especially in a context where investors, regulators, and consumers critically evaluate business actions through the framework of ESG (environmental, social, and governance) performance, as explained by Mu and Lee (2023. As a result, participating in sustainability and CSR also means that the organisation is perceived to be a party demonstrating greater accountability, trustworthiness and transparency. As Sharma and Singh (2022 stated, these perceptions may subsequently result in competitive advantages, such as improved employee satisfaction, increased investor confidence, and enhanced customer loyalty. Moreover, there is an increased global focus on critical issues facing us such as

social justice, ethical supply chains and climate change which have contributed to the growing importance of sustainability and CSR to be at the forefront of the changing dynamics of corporate responsibility.

2.2 Importance and evolution of CSR communication

According to the study, the communication of corporate social responsibility has grown immensely over the years, highlighting shifts in organizational priorities, technical capabilities, and societal expectations, as demonstrated by García-Rivas et al. (2023. From the fact view, the CSR communication was indeed static and one way communication through conventional media such as printed reports, corporate pamphlets and press releases. None of these approaches were used to obtain stakeholder feedback and most were used to enhance the company's business image or satisfy regulatory requirements. Although global corporations are nowadays increasingly facing calls for responsibility, business ethics and transparency, the traditional way of communicating corporate social responsibility has been reinterpreted. According to Elembilassery (2023, the growing focus on stakeholder engagement has been intimately linked to the development of corporate social responsibility communication. According to Freeman's stakeholder theory, the emphasis was changed from shareholders to a whole group of stakeholders including workers, consumers, communities, investors and suppliers. This meant that these approaches to communication became more responsive and inclusive. Thus the communication of CSR shifted from the mere tool of public relations to a strategic part of the organizational governance in order to build up long term legitimacy and trust.

Meanwhile, with the emergence of digitalization and globalization, rising disclosure is needed for corporate social responsibility. Investors and customers in today's world have become more environmentally and socially aware, actively pursuing knowledge regarding the firm's practices, contributions to society, and values, as discussed by Castillo-Abdul et al. (2024. Communication of CSR is therefore used as a tool for stakeholder communication and risk mitigation as well as a branding mechanism. Therefore, it is exceptionally crucial in improving the reputation of the brand, fortifying stakeholder relationships, and influencing public opinion. Additionally, Fallah Shayan et al. (2022 stated that the standards of reporting and legal frameworks, including the UNGC "United Nations Global Compact", the SDGs "Sustainable Development Goals", and the GRI "Global Reporting Initiative", have further formalized the practices of CSR communication.

By fostering uniformity, comparison, and openness among industries and businesses, these approaches assist stakeholders in determining the impact and legitimacy of CSR efforts.

Eventually, the development of digital media has transformed the way corporate social responsibility messages are prepared and shared. It made it possible by two-way, real-time communication through websites, social media, podcasts, interactive platforms, and blogs, as explained by REFERENCE. Therefore, businesses can respond to issues promptly, present their CSR effort in engaging and dynamic ways, and engage a broader range of audiences. In addition to raising awareness of CSR initiatives, this transition from monologue to dialogue has raised standards for responsibility and integrity.

2.3 Transforming CSR communication through digital media

According to Xiong (2024, the advancement of digital media has immensely changed the geography of the communication of CSR, resulting in reaching a wider range of audiences via various real-time, visually engaging, and interactive platforms, although the messages of Corporate social responsibility were previously limited to static press releases and annual reports. As emphasized by Kvasničková Stanislavská et al. (2020, digital media transforms how businesses exchange stories, interact with stakeholders, and establish credibility in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day, along with making CSR efforts more visible. Meanwhile, digital media includes a wide range of channels, such as the company's websites, social media platforms, podcasts, blogs, and video-sharing channels, which offer businesses exceptional prospects to instantly communicate with worldwide audiences, offering the opportunity to present sustainability initiatives as they occur either through the programs of volunteering workers, the efforts of community engagement, and real-time updates on ecological projects. Additionally, the ability of digital media to facilitate two-way communication is one of its main components, as explored by Meng et al. (2022. Digital media fosters a dynamic conversation between businesses and their stakeholders, in contrast to conventional communication approaches, which are usually unidirectional. Therefore, it allows companies to react to criticism, listen to public considerations, and develop relationships depending on mutual respect and transparency.

As stated by Topor et al., 2022, digital media improves the communication of CSR by promoting storytelling through multimedia formats like infographics, live streams, and videos, which make the initiatives of CSR more engaging and relatable, resulting in strengthening the trust of

stakeholders and humanizing business efforts. Additionally, data analytics has been pivotal in refining the communication of CSR by offering insights into audience sentiment and behavior, enabling businesses to customize messages for different audiences effectively. However, the improved visibility presented by digital media also increases expectations for responsibility and authenticity, as demonstrated by Meng et al. (2022. Therefore, stakeholders can promptly determine uncertainties or performative CSR initiatives, which can harm the reputation of the business. As a result, digital media demands that businesses embrace a genuine and transparent approach to the communication of CSR, guaranteeing their messages incorporate genuine efforts and promoting trust in their environmental and social responsibilities.

2.4 Improve engagement of stakeholders through digital platforms

According to Martínez-Peláez et al. (2023, the engagement of stakeholders has been crucial for effective CSR, and digital platforms have immensely revolutionized the way companies engage with their different stakeholders. In the current interconnected globe, stakeholders, such as workers, consumers, communities, investors, non-governmental institutions, and regulators, expect dynamic responsiveness and participation from businesses, instead of explicit passive communication. Therefore, digital platforms provide mechanisms that allow companies to engage, listen, and reconstruct value with every stakeholder in real time. Meanwhile, the Purnamawati et al., 2023 demonstrated that the active nature of digital platforms allows nonstop communication, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram allowing businesses to present their CSR efforts promptly, along with inviting dialogue, collaboration, and feedback. As a result, these platforms promote mutual trust and transparency by developing opportunities for every stakeholder to express their viewpoints, request questions, and keep companies responsible. Additionally, the company's blogs and websites function as engaging aspects like feedback forms, live chat tools, and comment sections, as well as hubs for explicit details about CSR further strengthening the engagement of stakeholders. Webinars, virtual town halls, and digital surveys offer prospects for businesses to collect understandings and engage stakeholders in the process of decision-making, eventually resulting in well-informed approaches to CSR that incorporate the expectations of stakeholders, as highlighted by Prieložná, 2023.

As examined by Zaitsev et al., 2024, digital engagement is also pivotal for creating brand champions and inspiring communities, as stakeholders who feel respected and heard have more

potential to support movements, communicate the content of CSR, and strengthen the firm's message. Therefore, this organic reach improves the social capital of the organization and strengthens its brand prominence since favorable testimonials and user-generated content regarding the efforts of CSR support trust and credibility. Furthermore, the engagement of digital stakeholders facilitates the detection and control of possible risks by allowing businesses to identify growing concerns and monitor online sentiment by leveraging the tools of social listening. Accordingly, the loop of this real-time feedback has been particularly beneficial for preventing reputational harm and sustaining stakeholder happiness, as stated by McIntosh et al., 2023. However, continuous monitoring and strategic preparation have been necessary for effective digital engagement. Hence, businesses need to guarantee that their communication is culturally sensitive, responsive, and authentic since stakeholders have been increasingly skeptical of performative or tokenistic CSR initiatives, leading to unfavorable perceptions if digital engagement is seen as dishonest.

2.5 Impact of digital CSR communication on brand perception

According to the research, brand impression has been dramatically influenced by how companies use digital platforms to share their CSR initiatives, as stakeholders progressively assess the organization by its ethical, environmental, and social behavior, along with by its services or product quality in the digital age, where information is transparent and readily available, as stated by Ruschak et al., 2023. Excellent digital communication of CSR can immensely improve the organization's brand reputation, establish long-lasting stakeholder devotion, and promote trust. Therefore, digital platforms offer exceptional prospects for businesses to tell stories about their sustainability and CSR responsibilities. Singh et al., 2024 concluded that utilising visually interesting content like infographics and videos, allowing the influence of companies' CSR efforts to be showcased can further reinforce the company's brand reputation. Consequently, this approach enhances the brand's reputation, making it likeable and representative and, consequently, increases perceptions of its responsibility, trust and transparency. In addition, real CSR messaging is linked to a positive brand perception through continuous digital storytelling about brand values (Topor et al., 2022). Therefore, by better CSR efforts, the stakeholders like the positive thoughts which leads to more marketing opportunities to increase brand loyalty, consumer engagement and support and growth in the social media platforms.

According to Çera and Ndou, 2024, digital platforms provide massive prospects for the communication of CSR, although their public perception indicates that perceived inauthenticity or inadequate implementation could damage the reputation of the brand. Meanwhile, greenwashing refers to the practice of businesses misrepresenting or exaggerating their CSR efforts can be quickly revealed online, resulting in stakeholder backlash and unfavorable promotion. Consequently, it emphasizes the significance of incorporating the communication of CSR with real-world approaches and being evident in both weaknesses and successes. Furthermore, Ruschak et al., 2023 argued that digital communication of CSR impacts brand image through online WOM "word-of-mouth" and peer influence. In addition to user-generated testimonials, content, and influencer relationships, the users of social media usually comment and share CSR-related content, strengthening brand narratives and expanding its reach.

2.6 Challenges in digital CSR communication

Rózsa et al. (2024 demonstrated that digital platforms provide several benefits for the communication of CSR, although they also pose challenges that businesses need to carefully navigate, as the improved interactivity and visibility allowed by digital media necessitate a high degree of responsiveness, authenticity, and transparency. However, the threat of greenwashing, in which businesses misrepresent or exaggerate their social or environmental effort to seem more trustworthy than they actually are, is considered a primary challenge in digital CSR communication. As argued by Troise and Camilleri, 2020, stakeholders efficiently spot differences between the organization's expressed values and its real practices in the digital age, as data is readily available and widely communicated. Once revealed, greenwashing could negatively harm the reputation of the brand and deteriorate public faith. Meanwhile, information overload is another massive challenge, e.g., the messages of CSR usually contend for engagement due to the continuous flow of content throughout digital platforms, resulting in challenges for businesses to effectively engage stakeholders, as discussed by Jin and Mirza, 2024. Additionally, another challenge is audience mistrust, as current stakeholders are growing more cautious of the performative efforts of CSR. Digital customers usually examine the content of CSR for authenticity, such as transparent reporting of both setbacks and achievements, community collaborations, and staff engagement.

As examined by Carl et al., 2022, the fragmented structure of digital audiences makes it challenging to effectively customize the communication of CSR, as diverse groups of stakeholders, including consumers, investors, communities, and workers have inconsistent communication choices and expectations. Consequently, a "one-size-fits-all" strategy could result in disengagement or miscommunication. Meanwhile, businesses also encounter resource and technological limitations, as successful digital communication of CSR necessitates making acquisitions in managing social media, content creation, qualified staff, and analytics tools. As a result, it could be difficult for small or resource-constrained businesses to communicate consistently across several channels, as highlighted by Adewole, 2022. Furthermore, managing unfavorable comments and public criticism is another massive challenge, as businesses are helpless to inspect social media, which requires responsiveness, transparency, and grace to protect their online brand.

2.7 Best practices and opportunities in digital CSR engagement

According to Dundua, 2023, companies can gain beneficial opportunities to enhance transparency, fortify stakeholder engagement, and create a socially aware brand reputation by incorporating digital media into the initiatives of CSR. Therefore, digital platforms allow for a change from stagnant reporting to dynamic and active engagement, in contrast to conventional communication of CSR. Accordingly, the capability for real-time communication is among the most crucial opportunities, as businesses can immediately inform stakeholders regarding ethical efforts, sustainability initiatives, and community projects using blogs, videos, and social media. By showcasing continuous dedication, this immediacy strengthens business credibility, along with improving stakeholder awareness. Additionally, digital platforms enable businesses to connect with diverse and global audiences. Furthermore, the borderless essence of online communication allows for the sharing of corporate social responsibility messages to all over cultures and regions, facilitating cross-cultural learning and national boundaries, as argued by Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko, 2022. Along with that, businesses can also leverage these platforms for interactive storytelling, which include videos, visuals, and user-generated content to share corporate social responsibility messages in a relatable and engaging manner.

Additionally, several most promising practices are necessary to optimize digital efforts of CSR engagement, e.g., transparency and authenticity are pivotal, so businesses need to guarantee that

their digital communication of CSR incorporates their real-world approaches, promoting trust by admitting weakness and honest reporting, as demonstrated by Etikan, 2024. Meanwhile, engagement and relevance will be improved by producing stakeholder-centric content that is relevant to the specific necessities of diverse audiences, including staff members, non-governmental organizations, and consumers. A reliable CSR approach is further strengthened by working with brand advocates and influencers, who increase the reach and credibility of the message. Along with that, a unified digital approach also guarantees uniform messaging that harmonizes CSR initiatives with wider organizational values. Zheng et al. (2023 stated that two-way communication increases responsibility and engagement, which includes feedback through comments and surveys.

2.8 Theoretical frameworks improving digital CSR approaches

As theoretical structures have proven to be important in guiding and explaining successful practises of CSR in the digital age, they are a precise technique for analysing how businesses interact with stakeholders, how they communicate CSR and how they are building the sustainable identity of the brand. According to Awa et al. (2024, one of the effective theories promoting the strategic usage of digital media in corporate social responsibility is stakeholder theory, which emphasizes the significance of managing the expectations and interests of every party impacted by the operations of the brand, not merely shareholders. It is therefore important due to this idea the need of businesses to communicate and interact with different stakeholder through inclusive, interactive and transparent communication on digital CSR perspective. On the contrary, digital platforms promote real time communication which organization's use to cope with the concerns of its stakeholders and present itself as responsible. Additionally, the theory of legitimacy has also been key to positing that companies need to conform to social values and standards to support legitimacy, as discussed by Fahmi et al. (2022.

With respect to CSR digital communication; the digital media platform provides visibility in communicating businesses' ecological stewardship, societal accountability and ethical behaviours in strengthening their legitimacy. For that reason, CSR is of importance to companies as it will improve their public credibility and confidence through frequently sharing credible efforts, in the realization that both frameworks underline the importance of transparency and accountability in maintaining and constructing the organizational legitimacy. Furthermore, another valuable

framework is the theory of dialogic communication, which emphasizes the significance of two-way, open communication between businesses and their target consumers, which is particularly applicable to digital CSR approaches, as argued by Zaitsev et al., 2024. Meanwhile, the key aspects of contemporary CSR initiatives, such as stakeholder empowerment and relationship-building, have been fostered by interactive tools and social media. Additionally, the theory of media richness demonstrates how various digital platforms differ in communicating complex data, indicating that richer media, like engaging graphics and videos, have more potential to deliver nuanced CSR messages, allowing organizations to choose the most promising digital tools for a variety of content, as demonstrated by Kandpal et., 2024.

2.9 Research gaps and summary

This chapter presented the literature on sustainability and CSR communication in the digital era, emphasizing the interconnection of these approaches in driving corporate behavior towards environmental, ethical, and social responsibility. Meanwhile, it also highlighted the transition of CSR communication through digital platforms, especially social media, which allow real-time transparency, global outreach, and engagement. Additionally, the literature revealed that digital communication of CSR favorably influences stakeholder involvement, brand reputation, and trust, although challenges like content saturation, greenwashing, reputational risks, and audience mistrust are also demonstrated by this chapter. Despite comprehensive analysis, various gaps remain, such as limited practical information on how diverse groups of stakeholders present digital CSR in all cultures and industries, and a determinate emphasis on how SMEs, “small and medium-sized enterprises,” approach CSR with limited resources, as discussed by O’Connor (2022. Additionally, the long-lasting impacts of digital CSR on organizational performance and stakeholder devotion have been underexplored, and there is a necessity for more interdisciplinary investigation incorporating communication examinations, technology, sustainability, and marketing. In summary, digital media has transformed the communication of CSR, further analysis will be crucial to understand its challenges and full potential, allowing the development of more credible and effective digital CSR approaches incorporating SDGs “sustainable development goals”, as demonstrated by De Luca et al., 2022.

3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This research methodology section details the way to achieve the aim of carrying out the research of how companies use digital media to the advances of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability initiatives. The objective of this chapter is to describe and explain the research design, method, approach, and strategies for data gathering in relation to the practice of digital CSR communication to public perception and stakeholder engagement. Without a clear and systematic research methodology reliability, validity and transparency of the findings are in jeopardy. To structure the development of the methodology, ***Research Onion*** framework was used by this study. By suggesting the research philosophy, approach, strategy, scales and deepness of research, choice of methods on data collection and analysis, the research onion provides layered approach to design research. The layers of the Research Onion have been thoughtfully crafted to harmonies with the study's qualitative nature and match the study's target research objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2020). The methods have been made to emphasize on the selection of techniques which will help in the in-depth explorations of corporate practices and the perceptions of the stake holders. The rest of this chapter are sequentially explained systematically selected philosophical stance, methodological approach, research strategy, data collection techniques, sampling methods and data analysis methods that fed into this study..

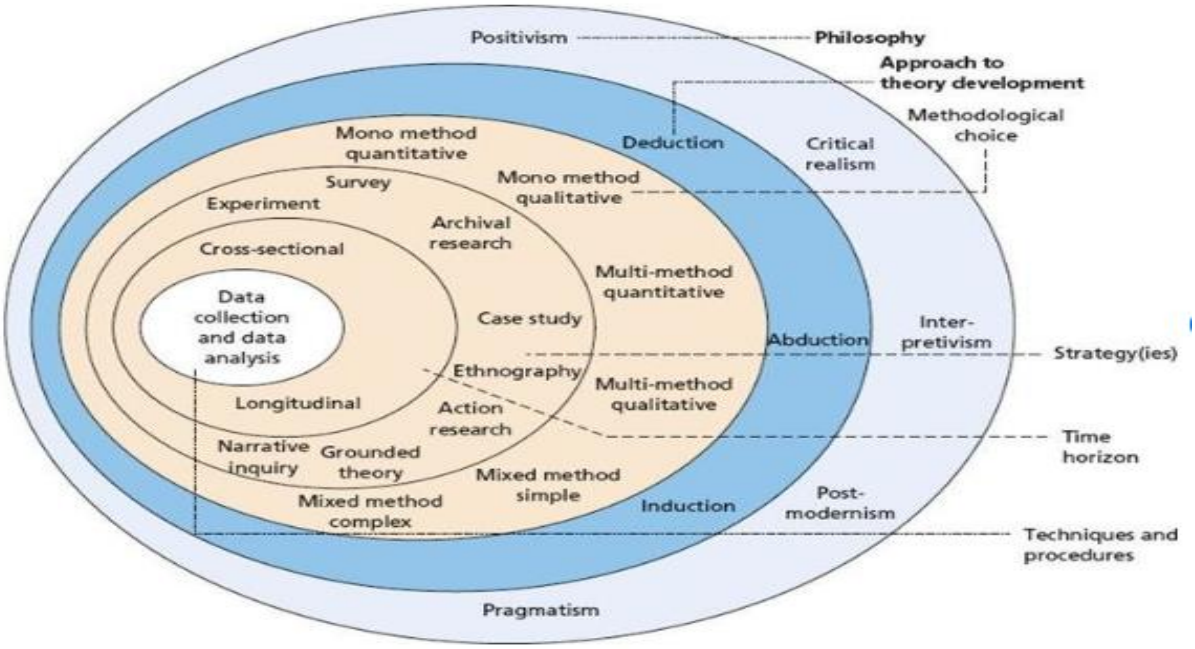

Figure 1: Research Onion

3.1 Research Philosophy

The choice of the appropriator search philosophy is consequential for guiding research design such that efforts result in methods matching the nature of inquiry. According to Mauthner (2020), Research philosophy is defined as the assumptions with regard to the development of knowledge and how reality exists and is interpreted. Social science research recognizes several philosophies including positivism, realism, pragmatism, and interpretivism. The assumption of positivism is that knowledge is objective and can be measured (Park, Konge & Artino, 2020). As argued by Michele (2020), realist philosophy underlines that reality exists and independently, but can never be perfectly understood. Advocates of pragmatism use multiple methods according to the research problem. On the other hand, interpretivism stresses that knowledge of reality is social in that reality is socially constructed and interpreted by human experiences and interactions (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022).

Interpretivism was chosen as the research philosophy for this study. Based on the study's goal to investigate the nuanced and subjective experiences of digital CSR communication by companies and stakeholders, Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) argued that interpretivism was most appropriate. Thus, as the project didn't aim to test a pre-defined hypothesis or create universal laws concerning CSR initiatives, the goal was to identify meanings, values and expressions of perceptions of CSR initiatives. Interpretivism was adopted by the researcher to enable participants' voices and experiences to direct the findings whilst using rich, contextual insights. In support of the aim of studying the role of digital media in engaging people with and building public trust in sustainability narratives (Chowdhury, 2014), this philosophical stance complemented the study. Moreover, flexibility was achieved with the interpretivism, that is, the generation of interpretive comprehension of complex social realities presumed to create these in an ever changing digital environment dealing with diverse organizational behaviours and reactions of varied stakeholders..

3.2 Research Approach

According to Kankam (2020), the research approach used is the logical reasoning whenever knowledge is developed and brings theory into the empirical observation. It decides whether the study is going from the data to the theory or theory to the data. In general, there are two primary research methods: datives or inductive. In the deductive approach, you test tried out theories or ideas against empirical observation, because it is usually quantitative (Woiceshyn and

Daellenbach, 2018). On the other hand, the inductive approach is built on the basis of creating new theories or patterns that are derived from a collected data interpretation, especially in qualitative research (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018). The second approach is a form of abductive approach which combines elements of both induction and deduction to find the best possible explanations of what has occurred given the evidence available.

An inductive research approach was adopted by the researcher in this study. The choice of induction used was appropriate because the research aspired to uncover and comprehend the intricate, subjective that companies use digital media to promote CSR and sustainability with no reference point from pre-existing basic theoretical models (Azungah, 2018). The study instead worked towards enabling patterns, themes, and even meanings to emerge naturally from the qualitative interviews that it was collecting. This approach offered a deeper, more flexible exploration of how participants experienced and understood their cancer, in line with the approach taken in study, as it was an interpretivist study. In this case, induction proved particularly useful as CSR communication strategies split between organizations are pretty diverse, perceptions of stakeholders are dynamic and context specific (Bonner et al., 2021). It was therefore an inductive approach to capture these variations, and allow the researcher to create a grounded understanding of the phenomena. The study built insights from the ground up and was thus able to make a contribution to existing knowledge about digital CSR communication that was meaningful and contextually rich.

3.3 Methodological Choice

In designing a study, it is essential to choose an appropriate methodological choice as a consistency between the research aim, philosophy and approach is essential. The methodological choice can be termed as the selection made of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed techniques in data collection and analysis (Krishnasamy Tharsika, 2022). There is the mono method, only depending on a qualitative or quantitative technique, the mixed method, using both methodological approaches, in order to have an overall view on the research problem. The main difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is that the quantitative method mainly emphasizes the data and statistical analysis, while the qualitative method heavily works with depth, meaning and the subjective interpretation (Rosairo, 2022). Mixed methods research combines both types so as to take advantage of the strengths of each component.

The approach adopted in this study was mono method; qualitative approach. Since the research aimed at bringing more spotlight to participants' narratives and their in depth insights, it was judged that this required a purely qualitative strategy (Liyanage, 2022). Thus a single qualitative method was used to have a cohesive and detailed examination on how organizations communicate CSR and sustainability initiatives through digital platforms. This methodological choice allowed a consistent interpretive analysis of the research in terms of the research's inductive reasoning and interpretivism basis without splitting the inquiry across types of data. Interviews generated qualitative data which was used to understand deeper dynamics, specific context, organizational storytelling practices and stakeholder perceptions (Melnikovas, 2018). In addition, using only qualitative methods allowed the study to delve into the complexity and richness of digital CSR communication in the most considered, holistic way possible and bolster the study's credibility and depth.

3.4 Time Horizon

According to research, Melnikov (2018), the time horizon is a framework, restricting the study to the time related scope. It decides if the research deals with a phenomenon at a given point in time or through a period of time. Cross sectional and longitudinal are the two main types of time horizons. Cross sectional studies involve collecting data at a chosen point in time or a minimal period of time, a snapshot of a situation or phenomenon (Wang and Cheng, 2020). Whereas longitudinal studies consist of repeated observations of the same variables over a protracted period of time to analyse the changes and developments over time (Prothero et al., 2018).

This piece of research is of a cross sectional time horizon. This was done as the study was not looking to monitor the evolution of digital CSR communications strategies and experiences with their evolution over time but instead to capture current existing attitudes, methods, and stakeholder experiences of digital CSR communications. Because the study focused on interrogating how organizations are currently using digital media to deliver CSR messaging, it was not necessary to engage in the temporal dimension in a very long timeframe. Also, our design was cross sectional, which allowed for a deep in detail in the review of diverse organizational practices but constrained by the academic time lines and resources (Raimundo et al, 2018). The nature of the study – the richness of individual experiences over observing changes or patterns across multiple periods being a priority – was also consistent with the choice of a cross sectional approach. The research

was able to gain detailed qualitative insights based on a specific moment, representing the current practices and perception of CSR digital communication (Wang and Cheng, 2020).

3.5 Techniques and Procedures

This section provides a detailed explanation of the techniques and procedures employed during the research to achieve the stated objectives.

3.5.1 Data Collection Method

According to Melnikovas (2018) the time horizon is a framework that outlines the what is the time related scope of the study. After that, it asks whether the research looks into a phenomenon at one point in time or over a prolonged period. Cross-sectional and longitudinal time horizons are the two main types of time horizons. Cross sectional studies collect data at one point in time or over a short period of time, describing what is going on at a given moment or time (Wang and Cheng, 2020). On the other hand, longitudinal studies hold repeated observations of the same variables over time, thus allowing for analysis of change and progress as time goes on (Prothero et al., 2018).

This piece of research was based on a cross sectional time horizon. The study focused on existing attitudes, strategies and stakeholder experiences with digital CSR communications, and therefore it did not seek to monitor change. Since its focus was on how organizations are currently using digital media for CSR messaging, it was unnecessary to extend the study beyond a relatively short period. Additionally, the cross sectional design enabled a deeper concentrated analysis of multiple organizational practices, within the constraints of academic timelines and resources (Raimundo, Echeimberg & Leone, 2018). The choice of approach was also consistent with the nature of the study, one that prioritized rich individual experiences over change and patterns across many time periods. The research was able to draw detailed qualitative insights based on a particular moment of contemporary engagement with CSR digital communication (Wang and Cheng, 2020).

3.5.2 Research Population

The research population is the group of people from which a sample is selected to take part in a study. To produce relevant, credible and viable data, to achieve research objectives, it is essential to identify the right population (Shukla, 2020). In qualitative research, the population is generally specified not through statistical representativeness but rather for its salience and dependency on

the phenomenon under consideration (Willie, 2024). The research population in this study consisted of the general public who are active on digital media platforms. This group was considered highly relevant due to them being the primary recipients and interpreters of companies' CSR and sustainability communication in the digital space. The study was able to expose authentic insights into how digital media users understood and reacted to these messages, as a way of engaging with digital media users. It was a deliberate choice to focus on the general public, as opposed to corporate representatives, which suits the goal of understanding public perceptions and stakeholder trust with the use of digital CSR communications. Additionally, digital media users were selected to guarantee that participants directly encountered online CSR content, increasing the experiences and views of participants into highly valuable research. Specifically it was prepared to explore real world engagement with CSR initiatives and the impact of digital communication on shaping perception of corporate responsibility and sustainability among individuals who regularly interact with electronic media.

3.5.3 Sample Size

In qualitative research, the focus is on data depth and richness rather than statistical generalization, to which sample size plays an important role. For this study, a total of seven participants were sampled. It was sufficient to explore many points of view while maintaining a level of detail to do in-depth qualitative analysis. Exploring the views and behaviours of people using digital media in relation to CSR and sustainability, the researcher managed to examine seven examples. Since the study was small, the researchers could explore each individual's story without sacrificing detail. Furthermore, the number of participants in this sample size was appropriate due to the study's use of semi-structured interviews, which tend to produce a large amount of qualitative data from each participant. Overall, the sample chosen was too rich and credible while remaining practical in time and resource constraints for the project.

3.5.4 Sampling Technique

The purpose of this research is to inform a pattern of diverse public perceptions regarding digital CSR communication, so participant selection needed to be unbiased and without prior assumptions (Ahmed, 2024). The study used simple random sampling as the most appropriate method of sampling without targeting specific demographics or professional groups. Simple random

sampling allows for every member of the defined population to have an equal chance of being sampled and thus, a transparent and unbiased way, for building the sample (Noor et al., 2022).

Indeed, simple random sampling fits very well with the intention of the study to get spontaneous and varied insights from everyday digital media users. Due to this, a more open and representative collection of views was allowed (Noor and Golzar, 2022). Like this, the use of randomness decreased the possibility for the researcher's bias to influence the selection process for more credibility of the results. Additionally, simple random sampling was a valid method of sampling to reach people who varied in levels of familiarity as well as interaction with corporate CSR communication online. The study was able to capture a broad spectrum of opinions, experiences, and interpretations (Noor and Golzar, 2022) by giving equal opportunity to all users of digital media to participate. However, this diversity was fundamental to producing a richer and authentic understanding of the influence of digital media on CSR and sustainability.

3.5.5 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis is a vital stage of the research process that involves gathering required data and then organizing and interpreting it to get meaningful facts from the data (Dibekulu, 2020). Qualitative research does not aim to summarise the data, but to approach them so as to delve into the patterns and relationships and the meanings hidden within, so as to discover the complexities of human experience and of the phenomena of our society. The data analysis process is very effective in converting raw and descriptive information to coherent findings that tackle the question of research (Bhatia, 2017). Therefore, the method for analysing the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews taken through thematic analysis was chosen for this study. Using thematic analysis, which is considered a flexible and widely used approach, this work can be focused on the process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurrent patterns in data referred to as themes (Naeem et al., 2023). The researcher is able to avoid losing that critical potential of systematic grouping of information into thematic categories displaying everyday experiences and perceptions, whilst being close to the participants' language and meanings.

It began with attuning (repeatedly reading the transcripts of the interviews) to become familiar with the content. The initial codes were used in capturing of the most critical words, experiences and thoughts for digital CSR communication. After these codes were examined, compared, and grouped into broader thematic categories that related to major patterns in participants' narratives,

these thematic categories were then compared and linked to previous published theories by Kiger and Varpio (2020). This facilitated the development of rich and nuanced insights in line with the study's inductive approach and interpretivism philosophy. Furthermore, the flexibility of the method allowed the researcher to attend to themes uncovered naturally from the interviews, ensuring that the perceptions of stakeholders were representative and authentic (Jowsey, Deng, and Weller, 2021). The thematic analysis was used to present in detail and meaningfully how digital media affect public engagement on CSR and sustainability initiatives.

3.6 Research Limitations

Although this study was carefully designed to explore the role of digital media in promoting CSR and sustainability, certain limitations must be acknowledged.

- *Cross-Sectional Time Horizon:* The cross-sectional design captured perceptions at a single point in time, without tracking how stakeholder views might evolve as digital CSR strategies develop. Therefore, findings are limited to the specific context and timeframe during which data were collected.
- *Self-Reported Data:* Data were collected through self-reported interviews, which may introduce bias. Participants might have provided socially desirable responses, particularly when discussing topics like corporate responsibility and sustainability, potentially affecting the authenticity of some insights.
- *Sample Size and Generalizability:* The study's reliance on a relatively small sample size of digital media users limits the generalizability of the findings. While rich insights were gathered, the results may not fully represent the broader population's perceptions across different demographics, regions, or cultures.
- *Participant Diversity:* Although simple random sampling was employed, the study did not stratify participants based on characteristics such as age, gender, education level, or digital literacy. This may have led to the underrepresentation of certain groups whose experiences with digital CSR communications might differ significantly.
- *Subjectivity in Data Interpretation:* Given the interpretivist philosophy and thematic analysis approach, the research findings are inherently shaped by the researcher's subjective interpretations. Despite efforts to ensure transparency and rigor, complete objectivity could not be achieved in identifying and categorizing themes.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Research involving human participants involves maintaining credibility and integrity, and ethical responsibility is crucial for conducting such research. It was in this study that the rights, dignity, and welfare of all those persons were safeguarded with the utmost care. The research purpose was clearly and thoroughly introduced to participants, and they gave informed consent before any data collection started. Along with this, they were assured about their voluntary participation and right to withdraw from the study at any point without any penalty. The top priority was protecting participant confidentiality. The final dataset stripped out the personal identifiers, while the codes adopted were to avoid disclosure of the subjects. Data were stored securely, and only the researcher could access them. As a study, it was strictly according to the ethical conduct prescribed by the academic institution, and formal ethical approval was acquired before fieldwork. Moral standards were upheld in the research process as a means to promote trust, transparency, and academic rigor throughout the process.

3.8 Summary

In this study, a qualitative research method was used to explore how companies use digital media to promote their CSR and sustainability initiatives. The research was carried out under an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive approach to obtain the subjective experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders guided by the "Research Onion" by Saunders et al. (2019). Rich contextual insights were obtained from seven randomly selected digital media users with the use of a mono-method qualitative strategy involving semi-structured interviews. The conditioning of the sample was a one-time period cross-sectional, and perceptions were assessed at some point in time. Key patterns inside the interview data were identified by thematic analysis and interpreted. Indeed, the methodology asked for depth and authenticity while acknowledging the limited generalizability of the small sample size and potential self-reporting bias. The study rigorously adhered to the ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity of participants, and securing data storage. In the main, the chosen methodology constituted a sturdy and believable qualification of the effect of digital CSR communication on general perception and stakeholder engagement.

4 Chapter 4: Results & Discussion

In this chapter, the results of qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven participants are presented regarding digital media's contribution to CSR and sustainability initiatives. This research aimed to investigate how digital media influence people's views on CSR, supporting a broader interest in assessing the consequences of digital involvement for trust and legitimacy. To understand personal experiences and interpretations thoroughly, this study opted for a qualitative, inductive method embedded in interpretivism (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022). Data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, starting with familiarization, followed by coding, theme identification, reviewing, defining, and writing up. Applying this procedure, known as thematic analysis, gave the researcher opportunities to recognize key themes from participants' stories without the limitation of pre-defined ideas (Naeem et al., 2023). The variation in age (21 to 45) and profession (students, designers, marketers, educators) among participants yielded comprehensive insights into how multiple audiences react to digital CSR content. The findings are presented in thematic order with supporting quotes from participants focusing on objectivity and clarity without interpretive commentary.

4.1 Emergent Themes from Interview Data

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data.

4.1.1 Theme 01: Digital Platforms as CSR Gateways

All participants reported encountering CSR and sustainability content predominantly through digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and corporate websites. These platforms serve as the primary gateways through which modern stakeholders engage with corporate values and social initiatives. The type of platform used was found to be highly correlated with participant demographics, particularly age and professional role. Younger participants (Participants 02 and 06) preferred visual-heavy, short-form platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, often citing the visual and quick nature of these formats as highly engaging. As Participant 02 explained, "I usually see CSR campaigns on TikTok and Instagram Reels… behind-the-scenes videos of how they're sustainable, which I love because it's quick and visual." This aligns with research by Singh et al. (2024), which notes that Gen Z audiences expect transparency

through engaging multimedia formats and are particularly critical of superficial or corporate-sounding messaging.

Older participants and professionals (Participants 03 and 05) reported LinkedIn, YouTube, and corporate microsites as primary sources. Participant 03 noted, "I regularly come across CSR content on LinkedIn, corporate microsites, and Twitter," reflecting a more structured consumption pattern for CSR-related content. These findings are consistent with Troise and Camilleri (2020), who argue that digital media has shifted CSR communication from monologic reporting in annual documents to dynamic, interactive platforms that foster ongoing stakeholder engagement. Moreover, digital channels offer organisations the ability to customize CSR narratives for diverse audiences. However, the variety of platforms also poses strategic challenges in maintaining consistency and coherence (Rózsa et al., 2024).

4.1.2 Theme 02: Authenticity and Trust in Digital CSR Messaging

Authenticity was repeatedly highlighted as the critical factor influencing whether CSR messaging was believed or dismissed as greenwashing. Participants emphasized the importance of evidence-based claims, NGO collaborations, and raw, behind-the-scenes content as markers of credibility. Participant 02 stated, "I trust brands when they show real employees or raw footage, not overly staged stuff. If they collaborate with charities like Ocean Cleanup or back it up with receipts… that builds trust." This reflects the shift described by Ekpebu (2024), who found that social media users are more likely to trust CSR initiatives backed by verifiable partnerships and transparent reporting.

Participant 06 added that "when companies make vague, feel-good statements without naming partners or showing results, I start to doubt their intentions." This sentiment aligns with the identification of blue washing as a significant issue (Adewole, 2022), in which companies use CSR messaging for brand enhancement without meaningful action. Critically, several participants linked trust to continuity and the presence of third-party validation. Participant 03 mentioned that he assesses authenticity through "metrics, third-party audits, and whether the messaging aligns with ESG reports." This is supported by Fahmi et al. (2022), who emphasise the role of legitimacy theory in evaluating CSR claims, particularly in an age where digitally literate stakeholders can easily identify inconsistencies between a firm's online persona and its operational reality.

Moreover, the emphasis on authenticity reflects a broader transformation in stakeholder expectations. Research by García-Rivas et al. (2023) highlights that CSR today is about message delivery, relational trust, and demonstrable impact. Participants repeatedly criticized one-time promotional CSR campaigns, preferring companies that report both successes and ongoing challenges. Participant 05 noted, “When Patagonia admitted the environmental cost of some of their products and still committed to improvements, it made me respect them more”.

4.1.3 Theme 03: Impact on Public Perception and Brand Re-evaluation

Similarly, Participant 05 explained, “I had a fairly neutral opinion about Vodafone until I saw their A key theme that arose from the interview data involved the meaningful impact that companies’ digital content consistently made on the public’s impression of them. Some participants said that interacting with CSR campaigns on digital platforms led them to change their earlier unfavourable or neutral views about those companies. The participant said, “Nestlé was just a big company to me before I noticed their water conservation projects in Pakistan on LinkedIn, which included local farmer testimonials.” Although I regard them differently now, I am still careful about how I assess their ongoing work. ‘Connected Education’ project in Ghana. They shared real stories of how their digital learning tools were changing outcomes in rural schools. It shifted my view; I now see them as more than just a telecom company.”

These findings align with the literature on CSR communication and consumer brand perception. García-Rivas et al. (2023) argue that digital CSR narratives can profoundly influence brand loyalty, particularly when the stories are emotionally compelling and supported by real-world outcomes. Furthermore, Singh et al. (2024) found that CSR initiatives that use storytelling elements such as community testimonies, project outcomes, and employee involvement lead to a 42% higher increase in consumer trust than those using generic statements or numerical reporting alone. Storytelling serves not only to inform but to engage stakeholders emotionally. According to Sharma and Singh (2022), when CSR narratives are humanized and tied to real impact, they enable stakeholders to form personal connections with corporate values. This was echoed by Participant 04, who described how witnessing Coca-Cola’s “Every Drop Counts” water campaign, which highlighted real villagers and clean water access, completely transformed her view of the company.

4.1.4 Theme 04: Preferred Content Formats

Participants across the sample demonstrated a clear preference for CSR content delivered in visually engaging and narrative-rich formats. The most commonly cited practical formats included short videos, Instagram Reels, mini-documentaries, infographics, and employee interviews. Participant 02 said, "Short-form videos work best for me. I remember lush showing how they package orders without plastic; it was shot in the warehouse with workers talking naturally. It made it relatable and real." Similarly, Participant 03 highlighted the use of animations to communicate complex sustainability goals: "Microsoft uses animation to explain carbon-negative goals, which simplifies complex targets for stakeholders." This preference aligns with Media Richness Theory, which suggests that richer communication mediums such as video and live demonstrations enhance understanding and emotional resonance (Topor et al., 2022). In a recent study by Rózsa et al. (2024), 68% of respondents reported that video content helped them better understand a company's sustainability efforts compared to traditional text or reports.

The data also suggested that authenticity in presentation was just as important as the medium itself. Participants valued content that included real employees, natural environments, and unscripted dialogue. Participant 06 appreciated LEGO's documentary series showing "how they're moving to plant-based plastics and working with renewable energy," describing it as "informative and not overly polished." These insights mirror the critique by Ekpebu (2024), who found that audiences are increasingly skeptical of overproduced content that lacks genuine voices or appears as marketing disguised as social impact. In contrast, visual storytelling that includes community perspectives, progress challenges, and localized impact fosters trust and retention.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Challenges in Digital CSR Communication

A recurring concern identified by participants was the challenge companies' face in communicating their CSR commitments effectively and authentically through digital platforms. Key barriers included digital fatigue, performative content, message inconsistency, and audience segmentation. These challenges not only impede trust-building but can also damage a company's reputation when not managed with transparency and clarity. Participant 05 explained, "Digital fatigue is real; CSR messages can get lost. Also, if companies only post during Earth Day or Pride Month, it feels opportunistic rather than a consistent commitment." This illustrates the risk of CSR being perceived as seasonal or superficial. According to Ekpebu (2024), over 60% of digital

consumers believe that corporate CSR campaigns are often designed more for branding than for genuine social impact. When companies fail to sustain consistent messaging throughout the year, stakeholders begin to question their intent and integrity.

Participant 02 echoed this concern from a generational perspective: “If the message seems rehearsed, Gen Z can sniff it out.” This reinforces research by Singh et al. (2024), which found that 71% of Gen Z respondents consider authenticity more important than production quality in CSR communication. In addition, content overload and fragmented targeting were highlighted as significant issues. Companies often struggle to communicate with a diverse stakeholder base across different platforms and demographics. Rózsa et al. (2024) noted that failure to tailor CSR communication to the audience can dilute impact and contribute to public skepticism. Fahmi et al. (2022) assert that CSR efforts, when not integrated across departments or aligned with organisational reporting, appear disjointed and inauthentic. Inconsistency in tone and visuals between marketing teams and sustainability officers can lead to conflicting narratives and undermine brand credibility.

4.1.6 Theme 06: Continuous Engagement Expectations

Participants strongly emphasised the need for CSR communication to be a dynamic, two-way dialogue rather than a static monologue. The majority viewed consistency, interaction, and responsiveness as core pillars of trustworthy and engaging CSR narratives. Participant 06 made this clear, stating, “It’s not enough to post once and disappear. When Ben and Jerry’s hosted a live Q&A about racial equity and kept the comments open for honest discussion, that showed courage and authenticity.” This comment reflects a broader stakeholder expectation for companies to demonstrate listening and accountability. Similarly, Participant 07 praised a local example: “Safaricom held a Twitter Space where people could ask questions about their carbon offsetting, now that’s real engagement. Not just talking, but listening.” The shift from unidirectional broadcasting to participatory engagement reflects trends regarding dialogic communication theory. According to Zaitsev et al. (2024), stakeholder trust increases by over 40% when CSR messaging incorporates real-time interaction, such as webinars or live feedback loops.

Research by García-Rivas et al. (2023) confirms that companies engaging regularly with audiences across digital platforms report higher levels of brand loyalty and perceived authenticity. This is about frequency and about meaningful interaction that shows responsiveness and long-term

commitment. Participant 01 highlighted IKEA's webinar on circular design as an example that "felt participatory" and strengthened trust. These insights are aligned with Stakeholder Theory, which calls for companies to actively include and respond to diverse stakeholder groups in shaping their CSR agenda (Freeman et al., 2007).

4.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study identified six key results from the thematic analysis that show how digital media impacts how people think and engage with corporate CSR and sustainability activities. Digital platforms, including Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube, are major entry points for CSR communications, even though the preferred platforms change based on age and career. Authenticity turned out to be the most significant element related to trust, which mainly stems from genuine content, partnerships with NGOs, and open transparency. Many of the participants reported re-evaluating their brands after encountering compelling corporate social responsibility content online. The study revealed that short videos, visual infographics, and condensed documentaries are the most successful formats when they authentically involve and feature real people. Challenges referenced were heavy competition for attention, inconsistent narrative styles, widespread audience segmentation, and shallow efforts that did not go beyond initial announcements.

Table 1: Results Chapter Summary Table

Theme	Key Findings
Digital Platforms as CSR Gateways	Participants mainly accessed CSR content via Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Younger audiences prefer short-form, visually engaging content.
Authenticity and Trust in Digital CSR	Trust is built through authenticity, as evidenced by partnerships and transparent content; superficial content or greenwashing risks damaging trust.
Impact on Public Perception	CSR content on digital platforms has the potential to shift neutral or negative views of companies towards a more favorable perception.

Preferred Content Formats	Short videos, behind-the-scenes content, and infographics are most engaging for participants. Authenticity in presentation is critical.
Challenges in Digital CSR Communication	Digital fatigue, content overload, and inconsistent messaging were identified as significant barriers.
Continuous Engagement Expectations	Two-way communication and ongoing engagement are crucial for building trust.

4.3 Discussion

The research set out to investigate how firms share information about their CSR and sustainability activities on digital media and the effects these communications have on public trust, engagement with stakeholders, and brand image. The analysis of the interviews generated six key themes: The findings were organised into the following themes: (1) digital platforms as gateways for CSR, (2) authenticity and trust in digital CSR messaging, (3) public perception and brand re-evaluation, (4) content preferences, (5) barriers to effective digital CSR communication, and (6) expectations for ongoing engagement. Themes captured here offer meaningful evidence of audience understanding and response to CSR communication in the digital environment.

4.4 Role of Digital Platforms in CSR Exposure

Participants consistently identified platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube as primary access points for discovering companies' ethical and environmental initiatives. This reinforces existing literature asserting that the digital environment has transformed CSR communication from passive, one-directional messaging into a dynamic, participatory exchange (Troise and Camilleri, 2020). Platform preference was shown to differ significantly by demographic. For example, younger participants gravitated toward short-form, visually-driven platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, which offered behind-the-scenes footage and user-generated content. Participant 02 remarked that "I usually see CSR campaigns on TikTok and Instagram Reels... behind-the-scenes videos of how they're sustainable, which I love because it's quick and visual." This supports Singh et al. (2024), who found that 73% of Gen Z respondents preferred brands that communicated CSR using visual storytelling over text-heavy formats.

In contrast, professionals and older participants relied more on LinkedIn, YouTube, and corporate microsites. Participant 03 stated, “I regularly come across CSR content on LinkedIn, corporate microsites, and Twitter.” These platforms were preferred for their formal tone, detailed reporting, and perceived credibility. As noted by García-Rivas et al. (2023), platform context and content presentation significantly influence the perceived seriousness and reliability of CSR communications. But platform heterogeneity introduces some problems. Following Jin and Mirza (2024), the targeting of multiple audience groups in digital CSR communications makes it challenging to create unified messages. This view is endorsed by Participant 05, who warned that “CSR messages can become lost” in today’s populated online platforms, suggesting digital burnout may be to blame.

Such fragmentation materializes a core prescription from Stakeholder Theory. It is argued by Freeman et al. (2007) that communicating well with stakeholders means including various information requirements and channels they favor. Even so, many organisations do not manage to integrate these requirements seamlessly. Fahmi et al. (2022) discuss how disparate or sectionalized CSR messaging on multiple platforms or internal divisions erodes a communication’s effectiveness. Legitimacy Theory contributes to our understanding of how digital activity influences how stakeholders view a company. Suchman (1995) identifies that organisations seek legitimacy through matching their behavior to the expectations and norms imposed by their operating context. These findings show that a company’s legitimacy can suffer when it picks the wrong platform or neglects to match its CSR voice to its audience.

4.5 Authenticity and Trust: The Crux of Digital CSR

Fahmi et al. (2022) argue that legitimacy is reinforced when companies transparently communicate Trust in corporate social responsibility, according to profiles, which depend mainly on the observability of the company’s actions, the presence of external confirmations, and the brand’s ability to keep its promises. These results are supported by Legitimacy Theory, which maintains that organisations must repeatedly show that their activities match the values of their stakeholders to maintain acceptance within society (Suchman, 1995). CSR objectives through quantifiable metrics and long-term commitment. Participant 01 expressed increased trust in a company when they “provide data and progress reports,” citing Ben and Jerry’s community initiatives as an example. This aligns with recent research by García-Rivas et al. (2023), which found that 68% of

consumers trusted CSR initiatives that included third-party verification and published outcomes more than those relying solely on company narratives.

However, participants also revealed strong skepticism toward vague claims and aesthetically polished campaigns that lacked evidence. Participant 02 observed that "if they use buzzwords like 'eco-friendly' with no proof, it's a red flag." This comment reflects the growing concern of greenwashing, where companies exaggerate their environmental credentials for reputational gain. According to Mu and Lee (2023), greenwashing erodes employee and consumer trust and can result in long-term damage to corporate legitimacy. Trust was further linked to consistency across platforms and honesty about limitations. Participant 05 described admiring Patagonia because "they admitted the environmental cost of some of their products and still committed to improvements." This aligns with Ekpebu (2024), who suggests that trust is built on success stories and on corporate humility and willingness to acknowledge shortcomings.

4.6 Brand Perception Shift through CSR Narratives

A notable finding was that digital CSR storytelling had a measurable impact on how participants perceived a company's brand. Several shared examples of how their opinions had shifted, sometimes significantly, after encountering credible CSR campaigns online. Participant 01 admitted, "I used to think Nestlé was just a corporate giant until I saw their water conservation projects in Pakistan... it made me see them more favourably." Similarly, Participant 05 said, "I now see Vodafone as more than just a telecom company" after learning about their "Connected Education" initiative in Ghana. These statements illustrate how CSR narratives can humanize brands and shift perceptions from neutrality or suspicion to cautious approval or loyalty.

These findings align with CSR perception studies such as Rehan et al. (2024), who demonstrated that well-communicated CSR activities increase positive brand associations by up to 49%, particularly when storytelling includes real people and localized impact. This is echoed by García-Rivas et al. (2023), who argue that authentic CSR stories strengthen emotional ties between consumers and corporations. Participant 06 described changing her view of Decathlon: "I used to think Decathlon was just a budget sports brand... their posts on local eco-friendly manufacturing changed my perception." This reinforces the idea that CSR narratives rooted in community involvement and relatable impact are particularly persuasive. However, brand perception shifts were not universal or uncritical. Several participants qualified their improved perceptions by

expressing ongoing scrutiny. This highlights the role of Stakeholder Theory, which suggests that companies must consistently engage with evolving stakeholder expectations, rather than assuming one campaign can cement reputation (Freeman et al., 2007).

4.7 Visual Storytelling as Engagement Catalyst

Participants across all demographics indicated a clear preference for video formats, behind-the-scenes footage, and documentary-style content over traditional reports or promotional graphics. Participant 02 noted, "Short-form videos work best for me… it was shot in the warehouse with workers talking naturally. It made it relatable and real." These preferences reflect the principles of Media Richness Theory, which asserts that richer, more immediate communication formats such as video are more effective at conveying nuanced and emotionally resonant messages (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Kandpal et al. (2024) found that video-based CSR campaigns resulted in 34% higher memory retention and 29% higher emotional connection compared to static infographics. Participant 03 also supported this, stating, "Microsoft uses animation to explain carbon-negative goals, which simplifies complex targets for stakeholders." This indicates that video content not only captures attention but also enhances understanding of technical sustainability concepts. Furthermore, authenticity in visual media was essential. Participants preferred content that included employees, unfiltered scenes, and minimal editing. Overproduced material was often perceived as marketing rather than meaningful engagement. As Ekpebu (2024) argues, authenticity in visual media is judged by content and by tone and representation, real people and real settings outperform actors and slogans. Infographics were still seen as applicable, particularly by professionals seeking to digest complex data. However, they were considered supplementary to video content rather than a replacement.

4.8 Key Challenges in CSR Digital Communication

While digital media has several benefits for CSR, the present study revealed a series of essential communication challenges. Interviewees brought up the problems of excessive content, confusion caused by inconsistent delivery, and noticeable fatigue among stakeholders. The results highlight the larger problem of undermining CSR credibility when it is practiced without real commitment, as opposed to an oversight framework. A significant point raised was the difficulty caused by an overwhelming volume of digital information. According to participant 05, genuine digital fatigue exists. CSR messages can get lost." This demonstrates that publishing large numbers of CSR-

related posts close together. According to Carl et al. (2022), repetitive, calendar-based CSR communication creates the impression of performativity, rather than purpose-driven impact. Their study found that 54% of digital consumers could not recall the specific brand behind CSR campaigns they viewed during environmental holidays, indicating a loss of message retention.

Furthermore, the study revealed concerns about tone and consistency. Participant 02 remarked, "If the message seems rehearsed, Gen Z can sniff it out." This highlights the delicate balance brands must maintain between professional messaging and authentic storytelling. Ekpebu (2024) stresses that the most successful CSR messages are those that include grassroots voices and transparent language, rather than overly branded narratives. Inconsistency across channels also weakens credibility. When CSR campaigns are disjointed, varying in message, visuals, or timing between Instagram, LinkedIn, and websites, stakeholders may perceive them as fragmented. Fahmi et al. (2022) attribute this dissonance to siloed communication strategies, where marketing and CSR departments operate without alignment.

4.9 Stakeholder Engagement: Two-Way Communication is Non-Negotiable

Participants consistently voiced a preference for companies that engaged in dialogue, rather than monologue. This preference reinforces the principles of Dialogic Communication Theory, which emphasises ethical, reciprocal, and interactive communication as foundational to building trust (Zaitsev et al., 2024). Participant 06 expressed frustration with brands that "post once and disappear," while Participant 07 praised Safaricom's live Twitter Space, stating, "That's real engagement… not just talking, but listening." These comments reflect the changing expectation that CSR should not be a broadcast strategy but a participatory process. According to Zaitsev et al. (2024), companies that enable stakeholder dialogue through tools like comment threads, polls, webinars, or live Q&A sessions achieve 43% higher trust scores among digitally active consumers. This expectation is consistent with Stakeholder Theory, which posits that organisations must include the voices and needs of all relevant groups to achieve legitimacy and long-term success (Freeman et al., 2007).

Furthermore, co-creation of CSR content emerged as a preferred practice. Participants valued when companies allowed NGOs, employees, and beneficiaries to share their perspectives directly. As Participant 01 noted, "When LEGO partners with WWF and shares joint impact reports, that

builds credibility." This finding supports García-Rivas et al. (2023), who highlight collaborative storytelling as one of the most effective trust-building practices in sustainability communication.

Moreover, frequent, real-time interactions were seen as signals of commitment. When IKEA hosted an Instagram Live to discuss sustainable furniture, it created a sense of transparency and accountability. According to Sharma and Singh (2022), regular digital interaction reinforces messaging and fosters long-term loyalty.

4.10 Synthesis with Theoretical Frameworks

Stakeholder Theory is strongly reinforced through the evidence that diverse audiences expect CSR content to be inclusive, interactive, and relevant to their values. Participant feedback revealed a desire for content that reflects real community input and responds to stakeholder concerns promptly (Freeman et al., 2007). Legitimacy Theory was evident in the strong association between transparency, consistency, and trust. Companies that demonstrated alignment between their messaging and actual impact, such as by publishing audit reports or showcasing NGO partnerships, were more likely to be perceived as legitimate actors in the sustainability space (Suchman, 1995; Fahmi et al., 2022). Dialogic Communication Theory emerged as a critical lens for evaluating CSR engagement practices.

4.11 Implications for Practice

For companies, the research underscores that CSR communication must be persistent, transparent, and evidence-based. To mitigate greenwashing concerns, firms must back statements with measurable impact, audits, and data transparency (Mu and Lee, 2023). For NGOs, the study revealed the importance of shared storytelling. Participants expressed greater trust in CSR campaigns that visibly included non-profit partners, as in the case of WWF collaborations. García-Rivas et al. (2023) affirm that NGO partnerships enhance credibility and ensure community representation in CSR narratives. For digital strategists, platform-specific tailoring is essential. TikTok and Instagram proved effective for Gen Z engagement through short videos, while LinkedIn and YouTube served older and professional audiences.

4.12 Summary

This chapter interpreted six emergent themes using Stakeholder Theory, Legitimacy Theory, and Dialogic Communication. Authenticity, participatory engagement, and visual storytelling were found to be central to effective CSR in the digital age. Trust was built not through slogans but through community voices, consistent updates, and credible partnerships. These findings form the foundation for the concluding recommendations, where actionable strategies are proposed to address identified gaps and enhance digital CSR effectiveness.

Table 2: Discussion Chapter Summary Table

Theme	**Key Insights**
Role of Digital Platforms in CSR Exposure	Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn are pivotal in corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. Tailoring content to each platform is essential for engagement.
Authenticity and Trust	Authentic CSR messaging requires transparent, evidence-backed claims. Trust is compromised by performative or vague messages.
Brand Perception Shift	Digital CSR narratives can significantly shift public perception of a brand, mainly when they include real impact stories and community engagement.
Visual Storytelling as Engagement Catalyst	Video content and visual storytelling enhance engagement, making CSR initiatives relatable and emotionally compelling.
Challenges in CSR Communication	Inconsistent messaging, greenwashing, and platform segmentation were identified as significant challenges.
Stakeholder Engagement	Effective CSR requires ongoing dialogue with stakeholders, not just one-way communication. Interactive formats such as live Q&As increase trust.

5 Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the final conclusions drawn from the research and offers practical recommendations based on the study's key findings. It reflects on how digital media influences CSR communication, stakeholder trust, and public perception. The insights provide actionable guidance for companies seeking to enhance the credibility, engagement, and effectiveness of their digital CSR and sustainability strategies.

5.1 Summary

This research set out to explore how digital media platforms are transforming the way companies communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability initiatives, and to assess the implications of such communication on stakeholder trust, public perception, and brand reputation. Through a rigorous qualitative methodology rooted in interpretivism and supported by thematic analysis, the study captured the nuanced perspectives of digital media users, highlighting both the potential and pitfalls of digital CSR communication in the modern landscape. The findings revealed that digital platforms, particularly Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube, have become central gateways for stakeholders to access, engage with, and evaluate CSR activities. These platforms enable companies to move beyond static CSR reporting and adopt dynamic, real-time methods of communication that better align with the expectations of contemporary audiences. Stakeholders, especially younger generations, prefer visual storytelling and short-form content that is easily digestible and emotionally engaging. This confirms the growing importance of media richness and content accessibility in driving effective CSR engagement.

A critical insight from the data was the indispensable role of authenticity in building trust. Participants repeatedly emphasized that CSR communication must be evidence-based, transparent, and supported by third-party validation or NGO collaborations. Empty slogans, vague promises, or overly polished content were perceived as greenwashing tactics, which significantly damaged brand credibility. Trust was found to be closely tied to consistent messaging, acknowledgment of challenges, and the presence of measurable impact. Brands that demonstrated humility, showcased real employees, and engaged in long-term storytelling were seen as more trustworthy and sincere.

The study also found that amongst skeptical publics, digital CSR campaigns could create a positive shift in public perception of a brand. The participants explained that they rethought positive

perceptions toward businesses they encountered after reading CSR articles that indicated an actual impact to the community, the environment or socially. This is consistent with stakeholder and legitimacy theories that note that digital CSR is about much more than marketing: it is about using the digital as a means of developing a relationship with stakeholders and enhancing corporate accountability. The other major theme was in the effective use of visual storyteling. According to participants, videos, mini documentations, animations and infographics were content formats preferred and found to be more relatable and more memorable in comparison to the more traditional text heavy reports. Visual media, however, were effective only if they were authentic and in the right tone. Stakeholders prefer content that felt natural, not scripted and emotionally resonant rather than overly produced or brand centric.

Despite these advantages, the study highlighted significant challenges in digital CSR communication. Key issues included digital fatigue, inconsistent messaging across platforms, performative CSR timed around social causes, and difficulties in tailoring content to diverse stakeholder groups. Participants cautioned that CSR efforts which appeared opportunistic or fragmented were often dismissed as insincere, suggesting that companies must develop more integrated and long-term digital engagement strategies. The challenge of audience segmentation also emerged as a key barrier, with different demographic groups favoring different platforms and content formats, complicating unified communication strategies. Crucially, the study emphasized the importance of continuous engagement and two-way communication. Participants valued brands that responded to feedback, facilitated open discussions, and enabled stakeholders to contribute to CSR narratives. Interactive tools such as live Q&A sessions, webinars, and comment threads were highlighted as effective methods for fostering trust and demonstrating corporate accountability. This supports the principles of Dialogic Communication Theory, which advocates for reciprocal, ethical communication that goes beyond broadcasting and embraces meaningful stakeholder participation.

Results were interpreted using the theoretical framework of Stakeholder Theory, Legitimacy Theory and Dialogic Communication which were relevant in anchoring theory. The Stakeholder Theory contributed to explaining the necessity of inclusive and adaptive communication and the need to conform to the expectations of different stakeholder groups. The Legitimacy Theory helped to reinforced the concept of consistency and transparency as a means to gaining the public's

approval. Finding the growing demand for participatory, interactive CSR discourse, Dialogic Communication Theory focused on some of the most significant CSR practices in digital space.

In general, the study shows that digital media have changed dramatically the way in which CSR is communicated, interpreted and assessed. What digital platforms can provide companies as powerful tools, when used strategically and ethically, is a means to build trust, become more transparent and thus create meaningful stakeholder relations. The potential is, however, only realized when CSR messaging is authentic, consistent and credible evidence (Abreu, 2000). Digital CSR communication is not branding fashion as it is here for the long run, to be committed to effect and values. The outcomes of this study provide a firm basis for firms that are intersted to improve their digital CSR perspective. Knowing the expectations of stakeholders and practicing a truly sustainable digital communication that is in line with their renowned sustainability objectives can help companies build a good reputation, enhance their relations with stakeholders and give back to the society and the environment meaningfully.

5.2 Implications

The findings of this research have several important implications for both practitioners and academics. For companies, the study emphasizes the necessity of adopting a strategic, transparent, and audience-centric approach to digital CSR communication. Organizations must move beyond one-off promotional content and instead commit to ongoing, interactive, and authentic engagement with stakeholders. The research highlights the critical role of platform-specific strategies, suggesting that CSR messages should be tailored to the preferences and expectations of different audiences, particularly when targeting generational or professional segments. For digital marketing and sustainability professionals, the results point to the value of visual storytelling, real-time updates, and collaboration with credible partners such as NGOs to build trust. These tactics enhance brand legitimacy and reduce the risk of being perceived as inauthentic or opportunistic. Academically, the research contributes to the growing body of literature at the intersection of digital media, stakeholder engagement, and CSR, reinforcing the applicability of Stakeholder Theory, Legitimacy Theory, and Dialogic Communication Theory in modern corporate contexts. Future research can build on these insights to explore long-term stakeholder responses, the role of emerging technologies in CSR, and strategies for smaller enterprises with limited digital resources. This study offers a practical roadmap for enhancing CSR credibility in a digital-first environment.

5.3 Research Limitations and Future Work

While this study provides valuable insights into digital CSR communication, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted using a small, purposive sample of seven digital media users, which, although sufficient for qualitative depth, limits the generalizability of findings across broader populations and cultural contexts. The cross-sectional design captured stakeholder perceptions at a single point in time, making it difficult to observe how attitudes toward CSR evolve in response to sustained digital campaigns or long-term engagement. Additionally, all data were self-reported, introducing the potential for social desirability bias, particularly in discussions around ethical and environmental behavior. The use of simple random sampling also did not account for stratification by age, occupation, or digital literacy, which could have yielded more differentiated insights. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on consumer perspectives and did not include the viewpoints of corporate managers or CSR professionals, whose experiences could offer a more comprehensive picture. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples across industries and countries to strengthen external validity. Longitudinal studies could track evolving stakeholder responses to digital CSR initiatives over time. Including corporate practitioners in future investigations would also enrich the understanding of strategic challenges and innovations in digital CSR communication.

5.4 Recommendations

This section provides recommendations based on the research findings to address the identified issues and enhance future practices.

5.4.1 Prioritize Authentic and Evidence-Based Communication

Companies must ensure that their CSR narratives shared on digital platforms are grounded in verifiable actions. Audiences, especially younger users, are highly attuned to performative messaging and are quick to reject CSR content that lacks transparency (Afzali and Kim, 2021). Businesses should collaborate with NGOs, publish third-party audits, and disclose both progress and setbacks. Featuring employee voices and real-world examples will humanize corporate efforts and distinguish genuine initiatives from greenwashing. The integration of key metrics, environmental reports, and impact data alongside visual content can greatly increase stakeholder trust and perception of brand integrity (Ellerup Nielsen and Thomsen, 2018).

5.4.2 Tailor Platform-Specific Content Strategies

Not all digital platforms serve the same audience. As shown in the study, TikTok and Instagram appeal more to younger stakeholders who value brevity, visual storytelling, and informal tone. Meanwhile, platforms like LinkedIn and YouTube are preferred for more in-depth and formal CSR content. Companies should adapt their messaging style, format, and tone to fit the expectations of users on each platform (CHAE, 2020). While consistency in brand values is essential, flexibility in communication format enhances relevance. Using media richness theory, businesses should invest in video, infographics, behind-the-scenes content, and live interaction depending on the platform's technical strengths and audience expectations (Mohamed and Yusuf, 2024).

5.4.3 Implement Continuous Two-Way Engagement

CSR communication should not be limited to promotional campaigns or symbolic observances such as Earth Day. Stakeholders expect regular and meaningful interaction. Companies should introduce mechanisms for two-way dialogue including comment threads, live Q&A sessions, webinars, and digital surveys. Tools like Twitter Spaces or Instagram Lives allow real-time discussion, which reinforces transparency and responsiveness (Xiong, 2024). Incorporating user feedback into future CSR initiatives and visibly responding to stakeholder concerns enhances participatory value. This aligns with dialogic communication theory and reinforces long-term trust.

5.4.4 Establish Internal CSR Communication Alignment

Many companies struggle with inconsistent messaging across departments and platforms. Marketing, sustainability, and corporate communication teams often operate in silos, which can produce disjointed narratives. Businesses must ensure integrated communication by establishing a unified digital CSR strategy. This involves creating centralized content guidelines, synchronizing campaign timelines, and aligning tone across all platforms. A cohesive digital voice improves message clarity and reinforces organizational legitimacy. Leadership must facilitate collaboration among departments to maintain coherence in sustainability storytelling and reporting (Kathryn Alexis, 2019).

5.4.5 Combat Digital Fatigue through Focused Messaging

The research highlighted digital fatigue as a major concern. Companies should resist the temptation to overload audiences with frequent or redundant posts. Instead, they must focus on high-quality, well-timed content that delivers value and avoids repetition. Using analytics to identify peak engagement periods and content preferences can optimize posting schedules. Additionally, brands should shift from one-off celebratory posts to sustained storytelling arcs, where updates are provided across a project lifecycle. This fosters narrative continuity and deepens audience connection with the cause (Hua et al., 2024).

5.4.6 Showcase Local and Community-Based Impact

CSR initiatives that reflect local realities and involve local community voices resonate better. When companies showed grassroots stories like someone funding a clean water project or educational program, the participants in the study came away with a positive perception change. Therefore, locally grounded storytelling should be prioritized for businesses focusing on community involvement, stakeholder engagement and real beneficiaries. Localized content like this reinforces brand authenticity and gives viewers a way to better relate to the specifics of how it has affected them (Panthong and Taecharungroj, 2021). NGO, community leaders and local influencers collaborations further enhance the credibility of the message.

5.4.7 Train Digital Teams in Ethical CSR Communication

The growing complexity of CSR messaging in digital spaces requires training for communication teams. Staff must be equipped with knowledge about ethical guidelines, stakeholder sensitivity, media literacy, and sustainability topics. Workshops, certifications, and continuous professional development should be introduced to build competence in crafting responsible and transparent digital narratives. Additionally, incorporating feedback loops within the organization can help monitor the alignment of digital CSR messages with stakeholder expectations and social realities (Harrison, 2021).

5.4.8 Monitor and Evaluate CSR Campaign Effectiveness

To ensure that CSR efforts achieve their desired outcomes, companies must establish monitoring frameworks using both quantitative and qualitative tools. Metrics should include reach,

engagement rates, sentiment analysis, and audience feedback. Qualitative insights from stakeholder interactions, surveys, and testimonials should inform future campaigns. Firms should conduct periodic evaluations and publish summary reports detailing outcomes, adjustments, and stakeholder reactions. This reinforces accountability and supports continuous improvement in CSR strategy (Bialkova and Te Paske, 2020).

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7 Appendix

7.1 Interview Questions

1. How do you usually come across companies' CSR and sustainability initiatives on digital platforms such as social media, websites, or blogs?
2. When you see a company promoting CSR or sustainability online, what factors make you trust or doubt the authenticity of their message?
3. In your opinion, which type of digital content (e.g., videos, infographics, blogs, social media posts) is most effective in communicating CSR and sustainability initiatives? Why?
4. Have you ever changed your opinion about a company (positively or negatively) after seeing their CSR activities on digital media? Can you describe what influenced that change?
5. What challenges do you think companies face when communicating their CSR efforts through digital platforms?
6. What actions or qualities make you believe that a company's CSR communication is authentic and trustworthy when seen online?
7. How important is it for you that a company shows continuous and interactive engagement (e.g., responding to feedback, hosting webinars) regarding their CSR initiatives on digital media?