

The Impact of Social Media on Corporate Social Responsibility: Motivations, Practices, and Outcomes

Keyu Yan^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Economics and Management, Beijing Jiaotong University, Weihai, 264401, China
a. 22726033@bjtu.edu.cn*

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In the information age, the rapid development of social media has influenced the public's views and cognition, and has directly and indirectly increased the expectations for companies to fulfill their social responsibilities. Based on a review of previous research literature, this paper argues that the impact of social media on corporate social responsibility (CSR) primarily includes motivational, operational, and effect-based impacts. The motivational impact of social media on CSR can be attributed to four factors: meeting consumer expectations and shaping brand image, reducing the pressure from social media public opinion, gaining interactive incentives from social media, and providing a transparent communication platform to capture stakeholders' attention. Social media also affects the specific practices of companies in implementing CSR activities. It offers a more effective platform for disseminating CSR information, helps establish appropriate communication methods, and enhances CSR image management on social media. Fulfilling CSR through social media can yield positive outcomes, shape corporate reputation and brand image, actively influence consumer attitudes and behaviors, and encourage companies to fulfill their social responsibilities in alignment with publicized information. Future research could focus on the differing impacts of social media on companies of various types and sizes, providing more detailed guidance and recommendations for companies.

Keywords: Social Media, Corporate Social Responsibility, Correlation Effect.

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to the idea that, in addition to generating profits and fulfilling legal responsibilities to shareholders, companies also have obligations to consumers, communities, and the environment. For instance, Apple has removed the power adapter from its iPhones in order to achieve its carbon neutrality goal by 2030, and KFC has set up surplus food collection stations for surrounding communities. As the concept of CSR has gained increasing attention from companies and society at large, businesses are paying more attention to giving back to society and enhancing their image through various channels. At the same time, the rapid development of social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu has provided new ideas and inspiration for companies to promote their CSR activities, offering a platform for interaction between companies and consumers. Through social media platforms, companies can more conveniently communicate with consumers, employees, investors, and other

stakeholders, understand their needs and expectations, and respond to their concerns in a timely manner.

Social media is interactive, visible, and transparent [1, 2]. Recent studies have explored the impact of social media on the motivation, practice, and effects of CSR [3-5]. However, most existing studies focus on a specific hypothesis or case for in-depth research and gradually discuss the impact of social media on CSR. Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive articles that discuss the impact and role of social media on CSR in the three dimensions of motivation, practice, and effect.

The significance of this study lies in organizing and summarizing the current research on the impact of social media on CSR, providing a reference for future research in this field. It also offers practical guidance on how companies can effectively carry out CSR communication and interaction in the era of social media. This study explores the various aspects and ways social media impacts CSR and provides theoretical guidance for companies to better use social media platforms to implement CSR activities.

The impact of social media on CSR is an emerging research area, and there is currently a lack of systematic research reviews. This study aims to explore the impact of social media on CSR, providing both theoretical references and practical guidance for companies to better utilize social media platforms to conduct CSR activities.

This study adopts the literature review method to organize and analyze recent literature on the impact of social media on CSR. This paper reviews the impact of social media on the motivation, practice, and results of CSR activities by companies, providing a reference for research in this field. It highlights the various ways social media influences CSR and offers theoretical guidance for companies to better utilize social media platforms to carry out CSR activities.

2. The Motivational Impact of Social Media on CSR

2.1. Consumer Expectations and Brand Reputation

The use of social media increases consumers' expectations for CSR activities, meaning that consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward companies are influenced by CSR motivations. Combining value-driven and performance-driven motivations can enhance consumers' willingness to spread electronic word-of-mouth [6]. Modern organizations recognize the importance of CSR communication in shaping consumer behavior, and consumers are increasingly inclined to choose organizations that actively engage in CSR activities [7]. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to actively utilize social media for CSR activities. The influence of social media makes companies more sensitive and respectful in their interactions with the public, thereby fostering improvements in corporate CSR [4]. Social media serves as a communication platform with wide-ranging influence, significantly increasing consumers' expectations for corporate social responsibility activities. Consumers are now more concerned about the CSR efforts of companies and may base their opinions and purchasing decisions on these behaviors. This trend encourages companies to invest in CSR to build a positive brand image and enhance consumer loyalty. Companies must recognize that their CSR activities on social media are vital to meeting consumer expectations, which will directly impact their market competitiveness and profitability.

2.2. Sentiment and Public Opinion

Negative sentiment and public opinion on social media may prompt companies to adopt superficial CSR practices in order to cope with the pressure of public opinion. Negative sentiment on social media can exacerbate managers' short-sighted behavior, leading companies to engage in ESG greenwashing [3]. While this behavior may alleviate CSR pressure in the short term, it can damage the company's reputation in the long run. Once this behavior is exposed, it can cause irreversible harm

to brand trust. For companies, public opinion is indeed a significant challenge; however, they should not seek short-term relief or focus only on public relations effects, but instead should sincerely invest in CSR practices.

2.3. Interactive Incentives

Performance indicators on social media (such as the number of shares, likes, and positive replies) can activate normative processes, thereby enhancing the intention to share information [5]. This suggests that the interactivity and visibility of social media may motivate companies to more actively participate in CSR activities to gain higher social recognition and support. The use of social media can enhance companies' CSR engagement and motivation, especially through consumer feedback and interaction [1]. Specifically, the interactivity and communication offered by social media enable companies to better understand consumer expectations and reactions, motivating them to engage in more socially responsible behavior and adjust their CSR strategies accordingly. This direct consumer engagement and feedback mechanism encourages companies to participate in meaningful social responsibility activities, leading to positive outcomes both socially and economically.

2.4. Transparency and Information Asymmetry

Social media provides companies with a transparent and interactive communication platform, reduces information asymmetry, encourages companies to pay attention to the needs and expectations of stakeholders, and influences their CSR motivation. Social media offers companies a platform to communicate with the public in a transparent and interactive manner, thereby reducing information asymmetry [2]. The presence of social media prompts companies to place greater emphasis on transparency and accountability. This interactivity not only enhances the CSR motivation of companies but also helps to build deeper relationships with stakeholders, which is crucial for the long-term success of companies.

3. The Operational Impact of Social Media on CSR

3.1. Interactivity and Dissemination

Hartmann et al. explored the impact of social media support on the dissemination of CSR information through experimental research, highlighting that when companies publish CSR information on social media, they should pay attention to the source of information sharing and the degree of content empowerment [5]. This means that when companies conduct CSR on social media, they need to design content that can trigger user interaction and sharing. Companies spread their CSR activities through social media to attract the attention of different stakeholders [7]. This method of communication allows CSR activities to become more widely known to consumers, thereby enhancing consumer participation and loyalty. Companies need to design effective CSR posts and enhance their influence through the dissemination mechanisms of social media [1]. The characteristics of social media (such as interactivity and dissemination) affect the specific practices of companies in CSR communication, and social media plays an important role in the dissemination of CSR information. For example, Zhao Zhiqiang, the founder of Big Pizza, published works on Douyin to collect consumer opinions and formulate policies, attracting a large number of comments from college students. Based on consumer demand, he formulated a policy to reduce some meal expenses for college students. This allowed the company to demonstrate its social responsibility and reduce the burden on consumers. Social media provides companies with an excellent channel to express their views and receive comments and opinions from consumers. The company's CSR

information dissemination strategy on social media needs to be carefully designed to ensure that the information resonates and prompts users to share.

3.2. CSR Transparency and Feedback

The way information is transmitted on social media (such as one-way or two-way) will affect consumers' attitudes and behavioral responses. Among them, two-way communication can more effectively improve consumers' attitudes when conveying value and performance-driven motivations [6]. Social media provides a communication platform that enables companies to have more direct two-way communication with consumers. This communication method can not only increase consumer participation, but also enhance their perception and evaluation of CSR activities. For example, Lei Jun, the founder of Xiaomi, updated social media before the Mid-Autumn Festival, introducing the 300,000 mooncakes that will be given to consumers in the form of a short video, and invited consumers to give their opinions on the Xiaomi Note series of mobile phones, striving to build effective two-way communication. The video received 581,000 likes and 180,000 comments as of November 30, 2024, effectively communicating with consumers.

Companies are increasingly relying on social media for CSR communication, and the uniqueness of social media affects consumers' attribution of CSR, as shown by the fact that company-generated social media communication is identified as an important antecedent of CSR attribution [8]. This suggests that companies' specific practices on social media will affect consumers' views on their CSR activities.

The CSR information posted by companies on social media needs to have clear themes and high-quality signal characteristics in order to better resonate with the public, including the use of tags and participation in discussions of existing social movements [2]. The active participation of employees on social media (such as sharing, liking and commenting on CSR-related content) can be regarded as an important indicator of the effectiveness of CSR communication [9]. Battocchio et al. found that among different types of CSR information, employee-related CSR information performed best in consumer behavior participation [10]. This means that companies can mobilize employees to post positive information about the company on social media as an effective way to communicate with consumers.

By interacting with consumers through social media, companies can more effectively communicate their values and performance-driven motivations, thereby enhancing brand image and consumer loyalty. This interactivity also requires companies to be more transparent and sincere in their communications, as consumers now have more opportunities and channels to verify the authenticity of corporate statements. At the same time, through the active participation of employees, companies can further enhance the credibility of their CSR information, as employees' personal networks can become a powerful channel for disseminating CSR activities.

3.3. CSR Image Management

As a tool for CSR image management, social media can both enhance the humanized image of enterprises and lead them to adopt false CSR performance. Social media can effectively humanize enterprises and make their CSR efforts more relatable [4]. Enterprises' performance on social media prompts them to focus more on showcasing and communicating their CSR results. As an important public opinion platform, user comments on social media may cause enterprises to adopt false representations of their CSR performance, potentially misleading investors about their actual ESG performance [3]. This behavior is considered an impression management strategy. In CSR image management, the "double-edged sword" nature of social media is evident. On the one hand, social media can help enterprises shape a positive and responsible image; on the other hand, improper use

of social media by enterprises, such as engaging in greenwashing, can cause significant harm when the truth is revealed. Therefore, when using social media for CSR communication, enterprises must ensure that their actions align with the information they convey to maintain their integrity and reputation.

4. The Effect-Based Impact of Social Media on CSR

4.1. Corporate Reputation and Brand Image

The widespread dissemination of CSR information on social media can significantly enhance a company's reputation and brand image, while also promoting positive electronic word-of-mouth [5]. The broad support of the community on social media is viewed as an endorsement of CSR information, which, in turn, boosts users' intention to share the information, creating a reinforcing cycle [5]. After establishing a Twitter account, a company's CSR rating is significantly better than that of its peers without a Twitter account. This is also supported by feedback from survey participants, indicating that social media participation can improve CSR outcomes [4]. When employees actively engage on social media, consumers tend to have a more positive view of the company's CSR activities, thereby enhancing the company's reputation [9]. CSR information on social media can resonate with the public, thus influencing the company's reputation [2]. Companies are accumulating reputation capital through the daily shifts in the public's opinions and attitudes on social media. Social media has a positive impact on the effectiveness of CSR communication, specifically reflected in the positive effects on brand attitudes and purchasing behavior. Social media support (such as likes and shares) can improve consumers' attitudes toward CSR, thereby affecting purchase intentions [1].

The role of social media in shaping corporate reputation and brand image is clear. Research shows that social media is a vital channel for companies to disseminate CSR information, shape their brand image, and accumulate reputation capital.

4.2. Consumer Attitudes and Behaviors

CSR communication on social media can affect consumer attitudes and behaviors, including increasing consumer participation, purchase intentions, and loyalty.

Bialkova and Te Paske pointed out that the credibility of information disseminated on social media and the credibility of CSR motivations can affect consumer attitudes and behavioral responses [6]. The use of social media can enhance consumers' willingness to participate and purchase intentions, especially when the information is considered credible. The results of Ahmad et al. show that CSR communication on social media has a positive impact on consumer loyalty, and consumers' brand appreciation plays a partial mediating role in this relationship [7]. This shows that CSR activities conducted through social media can effectively enhance consumer loyalty. When companies convey CSR information through social media, consumers will form positive value-driven perceptions and believe that the company demonstrates transparency and sincere commitment [8]. This shows that CSR communication on social media affects consumer attitudes and behaviors. CSR information on social media has an impact on consumers' attitudes and trust in brands, especially community-related CSR and company statements score higher in the evaluation of brand attitudes and brand trust [10].

The above articles all explore the impact of social media on consumer attitudes and behaviors. They point out that social media is an effective platform for companies to communicate CSR information with consumers and influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. After companies learn about this information, they can effectively and positively influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors by making targeted changes to their CSR behaviors on social media.

4.3. Consistency Between Social Media Information and CSR Behavior

The pressure from social media may lead to inconsistent behavior of enterprises in CSR, that is, there is a contradiction between the CSR statement of the enterprise and its actual behavior [3]. The result of such false performance of enterprises may damage their reputation, and in the absence of effective supervision, enterprises are more likely to engage in greenwashing. This view reminds enterprises that when using social media for CSR communication, they must ensure that their behavior is consistent with the information conveyed to maintain their integrity and reputation.

5. Conclusion

This review comprehensively analyzes the impact of social media on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and draws the following conclusions: First, social media significantly increases consumers' expectations of CSR activities and profoundly affects consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward companies. Second, the interactivity and visibility of social media motivate companies to participate more actively in CSR activities in order to gain higher social recognition and support. Third, social media provides a more transparent and effective platform for the dissemination of CSR information, which helps improve CSR behavior and enhance CSR effects. Social media has a significant impact on CSR motivations, practices, and effects.

Future research can further explore other mechanisms of social media's impact on CSR, including the differences and similarities in the impact of different types of social media platforms on corporate CSR decision-making and communication strategies. Research can also focus on the impact of social media on different industries (e.g., TO C, TO B, TO G) and different scales of CSR motivations, practices, and effects. In addition, it is also necessary to pay attention to the role of social media in corporate crisis management. Through these studies, more in-depth suggestions can be provided for corporate development, enabling companies to more effectively communicate and interact with CSR in the social media era.

References

- [1] Fernández, P., Hartmann, P. and Apaolaza, V. (2022) *What drives CSR communication effectiveness on social media? A process-based theoretical framework and research agenda*, *International journal of advertising*, 41(3), 385–413.
- [2] Saxton, G.D. et al. (2019) *Do CSR Messages Resonate? Examining Public Reactions to Firms' CSR Efforts on Social Media*, *Journal of business ethics*, 155(2), 359–377.
- [3] Long, L., Wang, C. and Zhang, M. (2024). *Does Social Media Pressure Induce Corporate Hypocrisy? Evidence of ESG Greenwashing from China*, *Journal of business ethics* [Preprint].
- [4] Balasubramanian, S.K., Fang, Y. and Yang, Z. (2021) *Twitter Presence and Experience Improve Corporate Social Responsibility Outcomes*, *Journal of business ethics*, 173(4), 737–757.
- [5] Hartmann, P. et al. (2021). *Explaining Viral CSR Message Propagation in Social Media: The Role of Normative Influences*, *Journal of business ethics*, 173(2), 365–385.
- [6] Bialkova, S. and Stephanie, Te Paske. (2021). *Campaign participation, spreading electronic word of mouth, purchase: how to optimise corporate social responsibility, CSR, effectiveness via social media?*, *European journal of management and business economics*, 30(1), 108–126.
- [7] Ahmad, N. et al. (2021). *CSR communication through social media: A litmus test for banking consumers' loyalty*, *Sustainability*, 13(4), 1–16.
- [8] Dunn, K. and Harness, D. (2018) *Communicating corporate social responsibility in a social world: the effects of company-generated and user-generated social media content on CSR attributions and skepticism*, *Journal of marketing management*, 34(17–18), 1503–1529.
- [9] Jiang, H. et al. (2022) *'Linking CSR Communication to Corporate Reputation: Understanding Hypocrisy, Employees Social Media Engagement and CSR-Related Work Engagement'*, *Sustainability*, 14(4), 2359.
- [10] Battocchio, A.F. et al. (2024). *Do Good and Be 'Liked': CSR Messages on Social Media during COVID-19 Pandemic and Consumer Responses*, *Journal of current issues and research in advertising*, 45(2), 219–241.