

Impact of Modes, and Media of CSR Communication on Stakeholder Engagement

Noushad P. K *

Abstract

ABSTRACT

Recently, companies have begun to place increased value on communicating their socially responsible initiatives to the stakeholders, as CSR communication is considered one of the essential elements of gaining business benefits from such efforts (Oh & Ki, 2019; Dawkins, 2004). The current study examines how various modes and media used for communicating CSR efforts of an organization influence stakeholder engagement by employing 2 modes (of CSR communication: symmetric vs. asymmetric) \times 2 media (for CSR communication: social media vs. corporate websites) between-subject experiments. Official social media pages and corporate websites of a fictitious company through which CSR information is communicated employing symmetric and asymmetric modes were created and presented to a sample of 160 post-graduate students of an Indian university. The results indicate that the symmetric mode of CSR communication reports higher stakeholder engagement than the asymmetric mode of CSR communication. It is also reported that CSR creates better stakeholder engagement than corporate websites when communicated through the company's official social media pages. This research contributes to the CSR communication and marketing literature on how to ensure the engagement of the stakeholders, particularly consumers, in communicating the CSR initiatives of an organization, considering various modes and media of communicating CSR initiatives.

Keywords: CSR, CSR communication, social media, stakeholder engagement, consumer engagement.

~How to cite: Noushad, P. (2023). Impact of modes and media of CSR communication on stakeholder engagement. *Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship*, 17(4), 54–67

DOI 10.70906/20231704054067

* School of Management Studies, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) Kochi, Kerala – 682 022

1. Introduction

In the current highly competitive marketing environment, companies worldwide consider Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategic tool for fostering and strengthening stakeholder attention, which brings in potential benefits in the form of relationship building (Park & Kang, 2020). However, to achieve these potential benefits, companies should engage in proper, effective, and intelligent CSR communication with the stakeholders (Greenwood, 2007). Previous studies (e.g., Illia, Zyglidopoulos & Romenti, 2015) consider CSR communication a crucial and critical corporate activity because it determines the stakeholders' decisions for rewarding the organizations for their CSR activities. Moreover, if irresponsibly managed, CSR might unfavourably influence the company's success because the stakeholders are likewise expected to offer their opinions concerning the organization's CSR communication practices. In other words, stakeholder engagement has become a central component of testing the viability of organizations' CSR communication endeavours and attaining market-related outcomes. Despite an increasing tendency among companies towards CSR communication endeavours in these years, their efforts towards focusing on growing stakeholder engagement have yet to give a guaranteed result of creating stakeholder relationships. Hence, there is a need to consider various factors related to the organization's CSR communication efforts, such as modes and media of CSR communication that might affect stakeholder relationships and engagement.

Ensuring stakeholder engagement depends on the type of media used to communicate the organization's CSR initiatives (Mercadé-Melé et al., 2017). Technological development has forced companies to change their styles of conveying CSR-related messages to the stakeholders (Ali et al., 2015). Subsequently, the traditional media platforms such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television used for communicating CSR messages are viewed as generally ineffective among the stakeholders in today's digital era (Kim & Ferguson, 2014; Dawkins, 2005; Clark, 2000). Instead, non-traditional CSR communication platforms such as corporate websites and official social media pages of the companies have advanced as potentially effective communication

tools as they facilitate dialogue-oriented interactions with the stakeholders (Hayes & Carr, 2021; Troise & Camilleri, 2021). On the other hand, the open nature of these non-traditional media can give rise to significant challenges for organizations (Donn & Hriner, 2022). For example, customer feedback in the form of negative comments on CSR-related social media posts may become a severe concern for organizations because if it is not effectively managed, it would severely damage their corporate image (Yang et al., 2019). Albeit many scholarly approaches towards comparing various CSR communication platforms from their effectiveness perspective, there is a need for explicitly examining different types of non-traditional CSR communication media as they can have far-reaching impacts on stakeholder engagement.

The concept of the modes of CSR communication, namely symmetric and asymmetric modes, is generally considered an antecedent for measuring various benefits elicited by CSR communication practices (for example, Kollat & Farache, 2017). Symmetric and asymmetric modes of CSR communication influence stakeholder engagement differently (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Morsing, 2006). Moreover, the relevant literature has recognized the significance of the dialogue-oriented, symmetric mode of CSR communication in the CSR communication practices of the organizations (e.g., Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018) that helps in ensuring participative decision-making between the company and the stakeholders toward CSR policies (Tao et al., 2018). However, comparing the symmetric and asymmetric modes of CSR communication on stakeholder engagement is considered an under-researched area. Therefore, drawing upon the conceptual frameworks of symmetric and asymmetric modes of CSR communication put forward by Kollat and Farache (2017), the current study aims to examine the role of different modes of CSR communication over various CSR communication media on stakeholder engagement by addressing the accompanying research questions:

1. Does the symmetric mode of CSR communication create more robust stakeholder engagement than the asymmetric mode?

2. Does social media create more robust stakeholder engagement than that of corporate websites?
3. Do the CSR communication media play any moderating role in the relationship between modes of CSR communication and stakeholder engagement?

We implemented an experimental approach to address these research questions by investigating the independent and combined effects of modes and media of CSR communication on stakeholder engagement. The current study makes three empirical contributions to the theory and managerial practices:

1. The degree of stakeholder engagement towards CSR communication efforts of the organizations varies to the extent of employing various modes of CSR.
2. A variety of media used for communicating CSR initiatives invariably influence stakeholder engagement.
3. CSR communication media moderates the relationship between modes of CSR communication and stakeholder engagement.

As such, the primary theoretical contribution of this research is that using a particular mode of CSR communication closely considering the peculiar features of the media of CSR communication mitigates the inherent limitations of an organization's CSR communication efforts that prevent stakeholder engagement. The clear implication is whether to respond to detailed feedback from the stakeholders must be decided based on the media to be adopted for communicating the CSR messages.

The remaining part of this paper begins by explaining this study's conceptual background and hypothesis development. We then explain the experimental method adopted for testing research hypotheses before presenting and discussing the results.

2. Conceptual Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Impact of Modes of CSR Communication on Stakeholder Engagement

In this technological era, creating and maintaining stakeholder relationships calls for more sophisticated communication strategies than previously (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), for example, symmetric and asymmetric modes of CSR communications (Kollat & Farache, 2017). The symmetric mode of CSR communication indicates a dialogue-oriented, proactive engagement between the company and the stakeholders regarding socially responsible initiatives, which, if necessary, prompts the organizations to make internal changes in their CSR policies in order to ensure mutual benefit to both communication parties; in contrast, an asymmetric mode relies on a sender-oriented, one-way process of informing stakeholders, where the company shows willingness neither to interact nor to engage with the stakeholders (Morsing, 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Huang, 2004). In short, the symmetric mode of CSR communication is characterized by listening to, understanding, and valuing stakeholders' feedback; on the other hand, the asymmetric mode does not promote a policy of genuinely listening to understand the concerns of the stakeholders (Lim & Greenwood, 2017; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Grunig & White, 1992). The concept of modes of CSR communication is essential because the symmetric and asymmetric modes of CSR communication are divergent. Hence, it can have a differential impact on the perceptions of consumer trust (Kollat & Farache, 2017) and, ultimately, stakeholder engagement.

It is evident from previous literature (e.g., Kent and Taylor, 2016) that the possibility of dialogic communication between them highly influences the company-stakeholder relationship. In this line, we approach this issue from a participative decision-making perspective toward an organization's CSR policies (Tao et al., 2018). The company works with its stakeholders to participate in an organizational decision-making process of framing its CSR policies with the help of an interactive, dialogue-oriented, symmetric mode of CSR communication. Moreover, Dunn and Grimes (2022), along with others (for instance, Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010 and Lee et al.,

2018), argue that a purely asymmetric mode of CSR communication cannot enhance stakeholders' perceptions towards legitimacy and trust, however, in symmetric mode as the organizations trying to handle stakeholder responses carefully are probably more capable of aligning their CSR initiatives with the communication practices and therefore increases social approval and perceived legitimacy of the organization.

The symmetric mode of CSR communication is an interactive exchange of CSR information between the company and the stakeholder, leading to dialogic communication (Kent & Lane, 2017). Many researchers (e.g., Lee and Park, 2013) have treated dialogue backed by high interactivity as a significant factor that can evolve positive relationships between the company and the stakeholders. In symmetric CSR communication, it is expected that the voice of the stakeholders is considered in the company's CSR-related decisions and shows changes in their organizational behaviour accordingly (Park & Kang, 2020). Moreover, there are significant shreds of evidence in the literature that the involvement of the companies varying from symmetric to asymmetric modes of CSR communication shows a tendency among the stakeholders to evaluate the approach of the stakeholders from the honesty and commitment point of view. Specifically, Min et al. (2015) argued that a company, when willing to be involved in a dialogue-oriented symmetric mode, indicates its readiness to accept full responsibility from its side concerning any failure attached to the CSR policies of the company; on the other hand, asymmetric mode of CSR communication may indicate little concern from the company relating to their CSR policies (Tax et al., 1998). This responsible/irresponsible image created in the stakeholders' minds on account of various modes of CSR communication will directly influence the stakeholders' positive/negative emotional states. Based on this, the symmetric mode of CSR communication will open room for better stakeholder engagement than the asymmetric mode. Hence, based on the above argument, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: The symmetric mode of CSR communication creates more robust stakeholder engagement than the asymmetric mode of CSR communication.

2.2. Influence of CSR Communication Media on Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to the modes of CSR communication, Korschun and Du (2013) highlight the potential importance of the virtual media of CSR communication in generating value for both the company and stakeholders. Companies can use various communication media, including traditional and non-traditional media, to disseminate CSR information to stakeholders (Pizzi et al., 2020). The selection of CSR communication media between traditional and non-traditional is significant because the same message in different media can influence the stakeholders' exposure differently (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). For instance, previous literature reports that the traditional media can generate a positive tone among stakeholders regarding the company's CSR policies (Lunenburg et al., 2016). However, it feels generally ineffective among the stakeholders amidst technological changes in the information and technological arenas (Kim & Ferguson, 2014; Dawkins, 2005; Clark, 2000). Hence, companies are expected to adopt non-traditional communication media for disseminating their CSR initiatives to the stakeholders. In this line, previous research has approached CSR communication to examine the relative effects and effectiveness of non-traditional media of CSR communication on influencing the mental states of the stakeholders. Of these wide varieties of non-traditional media of CSR communication, social media, as against corporate websites, which is accredited as a powerhouse of exchange of information with the least time and cost, has emerged as a potentially powerful and successful tool to communicate messages relating to CSR initiatives of an organization (Ali et al., 2015). For example, Korschun and Du (2013) proposed that social media have a significant role in co-creating value that creates a greater impact on stakeholder relationships.

As social media extents incredible opportunities for dialogic communication between organizations and their stakeholders, it can increase the persuasive power of the CSR communication efforts of an organization (Uzunoglu et al., 2017; Seele & Lock, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, as CSR communication through social media creates an impression among the stakeholders that the

organizations themselves are open to criticism, a sign of corporate sincerity and transparency, it helps shape stakeholders' behaviour, including consumers. This suggests that the media activism generated by social media insists that organizations be prepared to initiate CSR communication practices and engage appropriately with stakeholders' responses even when these comments are negative (Dunn & Grimes, 2022). This, in turn, enables the companies to strengthen stakeholders' engagement in the organization's CSR activities, the relationship between the company and the stakeholders, and stakeholder advocacy (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). In other words, companies are prepared to do more than listen to and engage with the stakeholders, which allows consumers to voice their opinions and be heard.

Moreover, social media offers corporations two-way communication through which they can transmit information relating to CSR initiatives to the stakeholders, accept immediate stakeholder feedback, and create interactions with stakeholders to build better relationships. On the contrary, corporate websites are considered low in media richness as they are relatively poor media for promoting ongoing and intimate discussions. Consequently, the company-stakeholder relationship from the CSR communication paradigm has been enriched to consider that the stakeholders now have a voice in the companies' CSR communication policies and want to be heard. Based on this argument, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₂: Social media creates more robust stakeholder engagement than a corporate website.

2.3. Moderating role of CSR communication Media on Modes of CSR Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Relationship

As a medium of CSR communication, social media offers corporations a wide range of opportunities and can give rise to significant challenges (Dunn & Griner, 2022; Corstjens & Umblijs, 2012). Thus, it will create issues for the companies if they rely solely on social media for CSR communication. For instance, social media allows stakeholders to publicize and share their negative remarks concerning CSR

initiatives, which companies may consider a severe risk to their reputation (Siti-Nabiha et al., 2021). This criticism, which can damage the corporate image, will insist that companies respond efficiently to aggregate stakeholders' misperceptions positively and repudiate the corporate image (Hayes & Carr, 2021). Hence, the uneven selection of the media of CSR communication between corporate websites and social media will help organizations approach CSR communication from a strategic point of view in such a way that tries to respond to the criticisms giving considerable importance. Likewise, while designing their CSR communication strategies, the companies need to integrate both the modes and the media of CSR communication into corporate repertoire to develop reliable and effective CSR communication outcomes in the eyes of the stakeholders (Ettinger et al., 2018; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Morsing, 2006). In other words, the symmetric and asymmetric modes, when adopted invariably in combination with the various media of CSR communication, can mitigate the detrimental impact of the inherent challenges of the CSR communication efforts of the organizations (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

It is, of course, essential to recognize that both modes and media of CSR communication have inherent qualities of influencing stakeholder responses. Hence, from the practical point of view, a pertinent approach towards communication effectiveness is to combine the positive effects of both these media in such a manner as to ensure stakeholder engagement. Given that the independent effects of both the social media and corporate website are likely to be positive, it is sensible to assume that the responses exhibiting the characteristics of both these media will most effectively be capable of mitigating the detrimental impact of CSR communication practices. In order to reap better results in the form of stakeholder engagement, the companies should integrate both these media and modes of CSR communication. More specifically, when it comes to applying varying modes of CSR communication in association with the types of media used for communicating the same, the stakeholders would be mentally prepared to show their tendency to engage with the CSR messages.

Regarding media-mode compatibility, a company's effort to communicate a CSR message through social media platforms by employing a symmetric

mode will likely create more robust stakeholder engagement (Kollat & Farache, 2017; Green, 2018). In other words, stakeholders' tendency to engage with the CSR messages communicated on social media platforms in a symmetric mode will be higher.

On the contrary, if the CSR message is communicated through corporate websites employing an asymmetric mode, it is also sufficient to engender the intention of the stakeholders to engage with such particular CSR messages. In contrast, a CSR message communicated through corporate websites stressing the importance of an asymmetric CSR communication mode will likely create similar outcomes. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H₃: CSR communication media moderates the relationship between modes of CSR communication and stakeholder engagement such that:

H_{3a}: Symmetric mode × social media creates more robust stakeholder engagement.

H_{3b}: Asymmetric mode × corporate website creates more robust stakeholder engagement.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Experimental Design and Participants

We conducted a 2 (modes of CSR communication: symmetric vs. asymmetric) × 2 (media of CSR communication: social media vs. corporate website) between-subject experiment to test the proposed hypotheses. One hundred sixty post-graduate students from an Indian university were recruited to participate in the experiment. Among these, 55% were male, and 45% were female. The average age of the participants was 20.99 years (S. D = 0.731).

3.2. Stimuli Development and Pre-test

Prior to the main experiment, we conducted a series of focus group interviews and pre-tests to

1. Select an appropriate type of fictitious company for stimulus development, which participants would consider personally familiar and relevant.
2. Select a social cause to be used by the company used by the fictitious company for investing in socially responsible activities.

3. Develop and test stimulus materials to ensure the success of experimental manipulations.
4. Ensure the realism and believability of the stimulus materials.

Pre-test participants were recruited from the academic and industrial sectors: CSR and CSR communication experts.

Company selection. Company selection was made in a two-stage process. In the first stage, a pool of 10 experts working in the area of CSR was asked to suggest a few types of industries where the concept of CSR can be fruitfully applied. The focus group suggested various industries, including supermarket chains, pharmaceutical companies, fashion stores, hotels, banking and insurance companies, and telecommunication companies. In the second stage, a group of 30 participants was asked to rate their familiarity and relevance towards the companies suggested by the focus group. We selected the hotel industry based on the participants' highest ratings in familiarity and personal relevance ($M_{\text{Familiarity}} = 4.30$, $M_{\text{relevance}} = 4.45$, on a 5-point Likert scale). This result was not surprising because the hotel industry, though attracting increasing research interests, is still considered under-researched, and for whom CSR communication is of utmost importance to give visibility to their CSR investments (Ettinger et al., 2018). Consequently, we named the hotel firm 'T-Inn Hotels,' which we decided to use as the stimulus company.

Social cause selection. A group of 30 participants was selected to rate their familiarity and relevance towards the social cause from the categorisation of CSR goals by following the suggestions given by Clarkson (1995), Inou and Lee (2011), and Grosbois (2012). The classification framework of CSR goals covers supplier relations, environmental issues, diversity issues, employee relations, and product and service quality. Based on the participants' ratings, the issue of community relations was selected because this CSR goal generated the highest ratings in familiarity and personal relevance ($M_{\text{Familiarity}} = 4.30$, $M_{\text{relevance}} = 4.40$, on a 5-point Likert scale). This result could have been more astonishing as the stakeholders expect support from the hotel to the community in which it is situated (Ettinger et al., 2018).

Stimulus development. To manipulate modes of CSR communication, we developed two messages relating to the CSR initiatives of T-Inn Hotel in the area of community relations; we developed two fictitious news releases, both of which reported the community relations programs of 'T-Inn Hotels': one broadcasted the information to which the company neither reacted to comments nor directly addressed other stakeholders that restrict the possibility of an interactive dialogue between the company and the stakeholders (asymmetric) and the other broadcasted the information on which the company engaged into the conversation by addressing others and responded the stakeholders' reactions that facilitates and promotes a dialogue-oriented communication among the company and the stakeholders (symmetric). To manipulate media of CSR communication, we created a mock Facebook page with like, comment and share features and a corporate website that incorporated the option for the stakeholders to record their comments.

3.3. Experimental Procedures

First, the participants were randomly selected for the experiment from a list of all the university students. Then, we randomly assigned all the participants to one of the four treatments to improve the internal validity. After that, we explained the purpose of the study to the participants and then gave a detailed picture of the experimentation procedure. Following this, the participants were given a detailed description of the modes and media of CSR communication and the media usually adopted by the companies to communicate their CSR-related information to the stakeholders.

Then, the participants were directed to review the experimental stimuli for almost 10 minutes. After the review, the participants completed a questionnaire with items measuring outcome variables, covariates, manipulation checks, and realism checks. We measured the participants' demographic details at the end of the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the participants were debriefed that the messages relating to the company's CSR activities they read were fictitious and created for the research purpose alone.

3.4. Measurement

We adapted an established scale from Chu, Chen and Gan (2020) to measure the outcome variable stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement is the total of all organisations' activities to positively involve the stakeholders in their CSR activities (Greenwood, 2007). The construct stakeholder engagement was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), which contains ten items: "I would like to post my personal experiences related to the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to follow or like the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to post or share my thoughts about the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to post or share photos, videos, memes, or gifs created by others that relate to the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to post or share photos, videos, memes, or gifs created by youths that relate to the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to receive messages or information from T-Inn Hotel regarding its CSR activities", "I would like to forward someone else's discussion about CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel to other people", "I would like to join Facebook groups dedicated to the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to create a Facebook group dedicated to the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel", "I would like to attend a gathering regarding the CSR activities of T-Inn Hotel that I learned about through social media". The internal reliability was $\alpha = .807$. Further, we statistically controlled for the attitude of the stakeholders towards CSR as it may affect their responses towards the stimuli (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Manipulation and Realism Check

The manipulation check aimed to determine whether the manipulated independent variable produced the desired control condition (Islam et al., 2021; Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020). First, we assessed whether manipulating the modes of CSR communication was successful by asking the participants their level of agreement with a statement that the CSR information they had just read seemed interactive, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The result of an independent sample t-test showed a significant between ($t_{[158]} = 21.602, p = .000$) symmetric mode of CSR communication ($M = 3.93$) and asymmetric

mode of CSR communication ($M = 1.98$). Then, we tested whether the manipulation of the media of CSR communication was successful by asking the participants their level of agreement with a statement that CSR information they have just read is posted on the official Face page of the company or the corporate website (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) (Dalla-Pria and Rodriguez-de-Dios, 2022). The examination of the social media manipulation reported that those who were exposed to the official Facebook page of the company condition reported a higher score in comparison with the corporate website ($M_{\text{[social media]}} = 3.45$, $M_{\text{[corporate website]}} = 2.60$), $t_{(158)} = 4.317$, $p = .000$). Similarly, those who were exposed in the corporate website condition reported a higher score in comparison with the official Facebook page of the company ($M_{\text{[corporate website]}} = 3.64$, $M_{\text{[social media]}} = 1.95$), $t_{(158)} = 13.265$, $p = .000$). Hence, the study confirmed the success of the manipulated conditions. Moreover, the results also showed that the mean realism scores were satisfactory ($M_{\text{[realism]}} = 3.95$).

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

To test hypotheses, we used a 2 (modes of CSR communication: symmetric vs. asymmetric) \times 2 (media of CSR communication: social media vs. corporate website) between-subject ANCOVA with stakeholder engagement as the outcome variable and CSR attitude as the covariate. The covariate analysis showed that the CSR attitude did not significantly influence the outcome variable ($F_{[1,155]} = .180$, $p = .672$). Hence, to confirm clarity, we eliminated the covariate and analysed variance to test the hypotheses.

H_1 predicted that the symmetric mode of CSR communication would create more robust stakeholder engagement than the asymmetric mode of CSR communication. There was a significant main effect of the symmetric mode of CSR communication ($M = 3.48$) on stakeholder engagement in comparison with the asymmetric mode of CSR communication ($M = 2.70$; $F_{[1,156]} = 86.56$, $p = .000$). Therefore, H_1 was supported. H_2 predicted that social media as the medium of CSR communication would create more robust stakeholder engagement than corporate websites. The result showed a statistically significant main effect of social media ($M = 3.20$) on stakeholder

engagement in comparison with corporate websites ($M = 2.97$; $F_{[1,156]} = 7.52$, $p < .05$). Thus, H_2 was supported.

Following the main effect, we tested the interaction effect between modes of CSR communication \times media of CSR communication on the outcome variable stakeholder engagement. The result was supported as statistically significant $F_{[1,156]} = 33.97$, $p = .000$). Subsequently, as part of testing H_{3a} and H_{3b} , a simple effect analysis (see Figure 2 and Table 1) was conducted. The result supported that the symmetric mode of communication creates more robust stakeholder engagement in the case of social media in comparison with corporate websites ($M_{\text{[social media]}} = 3.86$, $M_{\text{[corporate website]}} = 3.12$, $F_{[1,156]} = 36.72$, $p = .000$). Contrary to this, asymmetric mode of communication creates more robust stakeholder engagement in the case of corporate websites in comparison with social media ($M_{\text{[corporate websites]}} = 2.83$, $M_{\text{[social media]}} = 2.57$, $F_{[1,156]} = 4.76$, $p < .05$). Hence, we found support for H_{3a} and H_{3b} .

5. Discussion of Findings

This study examined how companies investing in socially responsible activities can enhance stakeholder engagement, ensuring that the communication-related fragments are effectively utilized. To this end, we first demonstrated the differential influence of various modes of CSR communication on stakeholder engagement. Our results indicate that a symmetric mode of CSR communication creates more robust stakeholder engagement than an asymmetric one. This result supports and extends the prior evidence of the positive effect of interactive and dialogue-oriented CSR communication strategies (e.g., Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Kollat & Farache, 2017). We then tested the role played by various modern media of CSR communication in creating stakeholder engagement. Our result reveals that a company's official social media pages, when used for communicating CSR initiatives, create more robust stakeholder engagement than when communicated through corporate websites. This result is in line with the findings of Sparks and Bradley (2017) that CSR information communicated through social media enhances the stakeholders' emotional and behavioural states, leading to stakeholder engagement.

Finally, we tested the moderating role of various media of CSR communication on the relationship between modes of CSR communication and stakeholder engagement. Our result shows that the symmetric mode is more productive in enhancing stakeholder engagement if CSR information is communicated through social media platforms; similarly, in the case of asymmetric mode, the corporate website as a medium of CSR communication can create more robust stakeholder engagement. This finding confirms the academic debates that are still going on concerning the differential perceptions of stakeholders towards organizations' CSR communication efforts. Morsing and Schultz (2006) described this communication dilemma as a double-edged sword where, up to some standard level, communicating CSR initiatives serves to achieve "positive corporate virtues"; however, beyond this level, it gives some warning signal to the companies as the stakeholders may believe that the organization is trying to hide something. However, our result advances this theoretical debate by identifying that various modes of CSR communication are more effective in creating stakeholder engagement when combined with another factor, namely, the media of CSR communication. We, therefore, stress that there is a need to extend the academic debate concerning CSR communication more conclusively and holistically, considering other factors that simultaneously influence the effectiveness of CSR communication. From a theoretical perspective, our findings propose that the unique characteristics of a wide variety of CSR communication media may be considered and dealt with as a boundary condition for effectively enhancing the engagement of the stakeholders. Hence, any conceptualization of CSR communication must be approached from an integrated and holistic perspective. Such an approach extends the ongoing debate in the literature as to whether the modes and media of CSR communication are practical components of stakeholders' responses toward the CSR communication efforts of the organizations. The current study highlights the importance of the modes and media of CSR communication as crucial components of any theoretical model enhancing stakeholder engagement toward an organization's CSR initiatives.

6. Theoretical and Managerial Contributions

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

The current study contributes to many aspects of the extant literature on CSR and CSR communication. Prior studies (for example, Reilly & Larya, 2018; Mercadé-Melé et al., 2017) primarily focused on evaluating the relationship between different media employed by the organizations for communicating their CSR initiatives and the stakeholders' responses towards such communication media. However, stakeholder responses, including involvement and engagement, are highly influenced by the extent of how strategically the companies are approaching their CSR communication, where the degree of the possibility of dialogic communication varies (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Ettinger et al., 2018; Kollat & Farache, 2017). Hence, the insights from the current study extend the concept of CSR communication by empirically displaying that both the symmetric and asymmetric modes and the non-traditional media of CSR communication, independently and jointly, stimulate the stakeholders to engage in and engage with the CSR-related policies and practices of the organizations.

Recent studies (Kim & Park, 2020) have focused on the impact of CSR-related activities on stakeholders' market-related responses in the form of positive/negative word-of-mouth intentions. Moreover, Reilley and Larya (2018) posit that the stakeholders' intention to purchase from the companies tends to grow in recent times based on factors other than mere profit motives. However, this is directly related to how effectively the companies manage their CSR-related communication strategies (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004) based on the perceived legitimacy of the corporate social responsibility efforts (Dunn & Grimes, 2022). The current study extends this view to suggest that the symmetric mode of CSR communication can act as a tool that can trigger stakeholders' engagement with the socially responsible initiatives of the organizations. This is because the dialogue-oriented CSR communication inherited by the symmetric mode contributes to creating and maintaining a good and healthy relationship between the company and the stakeholders. Grounded in legitimacy theory, the symmetric mode of CSR communication has often

inspired organizations to fulfil the needs of firms to act responsibly in the society where they operate (Colleoni, 2013; Adelopo et al., 2012).

Prior studies in CSR communication highlighted the role of the CSR communication media on stakeholders' positive perceptions of CSR initiatives (Mercadé-Melé et al., 2017). When using different communication media, the responses from the stakeholders toward CSR initiatives can also vary (Jeong et al., 2013). The results of the current study strengthen this position by establishing the growing acceptance of social media platforms among the stakeholders as an adventurous media of CSR communication and relying on Colleoni's (2013) arguments that the relationships built on a network of peers with no central controlled entities, the current study's findings strengthen this position by verifying the positive role of social media platforms in enhancing stakeholder engagement.

6.2. Managerial Contributions

CSR communication is considered a necessary condition for attaining market-related outcomes for companies. Findings from the current study recommend several insights to the managers of the organization that invest in socially responsible initiatives to enhance stakeholders' engagement with such initiatives. This study shows that there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the CSR communication-related issues of the organizations, particularly regarding the modes- and the media-related issues. Thus, it becomes imperative for the CSR managers of the companies to create a situation-based CSR communication strategy that combines different modes of CSR communication and considers the peculiar features of the CSR communication media. In this line, when employing corporate websites to communicate CSR messages, managers should prioritize the asymmetric mode of CSR communication as the aim is to inform stakeholders regarding CSR initiatives. On the contrary, when using official social media pages, the managers should be ready to interact with the stakeholders' feedback and adopt a symmetric CSR communication mode.

Second, our study results indicate that CSR managers should prioritize the symmetric mode of CSR communication in everyday situations, as the stakeholders are interested in dialogue with the

company regarding CSR initiatives. Finally, besides the corporate websites, CSR managers should use various social media platforms to contact the stakeholders to disseminate information regarding their CSR policies. As such, the stakeholders tend to report their views concerning the CSR initiatives of the organizations. With this, companies can modify their CSR policies, considering consumer feedback.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its valuable contributions to the theory and managerial applications, the current study needs some limitations that are expected to be addressed by future research:

1. The current study used a between-subject experimental design to investigate the impact of various modes and media of CSR communication on stakeholder engagement. Hence, it recommends future research to replicate the results employing other methodological designs, including longitudinal methods.
2. The sample is a group of post-graduate students from an Indian university, which limits the external validity of the model. Hence, we recommend reproducing the results by collecting data from actual consumers.
3. The study used the company's official Facebook page as the social media for communicating CSR initiatives. Hence, future studies can use other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube as communication media for getting richer experiences.
4. The current study evaluated the stakeholders' engagement towards the company's CSR initiatives regarding community relations. The future studies can check the engagement of the stakeholders towards other CSR programs such as supplier relations, environmental issues, diversity issues, employee relations, and product and service quality.

5. The current study examined the impact of CSR communication practices on the hotel industry.

Other industries actively invest in socially responsible activities, including supermarket chains, pharmaceutical companies, fashion stores, and banking and insurance companies. Hence, it is recommended to evaluate such firms' CSR communication practices on their stakeholders' engagement and involvement.

References

- Adelopo, I., Moure, R. C., Preciado, L. V., & Obalola, M. (2012). Determinants of Web-accessibility of Corporate Social Responsibility Communications. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 3(2), 235-247.
- Ali, I., Jiménez-Zarco, A. I., & Bicho, M. (2015). Using social media for CSR communication and engaging stakeholders. *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Digital Age*, 7, 165-185.
- Bortree, D. S. (2014). The state of CSR communication research: A summary and future direction. *The Public Relations Journal*, 8(3), 1-8.
- Chu, S. C., Chen, H. T., & Gan, C. (2020). Consumers' engagement with corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication in social media: Evidence from China and the United States. *Journal of Business Research*, 110, 260-271.
- Clarkson, M. E. (1995). A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance. *Academy of management review*, 20(1), 92-117.
- Colleoni, E. (2013). CSR Communication Strategies for Organizational Legitimacy in social media. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 18(2), 228-248.
- Corstjens, M., & Umblijs, A. (2012). The power of evil: The damage of negative social media strongly outweigh positive contributions. *Journal of advertising research*, 52(4), 433-449.
- Dawkins, J. (2005). Corporate responsibility: The communication challenge. *Journal of communication management*, 9(2), 108-119.
- De Grosbois, D. (2012). Corporate social responsibility reporting by the global hotel industry: Commitment, initiatives and performance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(3), 896-905.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International journal of management reviews*, 12(1), 8-19.
- Dunn, K., & Grimes, A. (2022). Speed and Symmetry: Developing Effective Organisational Responses to social media Criticism of CSR. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 107336.
- Dunn, K., & Harness, D. (2019). Whose voice is heard? The influence of user-generated versus company-generated content on consumer scepticism towards CSR. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35(9-10), 886-915.
- Duthler, G., & Dhanesh, G. S. (2018). The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and internal CSR communication in predicting employee engagement: Perspectives from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Public relations review*, 44(4), 453-462.
- Ettinger, A., Grabner-Kräuter, S., & Terlutter, R. (2018). Online CSR Communication in the Hotel Industry: Evidence from Small Hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 68, 94-104.
- Greenwood, M. (2007). Stakeholder engagement: Beyond the myth of corporate responsibility. *Journal of Business ethics*, 74(4), 315-327.
- Grunig, J.E. and Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Hayes, R. A., & Carr, C. T. (2021). Getting called out: Effects of feedback to social media corporate social responsibility statements. *Public Relations Review*, 47(1), 101962.
- Illia, L., Romenti, S., Rodríguez-Cánovas, B., Murtarelli, G., & Carroll, C. E. (2015). Exploring corporations' dialogue about CSR in the digital era. *Journal of business ethics*, 146(1), 39-58.
- Islam, H., Jebarajakirthy, C., & Shankar, A. (2021). An experimental based investigation into the effects of website interactivity on customer behavior in on-line purchase context. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 29(2), 117-140.
- Jeong, H. J., Paek, H. J., & Lee, M. (2013). Corporate Social Responsibility Effects on Social Network

- Sites. *Journal of Business Research*, 66, 1889--1895.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Kent, M. L., & Lane, A. (2021). Two-way communication, symmetry, negative spaces, and dialogue. *Public Relations Review*, 47(2), 102014.
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2016). From Homo Economicus to Homo dialogicus: Rethinking social media use in CSR communication. *Public relations review*, 42(1), 60-67.
- Kim, J., & Park, T. (2020). How Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Saves a Company: The Role of Gratitude in Buffering Vindictive Consumer Behavior from Product Failures. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 461-472.
- Kim, S., & Ferguson, M. T. (2014). Public expectations of CSR communication: What and how to communicate CSR. *Public Relations Journal*, 8(3), 1-22.
- Kollat, J., & Farache, F. (2017). Achieving Consumer Trust on Twitter via CSR Communication. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 34(6), 505-514.
- Korschun, D., & Du, S. (2013). How virtual corporate social responsibility dialogs generate value: A framework and propositions. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1494-1504.
- Lim, J. S., & Greenwood, C. A. (2017). Communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR): Stakeholder responsiveness and engagement strategy to achieve CSR goals. *Public relations review*, 43(4), 768-776.
- Lunenbergh, K., Gosselt, J. F., & De Jong, M. D. (2016). Framing CSR fit: How corporate social responsibility activities are covered by news media. *Public relations review*, 42(5), 943-951.
- Maignan, I., & Ferrell, O. C. (2004). Corporate Social Responsibility and Marketing: An Integrative Framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 32(1), 3-19.
- Mercadé-Melé, P., Molinillo, S., & Fernández-Morales, A. (2017). The Influence of the Types of Media on the Formation of Perceived CSR. *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC*, 21, 54-64.
- Min, H., Lim, Y., & Magnini, V. P. (2015). Factors affecting customer satisfaction in responses to negative online hotel reviews. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 56(2), 223-231.
- Morsing, M. (2006). Strategic CSR communication: Telling others how good you are. In *Management models for corporate social responsibility* (pp. 238-246). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
- Morsing, M., & Schultz, M. (2006). Corporate Social Responsibility Communication: Stakeholder Information, Response and Involvement Strategies. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 15(4), 323-338.
- Obermiller, C., & Spangenberg, E. R. (1998). Development of a scale to measure consumer skepticism toward advertising. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 7(2), 159-186.
- Oh, J., & Ki, E. J. (2019). Factors affecting social presence and word-of-mouth in corporate social responsibility communication: Tone of voice, message framing, and online medium type. *Public Relations Review*, 45(2), 319-331.
- Park, Y. E., & Kang, M. (2020). When crowdsourcing in CSR leads to dialogic communication: The effects of trust and distrust. *Public Relations Review*, 46(1), 101867.
- Pizzi, S., Moggi, S., Caputo, F., & Rosato, P. (2021). Social media as stakeholder engagement tool: CSR communication failure in the oil and gas sector. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 28(2), 849-859.
- Reilly, A. H., & Hynan, K. A. (2014). Corporate communication, sustainability, and social media: It's not easy (really) being green. *Business horizons*, 57(6), 747-758.
- Reilly, A. H., & Larya, N. (2018). External Communication about Sustainability: Corporate Social Responsibility Reports and social media Activity. *Environmental Communication*, 12(5), 621-637.
- Schultz, F., & Wehmeier, S. (2010). Institutionalization of corporate social responsibility within corporate communications: Combining institutional, sensemaking and communication perspectives. *Corporate Communications: an international journal*, 15(1), 9-29.
- Seele, P., & Lock, I. (2015). Instrumental and/or deliberative? A typology of CSR communication tools. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 131(2), 401-414.

- Siti-Nabiha, A. K., Nordin, N., & Poh, B. K. (2021). Social media usage in business decision-making: the case of Malaysian small hospitality organisations. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, 13(2), 272-289.
- Sparks, B. A., & Bradley, G. L. (2017). A “Triple A” typology of responding to negative consumer-generated online reviews. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 41(6), 719-745.
- Tao, W., Song, B., Ferguson, M. A., & Kochhar, S. (2018). Employees’ prosocial behavioral intentions through empowerment in CSR decision-making. *Public Relations Review*, 44(5), 667-680.
- Tax, S. S., Brown, S. W., & Chandrashekar, M. (1998). Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: Implications for relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 62(2), 60–76.
- Uzunoglu, E., Türkel, S., & Akyar, B. Y. (2017). Engaging consumers through corporate social responsibility messages on social media: An experimental study. *Public relations review*, 43(5), 989-997.
- Van Halderen, M. D., van Riel, C., & Brown, T. J. (2011). Balancing between legitimacy and distinctiveness in corporate messaging: A case study in the oil industry. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 14(4), 273-299.
- Viglia, G., & Dolnicar, S. (2020). A review of experiments in tourism and hospitality. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 80, 102858.
- Yang, M., Ren, Y., & Adomavicius, G. (2019). Understanding user-generated content and customer engagement on Facebook business pages. *Information Systems Research*, 30 (3), 839–855.

Appendices

Table 1: Sample characteristics

	N	Percentage
Gender		
Male	88	55
Female	72	45
Age		
Below 20	48	30
20 – 24	104	65
24 and above	8	5

Table 2: Manipulation check

	Mean	t-value	p-value
Modes of CSR communication			
Symmetric mode	3.93	21.602	.000
Asymmetric mode	1.98		
Social media			
Facebook	3.45	4.317	.000
Website	3.60		
Corporate website			
Website	3.64	13.265	.000
Facebook	1.95		

Table 3: Univariate ANCOVA results

ANCOVA Results			Simple Effect Analysis			
Source	F-statistics	Sig.	Moderator	Mean	F-statistics	Sig
Intercept	1527.078	0.000	Social media (A)	2.57	4.76	< .05
Modes	24.103	0.000	Website (A)	2.83		
Media	2.093	.007	Social media (B)	3.86	36.72	0.000
Modes * Media	9.458	0.000	Website (B)	3.12		

Note: The covariate media involvement reported as statistically insignificant ($F = .180$, $p = .672$). A and B indicate that the communication mode is asymmetric and symmetric, respectively. Degrees of freedom (1, 155).

Figure 1: Conceptual model

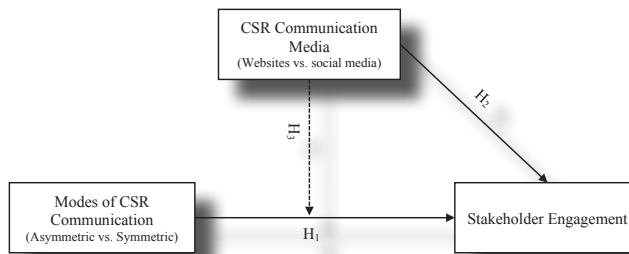


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Figure 3: Mode × media of CSR communication interaction on message effectiveness

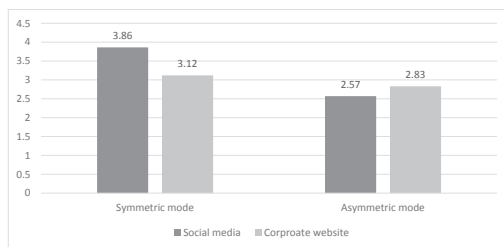


Figure 4: Stimuli material for Asymmetric-Facebook group



Figure 5: Stimuli material for Asymmetric-Website group

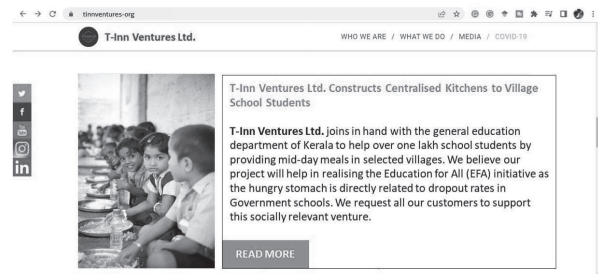
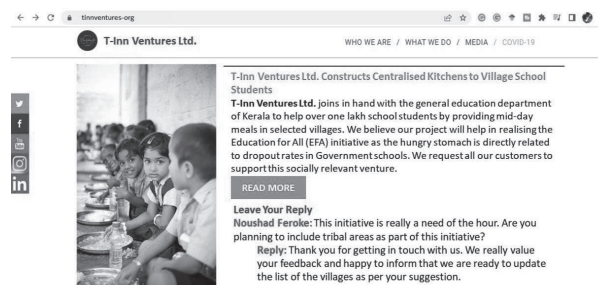


Figure 6: Stimuli material for Symmetric-Facebook group



Figure 7: Stimuli material for Symmetric-Website group



Symmetric, Website