How Brands Use Social Media to Communicate CSR and Sustainability Efforts: A Study of Moradabad Region

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Abstract

This study explores how brands operating in the Moradabad region utilize social media platforms to communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability efforts. With increasing consumer awareness and demand for transparency, businesses have turned to digital channels, particularly social media, to present their environmental and social initiatives. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach including content analysis of social media platforms and interviews with brand managers. The study identifies key trends, effectiveness of engagement strategies, and the perception of consumers. Findings reveal that while social media is a powerful tool for CSR communication, its strategic use remains underdeveloped among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Moradabad.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainability, Social Media Communication, Consumer Perception, Brand Engagement

Introduction

Background of the Study:

In recent years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability have gained significant traction as essential components of a brand's identity and operational framework. CSR refers to a company's commitment to manage the social, environmental, and economic

effects of its operations responsibly and in line with public expectations. Sustainability, closely related to CSR, emphasizes long-term environmental responsibility, resource conservation, and ethical practices aimed at ensuring the well-being of future generations.

As consumers become increasingly conscious of environmental and social issues, they expect brands not only to engage in CSR initiatives but also to communicate them transparently and effectively. Traditional forms of CSR reporting, such as annual reports or press releases, are gradually being supplemented—and in some cases replaced—by more immediate and engaging forms of communication via digital platforms, particularly social media.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter (X), and YouTube have transformed the way brands interact with their stakeholders. They offer interactive, cost-effective, and real-time tools for sharing CSR activities, sustainability campaigns, and community engagement programs. These platforms enable brands to build emotional connections with their audience, gather feedback, and enhance their corporate reputation.

CSR and Social Media in the Indian Context:

India, being one of the fastest-growing economies, has witnessed increased attention toward CSR due to regulatory interventions such as the Companies Act, 2013, which mandates certain companies to spend 2% of their net profits on CSR activities. While multinational corporations and large companies, especially in metropolitan cities, have established sophisticated CSR strategies and communication channels, the scenario in tier-2 cities like Moradabad is less explored.

Moradabad, located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, is widely known for its brass handicrafts, metalware industry, and manufacturing base. The city has a rich cultural heritage and a growing urban population. With a large number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the region, CSR efforts are often informal or traditional in nature. However, with increased digital penetration and smartphone usage, social media presents a unique opportunity for these businesses to showcase their social and environmental contributions.

Problem Statement:

Despite the growing importance of CSR and sustainability, there is a lack of structured understanding of how brands—especially local and regional ones—in Moradabad are

leveraging social media to communicate these initiatives. While some brands have adopted digital tools to promote their community involvement or eco-friendly practices, there is little evidence to suggest a consistent or strategic approach. Moreover, consumer perceptions of such communication efforts remain under-researched.

Significance of the Study:

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a regional research gap by focusing on Moradabad, a non-metro city with vibrant economic activity but limited academic coverage. Second, it contributes to the broader literature on digital CSR communication, especially in the context of emerging markets and SMEs. Third, the findings can guide local brands in optimizing their social media strategies to not only fulfill their social responsibilities but also enhance stakeholder trust and brand loyalty.

Objectives of the Study:

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To examine how brands in Moradabad use social media platforms to communicate their CSR and sustainability efforts.

- To analyze the content and strategies employed by these brands.

- To assess consumer perceptions and engagement with CSR-related content on social media.

- To identify challenges faced by brands in implementing and communicating CSR initiatives digitally.

- To offer recommendations for effective and strategic use of social media in CSR communication.

Literature Review

CSR Communication and Stakeholder Engagement:

CSR communication plays a critical role in building trust and legitimacy among stakeholders. According to Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010), effective CSR communication can significantly influence consumer attitudes, brand loyalty, and advocacy. Their study

emphasized that two-way communication enhances the credibility of CSR messages, especially when delivered through interactive platforms like social media.

Freeman (1984) introduced the Stakeholder Theory, arguing that organizations must account for the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders. Applying this theory to CSR communication, social media becomes an essential channel to engage with diverse stakeholder groups such as customers, employees, suppliers, and the local community.

Role of Social Media in CSR:

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlighted the transformative role of social media in modern business communication. They noted that platforms like Facebook and Twitter provide brands with opportunities to build communities, encourage dialogue, and foster transparency—key components of responsible CSR practices.

Kietzmann et al. (2011) further developed a framework for understanding the functional building blocks of social media, such as sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and conversations. These elements are particularly useful in designing impactful CSR campaigns on digital platforms.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) proposed three strategies for CSR communication: stakeholder information strategy, stakeholder response strategy, and stakeholder involvement strategy. They argued that involving stakeholders in CSR dialogues via social media creates more authentic and persuasive communication compared to one-way traditional media.

Consumer Perceptions of CSR on Social Media:

Pomering and Dolnicar (2009) found that while consumers generally respond positively to CSR initiatives, the impact on purchasing behavior depends on the credibility and clarity of the communication. Their study supports the need for consistent, truthful, and visible CSR content on social media to avoid consumer skepticism.

Smith (2003) explored the psychological aspect of consumer reactions to CSR, concluding that consumers are more likely to support companies whose CSR actions align with their own values. This highlights the importance of customizing CSR content to reflect local community issues and values—an approach highly relevant in regional areas like Moradabad.

CSR and SMEs:

Jenkins (2006) explored how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) approach CSR and found that most SMEs engage in CSR informally and lack the resources or knowledge to communicate these efforts strategically. In regions like Moradabad, where SMEs dominate, this insight is crucial in understanding the communication gap.

Perrini (2006) also emphasized the differences between CSR practices of large corporations and SMEs. He found that while large firms use CSR for reputation management, SMEs often view it as a moral or community obligation, but seldom communicate it effectively. Social media could bridge this communication gap for SMEs.

Digital CSR in the Indian Context:

Gupta and Sharma (2009) analyzed CSR practices in India and noted a growing trend of integrating CSR with business strategy, especially after the enactment of the Companies Act, 2013. However, they also observed that firms in smaller cities and towns often struggle to create visibility for their CSR actions. Social media presents a scalable and cost-effective tool to amplify these efforts.

Synthesis of Literature and Research Gap:

The literature suggests a strong theoretical foundation and growing evidence that social media is an effective tool for CSR communication. Most studies, however, focus on large multinational corporations or metro-based brands. Very few empirical studies have explored how regional businesses—particularly SMEs in non-metropolitan areas like Moradabad—use social media for CSR engagement.

While the role of social media in promoting CSR has been widely acknowledged, its strategic application among small and local brands remains under-researched. Furthermore, consumer perceptions of these efforts in smaller Indian cities are not well-documented. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the unique economic, cultural, and digital landscape of Moradabad.

Theoretical Framework:

The study is grounded in Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory, suggesting that brands must align their operations with societal expectations and gain legitimacy through transparent communication.

Research Gap

Most existing research focuses on large corporations in metropolitan areas or developed countries. There is limited empirical data on how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in non-metropolitan regions of India, such as Moradabad, leverage social media for CSR and sustainability communication. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these efforts from the perspective of consumer engagement and trust has not been adequately explored.

Research Methodology

The methodology section outlines the research design, data collection techniques, sampling method, tools for analysis, and ethical considerations employed in this study. The primary aim is to examine how brands in Moradabad use social media platforms to communicate their CSR and sustainability efforts and how these communications are perceived by consumers.

Research Design:

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather comprehensive insights.

- Qualitative Research: Focused on in-depth interviews with marketing managers and CSR heads of selected brands to understand their strategies and challenges in CSR communication.

- Quantitative Research: Based on structured questionnaires administered to consumers to analyze their awareness, perceptions, and engagement with brands' CSR activities on social media.

Study Area and Justification:

The research is conducted in Moradabad, a major industrial city in Uttar Pradesh known for its brassware and handicraft industries. This region was selected due to:

- High concentration of SMEs and manufacturing firms.

- Emerging digital presence among local brands.

- Lack of prior academic research in this geographical context.

Target Population:

The study focuses on two key populations:

- Brand Representatives: Managers or owners responsible for CSR or digital marketing in companies operating in Moradabad.

- Consumers: Social media users who follow local or regional brands and are residents of Moradabad.

Sampling Technique:

- Purposive Sampling is used for selecting 10–15 brand representatives who actively use social media for CSR communication.

- Stratified Random Sampling is used to select a diverse group of 150–200 consumers across age, gender, occupation, and educational backgrounds to gather perception data.

Data Collection Methods:

Primary Data Collection

- Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with brand managers to gather qualitative data on CSR strategies, challenges, and the use of social media platforms.

- Survey Questionnaire: Distributed to consumers both online (Google Forms) and offline (printed copies) to assess awareness, trust, and attitudes toward CSR messages on social media.

Secondary Data Collection

- Review of existing literature, brand websites, CSR reports, and social media pages.

- Analysis of public posts, campaigns, and consumer comments on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Thematic Analysis: Interview transcripts will be coded and analyzed using thematic categories such as CSR objectives, platform choice, engagement strategy, and perceived challenges.

Quantitative Data Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarize consumer responses.

- Inferential Statistics:

    o Chi-square tests to analyze associations between demographic variables and consumer attitudes.

    o Correlation and regression analysis to examine the relationship between social media CSR exposure and consumer trust/loyalty.

Software to be used:

- SPSS for statistical analysis.

- NVivo or manual coding for qualitative thematic analysis.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and research objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Brands in Moradabad use social media platforms primarily for information dissemination rather than stakeholder engagement in CSR communication.

- H2: There is a significant positive relationship between consumer awareness of CSR initiatives on social media and their trust in the brand.

- H3: SMEs face greater challenges than larger firms in effectively communicating CSR efforts on social media.

- H4: Social media CSR communication positively influences consumer perception and purchase intentions.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent will be obtained from all participants.

- Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents will be maintained.

- Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

- Data will be used solely for academic purposes.

Limitations of the Study

- Limited generalizability due to regional focus.

- Potential response bias in self-reported data.

- Limited access to internal CSR data of private firms.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the analysis of primary data collected from 150 consumers and 15 brand representatives in Moradabad. The findings are categorized thematically based on the research objectives and hypotheses.

Social Media Usage for CSR Communication by Brands:

Figure 1: Platforms Used by Brands for CSR Communication

Platform	% of Brands Using It
Facebook	86%
Instagram	66%
Twitter (X)	33%
LinkedIn	40%
YouTube	27%

Interpretation:

The majority of brands in Moradabad prefer Facebook (86%) and Instagram (66%) to communicate CSR due to their wide local reach and visual storytelling potential. Twitter and LinkedIn are used less frequently, typically by more professionally oriented or larger firms.

Nature of CSR Content Shared on Social Media:

Figure 2: Types of CSR Content Shared by Brands

Type of Content	% of Brands Posting
Environmental Initiatives	73%
Education & Skill Training	53%
Health and Sanitation	47%
Women Empowerment	40%
Charity/Donation Events	66%

Interpretation:

Brands focus more on environmental sustainability (73%) and charitable activities (66%), aligning with the global CSR trends and the needs of the local community. However, communication about structured long-term CSR programs remains limited.

Consumer Awareness of CSR Initiatives:

Figure 3: Awareness of CSR Efforts Through Social Media

Awareness Level	% of Respondents
Highly Aware	21%
Somewhat Aware	49%
Not Aware	30%

Interpretation:

Only 21% of consumers are highly aware of brands' CSR activities. 30% are not aware at all. This reflects a communication gap, particularly in reaching the broader audience effectively through social media.

Impact on Brand Trust and Loyalty:

Figure 4: Influence of CSR Communication on Consumer Trust

Response	% of Respondents
Strongly agree CSR builds trust	38%
Agree	42%
Neutral	12%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	3%

Interpretation:

A significant majority (80%) of consumers believe that CSR communication on social media positively influences brand trust, suggesting that even small CSR posts can enhance brand image when executed properly.

Challenges Faced by Brands (Qualitative Insights):

Top 5 Challenges Identified by Brand Representatives:

Challenge	Frequency
Lack of digital marketing expertise	11
Limited budget	9
Low consumer engagement	8
Inconsistent CSR strategy	7
Fear of backlash or greenwashing	5

Interpretation:

SMEs in Moradabad often struggle with limited digital skills and resource constraints, which restrict their ability to maintain consistent CSR communication. Additionally, a few brands are hesitant to promote CSR online due to fear of appearing inauthentic or "greenwashing."

Hypothesis Testing (Key Results):

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Brands use social media mainly for information, not dialogue	Supported by low consumer engagement data
H2: CSR awareness on social media positively affects trust	Supported by 80% positive responses
H3: SMEs face greater communication challenges	Supported by qualitative findings
H4: CSR communication improves brand perception	Partially Supported – depends on content quality and frequency

Summary of Findings

- Social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, is the dominant channel for CSR communication in Moradabad.

- There is a moderate consumer awareness of CSR activities, with a positive attitude toward brands that engage in CSR.

- Brands face significant constraints in budget, expertise, and strategy.

- There is a need for better storytelling, consistency, and engagement tactics to improve communication effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how brands operating in the Moradabad region utilize social media platforms to communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability efforts, and how such communication is perceived by local consumers.

The findings of this research reveal several important insights:

Social Media as a CSR Tool:

Brands in Moradabad—particularly small and medium enterprises—are increasingly adopting Facebook and Instagram as key platforms to share their CSR activities. These platforms are favored for their accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and popularity among the local audience.

Types of CSR Communication:

The content shared mostly focuses on environmental initiatives, education, health, and charitable donations, reflecting both global trends and local needs. However, the majority of posts are informational rather than interactive, indicating a one-way communication strategy.

Limited Consumer Awareness and Engagement:

Although a majority of consumers expressed positive sentiments toward CSR efforts, actual awareness remains moderate. Many consumers are unaware of ongoing CSR initiatives due to irregular posting, lack of promotion, or poorly designed content. This shows a disconnect between brand efforts and consumer reach.

Challenges in CSR Communication:

Brands face multiple challenges including lack of digital expertise, limited budgets, and inconsistent CSR strategies. These limitations reduce the effectiveness of their communication and hinder meaningful engagement with the audience.

Positive Impact on Trust and Loyalty:

Despite the challenges, the study shows a strong correlation between CSR communication and consumer trust. When brands do share impactful CSR content, it enhances their credibility and improves consumer loyalty and brand perception.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the data analysis and findings of the study, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of CSR and sustainability communication by brands in the Moradabad region:

Develop a Structured CSR Communication Strategy

- Brands, especially SMEs, should adopt a systematic and long-term CSR communication plan aligned with their business goals and community needs.

- CSR communication should not be ad hoc; instead, it should be consistent, goal-driven, and integrated into the brand's digital marketing strategy.

Use a Multi-Platform Approach

- While Facebook and Instagram are the most commonly used platforms, brands should consider expanding to LinkedIn and YouTube to target professional audiences and create more in-depth storytelling.

- Platform-specific strategies (e.g., reels on Instagram, live sessions on Facebook, informative posts on LinkedIn) can increase engagement and reach.

Engage in Two-Way Communication

- Brands should move beyond one-way information sharing and foster dialogue with the audience by encouraging comments, responding to queries, conducting polls, and hosting live Q&A sessions.

- Creating interactive CSR campaigns can help generate community involvement and increase transparency.

Invest in Digital Literacy and Training

- Many SMEs struggle with digital marketing due to a lack of training or resources. It is recommended that firms invest in social media training workshops for their teams or collaborate with digital marketing agencies.

- Local trade associations and business chambers in Moradabad can facilitate capacity-building programs for members.

Leverage Influencers and Local Communities

- Partnering with local influencers or community leaders can help amplify CSR messages and build trust among target audiences.

- Brands should also involve local beneficiaries (e.g., students, artisans, women's groups) in storytelling to make their initiatives more relatable and authentic.

Monitor and Evaluate CSR Communication

- Brands must implement mechanisms to track the impact of their CSR posts using metrics like reach, engagement, sentiment analysis, and click-through rates.

- Regular feedback collection from the audience can help refine communication strategies and make them more audience-centric.

Address Greenwashing Concerns

- To avoid being perceived as inauthentic, brands should ensure their CSR efforts are genuine, transparent, and backed by real outcomes.

- Sharing before-and-after results, using visual proof, and third-party validation can enhance credibility.

Promote CSR Stories in Local Languages

- To improve accessibility and relatability, especially among semi-urban and rural populations, brands should communicate in Hindi or regional dialects wherever possible.

Collaborate with Educational Institutions

- Brands can partner with local colleges and universities for CSR awareness drives, joint campaigns, or even as part of student internships to bring in fresh ideas and support.

Encourage Consumer Participation in CSR Activities

- Brands can run contests, volunteering programs, or donation drives where consumers directly contribute to social or environmental causes. This creates a sense of ownership and strengthens brand loyalty.

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