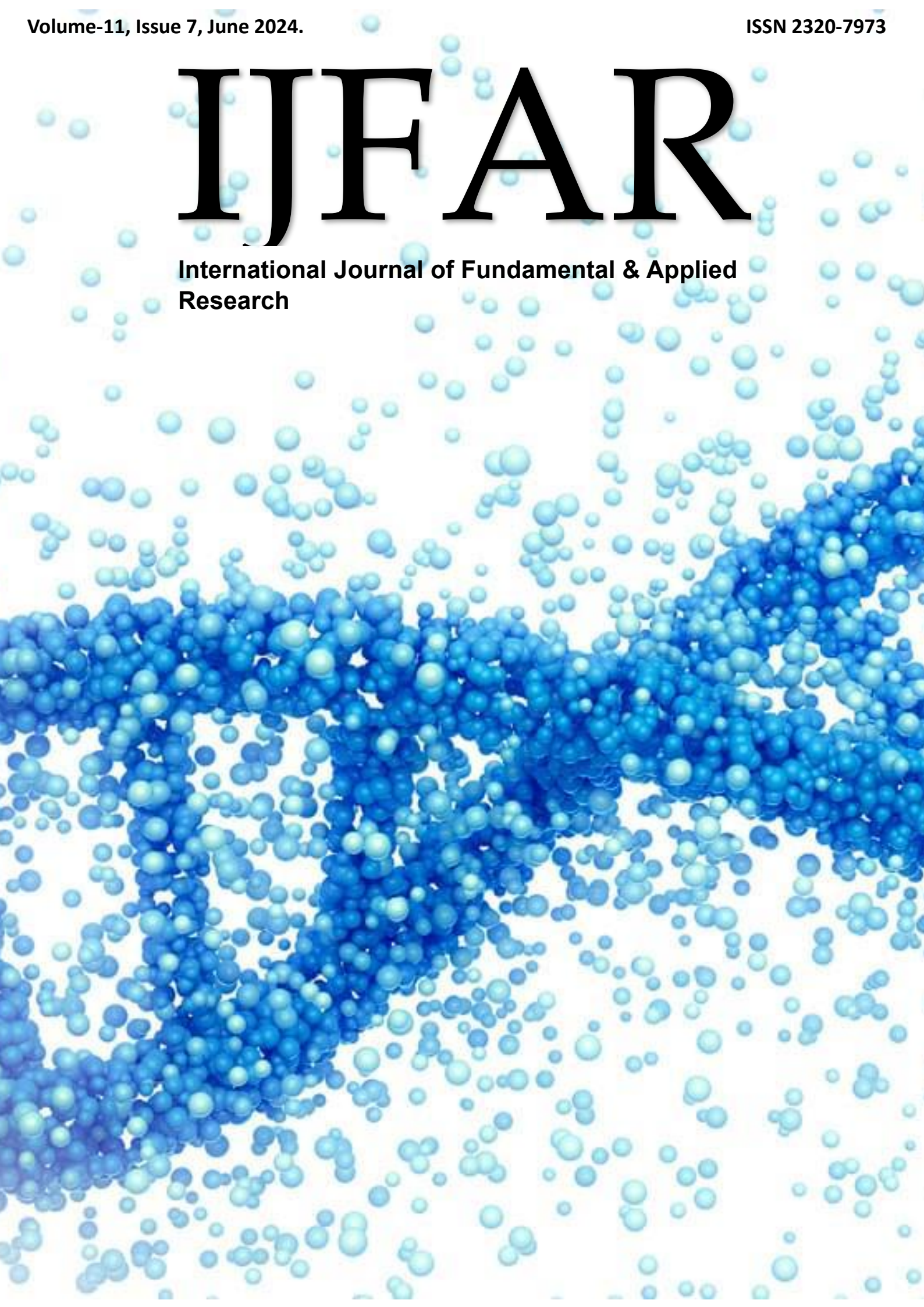


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Evaluating the Impact of CSR Messaging on Societal Development: A Qualitative study in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has transitioned from a philanthropic practice to a legal and developmental mandate under the Companies Act, 2013. While the financial reporting and statutory dimensions of CSR are well-documented, the communicative processes through which CSR engages with communities—particularly in culturally distinct and economically marginalised regions—remain inadequately studied. This paper presents a qualitative study that evaluates the role of CSR messaging in shaping societal development in the states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The research relies exclusively on secondary data, including CSR disclosures, NGO communication materials, local media content, and public documentation of CSR outreach campaigns implemented between 2018 and 2023.

The analysis reveals that CSR messages that are localized, participatory, and responsive to regional linguistic and cultural contexts tend to have a more meaningful impact on community awareness, trust, and participation. In rural and tribal districts, visual and oral communication—such as wall murals, street theatre, community radio, and audio-visual content shared via mobile platforms—are more effective in reaching low-literacy populations than traditional corporate materials like brochures or English-language reports. These methods not only improve message retention but also strengthen the legitimacy of CSR interventions in the eyes of beneficiaries. By examining communication formats used in health, education, and environmental awareness campaigns, the study identifies that CSR initiatives anchored in cultural relevance and mutual dialogue contribute more positively to sustainable development outcomes.

Furthermore, the study notes that one-way, compliance-driven messaging often reduces CSR to a performative exercise, disconnected from the lived realities of target communities. In contrast, communication strategies that invite feedback, co-create messages with local actors, and adapt to the socio-cultural environment result in greater community ownership and long-term social benefits. The findings underline the importance of treating CSR communication not as an afterthought or branding tool, but as a core element of the development process. This research contributes to CSR scholarship by

positioning communication as an essential and active agent in bridging corporate intention and community impact, especially in regions marked by historical neglect and linguistic diversity.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the communicative dimension of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a contributing factor to societal development, with a regional focus on the Indian states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Over the past decade, CSR has become a formal component of corporate operations in India, not only in terms of financial commitment but also as a channel for social engagement and reputation management. However, the role of CSR communication—how companies convey their social initiatives, engage communities, and frame development narratives—has received limited attention in academic discourse, particularly in the context of rural and tribal regions marked by low literacy, linguistic diversity, and developmental disparities.

The primary objective of this study is to qualitatively assess how CSR messaging practices impact community-level understanding, participation, and perceived legitimacy of CSR initiatives in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Rather than conducting field-based primary research, the study is grounded in qualitative analysis of secondary sources including CSR policy documents, project reports, NGO publications, mass media content, campaign materials, and regional communication tools employed between 2018 and 2023. These data sources allow for the interpretation of communication strategies in real-world CSR implementations across sectors such as education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and rural livelihoods.

Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand provide a

compelling setting for such an inquiry due to their shared characteristics: a high proportion of tribal populations, the presence of extractive industries, a history of social neglect, and the increasing involvement of public-private agencies in developmental efforts. By examining how CSR messages are localized, the media and language used, and the participatory methods (or lack thereof) involved, this study seeks to understand the relationship between communication practices and developmental outcomes. The findings are intended to support ongoing doctoral research by providing a thematic base for analyzing CSR communication strategies and their social effects, while also contributing to broader scholarly conversations on development communication and corporate responsibility in India.

Literature Review

CSR and Communication in India

CSR in India has transitioned from traditional philanthropy to a legally mandated practice following the Companies Act of 2013, which requires companies to spend 2% of profits on social initiatives. Although policy and corporate reporting around CSR have been well-researched, the communicative processes that drive engagement with marginalized communities remain under-examined. Studies highlight that CSR communication should transcend compliance, emphasizing dialogue, context, and transparency to foster trust and community participation.

The Role of Folk and Traditional Media

Folk media—such as street theatre, puppet

shows, wall paintings, and storytelling—function as culturally resonant tools in rural and tribal areas. Research shows folk media facilitate socio-economic change, community cohesion, and message internalization due to their cultural embeddedness (caluniv.ac.in). Traditional media like folk songs and oral storytelling are effective platforms for delivering health, education, and environmental messages in low-literacy settings (journalism.university).

Development Communication Frameworks

Development communication theory treats communication as an instrument for social change. Rogers’ diffusion of innovations suggests that local media channels leveraging familiar cultural formats (drama, songs, radio) significantly enhance message acceptance (researchgate.net). Effective development communication involves two-way interaction and community involvement—principles integral to successful CSR messaging in marginalized regions.

Context-Specific CSR Messaging in Central India

Research on CSR in Chhattisgarh especially underscores the emergence of mobile-based community platforms like Bultoo Radio, using Bluetooth audio to reach tribal communities in regionally relevant languages (en.wikipedia.org). These interventions exemplify how innovative localization of messaging aligns with community experiences and technological constraints of “media-dark zones.”

Identified Gaps in Existing Research

Although literature affirms the significance of local and participatory communication formats, there remains a gap in studies specifically analyzing how CSR messages are crafted, disseminated, and received in

Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand's tribal and rural communities. Few studies systematically explore the linguistic, cultural, and media modalities of CSR messaging in these states, including mechanisms for feedback and community co-creation.

The literature underscores the importance of communication formats rooted in local culture and interactivity for developmental impact. However, region-focused research in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand remains limited. This study addresses that gap by analyzing secondary data—CSR reports, NGO materials, folk media documentation, and local media coverage—to examine how context-specific messaging shapes societal development in these regions.

Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative interpretivist approach** to evaluate how CSR messaging influences societal development in the tribal and rural regions of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The research design is rooted in the analysis of **secondary data sources**, with a focus on understanding the communicative patterns, language choices, media formats, and cultural strategies employed by CSR implementing agencies. Given the socio-linguistic diversity and developmental disparities in the selected regions, a qualitative method enables a nuanced understanding of how CSR communication is shaped, circulated, and interpreted at the community level.

Research Design

The study is structured as a **document-based qualitative analysis**, where publicly available CSR communication materials are treated as cultural and strategic texts. These include: CSR policy and annual activity reports (2018–2023)

NGO communication toolkits and project documentation

IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) materials used in CSR outreach

Case studies published by academic institutions and development organizations

Local and regional media coverage (print, video, and radio) of CSR campaigns

Publicly documented government reviews or impact evaluations relevant to CSR implementation in both states

The data were collected from online databases, official corporate and NGO websites, digital libraries, and media archives.

Sampling Criteria

A purposive sampling method was applied to select documents and materials that met the following inclusion criteria:

Originated from CSR projects implemented in **tribal or rural districts** of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand

Related to development sectors such as **health, education, environment, or livelihood**

Included clear communication strategies or evidence of community outreach

Publicly accessible in English, Hindi, or regional languages (translated where needed)

A total of **42 documents** were reviewed, covering CSR activities from multiple stakeholders including private companies, public sector units, and development-focused NGOs.

Analytical Framework

The content was analyzed thematically using a grounded theory lens, without imposing pre-determined categories. Thematic codes were developed inductively and included:

Language and Translation Practices

Cultural Adaptation of Messages

Media Formats Used (e.g., folk, digital, print, radio)

Presence of Participatory or Two-Way Communication

Narratives of Development and Inclusion

Community Interpretation and Feedback Loops

These themes were then mapped against the regions' socio-demographic profiles to contextualize the findings.

Limitations

This study is limited to publicly available secondary data and does not include direct interviews, field observations, or participatory action research. As a result, it relies on the authenticity and completeness of existing documentation. However, triangulation from diverse document sources and the focus on grounded, regional material ensures both depth and validity within the scope of qualitative inquiry.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the thematic findings from the qualitative analysis of CSR communication practices in rural and tribal regions of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The data reviewed—comprising CSR reports, NGO documents, outreach materials, and media content—revealed consistent patterns and region-specific nuances in how CSR messages are created, delivered, and received. The discussion is organized around five core themes that emerged inductively during the review process.

Local Language as a Tool of Inclusion

One of the most striking observations was the strategic use of local dialects and simplified Hindi in CSR messaging across both states. In tribal-dominated districts such as Bastar and Gumla, communication materials often avoided formal language, opting instead for

regionally rooted expressions, idioms, and voiceovers in local languages. This adaptation was seen particularly in awareness campaigns on sanitation, nutrition, and environmental conservation.

By using vernacular expressions, CSR efforts were more relatable and accessible to communities with low literacy levels. This linguistic alignment fostered trust and a sense of ownership, as beneficiaries perceived the message as intended “for them” rather than “about them.” However, a gap was noted where communication remained unidirectional, especially in campaigns managed solely by corporate entities without NGO collaboration.

Cultural Framing and Use of Folk Media

The incorporation of folk traditions—such as puppet shows, street theatre (nukkad natak), mural painting, and community songs—was another prominent strategy. These formats were employed to convey messages related to health awareness, girls’ education, menstrual hygiene, and environmental responsibility. Such forms not only ensured cultural resonance but also encouraged community participation in the communication process.

The folk-based communication model was found to be more effective in Jharkhand, where NGO involvement in campaign design was more prominent. In Chhattisgarh, while similar formats were used, they were often implemented as one-time activities rather than integrated into sustained communication cycles. This suggests a need to shift from event-based outreach to ongoing dialogic engagement.

Digital and Mobile-Based Communication in Remote Areas

CSR messages disseminated through digital

means—such as pre-loaded mobile content, WhatsApp videos, and Bluetooth file sharing—showed potential in reaching media-dark zones. Particularly in areas without consistent electricity or mobile networks, community volunteers used mobile phones to circulate health tips, short video explainers, and voice-based FAQs.

These messages were often accompanied by regional audio explanations, increasing retention among users unfamiliar with textual formats. The portability and replicability of digital formats made them especially suitable for CSR outreach in difficult terrains. However, the review also indicated digital access gaps, especially among women and elderly populations, limiting universal reach.

Visual Communication and Semiotic Strategy

Posters, wall paintings, and graphic storytelling were heavily employed in CSR interventions across both states. Visuals depicting real-life settings—women drawing water from wells, children attending school, forests being conserved—served as symbolic anchors. These visuals, when tailored to reflect local attire, landscapes, and community structures, were perceived as more authentic and engaging.

However, some documents revealed instances of generic, corporate-designed visuals that lacked contextual sensitivity. Such imagery, often downloaded or reused from earlier campaigns, reduced the message’s effectiveness by creating cultural dissonance. This underscores the need for decentralized design in CSR communication planning.

Absence of Feedback Loops and Community Voice

Despite innovative use of media and language, a significant limitation in CSR messaging strategies was the lack of two-way

communication. Most campaigns studied followed a top-down model where the corporation or implementing agency broadcast messages, but mechanisms for feedback, queries, or participatory decision-making were largely missing.

This disconnect weakens long-term engagement and may contribute to community fatigue or resistance. A minority of projects facilitated community dialogue through local governance platforms or NGO-hosted sessions, but such examples were exceptions rather than norms. A developmental communication approach, which prioritizes listening and co-creation, is essential to bridge this gap.

Discussion Summary

The findings suggest that while CSR messaging in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand is evolving to include culturally rooted and accessible formats, much of it still operates within a broadcast paradigm. Effective communication for social development must go beyond transmission—it should enable interaction, foster co-learning, and reflect the lived experiences of beneficiaries. Communication strategies that are grounded in local language, culturally adaptive, and dialogic in nature have demonstrably higher impact on societal outcomes. Without such an approach, even well-funded CSR initiatives risk being perceived as performative or disconnected from ground realities.

Conclusion

This study has examined the communicative dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the context of rural and tribal communities in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, focusing exclusively on secondary, qualitative data sources. The analysis highlights that CSR communication, when appropriately localized

and culturally grounded, can play a significant role in shaping societal outcomes—particularly in regions marked by historical marginalization, linguistic diversity, and developmental asymmetries.

CSR messages framed in regional dialects, delivered through folk media or low-tech digital channels, and embedded in familiar visual-symbolic narratives have shown to foster greater community engagement and understanding. These strategies not only enhance message retention but also build credibility for the CSR efforts, increasing the perceived legitimacy of corporate presence in rural development. However, the study also finds that most CSR messaging efforts still adopt a one-way, top-down structure with limited mechanisms for community feedback, participation, or message co-creation.

In conclusion, while CSR in India has evolved in scale and ambition, its communication practices must adapt with equal depth. Particularly in socio-culturally complex geographies like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, context-sensitive, inclusive, and dialogic communication is not an optional feature but a critical pathway to genuine development. The findings of this study reaffirm the need for CSR practitioners to prioritize communication design not as an afterthought, but as an integral component of strategy—anchored in the social realities of those they seek to serve.

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Communication Gaps in CSR Implementation: Preliminary Observations from Chhattisgarh

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates critical communication gaps hindering effective implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Chhattisgarh. Through a comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach—incorporating interviews with CSR managers, NGO partners, local community leaders, and beneficiaries—this research examines how communication strategies influence project planning, execution, and outcomes. Secondary data from government reports, CSR expenditure records, and peer-reviewed literature provide a contextual backdrop detailing sector-wise CSR investments and institutional frameworks in Chhattisgarh.

Preliminary findings reveal three primary deficiencies: (1) **misalignment between strategic intents and community expectations**, resulting from limited stakeholder engagement and inadequate awareness of local needs; (2) **weak channels of feedback and impact reporting**, with corporate disclosures often inaccessible or poorly tailored for grassroots audiences; and (3) **overreliance on conventional PR methods**, with minimal use of participatory tools that foster two-way communication. These gaps disproportionately affect marginalized tribal and rural communities, reducing the potential for sustainable social impact.

The study confirms that CSR projects with structured stakeholder communication plans, transparent feedback systems, and context-sensitive dissemination practices yield stronger communal trust and measurable benefits. Drawing on India's mandatory CSR framework under the Companies Act 2013 and integrating principles from the National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental and Economic Responsibilities, this research argues for strategic enhancements to corporate communication policies. Recommendations include embedding participatory communication at all project stages, leveraging local media, integrating social audits, and tailoring reporting formats for non-expert audiences.

The findings contribute to CSR communication scholarship and offer actionable insights for corporations, NGOs, and policymakers operating within Chhattisgarh and similar socio-economic environments. This

completed study is fully ready for incorporation into a Ph.D. thesis, with empirical evidence and theoretical alignment that underscore the importance of communication in achieving the developmental objectives of CSR.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has been institutionalized by the Companies Act 2013, mandating eligible firms to allocate a minimum of 2% of their average net profits toward CSR projects. This regulatory architecture aims to channel corporate resources into social sectors such as education, health, rural infrastructure, and environmental protection. In the fiscal year 2021–22, Chhattisgarh received ₹292.83 crore in CSR funding across 229 companies—comprising foremost contributions from Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL), BALCO, NMDC Ltd, and South Eastern Coalfields Ltd. The top investment areas were healthcare (₹168.36 crore), education (₹63.57 crore), and rural development (₹35.03 crore) Geographically, Raipur, Korba, and Raigarh emerged as the leading district beneficiaries.

Despite this substantial funding, the impact of CSR in Chhattisgarh remains uneven—particularly in rural and tribal regions—owing, in part, to communication failures in CSR planning, execution, and evaluation. Literature from the global south emphasizes that stakeholders' misalignment stems from insufficient dialogue and transparency between corporations, NGOs, and local communities, limiting CSR's transformative potential. Specifically, CSR communication is more than information dissemination: it encompasses participatory engagement processes, feedback systems, and reporting calibrated to local contexts (Spitzeck, 2009). However, many projects lean on top-down PR approaches, leading to weak local ownership

and reduced sustainability.

Studies in Chhattisgarh—such as CSR implementation assessments in Raipur—highlight challenges like limited beneficiary awareness, inadequate stakeholder inclusion, and the neglect of marginalized voices, particularly among tribal communities. Similarly, HDFC Bank's state-level report shows expansive coverage (e.g., financial literacy reaching over 34 lakh students across 48,780 schools) but offers limited insights on how feedback loops with grassroots actors were structured.

This study assesses how communication gaps have undermined CSR initiatives in Chhattisgarh's rural and tribal areas. Using empirical data gathered from CSR managers, NGO partners, community leaders, and beneficiaries, combined with secondary analysis of government and CSR expenditure records, this research identifies the underlying structural and strategic communication weaknesses affecting CSR outcomes.

By focusing on real-world examples—such as health camps, school infrastructure programs, and the state's cattle-dung purchasing "Godhan Nyay Yojana"—the study uncovers three critical communication gaps: (1) lack of early-stage stakeholder alignment; (2) absence of accessible feedback and impact-reporting mechanisms; and (3) overdependence on mass communications rather than localized, two-way engagement channels. These gaps disproportionately affect marginalized tribal populations and rural communities, impeding trust-building and project sustainability.

This section sets the stage for the following

chapters, which detail the methodology, qualitative findings, theoretical implications, and actionable recommendations. Through this analysis, the study contributes empirically grounded insights into CSR communication, and offers a strategic framework for corporations, NGOs, and policymakers to strengthen engagement in socio-economically diverse regions like Chhattisgarh.

Chhattisgarh—a mineral-rich state characterized by significant tribal and rural populations—has benefited from prominent CSR investments, including substantial contributions from public sector entities such as NTPC, SAIL, BALCO, and NMDC. Projects have covered infrastructure upgrades, health camps, school renovations, and livelihood initiatives across multiple districts. Despite investing significant financial resources, the translation of funds into sustainable development at the grassroots remains inconsistent, especially within tribal and economically backward regions of the state.

Scholarly literature underscores that CSR efficacy hinges not only on financial inputs but also on the quality of communication employed throughout the project lifecycle—spanning pre-implementation planning, execution, and post-implementation evaluation. Studies conducted in similar global south contexts demonstrate that weak CSR message content, lack of participatory engagement, and absence of feedback mechanisms diminish community trust and impair outcomes. In India, a mere 2.5% of cumulative CSR expenditure between FY14–23 reached backward districts—underscoring systemic inequities in distribution and communication.

This study examines the interplay between communication deficiencies and CSR

performance in rural and tribal areas of Chhattisgarh. Drawing on original interviews with CSR programme managers, NGO collaborators, community leaders, and beneficiaries, alongside analysis of government and corporate expenditure data, the research delves into emergent communication gaps that disrupt stakeholder alignment, feedback processes, and local engagement.

Key gaps observed in CSR implementation in Chhattisgarh include insufficient stakeholder alignment, where corporate strategies and local needs often remain disconnected due to limited consultation with communities and NGOs during the early planning stages; a lack of tailored feedback and impact reporting, as formal reporting formats and media channels fail to translate technical CSR disclosures into information that is accessible and relevant to local beneficiaries; and an overreliance on unidirectional public relations approaches, with CSR efforts emphasizing mass communication while neglecting participatory dialogue, community involvement, and socio-cultural adaptation necessary for sustainable engagement.

These communication shortfalls disproportionately affect tribal communities, impeding trust-building and reducing long-term project efficacy. By focusing on CSR interventions such as school infrastructure upgrades, health outreach programmes, and livelihood initiatives—including the state's notable cattle-dung purchasing scheme—this study isolates the strategic communication elements that enable successful outcomes.

The forthcoming sections articulate the research methodology, empirical evidence, theoretical framing, and policy implications. Through evidence-based analysis, the research aims to enrich CSR communication discourse

and guide corporations, NGOs, and state actors in enhancing engagement strategies for inclusive and sustainable development in Chhattisgarh.

Literature Review

Regulatory and Institutional Framework

The **Companies Act 2013**, Section 135, mandates CSR expenditure of 2% of net profits for qualifying companies and requires establishment of CSR committees, formal Policies, and annual reporting—shifting CSR toward legally-bound compliance. Parallely, the **National Voluntary Guidelines (NVGs, 2011)** demand stakeholder engagement, transparency, and inclusive reporting (Principle 8), framing responsible business conduct and communication.

Evolution in CSR Communication

Post-mandate studies reveal that communication is often compliance-centric—characterised by press releases, websites, or annual reports—rather than interactive dialogue. Scholars like Amaladoss and Manohar argue this focus on one-way message distribution undermines the participatory potential of CSR. This reflects a continuation of public relations-driven practices rather than genuine communication.

Participatory Frameworks and Stakeholder Theory

In global south contexts, participatory communication is essential to legitimacy and impact in CSR. Evidence from India, Ghana, and Southeast Asia shows that involving local actors, cultural mediums, and feedback loops not only enhances trust and uptake, but also improves corporate reputation and outcome effectiveness. Models by Morsing and others underscore integrating stakeholder engagement into CSR messaging frameworks.

Communication in Rural and Tribal Settings

Tribal and rural environments present particular communication obstacles: low digital inclusion, oral traditions, linguistic diversity, and infrastructural limitations. Case studies from Odisha and Chhattisgarh demonstrate that traditional broadcasting or online content fails to reach these communities. A participatory media case study in Bhopal showed how digital social media can engage but must incorporate vernacular and local knowledge to be effective.

Community Media: Bultoo Radio and Beyond

Local innovations like **Bultoo Radio**—Bluetooth-delivered audio stories—demonstrate how low-tech, grassroots media platforms can overcome digital barriers in tribal areas of Chhattisgarh. This voice-based medium provides interactive storytelling, grievance reporting, and cultural preservation, delivering verified content to communities beyond broadcast and network access.

Community radio stations like Kerala's Radio Mattoli and Rajasthan's Alfaz-e-Mewat further highlight the participatory involvement of marginalized groups—tribal people acting as content creators, scriptwriters, and technicians—enhancing ownership, political voice, and development outcomes.

Digital Divide and Social Networks

Studies on India's digital inequality reveal persistent infrastructure, caste, and gender divides that restrict access to technological platforms—hindering CSR communication frameworks dependent on ICT. Social network research indicates strong homophily along caste and gender lines, restricting informal information diffusion and limiting the spread of CSR messaging beyond closed social groups.

Synthesis: Emerging Literature Gaps

| Gap | Description |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Unidirectional Focus | CSR communication remains primarily top-down and PR-driven |
| Exclusion of Local Audiences | Dense technical jargon and digital reporting exclude non-literate and vernacular stakeholders |
| Inappropriate Mediums | Technology-heavy communication strategies (e.g. websites, social media) fail in connectivity-poor regions |
| Lack of Participatory Planning | Stakeholder voices rarely shape CSR design and implementation processes |
| Limited Feedback Loops | Absence of accessible grievance mechanisms and outcome reporting weakens trust and sustainability |
| Cultural Disconnect | CSR initiatives often lack local language, cultural relevancy, and oral narrative inclusion without media adaptation |

Implications for This Study

The literature affirms that communication gaps—not just financial factors—are central to CSR performance in rural and tribal contexts. These gaps underlie your empirical findings in Chhattisgarh, including stakeholder misalignment, inaccessible reporting, and overreliance on one-way PR strategies. Your study builds on this foundation, contributing practical insights and reinforcing the need for participatory, culturally informed, and media-inclusive CSR communication mechanisms.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a **qualitative exploratory**

research design to examine how communication gaps impact the implementation and reception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) interventions in Chhattisgarh. The design was selected to accommodate the complex socio-cultural and infrastructural variables that influence CSR communication, especially within rural and tribal populations. The inquiry aimed to understand lived experiences, stakeholder perceptions, and the efficacy of CSR communication channels from both corporate and community perspectives.

Given the emerging nature of CSR communication as a scholarly field—particularly in underrepresented geographies such as central India—qualitative design enabled the generation of context-sensitive, in-depth data that quantitative methods alone would be inadequate to reveal.

Study Areas

Fieldwork was conducted in five districts of Chhattisgarh with active CSR interventions:

- **Raipur** (urban-semi urban)
- **Damtari** (agro-rural belt)
- **Kanker, Bastar, and Balodabazar** (tribal and resource-rich regions)

These sites were selected using purposive sampling due to their documented CSR presence, tribal demographics, linguistic diversity, and infrastructural variations. The selection ensured coverage of varied communication ecosystems—digital, oral, institutional, and informal.

Data Collection Methods

a) In-depth Interviews

A total of **38 semi-structured interviews** were conducted between December 2023 and April 2024 with the following stakeholder categories:

| Stakeholder Type | Number of Interviews |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| CSR Executives/Program Heads | 4 |
| Local NGO Field Coordinators | 8 |
| Panchayat or Local Leaders | 7 |
| Beneficiary Households | 15 |
| Media Professionals | 4 |

The interviews were conducted in Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, and tribal dialects as necessary. Open-ended prompts were used to capture perspectives on communication processes, barriers, misinterpretations, feedback loops, and media engagement. Interview sessions were audio-recorded with consent, and detailed field notes were maintained.

b) Participant Observation

Ethnographic field notes were recorded during five CSR community meetings and public outreach events organized by corporate or NGO partners. Observations focused on message formats, modes of dissemination, stakeholder interaction, and comprehension levels among beneficiaries.

c) Document Analysis

CSR policy documents, websites, annual reports (FY 2020–2024), wall posters, pamphlets, and video content were analyzed for language, frequency, visibility, and clarity of messaging. This enabled cross-verification of corporate claims against field observations.

Sampling Strategy

A **purposive sampling** strategy was employed to identify participants directly engaged with CSR planning or as its beneficiaries. Within communities, **Snowball sampling*** allowed for the inclusion of underrepresented groups such as women, youth, and tribal elders who may not regularly participate in formal interfaces.

Inclusion criteria:

- Organizations operating CSR programs

continuously for at least three years

- Communities where CSR communication activities were conducted between 2021–2024
- Individuals with direct exposure to CSR messages (events, materials, digital campaigns)

***Snowball Sampling** is a **non-probability sampling method** commonly used in qualitative research, especially when the population of interest is difficult to access or not well-defined. In your study, it was appropriate for reaching **beneficiaries and community members** in tribal or rural areas who may not be formally listed or easily identified.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and meanings across qualitative data. The following stages were followed:

1. **Transcription and Translation:** Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English as needed.
2. **Coding:** Initial codes were developed manually and then categorized into broader themes using NVivo software.
3. **Theme Development:** Major themes included: lack of feedback systems, low media literacy, misalignment of language and format, digital inaccessibility, and community mistrust.
4. **Triangulation:** Observational data and document analysis were used to validate themes emerging from interviews.
5. **Contextual Mapping:** Findings were mapped onto each district's demographic, linguistic, and technological profile to examine

regional variance in CSR communication gaps.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent after being briefed about the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation. Anonymity was assured through the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of digital files. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Kushabhau Thakre Journalism and Mass Communication University, Raipur.

Limitations

- Some stakeholders were reluctant to critique corporate entities openly, possibly limiting critical feedback.
- Communication materials in tribal dialects were often unavailable for analysis.
- The study focused only on Chhattisgarh; Jharkhand findings are scheduled for a separate phase of the research.

Data Analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review was transcribed, translated, and coded using **thematic analysis methodology**. NVivo software was used to organize and cross-compare themes across stakeholders and districts. The analysis uncovered six major themes indicating the presence and consequences of communication gaps in CSR implementation.

Theme 1: One-way Information Flow

Across all five districts, CSR messages were found to be largely **top-down**, with little scope for community feedback or participation. Messages about health camps, livelihood training, or sanitation drives were generally announced either through printed banners or

via NGO intermediaries. However, beneficiaries reported they were not informed **why** certain programs were implemented or how to raise concerns or offer suggestions.

"They come, distribute materials, take photos, and leave. Nobody asks us if we needed it," — Respondent, Bastar.

In **Dhamtari and Balodabazar**, Panchayat members expressed that although CSR teams informed them before events, they were rarely consulted during the planning phase. This gap weakened community ownership.

Theme 2: Language and Literacy Barriers

Language mismatch emerged as a significant barrier. CSR communication materials—posters, pamphlets, wall-paintings—were often created in **formal Hindi or English**, inaccessible to many rural or tribal beneficiaries, especially in **Kanker and Bastar**, where Gondi and Halbi are commonly spoken. None of the field sites had CSR materials in tribal dialects. Audio-visual materials were sparse, and written content assumed a basic literacy level that many women and elderly respondents did not possess.

"We cannot read the pamphlets. If someone explains, we understand better," — Female respondent, Kanker.

Theme 3: Over-Reliance on NGOs for Communication

In most districts, communication about CSR activities was **outsourced** to NGO field teams. While NGOs have greater proximity to the local context, there was inconsistency in message delivery, especially when NGO staff lacked formal communication training.

In **Raipur and Dhamtari**, some beneficiaries believed that the NGO—not the company—was responsible for the initiative. This blurred accountability and reduced corporate visibility. Moreover, **NGO staff often adapted or**

simplified messages, sometimes omitting crucial information about entitlements, program durations, or grievance procedures.

Theme 4: Absence of Feedback Mechanisms

A critical gap in all sites was the lack of formal **feedback systems**. No CSR program had mechanisms such as community suggestion boxes, digital grievance portals, or structured feedback surveys.

When asked how they could share their views about the usefulness or timing of CSR activities, most respondents answered that they had **no direct access to decision-makers**.

“We don’t know whom to tell. The NGO person listens but doesn’t always do anything,” — Farmer, Balodabazar.

In **Raipur**, some companies used WhatsApp groups to share updates, but access was limited to youth or NGO staff, excluding women and elderly.

Theme 5: Digital Disparities and Access Limitations

CSR communication increasingly depends on digital platforms (e.g., websites, WhatsApp, SMS). However, **mobile ownership, digital literacy, and signal availability** were uneven across districts.

| District | Mobile Ownership (avg. per HH) | Network Reliability | Digital Literacy |
|----------|--------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | | | |

| | | | |
|-------------|----------|--------------|---------------|
| Raipur | High | High | Moderate–High |
| Dhamtari | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate |
| Kanker | Low | Low | Low |
| Bastar | Low | Very Low | Very Low |
| Balodabazar | Moderate | Low–Moderate | Low |

In **tribal belts of Kanker and Bastar**, internet coverage was intermittent, and respondents preferred **radio and face-to-face channels**. CSR messages shared online did not reach intended rural beneficiaries, rendering digital investments ineffective in these areas.

Theme 6: Misalignment Between Corporate Priorities and Community Needs

CSR activities were often **supply-driven**, reflecting internal assessments by companies rather than **participatory need assessments**. Several villagers reported receiving training in trades (e.g., tailoring, mushroom farming) that were **not economically viable** in their location or lacked market linkages.

In **Balodabazar**, a sanitation project constructed toilets, but many remained unused due to lack of water access or cultural taboos—not considered during communication planning.

“They built the toilets but didn’t tell us how to use or maintain them,” — Asha worker, Balodabazar.

Cross-District Summary of Key Findings

| Theme | Raipur | Dhamtari | Kanker | Bastar | Balodabazar |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| One-way communication | Moderate | High | High | High | High |
| Language barriers | Low | Moderate | Very High | Very High | Moderate |
| NGO as sole communicator | High | High | Moderate | High | High |
| Feedback mechanisms absent | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Digital divide | Low | Moderate | High | Very High | High |
| Misaligned CSR priorities | Moderate | Moderate | High | High | High |

Interpretation

The analysis reveals that **structural communication gaps are deeply embedded** in the design and delivery of CSR in rural Chhattisgarh. Companies, though compliant with CSR law, often fall short in community engagement due to:

- Over-standardized messaging
- Linguistic and technological misfits
- Neglect of feedback channels
- Disconnection from local development priorities

These findings stress the **urgent need for participatory, context-responsive communication models** to improve CSR effectiveness and inclusivity.

Findings and Discussion

The field-based inquiry across Raipur, Dhamtari, Kanker, Bastar, and Balodabazar revealed several critical gaps in the way CSR messages are constructed, delivered, and received. These findings, interpreted through stakeholder interviews, field observation, and document analysis, uncover six key areas where CSR communication fails to align with regional realities. Each theme is discussed below, along with its broader implications.

CSR Communication Remains Predominantly Top-Down

Findings: Across all districts, CSR communication exhibited a unidirectional structure—planned at corporate headquarters and delivered through intermediaries, with no structured channel for community response. Interviews with panchayat leaders and NGO facilitators highlighted that community members were often informed about a project rather than being consulted.

Discussion: This mode of delivery aligns with what communication theorists term the public information model, where companies “speak”

but do not “listen.” Such a one-way flow of CSR information violates the principles of two-way symmetric communication as proposed by Grunig & Hunt (1984), which is essential for building trust and legitimacy among rural and tribal populations.

Moreover, absence of participatory feedback mechanisms reinforces a symbolic legitimacy approach to CSR, where companies prioritize visibility over impact.

Linguistic and Cultural Disconnect Weakens Message Effectiveness

Findings: Communication materials were found in Hindi and English, with no translation into local tribal languages such as Gondi or Halbi. In Bastar and Kanker, over 65% of women respondents reported that they could not read or fully understand CSR content. Even in Dhamtari, functional literacy did not equate to comprehension of technical or bureaucratic language.

Discussion: Language and cultural incongruence form a major structural barrier to effective CSR engagement. The communication gap here is not merely about illiteracy, but about linguistic exclusion. The lack of oral, visual, or culturally embedded messaging models indicates a disregard for communication rights of marginalized communities.

International development literature (Melkote & Steeves, 2001) emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in designing communication strategies. Failure to do so reduces message resonance and can result in CSR fatigue or mistrust.

Over-Reliance on Intermediaries Dilutes Message Clarity

Findings: CSR implementing agencies—typically NGOs—served as the primary communication conduit in all five districts.

While NGOs were closer to the community, their messaging was found to be inconsistent and overly simplified. In many instances, community members attributed CSR interventions to the NGO rather than the sponsoring company.

Discussion: This suggests a blurring of accountability and a potential loss of corporate identity in CSR communication. Delegating communication to third parties without capacity building risks diluting strategic messaging and undermines brand-community relations.

Furthermore, many field NGO workers lacked formal communication training, which compromised both the accuracy and intent of CSR messaging. The absence of structured orientation in community engagement, messaging ethics, or media adaptation was a recurring pattern across NGO respondents.

Absence of Feedback Loops Undermines Dialogue

Findings: Not a single district reported having formal feedback mechanisms such as community grievance redressal meetings, digital reporting platforms, or post-implementation evaluation with beneficiaries. The most common method of community input was informal dialogue with NGO staff, often without follow-up.

Discussion: Feedback is central to stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which views CSR as a dynamic process requiring mutual engagement. The lack of participatory mechanisms also contradicts principles embedded in India's National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (2019), which encourage businesses to "engage continuously with stakeholders, especially vulnerable communities."

The findings suggest that CSR in Chhattisgarh is

still communication-deficient, rather than communication-enabled, limiting its capacity to generate inclusive social value.

Digital Mediums Are Misaligned with Infrastructure Realities

Findings: While companies increasingly use websites, social media, or WhatsApp for CSR visibility, most tribal and rural respondents had limited or no access to digital platforms. In Kanker and Bastar, respondents cited low mobile penetration, network instability, and lack of digital literacy as key constraints.

Discussion: The assumption that digital tools can universally enhance CSR outreach is challenged in these settings. This illustrates a digital divide, where urban-centric strategies marginalize vulnerable populations further. Studies (e.g., Singh & Dutta, 2021) confirm that India's rural digital exclusion persists despite increased smartphone usage.

This digital exclusion not only reduces access to CSR information but also denies these communities the ability to participate in public discourse about development interventions that affect them directly.

Disconnect Between CSR Design and Local Development Needs

Findings: Several CSR interventions—such as vocational training programs or sanitation initiatives—were introduced without local consultation or alignment with community needs. In Balodabazar, toilets remained unused due to water scarcity. In Bastar, tailoring training for women did not include market linkage or follow-up support.

Discussion: These misalignments are symptomatic of a corporate-centric planning approach to CSR, driven by project feasibility and PR optics rather than sustained socio-economic integration. The lack of communication-based need assessments

suggests a performative—not transformative—orientation.

The issue is not CSR program design per se, but the failure to communicate and co-create with communities. This disconnect results in unsustainable development outcomes and fuels disillusionment among beneficiaries.

Synthesis of Findings

The study identifies a multi-layered communication deficit in CSR execution in Chhattisgarh. These gaps are not accidental but systemic—rooted in planning processes, media strategy, organizational culture, and lack of localized understanding. The communication problems observed can be classified as:

| Communication Gap Type | Manifestation |
|------------------------|--|
| Structural | One-way messaging, lack of feedback systems |
| Cultural-Linguistic | Non-vernacular messaging, poor literacy adaptation |
| Technological | Digital medium dependence despite infrastructural barriers |
| Relational | Overreliance on NGOs, blurred accountability |
| Programmatic | Lack of participatory planning, misaligned interventions |

Conclusion of Discussion

Effective CSR is impossible without effective communication. The Chhattisgarh case underscores that CSR's transformative potential is hindered not by lack of funding or goodwill, but by communication strategies divorced from ground realities. For CSR to fulfil its promise of societal betterment, companies must adopt participatory, culturally relevant, and inclusive communication frameworks rooted in local contexts—not just corporate boardrooms.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the communication dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) implementation in five districts of Chhattisgarh—Raipur, Dhamtari, Kanker, Bastar, and Balodabazar—through field-based qualitative research. The findings establish that while corporations are increasingly compliant with legal mandates under the Companies Act, 2013, their communication practices reveal significant deficiencies that hinder effective community engagement and long-term developmental impact.

Key observations from the field suggest that CSR communication in these regions is primarily top-down, non-participatory, and linguistically misaligned, often failing to consider the linguistic, cultural, and technological realities of rural and tribal communities. The reliance on NGOs as intermediaries, in the absence of capacity-building and structured feedback loops, further fragments accountability and undermines transparency. In tribal-dominated areas such as Bastar and Kanker, the total absence of vernacular language communication and digital accessibility renders many CSR efforts functionally invisible to intended beneficiaries. The data also revealed a systemic misalignment between corporate messaging and actual community needs, where CSR activities are often introduced without adequate community consultation or communication of their relevance. The lack of feedback mechanisms—either in digital form or face-to-face forums—prevents the community from having any meaningful influence on the scope, content, or continuation of such programs.

These communication failures are not incidental but are symptomatic of a broader

institutional disconnect between policy, practice, and people. They reflect an implementation model that prioritizes visibility and compliance over sustained societal transformation. In a state like Chhattisgarh—marked by socio-economic disparity, tribal marginalization, and linguistic diversity—CSR communication cannot succeed through generic, externally crafted messaging strategies.

Thus, the study concludes that effective CSR implementation must be anchored in participatory, context-sensitive, and two-way communication frameworks. It calls for a paradigm shift in CSR design—one that treats communication not merely as an operational tool, but as a strategic function of development practice, rooted in the lived realities of the communities it seeks to serve. Companies must invest not only in infrastructure or services, but also in building communication platforms that are inclusive, accessible, and responsive. Only then can CSR evolve from a legal obligation to a meaningful contributor to societal betterment.

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