



Research Paper

Evaluating the Influence of E-Commerce Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives in the Dynamic Food Industry Environment: TISM Approach

Priyanka Kumari

Research scholar Department of commerce and management Patliputra University, Patna, Bihar

Dr Anand Murti Pandey

Assistant professor Dept of commerce and management Patliputra university, Patna, Bihar

Abstract

E-commerce has impacted the corporate world globally including India and has been adjusted to corporate social responsibility (CSR). This paper discusses the significance of CSR activities by e-commerce companies that are supported through online means of doing business to consider the relationships and relevance of e-commerce platforms to organisations and communities. Employing the modified Total Interpretative Structural Model (m-TISM), this research identifies and analyzes seven key antecedents: Organizational learning, top management support, community engagement, strategic partnerships, technological knowledge, usable interfaces, and sustainable supply chain practices.

This theoretical concept investigates how these antecedents interact with each other, providing a guide to applying the analyses on CSR implementation in e-commerce platforms. Real-world examples of food delivery service providers support the framework by indicating emerging practices and solutions.

As the study suggests, CSR's characteristics imply collaboration with holistic partners, flexibility in using technology, and environmentally friendly strategy as the fundamental activities in the digital commerce environment. Such conclusions can be used to improve CSR initiatives in the food industry by business leaders, policymakers, and scholars.

This research enhances the scarcity of literature on e-commerce CSR activities in India and provides the groundwork for investigating other aspects of digital innovation in responsibility.

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I. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Initiated in the early 2000s but growing exponentially in the last decade, e-commerce has transformed how organizations in India function and opened up new possibilities regarding how they might engage with customers, procure goods and services, or be answerable to shareholders and the public. Today e-commerce platforms remain one of the critical links in the digital economy because they have become significant drivers of economic development, technology, and employment. At the same time CSR has come into India's legal and social fabric and the Companies Act, 2013 now embodies expectations that corporations need to impact society positively.

In this changing landscape, e-commerce must discover how it can incorporate CSR into its model. These platforms with wide connections in the online world can involve the stakeholders, as well as inform them of the social and ecological challenges and encourage them.

The entity is to be sustainable. In today's society, CSR activities related to e-commerce are crucial because the food industry struggles with factors such as supply change and the environment, for instance. However, little research exists on the dynamics between e-commerce and CSR, which creates the need to investigate how these schemes work and impact the industry.

1.2 Research Gap and Rationale

Even though the general discussion on CSR is quite extensive, especially in traditional Industries little research has been done to assess CSR in the e-Commerce Sector. Prior studies mainly investigate CSR in terms of fragmented elements and less attention has been paid to the synergy between various CSR elements under e-commerce circumstances. In addition, only a limited number of papers have focused on the specific context of the food business, which is significant due to uncertainties regarding the customers' health, sustainable resources, and product waste disposal.

Thus, this study aims to embrace this research gap by using the m-TISM in a context, to understand relationships between selected antecedents of CSR in e-commerce. This research is timely because it zeroes in on the food delivery segment and shows how digital platforms can operate for positive social and environmental change alongside commercial goals. The study results will add to the lessons learned and provide working recommendations for e-commerce ventures, governments, and interested parties.

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is twofold: To assess the impact and effectiveness of CSR implementations triggered by e-commerce within the volatile food industry. Thus, the study aims to establish the contextual relationship of these critical antecedents to give insights regarding the implications of more sustainable business practices.

Key research questions include:

1.3.1 The following are the research questions; What are the most important drivers of CSR activities as they apply to e-commerce in the food industry?

1.3.2 Impact and relationship of these antecedents on the CSR strategies implementation
the nature of a firm How does the nature of a firm bring about these antecedents in the implementation of CSR strategies?

1.3.3 What is the part of e-commerce that increases the efficiency of CSR in managing social and environmental issues?

With these objectives, the research aims to fill the gap in the existing literature and provide a framework that explains the integrated relationship between e-commerce and CSR in the context of India's food industry.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of E-Commerce CSR Initiatives

Global business has been significantly revolutionized by e-commerce as it reveals the degree to which the conventional operational paradigms may be altered and encourages innovation in CSR. CSR activities are well implemented by international organizations including Amazon and Alibaba use such strategies as carbon neutrality, community development and sustainable supply chains to improve brand image and consumer loyalty (Bai et al., 2021). These platforms harness their affiliated ecosystems to engage the stakeholders, enforce sustainable solutions and deal with topical challenges like environmentalism and social justice.

The advance of e-commerce is not any different in India. Large firms such as Flipkart and Zomato have brought CSR practices into their business strategies whereby CSR activities touching on food security, eating habits, waste management and the betterment of the community are practised (Singh & Kaur, 2020). E-commerce firms in India need to initiate contributions towards society as the Companies Act, of 2013 creates a regulatory environment for such spending for qualifying organizations. Although non-public CSR practices in e-commerce have evolved in recent years, many of the CSR practices remain.

Uncoordinated and often, the few that are coordinated, lack a systematic way of measuring the impact and discontinuity.

This research intended to fill this gap with a focus on investigating the contextual relationships of CSR antecedents in the e-commerce industry within the context of the food industry in India. This academic study shows how the adoption of methodologies such as the Total.

The Interpretative Structural Model (TISM) differs from the traditional ad hoc approach to analysing the factors that motivate the CSR activities of firms.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks Related to CSR and TISM

The current theory of CSR applied to e-commerce has its roots in several acknowledged theories. Thus, one of the first models developed is Carroll's CSR Pyramid (1991) which divides CSR into economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic groups. The given model offers a rather general view of the relations between businesses, including e-commerce platforms, and society's expectations regarding its behaviour and making a profit. However, the highly emerging market of digital commerce needs more versatile conceptualisations.

According to the Stakeholder Theory formulated by Freeman (1984), different stakeholders in an organisation are involved in determining its policies. As applicable to e-commerce CSR, this theory underscores the concentricity of relations between companies, consumers, providers, and society. For instance, Zomato, which sets massive importance on sustainability in its corporate social responsibility initiatives, has centred its platform's strategy on community building.

TISM, known as the Total Interpretative Structural Model, presented by Jharkharia and Shankar (2005) is the type of model which gives a cardinal idea of a system of multiple factors. The novel TISM expands the conventional ISM through the addition of interpretative feedback; thus, TISM is highly suitable for investigating intricate systems, such as CSR in e-commerce. In this study, the m-TISM approach is used to analyse and categorise relevant antecedents of CSR in the food industry. This method also gives an all-around idea of the complex interplay of factors ranging from organizational learning, top management support, and technological innovations for effective working outcomes.

2.3 Identifying Critical Antecedents

In light of the literature review, the seven preconditions that have been considered determinant to the undertaking of CSR initiatives in the e-commerce sector were as follows. Each antecedent plays a unique role in shaping the strategies and outcomes of CSR efforts:

2.3.1 Organizational Learning: The findings of the research indicate that ongoing learning and change management create a favourable enabling environment for the promotion of innovative CSR. Argote (2011) has opined that learning organizations are more prepared to incorporate social responsibility into their business processes to obtain sustainable results.

2.3.2 Top Management Support: Nevertheless, executive sponsorship is a critical determinant of CSR activity. Amran and Haniffa (2011) found that top management plays a crucial role in establishing priorities, providing resources and maintaining organisational legitimacy.

2.3.3 Community Engagement: E-commerce entails a social setup where most of the platforms depend on the exchanges between the communities. Mitchell et al. (2016) reveal proactive strategies for engaging with communities to improve brand equity and CSR communications.

2.3.4 Strategic Partnerships: Engagement of non-governmental organizations, suppliers and governmental organizations promotes the achievement of corporate social responsibility goals. For example, platforms such as Swiggy have signed contracts with organizations that deal with waste management in addressing food wastage (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

2.3.5 Technological Knowledge: The application of technology in CSR practices increases the practicability of its implementation. Verma et al. (2019) discovered that AI and blockchain technology enhance resource efficiency and CSR project transparency.

2.3.6 User-Friendly Interface: The simplicity of e-commerce interfaces remains the greatest determinant of how consumers conduct themselves with e-commerce sites.

Appriable designs generate awareness and involvement concerning CSR campaigns (Chaudhuri et al., 2020).

2.3.7 Sustainable Supply Chain Practices: Sustainable supply chain management mainly targets the modern food industry geared towards the conservation of the environment and fairness in trade. Pagell and Wu (2009) state that green logistics embedded in CSR are even more critical in industries that are considered environmentally sensitive.

Applying the m-TISM framework to these antecedents, this research contributes to a highly structured identification of how these contextual factors are connected and how they help to assure successful CSR implementations. The research findings not only fill the gap within the existing academic literature but also offer useful recommendations to various stakeholders in e-commerce and the domains of the food industry.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employs the modified Total Interpretative Structural Model (m-TISM) methodology, a qualitative approach well-suited for exploring complex, multi-faceted phenomena like CSR initiatives in the e-commerce sector. Unlike traditional methods that rely on quantitative data, m-TISM emphasizes the contextual relationships between factors, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their interplay. By extending the conventional ISM framework, m-TISM incorporates interpretative logic, enabling researchers to address hierarchical relationships and feedback loops between critical variables.

The choice of m-TISM is particularly relevant for this research as it enables the analysis of CSR initiatives without requiring extensive numerical data. Instead, it draws on theoretical insights, expert opinions, and case study evidence to build a robust framework. The methodology involves three key steps:

3.1.1 **Identification of Key Antecedents:** Based on an extensive literature review, seven critical antecedents were identified as influencing CSR initiatives in e-commerce.

3.1.2 **Development of Structural Model:** Using pairwise comparisons, the relationships between these antecedents were analyzed to develop a hierarchical framework.

3.1.3 **Interpretative Feedback Analysis:** The model was refined through expert validation to ensure that the identified relationships reflect real-world dynamics.

This approach ensures that the research captures the intricate dependencies among antecedents, providing actionable insights for CSR implementation in the food industry.

3.2 Key Antecedents and Their Definitions

The seven antecedents identified in this study play a pivotal role in shaping the CSR initiatives of e-commerce platforms:

3.2.1 **Organizational Learning:** The process of acquiring and applying knowledge within an organization to adapt and innovate. It fosters sustainable CSR practices by enabling companies to respond effectively to evolving societal needs.

3.2.2 **Top Management Support:** The commitment and involvement of senior leadership in driving CSR strategies. Effective top management support ensures the alignment of CSR goals with business objectives.

3.2.3 **Community Engagement:** Active collaboration with local communities to address social and environmental challenges. This includes initiatives like skill development programs and food donation drives.

3.2.4 **Strategic Partnerships:** Collaborations with NGOs, suppliers, and government bodies to enhance the scope and impact of CSR efforts. Partnerships facilitate resource sharing and the implementation of large-scale initiatives.

3.2.5 **Technological Knowledge:** The ability to leverage technology for implementing innovative CSR solutions. Examples include using AI for food waste reduction or blockchain for supply chain transparency.

3.2.6 **User-Friendly Interface:** The design of accessible and intuitive digital platforms that encourage consumer participation in CSR activities, such as donating to causes or choosing eco-friendly options.

3.2.7 **Sustainable Supply Chain Practices:** The integration of environmentally and socially responsible practices into supply chain operations. This includes sourcing from ethical suppliers and minimizing carbon emissions.

Each antecedent contributes uniquely to the CSR framework, and their interrelationships are explored through the m-TISM approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of their collective impact.

3.3 Justification for Case Study Selection

The study focuses on food delivery companies as a case study to analyze CSR initiatives in e-commerce. This sector was chosen due to its unique position at the intersection of consumer needs, technological innovation, and societal impact. Food delivery companies like Zomato and Swiggy have rapidly gained prominence in India, leveraging digital platforms to provide convenience while facing challenges such as food waste, packaging sustainability, and fair labour practices.

These companies are ideal candidates for studying CSR initiatives because:

3.3.1 **High Visibility and Consumer Interaction:** The direct interface with consumers makes CSR initiatives highly visible, influencing public perception and brand loyalty.

3.3.2 **Significant Environmental Footprint:** The reliance on single-use packaging, transportation logistics, and food waste highlights the need for sustainable practices in this industry.

3.3.3 **Potential for Technological Innovation:** The sector's reliance on digital technology provides opportunities to integrate innovative CSR strategies, such as AI-driven delivery optimization or blockchain-based sourcing transparency.

3.3.4 **Alignment with Societal Needs:** Food delivery companies address critical societal issues, including hunger and employment generation, aligning with CSR objectives.

By focusing on this dynamic and impactful sector, the study not only highlights the applicability of m-TISM in real-world scenarios but also provides actionable insights for improving CSR practices in the food industry and beyond.

IV. Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Contextual Relationships

The m-TISM analysis highlighted the relationships between the described seven antecedents of CSR in e-commerce and accordingly presented the interdependence of these factors. All antecedents are at different ranks in the hierarchy some as the basic driver and others as the driver outcomes.

Organizational learning was identified as the least complex antecedent and therefore acted as the first step towards good CSR practice. By promoting a learning culture, an organisation creates the capacity for innovation to incorporate sustainable practices into the learning environment. This antecedent has a high impact on Technological Knowledge since learning ensures that companies possess the means of effectuating digital technologies such as AI and blockchain for CSR initiatives.

Top Management Support is postulated as a key facilitator for ensuring that changes take place and support is given to CSR development at the strategic level. It encapsulation entails a reinforcement of Strategic Partnerships because the leadership's commitment is usually a critical factor in the definition and effectiveness of relations with NGOs, suppliers, and Government institutions. These partnerships, therefore positively impact Community Engagement so that companies address these challenges professionally.

The other key output of technological knowledge, partnership, and community engagement was thus considered to include the implementation of Sustainable Supply Chain Practices.

For instance, looking at the idealism of using environmentally friendly packaging or an efficient logistics supplier, these come along the line of increased technological development, strategic partnership, and most importantly an involvement of the community through organizational support. Likewise, the User-Friendly Interface provides the tangible aspects of the consumer-orientated CSR, including the donation mechanics or encouraging the consumer to make the 'right' choice.

This intertwined structure proves that CSR in e-commerce can only be addressed on an integrated level. As for the result, based on organisational learning and top management support to continue the ripples for practical CSR solutions for the firm's strategic management.

4.2 Implications for E-Commerce CSR in India

The findings of this study have significant implications for stakeholders in the Indian e-commerce sector, including policymakers, businesses, and consumers.

4.2.1 **For Businesses:** Companies can use the m-TISM framework to design more cohesive and impactful CSR strategies. By understanding the contextual relationships among antecedents, businesses can allocate resources efficiently, focusing on high-impact areas like organizational learning and leadership development.

4.2.2 **For Policymakers:** The study highlights the need for policies that encourage technological innovation and strategic partnerships. Government incentives for sustainable supply chains and community-focused initiatives can amplify the impact of CSR activities in the e-commerce sector.

4.2.3 **For Consumers:** The role of a user-friendly interface in CSR demonstrates the importance of consumer participation. E-commerce platforms can leverage their digital reach to engage customers in social and environmental causes, fostering a culture of shared responsibility. The broader implication is that CSR in e-commerce is not just a corporate obligation but a strategic opportunity to drive positive societal change. By aligning their CSR efforts with the needs of communities and leveraging their technological capabilities, Indian e-commerce companies can set global benchmarks for socially responsible business practices.

4.3 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights into CSR in e-commerce, it has certain limitations:

4.3.1 **Lack of Numerical Data:** The theoretical nature of the study limits the ability to quantify the impact

of each antecedent. Future research could incorporate surveys or case-specific data to validate the findings.

4.3.2 Sector-Specific Focus: The study focuses exclusively on food delivery companies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other e-commerce sectors.

4.3.3 Geographical Scope: The research is primarily centred on the Indian context, which may not account for variations in CSR practices across different countries or regions.

Despite these limitations, the study lays a strong foundation for future research and practical applications, offering a structured framework to understand and enhance CSR initiatives in the evolving e-commerce landscape.

V. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This paper aimed to examine the complex patterns of CSR practices among the e-companies in the Indian context particularly the food delivery organisations, thus proposing an integrating framework by the use of the m-TISM model. The research examined Alchemy Seven to discover seven key antecedents; organisational learning, top management support, community engagement, compatible partnerships, technological know-how, user-friendly interface and sustainable supply chain practices about contextuality.

The results reveal that AL and TMS are first-order variables because they are the primary determinants of other second-order variables of CSR antecedents. For instance, entrepreneurial orientation and customer focus were identified as central themes that enhance the impact of CSR by engaging the collective resource and meeting the requirements of social capital. Extensive technological knowledge and easy-to-use interfaces also help companies add creativity while increasing the consumers' engagement in, and awareness of CSR activities.

The factors postulated in the m-TISM framework show that these antecedents are connected, providing a contextual insight into CSR for e-commerce firms. The study also discussed the implications of the food delivery companies to foster change toward sustainability in their supply chain. These findings outlined a guide that businesses interested in synchronizing success with social/ environmental results should adopt.

5.2 Future Directions for Research

While this study provides a theoretical framework for understanding CSR initiatives in e-commerce, it opens avenues for further exploration:

5.2.1 Incorporation of Empirical Data: Future research could incorporate quantitative methods, such as surveys or case studies, to validate the contextual relationships identified in this study. Collecting numerical data would enhance the reliability of the findings and provide measurable insights into the impact of each antecedent.

5.2.2 Cross-Sectoral Analysis: Expanding the research to include other sectors within e-commerce, such as online retail or digital education platforms, could reveal variations in CSR practices and their drivers. This would enhance the generalizability of the m-TISM framework.

5.2.3 Geographical Comparisons: Comparative studies across different countries or regions could provide insights into how cultural, regulatory, and economic factors influence CSR initiatives in e-commerce.

5.2.4 Consumer Perspective: Future research could explore consumer perceptions and participation in CSR activities facilitated by e-commerce platforms. This would offer valuable feedback for designing more inclusive and impactful CSR strategies.

By addressing these areas, researchers can build on the foundations laid by this study, contributing to a deeper understanding of CSR in the dynamic and rapidly evolving e-commerce landscape.

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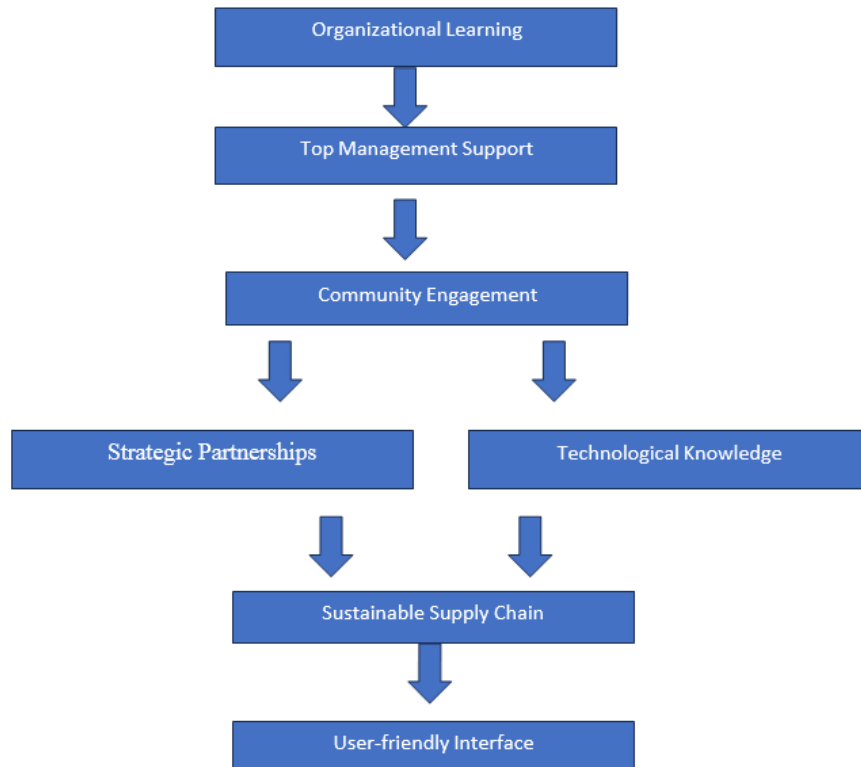
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Appendix: TISM Model Representation

The framework used in this study is the Total Interpretative Structural Modeling (TISM) to decipher and make sense of the different interrelations of the varied antecedents that influence CSR in the e-commerce food delivery business. The following diagram illustrates the major factors considered by the model and CSR activities as well as their interconnections at various levels.

Figure 1: TISM Model for E-Commerce CSR Initiatives in the Food Delivery Industry

In the following diagram, the major antecedents are depicted along with the mechanisms through which they operate. Much of what it indicates is how each of them sequentially interrelates with the others, from the base, which are the factorial antecedents, to the operational.



Explanation of the TISM Model Representation

5.2.5 **Organizational Learning:** At the foundation of the model, organizational learning is critical as it facilitates knowledge acquisition and innovation. This factor enables the understanding and adaptation of CSR strategies within the company.

5.2.6 **Top Management Support:** This is a central driver, influencing all other antecedents. Without strong backing from top management, CSR initiatives lack direction and leadership, making it essential for the implementation of all strategies.

5.2.7 **Community Engagement:** This factor depends on both top management support and strategic partnerships. Community engagement is driven by initiatives that are supported at the leadership level and are expanded through partnerships with various stakeholders.

5.2.8 **Strategic Partnerships and Technological Knowledge:** These two antecedents interact to form the backbone of many CSR initiatives. Strategic partnerships enable access to resources and external networks, while technological knowledge ensures that CSR initiatives can be scaled effectively and innovatively.

5.2.9 **Sustainable Supply Chain Practices:** This is influenced by both technological knowledge and the development of user-friendly interfaces. Technological advancements enhance sustainability in supply chains, while user-friendly interfaces allow for better implementation and monitoring.

5.2.10 **User-friendly Interface:** Although this is influenced by all the antecedents, its primary role is to implement CSR strategies at the customer-facing level. It ensures that all CSR activities are accessible, transparent, and user-centric, promoting greater consumer involvement in responsible business practices.

Antecedents and Their Interrelationships

In the TISM model, there is a clear series of antecedent factors where each level impacts the successive level. The continuity from organisational learning to the user interface demonstrates foundation knowledge that underpins strategic decisions and leads to operation implementation. Below is a summary of the interrelationships between these antecedents:

5.2.11 **Organizational Learning** → **Top Management Support** → **Community Engagement**

5.2.12 **Top Management Support** → **Strategic Partnerships** → **Technological Knowledge**

5.2.13 **Strategic Partnerships** → **Sustainable Supply Chain Practices**

5.2.14 Technological Knowledge → Sustainable Supply Chain Practices

5.2.15 Sustainable Supply Chain Practices → User-friendly Interface

5.2.16 User-friendly Interface is affected by all the other antecedents, enabling CSR practices to be effectively communicated and executed at the consumer level.

Justification for TISM Model Usage

This framework best fits this research because it is straightforward and systematic in establishing relationships between several antecedents that motivate CSR programs in the food delivery e-commerce firm. The identification and analysis of the factors and their interactiveness using the TISM model also enables this study to reveal not merely sequential but also hierarchical impacts on CSR strategies in this context.

This approach is most useful in environments where quantitative data is difficult to collect due to its reliance on expert opinion, literature analysis and theoretical concepts for defining and modelling dependent and independent variables. Hence, the TISM model is apt for the understanding of the non-metric nature of the CSR initiatives and indeed offers the necessary 'gear' for working through several issues related to examining the RBPs in the context of the e-commerce food delivery business from India.