

Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Digital Era: A Systematic Review of Its Impact on Corporate Reputation

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ABSTRACT

Rapid advancements in digital technology have changed how businesses communicate corporate social responsibility (CSR), and digital channels have become essential for engaging stakeholders and enhancing a company's reputation. As previous studies have looked at digital CSR communication, there is still a lack of comprehensive knowledge on how digital CSR practices affect stakeholder trust, corporate credibility, and long-term performance results. Specifically, there is a lack of methodical synthesis that links ethical concerns, stakeholder responses, and strategies for communication in digital CSR contexts. To address this gap, this study conducts a systematic literature review of digital CSR communication and its implications for corporate reputation. Guided by PRISMA protocol, relevant studies were identified from Scopus and Mendeley databases. Following a structured screening process, 38 peer-reviewed studies were included for analysis. The review synthesizes findings into three interrelated themes. First, digital channels, tactics, and process models in CSR communication examine how organizations strategically use digital platforms and tools to communicate CSR initiatives. Second, stakeholder responses and performance outcomes of digital CSR highlight how stakeholder perceptions, trust, and engagement shape reputation, loyalty, and long-term value creation. Third, transparency, ethics, and risk in digital CSR address challenges related to greenwashing, legitimacy, and crisis management in online environments. This review advances digital CSR scholarship by offering an integrated framework that links communication strategies, stakeholder dynamics, and ethical considerations. Practically, it provides guidance for organizations seeking to leverage digital CSR communication while safeguarding credibility and mitigating reputational risks in an increasingly digitalized landscape.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility, corporate reputation, digital era, stakeholder, corporate strategy.*

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication has become a pivotal component of corporate strategy, particularly in the digital era where online platforms mediate organizational stakeholder relationships. The integration of websites, social media, and digital storytelling tools into CSR communication has transformed how organizations present their social and environmental commitments, engage stakeholders, and manage corporate reputation. Prior research suggests that effective CSR communication can enhance corporate credibility, build stakeholder trust, foster long-term loyalty, and create mutual values, all of which are critical for sustainable business performance (Eberle et al., 2013; Kim, 2019; Schroter et al., 2022; Sharipudin et al., 2025; Surya & Mahmud, 2025).

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Despite growing scholarly interest in digital CSR communication, existing studies remain dispersed across platforms, industries, and theoretical perspectives. Much of the literature examines isolated aspects of digital CSR, such as message framing, platform use, or stakeholder reactions, without offering an integrated understanding of how digital strategies, stakeholder responses, and ethical challenges jointly shape corporate reputation. In particular, limited attention has been given to synthesizing how transparency signals, perceptions of greenwashing, and crisis-related risks influence stakeholder legitimacy judgments in digital environments.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is threefold. First, it aims to examine key digital channels, strategies, and communication processes used in CSR communication to enhance stakeholder engagement in online environments. Second, it seeks to analyze how stakeholder responses to digital CSR narratives influence corporate reputation, loyalty, and organizational performance outcomes across industries. Third, the study explores how transparency and ethical cues in digital CSR content shape stakeholder perceptions of legitimacy, greenwashing, and reputational risk. By systematically reviewing existing literature, this study clarifies the strategic, relational, and ethical dimensions of digital CSR communication and contributes to a more coherent understanding of its role in corporate reputation management. In short, systematic review was used since it can fully capture trends, highlighting unsolved subjects in the current literature (Zhao et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The relationship between CSR communication and corporate reputation has been extensively studied, with a consensus that effective CSR communication positively influences corporate reputation. Studies have shown that CSR communication characterized by transparency, authenticity, and alignment with cultural values enhances stakeholder trust and identification that improve corporate reputation (Terchila, 2025; Zhe et al., 2025). From the perspective of stakeholder theory, this relationship can be understood as a process of managing stakeholder expectations and strengthening organization and stakeholder relationships. CSR communication becomes effective when it does not only inform stakeholders about corporate initiatives, but also demonstrates responsiveness, accountability, and alignment with stakeholder values. At the same time, legitimacy theory suggests that CSR communication helps organizations justify their social role and maintain public acceptance by showing that their actions are consistent with societal norms and expectations. The effectiveness of CSR communication can also be influenced by several factors, including the medium used, the tone of the message, and the level of stakeholder engagement.

a. Digital Platforms and CSR Communication

Digital platforms, particularly social media, have become essential tools for CSR communication. They offer companies the ability to reach a broader audience, engage in real-time interactions, and foster a sense of community among stakeholders (Dundua, 2024; Schroter et al., 2022;). Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook allow companies to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly communicate their CSR initiatives to the public. In relation to ELM, digital platforms also influence how stakeholders process CSR messages. Detailed, transparent, and evidence-based CSR information may encourage stakeholders to evaluate the message through the central route, while visual storytelling, emotional appeals, and brand image may influence stakeholders through the peripheral route.

Therefore, digital CSR communication does not only depend on platform visibility, but also on how message quality and persuasive cues shape stakeholder interpretation. Despite the growing use of social media as a strategic CSR communication tool, existing studies report inconsistent findings regarding its impact on corporate reputation (Schroter et al., 2022). Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that may influence this relationship. Therefore, further investigation is needed to clarify the role of social media CSR communication in shaping corporate reputation, particularly within emerging institutional and socio cultural contexts.

b. Interactive CSR Communication

Interactive digital media can enhance the credibility of CSR messages and strengthen stakeholder identification with the company. Increased interactivity in CSR communication has been shown to boost corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intentions. However, companies must carefully monitor these channels, as negative user evaluations can significantly harm corporate reputation. Interactive digital media can enhance the credibility of CSR messages and strengthen stakeholder identification with the company. From the stakeholder theory perspective, interactivity is important because it transforms CSR communication from one way information dissemination into a dialogic process where stakeholders can respond, question, and participate in meaning-making. Increased interactivity in CSR communication has been shown to boost corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intentions because stakeholders may feel more recognized and involved. However, companies must carefully monitor these channels, as negative user evaluations can significantly harm corporate reputation. This also reflects legitimacy theory, as digital interaction exposes organizations to public judgment, where legitimacy can either be strengthened through transparency or weakened when CSR messages are perceived as inconsistent or symbolic.

c. Challenges in Digital CSR Communication

Despite the advantages of digital CSR communication, companies face several challenges. The digital media environment subjects companies to constant public scrutiny, making it essential for them to maintain high levels of transparency and accountability (Aula & Heinonen, 2016). This challenge is closely related to legitimacy theory, as organizations must continuously maintain social approval in a digital environment where stakeholders can easily evaluate, challenge, and circulate counter narratives about CSR claims. When CSR communication lacks authenticity or is perceived as greenwashing, it may create a legitimacy gap that negatively affects corporate reputation. Additionally, the rise of polarization in public discourse complicates CSR communication, as it can lead to oversimplified and divisive narratives that undermine trust and consensus (Schoeneborn et al., 2024).

d. Strategic Integration of CSR and Digital Marketing

The strategic integration of digital marketing into CSR campaigns can amplify the reach and impact of CSR initiatives. Companies that effectively leverage digital marketing tools and social media platforms can enhance their brand reputation and foster deeper connections with stakeholders (Dundua, 2024). However, the success of such initiatives depends on a balanced approach that combines genuine social impact with transparent and responsible communication (Ernestivita et al., 2024). Theoretically, this indicates that corporate

reputation is shaped not only by the visibility of CSR messages, but also by the perceived fit between CSR actions, stakeholder expectations, and organizational identity. Stakeholder theory explains the importance of engagement and value alignment, legitimacy theory explains the need for social acceptance, while ELM explains how stakeholders assess CSR messages through message quality and persuasive cues.

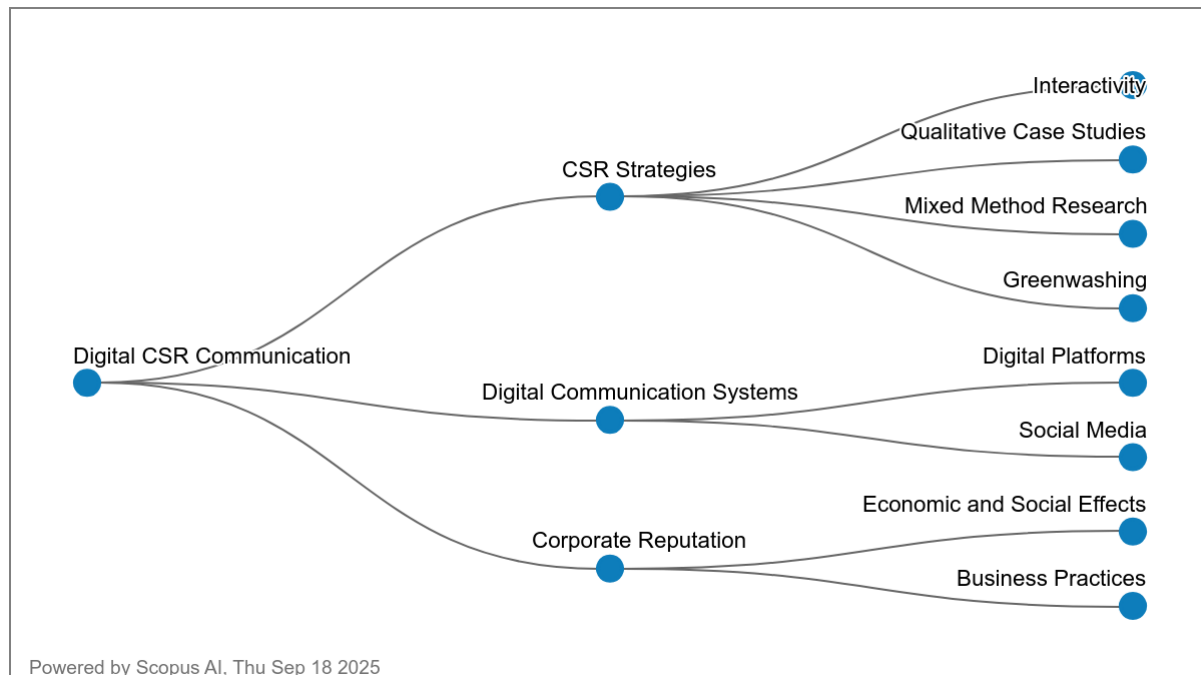


Figure 1: Concept map

The concept map (Figure 1) developed from the literature review positions Digital CSR Communication as the central theme, illustrating its interconnectedness with CSR strategies, digital communication systems, and corporate reputation. Within CSR strategies, the literature emphasizes elements such as interactivity, qualitative case studies, mixed-method research, and the persistent challenge of greenwashing. These aspects highlight how organizations design and evaluate CSR initiatives while underscoring the importance of credibility and stakeholder engagement. The second dimension, digital communication systems, encompasses the role of digital platforms and social media as key channels for disseminating CSR information. These tools not only expand the reach of CSR messaging but also transform communication into a more participatory and dynamic process.

The third dimension, corporate reputation, reflects the outcomes of digital CSR communication, where effective practices contribute to positive economic and social effects while reinforcing ethical and sustainable business practices. This linkage demonstrates that CSR communication extends beyond information delivery to shaping organizational image, trust, and long-term sustainability. Overall, the concept map captures how digital CSR communication operates at the intersection of strategy, technology, and reputation, with literature consistently stressing its role in fostering engagement, ensuring authenticity, and enhancing corporate legitimacy.

In conclusion, digital CSR communication plays a critical role in shaping corporate reputation. While digital platforms offer numerous opportunities for enhancing stakeholder engagement and trust, companies must navigate the challenges of transparency,

accountability, and public scrutiny. By adopting strategic and authentic CSR communication practices, companies can build a positive corporate reputation and contribute to sustainable business practices.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Research questions (RQs) guide this systematic literature review by defining its focus, structuring the search, and ensuring consistent analysis (Kitchenham, 2007; Ghazali et al., 2025). To make the RQs clear and focused, the PICo framework (Population, Interest, Context) was applied (Lockwood et al., 2015). PICo helps specify the target group, main topic, and setting, ensuring relevant studies are selected and interpreted accurately. Using this approach, the review explores how digital CSR communication affects stakeholders and corporate reputation while addressing ethical and credibility issues. The RQs are:

Q1. How are digital channels used in CSR communication to engage stakeholders effectively online?

Q2. How do stakeholder reactions to digital CSR messages affect corporate reputation, loyalty, and performance?

Q3. How do transparency and ethical signals in digital CSR content influence perceptions of legitimacy, greenwashing, and crisis risk.

METHODOLOGY

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) technique is a commonly used standard for conducting systematic literature reviews that ensures openness, accuracy, and consistency throughout the process (Page et al., 2021). Following PRISMA, which offers instructions on how to methodically find, screen, and incorporate studies for review, help researchers increase precision and rigor of analysis. PRISMA provides a transparent structure for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant studies, thereby enhancing the credibility, replicability, and methodological rigor of the systematic review process. In this investigation, two significant databases, Scopus and Mendeley, were used due to their extensive coverage and resilience. The PRISMA methodology is structured into four essential phases, which are identification, screening, eligibility, and data abstraction. Databases are examined during the identification step to find all pertinent studies.

a. Identification

In the first stage of the PRISMA framework, which is *Identification*, the focus is on comprehensively capturing all potentially relevant records from the selected databases before filtering them further. In this study, Scopus was used as the primary indexing database due to its broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature in business, management, social sciences, and communication-related fields. In addition, Mendeley was used as a supplementary literature discovery tool to identify potentially relevant articles and reduce the possibility of overlooking studies related to digital CSR communication and corporate reputation. However, Mendeley was not treated as a primary indexing database but as a supporting source in the identification stage. The initial outcome yielded 408 records from Scopus and 55 records from Mendeley, making a total of 463 records.

The combination of these databases ensures inclusivity and academic rigor, reducing the risk of overlooking significant contributions in the field. The inclusion of multiple keywords reflects an intentional attempt to bridge conceptual overlaps, as “corporate reputation” and “corporate image” are often used interchangeably in management and communication scholarship, yet they possess nuanced distinctions that can broaden the scope of analysis. This stage, therefore, not only demonstrates methodological transparency but also positions the review to capture the multifaceted nature of how digital CSR communication is linked with stakeholders’ perception of corporate legitimacy and trust.

Table 1: The search string

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("corporate social responsibility" OR CSR) AND ("digital communication" OR "online communication" OR "internet communication" OR web* OR "social media communication" OR "social network*" OR platform* OR "digital communication" OR "online communication" OR "interactive media") AND ("corporate reputation" OR "organizational reputation" OR "corporate image" OR credibility OR trust* OR legitimacy OR "stakeholder perception*" OR "brand reputation")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "MULT")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2024) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2025)) - Date of Access: September 2025
Mendeley	corporate social responsibility AND digital communication AND corporate reputation - Date of Access: September 2025

b. Screening

In the second stage of the PRISMA framework, *Screening*, a more rigorous filtering of the initially identified records was undertaken to ensure the review’s alignment with the research objectives and methodological standards. Out of the 463 records retrieved, 345 were excluded based on a predefined set of exclusion criteria: non-English language publications, documents published prior to 2021, conference papers, book chapters, review articles, and articles marked as “in press.” Furthermore, studies falling outside the disciplinary boundaries of Business, Management, and Accounting, as well as those classified under Social Sciences and Multidisciplinary categories, were excluded to maintain disciplinary focus and theoretical coherence.

This rigorous exclusion process reduced the dataset to 118 eligible records, with 103 from Scopus and 15 from Mendeley. To further refine the pool, a duplicate-checking process was conducted, which led to the removal of one overlapping article. The decision to impose such criteria reflects both methodological precision and theoretical alignment. For instance, limiting the timeframe between 2021 - 2025 ensures the inclusion of the most contemporary scholarship, which is particularly important in studying digital CSR communication, as the digital landscape is rapidly evolving and earlier works may not capture emerging platforms, tools, and practices.

Similarly, restricting the scope to journal articles rather than conference or review papers ensures the inclusion of peer-reviewed, original research that meets higher standards of academic rigor and contributes novel empirical or conceptual insights. The focus on Business, Management, and Accounting disciplines reflects the centrality of organizational strategy, stakeholder management, and corporate image in the context of CSR

communication, thereby avoiding conceptual dilution from multidisciplinary works that may not directly engage with these constructs. This stringent screening step not only strengthens the internal validity of the review but also enhances its external credibility by demonstrating transparency in how irrelevant, outdated, or methodologically weaker studies were systematically excluded. Ultimately, the careful reduction of records through a transparent, criterion-driven process ensures that the final dataset represents a high-quality, focused, and contemporary body of literature capable of yielding robust insights into the nexus between digital CSR communication, corporate reputation, and corporate image.

Table 2: The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2021 – 2025	< 2021
Literature Type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business, Management and Accounting - Social Sciences - Multidisciplinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Besides Business, Management and Accounting - Social Sciences - Multidisciplinary

c. Eligibility

In the *Eligibility* stage of the PRISMA framework, a more detailed and critical assessment was conducted on the 117 records that had passed the screening process. At this stage, the titles, abstracts, and the full texts were examined to determine their relevance and alignment with the objectives of the study. From this evaluation, 79 records were excluded for specific reasons like articles that were outside the field of business and communication, studies with titles that were deemed not significant to the scope of digital CSR communication and corporate reputation, abstracts that did not align with the review’s objectives, and papers for which full-text access was unavailable. The exclusion of these records reflects a systematic effort to ensure conceptual precision and methodological integrity, ensuring that the final body of literature would directly address the interplay between digital CSR communication, corporate image, and reputation. Each reason for exclusion represents a safeguard against the inclusion of studies that could compromise the review’s focus, depth, and contribution, particularly in a field where interdisciplinary overlaps may generate ambiguity if not carefully managed.

Following this rigorous eligibility assessment, 38 studies were deemed suitable and were included in the qualitative synthesis. The final selection represents a highly refined and targeted body of knowledge that provides strong empirical and conceptual insights into the research domain. By narrowing down from 463 initial records to 38 eligible studies, the process demonstrates the robustness and transparency expected of high-quality systematic reviews. This final pool reflects the most relevant and significant contributions that ensures that the subsequent analysis is anchored on evidence that is methodologically sound. Importantly, this stage also highlights the practical challenges of conducting SLRs, such as restricted access to certain full texts, underscoring the need for methodological adaptability

and justification in exclusion decisions. Overall, the eligibility stage ensures that only studies with direct theoretical and empirical relevance are retained, laying a strong foundation for meaningful synthesis and critical discussion in the qualitative analysis.

e. Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analysis was employed as one of the key assessment strategies in this study to synthesise findings across diverse research designs, including quantitative approaches. The primary aim was to identify pertinent themes and subthemes that emerged from the literature. Data collection served as the initial step in this thematic development process. As illustrated in Figure 2, the authors systematically examined 38 selected publications, carefully extracting claims and evidence relevant to the scope of the study. Subsequently, the most significant contributions to the field of “Digital CSR Communication and Corporate Reputation” were critically evaluated, with particular attention paid to methodological approaches and reported findings.

To ensure methodological transparency, the authors worked collaboratively in developing themes grounded in the evidence, while maintaining a detailed log to capture observations, interpretations, and emerging insights during the analysis. This log also documented challenges and reflections that informed the interpretive process. In the final stage, the authors compared and cross-checked their analyses to ensure consistency in theme construction, and any disagreements in conceptual interpretation were resolved through discussion and consensus among the research team.

To strengthen the reliability of the thematic coding process, the selected articles were reviewed and coded collaboratively by the authors. Initial codes were developed based on recurring concepts, theoretical perspectives, research methods, and key findings related to digital CSR communication and corporate reputation. The authors then compared their coding outcomes to identify similarities and differences in interpretation. Any disagreement in theme classification was discussed until consensus was reached. Although no statistical intercoder reliability test such as Cohen (1960) was conducted, the use of cross checking, coding comparison, and consensus discussion helped improve consistency and reduce individual bias in the thematic analysis.

f. Quality of Appraisal

According to the guidelines proposed by Kitchenham and Charters (Kitchenham, 2007), once we have selected primary studies, we have to assess the quality of the research they present and quantitatively compare them. In this study, we apply quality assessment from Abouzahra et al. (2020), which consists of six QAs for our SLR. The scoring procedure for evaluating each criterion involves three possible ratings: "Yes" (Y) with a score of 1 if the criterion is fully met, "Partly" (P) with a score of 0.5 if the criterion is somewhat met but contains some gaps or shortcomings, and "No" (N) with a score of 0 if the criterion is not met at all.

- QA1. Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
- QA2. Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
- QA3. Is the study methodology clearly established?
- QA4. Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
- QA5. Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
- QA6. Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

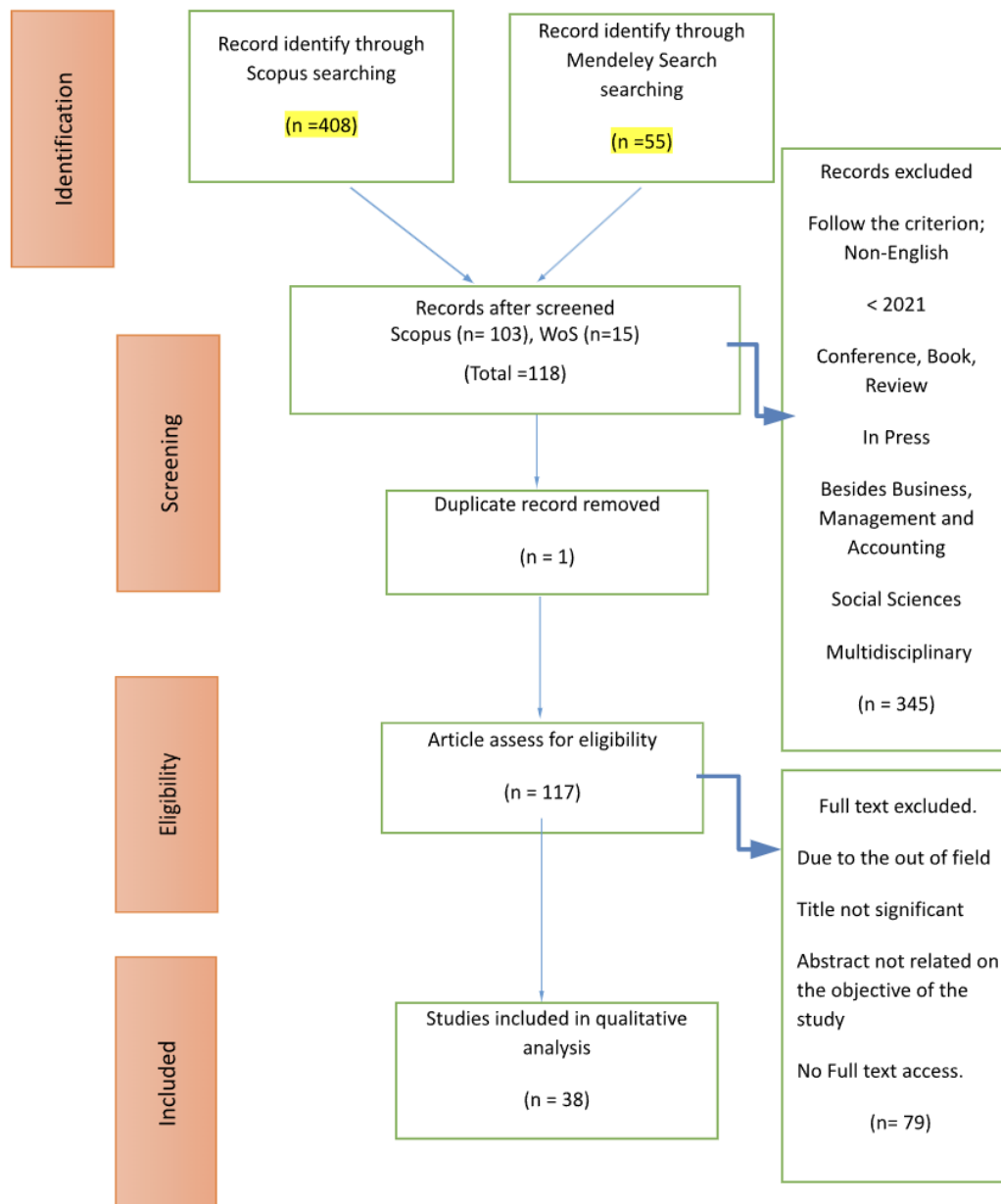


Figure 2: Flow diagram of the proposed searching study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quality assessment of the 38 reviewed studies indicates strong methodological clarity and theoretical grounding. Most articles fulfilled QA1–QA4, demonstrating clearly defined research purposes, appropriate methodological designs, and explicit conceptual frameworks. This suggests that research on digital CSR communication and corporate reputation has reached a mature and methodologically stable stage.

However, two key weaknesses were identified in this study. First, only a limited number of studies positioned their findings in comparison with similar empirical work (QA5). Second, many articles did not explicitly acknowledge methodological limitations (QA6), such as sample size restrictions, contextual constraints, or measurement bias. Although some studies provided critical reflections, systematic comparative integration and transparent limitation reporting remain underdeveloped.

Overall, while the field demonstrates strong structural rigor, future research would benefit from stronger comparative benchmarking and clearer acknowledgment of research boundaries to enhance reliability and generalizability. Here is the quality assessment table for the selected papers:

Table 3: Quality assessment

Ps	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Mark	Percentage (%)
PS1	Y	Y	Y	P	P	N	4	66.7
PS2	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS4	Y	Y	P	Y	P	N	4	66.7
PS5	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS8	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS9	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS10	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS11	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS12	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS13	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS14	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS15	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75
PS16	Y	Y	N	P	N	N	2.5	41.7
PS17	Y	Y	P	P	Y	N	4	66.7
PS18	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS19	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS20	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS21	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	83.3
PS22	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS23	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS24	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS25	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	83.3
PS26	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS27	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS28	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS29	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75
PS30	Y	Y	P	Y	P	N	4	66.7
PS31	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75
PS32	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS33	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	83.3
PS34	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4	66.7
PS35	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	83.3
PS36	Y	Y	Y	P	P	N	4	66.7
PS37	Y	Y	Y	P	N	N	3.5	58.3
PS38	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	83.3

Based on the systematic analysis of the 38 selected studies, this paper identifies three overarching themes that explain how digital CSR communication influences corporate reputation. These themes capture the dominant patterns across the literature and reflect the strategic, relational, and ethical dimensions of digital CSR practices. The first theme focuses on digital channels, tactics, and process models used in CSR communication. The second theme examines stakeholder responses and performance outcomes resulting from digital CSR

initiatives. The third theme addresses transparency, ethics, and reputational risks, particularly issues related to greenwashing and legitimacy. Overall, these themes provide a structured framework for understanding the mechanisms through which digital CSR communication shapes corporate reputation in contemporary digital environments.

a. Theme 1: Digital Channels, Tactics, and Process Models in CSR Communication

CSR communication is most effective when messages are credible, externally validated, and disseminated across multiple digital platforms. Across sectors including hospitality, tourism, banking, medical tourism, and regulated industries, corporate websites remain primary legitimacy hubs that signal youth engagement, education initiatives, community commitment, and SDG alignment (Camilleri, 2022; Garcia-De-Los-Salmones-Sanchez et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2023; Pérez & García-De-Los-Salmones-Sánchez, 2023). Podcast based CSR initiatives institutionalize sustainability narratives and reinforce corporate voice, particularly in highly regulated sectors (Barrio Fraile et al., 2023). Post pandemic Twitter analyses further show that human centred CSR narratives focusing on safety, people, and work function as reputational anchors (Mazza et al., 2022; Zeler et al., 2022). These findings indicate that diversified platform choice and stakeholder fit alignment are more influential than reliance on a single digital channel.

Message level credibility cues significantly enhance CSR persuasiveness when external organizational validation strengthens disclosure trust more effectively than internal endorsements (Sun et al., 2024). Studies applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model confirm that timely, relevant, consistent, and expertise driven messages generate stronger central route persuasion effects (Camilleri, 2022). Similarly, CSR post attitudes influence corporate image and sharing intention through affect transfer processes (Garcia-De-Los-Salmones-Sanchez et al., 2021). Loss framed appeals and credible sources further increase sharing likelihood (Chang et al., 2023; Fernandez et al., 2022; Hartmann et al., 2021). Overall, digital CSR legitimacy depends on credibility, external validation, message quality, and process coherence rather than episodic content dissemination.

b. Theme 2: Stakeholder Responses and Performance Outcomes

According to studies, stakeholders respond positively when CSR communication is trustworthy, transparent, and consistent with moral standards. It enhances advocacy, loyalty, stakeholder trust, corporate image, and purchasing intention (Waghmare et al., 2025). Legacy media salience further shapes CSR reputation effects. While news coverage may be negative, visibility itself amplifies reputational judgment depending on stakeholder attention (Vogler & Eisenegger, 2021). Industry audits confirm that CSR engagement increases across digital platforms, yet reputational gains are stronger when agenda level concerns are addressed (Button et al., 2023; Vogler & Eisenegger, 2021).

Importantly, trust frequently mediates CSR behavior relationships. Ethical judgment variables, perceived fairness, and governance integrity strengthen reputation appraisal (Ugwuoju, 2025). Conversely, algorithmic misconduct such as price discrimination erodes ethical perceptions and loyalty, especially among high-trust or price-sensitive stakeholders (Chen et al., 2023). These findings indicate that CSR visibility alone is insufficient. Reputational impact depends on credibility, fairness signals, governance alignment, and stakeholder value congruence.

b. Theme 3: Transparency, Ethics, and Risk

Transparency strengthens reputation when CSR communication aligns with observable corporate behavior, but inconsistency triggers reputational backlash. Transparency disclosures function as legitimacy signals when linked to verifiable CSR performance (Amin et al., 2024; Diaz, 2024). Experimental evidence shows that honest product risk transparency can increase responsibility perceptions and purchase intention among involved stakeholders (Sun et al., 2025). However, perceived hypocrisy or inconsistency activates moral outrage, condemnation, and boycott intentions (Lewin & Warren, 2025). Interestingly, prior credibility may heighten vulnerability when contradictions emerge. Hospitality research further confirms that a strong corporate image can buffer negative CSR incidents (Garcia-De-Los-Salmones-Sánchez et al., 2021). Crisis-sensitive sectors demonstrate that dialogic engagement and responsiveness are critical for maintaining legitimacy during controversy (Pizzi et al., 2021). Communication capability gaps, where CSR publicity exceeds internal CSR governance also weaken sincerity judgments (Estanyol et al., 2024). Thus, digital CSR reputation is sustained when transparency is honest, governance-aligned, externally validated, and continuously monitored. Greenwashing or symbolic disclosure rapidly undermines stakeholder trust.

Table 4: Summary of key themes in digital CSR communication and corporate reputation

Theme	Core Idea	Key Mechanisms	Main Outcomes
Digital Channels, Tactics & Process Models	CSR works best when messages are credible, externally validated, and shared across multiple platforms.	Multi-platform dissemination (websites, Twitter, podcasts); External validation; Message quality (timeliness, relevance, expertise); Normative influence and social proof.	Enhanced corporate reputation; Increased stakeholder trust; Higher sharing intention; Stronger legitimacy formation.
Stakeholder Responses & Performance Outcomes	Stakeholders respond positively when CSR communication is visible, trustworthy, and aligned with ethical expectations.	Trust mediation; Ethical judgment; Governance fairness; Platform visibility; Agenda salience.	Improved reputation; Brand loyalty; Advocacy behaviour; Purchase intention; Green innovation competitiveness.
Transparency, Ethics & Risk	Transparency strengthens reputation, while inconsistency or greenwashing harms trust.	Honest disclosure; Performance-linked transparency; Hypocrisy perception; Moral outrage activation; Dialogic engagement; Governance alignment.	Strengthened legitimacy; Purchase support; Reduced boycott intention; Crisis resilience; Long-term reputational stability.

CONCLUSION

The first part emphasizes that the systematic review confirms that digital CSR communication plays a fundamental role in shaping corporate reputation. The study was guided by the PRISMA protocol and structured through three central research themes which is Digital Channels, Tactics, and Process Models in CSR Communication; Stakeholder Responses and Performance Outcomes of Digital CSR; and Transparency, Ethics, and Risk in Digital CSR. Findings demonstrate that digital channels such as social media and online platforms not only facilitate direct interaction with stakeholders but also create opportunities for real-time engagement, trust building, and visibility of CSR practices. These benefits, however, are dependent on how strategic communication is designed, where interactive, transparent, and

authentic messaging significantly enhances stakeholder identification, loyalty, and reputation outcomes. The analysis further highlights that stakeholder reactions to digital CSR communication are multi-dimensional, shaping attitudes, loyalty, and long-term performance perceptions. Positive responses are linked with transparent and value-driven initiatives, while misalignment, greenwashing, or conflicting signals lead to skepticism, reputational risks, and hostile reactions such as negative e-word-of-mouth (eWOM). In parallel, transparency and ethics emerge as central determinants in maintaining credibility and legitimacy, especially under conditions of heightened scrutiny or crisis, where inconsistencies between disclosed commitments and actual practices risk severe reputational damage.

The second part of the conclusion reflects on broader contributions, implications, and directions for future research. The review consolidates fragmented evidence across multiple contexts and provides a thematic synthesis of how digital CSR communication affects corporate reputation in the evolving digital economy. It contributes to theory by integrating perspectives on legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, and transparency with practical observations of CSR practices in digital channels. For practice, the findings underline that organizations must move beyond superficial CSR disclosures and adopt consistent, transparent, and ethically grounded communication strategies to sustain long-term reputational value. This requires embedding CSR into core business processes rather than treating it as a promotional tool, ensuring alignment between digital narratives and actual performance. Nevertheless, limitations of this review should be acknowledged, particularly the scope of databases and time frames applied, which may exclude emerging work outside the selected parameters. Future research may address these gaps by exploring cross-cultural variations, the influence of AI-driven communication, and the longitudinal impacts of CSR communication on trust and loyalty. The study underscores that digital CSR communication is not merely about visibility but about sustaining credibility and legitimacy in a context where stakeholders are increasingly vigilant and empowered to evaluate organizational authenticity. This positions CSR communication as both an opportunity and a responsibility for corporations aiming to strengthen their reputation and secure sustainable stakeholder relationships.

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BIODATA

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