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RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

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STRATEGIC CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: COMPANIES' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

CSR, the new vertical in the management function has emerged as strong measure of business ethics and practice. It is paramount on all the corporate houses to intertwine their CSR activities with the vision of the company and identify the outcomes of such activities for effective CSR practices. Strategic CSR is nothing short of mystery in the wake of fragmented CSR efforts, good governance excellence and absence of standardized method to assess the effectiveness of CSR policies and practices. However, companies are aware of its impact on branding, competitive advantage, employees 'attitude, general perception, stakeholders' betterment & business innovations by leveraging its resources and capabilities to address socio-economic issues effectively. This review paper investigates into the dimensions of strategic CSR for bringing up a general framework with linkages of all possible key variables within the system. This is exhaustive study of theories and practices of CSR. Management in the organizations must include all these dimensions to bring strategic aspect in company's CSR as against the ever-evolving society and business process.

KEYWORDS

TBA, corporate social responsibility, strategic function, stakeholder.

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INTRODUCTION

he evolving concept of CSR has reached to strategic level where companies are continuously evaluating CSR for better concerted efforts towards their stakeholders' involvement and improvement. CSR strategies can empirically be associated with competitive advantages like attracting valuable employees, enhancing corporate image and reputation (Filho et al, 2010), can be taken as strategy to outperform rival companies (Porter and Kramer,2002) strategic CSR engagement, CSR has significant potential for direct value creation both for business and society (Atle Midttun 2009 Research Report 2/2009), even if CSR is not integrated into the core business planning, it still is critical enough to merit a strategic role, because through its implementation a company reveals how it interacts with its stakeholders (Rangan, Kash, Lisa Chase, and Sohel Karim. "Why Every Company Needs a CSR Strategy and How to Build It." Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 12-088, April 2012.). Engaging in strategic CSR can yield growth in market share, increased organizational learning, retention of deeply engaged employees, support from external stakeholders, and favorable relationships with investors (Heslin, P. A., & Ochoa, J. D.,2008). Sometimes, CSR is associated with the concept of sustainable development and hence, strategy of sustainable development is the core concern of responsibility in modern organization. Therefore, companies strategizing on CSR need to focus on innovating or finding such solutions for business activities, which are socially responsible, ecologically friendly and economically valuable. (Rok, 2010).

CSR: In the year 1920s there was emergence of CSR concept; but due to the Great Depression and World War II, it failed to become a serious topic amongst business leaders until the 1950s. CSR found itself in the spotlight in 1951 when Frank Abrams, chairman of the board for Standard Oil of New Jersey, published an article in Harvard Business Review where he stated that is was business' obligation: to conduct the affairs of the enterprise to maintain an equitable and workable balance among the claims of the various directly interested groups, a harmonious balance among stockholders, employees, customers, and the public at large (Frederick. 2006).

In 1953, Howard Bowen proposed the CSR definition as "the obligations of business to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society (Bowen, 1953)." A theoretical model had not been accepted until Carroll (1979) developed the corporate social performance (CSP) model whereby CSR, social issues and corporate social responsiveness were considered the leading philosophy for corporations to behave in a socially responsible manner. Although the CSP model advanced CSR philosophies, it was not able to gain widespread application because it lacked the ability to measure and test the model. Evolution continued when academics and businesses started to focus their CSR initiatives toward business strategy. During this period, the role of stakeholders rose to prominence in the CSR debate due to contributions by leading academics such as Peter Drucker (Lee, 2008). The view that stakeholders' importance to corporations compared to shareholders was a contradiction to Nobel laureate Milton Friedman's beliefs that "there is only one responsibility of business, namely to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits (Friedman, 1970)."Later, almost all thinkers have considered economic responsibility of making profit towards shareholders as just one of the responsibilities but a most important one before firm starts delivering other responsibilities towards society.

Strategic function: "Strategic management can be defined as the art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives. The purpose of strategic management is to exploit and create new and different opportunities for tomorrow; long-range planning, in contrast, tries to optimize for tomorrow the trends of today." (David, 2011). Strategic function is maximum utilisation of resources & technology for competitive advantage

CSR in India: With the incorporation of new section 135 and schedule VII in The Companies Law in 2013, that every company having net worth of Rs 500 crore or a net profit of Rs 5 crore or more during any financial year shall constitute a CSR committee of the Board consisting three or more directors. At least 2% of such profit must be spent in pursuance of CSR.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research article is focused on identifying the dimensions of strategic CSR based on past researches and current business practices. The objectives are to study and analyze all the CSR theories and understand their perspectives from company's viewpoint. It tries to bring multiple perspectives to build CSR framework. All parameters and dimensions that are integral part in CSR strategy are enumerated and investigated for its importance in whole CSR framework.

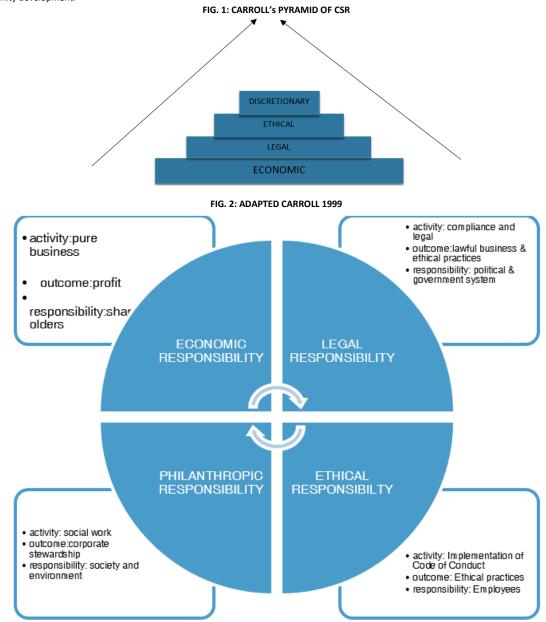
METHODOLOGY

This is a review paper, which is based on analytical understanding of extant literature on CSR and its strategic aspect.

CSR THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Responsibility is defined as the obligation of business managers to make profit for the shareholders while ethically interacting with stakeholders for community welfare and ethical corporate wellbeing.

1. CSR theory: The pyramid of CSR describes the four different components that are unified with each other and provide framework how a business organization might engage in business decisions, actions, practices, and policies simultaneously (Carrol, & Buchholtz, 2008. p. 46). The pyramid approach gives a clear demarcation of four responsible categorization of company's functions which will amount to its CSR approach. Carroll's pyramidal depiction of CSR activities is undoubtedly still being the basic conceptual framework of CSR in the world however it is contested by Visser in his article *The age of responsibility: CSR 2.0* and the new DNA of business (Visser, 2011) that in the developing countries, economic responsibility is still a paramount function of all followed by philanthropic responsibility. In India, TATA Group which started in 1874 with the textile industry came with social welfare measures as early as 1912 after it achieved economic viability. Also, it started with Tata Trusts, which is amongst India's oldest, non-sectarian philanthropic organizations that works in several areas of community development.



2. Stakeholder Approach: stakeholder Theory of CSR advocates the identification of stakeholders in a firm and understand their strategic priorities to weave it in the firms' strategies. It was originally detailed by Ian Mitroff ("Stakeholders of the Organizational Mind",1983) but popularized by Freeman in an article on Stakeholder theory which was published by California Management Review in late 1983 and this was followed by accomplished work, on stakeholder theory, Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach wherein he gave "principle of who or what really counts". Stakeholder is any group or an individual who can influence or can be influenced by the achievement of firm's objectives. The relationship between corporation and the stakeholders is a significant measure of corporate citizenship which shows the integration of strategic needs of stakeholders with that of firms to deliver effective societal and environmental commitments. The modern organizations have engaged their management to navigate their stakeholders' concerns while implementing business model. These organization have to consider company specific basis to identify the stakeholders because there is no general standardized method of identification and following this organization have to categorize these stakeholders for CSR programs & their implementation which is strategic so far till company sustain benefit in some way for the organization & its stakeholders.

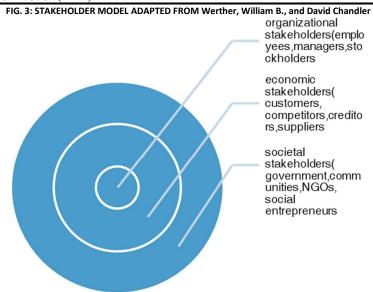


Fig 3. Explains the stakeholder's relationship vis external factors like socio-economic factors & competition. ITC, a conglomerate, has focused on engagement of key stakeholders in CSR process and therefore ITC has adopted structured approach to building partnerships in sustainable business practices. ITC has endeavored to forge an enduring and long sustainable relationship with its key stakeholders such as shareholders, farmers, customers, suppliers, employees, local communities, regulatory bodies, media etc. ITC has institutionalized the existing relationships with stakeholders through established procedure whereby the key stakeholders are identified and consulted. (Lawania, B. D., & Kapoor, S. Concept and Practice of Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility: Special Reference to CSR in ITC Limited.)

3. Three domain model: Three domain model is built around three main areas of social responsibility namely legal, economic and ethical. Carroll model included all the domain in addition to philanthropic component of social responsibility of companies while philanthropic is not considered as exclusive area because it cut across all the three areas. This model treats corporate philanthropy as either "strategic philanthropy," subsumed under economic responsibility, or "charity expected by society," subsumed under ethical responsibility (Geva, A. 2008). These three responsibilities are three cogwheels of CSR (fig. 4 shows how these three domains are interconnected and major force comes from economic aspect) and it's a compulsion for an organization to make profit to sustain the competition which is external to the organization. The legal responsibility and compliance must be met to operate in the political environment.

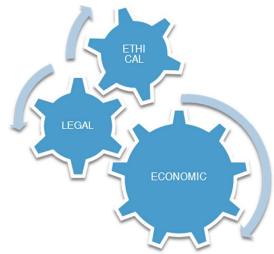


FIG. 4: ADAPTED FROM SCHWARTZ AND CARROLL (2003:509)

4. Triple Bottom Approach(TBA): This approach is developed because of survey by international experts in corporate social responsibility and sustainable development & it was found that there are precisely three categorizations of CSR viz. social, economic and environment. A much more comprehensive approach will evolve with wide array of stakeholders and coordinates spanning areas of government policy, tax policy, technology policy, economic development policy, labour policy, corporate reporting policy and so on.21st century will register an emergence of comprehensive approach to sustainable development and environment protection. (Elkington, J.,2004).

STRATEGIC CSR & ITS DIMENSIONS

In modern organization, CSR has been identified as a function which is beyond sporadic philanthropy and occasional community service as it can be run with the corporate philosophy that may influence strategic decision making, hiring practices, partner selection, & brand development.

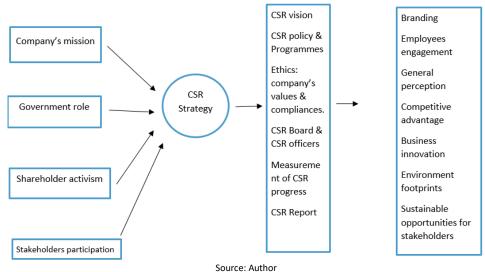
On the basis of exhaustive study of CSR literature from companies' and researchers' perspectives it is found that the following variables are integral part of strategic CSR.

- 1. Involvement and engagement of stakeholders
- Organizational framework for CSR
 - a) CSR officer
 - b) CSR Vision
 - c) Measurement & rewards

- 3. Ethical values
 - a) Code of conduct
 - b) Ethics related to environment
 - c) Ethics related to stakeholders
 - d) Monitoring & enforcement
- 4. Transparency.
 - a) CSR Reports
 - b) CSR Audit
 - c) Institutionalization of PR process
- 5. shareholder activism

INFLUENCER CSR ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOME FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENT

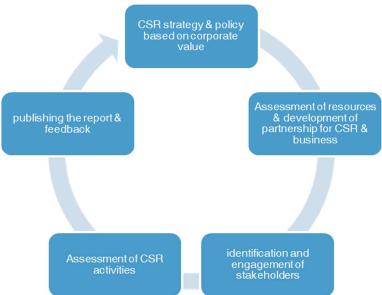




Strategic CSR process

- a) CSR strategy and policy (Filho et al,2010)
- b) Partnership & resources (Afzal, S., & Thiengnoi, P., 2009)
- c) Engagement of stakeholders
- d) Assessment of CSR activities
- e) Publishing of Annual CSR report

FIG. 5: STRATEGIC CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROCESS



Source: Author

Strategic CSR process considers stakeholder element paramount to any other factor as stakeholder approach has offered a new outlook of organizing CSR and provides a structural framework for CSR policy & its execution. Basically, stakeholders are given opportunity to participate in decision making process and this is necessary due to ever changing market, objectives and expectations of people who have stake in the business (Jane & Foster, 2002). Company's commitment to its CSR strategy becomes strong with identification of stakeholder's priorities and leveraging of its resources and capacity for building societal & economic capital for its stakeholders. Implementation of CSR necessarily calls for robust monitoring and evaluation of CSR performances for tracking CSR progress and generating sustainable opportunities and positive environment footprint.

CONCLUSION

Many researches and corporate executives have found that CSR executed in fragmented or sporadic way cannot bring any change in the society and any advantage to the companies. Leaders in the organization need to spearhead with the strategy to embark on CSR with a clear, logical, systematic and objective approach. Companies must device a method to identify their stakeholders based on importance of their stakes in the company and accordingly give them the opportunity to communicate their priorities, so that management and stakeholders can produce a comprehensive design for CSR policy and its implementation. This design should necessarily have companies vision & objectives in consideration. Prioritizing the strategic importance of stakeholders is a step towards competitive advantage. Modern organization must keep up the corporate citizenship by showing responsibility towards stakeholders, environment and government. Companies should make the system transparent with CSR audit and by presenting CSR report annually. Companies are holding CSR in the strategic position because companies are putting huge money for social and environmental cause and they want to make all this worthwhile with their clear focus on certain desirable outcomes and ethical practices. With the ever-vigilant world, government and media, companies cannot fudge and still grow. A responsible business can create world with satisfied shareholders and progressing stakeholders. Corporate leaders are the stewards steering their business houses with a vision to sustain themselves in the competition with their commitment to the stakeholders of performance, trust and leadership.

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