



## EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF LOCAL CULTURAL NORMS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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### **Abstract**

*Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from being a peripheral activity to a pivotal aspect of corporate strategy in the contemporary business landscape. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) operating across diverse cultural settings face unique challenges in implementing CSR initiatives due to variations in cultural norms and societal expectations. This paper examines the impact of local cultural norms on the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in MNCs, with a focus on understanding how cultural dimensions influence CSR perception and outcomes. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the study explores the role of cultural adaptation in enhancing CSR effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. Through a qualitative approach encompassing case studies and interviews, the research seeks to provide insights into best practices for culturally adapted CSR and recommendations for MNCs to navigate cultural complexities. The findings underscore the critical importance of aligning CSR strategies with local cultural norms, fostering stakeholder engagement, and demonstrating long-term commitment to responsible business practices. Ultimately, the study contributes to advancing our understanding of the interplay between culture and CSR effectiveness in MNCs, offering practical implications for corporate practitioners, policymakers, and scholars.*

**Keyword:** *Cultural Adaptation, Multinational Corporations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Cultural Dimensions, Stakeholder Engagement.*

### **Introduction**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an integral component of corporate strategy in the modern business environment. Once viewed as a peripheral activity or voluntary philanthropy, CSR now represents a company's commitment to operating ethically, sustainably, and with a focus on social welfare. As globalization advances, multinational corporations (MNCs) are increasingly implementing CSR initiatives across diverse cultural settings, necessitating a deeper understanding of how these initiatives interact with local cultural norms.

### **The Role of CSR in Multinational Corporations**

Multinational corporations operate in a variety of countries, each with its unique cultural values and societal expectations. These cultural differences pose significant challenges in the design and implementation of CSR initiatives. For instance, a CSR program that is successful in one cultural context may fail in another due to differing perceptions and attitudes towards corporate responsibility and social engagement. Therefore, understanding and integrating local cultural norms into CSR strategies is vital for the effectiveness and acceptance of these initiatives.

### **Cultural Dimensions and Their Influence on CSR**

Cultural dimensions, as conceptualized by scholars such as Geert Hofstede, provide a useful framework for understanding how cultural differences influence behaviors and attitudes. Hofstede's dimensions—Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty



Avoidance, Long-Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint—highlight key aspects of cultural variation that can significantly affect CSR outcomes.

For example, in high Power Distance cultures, where hierarchical structures are prominent, CSR initiatives that emphasize respect for authority and traditional social structures may be more effective. Conversely, in low Power Distance cultures, initiatives promoting equality and participatory engagement might resonate better. Similarly, collectivist societies may favor CSR activities that benefit the community as a whole, whereas individualist societies might appreciate initiatives that highlight personal benefits and achievements.

### **The Need for Cultural Adaptation in CSR**

Given the diversity of cultural environments, a one-size-fits-all approach to CSR is often ineffective for MNCs. There is a growing recognition of the necessity to tailor CSR strategies to align with local cultural norms. This cultural adaptation involves a thorough understanding of local values, active engagement with community stakeholders, and the design of CSR initiatives that resonate with the local population. Such alignment can enhance the relevance and impact of CSR activities, fostering stronger relationships with local communities and achieving better overall outcomes for both the corporation and society.

### **Research Problem**

Despite the theoretical acknowledgment of the importance of cultural adaptation in CSR, empirical research on how local cultural norms specifically influence the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in MNCs is limited. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the impact of cultural dimensions on the reception and effectiveness of CSR activities in various cultural contexts. Through a combination of qualitative case studies and quantitative surveys, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of how cultural factors shape CSR effectiveness.

### **Research Questions**

The primary questions guiding this research are:

1. What are the key cultural dimensions that impact the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in MNCs?
2. How do local cultural norms influence the perception and acceptance of CSR activities?
3. What strategies can MNCs adopt to effectively align their CSR initiatives with local cultural expectations?

### **Importance of the Study**

Understanding the relationship between local cultural norms and CSR effectiveness is crucial for MNCs aiming to achieve their social responsibility goals while maintaining business success. This study offers valuable insights into the cultural factors that can either enhance or hinder CSR efforts, providing practical recommendations for MNCs to navigate cultural complexities. By developing culturally informed CSR strategies, MNCs can fulfil their ethical obligations and strengthen their competitive position in the global market.

### **Research Objectives and Hypothesis**

#### **Objectives**

1. To identify key cultural dimensions that impact the effectiveness of CSR initiatives.
2. To analyze the extent to which local cultural norms influence the perception and acceptance of CSR activities.
3. To provide recommendations for MNCs to adapt their CSR strategies to local cultural contexts.



## Hypothesis

H1: Local cultural norms have a significant impact on the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in MNCs.

H2: MNCs that tailor their CSR initiatives to align with local cultural norms achieve better community engagement and positive outcomes.

H3: Specific cultural dimensions, such as collectivism vs. individualism and power distance, are more influential in determining CSR effectiveness.

## Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the influence of local cultural norms on the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in multinational corporations (MNCs).

In-depth case studies are conducted on selected MNCs operating in diverse cultural contexts. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including corporate executives, local employees, and community representatives. These interviews aim to gather detailed insights into how CSR initiatives are perceived and implemented within different cultural settings. Additionally, content analysis of CSR reports and corporate communications is conducted to identify themes and patterns related to cultural adaptation in CSR practices.

By focusing on qualitative methods, this approach allows for a deep exploration of the nuances and complexities of cultural influences on CSR effectiveness in MNCs.

## Cultural Dimensions and Their Impact on CSR

### Cultural Dimensions and Their Impact on CSR: Special Reference to India

Cultural dimensions, as conceptualized by Geert Hofstede and other scholars, play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, particularly in the context of India.

### Power Distance

India exhibits a relatively high Power Distance, characterized by hierarchical structures and deference to authority. In the realm of CSR, this dimension manifests in a preference for CSR activities led by influential figures or institutions, such as government agencies or prominent corporate leaders. Companies with a hierarchical CSR structure may find greater acceptance and effectiveness in their initiatives by aligning with established power dynamics and engaging with government stakeholders.

### Individualism vs. Collectivism

India is traditionally a collectivist society, emphasizing strong family and community ties. CSR initiatives that prioritize collective welfare and community development are often more well-received in India. Companies engaging in CSR activities that benefit broader society, such as education, healthcare, or environmental conservation, tend to garner greater support and engagement from local communities.

### Masculinity vs. Femininity

India exhibits a blend of masculine and feminine cultural traits, with a growing emphasis on gender equality and social inclusion. CSR initiatives that promote diversity, gender equity, and women's empowerment align well with India's evolving cultural landscape. Companies that prioritize gender-sensitive CSR programs, such as women's education, skill development, and entrepreneurship, can enhance their reputation and impact in the Indian market.



### **Uncertainty Avoidance**

India demonstrates moderate to high Uncertainty Avoidance, reflecting a preference for stability, rules, and structured environments. In the realm of CSR, this dimension influences the perception of risk associated with innovative or unconventional initiatives. Companies that adhere to established CSR frameworks, comply with regulatory requirements, and demonstrate transparency in their activities are likely to gain trust and support from Indian stakeholders.

### **Long-Term Orientation**

India's cultural orientation towards long-term goals and sustainability is reflected in its approach to CSR. Companies that invest in sustainable development projects, environmental conservation, and social welfare programs aligned with India's long-term interests are viewed favorably by stakeholders. Long-term CSR partnerships and commitments demonstrate a company's dedication to making a lasting positive impact on Indian society and the environment.

### **Indulgence vs. Restraint**

India exhibits elements of both indulgence and restraint, with cultural attitudes towards pleasure, gratification, and self-control. In the context of CSR, initiatives that balance indulgence with restraint, such as promoting responsible consumption, ethical business practices, and cultural preservation, resonate well with Indian values. Companies that demonstrate sensitivity to local customs, traditions, and ethical norms enhance their credibility and acceptance in the Indian market.

### **CSR in Multinational Corporations**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in multinational corporations (MNCs) has evolved from a peripheral activity to an integral component of business strategy. MNCs, operating in diverse cultural, economic, and regulatory environments, face unique challenges and opportunities in implementing CSR initiatives.

### **Evolution of CSR in MNCs**

Historically, CSR in MNCs primarily focused on philanthropy and compliance with local regulations. However, as stakeholders increasingly demanded greater accountability and transparency, MNCs began to adopt a more strategic approach to CSR. Today, CSR is viewed as essential for MNCs to build trust, mitigate risks, enhance reputation, and create shared value for all stakeholders.

### **Key Drivers of CSR in MNCs**

#### **Several factors drive CSR initiatives in MNCs:**

- 1. Stakeholder Expectations:** MNCs are accountable to a wide range of stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, communities, and governments. Meeting the expectations of these diverse stakeholders is a key driver of CSR activities.
- 2. Business Ethics and Values:** Many MNCs recognize the importance of ethical conduct and responsible business practices. CSR initiatives aligned with the company's values and ethical principles contribute to long-term sustainability and competitiveness.
- 3. Regulatory Compliance:** MNCs operate in multiple countries with varying regulatory frameworks. Compliance with local laws and international standards is essential for CSR initiatives to avoid legal risks and maintain reputational integrity.
- 4. Market Opportunities:** CSR can present significant business opportunities for MNCs. Addressing social and environmental challenges can lead to innovation, market differentiation, and access to new markets and consumers who prioritize sustainability.



**5. Risk Management:** Effective CSR helps MNCs manage risks related to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. Proactive engagement in CSR can mitigate operational, reputational, and financial risks, enhancing resilience and long-term viability.

### CSR Strategies in MNCs

MNCs employ various CSR strategies tailored to their unique contexts and objectives:

- 1. Global Standards, Local Implementation:** MNCs often establish global CSR policies and standards while allowing flexibility for local implementation. This approach ensures consistency in core principles while adapting to local cultural norms, regulations, and community needs.
- 2. Partnerships and Collaboration:** MNCs collaborate with governments, NGOs, academia, and other stakeholders to address complex social and environmental challenges. Partnerships facilitate knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and collective action for greater impact.
- 3. Supply Chain Management:** MNCs recognize the importance of responsible supply chain management. Ensuring ethical sourcing, labor practices, and environmental stewardship throughout the supply chain is integral to CSR objectives and risk mitigation.
- 4. Employee Engagement:** Engaging employees in CSR initiatives fosters a sense of purpose, pride, and loyalty. MNCs offer volunteer programs, skills-based volunteering, and employee matching grants to support employee involvement in CSR activities.
- 5. Environmental Sustainability:** Many MNCs prioritize environmental sustainability through initiatives such as carbon reduction, energy efficiency, waste management, and biodiversity conservation. Adopting sustainable business practices aligns with CSR goals and contributes to mitigating climate change and environmental degradation.

### Challenges and Opportunities

While MNCs have made significant progress in integrating CSR into their operations, several challenges persist:

- 1. Cultural Sensitivity:** Adapting CSR initiatives to diverse cultural contexts requires sensitivity and understanding of local customs, values, and priorities.
- 2. Complexity and Scale:** Managing CSR across multiple countries and regions presents logistical, operational, and coordination challenges for MNCs.
- 3. Measurement and Reporting:** Measuring the impact of CSR initiatives and transparently reporting outcomes remain challenging. MNCs need robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems to demonstrate accountability and drive continuous improvement.
- 4. Regulatory Compliance:** Compliance with evolving CSR regulations and standards across jurisdictions requires MNCs to stay abreast of legal requirements and industry best practices.

Despite these challenges, CSR presents significant opportunities for MNCs to create positive social, environmental, and economic impacts while enhancing their long-term competitiveness and resilience in a rapidly changing global landscape. Through strategic and authentic CSR leadership, MNCs can contribute to sustainable development and societal well-being while fulfilling their business objectives and obligations.

### Impact of Cultural Dimensions

The impact of cultural dimensions on multinational corporations (MNCs) is profound, influencing various aspects of organizational behavior, decision-making, and performance. Cultural dimensions, as conceptualized by scholars like Geert Hofstede, provide a framework for understanding how cultural differences shape attitudes, values, and behaviors across societies. The impact of these dimensions on MNCs can be observed in several key areas:



### **Leadership and Management Styles**

Cultural dimensions such as Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance influence leadership and management styles within MNCs. In societies with high Power Distance, hierarchical structures are prevalent, leading to centralized decision-making and autocratic leadership styles in MNC subsidiaries. Conversely, in societies with low Power Distance, such as many Western countries, leadership tends to be more participatory and decentralized. MNCs operating in culturally diverse environments must adapt their leadership approaches to align with local cultural norms to foster effective communication, collaboration, and employee engagement.

### **Organizational Structure and Communication**

Cultural dimensions also impact organizational structure and communication patterns within MNCs. Collectivist societies prioritize group harmony and consensus-building, leading to flatter organizational structures and collaborative decision-making processes. In contrast, individualistic societies emphasize autonomy and individual achievement, often resulting in hierarchical organizational structures and clear reporting lines. MNCs must navigate these cultural differences to establish effective communication channels, facilitate knowledge sharing, and promote cross-cultural understanding among employees.

### **Employee Motivation and Work Practices**

Cultural dimensions influence employee motivation and work practices within MNCs. Masculine societies prioritize material success and competitiveness, leading to performance-driven work cultures where rewards are linked to achievement. In feminine societies, on the other hand, collaboration, work-life balance, and relationship-building are valued, shaping organizational cultures that emphasize employee well-being and social responsibility. MNCs need to tailor their motivation strategies and work practices to accommodate cultural preferences and expectations to enhance employee satisfaction, retention, and performance.

### **Decision-Making and Conflict Resolution**

Cultural dimensions significantly impact decision-making processes and conflict resolution strategies within MNCs. Societies with high Uncertainty Avoidance tend to favor structured decision-making approaches and avoid ambiguity, while societies with low Uncertainty Avoidance are more tolerant of risk and ambiguity, embracing innovation and experimentation. Similarly, cultural dimensions such as Individualism vs. Collectivism influence conflict resolution styles, with collectivist societies prioritizing harmony and consensus-seeking, whereas individualistic societies emphasize assertiveness and competition. MNCs must navigate cultural differences in decision-making and conflict resolution to foster effective teamwork, problem-solving, and innovation.

### **Customer Behavior and Market Dynamics**

Cultural dimensions also shape customer behavior and market dynamics, influencing consumer preferences, purchasing decisions, and brand perceptions. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, such as Individualism vs. Collectivism and Long-Term Orientation, provide insights into consumer behavior in different cultural contexts. For example, consumers in collectivist societies may prioritize group affiliation and social approval when making purchasing decisions, whereas consumers in individualistic societies may prioritize personal preferences and self-expression. MNCs must understand these cultural nuances to develop targeted marketing strategies, product offerings, and customer experiences that resonate with local preferences and values.



## **Best Practices for Culturally Adapted CSR**

Best practices for culturally adapted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in multinational corporations (MNCs) involve understanding and integrating local cultural norms, values, and expectations into CSR strategies. By aligning CSR activities with the cultural context of host countries, MNCs can enhance the effectiveness, acceptance, and sustainability of their CSR efforts. Here are some best practices for culturally adapted CSR:

### **Conduct Cultural Assessments**

Before designing CSR initiatives, MNCs should conduct thorough cultural assessments to understand the social, economic, and cultural landscape of host countries. This includes identifying cultural values, norms, beliefs, and preferences that may impact CSR perceptions and outcomes. Cultural assessments help MNCs tailor their CSR strategies to align with local contexts and avoid potential cultural misunderstandings or conflicts.

### **Engage with Local Stakeholders**

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for culturally adapted CSR. MNCs should actively involve local communities, government agencies, NGOs, academia, and other key stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of CSR initiatives. Engaging with local stakeholders ensures that CSR activities address genuine community needs, priorities, and aspirations, fostering trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

### **Adapt CSR Strategies**

MNCs should adapt their CSR strategies to accommodate local cultural norms, values, and preferences. This may involve customizing CSR programs, messaging, and communication channels to resonate with local audiences. For example, CSR initiatives promoting community welfare, environmental sustainability, or cultural preservation are often more well-received in host countries when tailored to align with local customs, traditions, and sensitivities.

### **Foster Cross-Cultural Collaboration**

Encouraging cross-cultural collaboration and knowledge exchange within MNCs facilitates cultural learning and adaptation. MNCs should provide cross-cultural training and development programs for employees working in diverse cultural settings to enhance cultural competence and sensitivity. Fostering a culture of inclusivity, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity strengthens MNCs' ability to adapt CSR initiatives to local contexts effectively.

### **Ensure Transparency and Accountability**

Transparency and accountability are essential for building trust and credibility in CSR initiatives. MNCs should communicate openly and transparently with stakeholders about their CSR goals, activities, and outcomes. This includes providing clear and accessible information about CSR performance metrics, impact assessments, and stakeholder feedback mechanisms. Demonstrating a commitment to ethical conduct, integrity, and accountability enhances MNCs' reputations and social license to operate in host countries.

### **Monitor and Evaluate Impact**

Regular monitoring and evaluation of CSR initiatives are critical for assessing effectiveness, identifying challenges, and driving continuous improvement. MNCs should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of CSR activities on social, environmental,



and economic outcomes. This includes collecting quantitative and qualitative data, conducting impact assessments, and soliciting feedback from stakeholders. By measuring and reporting on CSR performance, MNCs demonstrate accountability and contribute to greater transparency and accountability in their CSR practices.

## **Findings and Discussion**

In examining the impact of local cultural norms on the effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in multinational corporations (MNCs), several key findings and discussions emerge from the research:

### **1. Cultural Dimensions Influence CSR Perception**

The research reveals that cultural dimensions significantly influence how CSR initiatives are perceived and received in different cultural contexts. For example, societies with high Power Distance may respond more favorably to CSR activities led by authoritative figures, while societies with low Power Distance may prefer participatory approaches. Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for MNCs to tailor their CSR strategies effectively.

### **2. Cultural Adaptation Enhances CSR Effectiveness**

The study finds that culturally adapted CSR initiatives are more effective in generating positive outcomes and community engagement. By aligning CSR activities with local cultural norms, MNCs can enhance relevance, acceptance, and impact. For instance, initiatives that prioritize collective welfare and community development resonate more strongly in collectivist societies, fostering stronger relationships and trust with local stakeholders.

### **3. Importance of Stakeholder Engagement**

Findings underscore the critical role of stakeholder engagement in successful CSR implementation. MNCs that actively involve local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the CSR process achieve greater buy-in and support for their initiatives. Effective stakeholder engagement facilitates better understanding of local needs, priorities, and expectations, leading to more impactful and sustainable CSR outcomes.

### **4. Flexibility and Adaptability Are Key**

The research highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in CSR strategies. MNCs must be willing to modify their approaches to accommodate evolving cultural dynamics and changing societal norms. Adaptable CSR frameworks allow MNCs to respond effectively to cultural shifts, regulatory changes, and emerging challenges, ensuring continued relevance and success in diverse cultural environments.

### **5. Long-Term Commitment Yields Positive Results**

Long-term commitment to CSR is associated with more significant social, environmental, and economic impact. The study finds that MNCs that make sustained investments in CSR initiatives over time achieve tangible benefits, including enhanced brand reputation, stakeholder trust, and competitive advantage. Long-term CSR partnerships and collaborations demonstrate MNCs' commitment to making a meaningful and lasting difference in host communities.





## **6. Measurement and Evaluation Are Critical**

Effective measurement and evaluation mechanisms are essential for assessing the impact of CSR initiatives and driving continuous improvement. The research emphasizes the need for robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems to track CSR performance, measure outcomes, and demonstrate accountability. By collecting and analyzing data on CSR effectiveness, MNCs can identify areas for improvement and optimize their CSR strategies for maximum impact.

## **Conclusion**

The examination of the impact of local cultural norms on the effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in multinational corporations (MNCs) underscores the critical importance of cultural adaptation in driving meaningful and sustainable CSR outcomes. The research findings reveal several key insights that inform the development and implementation of culturally sensitive CSR strategies:

### **1. Cultural Context Matters**

Local cultural norms significantly influence how CSR initiatives are perceived, accepted, and embraced in different cultural contexts. MNCs must recognize and adapt to these cultural nuances to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of their CSR efforts.

### **2. Tailoring CSR Initiatives**

Culturally adapted CSR initiatives that align with local values, priorities, and expectations are more likely to succeed in generating positive social, environmental, and economic impact. MNCs should customize their CSR strategies to resonate with the cultural dynamics of host countries, fostering stronger relationships and trust with local stakeholders.

### **3. Stakeholder Engagement Is Key**

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for successful CSR implementation. MNCs should actively involve local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the CSR process, soliciting feedback, and building collaborative partnerships to address shared challenges and achieve common goals.

### **4. Flexibility and Long-Term Commitment**

Flexibility and long-term commitment are crucial for adapting CSR strategies to changing cultural landscapes and achieving sustained impact. MNCs must remain agile and responsive to cultural shifts, regulatory changes, and emerging trends, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to responsible business practices and social responsibility over time.

### **5. Measurement and Evaluation**

Robust measurement and evaluation mechanisms are essential for assessing the impact of CSR initiatives, tracking progress, and driving continuous improvement. MNCs should implement rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems to measure CSR performance, demonstrate accountability, and communicate outcomes transparently to stakeholders.

### **6. Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership and corporate governance are foundational to effective CSR practices. MNCs must uphold high ethical standards, integrity, and transparency in all aspects of their operations, fostering a culture of responsibility, trust, and accountability across the organization.



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