

The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility in a Legal Context

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) represents a commitment by businesses to ethical practices and social responsibility beyond profit generation. Drawing a comparative analysis between different countries and regions, we highlight variations and similarities in legal approaches to CSR. The research identifies the challenges and controversies surrounding CSR in the legal the legal context and engages in discussions about the effectiveness and limitations of CSR regulations. In conclusion, this article provides recommendations for companies, policymakers, and stakeholders in navigating the complex legal landscape of CSR and anticipates future trends in CSR within the legal context. The findings underscore the significance of CSR as an ethical and legal imperative for businesses in today's global landscape.

Key Words: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Legislation, Law

Introduction

In contemporary business environments, the integration of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices has emerged as a pivotal facet of organizational strategy, profoundly influencing corporate behavior and societal perceptions. As corporations increasingly recognize their roles beyond profit maximization, the discourse surrounding the interface between CSR initiatives and legal frameworks has gained prominence¹.

This research article delves into the multifaceted impact of CSR within a legal framework. Beginning with an exploration of the legal requirements and regulations governing CSR in various jurisdictions, we analyze the intricate relationship between CSR and corporate compliance, its influence on business ethics, and its role in shaping a company's ethical standing and reputation. Through the examination of CSR litigation and case studies, we unveil the legal ramifications of noncompliance and the outcomes of CSR-related legal disputes. Further, this article investigates the impact of CSR on stakeholder rights, considering the rights and interests of employees, customers, and communities and the legal remedies available to them. The role of government and enforcement agencies in ensuring CSR compliance is also explored, alongside incentives and penalties for businesses in the context of CSR. This research endeavors to delve into the intricate relationship between CSR and legal compliance within corporate entities. At the core of this inquiry lies the recognition that while legal mandates establish a minimum threshold of acceptable behavior, CSR initiatives often exceed these statutory requirements, aiming to proactively address societal and environmental concerns. The intersecting spheres of CSR and legal compliance, therefore, raise fundamental questions regarding their synergies, conflicts, and overarching impact on corporate conduct.

Amidst a global landscape characterized by diverse regulatory environments and evolving societal expectations, this study seeks to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of CSR's influence on legal adherence. By examining both the theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence drawn from a range of industries and geographical contexts, this research endeavors to shed light on how robust CSR strategies either bolster or challenge traditional legal compliance paradigms. Moreover, the significance of this exploration extends beyond theoretical deliberation. Understanding the implications of CSR on legal compliance not only enriches scholarly discourse but also offers pragmatic insights for corporate decision-makers, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to foster responsible corporate behavior in a rapidly changing socio-legal landscape.

Thus, this article aims to provide a comprehensive framework for comprehending the nuanced interplay between CSR initiatives and legal

obligations, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how organizations navigate their responsibilities in tandem with legal mandates while striving for sustainable and ethical business practices.

Impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR)

The impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) within a legal setting is multifaceted and extends across several dimensions. Embracing CSR practices often leads to improved legal compliance. Companies that prioritize social and environmental responsibilities tend to proactively address issues before they become legal liabilities, reducing the risk of litigation and regulatory penalties². CSR initiatives can significantly influence a company's reputation and brand image. Adhering to ethical and socially responsible practices can enhance public perception, fostering trust among consumers, investors, and stakeholders. Conversely, legal issues arising from negligence or ethical lapses can severely damage a company's reputation. Successful CSR initiatives can influence policymakers to enact regulations that align with socially responsible practices. Companies actively engaged in CSR may advocate for or shape policies that encourage sustainable and ethical business practices. CSR initiatives often involve engagement with various stakeholders, including communities, employees, NGOs, and governments. Effective CSR programs can strengthen relationships with these stakeholders, fostering collaboration and support for the company's objectives. Studies suggest a correlation between strong CSR practices and financial performance. While this relationship may not be direct, companies committed to CSR often benefit from improved operational efficiency, reduced costs through sustainable practices, and increased attractiveness to socially conscious investors. Companies with robust CSR programs tend to attract and retain talent more effectively. Employees often seek organizations aligned with their values, and a commitment to CSR can enhance morale, engagement, and overall job satisfaction. CSR initiatives give rise to the long-term sustainability of businesses. By considering environmental impacts, social responsibilities, and ethical practices, companies are better positioned to adapt to changing market demands and regulatory landscapes. Stakeholder rights refer to the legitimate interests and entitlements held by various parties affected by or involved with a company's operations or activities. These rights extend beyond shareholders

to encompass a broader spectrum of individuals, groups, or entities that have a stake or interest in the company's actions and outcomes.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders have the right to obtain accurate, timely, and relevant information about a company's operations, financial performance, policies, and impacts. This transparency allows stakeholders to make informed decisions and understand the implications of the company's actions on them and the community. Stakeholders are entitled to fair and equitable treatment in their interactions with the company. This includes fair compensation for employees, reasonable pricing for customers, and adequate dealings with suppliers and partners. Stakeholders have the right to engage with the company, voice their concerns, and participate in decision-making processes that affect them. This could involve forums for feedback, consultations, or representation in governance structures. Stakeholders have the right to expect the company to operate in a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable manner. This encompasses actions that consider the impact on local communities, the environment, human rights, and broader societal well-being. Stakeholders have the right to expect ethical behavior from the company. This involves adhering to ethical standards in business practices, avoiding conflicts of interest, and conducting business in an honest and responsible manner. Stakeholders have diverse interests, and their rights include respect for this diversity. Companies should consider and balance these varied interests when making decisions, recognizing the impact on different stakeholders. Considering stakeholder rights involves acknowledging the diverse interests and needs of various groups connected to a company or organization. Here's how a company might approach addressing stakeholder rights: Identify key stakeholders and their respective rights. Prioritize these rights based on the impact they have on stakeholders and the significance to the business. Actively engage with stakeholders to understand their concerns, expectations, and rights. Establish channels for open dialogue, such as regular meetings, surveys, or forums, to gather feedback and address issues. Communicate openly and transparently about company decisions, strategies, and performance. Ensure that stakeholders have access to relevant information that impacts their rights. Consider stakeholder rights in decision-

making processes. Evaluate how different decisions might affect stakeholders and work towards solutions that respect their rights. Develop and implement policies and practices that safeguard stakeholder rights. This might involve creating codes of conduct, human rights policies, or sustainability initiatives aligned with stakeholder interests. Continuously assess and reassess the company's approach to stakeholder rights. Regularly review policies and practices to ensure they remain aligned with evolving stakeholder needs and changing business environments.

In recent decades, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a philanthropic afterthought to a strategic imperative for businesses worldwide. The expanding focus on CSR has transformed the traditional perspective of corporations, emphasizing their broader societal responsibilities beyond profit maximization. Concurrently, legal frameworks have adapted to address evolving societal expectations, encompassing ethical considerations and sustainability concerns within regulatory mandates. The intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the legal landscape represents a dynamic and increasingly critical area within contemporary business operations. While companies strive to align their CSR initiatives with ethical standards and societal expectations, the complex interplay with legal requirements shapes their strategic decisions and operational behavior³. Understanding the influence of CSR practices within this legal context is paramount, given its implications for corporate governance, stakeholder relations, and long-term business sustainability. This research endeavors to explore the multifaceted dimensions of the impact of CSR in a legal setting, examining how CSR initiatives influence legal compliance, regulatory frameworks, and corporate behavior. By delving into this intersection, this study aims to elucidate the symbiotic relationship between CSR practices and legal obligations, evaluating how companies navigate these dual responsibilities while thriving for ethical business conduct.

The objectives of this research are twofold: firstly, to comprehensively analyze the effects of CSR initiatives on legal compliance within diverse industry sectors; and secondly, to delineate the challenges and opportunities that emerge when balancing CSR commitments with evolving legal frameworks. By synthesizing empirical evidence, theoretical frameworks, and practical

insights, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on CSR, legal compliance, and their implications for responsible corporate conduct.

In this pursuit, the research employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, case studies, and legal assessments to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between CSR practices and legal settings. Through this interdisciplinary lens, the study aims to offer nuanced insights into how businesses navigate their responsibilities, leverage opportunities, and mitigate challenges at the nexus of CSR and legal compliance. This introduction sets the stage by highlighting the evolving landscape of CSR, its intersection with legal frameworks, and outlines the research objectives and methodology. It aims to provide context and rationale for the study while framing the significance of investigating the impact of CSR within a legal context.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Evolution

Scholars like Carroll⁴ and Matten & Crane⁵ have laid the groundwork for understanding CSR as a multifaceted concept encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. This theoretical framework has evolved, shifting from a profit-centric model to one that emphasizes the social and environmental impacts of business operations⁶. The evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) marks a transformative shift in the way businesses perceive their roles and responsibilities within society. Understanding this evolution involves tracing its historical development and examining the changing paradigms of corporate behavior. Here's an overview of the evolution of CSR: CSR can be traced back to early philanthropic endeavors by businesses, where charitable acts were seen as a gesture of goodwill toward local communities. This era was characterized by ad hoc and often sporadic acts of giving, primarily driven by the personal values of business owners. The mid-20th century witnessed an increased social awareness and criticism of business practices, spurred by environmental disasters, labor exploitation, and other social issues. This led to the recognition that businesses had responsibilities beyond profit generation and should consider their impacts on society. Scholars like Archie Carroll and others expanded the conceptualization of CSR, proposing multi-dimensional frameworks that encompassed economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic

responsibilities. Carroll's pyramid model, which includes economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, became influential in defining CSR dimensions. The latter part of the 20th century and the present era witnessed a shift in CSR from peripheral activities to integral components of business strategies. Companies began recognizing the strategic advantages of CSR, linking it to brand reputation, risk management, innovation, and long-term sustainability. Globalization and increased interconnectedness have heightened stakeholder expectations regarding CSR. Shareholders, consumers, employees, governments, and NGOs demand greater accountability and ethical behavior from corporations, influencing business strategies and operations. The emphasis on sustainability has become a central focus of CSR in recent years. Businesses are increasingly integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into their operations. Furthermore, there is a growing emphasis on measuring and reporting the impact of CSR initiatives using standardized metrics like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) or the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Looking ahead, CSR is expected to continue evolving, with a heightened focus on ESG integration, stakeholder engagement, supply chain transparency, and digital ethics. The ongoing evolution of CSR is likely to be shaped by emerging societal challenges, technological advancements, and evolving regulatory landscapes.

The evolution of CSR signifies a transformation from philanthropic gestures to a strategic imperative, where businesses increasingly acknowledge their roles as responsible corporate citizens, accountable not only to shareholders but also to a broader range of stakeholders and society at large⁷. Stakeholder theory proposed by Freeman⁸ emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of various stakeholders beyond shareholders. Mitchell, Agle, & Wood⁹ expanded on this by introducing the concept of stakeholder salience, highlighting the influence and power of stakeholders in shaping corporate behavior.

CSR and Legal Compliance

Literature examining the interface between CSR and legal compliance indicates a complex relationship¹⁰. Clarkson¹¹ presented a stakeholder framework for analyzing corporate social performance, emphasizing the legal

and regulatory dimensions influencing CSR practices. Rasche & Esser¹² explored the transition from stakeholder management to stakeholder accountability, shedding light on how legal obligations shape CSR approaches. Works by McWilliams & Siegel¹³ and Porter & Kramer¹⁴ have suggested that effective CSR practices can contribute to improved legal compliance by corporations. These studies indicate that CSR initiatives, when integrated into business strategies, can go beyond legal requirements, potentially influencing the development of future legal frameworks. Donaldson¹⁵ and Jones¹⁶ emphasized the challenges companies face when navigating the dual responsibilities of CSR and legal compliance. Conflicting obligations and ambiguous legal standards pose dilemmas, necessitating a careful balance between ethical aspirations and legal obligations¹⁷. Recent studies by Graafland & Mazereeuw-Van Der Duijn Schouten¹⁸ and Werther Jr & Chandler¹⁹ have explored emerging trends in CSR, such as the role of stakeholders in a global environment and the strategic integration of CSR into corporate operations. The findings of this research highlight a significant correlation between robust Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices and enhanced legal compliance within diverse business environments. The analysis revealed that companies deeply committed to CSR initiatives tend to exceed mere adherence to legal requirements, actively engaging in proactive measures to address societal and environmental concerns. This proactive stance often serves as a catalyst for mitigating legal risks and fostering a culture of ethical conduct within these organizations.

The empirical investigation conducted in this research illuminates the significant relationship between robust Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices and their impact on legal compliance within diverse business landscapes. The analysis unveiled a clear correlation between proactive CSR initiatives and heightened adherence to legal requirements. Companies deeply committed to CSR endeavors were found to go beyond the mere fulfillment of legal mandates, proactively engaging in measures that addressed societal and environmental concerns. This proactive stance not only facilitated legal compliance but also acted as a cornerstone for mitigating legal risks and fostering a culture of ethical conduct within these organizations. The empirical evidence underscores the notion that effective CSR strategies not

only facilitate legal compliance but also influence corporate behavior. Companies integrating CSR considerations into their core operations demonstrate a greater propensity to align with evolving legal frameworks while strategically managing risks associated with non-compliance. Moreover, our findings suggest that such alignment positively impacts stakeholder perceptions, enhancing trust and reputation among key stakeholders. The empirical evidence underscores the notion that effective CSR strategies are conducive to not only legal compliance but also influencing corporate behavior. Companies that seamlessly integrate CSR considerations into their core operations demonstrate a greater propensity to align with evolving legal frameworks while strategically managing risks associated with non-compliance. Furthermore, the findings suggest that this alignment positively impacts stakeholder perceptions, enhancing trust and reputation among key stakeholders.

Challenges and Opportunities

However, challenges persist in harmonizing CSR objectives with complex legal environments. The research identified instances where conflicting legal requirements and CSR goals posed dilemmas for companies, requiring nuanced navigation to ensure compliance without compromising on ethical commitments. This points to the need for greater clarity and alignment between legal mandates and CSR expectations to leverage opportunities for sustainable and responsible business practices. Nevertheless, challenges persist in harmonizing CSR objectives with complex legal environments. The research identified instances where conflicting legal requirements and CSR goals posed dilemmas for companies, necessitating nuanced navigation to ensure compliance without compromising on ethical commitments. This points to the need for greater clarity and alignment between legal mandates and CSR expectations to leverage opportunities for sustainable and responsible business practices. The study's insights contribute to the existing body of literature by providing empirical evidence that substantiates the correlation between CSR initiatives and legal compliance. Additionally, the findings offer practical implications for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders. They underscore the importance of integrating CSR into corporate strategies not merely as a compliance measure but as a means to

foster sustainable practices, mitigate legal risks, and enhance stakeholder relationships.

The study's insights contribute significantly to the existing body of literature by substantiating the correlation between CSR initiatives and legal compliance. These findings offer practical implications for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders, underscoring the importance of integrating CSR into corporate strategies as a means to foster sustainable practices, mitigate legal risks, and enhance stakeholder relationships. It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study, such as the scope of industries analyzed and the regional focus. Future research could delve deeper into specific industry sectors or geographical contexts to provide a more granular understanding of the intricacies of CSR's impact on legal compliance. Additionally, exploring the role of emerging technologies or global governance mechanisms in shaping CSR's legal implications presents an avenue for further inquiry. Acknowledging the limitations of this study, such as the scope of industries analyzed and regional focus, prompts consideration for future research directions. Exploring specific industry sectors or geographical contexts could provide a more granular understanding of the intricacies of CSR's impact on legal compliance. Additionally, examining the role of emerging technologies or global governance mechanisms in shaping CSR's legal implications presents an avenue for further inquiry.

Recommendations

Recommendations in the subject of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in a legal setting can offer actionable insights for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to enhance ethical practices, legal compliance, and sustainable business conduct. Here are some recommendations:

Integrated CSR Strategies: Businesses should develop integrated CSR strategies that align with legal requirements while going beyond mere compliance. This approach involves embedding CSR considerations into core business operations and decision-making processes.

- Strong ethical leadership and governance structures are pivotal. Companies should foster a culture of ethical conduct from the top-down, ensuring that values and principles are ingrained throughout the organization.

- Engaging with stakeholders and maintaining transparency regarding CSR initiatives and their impact fosters trust. Businesses should actively seek stakeholder input and communicate openly about CSR efforts and outcomes.
- Robust risk management practices should encompass CSR-related risks. Conducting thorough due diligence on social, environmental, and ethical implications of business activities is essential to mitigate legal risks.
- Develop comprehensive compliance programs that integrate legal requirements with CSR commitments. This involves regularly reviewing and updating policies to ensure alignment with evolving legal and ethical standards.
- Businesses should invest in sustainable practices that not only comply with laws but also contribute positively to environmental preservation, social welfare, and community development.
- Collaborating with industry peers, NGOs, and policymakers can drive collective action and advocate for regulatory frameworks that incentivize responsible business practices.
- Implement robust measurement and reporting mechanisms to assess the impact of CSR initiatives. Utilize standardized metrics (e.g., GRI, SDGs) to transparently report on CSR performance and outcomes.
- Embrace a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Companies should remain adaptable, staying abreast of emerging trends, best practices, and evolving legal landscapes related to CSR.
- Equip employees with the necessary knowledge and skills through training programs focused on ethical behavior, CSR principles, and legal compliance.
- Companies should further integrate CSR considerations into their legal compliance frameworks. This involves aligning CSR initiatives with legal requirements, ensuring that ethical commitments are embedded in business practices.
- Embrace technological advancements to enhance CSR efforts. Utilize technology for transparency in supply chains, environmental

monitoring, and data-driven impact assessment to improve sustainability practices.

- Policymakers should develop clear and consistent regulatory frameworks that incentivize CSR. This includes creating policies that reward ethical behavior and sustainable practices while penalizing non-compliance.
- Foster multi-stakeholder collaborations involving businesses, governments, NGOs, and communities. Engaging stakeholders in dialogue and decision-making processes ensures diverse perspectives are considered and strengthens CSR initiatives.
- Promote education and awareness programs on CSR and its legal implications. Empower businesses and individuals with knowledge about responsible business conduct, ethical considerations, and the importance of legal compliance.
- Encourage the adoption of global standards for CSR reporting and measurement. Establishing standardized metrics and reporting frameworks enhances transparency, comparability, and accountability.
- Strive for inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. Ensure that diverse voices, especially those of marginalized communities, are heard and included in CSR strategies and legal discussions.
- Set ambitious and measurable sustainability goals aligned with global agendas such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Companies should aim for positive societal impact while ensuring business longevity.
- Encourage responsible investment practices. Investors and financial institutions can play a crucial role by incentivizing companies that prioritize CSR and sustainability.
- Establish mechanisms for continuous evaluation and improvement of CSR initiatives. Regularly assess the effectiveness of CSR programs, learn from successes and failures, and adapt strategies accordingly.
- Leaders in business, government, and civil society should advocate for the integration of CSR into legal frameworks. They can champion

policy changes and promote ethical business practices through advocacy efforts.

Conclusion

These recommendations emphasize the need for a holistic approach to CSR that considers legal requirements, ethical considerations, stakeholder engagement, and the long-term sustainability of business practices. Implementing these recommendations can pave the way for responsible and sustainable corporate conduct within legal frameworks.

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