

## Corporate Social Responsibility Practices of Global Automakers in Asia: Application of Carroll Model with Multi-Case Study Method

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### Abstract

In spite of acknowledging the importance of sustainable and socially responsible practices; researchers have not been able to unanimously identify the priority areas of CSR for the automotive sector. This research was designed to understand the CSR activities of the global automakers in the Asian countries by applying the Carroll model wherein researchers wished to analyse the CSR programs of the global automakers, identify the priority CSR areas and assess the effect of CSR strategies on business performance of global automakers. Case study method was used in the existing study. This study utilised multiple case study research strategy whereby two automobile companies were studied in depth namely, Toyota and Volkswagen. The data for the study was secured from different- structured data sources like company reports, sustainability data records and media coverage. Data was analysed using content analysis. The study concluded that both companies are widely engaged in CSR initiatives that covered ethical, philanthropic, legal, and economic responsibilities. Toyota focused on their production process and policies that was employee centric, Volkswagen worked on industry modernization as well in their ethical practices. The philanthropic initiatives at both places worked towards education/training, employment generation, collaborations/partnerships, environmental and social welfare. Volkswagen also focused on sports and, art and cultural aspects in their humanitarian responsibilities. Both the peers were on the same page regarding economic practices where the cutting costs and improving efficiency was in focus. Both Toyota and Volkswagen gave more priority to the philanthropic and ethical aspect than the economic aspect. Both the companies experienced similar outcomes from these CSR initiatives like positive financial measures, quality metrics, brand identity improvement and differentiation, worker and consumer satisfaction, risk management and aversion, improved partnership opportunities.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Responsibility, Philanthropic Responsibility, Toyota, Volkswagen.

## **Introduction**

Asian market is the largest market in the world with a population of more than 4.7 billion, accounting for nearly 60% of the world's population (Worldometer, 2024). For decades, countries like China, Thailand and India have attracted the global automotive players like Toyota, Volkswagen, General Motors, and BMW etc. owing to supply of skilled and cheap labour, convenient location facilitating export ease, tax incentives to the foreign players and manufacturing and assembling of automotive parts within domestic boundaries (Visram, 2018). This business-friendly environment in Asian countries not only allowed the foreign brands to profitably exploit the factors of production; but also allowed them to enjoy a great market share in Asian countries in the sale of automobiles. However, now countries like China and India have become more than the low-cost and state-assisted production partner to the global automotive players and emerging as top automotive players on global map, especially in the context of electric vehicles (Wayland, 2024). Car brands from the Asian countries are continue to surprise the global giants in terms of cost efficiency, advanced technology, and cleaner production methods.

Demand for socially responsible practices is on a rise in the Asian market. Customers in Asian countries have started preferring the greener alternative, even at premium price and favour the socially responsible brands (Lv et al. 2024; Sun, He & Thøgersen, 2022; Serohi, 2022). Asian countries have created policies to encourage investments towards an environment friendly environment. They are aiming towards creation of a business environment which enhances and protects the natural environment and ensures the well-being of local community along with ensuring the economic growth. They are focusing on improving policies of low-income employees. A remarkable shift can be seen from a quantity-oriented production strategy of the Asian countries to a quality oriented one. (Stepanova, 2021). Hence, given the tough competition from their earlier production hubs and changing consumer behaviour dynamics coupled with strong government intentions to protect the natural environment and local communities, global brands have to resort to adopt innovative strategies for the purpose of sustainability to survive ever growing competitive environment. Their strategies include reduction of carbon footprint, focusing on fuel efficiency, development of electric automobile industries, adoption of futuristic innovative technologies. (Zhu et al., 2007). These actions will gain legitimacy only if they are backed by corporate social responsibility programs which aim towards supporting local groups for enabling them to adapt to the such modifications while maintaining economic growth. Resorting to socially responsible behaviour will be helpful to companies for compliance with the regulatory framework and also to benefit from them for profit maximisation through brand building and promotion.

Given this backdrop, this study aims to explore the CSR practices of the global automakers in Asian context. The automotive sector is an excellent area for analysis since it serves as a cornerstone of the worldwide economy and a primary generator of macroeconomic development, equilibrium, and technical development. It promotes commercial progress, state revenue, R&D, and personal advancement. Automobile industry is the world's major industry, with a projected USD 2.8 trillion in worldwide business activity in the year 2022 (Statista, 2022). This encompasses not just large automobile manufacturers, but additionally a wide range of enterprises whose primary activity is the production, design, or sale of automotive components or automobiles. Lenort, Wicher, and Zapletal (2023) claim that the automotive sector has a significant multiplier influence on the economy as a whole since it supports both upstream (mine, steel, gasoline, chemical substances, and electronics) together with downstream sectors (ICT, banking and insurance coverage, maintenance, and transportation services). Apart from exerting a noteworthy impact on the national economy, the automotive industry acts as world's largest R&D investors, spending more than 120 billion Euros per year (ACEA, 2023). Also, automotive industry, as a whole, is distinguished by multiple manufacturing operations and an intricate, diversified supply chain network. Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) are located in the heart of the industrial cord, responsible for both manufacturing and consumer demand, and hence face extremely complicated and difficult CSR challenges. Along with sectoral features, the industrial policy at global level is currently pushing the automotive sector's strategic progression towards enhancing excellence, appreciating technological advances to harness sustainable energy, and encouraging innovation. All of these elements are inspiring car companies to undertake positive changes in satisfying CSR across their supply chains (Lukin, Krajinović & Bosna, 2022).

In spite of acknowledging the importance of sustainable and socially responsible practices; researchers have not been able to unanimously identify the priority areas of CSR for the automotive sector. A few firms however, have tried to identify the preferred CSR activities of the automakers. One such global study was conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2019) wherein along with other sectors, automakers also preferred to work towards 'responsible production and consumption',

'industry innovation', 'climate action' and 'decent work and economic growth'. Authors like Ali et al. (2018) and Yu et al. (2020) in their Asian countries centric studies highlighted that automobile companies tend to ignore climate action, life below water and life on land while operating in emerging nations like China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa. A recent study conducted by Lenort et al. (2023), detailing the CSR activities of the global automakers confirmed that the latter varies greatly in the developed and developing economies; validating the need for the further studies identifying the priority areas of CSR of global automakers in Asian context.

### **Literature Review**

This part explores the current scholarship regarding the topic of CSR especially its principles, comprehension throughout the leadership and scholastic community, efficacy and assessment, and the way CSR is planned and implemented across the automotive sector.

Although, there is no census around the definition of CSR; yet the terminology refers to all such activities which are practiced by a firm aiming to enhance their performance in terms of social, economic and environmental impact. Another term for the same is corporate citizenship and Socially Responsible Investment (SRI). Companies have defined CSR differently which ultimately changes the basic understanding of what formulates an efficient corporate behaviour. Bowen (1953) introduced one of the first definitions of corporate social responsibility. He defines it as an obligation to do an act, follow regulatory practices and make decisions which are essential for societal value addition. Carroll (1979) categorises corporate social responsibility under four categories of responsibilities through the pyramid model. This pyramid entails responsibility of the company towards its own assets, responsibility of the company towards its liabilities, responsibility of the company towards its employees and finally responsibility towards the society at large. He states that the social responsibility of a company is supreme and it encapsulates all economic, moral, legal and philanthropic expectations of a society. (Carroll, 1979; p. 500). Elkington (2013) has divided corporate social responsibility into three categories namely economic, social and environmental. Dahlsrud (2008) has determined five major areas of corporate social responsibility that includes environment, economy, society, voluntariness and the invested stakeholders. Despite many models of CSR, one suggested by Carroll (1979) categorising the most significant responsibilities of any company namely, economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic complying with the shared value approach (Basu and Palazzo, 2008; Carroll, 2016), regulatory and ethical principles (Fordham and Robinson, 2018; Garriga and Mele, 2004) is the most relevant and widely used in business, politics, education and philanthropy (Milhaljevic and Tokic, 2015; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2018).

Researchers have conveniently taken sides while assessing the concept of CSR with some favouring it while others denying the same. Justifying the CSR activities experts like Dahlsrud (2008) and Söderholm and Svahn (2015) have been able to validate a positive correlation between CSR activities of a company and the financial performance. An early study in 1990's by Roman and Hayibor who analysed the financial performance of about 55 companies that were engaged in philanthropic activities came to the similar conclusion highlighting the positive association between CSR and firm's performance ( $r = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This correlation was even stronger in smaller firms. ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Study conducted by Wen and Fang (2008) based on 46 Chinese companies found that CSR activities have a negative impact on the financial outcome of a company in the short run but have a positive impact in the long run. Proponents of CSR have also confirmed the positive effects of the latter on customer loyalty, customer response and engagement (Murray and Vogel, 1997; Shukla et al. 2019; Hwang, and Kandampully, 2015).

**Opponents argue that** a great deal of data that is produced by companies regarding their CSR activities, is misleading in nature, especially regarding societal, charitable and environmental activities (Lydenberg, 2002). It is contended that companies produce deceptive data to influence consumer loyalty by establishing how their CSR activities are benefitting the society (Lyon and Montgomery, 2015). Simultaneously, CSR is widely criticised for greenwashing which entails luring customers under the garb of environmental and ethical concerns for profit maximisation (Hamza and Jarbou, 2020; Torelli, 2020; Uyar et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020). An article of Harvard Business Review (Ioannou et al., 2022), explains the concept of greenwashing and deceptive tactics of companies. It labels CSR activities as a gimmick and a marketing tool for gaining credibility before customers, employees and investors. The claims made by companies may or may not be true in actuality. (Fanning et al., 2022; Yilmaz and Baybars, 2022). Also, studies indicate no or negative correlation between CSR of a company and the financial performance of a company (Michailidis and Economou, 2011). McWilliams, Siegel and Wright (2006) found a neutral impact of CSR activities on financial performance of a company. Su and Jie (2015)

stated that CSR activities impact the financial performance depending upon the industry and sector. It was concluded that there exists an interaction effect between a particular industry and their CSR activities pertaining to its impact on financial performance. The impact of companies having CSR and those that do not conduct CSR activities are similar in all sectors except in the transportation industry, wherein the impact is negative.

There are innumerable methodologies for evaluating the CSR performance of a company. (Thao et al., 2019). Mathews (1997) believe that such evaluation or analysis must be based on a timeline wherein any disclosure and true successful measures can be analysed through a longitudinal study in order to assess overall impact of success. Gray et al. (2001) believes that CSR evaluation should be based on the topic and dimensions of such activities and on the authenticity of the information disclosed by the company. Belal and Momin (2009), stated that such evaluation can be done more efficiently based on the content and the extent of the CSR activities, managerial aspect of the activities and the perception of the stakeholders. Evaluation of CSR activities can also be done by evaluating individual items of such activities on the bases of standardized methods; for example, Jankalova (2015) suggested that CSR activities of a firm might be assessed by referring to Business Excellence models, FTSE4Good Index, Dow Jones, Sustainability Index, ESG Index, Dax Global Alternative Energy Index, UN Global Compact principles, OECD guidelines for multinational companies etc. DeSegni et al. (2015) contends that CSR performance of a firm must be analysed by assessing the competitive advantage that a firm has got because of its CSR activities. Teece et al. (1997) stated that this can be achieved through a dynamic capabilities approach. Organisations consistently try to gain an advantage through using new and innovative strategies that will differentiate them from others and CSR precisely does the same. This kind of an approach can be extremely helpful to ascertain the interactions between CSR activities and their business performance. DeSegni et al. (2015), also asserted that in order to evaluate CSR activities through it is essential to see whether convergence of environment preservation and social value systems with firm's business performance resulted in increased value creation. Bansal and Roth (2000) contended that a firm's CSR can be claimed effective if it positively affects the financial performance of the firm.

ISO 26000, a guiding document ensuring social responsibility, provides a roadmap for development, implementation, and maintenance of a social responsibility system (Habidin et al., 2014). These guidelines can serve as an efficient measure of assessing the social responsibility of the automakers. However, existing literature indicates that automakers use different markers to highlight their social responsibility. Some consider emissions, cleaner manufacturing waste management strategies and recycling methodologies for calculating outcome of environmental preservation strategies as the measures of CSR (Guthrie et al. 2007; Purnomo and Widianingsih, 2012); whereas others consider costs related to energy as well as waste management as significant markers of CSR (Muller and Kolk, 2008; Reinhardt and Stavins, 2010). Community development has also been used as a CSR measure wherein automakers like General Motors have formulated strategies towards community development for enhancing health and safety measures for employees and providing training and consultancy for various stakeholders of the company which may be internal or external (Guthrie et al. 2007; Choi et al. 2008). Profit maximization and diversion of profit for societal development (McKinley, 2008) and employee welfare and well-being (Ioannou and Serafeim, 2010; Fuzi et al. 2012) have also been used as important CSR measures of automakers.

Vieira Li and Scotina (2022) noted the irregularity in CSR reporting of the automakers wherein some focus more on economic aspects while reporting their CSR performance whereas some others highlighting the social and ethical aspects. Another study conducted by Chang, Choi and Song (2020) highlighted the difference in the CSR activities of the automakers in Asian countries especially among China, Japan and Korea and accredited this difference in CSR practices due to the government backed impetus as in countries like China and India, CSR activities are actively promoted by the government wherein these governments have mandatory regulations in place regarding the CSR practices of the organizations including the automakers (Zhang et al. 2021). Researchers like Ali et al. (2018), Yu et al. (2020), Lukin et al. (2022) and Lenort et al. (2023) analysed the CSR activities of the global automakers across the globe and acknowledged that global automakers have although recognised the need of CSR activities across the supply chain; still their CSR efforts vary greatly between the developed and developing nations wherein the latter remains at a disadvantaged position whereby global automakers giants don't hesitate to ignore the societal and ethical priorities and remain emphasized upon the measures improving the economic aspects only.

Review of existing literature highlighted several gaps that need to be filled. The first gap was analysed regarding the diversity of the measures signifying CSR activities. In order to form a concrete opinion whether a company has been

fulfilling all its social obligations, a trustworthy measure must not only be stated in theory; but also needs to be validated in reality. Carroll model has been a successful theoretical framework determining the CSR performance of the organization; yet its application remains yet to be seen in automobile sector. This study would see the application of Carroll model in automobile sector. Secondly, while discussing CSR most common argument in favour of and against CSR is determined assessing the impact of CSR on financial performance of the firm. However, there are many indicators such as quality, satisfaction, collaboration, engagement etc. that can also serve as deciding factors against which CSR activities might be judged. However, existing literature seems to sway in favour of financial aspect only. This study would broaden this area by assessing the effect of CSR on diverse aspects and not just monetary aspect. Third, it was observed that automakers report number of activities under the larger ambit of CSR; they refrain from highlighting their priority area of CSR. It would be interesting to know whether they have moved past the economic priority or the latter still serves as the guiding principle of all the CSR activities of the automakers. This study would highlight the priority area of the global automakers. Fourth, existing literature reveals that CSR activities of the global automakers differ in developing and developed nations; yet very few efforts have been made to study the CSR activities of global automakers in developing economy. This study would fill this gap by analysing the CSR activities of global automakers in emerging economies namely the China and India.

### **Objectives and Research Methodology**

This research was designed to understand the CSR activities of the global automakers in the Asian countries wherein researchers wished to analyse the CSR programs of the global automakers, identify the priority CSR areas and assess the effect of CSR strategies on business performance of global automakers. Specifically, this research aims:

- 1) To analyse the CSR programs of global automakers in Asian countries by applying the Carroll model.
- 2) To identify the priority CSR areas of global automakers in Asian countries.
- 3) To assess the effect of CSR strategies on business performance of global automakers in emerging economies.

This research had a qualitative orientation. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), investigators can gain a greater comprehension of the subject matter, diverse ideas, attitudes, and perspectives of participants by utilizing qualitative approach. The goal of the research was to comprehend the performance, tactics, and CSR strategies and practices of the automakers and to give recommendations for future development. Therefore, instead of determining the quantitative link amongst the variables themselves and verifying the presumptions, the current investigation sought to gain a holistic knowledge of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts of global automakers and give recommendations for possible advancement. Therefore, the qualitative examination was a better fit for the present investigation. Case study method was used in the existing study. An extensive investigation on an individual, a group of individuals, or an entity with the goal of generalizing over multiple units is known called a case study (Jacobsen, 2002). A case study centres on a particular entity. Main aim of employing case study method is to explore the situation or a particular context (Cousin, 2005). Utilizing a variety of data streams and drawing from pre-existing conceptual expertise, case study inquiry examines discrete entities either one or more in real-world contexts (Dul and Hak, 2007). According to Lewis-Beck et al. (2003), case study investigations might be carried out as one study comprising one organization or as multiple case studies engaging various organizations.

This study utilised multiple case study research strategy whereby two automobile companies were studied in depth namely, Toyota and Volkswagen. Both the automakers have worldwide presence with a strong revenue stream and often get features in most responsible automakers in the world (Brand Finance Automotive Report, 2024; Brown, 2023). Also, both the automakers have multiple manufacturing plants in Asia, especially across China and India. Toyota was selected as the company is popular for its CSR programs. Green supply chain, usage of hybrid vehicles, zero emission strategy, paperless working system, responsible supplier network and programs for youth are some of the common practices of the company (Isaksson and Mitra, 2019). Volkswagen was selected for its unique CSR strategies including enhancement of safety methods, vocational training, charitable activities, sustainable practices and children safety (Zhang, Atwal and Kaiser, 2021).

A qualitative investigation can be conducted using a variety of methods for gathering data, such as group discussions, observations, interviews, and conducting secondary research (Saunders et al. 2009). The secondary research was carried

out for this study. According to Vartanian (2010), secondary data is pre-existing information that has been gathered by another party and utilized by the person conducting the study for the purpose of investigation. The data for the study was secured from different- structured data sources like company reports, sustainability data records and media coverage. A research technique called 'content analysis' that looks for commonalities, patterns or trends in written, spoken, or graphic datasets, was used for this study (Harwood and Garry, 2003). According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis refers to a technique that provides a methodical, impartial means of deriving conclusions so as to describe and characterize the phenomenon under study. Content analysis can be done in both qualitative and quantitative ways. While quantitative aspect concentrates on tally up, qualitative aspect emphasizes perspectives that aid comprehension (Drisko and Maschi, 2016). This study assessed the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and strategies of global automakers in the Asian countries using qualitative content analysis to find the hermeneutic and concealed information developing into themes (Neuendorf, 2017).

Content analysis was executed by first selecting the content from broadcasting mediums, reports and datasets between the year 2017 and 2023. Further, units and categories of analysis were defined. Unit of analysis were the activities conducted by the selected two companies in two Asian countries. CSR activities of the companies were categorised into environmental, ethical, philanthropic and economic responsibility as suggested by Carroll model. The third step was to determine the coding rules for assigning codes to the activities. Titles that included information on emissions reductions, environmentally friendly technologies, consumption of energy, effective manufacturing technology, environmentally friendly materials, without paper working, managing waste, reusing, recycling, energy from renewable sources, plantations, environmental funds, green suppliers, and accountable collaborators were coded to the environmental group. Ethical responsibility codes included honest and equitable interactions, fair commerce, equal opportunity, plurality, inclusivity, and adherence to the law, among other things. Philanthropic responsibilities included paying back efforts, benevolent trusts and estates, gifts, community, and charities. The equitable compensation, wage equality, profits, openness, ecological vendors, equitable administration, rights for workers, etc. were treated as economic responsibility. The fourth step was followed by coding the content according to the aforementioned rules manually. Finally, the texts were analyzed for determining findings and conclusion. Coding the text in accordance with the preset guidelines was the fourth stage. After carefully reviewing every document, codes were manually allocated. Interpretation and evaluation were the final steps.

**Results of the study**

Firstly, CSR activities of Toyota were assessed by referring to the CSR reports, sustainability reports, and the special mentions of the CSR initiatives on both the company website and media outlets (both digital and print) in India and China. Content analysis of the same was conducted and results have been displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Content analysis of CSR initiatives of Toyota in Asia

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
<b>Ethical responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low emission vehicles</li> <li>• 3Rs philosophy</li> <li>• Sustainable waste management</li> <li>• Renewable energy</li> <li>• Net-zero carbon footprint</li> <li>• Natural environment preservation</li> <li>• Promotion of equity, diversity and inclusivity</li> <li>• Focus on rights &amp; welfare of employees</li> <li>• Guidance &amp; growth</li> <li>• Openness and flexibility in workplace</li> </ul>	Environmental conservation, Alternative energy based vehicles, Hybrid vehicles, Net-Zero vehicles, Sustainable fuels, Optimized transport, Recycling, Reduction, Reuse, Environmental consciousness, Carbon footprint, Net-Zero carbon emission, Neutralizing effects, Concurrence, Solar production, Waste management, Safe disposal, Decreased environmental toll, Skill training, Skill management, Off the job preparation, On the job advancement, Career structuring, worker rights, Interpersonal perspective , Inclusivity, Equity, Gender diversity, Flexible remunerations, Incentives, Worker welfare schemes, Health insurance, Medical camps, Professional-Personal life balance, Free communication, Secure working environment, Accommodating workplace, Efficiency linked payment, Just and unambiguous remunerations, Ethically justifiable

		accession, Responsible affiliates , Environmental change, Resources, Air quality.
<b>Economic responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost efficiency</li> <li>• Optimal utilization</li> </ul>	Industry amelioration, Viable cost deduction, Improved Technology
<b>Legal responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal obeyance</li> <li>• Legal risk aversion</li> <li>• Vehicular safeguards</li> <li>• Safety in workplace</li> <li>• Audits and control</li> </ul>	Deference, rules, code of ethics, safe operations safety for workers, hygienic working environment, legal aptitude education, compliance practice, obeying taxes, stakeholders representation, legal administration, risk aversion, legal underpinning, IP protection, anti-counterfeiting consciousness sessions, consistent audits and assessment, substance control, chemical management assessment
<b>Philanthropic responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighting collaborative education, a &amp; support to employees</li> <li>• Youth advancement</li> <li>• Environmental conservation</li> <li>• Collaborations with civil society</li> <li>• Societal contributions</li> <li>• Social welfare awareness programmes</li> </ul>	Partnerships, Corpus for education, Educational Transformation, Job support, Youth Enlightenment, Collaborative research programs, Scholarship corpus, Large scale production happiness, Social attentions, Financial sustenance, Communal well-being, Environment, Circular culture, Collaboration with Civil Society, afforestation initiative, reserves for afforestation, biodiversity preservation, rural embellishment, Desertification aversion actions, reprocessing campaigns, waste assemblage, Traffic safety approach, Children safety course of action, Elderly care, Medical aids, Community needs, Philanthropy, Blood donation campaigns.

It can be noticed from the above table that the CSR initiatives of Toyota comprehensively encompassed a range of ethical, legal, economic and philanthropic responsibilities as suggested by Carroll model. These range of themes were further categorised into sub themes and keywords were identified that were assigned or coded to the respective sub themes and themes.

The largest number of keywords fell into the ethical responsibility theme where Toyota appeared to embrace concepts such as sustainable waste management, renewable energy, net-zero carbon footprint, promotion of equity, diversity and inclusivity, focus on rights and welfare of employees, guidance & growth, openness and flexibility in workplace. all these indicate a focus on environmental conservation and worker benefits. The company’s philanthropic responsibility theme was showcased by concepts such as collaborative education and support to employees, youth advancement, environmental conservation, collaborations with civil society, societal contributions, social welfare awareness programmes where some interesting keywords such as blood donation campaigns, elderly hospice care, afforestation drives, rural beautification, circular society, collaborative research programs came up indicative of commitment towards education, job creation, societal welfare, environment and, community development.

Toyota’s legal responsibilities were also showcased via their focus on legal abiding, legal risk aversion, vehicular safeguards, safety in workplace, audits and control while their economic responsibilities were mentioned fleetingly within the sub themes cost efficiency, optimal utilization where keywords like industry amelioration, viable cost deduction and improved technology were noticeable.

*CSR initiatives of Volkswagen*

Volkswagen, the same as Toyota’s practice also publishes their CSR records through CSR and sustainability reports and also relies in a similar way on media and social media as well. Their data in the same manner as Toyota has been presented in the following Table.

Table 2: Content analysis of CSR initiatives of Volkswagen in Asia

Theme	Sub-dimensions	Keywords
<b>Ethical responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diminished emissions</li> <li>• Clean energy</li> <li>• Industry Modernization</li> <li>• Accountable production and accession</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Recyclability</li> </ul>	Environmental conservation, Worker participation, energy efficient, sustainable council, employee inspiration, goTozero, carbon footprint, emissions neutrality, Net Zero, waste control, electric-cars, electric-factories, reduced carbon emissions, mobility transformation, green finance, viable production, social impact, environmental commitment, manageable supply chain, compatible vehicles, fair operations, workers health, recycling, pollution avoidance, equality, collaborations, impartiality, training, contrasting viewpoints, value based management, succession forethought, consumer focus, constructive disagreement, gender diversity, women voices, green mobility, engagement, attraction, retention, workers healthcare support, integrity management, ethical decision-making, waste management
<b>Economic responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost optimization</li> <li>• Optimised cash flows</li> </ul>	Economies of scale, cost efficiency, efficiency, production, synergy, cash flow, profit margins
<b>Legal responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory and discretionary compliance</li> <li>• Internal management and risk assessment</li> <li>• Human rights obedience</li> <li>• Stakeholder engagement</li> </ul>	Environment standards, norms, discretionary compliance, risk control, safeguards, law compliance, shareholder engagement, stakeholder trust, recommendations, practical suggestions, processes, anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, human rights, assessments, whistleblower, human rights compliance, code of conduct, internal management, internal risk analysis, product compliance, declarations, metrics, prevention of child labour, prevention of forced labour
<b>Philanthropic responsibility practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports instruction</li> <li>• Cultural accentuation programs</li> <li>• Poverty eradication program</li> <li>• Ecological rehabilitation</li> <li>• Job creation programs</li> <li>• Collaborative teaching programs</li> <li>• Youth collaboration program</li> <li>• Educational aid program</li> <li>• Philanthropy &amp; humanitarianism</li> </ul>	Sports advancement, football coaching, sustainable music, camps, arts, culture, art participation, youth composer, youth music festival, musical instruction, inter-cultural intelligence, poverty eradication, monetary support, vocational courses, empowering students, Green belt, forestation, Ecological rehabilitation, job creation, reducing greenhouses, precluding soil erosion, improving biodiversity, prohibiting desertification, controlling local ecology, Plantation, cooperation with green organizations, joint effort with teachers, contributions, reserves, donation, eco-transformation, environmental cognizance, Youth environmental representative, student consultation, student association, educational scholarships, child educational funds, child assistance, support for refugees.

The largest numbers of keywords were identified under the philanthropic responsibility theme which could be categorised into sub themes such as sports instruction, cultural accentuation programs, poverty eradication program, ecological rehabilitation, job creation programs, collaborative teaching programs, youth collaboration program, educational aid program, philanthropy & humanitarianism. Volkswagen's philanthropic initiatives included sports advancement, art



participation, poverty eradication, ecological rehabilitation, job creation, improving biodiversity, educational scholarships and support for refugees. The company has also substantially showcased its ethical responsibility and mentioned that it worked towards environmental conservation, worker participation, carbon footprint, viable production, social impact, women voices and workers’ healthcare support all of which fell within the sub themes namely: diminished emissions, clean energy, industry modernization, accountable production and accession, diversity, and recyclability. This can be noted from the table 2, the company paid attention to discretionary compliance along with the mandatory regulations as far as the legal responsibilities are concerned. The responsibility towards stakeholders and economic responsibilities were also briefly noticed in the data. The data as identified by the company regarding its CSR initiatives’ performance indicated improved quality, sales and margins as well as improved brand identity, consumer satisfaction and worker engagement.

Further, this study identifies any kind of similarities or differences between the CSR strategy of Toyota and Volkswagen. A comparative analysis of the automakers has been given below:

Table 3: Comparative analysis of Toyota and Volkswagen CSR strategies

<i>CSR practices</i>	<b>Toyota CSR Strategy</b>	<b>Volkswagen CSR Strategy</b>
<b>Ethical practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmentally conscious production process</li> <li>• Employee centric policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountable production</li> <li>• Industry Modernization</li> <li>• Diversity</li> </ul>
<b>Economic practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost efficiency</li> <li>• Optimal utilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost optimization</li> <li>• Optimised cash flows</li> </ul>
<b>Legal practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliances</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Management and risk aversion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory and <b>discretionary compliance</b></li> <li>• Management and risk assessment</li> <li>• <b>Stakeholder engagement</b></li> </ul>
<b>Philanthropic practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Advancement</li> <li>• Environmental conservation</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Societal Welfare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sports</b></li> <li>• <b>Art and cultural accentuation</b></li> <li>• Poverty eradication</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Ecological rehabilitation</li> <li>• Philanthropic initiatives</li> </ul>

It is evident from the above table 3, Toyota focused on their production process and policies that was employee centric, whereas Volkswagen worked on industry modernization as well in their ethical practices. Both the peers were on the same page regarding economic practices where the cutting costs and improving efficiency were in focus. Same pattern can be observed regarding the legal responsibilities wherein both entities focused on compliances and risk management but Toyota also communicated regarding their commitment to safety norms whereas for Volkswagen it was stakeholder engagement. The philanthropic initiatives in both companies worked towards education/training, employment generation, collaborations/partnerships, environmental and social welfare. Volkswagen also focused on sports and, art and cultural aspects in their humanitarian responsibilities. An all-encompassing study of CSR initiatives of both companies indicated that they both focused more on their philanthropic and ethical responsibilities and little focused on their economic responsibilities and some necessary focus on legal ones. Although it can be said that Volkswagen was more creative in their practices than Toyota.

The effect of CSR performance of both entities was also compared, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparative CSR performance of Toyota and Volkswagen

<i>Automobile Maker</i>	<b>Impact of CSR performance</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
<i>Toyota</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Consumer satisfaction</li> <li>• Worker satisfaction</li> <li>• Durability</li> <li>• Risk Minimization</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Optimal transport</li> </ul>	Quality moderation, Refinements, minimized risk, Consumer satisfaction, Consumer involvement, High value products, Sales, Collaborations, Effectiveness, Improved mobility, Minimized climate impact, Consistent cash flows, Individual development, Worker gratification, transparent functioning
<i>Volkswagen</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Consumer satisfaction</li> <li>• Worker engagement</li> <li>• Sales and margin</li> <li>• Brand identity</li> <li>• Substantiable mobility</li> </ul>	Improved, technologically percipient, energy optimized transport, software driven mobility, customized resolution, quality, margin, sustainable transport, unprecedented mobility, growth, employee control, optimization, productivity, consumer excitement, consumer satisfaction, consumer retention and mobility, quality product, ROT, Net cash flows, return on sales

It can be deduced from Table 4 that both companies felt the benefits of their CSR initiatives like quality improvement, consumer and worker satisfaction and, durable cash flows. They also acknowledged improved, sustainable and optimal mobility solutions as a result of their CSR activities. Toyota also experienced better collaboration opportunities and risk minimization as a result. The difference regarding risk management comes from Toyota’s focus on Legal education, legal underpinning, IP protection, substance control and regular audits and assessments, all of which also resulted in Toyota experiencing more openness regarding their operations. Whereas Volkswagen was content with their distinguished brand identity from peers owing to their creative CSR initiatives, which resulted in improved, technologically percipient, more software driven and customized mobility solutions.

**Discussion and implications**

The conclusion one can draw from the above is that both the companies focused a lot on each aspect of CSR initiatives with their focus being most on philanthropic and ethical responsibilities and least on the economic responsibilities. While Toyota was able to derive more benefits of these initiatives than Volkswagen, the latter was more creative and innovative in their arena. The outcomes support Carroll's (1979) CSR model's implementation in a Asian automobile market. The findings were corroborated by earlier research by Dahlsrud (2008), Elkington (2013), Milhaljevic and Tokic (2015), and Ehie (2016), which emphasized the significance of acting responsibly toward the business's economic, social, ecological, and charitable facets. It was discovered that every year, both businesses provided a detailed disclosure of their CSR initiatives through various media. The CSR policies of both firms could be considered effective as they adhere to the assessment procedures of Mathews (1997), Belal and Momin (2009), Gray et al. (2001), and Thao et al. (2019), which emphasize regular publication of CSR information with comprehensive details and high-quality information.

Both the companies gave priority to the ethical and philanthropic areas of CSR whereas for both the firms economic area had less priority. Researcher including Guthrie et al. (2007), Ioannou and Serafeim (2010), Fuzi et al. (2012) Reinhardt and Stavins (2010), Habidin et al. (2014), and Purnomo and Widianingsih (2012) have all underlined the role of CSR initiatives similar to the ones observed in the present study. Garriga and Mele (2004) similar to the present study found ethical and philanthropic responsibilities to be significant. Researchers like Zhu et al. (2007) and Stepanova (2021) justify the increased emphasis of global automakers on ethical and philanthropic areas in Asian countries by stressing that global. Toyota and Volkswagen unanimously focused more on humanitarian and ethical responsibilities more and minimal focus was on the economic responsibilities which was previously shown by Choi (2008) who believed that this new focus on humanitarian

and ethical aspects is the 'third' stage of industrial development. However, results are in contrast with Ali et al. (2018), Yu et al. (2020), Lukin et al. (2022) and Lenort et al. (2023) wherein these studies emphasized that in emerging economies especially in Asian context, global automakers emphasize upon economic aspect more than the ethical and philanthropic aspects. The results of the present study, however, indicated that the global automakers have started giving importance to ethical and philanthropic aspects of CSR. However, these results must be interpreted with caution as emphasis on ethical and philanthropic aspects in countries like India and China might also be due to the government guidelines stipulating the minimum mandatory spend on CSR. Chang, Choi and Song (2020) have also advised interpreting the improved CSR activities of global automakers in Asian markets in the similar context. Stepanova (2021) also highlighted the importance of legal compliance of companies due to high level of government regulation and Carroll (2016) too believed that such behaviour is part of ground rules for every organization which was observed in the present study as well.

A wide variety of outcomes like quality improvement, brand identity, risk minimization, worker and consumer satisfaction and their engagement were included on the list of outcomes in the present study; indicating that apart from sales and profits, companies are realizing the benefits on variety of outcomes. Toyota was able to derive and list more outcomes than Volkswagen like improved durability, risk management, improved collaborations, and openness in their operations. Volkswagen apart from all these noticed improved sales and margins, and they were also able to get brand differentiation as a result of their creative CSR strategies which previously in a study by DeSegni et al. (2015) has been contended by the authors wherein the study also revealed a positive effect upon openness, durability, environmental measures, and also upon the financial metrics. The positive effect on financial metrics has also been confirmed by previous researches like Bansal and Roth (2000), Buysse and Verbeke (2003), Dahlsrud (2008) Boons and Wagner (2009) and Söderholm and Svahn (2015) although these results stand in contradiction of some researches that suggest a negative relation between CSR initiatives and financial metrics of the company like McWilliams, Siegel and Wright (2006), Wen and Fang (2008) and Michailidis and Economou (2011). This contradiction can be justified by the fact that the studies showing a negative relation were not conducted within the automobile industry which is the insistence of Su and Jie (2015) who believe that the industry type can affect the relation between CSR and financial metrics. However, to support the positive relation between CSR and consumer satisfaction and financial wellness research by Murray and Vogel (1997), Hwang, and Kandampully (2015), Lee et al (2015) and Shukla et al. (2019) can be considered.

Among the implications of the study the first and most prominent is one that the companies are while being more engaged in philanthropic, ethical and legal responsibilities; are not giving much attention to the economic responsibilities. This indicates that the ethical and humanitarian responsibilities are the major focus in Asian automobile industry and a focus only limited to cost optimizations is not desirable. The present study showcased that the focus on philanthropic and ethical responsibilities still resulted in the much-desired effect of improved ROI, quality, margins, workers, and consumer satisfaction along with achieving the sustainability goals regarding environment, mobility, and risk management, and also resulted in meaningful collaborations. The study revealed a positive relation between the financial measures and the fulfilment of philanthropic, environmental, and ethical responsibilities.

While the companies Toyota and Volkswagen hail from different parts of the world i.e., Japan and Germany respectively, they both had almost similar approach in prioritising CSR initiatives and reported similar outcomes as well. These results indicate that the automobile companies have a stellar image of being indulged in CSR initiatives across the globe and the same is true for the largest markets i.e., China and India; where they enjoy positive CSR outcomes. This also indicates the global application of CSR initiatives irrespective of the macro-economic factors. The similar strategy for CSR initiatives of the automobile giants can also be attributed to their long-lasting footprint in these markets and also the fact that both Indian and Chinese regime keeps compliance standards at a minimum required level.

### **Conclusion and future research areas**

The study concluded that both companies are widely engaged in CSR initiatives that covered ethical, philanthropic, legal and economic responsibilities. Toyota focused on their production process and policies that was employee centric, Volkswagen worked on industry modernization as well in their ethical practices. The philanthropic initiatives at both places worked towards education/training, employment generation, collaborations/partnerships, environmental and social welfare.

Volkswagen also focused on sports and, art and cultural aspects in their humanitarian responsibilities. Both the peers were on the same page regarding economic practices where the cutting costs and improving efficiency was in focus. It was observed that Volkswagen was more creative in their CSR strategies and initiatives. Both Toyota and Volkswagen gave more priority to the philanthropic and ethical aspect than the economic aspect. Both the companies experienced similar outcomes from these CSR initiatives like positive financial measures, quality metrics, brand identity improvement and differentiation, worker and consumer satisfaction, risk management and aversion, improved partnership opportunities, although Toyota mentioned more outcomes than Volkswagen.

The current research has many limitations, which are essential for discussion. The multi-method case approach is usually better than others, yet it becomes difficult to find evidence for the same to be able to generalise the findings. For instance, only two automobile manufacturing companies were selected to analyse their CSR practices in two countries only; despite finding convincing results; the same cannot be said for other global automakers and other Asian countries. The research determines similarity in practices followed by both the companies with minor variations. This could be solely because of different national dynamics. Researchers can extend existing study by comparing domestic companies as well. Future researchers can extend the present study by taking a domestic Asian automobile player as a case study. Also, the study used qualitative content analysis method to analyse the collected data wherein frequency of the keywords was not given importance; resulting in equal weightage of all the themes. Future researchers might conduct the study with quantitative content analysis to see the relative importance of different aspects of CSR. Secondary data has been used to conduct the current study and the claims made have been taken on the face value. This constraint should be taken into consideration in future researches and the findings can be validated by comparison with various audit agencies or organisations. Primary study can also be conducted by using a survey methodology or an interview method for confirmation of these results. The current research used Carroll's created framework for understanding the CSR performance of the automotive manufacturing companies in Asia. Future researches might use other CSR models to evaluate CSR practices to understand differences if any. This will enable us to identify the most suitable model for evaluation. These two companies are established organisations with sufficient funds for CSR operations. Future researches might take different kinds of organisations as control groups to analyse CSR practices, considering the size, experience and type of vehicle.

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