



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Several Dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility and Its Significance

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Sep 16, 2024 Accepted: Nov 30, 2024	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is considered a vital part of corporate sustainability. Businesses' traditional role has changed in today's world. Now corporations are expected to be economically lucrative by satisfying the needs and expectations of different stakeholders. Oman is a modest country with a modern economic infrastructure. Oman Vision 2040 gives high priority to the country's sustainability in different social and economic sectors. CSR is the dominant and essential principle of the latest Oman Code of Corporate governance. The aim of this study is to identify the various dimensions of businesses' CSR which should reflect the complete measurement of CSR activities of the business in Oman. The conceptual framework is proposed in this study which reflects the CSR measurement from a different perspective. The proposed framework is based on the Oman Code of Corporate Governance (2015), UN Sustainable Development Goal (2017), and ESG rating agency elements. There are six main dimensions and themes are identified and proposed which further composed of a total of forty-five elements. This study intends to contribute to the literature by introducing and proposing a new CSR indicator and contributes in the context of Oman where measurement of CSR activities is still missing. The conceptual framework is useful for various stakeholders to use as a guideline for planning and implementing CSR actions as well as using as a benchmark for the Oman CSR execution.
Keywords Conceptual framework Corporate social responsibility Measurement Oman	
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INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is considered a self-governing business concept that helps businesses to pursue ethical operations which should align with the morals of society. The notion of CSR is broader that is recognized, acknowledged, and implemented differently and uniquely by each business, whereas the fundamental idea of CSR is to practice ethical behaviors and mitigate any adverse business effects on the community or society at large (Sheehy & Farneti, 2021). As a result, each country has set up its own CSR laws and principles which describe the minimum expectations from companies operating in its jurisdictions and highlighted the priority areas of being a good corporate citizen. CSR is also assumed as a tool for business sustainability that achieves various objectives to be highly ethical in society (Nath et al., 2019).

Oman is a modest country and one of the important members of the GCC countries (Gulf Cooperation Council). Among the GCC countries, Oman is the first country to develop the Code of Corporate Governance in 2002. The notion of CSR is introduced in the Oman Code of Corporate Governance in 2015 as the thirteenth important principle of the code. According to the code, CSR practices should

be linked to business activities, and the management is responsible to develop a CSR charter. As a result, the management should deliver the CSR philosophy by practicing various CSR activities which target the community segments (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016).

After the launch of CSR as an essential component of the Oman Code of Corporate Governance in 2015, the implementation of CSR activities has been officially structured among listed companies. All listed companies at Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) are expected to establish a CSR program and to include CSR activities in the annual reports which reflect the actions, measures, impacts, and sustainability assessment taken by the business during the stated period. The Code of Corporate Governance in Oman is consisting of fourteen principles and the thirteenth principle highlights the corporate social responsibility directions for the business (C.M.A. 2016). According to the code, CSR is related to the company's objectives and actions, and the business should pursue exercising its title role as a good corporate citizen and alleviate the negative effect of activities if any. Thus, all the companies listed on Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) are required to disclose their CSR activities.

Measurement of CSR activities is also a critical aspect of CSR performance, government and regulatory bodies can assess and evaluate their regulations through the measurement of CSR as well as businesses can reflect their performance through the measurement of CSR (Asif & Batool, 2017). There are various indexes and measurement methods that reflect different economies. There is a need to develop a CSR index that should reflect country-specific CSR in case of the absence of an ESG rating agency for a country (Masoud & Vij, 2021; Younas, 2022). Thus, there is a lack of measurement of CSR activities in Oman which benchmark international and national standards. Therefore, the proposed study attempts to fill this gap from the perspective of Oman's economy.

The notion of CSR is broad and covers a wide range of activities. The diversifying nature of CSR allows businesses to consider several implications of CSR activities. The objective of this study is to identify the varying dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of the business organization that reflects the complete measurement of CSR activities of the business in Oman, and which should align with the UN Sustainability goal (2017), ESG ratings, and the Oman Code of Corporate Governance. The identification of several dimensions of the CSR concept from the perspective of Oman is a novel part of this study. This study is intended to fill the gap in the literature in the context of Oman's CSR dimensions. The study provides useful insight to businesses and regulators for planning and regulating various dimensions of CSR policy.

This paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 examines the background of the study. Section 3 highlights the different dimensions of CSR. Section 4 highlights the methodology of the study. Section 5 suggested the conceptual framework for measuring CSR in Oman. Section 6 includes a discussion of the proposed framework. Section 7 focuses on the limitations of the study and potential opportunities. Section 8 describes the conclusion.

Background

The notion of CSR appeared in the 1930s as a perception of businesses' social responsibility towards society (Carroll, 1979). Later, Bowen (1953) argues that CSR is the responsibility of businesses to develop and adhere to sustainable goals and give priority to the values of humanity and society. Generally, CSR is considered a responsibility and liability of corporations to use their resources in the interest of society. Thus, CSR covers social, economic, and environmental aspects to solve the social problems of mitigating negative impacts of businesses if any (Murphy, 1978).

Similarly, Kotler and Lee (2005) identified it as an endeavor to develop improved society welfare which reflects the business's voluntary practices and commitment towards human and environmental issues. Whereas Johansson et al. (2015), claimed that the most important social responsibility of any business is to increase its stakeholder's wealth and profit from a social

accountability perspective. However, it is argued that CSR performance is the existence of business practices based on acknowledgment between society and business (Duca & Gherghina, 2018).

The notion of CSR is aligned with the SDG (sustainable development goals). This idea provides countless opportunities which enhance the environmental effects of productivity of resources, economic sustainability, and an improvement of new knowledge and processes (Diez-Cañamero et al., 2020). Sustainable development is not only comprised of environmental issues but also covers economics, societal, corporate, and all stakeholder perspectives (Eding & Scholtens, 2017). Thus, the demanding side of the CSR notion is the balancing of CSR activities and perspectives which includes economics, legal, ethical, environmental, and social responsibility of several stakeholders that creates an expectation for their relationships with the business. In addition, CSR can not be generalized among businesses of their unique operating environment, ethical concern, and accountability issues (Wan-Jan, 2006).

According to Matten and Moon (2020), corporate social responsibility can be split up into three levels. At the first level, the business has legal obligations to comply with all legitimate actions. At the second level, the business is responsible to adhere internal CSR practices in terms of hiring human resources and protecting the environment from business negative operations if any. At the third level, the business actions should acknowledge the social responsibility which can represent in its actions (Younas & Kassim, 2023).

It is argued that CSR is divided into four categories, which are economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibility (Ye et al., 2020). Economic responsibility should focus on the profitability of the business, legal responsibility refers to compliance with laws and regulations, ethical responsibility covers fair treatment, and discretionary responsibility focuses on the corporate image of being a good corporate citizen.

CSR's triple bottom line consists of social responsibility, environmental responsibility, and economic responsibility which is considered a baseline concept of CSR notion (Tilt, 2016). This triple-bottom-line approach as a sustainability framework introduced the three pillars of CSR which are people, planet, and profit. As a socially responsible business needs to respond to societal problems and concerns which refer to people (Younas et al., 2024). Environmental issues are needed to be addressed as a planet concern. Whereas being a profitable business is the economic perspective of business which portrays as the business grows and increases shareholder wealth (Aguinis, 2011).

CSR Dimensions

During different times different dimensions of CSR have been included in the literature. The triple bottom approach, four levels of Carol's pyramid, three levels of CSR, and UN Sustainability Development Goals, all reflect various parameters to measure CSR performance. Thus, six parameters for CSR measurement are discussed here which may reflect the CSR performance from all aspects.

Governance and Compliance

The business is first expected to conduct its affairs in its compliance abiding limit and fulfill all government regulations honestly. The business should follow all the rules and regulations as stipulated in law and disclose its strategy and plan through a statement. The business also needs to acknowledge CSR, develop a formal plan of CSR, disclose its CSR activities, and follow all the rules and regulations as described by the state laws. As discussed by Matten and Moon (2020), the first level of CSR is the governance and compliance structure of business which adds the obligation to comply with the law. Thus, this dimension assumed that businesses should abide by the law and disclose information regarding corporate governance and CSR objectives of the business.

In general, the best business performance can be determined by the modest structure of the organization, the fair composition of the directors board, and justified the formation of an audit committee and its efficient execution (Ruangviset et al., 2014). Stakeholders expect that businesses should disclose honest information on corporate governance structure particularly publicly listed companies are required to adhere to corporate governance practices and disclose information regarding stakeholder approach, board of directors, audit committee, internal control structure, risk management structure, and committee, developing and implementation of corporate governance as well as CSR (Ali et al., 2020).

Social and Community Welfare

In the literature social and community welfare is assumed to be a top priority for CSR performance (Abdullah & Benedict, 2009; Arli & Cadeaux, 2014; Eding & Scholtens, 2017; Murphy, 1978). Businesses are expected to keep a balance between the needs of business and the needs of society. In general, the business should need to prove a good corporate citizen by fulfilling society's expectations. Social and community welfare consists of volunteering actions such as donations for the development of society, and the economy, supporting minorities, and sponsoring social events and other community-related activities. The social and community dimension of CSR supports and improves the corporate image of the business (Arsić et al., 2017; Pratiwi et al., 2024).

The main objective of the social and community welfare dimension is to build up a better and safer society that integrates social and human concerns into business strategies (Jhawar & Gupta, 2017). Supporting society by resolving its issues and paying donations for critical issues is the main focus of CSR activities. Society expects businesses to play their role, particularly during times of disasters, pandemics, and emergencies because government alone cannot be able to respond to hazards. Thus, businesses need to be prepared for any contribution of society in the normal course of business as well as in some emergencies (Jamali, 2008). Businesses can support society as well as government actions that the government is not able to reach, so solving societal issues is not the only responsibility of the government but businesses can support the government. Supporting rural development, supporting minorities, supporting SMEs, and supporting different societal activities can provide an opportunity for business to prove their identity as good corporate citizens (Haslinda et al., 2016; Jamali, 2008; Jam et al., 2010).

Health and Education

The continued dedication of businesses to perform ethically and contribute to financial expansion goals facilitates businesses to earn a good name (Ehsan et al., 2018). Similarly providing health and education facilities to the society and local community is the key objective of CSR activities. Health and education-related activities are important to any society. Health and education are the top priority in the UN Sustainability Development Goals (Younas & Kassim, 2022). The provision of quality education is the main factor that contributes to society's development through developing awareness. People expect the government as well as reputed businesses to involve in providing better education facilities (Minnee et al., 2013). Support of education in the forms of donations, fee support, and provision of educational tools are the most common examples on which businesses usually focus. Similarly, health is an intensive area of businesses' voluntary contributions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many businesses exclusively focus on this area (He & Harris, 2020). Businesses earned a good name and developed a good corporate image by providing a huge amount of donations, medical instruments, kits, and medicines.

Environment and Energy

The environment and energy dimension is a significant issue since the 1970s and businesses have the responsibility to deal with environmental and energy issues with corporate social responsibility (Aleksic & Boskovic, 2017). Most businesses are causing environmental problems and corporates are

under pressure to deal with the damage of environmental issues. Similarly, climate shift and change are one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and businesses' responses to these changes' effects significantly the society. Thus, life below the water and on the land is a rising concern of various stakeholders in the domain of CSR performance (Kumar, 2017).

The lack of natural resources is another issue that businesses should need to take care of and respond to. Scarce energy resources, waste management, recycling, and the lowered energy consumption is other concerns that need to be responded to by businesses. Business strategies should consider environmental issues and efficient energy sources (Arsić et al., 2017). Natural resources are scarce and diminishing natural resources give a call to businesses for their CSR actions (Alizadeh, 2022). Thus, corporates are responsible for searching for alternative efficient energy means which should improve business performance and lessen the adverse effect on society.

Product and Service

Businesses are responsible to increase awareness about their product and service. Quality assurance is the main concern for customers and users. Businesses have an obligation to explain their products and services and specify the product features (Doda, 2015). Businesses should need to present their research and development strategy which ensures the sustainability objective of the business. Consumers are concerned more with product and process safety and its implications. Ethical and moral concerns should be the highest priority for good corporates (Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2020). Business is obliged to disclose if their products or processes have any negative impact on the consumer as well as on society.

This type of information can be available on different business platforms, including business manuals, websites, annual reports, and product description documents. Customers always value businesses that show a high level of transparency in their disclosure activities (Fahad & Rahman, 2020). If any issue arises regarding product and service safety, it not only harms the business profitability but also develops a negative business image (Odeh et al., 2020). The product and services may also cover value-added statements which may help the business to be more competitive in the market. Similarly, customer services and after-sales services disclosure is an essential part of the product and service dimension.

Workforce

The workforce is also considered as internal social CSR which focuses on employees and their social well-being. Fair treatment of existing and future employees should need to be taken into account by CSR-concerned businesses. It is argued that employees' performance can be improved through training opportunities and fair treatment (McLaughlin, 2019). Employee training, career development opportunities, employee compensation, employing minorities, and providing a safe working environment may include in the workforce dimension. Providing a favorable working environment with a balance of growth opportunities and a justified compensation policy develops the business as a CSR brand. The safe working environment for employees is the responsibility of businesses to show their concern for employees' safety and security (Aribi & Gao, 2011)(Diez-Cañamero et al., 2020).

Workforce as external social CSR should emphasize providing equal employment opportunities to the people. Focusing on UN SDG gender equality is the issue that businesses should reflect in their strategic plans and actions. Focusing on minorities, developing women, and national concerns should need to be considered for active CSR-oriented businesses. Thus, Omanisation is one of the concerns which is always highlighted in Oman's strategic plans and policies and is an important element of Oman Vision 2040.

METHODOLOGY

The current study is proposed to adopt a content analysis methodology to collect and gather the data. The content analysis approach is the broadest approach that will be used to measure the different perspectives of CSR disclosures (Milne & Adler, 1999). The proposed CSR index will use the dichotomous method, where the element of CSR availability will be reflected in the form of 1, while in case of absence of an element will be reflected in the form of 0. Thus a composite index should reflect all the six proposed dimensions and elements in each dimension (Diez-Cañamero et al., 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The study proposed the model which is based on and used as a guideline of UN Sustainability Development Goals (2017), ESG rating agency elements, and the current Oman Code of Corporate Governance issued by Capital Market Authority (CMA) Oman in 2015, and its principles. This conceptual model consists of six wider dimensions which further recommend various elements of CSR. Figure 1 portrays the various dimensions of CSR measurement for Oman-listed companies at MSM.

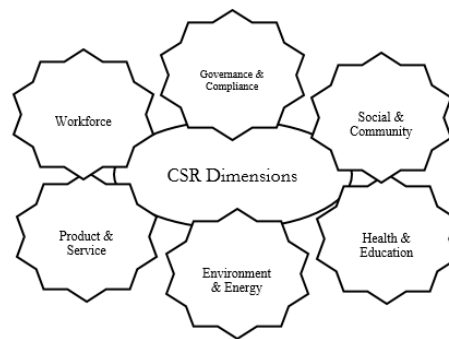


Figure. 1. Conceptual framework for measuring different dimensions of Oman CSR

DISCUSSION

The proposed conceptual framework for measuring the different dimensions of CSR in Oman is aligned with UN SDG, ESG ratings, as well as Oman's code of corporate governance. Each dimension consists of further elements which develop as a comprehensive CSR index. There are a total of 45 elements that are proposed for the CSR index (Appendix A). Governance and compliance consist of eight elements, social and community consist of eight elements, health and education are composed of six elements, environment and energy also consist of six, product and service include seven elements, and finally workforce consists of ten elements.

The first dimension of the proposed model is governance and compliance which consists of eight elements. This dimension of CSR reflects a business commitment to the first level of CSR as described by Matten and Moon (2020). The varying elements in this dimension are starts from the business approach to acknowledge the CSR and as a result, develop a CSR charter as well as at the end of the year disclose its business activities in the domain of CSR (Younas et al., 2023). In addition, the composition of the organization such as the formation and justification of the board of directors, audit committee, internal control, and stakeholder approach is counted as this particular factor (Ruangviset et al., 2014).

Businesses as a socially responsible organizations contribute to society which is reflected in the second dimension namely, social and community. In the normal course of operations, businesses provide contributions to society in the form of donations which is a notable CSR element. Similarly, donations to affected people by disasters or floods are considered an important contribution to

society. These donations not only support society but also provide assistance to the government in resolving societal issues (Murphy, 1978). Oman witnesses several natural calamities in the previous years due to climate change, where government alone is unable to relocate people, then many businesses were expected to play their roles in such situations (Haddad et al., 2020). Similarly sponsoring events that are helpful in building a strong social and cultural society and supporting women's development programs as well as supporting SMEs is measured under this dimension.

Another important proposed CSR dimension is health and education. Donations to the health and education sector are the traditional form of business CSR actions. Whereas the pandemic of Covid-19 calls for businesses to rethink and recreate the form of assistance to the health and education sector (Ehsan et al., 2018). The business responsibility is not over only by donating some amount of money to the health and education sector, whereas business needs to take responsibility to assist in the provision of quality health and education facilities through different measures which may cover from donations to direct provision of services or assistance to responsible bodies.

Environment and energy is the top concern of many stakeholders. In the past, many businesses operations and products have impacted negatively the environment. Now in the world of highly CSR-conscious customers business needs to less harm the environment by creating some positive impacts on the climate (Ye et al., 2020). Thus, businesses are responsible first for increasing environmental awareness, second for managing and solving various issues such as waste management, recycling issues, and improving green issues situations. Similarly diminishing natural resources is another area where business needs to focus on sustainability and search for efficient and effective energy means.

Another important proposed dimension focuses on the business product and services. The availability of sufficient information about business operations, products, and services is much-needed information by several stakeholders (Doda, 2015). A good quality product and service, its safety concerns, and its added value assumption is proposed to reflect in this dimension. Business as an ethical corporate citizen is to disclose extensive information from the manufacturing of the product to servicing the customer.

The last proposed CSR dimension is a workforce that focuses on current and prospective employees' dimensions. Providing training and career development opportunities, equal opportunities, equality, and compensation policy are presented by this dimension of CSR (McLaughlin, 2019). Employment of women particularly in Oman where the government support and encourage women's employment in every sector is mirrored in this dimension. Omanisation is also an important part of Oman Vision 2040 which is also exhibited as an important CSR element.

Limitations and Future Opportunities

The current study attempts to present the conceptual framework for measuring different dimensions of CSR in Oman. The study proposed only a conceptual model which is based on the UN Sustainability Development goal (2017), ESG rating agency elements, and the Oman Code of Corporate Governance (2015). The proposed framework reflects the CSR dimensions which are highly suitable for the Omani economy. The proposed CSR index will be used to study the CSR disclosure and performance of Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) publicly listed companies. Whereas in the future the index can be extended by adding some more elements which reflect the most yelling trends in the world because the dimension of CSR is ever-changing. Future research may focus on the comparison of different GCC countries because all these countries reflect similar tendencies due to geographical and strategic alliances.

CONCLUSION

There are several CSR aspects, and the dimensions of CSR are varied and ever-changing. There are various guiding authorities that provide general guidance for CSR performance. Thus, the need to

develop a separate and composite index for Oman CSR is discussed in this study. The current study proposes a conceptual framework for measuring CSR activities in Oman. The proposed CSR framework consists of six main dimensions which are further split into elements in each dimension. There is a total of forty-five dimensions proposed in the current study for measuring CSR performance in Oman particularly listed companies at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The study offers a guide to several stakeholders in planning and implementing CSR activities. The proposed framework is developed in the context of Oman and attempted to align with the UN SDG, ESG rating agency, and Oman Code of Corporate Governance.

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Appendix A: Elements of Proposed CSR Index Under Six Main Themes

Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6
Governance & Compliance	Social & Community	Health & Education	Environment & Energy	Product & Service	Workforce
Acknowledgment of CSR	Donations for flood-affected people	Donations to educational institutions	Environment awareness	Explanation of products or service	Employee training
CSR Charter	Rural development	Scholarship/assistance to needy students	Waste management	Quality product or service	Number of employees
Disclosure CSR Policies	Women development	Sponsoring or organizing different educational activities	Recycle concern	Research & Development concern	Career development
Risk management committee	Sponsoring events	Provision of health care	Green issues	Product or process safety	Employee benefits
Board of Directors disclosure	Religious activities	Donations to hospitals	Reduced energy consumption	Value added statement	Job sustainability
Audit committee disclosure	Assistance to Ministry	Donations for Pandemic	Investment in energy	Statement of ethics,	Compensation policy or plan
Internal control	Other community activities			Disclosure of customer service	Safe working environment
Stakeholder approach	Support to SME				Employment of women
					Omanisation
					Employment of minorities
8	8	6	6	7	10
45					