

Brand evangelists' expectations: consumption decisions towards digital corporate social responsibility communication

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Submitted: 27 May 2025, Revised: 26 November 2025, Accepted: 2 December 2025, Published: 31 December 2025

ABSTRACT

Background: Digital Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication could effectively influence stakeholders' decisions. **Purpose:** This study explores how the expectations of millennials as brand evangelists towards digital CSR communication contribute to purchasing behavior. **Methods:** Using a qualitative approach, this study examines Indonesian millennials' perceptions and attitudes toward CSR activities communicated by Indonesian unicorn companies on Instagram. The data were collected through interviews with 15 Indonesian millennials who actively use Instagram and follow the official account(s) of at least one Indonesian unicorn company. **Results:** The findings reveal that millennials share positive experiences and support CSR initiatives through Instagram, with communication conveyed transparently and effectively. This demographic's digital savviness improves expectations for CSR initiatives, which, in turn, influence consumption choices through partnerships with Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and through content that promotes their business sustainability. **Conclusion:** Indonesian unicorn companies adopt strategic digital CSR communications to meet the heightened expectations of Indonesian millennial consumers, who serve as brand evangelists, supporting, inspiring, and recommending their products. **Implications:** By aligning CSR initiatives with their brand and sharing them through digital channels, Indonesian unicorn companies can build consumer awareness, trust, engagement, and loyalty, ultimately promoting positive consumption decisions through rational and ethical actions that contribute to societal progress.

Keywords: Digital CSR communication; instagram; brand evangelists' expectation; consumption decision; unicorn companies

To cite this article (APA Style):

Santoso, N.R., & Negoro, S.H. (2025). Brand evangelists' expectations: consumption decisions towards digital corporate social responsibility communication. *Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi*, 13(2), 365-385. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkk.v13i2.63764>

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, companies' primary objective has been to sustain and grow their economic value, achieved by delivering products and services that generate substantial financial returns. Today, companies recognize that their role extends beyond generating profit. They aim to create broader societal and environmental benefits, as reflected through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Ihlen et al., 2011, p. 6). This shift has been driven by the recognition that stakeholders, particularly consumers, possess the authority to redefine and evaluate companies' business practices vis-à-vis society (Pradhan, 2018), thereby shaping their expectations of companies' business activities. The fulfillment of such expectations plays a vital role in shaping consumer decisions regarding companies' products and services (Pradhan, 2018).

CSR has been identified as one of the most important indicators of business success. It has positive effects on companies' sustainability (Barnett et al., 2020). Companies take CSR seriously, as it is a core element of their reputation (Ihlen et al., 2011, p. 11), which encourages them to shape their corporate culture to achieve best CSR practices (Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2019). Therefore, companies invest significant resources in designing, implementing, and communicating their CSR activities (Barnett et al., 2020).

Furthermore, many scholars have demonstrated the numerous advantages that CSR confers on companies. Notably, it

profoundly affects consumers' loyalty (Ajina et al., 2019) and purchase intentions (Gupta & Wadera, 2021), with trust more likely to be earned by companies that actively engage in CSR activities. When businesses implement CSR initiatives and communications, they also encourage consumers to voluntarily engage in positive word-of-mouth marketing for their products and services (Alawamleh & Giacaman, 2020). Consequently, consumers consistently hold high expectations of companies, and these expectations have been increasing over time (Ajina et al., 2019).

The current market landscape is shaped primarily by the predominance of millennial consumers, particularly in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). Nevertheless, scholarly research on CSR communication specifically targeted at this segment remains lacking. In Indonesia, individuals born between 1981 and 1996 constitute approximately 25.87 percent of the total population, or 69.90 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). Millennials are characterized by meticulous attention to detail. Before making decisions or taking action, they diligently gather information, driven by a curiosity to acquire knowledge relevant to their lives (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020; Pradhan, 2018). This behavior is deeply ingrained in their upbringing in an era characterized by pervasive digital technologies, including text messages, social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube), and other aspects of the digital age (Moreno et al., 2017). In addition, because most millennials are employed, they have greater

purchasing power (Moreno et al., 2017).

The existing body of research on CSR communication has been shaped primarily by Western scholars and has focused predominantly on developed countries. In the West, the context of CSR is diverse and multi-layered. CSR must be grounded in macro-level and societal influences. Moreover, Western companies seriously consider the implications of their CSR activities for prevailing organizational culture (Higgins & Debroux, 2009). On the other hand, CSR in Asia is heavily concerned with the persistent dominance of ethical norms as an issue focus and the significance of 'community' as a primary stakeholder (Kim & Moon, 2015). Moreover, the benefits of CSR in the Asian context include risk reduction, staff recruitment and retention, cost savings, and building strong relationships with stakeholders. Despite the benefits, implementation is hindered by obstacles such as limited resources and skills, limited awareness of stakeholder needs, and inefficient production methods (Welford & Frost, 2006).

Although CSR has been extensively examined in Western and Asian countries, it remains crucial to conduct comprehensive research on how digital CSR communication, particularly on Instagram, shapes the expectations of millennial consumers when making consumption decisions (Pradhan, 2018). This is particularly pertinent in developing countries, where CSR activities primarily address pressing social challenges, including poverty, social degradation, and social

inequalities (Matten & Moon, 2004). While the literature on CSR in developing countries has touched upon China and India to some extent (Balasubramanian et al., 2005), research specific to Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, remains limited. Furthermore, most prior studies have relied heavily on quantitative research methods. To address these gaps, a qualitative study was conducted from a communications perspective and explicitly focused on Indonesian millennials. This can be used to explore the role of digital CSR communication, especially on Instagram, in shaping millennials' expectations when making consumption decisions through identifying, gathering information, and evaluating alternative solutions (Pradhan, 2018).

CSR functions as both a means and an end, encompassing both the process and the outcome. It emphasizes the importance of focusing on business practices and their broader effects (i.e., beyond the financial) by considering stakeholders and their impacts. To effectively contribute to societal improvement, CSR should acknowledge and incorporate the concerns of the wider community (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). CSR also entails companies' efforts to understand the various impacts of their operations (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). CSR significantly shapes stakeholders' perceptions of a company's social activities, including their economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions (Ajina et al., 2019). Employing CSR enables companies to demonstrate the scope of their contributions and responsibilities

to the public.

To understand the urgency of CSR, Ihlen et al. (2011, pp. 50-55) identified three perspectives that explain why companies engage in CSR: normative, strategic, and negotiation. From a normative standpoint, companies engage in CSR because they are perceived as socially and environmentally responsible, consistent with their organizational role in society, with implications for CSR communication. On the other hand, the strategic perspective emphasizes the need for organizations to build and maintain broader public acceptance to enhance their competitive opportunities relative to rivals. From a negotiation perspective, CSR focuses on meeting social expectations to improve social standards and expectations over time.

Companies' implementation of CSR is reflected in ongoing programs guided by the principles of sustainability, its social, economic, and environmental dimensions (the triple bottom line). These have extensive experience in transformation, with digital elements integrated into sustainability efforts as business models have evolved to meet the challenges of the digital era (Idowu & Schmidpeter, 2017). Sustainability is critical for companies implementing CSR, as stakeholders may critically evaluate a company's sustainability efforts. When a company's CSR initiatives align with its core products, which serve as its selling point, public trust is increased. On the other hand, CSR activities that do not align with a company's products can generate skepticism and cynicism (Abdulrazak & Amran, 2017). In

this context, companies, recognizing the crucial role of digitalization in CSR communication, have prioritized digital media in openly and effectively communicating their CSR reports. Effective communication of CSR is essential for organizations. Various studies have demonstrated its impact on stakeholders' perceptions of the company and on the relationships among them (Viererbl & Koch, 2022). For companies, CSR communication is viewed as a strategic approach in connecting with consumers and shaping public perceptions (Dutot et al., 2016).

CSR communication is delivered through multiple channels, with digital currently the preferred channel. Kesavan et al. (2017) note that traditional media do not contribute significantly to CSR communication. In contrast, social media exerts a strong influence and can complement traditional media within a company's digital strategy. For companies, social media drives high levels of public engagement (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). Furthermore, social media has transformed CSR communication, enabling swift responses and expanding companies' marketing reach (Kollat & Farache, 2017). Social media interactions indicate that companies and users seek to express opinions and disseminate organizational information to strengthen the relationship between the organization and the public (Negoro & Santoso, 2024).

CSR is a strategic communication approach employed by companies to enhance brand reputation, foster customer loyalty, and influence purchasing behavior (Ihlen et al., 2011,

p. 3-5). Therefore, CSR should consider the diverse backgrounds of stakeholders, including consumers (Ihlen et al., 2011, p. 8), as they are essential to a company's profit objectives. Then, the company can prioritize meeting their needs, adapting to evolving demands, and considering the prevailing environment (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). To address customer expectations and needs, companies indirectly increase positive values such as commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty (Ajina et al., 2019), thereby fostering stability and consumer trust by disseminating clear and accurate information (Santoso et al., 2023).

A company's ability to meet customer expectations is closely linked to increased financial revenue. Therefore, understanding the needs of millennials is crucial, as they are a significant consumer base for start-ups. This is especially true as e-commerce and online payment platforms expand, given that millennials are often characterized as technology enthusiasts (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). Millennials have thus become an important target group for research on CSR communication (Moreno et al., 2017).

Millennials are more conscious of business activity than other generations (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). They employ an idealized perspective to evaluate business operations. They are inherently skeptical of corporate ethics, which leads them to seek evidence that the company's actions are sincere and motivated by altruism. Millennials do not trust philanthropic activities because they believe businesses

should be responsible for their own areas of endeavor (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). Moreover, they are less devoted to companies that are less involved and have fewer rules because they are better knowledgeable, more mobile, and more aware of global social issues. They are voicing serious concerns about the underlying goals and the business's ethical behavior and CSR strategy (Ahmad, 2019).

CSR communication has emerged as a vital strategy for companies to engage effectively with millennial consumers. It thus demands the ability to address millennial expectations (Andersen et al., 2017). It also becomes a medium for companies to interactively engage with consumers through storytelling (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). Some companies have aligned their CSR initiatives with their products or brand offerings (Andersen et al., 2017). Alignment between stakeholder expectations and companies' social activities is crucial to enabling integrated CSR, both internally and externally (Weder & Karmasin, 2017).

Furthermore, CSR communication continuously generates new expectations among stakeholders. It is more than merely perceiving the company as a business unit, brand, or workplace. Yet it represents a company's ethical responsibility and significantly shapes its image. As a result, openness and alignment have emerged as crucial aspects in companies' CSR activities (Andersen et al., 2017). Openness also enhances public opinion of companies' performance (Santoso et al., 2023).

Public awareness of social and

environmental issues has led consumers to expect and demand that companies address these issues ethically in the communities where they operate (Alawamleh & Giacaman, 2020). In addition, public expectations for CSR communication emphasize transparency and visible outcomes, with a demand that the media facilitate the dissemination of CSR efforts and instill public confidence (Abdulrazak & Amran, 2017).

Transparency in CSR activities is of significant importance to stakeholders, as it fosters trust in companies. Transparency contributes to a company's perceived responsibility and responsiveness to various issues, which provides stakeholders with an overview of its role in its surrounding environment and community (Jarolimek & Weder, 2017). Transparency also enhances stakeholders' trust, leading them to support companies' sustainability (Santoso et al., 2023). If a company communicates its CSR objectives in a transparent manner under both congruent-fit and incongruent-fit scenarios, consumers will perceive the company's CSR motives as trustworthy. More crucially, when a firm makes CSR claims in a highly transparent manner, a low-fit alignment, rather than a high-fit cause, can be used effectively.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, which is effective for in-depth examination of specific phenomena while

clarifying the characteristics of broader related phenomena (Gerring, 2004). This methodology was particularly well-suited to understanding how digital CSR communication in Indonesian unicorn companies influences millennial consumers' purchasing behavior.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with key informants. The interview guide was developed based on theoretical concepts of digital CSR communication and purchasing behaviors. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select informants deemed reliable and competent, ensuring they were rich sources of information (Pandin & Yanto, 2023). To investigate how digital CSR communication contributes to millennials' purchasing behavior, the following criteria were used to select participants, as illustrated in Table 1: a) Instagram activity where participants are active users, where they needed to have a public (unlocked) Instagram account and must have engaged with Instagram at least once in the previous month by uploading photos or videos, b) affiliation with Indonesian unicorn companies, where participants should follow the official Instagram account of at least one of five Indonesian unicorn companies (Gojek, Tokopedia, Traveloka, Bukalapak, or OVO), and c) engagement with CSR content, where participants should have engaged with CSR-related content by either commenting on or liking photos or videos posted by Indonesian unicorn companies about their CSR activities.

Potential participants were contacted via direct messages on Instagram. Each introductory

Table 1 Informant Identity

Informant	Followed Account	Reason for Following
Informant 1	@ovo_id	To learn about promotions.
Informant 2	@ovo_id	To stay updated on promotions.
Informant 3	@ovo_id	To find out about promotions.
Informant 4	@gojekindonesia	To find information about products and promotions.
Informant 5	@gojekindonesia	To explore engaging content.
Informant 6	@gojekindonesia	To find out about promotions.
Informant 7	@traveloka	To find information about hotels and restaurants.
Informant 8	@traveloka	To stay updated on travel policies.
Informant 9	@traveloka	To learn about promotions.
Informant 10	@bukalapak	To gain knowledge about e-commerce, learn how to order products, and find affordable and high-quality gadgets.
Informant 11	@bukalapak	To discover interesting information.
Informant 12	@bukalapak	To stay engaged with promotional programs.
Informant 13	@tokopedia	To stay updated on promotions.
Informant 14	@tokopedia	To stay informed about promotions.
Informant 15	@tokopedia	To find giveaways and promotions.

Source: Interview, 2022

message included an explanation of the study's purpose and a request for their voluntary participation. Before scheduling interviews, participants were sent links to CSR promotional materials to refresh their recall of the CSR videos they had engaged with, for example, content from Tokopedia's Instagram account (@tokopedia) with the #BangkitBersama hashtag posted on 10 December 2021. Additionally, informed consent forms were sent, emphasizing the study's voluntary nature.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via WhatsApp call. Prior to the interviews, the consent forms were explained and re-read to ensure participants fully understood their involvement. The interviews

were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, their native language, to facilitate ease of expression and narrative storytelling. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and openness. The recordings were carefully transcribed, and the transcripts were reviewed multiple times for accuracy and a comprehensive understanding of the interview content.

Moreover, the transcribed data were coded and classified into themes aligned with the research objectives. The coding process was thorough, and made sure that all relevant data were captured and properly categorized through: 1) open coding, where the initial codes were identified and categorized based on

their relevance to the research questions, and 2) axial coding, where initial codes had been thematized. The findings were then translated into English and proofread to maintain accuracy. An inductive analysis approach was used to interpret the data, allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically.

The study adhered to ethical standards by ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Millennials have various motivations for following the Instagram accounts of unicorn companies. Aside from being interested in the promotions, they also seek in-depth information on the companies' CSR activities. They value transparency and appreciate companies' efforts to publicize their other programs on social media. This indicates that millennials seek added value and authenticity in their interactions with unicorn companies' social media accounts, rather than merely pursuing promotional offers.

I follow this [account] not just because of the promotions, but also to get other information from OVO about the CSR they are conducting, and perhaps about other programs they are developing, which are also posted. (Informant 1, follower of OVO, personal interview, November 27, 2022).

Indonesian unicorn companies have partnered with MSMEs (Micro, Small, and

Medium Enterprises) as part of their CSR program implementation. The implication is that social responsibility is not only a government duty but also requires contributions from the private sector.

It's quite gratifying to help society advance the economy in Indonesia. It's not just the government's responsibility; the private sector also has a crucial role, especially large companies. So, the hope is that there will be more involvement from large private companies. Essentially, it's about building the economy, especially since there have been many collaborations lately that seem to be able to boost the economy. (Informant 4, follower of Gojek, personal interview, May 13, 2022).

Gojek provides facilities where the government hasn't. For instance, Gojek offered COVID-19 vaccination facilities to help people access these services. (Informant 5, follower of Gojek, personal interview, November 27, 2022).

Issues concerning minorities and marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, have also received attention from Indonesian unicorn companies. This provides significant value, particularly when issues are overlooked by other companies. This is highly positive for the company, as it demonstrates its commitment to supporting marginalized or minority groups.

Traveloka is empowering people with disabilities. This is very positive for Traveloka because they are willing to engage with marginalized or minority groups. (Informant 7, follower of Traveloka, personal interview, November 16, 2022).

As unicorn companies rapidly grow, their

impact on traditional business revenue streams, such as ticket sales agents, becomes more evident. It is therefore crucial for such unicorn companies to establish strong partnerships with these agents. To achieve this goal, unicorn companies need to listen to and understand the needs of those affected by their growth. Millennials value companies that demonstrate social responsibility by building good, mutually beneficial relationships with traditional business partners, in addition to providing direct economic benefits through their innovations. By demonstrating a commitment to collaboration and the well-being of all stakeholders, unicorn companies can enhance their positive image and gain the trust of millennials who seek more than mere business transactions.

Traveloka is beginning to acknowledge those who have been, so to speak, affected by this business. For instance, they partner with ticket agents so that these agents can become distribution channels. It's not just about going directly to the end user, but also partnering with ticket agents. At the very least, to listen to the needs of the ticket agents. (Informant 8, follower of Traveloka, personal interview, November 10, 2022).

Effective CSR communication by unicorn companies can add value and shape positive perceptions. Communicating CSR programs through platforms such as Instagram demonstrates both companies' social commitment and effective branding. In transparently and engagingly presenting CSR activities, unicorn companies can build a positive image that resonates with millennial

values. Therefore, effective and authentic CSR communication can increase customer loyalty and strengthen a company's market position.

So far, I see Gojek as being very socially conscious. Their branding strategy has penetrated and resonated with the market. It's like when a marketer offers a product; they know it's about branding." (Informant 5, follower of Gojek, personal interview, November 27, 2022).

Through their CSR programs, unicorn companies contribute to advancing MSMEs in Indonesia, which enables them to become more adaptive to digitalization. These companies serve as both digital economic platforms and media for educating the public about the importance of technology in supporting MSMEs. To achieve this, they can work to proactively create breakthroughs and reach MSMEs in remote areas, which are often difficult to access through conventional media. By influencing digital technologies, these companies serve as bridges that connect small business owners to broader markets. This can help them compete effectively in the digital era.

The hope is that marketplaces will become more educational and assist MSMEs, with more breakthroughs to help small communities in remote areas that are still not reached by traditional media. After all, marketplaces have the potential to support traders in this digital era. (Informant 15, follower of Tokopedia, personal interview, October 18, 2022)

Promotional messages on Instagram can help increase user loyalty by attracting their attention through appealing offers. More

intriguingly, however, users continue to use services even after these promotions have ended. User loyalty can persist and grow when companies meet consumers' needs and build trust. Therefore, effective CSR communication can strengthen long-term user trust and loyalty.

Even without promotions, I use the app, especially when there's a promotion; it makes me more enthusiastic about using it. (Informant 4, follower of Gojek, personal interview, May 13, 2022)

As a Traveloka user, I will still choose it for all my travel-related needs. Even though many companies offer similar services, I am loyal to one brand. (Informant 9, follower of Traveloka, personal interview, November 10, 2022).

Instagram is highly effective for reaching the public and educating consumers about companies' CSR programs. For the rapid growth of social media and Indonesia's large user base, unicorn companies are expected to leverage popular platforms to communicate their CSR initiatives. However, such communication needs to be adjusted to the characteristics and users of each social media platform, as well as to the unicorn company's profile and target audience. This enables CSR messages to be more targeted and to have a greater impact.

Gojek's CSR communication on Instagram is quite powerful nowadays. The hope is to broadcast on more social media platforms. Instagram is still needed because it is one of the most widely used social media platforms in terms of active users. (Informant 6, follower of Gojek, personal interview, June 27, 2023)

Millennials expect creative and visually appealing CSR communication in the digital era. To meet this expectation, unicorn companies can draw inspiration from popular films by creating content with humorous elements, such as jokes or humorous advertisements. This approach is expected to make CSR messages more memorable and resonate with audiences. Additionally, unicorn companies must pay attention to aesthetics in their communication, so that their content does not merely appear to sell products but instead focuses on storytelling experiences and the positive impacts of CSR.

Maybe a film is already in our minds, and so it sticks better, like a parody or an advertisement turning into something else. Then it's remembered for a longer time. (Informant 10, follower of Bukalapak, personal interview, November 27, 2022).

It's already good. Maybe it could be made more aesthetically pleasing. I like it, and it doesn't seem like it's selling a product. Now it's more about sharing people's experiences and the behind-the-scenes. (Informant 13, follower of Tokopedia, personal interview, May 25, 2022)

Good CSR communication can enhance satisfaction among social media followers. When CSR communication is delivered in a simple and informative manner, supported by attractive visuals, viewers are more likely to understand the message conveyed and be interested in watching the uploaded videos. Therefore, content created with consideration of millennials' preferences and information consumption habits can increase engagement and appreciation of the company's CSR

initiatives.

Overall, I am satisfied with the video. On Instagram, the explanation is brief in the post. That also helps people understand or watch the video. (Informant 11, follower of Bukalapak, personal interview, November 8, 2022).

[I am] quite satisfied because it is informative. The words are easy to understand, and the visuals are attractive. (Informant 2, follower of OVO, personal interview, November 29, 2022)

Unicorn companies attempt to provide a positive user experience for their followers by presenting interactive and engaging content. CSR content is delivered in line with trends and current developments relevant to the target market. With the trends and content that resonate with millennials, unicorn companies can enhance the appeal and effectiveness of their CSR communication on digital platforms.

Thank you for providing a user experience that is interactive and catchy. The background sound follows the [current] trends. The concepts are also refreshing; I find them fresh." (Informant 7, follower of Traveloka, personal interview, November 16, 2022).

Unicorn companies are actively engaging bloggers to raise awareness of their CSR programs and increase their visibility to the public. By enabling bloggers to discuss CSR programs across social media channels, unicorn companies can leverage bloggers' creativity and reach to expand their audiences. This approach allows them to create more authentic and relevant CSR communications that align with the values and preferences of their millennial

consumers. In this way, unicorn companies can enhance public awareness and engagement with their CSR initiatives.

One of my contributions was when Gojek organized a gathering and launched a new program. The program was targeted at the general public, including bloggers and others, to promote their new program and increase its visibility. At that time, Gojek allowed participants to freely help spread the word about their programs through social media, writing in their own ways. (Informant 4, follower of Gojek, personal interview, May 13, 2022).

Unicorn companies can communicate their CSR programs interactively and encourage the active engagement and participation of millennial followers. The responses from followers fall into two categories: explicit and implicit. Explicit responses include actions such as liking, saving important posts, sharing content, leaving comments, and participating in quizzes. Meanwhile, implicit responses occur when followers do not visibly react but are still influenced by the content or use it for personal consumption. These creative, interactive CSR communications can help unicorn companies build stronger and more meaningful relationships with millennials, increasing awareness and appreciation of their CSR initiatives.

I definitely like and save some posts. I save and share them with my friends. For comments, I usually leave one, for example, during giveaways. Sometimes there are quizzes when they are live on the app. (Informant 7, follower of Traveloka, personal interview, November 16, 2022).

"Such reactions are more personal

consumption.” (Informant 3, follower of OVO, personal interview, November 28, 2022).

The strength of a post lies in its ability to capture the audience’s attention. In this context, followers’ attention is crucial, particularly when they watch a video to the end. This happens because visually appealing, relevant presentations create a more engaging, captivating experience. Companies can ensure their CSR messages receive maximum attention from millennial consumers through posts, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions and increasing awareness of and support for CSR initiatives.

If I am interested, I watch it to the end. The information is intriguing and shows things I didn’t know before, like how OVO does things, because the visuals are also interesting. (Informant 2, follower of OVO, personal interview, November 29, 2022).

Through social media platforms such as Instagram, companies can create an impact that encourages users to purchase products and builds a sense of connection and involvement in their social programs. Effective CSR communication can influence consumers to purchase a company’s products, with the expectation that their purchases contribute to the promoted social initiatives. By purchasing products, consumers perceive themselves as participating in the company’s social programs, especially when a portion of the profits from their purchases is allocated to support these programs.

Definitely, as users, we feel respected. We are not just shopping; it turns out that Tokopedia is not just pursuing business

goals but also acts responsibly through its social programs. As consumers, we don’t lose out because Tokopedia allocates a percentage of what we spend for their social programs. (Informant 14, follower of Tokopedia, personal interview, October 24, 2022).

Followers are often motivated to make purchases not only by location but also by the company’s empathetic approach. Through highlighting partnerships with MSMEs, companies can promote social values and support for these businesses, thereby motivating millennial consumers. Consumers are more motivated to buy when they know their purchases contribute to MSME success and support broader social initiatives.

If the products offered by Bukalapak come from MSMEs and are interesting, I will buy them, whether they are from MSMEs inside or outside Jogja. (Informant 12, follower of Bukalapak, personal interview, November 18, 2022).

The presence of competitors does not divert followers’ attention from unicorn companies, as the benefits and values communicated through effectively communicated CSR programs on Instagram tend to strengthen their loyalty. Followers perceive that the advantages they gain from engaging with unicorn companies are more relevant and valuable than those offered by competitors. This ensures that their purchasing decisions are more strongly influenced by social values and the direct benefits they derive from the brands they support.

As a user of Traveloka, I will continue to use it for all my travel-related needs, even though many other companies offer

the same things. I am loyal to one brand.” (Informant 9, follower of Traveloka, personal interview, November 12, 2022).

In the context of millennial consumers’ expectations for CSR communication, posts from unicorn companies may increase followers’ interest in purchasing products. Followers often make purchase decisions based on logical, rational considerations shaped by the language and visualizations used in the content. Content presented in clear language, with attractive visuals, can shape perceptions of product value and benefits and strengthen purchasing decisions. Thus, unicorn companies can leverage these elements to enhance appeal and encourage purchase decisions based on the CSR conveyed through social media.

If I buy, sure. It’s just how they promote it; sometimes we see the language and reality are different; cafes are different, products are different. This is a factor that can hinder buying. (Informant 6, follower of Gojek, personal interview, June 27, 2023).

Millennials seek added value from companies, particularly authenticity and transparency, especially in CSR activities. Millennials, as individuals who interact in social contexts, tend to align their personal identities with the values upheld by the companies they follow (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Thus, unicorn companies use Instagram as a promotional platform and a channel to engage socially conscious consumers who seek to take action that drives positive change. They are interested in information about CSR programs that enhance social and environmental welfare and align their identities with companies that

demonstrate responsible practices.

The findings of this study indicate that unicorn companies in Indonesia implement CSR initiatives that focus on relevant social issues, such as providing vaccination facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative offers benefits that the government does not always provide, while also advancing social and political objectives. Through collaboration with MSMEs, unicorn companies demonstrate their commitment to social welfare. Such collaboration in implementing CSR not only shows the private sector’s contribution to economic development but also underscores its commitment to social sustainability. Unicorn companies recognize millennials as a significant stakeholder group (Kim & Moon, 2015). They play a significant role in shaping organisational sustainability, as they view social responsibility as a shared duty among the private sector, government, and society.

Unicorn companies play an essential role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by supporting MSMEs and addressing social issues that receive less attention, such as minority rights and disability inclusion. This approach creates value and enhances public perception, ultimately strengthening millennials’ emotional connection with and empathy toward the brand, thereby improving its image among millennials (Khan et al., 2019). They believe that by supporting unicorn companies, they are also contributing to greater, more sustainable social change.

CSR programs conducted and

communicated through Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened the position of Indonesian unicorn companies as corporate citizens with greater economic and social power than the government (Garriga & Mele, 2004). During the pandemic, the Indonesian government oversaw the gradual distribution of vaccines. However, the private sector also played an active role in helping the government ensure a more equitable distribution of vaccines nationwide. The role of corporate citizens not only demonstrates support for government efforts but also constitutes a form of social investment (Garriga & Mele, 2004).

All unicorn companies in Indonesia actively collaborate with MSMEs to support economic growth. This initiative could drive economic growth become a strategic step toward fulfilling their responsibilities as corporate citizens, helping improve the community's economy. This collaboration aligns with SDG number 8, which focuses on sustainable economic growth (United Nations, 2025).

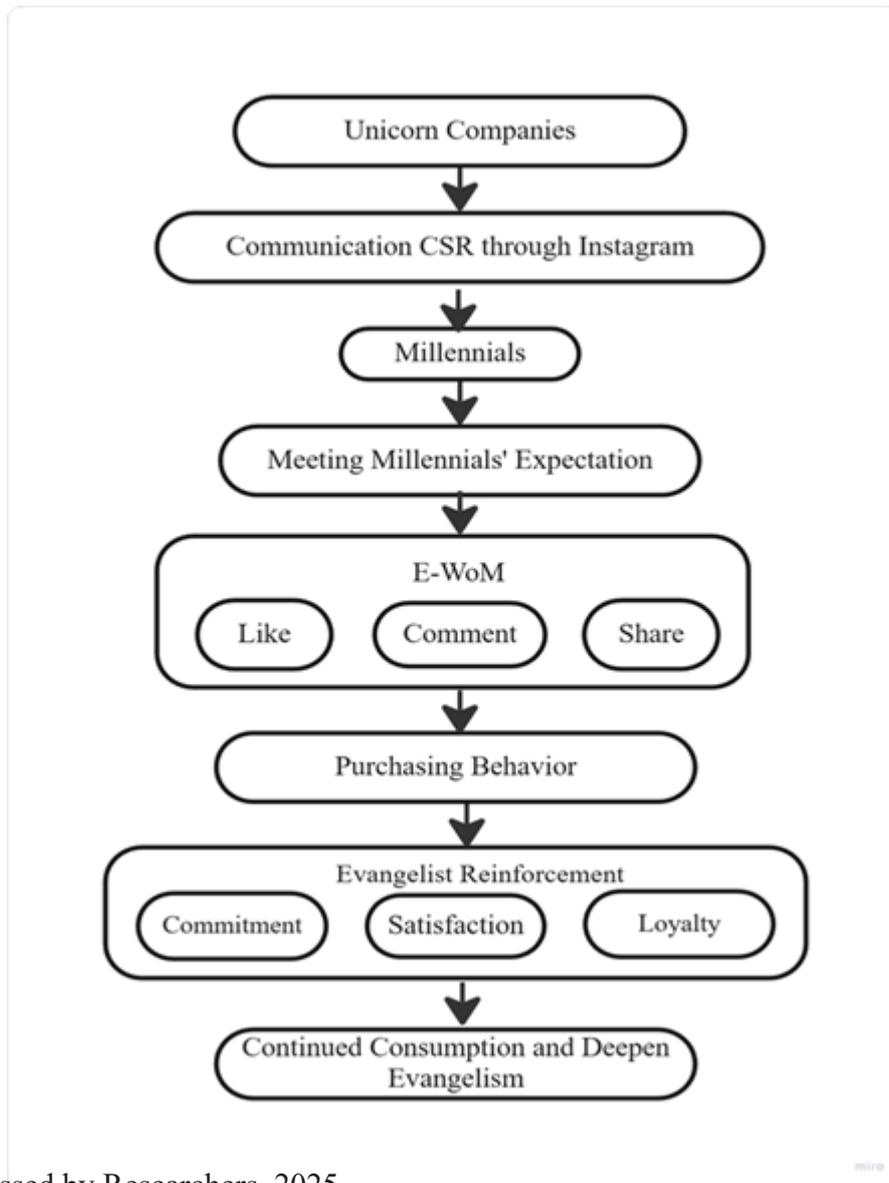
MSMEs in Indonesia are vital to community employment. According to the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2025), MSMEs that have entered the digital ecosystem in Indonesia have shown significant growth. With support and partnerships from unicorn companies, MSMEs can grow faster and create decent jobs. This collaboration helps sustain the business and digital ecosystem in Indonesia.

Also, Instagram is widely regarded as a powerful platform for reaching audiences in Indonesia (Kusumasondjaja, 2018). In the

context of CSR communication, Instagram is a social media platform that can educate the public about companies' CSR activities and influence public opinion (Yadav & Verma, 2025). Additionally, Instagram provides an alternative social media platform for communicating CSR programs transparently to millennials. The internet's power to transform media into tools for consumer empowerment enables consumers to become brand evangelists or even brand destroyers, depending on how these platforms are used (Argenti & Barnes, 2009, p. 12).

For millennials, CSR activities communicated via social media, such as Instagram, can shape positive perceptions of companies (Yang et al., 2020), as evidenced by their reactions (Negoro & Santoso, 2024). Research shows that the social commitment demonstrated by unicorn companies creates the perception that they share values with millennials. Such a value alignment can increase millennials' brand loyalty, in this case, to unicorn companies, because they feel more connected with and committed to brands that support social issues they deem important. Millennial loyalty drives the creation of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM), which influences millennials' purchasing decisions regarding products or services from unicorn companies.

Effective CSR communication through Instagram is key for unicorn companies to achieve and maintain millennial consumer loyalty (Macca et al., 2024). Through visually appealing and informative content, companies



Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

Figure 1 Creating Brand Evangelist Process

can build narratives that align with this generation's values and preferences. Millennials are more likely to interact with content that reflects authenticity and offers emotional experiences, motivating them to support the company's products or services. Through emotional and aesthetic appeal, unicorn companies can build deeper, more meaningful relationships with their audiences. This strategy strengthens companies' image as socially responsible entities and enables unicorns to

increase engagement and solidify their position.

From a CSR communication perspective, millennials have high expectations after following a company on Instagram and seeing its posts. CSR communication can be packaged in an engaging, creative way that incorporates features and accents to enhance millennial awareness. Instagram is used not only for promotion and product sales but also for storytelling that highlights the positive impact of implemented CSR programs. This

creates an emotional connection between unicorn companies and millennials. By meeting customer expectations and needs, companies indirectly foster positive values such as commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty (Ajina et al., 2019), which, in turn, strengthen consumer loyalty and trust, thereby influencing purchasing behavior.

The findings show that millennials can act as brand evangelists, supporting and inspiring positive behavior among their followers. Brand evangelism is a form of consumer behavior that involves not only purchasing products but also recommending them to others (Sajoy, 2018). Evangelist reinforcement, such as commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty, encourages millennials to continue consumption and deepen evangelism. The findings reveal that unicorn companies have asked several millennials to create Instagram content in their own unique styles, drawing on their personal experiences.

Sharing content about unicorn companies' CSR activities and providing positive comments can increase awareness and appreciation among followers. Consumers' attitudes toward companies' CSR on social media reflect their engagement with CSR communication (Chu et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Millennials seek meaningful relationships with companies whose personal values align with CSR initiatives. Through social activities, such as partnerships with MSMEs and vaccine distribution during the pandemic, unicorn

companies are committed to social welfare and sustainability. This creates a strong connection with millennials, which builds a positive perception of the company as a responsible corporate citizen and encourages them to purchase its products.

Furthermore, millennials' role as brand evangelists strengthens unicorn companies' positions in competitive markets. Through sharing positive experiences and supporting CSR initiatives, millennials raise brand awareness within their networks and inspire social change. Collaborating with millennials enables unicorn companies to achieve wider reach and increase the impact of their CSR initiatives. Companies that consistently demonstrate a commitment to relevant social issues will have a competitive advantage in retaining socially conscious millennials.

Although the results of this study cannot be generalized, it gives a solid foundation for understanding the expectations of Indonesian millennial consumers as brand evangelists. Nevertheless, the findings of this study serve as a reminder of the importance of considering millennial consumers as brand evangelists when communicating CSR through digital media. They are financially and economically stable and tend to support, inspire, and recommend companies' products.

This research can be developed further in a specific context, considering the organizational culture, such as values and behavioral aspects, that potentially affect digital CSR communication to strengthen companies'

reputation and get support from stakeholders.

Through audiovisual content, unicorn companies use digital media to communicate their CSR. It is an opportunity for future studies to investigate how companies build their reputation and interact with the public through a semiotic lens. This method can provide a comprehensive explanation, not only of the denotation and connotation of messages delivered through audiovisual content, but also of aspects beyond them.

For future studies, using an experimental method helps researchers assess the impact of digital CSR communication on millennials' consumption decisions. Hopefully, it could optimize digital media for communicating CSR. In addition, future research should include Generation Z participants, who are digital natives. Understanding this generation will yield additional insights that benefit companies in developing digital CSR communication.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, N.R.S. and S.H.N.; methodology, N.R.S.; formal analysis, N.R.S.; investigation, N.R.S.; resources, N.R.S.; data curation, N.R.S.; writing (original draft preparation), N.R.S.; writing (review and editing), N.R.S. and S.H.N.; supervision, N.R.S.; project administration, S.H.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who supported us in completing this work, especially Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta for funding this research, and to all the participants who generously shared their time and insights during the interviews. The authors understand and acknowledge the use of AI tools (ChatGPT and Grammarly) during the preparation of this work to identify improvements in the writing style. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full

responsibility for the content of the publication.

Data Availability Statement: All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research has been fully funded by Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta.

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