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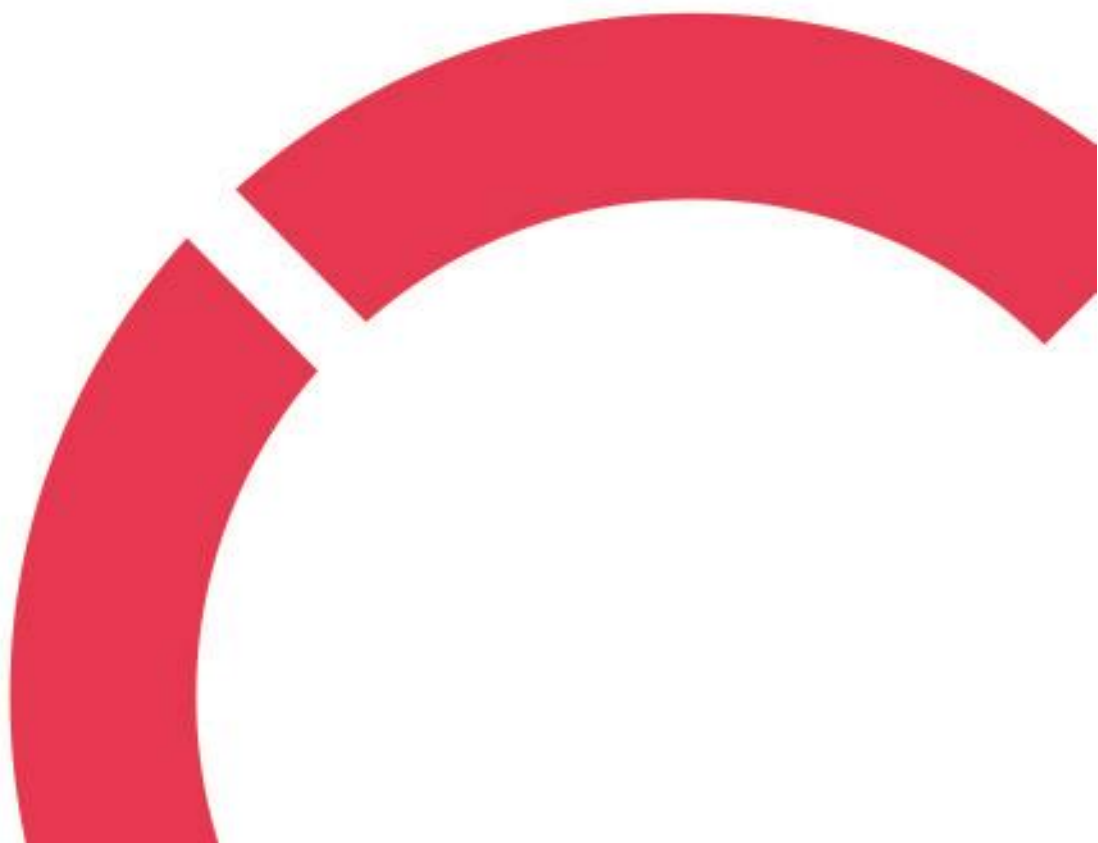
**THE IMPACT OF UNILEVER'S CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY  
INITIATIVES**

**Thesis**

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**International Business**

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## ABSTRACT

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<b>Name of thesis</b> The Impact of Unilever's Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives		
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<p>Unilever is an Anglo-Dutch, multinational company which operates all around the world with fast-moving consumer goods. The organization holds great responsibility to affect millions of lives through its actions. The following report has aimed to identify whether Unilever is creating a meaningful impact or not through its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. While doing so, the report has focused on the concept of CSR, the motivation behind working on corporate social responsibilities, the types of CSR, and the impact of engaging in CSR activities.</p> <p>The key finding from this report was that Unilever mostly engages in philanthropic and value-creating CSR activities, and that is justified because philanthropic activities help in creating a good image and value-creating CSR activities are well suited with large organizations, and they also impact the performance of the organization.</p> <p>The thesis findings state that Unilever has a bad track of water pollution, deforestation, violating employee safety standards, sexual harassment at the workplace, and, most importantly, the organization has been one of the key polluters in the world through plastic and through emitting CO<sub>2</sub>. However, through its value-creating CSR activities, the organization has been able to bring impactful changes to its stakeholders around the world. However, when it comes to preserving the climate, which affects all the stakeholders, Unilever has lacked behind greatly by not putting enough effort into reducing emissions and plastic pollution.</p>		

<b>Keywords</b> Corporate Social Responsibility, Climate, Emission, Pollution, Sustainability, Stakeholders
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

When an organization decides to serve society in any manner and engages in such activity, that is called corporate social responsibility or, in short, referred to as CSR or CSR activities (Ghoneim, 2019). Organizations nowadays are increasing their CSR activities for reasons like increasing brand awareness, creating a good brand image, giving back to society, and realizing more revenue. Examples of CSR activities include participating in activities that ensure low emissions, fair trade, ensuring diversity and inclusion, giving donations and ensuring environmental safety in every action. CSR ensures that a business organization is not seen just as a money-making machine; rather, they are also considerate of the people they are related to who ensure the business continuation. Since corporate social responsibilities are becoming a more common operation for business organizations, it has become vital to understand how CSR works in a real-life scenario. To understand this, this thesis will shed light on understanding the impact of CSR activities by reflecting on Unilever's CSR actions. The report will provide a detailed analysis of why organizations participate in CSR activities, what benefits organizations acquire by participating in CSR activities, what measures Unilever has taken to participate in CSR activities, and how they have done it; the report will also try to understand what benefits Unilever has acquired by participating in CSR activities and if there is any gap from Unilever's end regarding CSR actions that need to be addressed by the organization.

The whole purpose of the report will be to understand when an organization participates in CSR activities and what impact it has internally and externally. The research findings from this report will go a long way for business organizations to understand why CSR is important and whether they should consider participating in CSR activities or not.

## 2 ABOUT UNILEVER

Unilever started its journey as a family business in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with butter, then later moved to the business of producing soaps (Unilever PLC (a), 2022). Since then, the organization has been in operation for about more than 100 years as one of the largest fast-moving consumer goods serving companies. Unilever, at present, is operating in 190 countries, and it has a consumer base of around 3.4 billion people who can be considered repetitive customers. The organization realized a €52 billion turnover in 2021, which demonstrates how well the organization is performing. Unilever has more than 400 brands; among them, Unilever has 13 specific brands that realized a turnover of around €1 billion in 2021. The products of Unilever can be categorized into five major groups, and these fall under personal care, home care, beauty & wellbeing, ice cream, and nutrition.

To understand the internal picture of Unilever, a critical view is needed regarding its hierarchy, employees, and culture. Unilever has around 1,48,000 employees all across the globe, and the organization takes diversity and inclusion very seriously since it ensures a 52/48 gender balance and it also needs to be noted that the organization ensures leaders who are local to their designated market, and this rate is around 92% (Unilever PLC (b), 2022).

The organization does not only consider the people aspect; rather, it also prioritizes the wellbeing of the environment because Unilever ensures a 53% recycling of the plastics that it uses in packaging. Also, the organization has ensured around a 64% reduction in emissions compared to its emission in 2015 (Unilever Annual Report and Accounts, 2021).

### **3 CONCEPTS & METHODS**

This section will discuss regarding the scope of the study, the problem statement the thesis is addressing, the objective of the thesis, the hypothesis, the limitations, strengths, and the methodology that has been used to address the problem and the objective of the thesis.

#### **3.1 Scope of the study**

The dissertation report's main purpose is to provide a thorough understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility by reflecting on the initiatives taken by Unilever in regard to corporate social responsibility. The report will discuss the key concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility and different motivations that persuade organizations to participate in CSR activities. Also, the report will discuss different types of CSR activities and their impact on society. These findings will later be used to analyze the CSR activities of Unilever to understand the similarities and gaps that Unilever is not addressing while engaging in CSR activities.

#### **3.2 Problem statement**

Many organizations refrain from engaging in activities that involve Corporate Social Responsibility because organizations perceive that CSR activities are unnecessary, and this requires an investment that reduces revenue. Also, there is a gap of knowledge for business organizations in terms of understanding how CSR activities actually make an impact. The following report takes Unilever as an example and tries to showcase how Unilever's CSR activities have made an impact both externally and internally for all stakeholders. Also, through this report, business organizations will understand in what ways an organization can engage in socially responsible activities.

#### **3.3 The objective of the report**

The dissertation report has primary and some secondary objectives while discussing Corporate Social Responsibility.

The primary objective of this thesis is to understand the initiatives taken by Unilever in regard to addressing corporate social responsibility, the intention of Unilever regarding engaging in various CSR activities, the impact of CSR activities in various sectors undertaken by Unilever, and if there is any major unaddressed issue by Unilever in regard to CSR activities.

The secondary objectives of the thesis involve understanding the benefits for a business organization for participating in CSR activities, the intent behind CSR activities, how CSR activities are executed by the business organization, and different types of CSR activities and their impact on society.

### **3.4 Research questions**

The dissertation report aims to answer a set of questions in regard to Corporate Social Responsibility. The research questions are how Unilever engages in CSR activities; what impact does Unilever has on its stakeholders through its CSR activities; what are the different kinds of motivation that an organization might have while engaging in CSR activities, and what options do businesses have when it comes to engaging in CSR activities?

### **3.5 Research hypothesis**

In order to critically understand the impact of CSR activities of Unilever, the dissertation will be based on the hypothesis that Unilever creates a meaningful impact on its stakeholders through its CSR activities. Therefore, the null hypothesis will state that Unilever does not create any meaningful impact on its stakeholders through its CSR activities.

### **3.6 Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study is that this report has collected data from Unilever's website to understand the initiative and the impact of each of the initiatives based on the data information and data shared by Unilever. This is why there is a lack of verification of the data posted by Unilever.



### **3.7 Strength and Application of the report**

Although the report has information collected mostly from Unilever's website, the report has cross-verified the gaps in Unilever's initiative so that the readers can understand the problematic areas where Unilever is lagging behind in terms of ensuring their corporate social responsibility.

The report findings will allow the reader to have a thorough understanding of what corporate social responsibility is and why organizations participate in corporate social responsibilities. The report will also cover the types of corporate social responsibilities, and the report will also share insight on what type of corporate social responsibility a business organization should follow. Finally, the report moves towards the example of Unilever, where the reader will be able to acquire real-life examples of corporate social responsibilities. Through Unilever, the readers will be able to understand the types of corporate social responsibility-related activities that Unilever has engaged itself in, and the readers will also be able to understand the impact of each of the corporate social responsibility-related activities and the gaps that Unilever has in terms of addressing its stakeholder's expectations. Based on the findings, the reader will be able to understand the level of impact Unilever has been able to create through its CSR activities.

### **3.8 Methodology**

The following dissertation report is on understanding the impact of Unilever's CSR activities. The report is a descriptive report and aims to use secondary data that considers both qualitative and quantitative data to address the key objective of the report. The first three-step of addressing the dissertation objective includes being clear on the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, understanding the motivations behind engaging in CSR activities, and understanding various types of CSR activities and their internal and external impact. The first and second steps will be discussed in the literature review section.

The first step for addressing the research objective is to clearly address the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, and for this, the definition of CSR will be acquired from various published journal articles to be clear on the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility. In the second step, the report will

demonstrate the motivations of CSR activities for business organizations, and the sources of this information will be acquired from academic and non-academic sources like newspapers or industry sources.

In the third step, the report will define the key stakeholders of Unilever. Fourthly, the focus will be on understanding various types of CSR activities and their internal and external impact. The source for this information will be Unilever's website. Afterward, the report will shed light on if there are any gaps in addressing the corporate social responsibilities of Unilever. The dissertation report in the final phase will draw a discussion that will highlight the key lacking and strengths.

## 4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section will cover the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility in detail, including details on why organizations participate in CSR activities, the types of CSR activities, the use case for each type of CSR activity, and the impact of CSR activity on business performance.

### 4.1 Concept of corporate social responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility is referred to as actions that take into consideration the stakeholder's requirements and the performance of economic, social, and environmental actions by the organizations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). According to Hopkins, CSR is the actions and processes of an organization through which it handles its stakeholders in a responsible manner that is acceptable in a civilized society. Here Hopkins addresses civil society because CSR requires social responsibilities to be addressed, and according to him, economic and environmental responsibility falls under social responsibility. Russell argues that, when it comes to corporate social responsibility, organizations need to do more than just focus on economic and technological performance and focus on increasing the standard of living for the people. Bowen refers to CSR as the organizational actions that align with a society's values and objectives. On the other hand, Wood refers to CSR activities, not as a separate action that an organization needs to take under pressure; rather, it is an integral part of performing business. (Kraus & Brtitzelmaier, 2012).

To summarize, the concept of CSR or Corporate Social Responsibility by various authors, there are some key traits that can be identified when we talk about the concept of CSR, and all the definitions by various authors have the core idea of CSR in common. After analyzing the different definitions by different authors regarding Corporate Social Responsibility, it could be stated that CSR activities are the actions of organizations that, no matter under what intention are executed, must focus on the wellbeing of the society, and this includes all parties who are internal and external to the organization.

## 4.2 The motivation behind engaging in CSR activities

When an organization participates in CSR activities, the organization's benefits are not limited to only favorable attitudes from the stakeholders, rather the organization is able to enjoy other benefits like developing a good image among the stakeholders, building a strong relationship with the stakeholders, being able to attract resourceful talented employees, and most importantly it also helps the organization to generate more profit for the overall effect of the CSR activities. Although it has also been pointed out by the authors that there are two key reasons why organizations participate in CSR activities, and these can be classified into two categories. The first reason is extrinsic, in which an organization's main purpose in serving through CSR activities is to gain more profit from the overall effect of CSR activities and the second reason is intrinsic, where an organization genuinely wants to address a social issue through its CSR activities (Du et al. 2010).

Reeve argues that CSR is a method for organizations to benefit themselves while also doing good for society. According to him, there are multiple motivations behind an organization's participation in CSR activities. First comes innovation because one of the key purposes of CSR is ensuring sustainability, and to ensure sustainability, organizations must be prone to research and development to ensure innovation. For example, Unilever came up with a conditioner that uses less water, and this innovation is linked to its sustainability. Secondly, CSR activities are executed to ensure cost savings, and this could be done by ensuring the least waste in the production process, using less energy, and through many other activities. Ensuring brand differentiation is another key reason that motivates organizations to participate in CSR activities; however, nowadays, this reason has become obsolete in today's business context because this strategy is overused across the globe by various renowned brands. Organizations, through CSR activities, are able to ensure customer engagement by communicating with the customers regarding various CSR initiatives. Customer engagement ensures that the relationship between an organization and its customers is not only transactional; rather, customer engagement also ensures that customers are able to deeply connect their values and ideologies with the organization (Epstein-Reeves, 2012). According to Carroll (1979), organizations have four distinct responsibilities for which they engage themselves in CSR activities. Firstly, comes economic responsibility which means that organizations need to be profitable and need to be productive to meet the needs of the consumers in society. Secondly, comes legal responsibility, where organizations participate in CSR activities because it is required by law. For example, in many developed countries, automobile manufacturers need to ensure that their produced vehicles are not exceeding the limit of emission that is stated by the law.

Based on various social norms and values, organizations perceive some CSR actions as their ethical responsibility and this type of activity is called Ethical Responsibility. When organizations sometimes participate in CSR activities that are fully intentional and not initiated just to adhere to some obligation can be classified as Discretionary Responsibility.

If we are to generalize on whether the majority of organizations participate in CSR activities because of earning profit or because they want to do what is right, studies have found that it is the intrinsic reason or the need to do the right thing is, what drives organizations to participate in CSR activities (Grimstad et al., 2020). When it comes to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), CSR activities are executed with the intent to give back something to society rather than earning profit. Also, SMEs prioritize their local image, and this need to develop a good image among the local community is also another key reason why they participate in CSR activities (Santos, 2011).

When all the motivations behind CSR activities are brought together, it is quite convenient to list down some of the key reasons why business organizations participate in CSR activities based on the literature that has been studied above. There are generally three reasons behind participating in CSR activities; firstly, organizations participate in CSR activities because they voluntarily want to give something back to society. The second reason is organizations want to participate in CSR activities because they want to increase their profit generation by doing good, and this is achieved because organizations get to enjoy a good brand reputation, differentiation benefits, cost-cutting benefits, strong relationships with the stakeholders, and many other advantages. The third reason why organizations participate in CSR activities is that they are forced to do so because of local law or because of community pressure; otherwise, the organization is expected to face backlash from the operating market for noncompliance (How mandatory corporate social responsibility, wiley online library, 2023).

### **4.3 Types of CSR Activities**

According to Chen et al., (2018), there are three types of CSR activities, and the differentiation is done solely based on what intent organizations are executing the CSR activities for. Philanthropic CSR comes first, and it refers to CSR activities that are not tied to any other reason but to assist society; in other words, organizations do not seek anything in return like good brand image, profit, or reputation. For example, Coca-Cola has donated to many primary school education programs, and there is no extrinsic benefit Coca-Cola can acquire from this, and it is done solely for the purpose of serving society.

Secondly, promotional CSR activities are executed with the intent of gaining exposure and developing a good brand image and brand awareness. This strategy falls under the category of doing good by doing good, where the organization gains monetary benefit by serving society. For example, when McDonald's announced that it would donate 10 cents for every burger sold, it was generating revenue and was also serving society at the same time (Barone et al., 2000). The third type of CSR is called the value-creating activity, and in this type of CSR activity, an organization tries to relate its core competency with a social cause. In this strategy, the organization has to invest in a substantial manner to support a social cause. Studies have found that value-creating CSR strategies are received more positively by customers compared to philanthropic or promotional CSR activities (Chen et al., 2018). However, when it comes to effectiveness, it needs to be noted that organizations that have low competence to invest and make an impact are better off following a promotional CSR activity because they underperform when it comes to value-creating CSR activities. But organizations that have high competency should follow value-creating CSR activities because they are able to create more impact through such initiatives. But if we consider how well philanthropic CSR activities perform, it needs to be noted that the positive effect is similar for both high and low-competency firms (Chen et al., 2018).

#### **4.4 Impact of corporate social responsibility activities**

A study of six organizations that have participated in CSR activities was done to understand the impact of CSR. The two key dimensions that were under scrutiny were turnover and Return on Assets or ROA. It was found that the organizations that participated in CSR activities showed higher performance in terms of gaining a higher turnover and in attaining a higher ROA (Siddiq & Javed, 2014). It was very interesting to find that the impact of CSR activities differed based on the type of industry from which an organization is participating in CSR activity. This is mostly because not all types of business organizations enjoy a similar level of exposure when executing CSR activities. In order to study the impact of CSR on brand reputation, a study was done on 130 US-based companies which were from varying industries. The study results have stated that when an organization participates in CSR activities, it positively impacts the organization's reputation among the public (Rothenhoefer, 2018). The study also points out that the benefits of CSR activities take time for organizations to realize; in other words, the benefits of CSR take time to get emerged. The result also point out a very interesting finding, and it is that organizations need to execute a chain of CSR activities to ensure the benefits of CSR activities, and sudden execution of CSR activity to hide a bad deed does not work at all to uphold or increase bad reputation among the public (Rothenhoefer, 2018).

A particular study was done to understand the impact of CSR on consumers' brand preferences (Tingchi Liu et al., 2014). The study was conducted on Chinese restaurants that undertook CSR activities. The study findings suggest that CSR activities have a strong relationship with consumer brand preference when it comes to the service industry. Customers also evaluate an organization's participation in CSR activities to evaluate an organization's service quality, and also consumer brand loyalty also depends on the extent to which an organization participates in CSR activities. The study further suggests that when management combines brand management, organizational strategy, and CSR practices and ensures an alignment among these, organizations also get to enjoy a competitive advantage which ensures the sustainability of an organization. However, it needs to be noted that the study results were based on the service industry of China, and further research is needed on other continents to understand the wide applicability of the results (Tingchi Liu et al., 2014).

Based on the literature findings on the impact of CSR, there are a couple of key advantages that can be segregated from the findings. Firstly, CSR activities do help in generating more profit, turnover and return on assets, and it is not just another account for an organization that just brings expense (Siddiq & Javed, 2014). Secondly, not all organizations realize the benefit of CSR in the same manner because some organizations experience it in a relatively high manner, while the impact of CSR is not that significant for some organizations (Siddiq & Javed, 2014). Also, the various benefits of CSR should not be expected to be realized instantly because the effect of CSR on turnover, profit, return on assets, brand reputation, customer loyalty, and other factors takes time; in other words, it is a slow process, but it does provide concrete results. It also needs to be pointed out that CSR activities do not provide any benefit to an organization if the purpose is to hide a misdeed. Finally, CSR activities have a very strong impact on ensuring customer loyalty and building consumer preference towards a brand, and this eventually results in better organizational performance that leads to higher profit generation for an organization (Rothenhoefer, 2018).

## 5 UNILEVER'S CSR ACTIVITY ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the thesis focuses on has focused on identifying who the key stakeholders of Unilever are, and a thorough description of Unilever's CSR activities and their impact is also discussed in this section.

### 5.1 Unilever's stakeholders

Unilever's stakeholders based on priority can be classified into consumers, employees, investors, suppliers, and communities.

Unilever's most important stakeholders are its customers, and they are also important for Unilever they the organization thinks of devising a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. Consumers, in most cases, are concerned with price and quality, but they are also seen to be concerned about the environmental consequences of Unilever's products and their actions (Unilever PLC (c), 2023).

Employees are stakeholders of Unilever who directly impact Unilever and also are directly impacted by Unilever's actions and initiatives. The major requirements of employees are decent work-life balance, good compensation, workplace safety, job security, and growth (Unilever PLC (c), 2023).

Investors are on the third priority list of Unilever. Investors are concerned with the company's performance, profitability, growth, sustainability, innovation, productivity, and expansion of business. These factors motivate investors to invest in Unilever more and to attain confidence in the organization (Unilever PLC (c) , 2023).

Suppliers are also very important for the success of the company because the supply of raw materials of good quality and a decent supply of capacity is vital to ensure the sustainability of the brands of Unilever. Suppliers expect a fair price for their goods and also long-term relationships, which will ensure that their business is gaining growth by supplying to Unilever (Unilever PLC (c), 2023).

Since Unilever operates all around the world, they deal with diverse communities in different markets. Based on the region of the world, community needs might vary, but one of the key needs of the com-



munities is that they seek environmental safety. Addressing the needs of the community is very important because communities can severely influence the image of an organization through their reaction (Unilever PLC (c), 2023).

## **5.2 Examples of CSR activities of Unilever**

Unilever has a long history of engaging in diverse CSR activities, and these CSR initiatives were not devised for a specific group of stakeholders; rather, they considered all kinds of stakeholders and devised different CSR initiatives to cover the interests of different stakeholders (Unilever, 2000). The examples of Unilever's CSR initiatives are presented below.

### **5.2.1 Saving the Environment**

Unilever is focusing on ensuring sustainable living for all of its stakeholders by reducing the impact on the environment for its operations. The core strategy is to double the business operations while reducing the environmental footprint (Planet & Society, 2022). Unilever has set a target to become carbon positive through its operations by the year 2030. Being Carbon Positive means Unilever will be removing more carbon dioxide from the environment compared to what it will be creating through its operations. To achieve this target, Unilever has taken many initiatives, like implementing energy-efficient technologies and investing in renewable energy sources. Till now, Unilever has been able to reduce its emission by 64% from 2015 by using sustainable energy sources like sunlight, wind, water, biomass, and green hydrogen (How we're working towards 100% renewable energy by 2030, 2022).

### **5.2.2 Sustainable Consumption**

As a part of the sustainability plan, Unilever has set a goal to reduce food waste by half during the process of taking food from the factory to the shelf in the year 2022 (Food Waste Solutions, 2022). Unilever has also decided to reduce its carbon footprint by focusing on plant-based sales and to make the sales worth \$1 million within the next seven years (Poinski, 2021) through plant-based products.

Unilever has a set of brands that are referred to as “Sustainable Living Brands” by Unilever because they are focused on improving the wellbeing of people. The portfolio of sustainable living brands includes Dove, Lipton, Ben& Jerry, and other brands. Dove focuses on promoting self-esteem and positivity among women and young girls. Unilever also ensures the least amount of water and energy usage in its Dove brand. For Lipton, and Ben & Jerry, Unilever also uses a similar strategy that ensures the least amount of water and energy usage in packaging, in production, and in the entire supply chain (Maling Purpose Pay, 2022).

### **5.2.3 Responsible Sourcing**

Unilever has ensured responsible sourcing through its Unilever Sustainable Agriculture Code (USAC). The USAC is focused on reducing the environmental and adverse social impact of agriculture. The USAC is devised based on international standards like the United Nations Global Compact, the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles. The USAC covers standards for various issues like usage of the land, water management, health of soil, the welfare of animals, and engagement of communities. The USAC ensures that efficient usage of resources is being conducted while ensuring the rights of the workers and the sustainability of the environment for each of its supply chains (Unilever PLC (d), 2022).

### **5.2.4 Deforestation-Free Supply Chain:**

Unilever has set a target to ensure that their palm oil, paper, boards, tree, soy, and cocoa will be sourced from locations that are free from deforestation by the year 2023 (Solutions to deforestation in our supply chain, 2022). In order to ensure this, Unilever is focusing on tracing its raw material sources. The tracing is done by Unilever through using various technologies, also tracing technology is used with supplier management as well to ensure that sourcing is done from the right place. Unilever has also set a protocol to partner with suppliers who have the intention to stop deforestation. Also, Unilever has set clear guidelines that guide the suppliers in terms of how sourcing should be done and how deforestation should be avoided at all costs. Also, Unilever has also gone far enough to ensure that sourcing is done from areas that are at low risk of causing deforestation. To strengthen the deforestation campaign, Unilever is also working with farmers and smallholders. Unilever is trying to ensure better livelihood opportunities for farmers by diversifying their income sources and by helping

them in increasing their productivity. Secondly, Unilever is empowering farmers and smallholders by helping them restore degraded lands and by helping them in preserving the natural ecosystem. Thirdly, Unilever is working on improving its standards to ensure proper compliance with human rights and to preserve the natural ecosystem in the best manner possible.

The impact of the deforestation campaign has resulted in pollution-free, environmentally friendly packaging and has resulted in deforestation-free sourcing of tea, paper, soy, and cocoa. To further illustrate the impact, it can be stated that 86% of the sourced tea of Unilever is sustainably sourced. While sourcing soy, Unilever has been able to source 93% of its soy from deforestation-free sources. The policies of Unilever to fight off deforestation have also resulted in the removal of many suppliers who have not complied with stopping deforestation (Solutions to deforestation in our supply chain, 2022).

### **5.2.5 Regenerative Agricultural Principles**

Unilever's Regenerative Agricultural Principles are devised to ensure the nourishment of the soil, improvement of water quality, and the regeneration of lands. The regenerative agricultural principles of Unilever includes having a positive impact on soil health, water, and on air, empowering local communities to be empowered enough to ensure their wellbeing and to enable them to be able to protect the environment, ensuring the maximum usage of renewable resources and minimizing the usage of non-renewable resources, and ensuring the lowest resource input during production.

To ensure the implementation of regenerative agriculture and farming Unilever has set up "Lighthouse" programs where the main intention is to identify the support that is required by the suppliers and the farmers to ensure the implementation of regenerative agricultural practices. Through the farmers, Unilever ensures that after harvest, the soil is covered with non-commodity crops, which protects the land till the next growing season. Cover crops ensure the reservation of necessary nutrients, relieve soil compaction, and ensure many other advantages that protect the land. The main motto of creating regenerative agriculture and farming practices is to ensure the protection of the natural ecosystem. Unilever ensures this by working with governments, NGOs, suppliers, and tech-based companies (Regenerative agriculture and farming practices 2022).

### **5.2.6 Water Preservation**

From 2008 to the present, Unilever has been able to reduce the usage of water by 49% from its manufacturing sites on every ton of production. Unilever has set a goal to set up its water preservation initiatives by 2030 in every water-stressed location. To ensure the preservation of water, Unilever is ensuring a water recycling procedure to save water. In India alone, through the water stewardship program, Unilever has been able to preserve around 50 billion liters of water.

As a part of preserving water, Unilever has set a target to make all of its product lines bio-degradable by the year 2030. Having bio-degradable products means that the materials produced by Unilever will not harm the ecosystem. This has led Unilever to focus more on products that are washed off after use. One of the greatest initiatives by Unilever is to bring advancement in the detergent formulas to ensure the least usage of water while ensuring the cleansing of clothes (Sustainable solutions to water scarcity 2022).

### **5.2.7 Plastic Waste Management**

Firstly, Unilever has taken certain initiatives to recycle plastics. The initiatives are expected to run in full blow by the year 2025, and they include bringing down the usage of virgin plastics by half, ensuring fully recyclable plastics, ensuring 25% recycled plastics in the packaging of products recycled (Our goal to reduce plastic packaging, 2022).

The goals of the initiatives mentioned above include reducing the usage of plastics in packaging and ensuring the best quality of plastic when used in packaging. Thirdly, Unilever aims to increase refill stations so that the same plastic can be used for a longer period of time. To ensure less plastic, Unilever encourages its customers to use plastic bottles for a lifetime or at least as long as they can use them. This is done by encouraging the customers to refill the existing bottles of goods like shampoo, sprays and, handwash. Unilever has already been able to recycle 17% of the plastic that it uses in its packaging. Unilever has invested in an artificial intelligence-based system that can automatically detect and sort plastics for recycling. Unilever has also ensured the usage of such pigments that allows even black-colored plastics to get recycled, which is, in general, very difficult to be recycled (Our goal to reduce plastic packaging, 2022).

### **5.2.8 Manufacturing Waste Management**

To reduce waste during production, Unilever relies on finding reusable materials from the waste or tries to recycle items. They also ensure that the two third of the waste generated by Unilever is from biological sources so that the least harm is done to the environment (Unilever PLC (e), 2023).

### **5.2.9 Food Waste Management**

Unilever has set an aim to reduce the food waste in this operation by half by 2025 (Food Waste Solutions, 2022). Unilever is also partnering with its suppliers and other partners to reduce food waste in the supply chain. The organization encourages its customers through its brands to ensure the prevention of food waste. However, from 2019 to 2021, Unilever has been able to reduce food waste to only 3%, and they have claimed that due to Covid, they have suffered much in terms of reducing food waste during Covid (Food Waste Solutions, 2022). However, Unilever has done a tremendous job in terms of encouraging its customers to reduce food waste by using its brand, Hellman. Through Hellman, Unilever has launched multiple campaigns. For example, the "make taste not waste" campaign has reached around 150 million people across the US, UK, and Canada, where the campaign's focus was to educate customers on how to make delicious recipes with waste food (Food Waste Solutions, 2022). Another TV program in the UK was launched to teach people how to cook food in the most efficient manner that ensures the least waste of food (Food Waste Solutions, 2022). Also, Hellman has helped the UN with communicating with the world regarding the effect of food waste; the brand has also worked on communicating with the people because food waste occurs. Hellman has also partnered with BEworks scientists to identify the key reason for food waste through research on 1000 families. The research has found that one of the key reasons for food waste is that people forget what is in their fridges, and this is why Hellman inspires people to establish one use-up day in a week so that the food-waste can be reduced. Hellman has also developed a fridge night app that assists people in making delicious food through leftover items from the fridge and eventually resulting in a greater reduction in food waste management (Food Waste Solutions, 2022).

Unilever, aside for Hellman, has taken many other initiatives so that consumers ensure the least food waste. It has been identified that one of the major reasons why food waste occurs is because different date formats on food confuse consumers regarding the expiry date. Unilever, in 2021 has assisted in the US to ensure the implementation of a standard expiry date format to reduce confusion. Unilever

has also partnered with the app “Too good to go” which ensures the consumption of surplus food from restaurants and shops (Food Waste Solutions, 2022).

#### **5.2.10 Ensuring Quality Food**

Unilever, through its food items, is ensuring nutrition by focusing more on plant-based foods. Also, Unilever aims to lower calories in its foods and, at the same time, is focusing more on ensuring nutrition (Reducing salt, sugar and calories 2023).

#### **5.2.11 Ensuring Well-being**

Through Lifebuoy’s campaign, Unilever has been able to develop good handwashing habits among 1 billion people (The importance of handwashing, 2022). Unilever has reached around 486 million people in 30 countries and has deployed campaigns with NGOs and governments to achieve this result. During Covid-19, Unilever donated around 20 million cleansing products. Unilever has developed a handwashing digital game for kids, which has shown 90% positive results in terms of developing a good handwashing practice. Unilever installed around 500,000 hand washing stations and trained around 140,000 health workers regarding hygiene practices during Covid-19. Unilever partnered with Sightsavers and reached around half a million people by teaching them hygiene practices, and this was done in the schools of Ethiopia, Zambia, and Kenya. This resulted in a 40% increase in positive hygiene practices among the participants.

Unilever has developed a mobile app called “Mobile Dcotarni” which has helped in achieving 1.5 times increased handwashing frequency among mothers and pregnant women. Unilever has also launched a mobile app for providing telemedicine services in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and the service is at present serving more than 300 million people (The importance of handwashing, 2022).

#### **5.2.12 Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion**

Within the year 2030, Unilever has set a target to ensure a 50:50 gender balance. Also, the organization is trying to ensure the representation of various minority groups, including employees with disability within Unilever. Unilever has also ensured flexible working culture based on the region in which it is operating (A beacon of diversity and inclusion 2022).

### **5.2.13 Raising Living Standard**

Unilever has decided to ensure a minimum wage for the ones who are directly related to providing goods and services to Unilever within the year 2030. Unilever, within the year 2020, has already ensured a living wage for all of its employees. Unilever also ensures that the wage or salary within every country of operation is up-to-date with living costs (Raise living standards 2022).

### **5.2.14 Ensuring Human Rights**

Unilever has set a strict policy in terms of ensuring that there is no one working under the age of 15 within its supply chain and within the company. In order to ensure fairness in terms of ensuring human rights, Unilever allows its employees to form and join unions to represent themselves. As a result of this, 8-% of the total workforce is now under a union (Human rights in our operations, 2022).

### **5.2.15 Marketing**

Since Unilever has a number of beauty and healthcare brands, it has decided not to use any models in any of its advertising to hold “size zero” to ensure that unhealthy fitness is not promoted. Unilever uses the guideline set by World Health Organization which is between 18.5 BMI and 25 BMI. In April 2022, Unilever decided not to promote food and beverages to children who are under the age of 16 (Advertising and marketing, 2022).

### **5.2.16 Ensuring Employees’ Good Health and Well-Being**

Based on a survey carried out by Unilever, it has been found that 85% of the employees found Unilever to care about their wellbeing. Although, not much data is available regarding the survey procedure. Unilever has devised mental health programs for its employees, and till now, around 4000 people have been assisted with mental health support. To address physical health, Unilever has a Global Health and Well-being team; the team’s main purpose is to ensure a safe working place, perform pre-employment and annual medical examinations, ensuring the fitness of the employees and workers. From 2014 to

2021, occupation-related illness frequency at Unilever globally has been brought down from 0.54 to 0.13 (Employee health and wellbeing 2022).



### **5.2.17 Ensuring Engagement with Diverse Stakeholders**

Unilever has around 148,000 people working for it all around the world, and Unilever has taken the initiative to learn about the views of this vast pool of human resources through its UniVoice survey program. For example, in 2021, around 90,000 people participated in the survey to share their views regarding Unilever's actions. Also, there are bi-weekly meeting sessions with CEOs and management and regular meetings with local leaders for the employees to ensure that the full decorum is properly aligned with each other (Engaging with stakeholders, 2022).

To ensure engagement with customers, Unilever has set up 37 in-house data centers that collect and stores data from its interaction with customers. In this process, carelines and digital marketing tools are also used to acquire information. The sole purpose is to address the expectation of the customers by storing their complaints and requirements (Engaging with stakeholders, 2022).

## **6 IMPROVEMENT POINTS IN UNILEVER'S CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EFFORTS**

There are many examples where Unilever has failed and showed unwillingness to comply in terms of responding to its social responsibilities. Extensive plastic pollution and unethical reporting are two of the major issues with Unilever. These issues are described in details in this chapter.

### **6.1 Plastic Pollution**

According to a report published by Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, it was found in 2019 Unilever and Nestle were the top plastic polluters in the Philippines (Dayen, 2019). According to another report by the Guardian, Unilever has been identified as one of the major plastic polluter in the world after Coca-Cola and Pepsico (Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Nestlé named top plastic polluters for third year in a row, 2020). It also needs to be mentioned that the usage of plastic is also related to CO<sub>2</sub> emission. Because the production and recycling of one ton of plastic release five tons of carbon emission into the environment. It means the plastic problem is not only harming the water and natural habitats like plants, animals, and sea creatures, but it is also responsible for polluting the air and eventually harming everyone. Perhaps the solution is not recycling plastics but rather having a packaging system that is environmentally friendly (Jr, 2022).

### **6.2 Low Integrity in Reporting**

According to NewClimate Institute and Carbon Market Watch, Unilever has been found to be one of the companies with the lowest integrity in terms of reporting their impact on climate-preserving activities (Meredith, 2022).

Based on the 2021 NewClimate Institute report, Unilever has not been able to ensure a reduction in emissions based on the Paris Agreement's requirements (Newclimate Institute, 2021). The Paris Agreement is an agreement between 195 countries where the goal is to reduce the global temperature by 2 degrees Celsius, and for that, certain requirements need to be filled up. Due to noncompliance

with this agreement means that Unilever is not ensuring the necessary steps, or at least they are not doing it in a meaningful manner to bring positive change to preserve the climate. In other words, Unilever's emission reduction initiatives are lagging behind in a great manner. On the other hand, Unilever has set very spectacular targets to reduce emissions which is not compliant with what the organization has actually achieved. The NewClimate Institute's report has also stated that Unilever has not clarified how it is actually planning to reach its emission reduction goals (Newclimate Institute, 2021).

## 7 DISCUSSION

If we analyze the CSR activities of Unilever, we can see that Unilever is rarely engaged with its stakeholders through promotional CSR activities. The organization has focused greatly on philanthropic and value-creating CSR activities with the intention to serve society and to do good by good. However, it needs to be noted that Unilever has a long history of not complying with its social responsibilities. This can be seen through deforestation, mercury waste dumping in unauthorized locations, plastic pollution, and extreme emissions through its operations and its supply chain, sexual harassment in the workplace, noncompliance with safety standards in plants, and so on (Winegarden, 2017).

Unilever's former CEO Paul Polman's faulty strategies were one of the reasons why Unilever suffered a bad reputation for many of its misconducts, and the results of these misconducts manifested through reduced sales. As an initiative to recover from the disastrous situation, in 2019, Unilever appointed its new CEO, Alan-Jope. Much has changed after this. Unilever has brought drastic improvements in ensuring effective responses to society and to the stakeholders. Unilever's strongest foothold in terms of ensuring corporate social responsibility lies with stopping deforestation, initiatives to stop food waste by consumers, employee safety, ethical marketing practices, wellbeing for the people in general through handwashing, and donations, ensuring standard payment for all employees, and generating good quality products (Planet & society, 2023).

However, based on the information collected above, Unilever has lacked severely in protecting the climate. Unilever's strategy to reduce plastic pollution is not effective since recycling plastic is not the ideal solution for reducing the impact of plastic on the climate. Moreover, there are claims on Unilever regarding altering and exaggerating the impact of their plastic reduction strategy (Meredith, 2022). The collected descriptive data is strong proof that Unilever is not working effectively on the plastic pollution problem. Another co-related problem is the emission problem since Unilever is still struggling or not trying hard enough to reduce its carbon footprint, according to the report by NewClimate (Newclimate Institute, 2021). The recycling of plastic is causing more emissions, and it is almost like creating more problems while solving another one for Unilever. Another important lack of Unilever, to which the organization agrees, is the food waste in its supply chain. Unilever is struggling to reduce the food waste percentage greatly in its supply chain; however, the organization has shown great results in terms of ensuring the reduction of food waste through its customers (Food Waste Solutions, 2022).

Now, if we go back to the hypothesis, which was to understand whether Unilever creates a meaningful impact or not on its stakeholders through its CSR activities, the answer is that it depends on the context. Because Unilever is doing a tremendous job in reacting to the health and wellbeing of its stakeholder, it is working hard on deforestation. The organization has also achieved great results in terms of reducing food waste by its customers; it has ensured ethical marketing practices, employees' safety, diversity and inclusion, a living wage, and in ensuring the wellbeing of the mass through various hygiene programs. So, with the customers and employees, and with society, Unilever has been able to bring a meaningful change through the mentioned CSR activities.

On the other hand, climate change affects all the stakeholders of Unilever. Unilever's struggle to stop plastic pollution and inability to reduce emissions is harming the climate adversely in a great manner. This is why it can be stated that Unilever is not creating a meaningful impact on its stakeholders through its actions to protect the climate.

## 8 RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information collected on Unilever's CSR practices, there is some clear room for improvement that Unilever needs to focus on. For example, Unilever needs to rethink its packaging, and its strategy must prioritize removing plastic entirely from its supply chain. Secondly, the organization needs to focus hard on its emission goals. Although the organization has set some very good goals to remove emissions entirely from its supply chain, Unilever is not working effectively based on its goals. Unilever needs to deploy a separate team who will be solely responsible for monitoring, reducing, and bringing necessary changes to the supply chain so that they can achieve the net zero target of emissions.

## 9 CONCLUSION

Unilever PLC is undoubtedly one of the most important companies in the world, which directly or indirectly impacts every part of the world. The organization should be commended for the improvements that it has brought in terms of responding to the stakeholders through its CSR activities. However, there needs to be external pressure on the organization so that they keep their word in terms of reducing emissions. The organization is also not taking the necessary initiative to remove the plastic as its packaging material. If Unilever is able to reach its net zero commitment and is able to remove plastic pollution entirely from its supply chain, it could be safely stated that Unilever brings a meaningful impact on all of its stakeholders through its CSR activities.

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