

CSR, HAPPINESS, AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE: HOW INDIA'S TOP CORPORATIONS SUPPORTED WELL-BEING IN THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

Bhavin M. Badiyani, Dr. Delnaz Jokhi

Ph. D. Scholar,
Faculty of Commerce,
JG University, ASIA Campus, Drive-in Road, Thaltej, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Pin: 380054.
bhavinbadiyani24@gmail.com
9913281263

Associate Professor,
JG University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic placed an incomparable strain on mental health and emotional well-being worldwide, forcing corporations to re-examine the strategies they employ for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This research paper explores how CSR might create not just happiness but also emotional resilience that could help people get through the pandemic without suffering mental breakdowns. The study focuses on some of the largest corporations in India and makes use of secondary data—CSR reports, sustainability disclosures and other publications—to better understand how these companies have integrated well-being initiatives into their CSR frameworks. The study's base of knowledge allows for identification of "best practices" in CSR that could lead to both mental health and emotional resilience among not just employees but also the communities in which these corporations operate. The research underlines that some of India's leading corporations—Tata Group, Infosys, and Reliance Industries, to name a few—set up innovative CSR programs during the pandemic. These programs have in common is that they serve as platforms for mental health. The predominant narrative originating from these companies is one of empathy, of a newfound understanding of the importance of mental health. Nevertheless, the study uncovers some problems also, but finally it concludes by offering some actionable recommendations.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Mental Health, Emotional Resilience, COVID-19 Pandemic, Well-being Initiatives, Indian Corporations.

INTRODUCTION

India's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) took a new direction because of the COVID-19 pandemic, evolving to place an increasing emphasis on emotional strength and, particularly, mental health preparedness. How did the CSR of India's largest corporations respond? In this paper, the researchers analyze some of the top corporations and provide a rare peek at the inner workings of their long-term strategy, all through the lens of the PERMA model.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the ways in which CSR initiatives help to understand the science of happiness by cultivating emotional resilience and well-being during the pandemic.
2. To assess the impact of CSR interventions on mental health issues, drawing on examples from leading corporations in India.
3. To catalogue best practices and suggest steps that can be taken to ensure the science of happiness is part of the next generation of CSR in India and elsewhere.

METHODOLOGY

This study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including CSR reports and sustainability disclosures from leading Indian corporations, government publications and directives on CSR, and academic research on CSR, mental health, and emotional resilience. Additionally, insights from NGOs, think tanks, and international organizations that address these themes were examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of how India's top corporations supported well-being during and after the pandemic. The research design used is exploratory and descriptive in nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ITC Limited (2023) aimed to document the company's initiatives for workforce health and well-being. For that purpose, ITC conducted the Feel Good with Fiama Mental Wellbeing Survey 2023, which used a survey-based approach to quantitatively and qualitatively gauge the mental health awareness and perceptions of over 2,500 Indian respondents. At the study's core was an attempt to uncover the mindsets of urban and semi-urban Indians about mental health, as well as the demographic factors that play a role in those mindsets. From this foundation, the study's results and implications were extrapolated to offer insights into the current state of corporate mental health initiatives in India.

Wipro (2021) focused on the determination of the company's initiatives of corporate social responsibility (CSR) for the 2020-21 period. The study used a descriptive approach, detailing various CSR programs and their impact. It found that Wipro's CSR efforts during and after the pandemic focused on healthcare support, education, and community welfare. While immediate pandemic relief included providing medical supplies and financial aid, the post-pandemic phase saw a shift toward long-term development initiatives such as digital education, sustainability programs, and livelihood enhancement, reflecting an evolving CSR strategy.

Infosys (2021) aimed to gauge the company's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives, with a concentration on social impact. The report qualified descriptive methods and provided a detailed account of what the company was doing in terms of CSR, especially in the period after the pandemic. The report attempted to assess not merely what was being done, but the actual impact of those initiatives. The key finding was that while the company continued with health-related activities, there was a noticeable and pleasing shift toward long-term sustainability, digital literacy, and education-related initiatives that seemed to fit their CSR profile much better than the previous health-oriented initiatives.

Infosys (2020) set out to record the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report employed a descriptive approach, outlining the initiatives and financial commitments of the Infosys Foundation. It found that the foundation allocated INR 100 crore towards COVID-19 relief efforts, with a concentration on these three areas: expanding hospital capacity, providing medical equipment, and supporting food and hygiene programs for the most vulnerable communities. At the end of the report, the company offered some advice for documenting CSR initiatives during a crisis.

Reliance Industries (2020) aimed to spotlight the company's initiatives related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Using a descriptive approach, the report outlined Reliance's emergency healthcare contributions during the pandemic. Reliance Industries established the first dedicated COVID-19 hospital in India. It also did the following:

- Provided free fuel for emergency services
- Manufactured PPEs
- Supplied meals to marginalized communities

The report emphasized the immediate relief strategy of Reliance Industries during the pandemic.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) (2020) documented the CSR activities of Tata Group during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company used a descriptive science approach to outline the multitude of relief measures that the Tata Group undertook while aiming to maintain a sense of normalcy for their stakeholders. The group committed considerable financial resources and, more importantly, real in-kind support to shore up their stakeholders against the ill effects of the pandemic. The Tata Group mobilized a large part of its efforts towards emergency relief.

Tata Steel (2020) set out to record the company's CSR initiatives stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. The report utilized a descriptive approach and was largely an outline of the community support measures the company had undertaken. From this, one can glean the essential elements of Tata Steel's pandemic response, which focused—largely but not exclusively—on the bolstering of healthcare infrastructure. That was a key part of the "pandemic playbook" for many companies, and it took a quite literal turn for Tata Steel. Its strategies involved setting up actual treatment facilities, purchasing health gear, and a range of other activities in support of the essential workers in healthcare.

ITC Hotels (2020) aimed to document and to describe the measures and initiatives taken by the company during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure employee safety and engagement. The study was descriptive in nature and aimed to cover a broad range of various employee-centric pandemic measures implemented by ITC Hotels. Among these were strict hygiene protocols; mental health support programs; virtual training sessions; and wellness activities of all kinds. Throughout the report, there is a pronounced emphasis on a CSR-driven work culture and a commitment to employee well-being during the crisis.

The PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) is an acronym that stands for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement. The PERMA model is a component of the positive psychology framework. One of the main ideas of positive psychology is to enhance not just the absence of mental illness but also the presence of mental health. Seligman underscores the fact that within this framework, there is growing recognition of the role of psychology—especially positive psychology—in helping organizations to succeed. By fostering positive emotions, engagement, and meaningful relationships, CSR initiatives align with the PERMA model of well-being.

Hindustan Unilever (n.d.) aimed to highlight the importance of handwashing as a "key public health measure." The article had a descriptive base and was awareness founded. It found that Hindustan Unilever did a few very important things: (a) executed large-scale campaigns to educate communities about proper handwashing practices; (b) distributed important hygiene products like soaps and sanitizers; and (c) collaborated with both governmental and non-governmental organizations to drive behavior change reinforcing the importance of 'hygiene = disease prevention,' especially in the time of and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hindustan Unilever (n.d.) sought to detail the CSR activities of the company, with a specific focus on societal health and well-being. It used a descriptive method to outline a number of health and hygiene programs. The study found that Hindustan Unilever had several initiatives in place that promoted better nutrition, education about sanitation and hygiene, and that helped expand access to health and wellness products. It also noted that the company collaborated with some stakeholders to push for community "well-being" in a more long-term sense, a part of the shift that many companies are making to focus on "sustainable development" rather than "immediate relief" post-pandemic.

ITC Limited (n.d.) set out to document the initiatives the company has taken to ensure the health and well-being of its workforce. The study took a descriptive approach, outlining ITC's Workforce Wellness Program. It found that Hindustan Unilever implemented initiatives promoting nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene education, expanded access to health and wellness products, and collaborated with stakeholders to drive long-term community well-being, reflecting a shift towards sustainable development beyond immediate pandemic relief.

Analysis of CSR Initiatives in India

The researchers examined how well-being was handled by some of India's top companies through CSR during the pandemic. They conducted a literature review and then carried out a secondary data analysis, focusing on major corporations.

1. Hindustan Unilever

Hindustan Unilever launched the 'Lifebuoy Handwashing Campaign' to promote hygiene and well-being. The campaign aimed to inculcate good handwashing habits among children and communities, reaching over 486 million people in 30 countries through on-ground programs and approximately 587 million people through TV advertisements. The company also provided mental health resources for employees, including access to counselling services and well-being programs. As an impact, Increased awareness of hygiene practices contributed to improved public health and reduced illness rates. Employee support initiatives led to enhanced morale and productivity.

The Lifebuoy Handwashing Campaign not only pushed for physical health but also made people feel good in the same way that charitable donations or acts of kindness do. In other words, it was much more than a simple public health messaging campaign.

2. ITC Limited

Mental wellness programs were launched by ITC Limited for both staff and communities. These included counseling services and stress management workshops. The company put on sessions that were wholly dedicated to the mental health of participants. These sessions did not try to blend mental health with anything else but put a spotlight directly on it and went into depth about the subject. Mental health was not only discussed; it was made a top priority. The company went to great lengths to increase awareness. It was even in the community, having campaigns that were wholly about living stress-free and what that looks like and why it matters.

3. Wipro

Wipro carried out a number of initiatives aimed at the mental health and emotional well-being of its employees in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the following:

a. Amigo Circle Program: Launched in 2020, this program provides content moderators with a confidential space to discuss their well-being, allowing them to better engage with their work and be more emotionally resilient. This is a perfect example of how CSR can be used to build relationships and enhance the mental health of employees who work in difficult conditions.

b. Financial Commitment: Wipro and Wipro Enterprises Ltd, along with the Azim Premji Foundation, pledged to commit ₹1,125 crore in order to tackle the health and humanitarian problems wrought by COVID-19. The emergency capital is intended to support the professionals who work at the pandemic's sharp end, and to help them upgrade their services to better cope with the ongoing situation.

These initiatives highlight Wipro's dedication to fostering mental health and resilience during the pandemic.

4. Tata Group

The Tata Group pledged INR 1,500 crore to COVID-19 relief efforts, focusing on health infrastructure, medical supplies, and community support. Tata Steel's CSR team launched the #CombatCovid-19 initiative, a 10-point agenda aimed at supporting communities through information dissemination, mask production, and collaboration with local administrations.

5. Infosys

The Infosys Foundation dedicated INR 100 crore to assist in the relief efforts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds are directed towards the medical equipments, healthcare infrastructure and support for

the frontline workers. The pandemic brought about new challenges for every individual, both personally and professionally. To help employees navigate these uncharted waters, the company established a plethora of programs aimed at supporting not just physical, but also mental health—and even work-life balance.

6. Reliance Industries

India's first dedicated COVID-19 hospital was set up in Mumbai by Reliance Industries, and it was the company's health gesture during the pandemic. Free treatment was offered to the patients admitted at the hospital, while the company ensured that the healthcare system didn't crumble under the weight of too many patients. It wasn't just the COVID-19 hospital that Reliance set up in Mumbai. The company also undertook to offer free meals to many underprivileged members of society in that same city—people with no means to get food during the food scarcity that the pandemic caused.

Initiatives like these demonstrate the proactive, responsive role that these corporations are taking to address mental health and general well-being during and even after the pandemic. They represent, on the one hand, immediate needs and, on the other, long-term, sustainable well-being. In both cases, the initiatives are contributing to the science of happiness.

Alignment with PERMA Model

The model of well-being known as PERMA (Seligman, 2011) provides a nice, clean, and straightforward answer to the old but persistent question: "What is well-being?". It tells us that well-being consists of five dimensions:

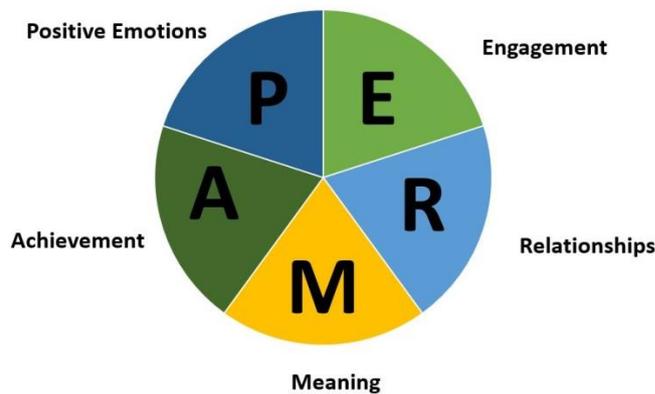


Figure 1 PERMA Model (Source: Wikimedia.org)

- Positive Emotions** were engaged through the mental health awareness campaigns and stress relief management programs during the pandemic, helping employees and communities navigate through the collective anxiety of these times.
- Engagement** was guaranteed via easeful wellness interactive sessions and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that helped ensure all were actively participating in the well-being initiatives of the company.
- Relationships** were enhanced in community-driven CSR interventions like the healthcare service provided by Reliance Industries. Here, we find the essence of a CSR engaged and integrated into community-driven projects.
- Meaning** was what clients were experiencing when I saw their company shift towards long-term commitments doing things like digital and sustainability literacy, all of which clearly demonstrate a much deeper societal role for them as businesses.
- Achievement or Accomplishment** is what CSR is now able to showcase by rendering measurable outcomes, the kinds of which business reports now more vividly illustrate.

By aligning CSR with the PERMA model, corporations foster resilience, engagement, and long-term well-being, ensuring that CSR surpasses philanthropy to become a strategic driver of societal and organizational happiness.

DISCUSSION

Corporate social responsibility has changed from providing help on a temporary basis to supporting sustainable well-being initiatives. Table 1 shows the way in which prominent corporations have adopted the PERMA model.

PERMA Dimension	CSR Initiatives (by Indian Corporations)	Impact on Well-being
Positive Emotions	Mental health awareness campaigns (Wipro, ITC), stress relief programs (Infosys)	Reduced anxiety, improved employee morale
Engagement	Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) (Tata Steel), skill development workshops (Infosys)	Increased job satisfaction and workplace productivity

PERMA Dimension	CSR Initiatives (by Indian Corporations)	Impact on Well-being
Relationships	Community-driven healthcare services (Reliance), food and hygiene distribution (Hindustan Unilever)	Strengthened social bonds and corporate trust
Meaning	Long-term sustainability programs (Wipro), education and digital literacy initiatives (Infosys)	Greater sense of purpose among stakeholders
Achievement	Measurable well-being outcomes, such as improved workplace mental health and community resilience programs (Tata Group, ITC)	Long-term corporate reputation and stakeholder well-being

Table 1 CSR Initiatives of Leading Corporations and PERMA Model (Source: Created by researchers)

FINDINGS

- Shift in CSR Focus:** The priorities of CSR have shifted during the pandemic. We now have a greater understanding of the science of happiness. Mental health and emotional well-being have taken the center stage.
- Employee-Centric Initiatives:** Employee-centric initiatives, grounded in evidence-based approaches to well-being, resulted in higher productivity, retention, and overall flourishing.
- Community Impact:** Community-focused CSR programs not only addressed immediate needs but also contributed to long-term societal happiness and resilience.
- Long-term Benefits:** Corporations that integrated well-being into their CSR strategies demonstrated the potential of organizational interventions to enhance stakeholder trust and brand loyalty, key indicators of sustainable happiness.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic was a wake-up call, not just for public health systems but for corporate responsibility as well. It revealed an undeniable truth: happiness, resilience, and emotional well-being are not luxuries—they are necessities. Once primarily focused on traditional CSR themes, India's top corporations twisted swiftly to address mental health, emotional resilience, and holistic well-being. This study found that the initiatives of these corporations not only provided immediate psychological support but also laid the groundwork for what is increasingly looking like a paradigm shift—where CSR is no longer just about philanthropy but also about nurturing sustainable happiness.

From urgent actions to prolonged welfare schemes, firms are respelling the CSR story. This alteration behaves well with the PERMA model of positive psychology: It isn't good enough just to not be bad—to have programs ensuring compliance and off-the-books emergency relief. With a UN-like mission to go well beyond compliance, CSR should be a force for real, positive change. And that's what many firms now aim for.

Going forward, the assignment is well-defined: CSR must progress and act as a catalyst for emotional wellness, dismantling barriers, minimizing stigma, and accomplishing impact with measurable metrics. Those corporations that accept this as their new role won't solely perform acts of corporate kindness—they will drive our contemporary society toward an emotionally healthier future.

Corporate Social Responsibility is no longer merely an obligation; it now aligns with the Science of Happiness, forming the very core of a vibrant and emotionally resilient society.

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