



TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED CSR AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND EMERGING AI FOR ADVANCING SDG 5

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has moved beyond philanthropy and is now considered a strategic business action, and is connected to social outcomes like gender equality and women's empowerment. Digital technologies have already transformed the approach to designing, delivering, measuring and communicating CSR programmes. This paper provides a literature review on technology-based CSR and how it can empower women. It explores three tracks: Digital Literacy, Financial Inclusion via Digital Platforms, Women entrepreneurs and employment. It also consolidates evidence from its effect on such programmes in countries such as India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya and Pakistan. A qualitative and thematic review of peer-reviewed research was conducted to uncover themes, outcomes and constraints. The results indicate that technology-facilitated CSR can have an impact on the income, confidence, financial independence, market access and involvement in household and community decision-making of women. These gains rely on a number of factors, such as local cultural norms, the cost of technology, digital infrastructure, targeting, and the design of the programmes that address women's particular constraints. Main challenges that remain are the digital gender divide, low digital literacy, lack of CSR funding for women, and threats to data ethics and cybersecurity. The paper ends with recommendations for the integration of digital tools in CSR monitoring and reporting, the adoption of corporate digital responsibility and the build-in of programmes with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5.

KEYWORDS: Technology-Enabled CSR, Women's Empowerment, Digital Literacy, Digital Financial Inclusion, Women's Entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) can be better understood as a responsibility of corporations not just to make a profit but to help society. It has to do with behaving ethically and obeying laws. It is promoting a green business environment. It also means taking care of employees, customers and communities. It seeks to harmonise business success with social welfare. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which started with philanthropy, is now being considered as a strategic priority and correlates the performance of business organisations to their social impact, i.e., gender equality and women's empowerment (Menka & Alam, 2025).

Increasingly, businesses in developing countries are framing women's programs as a way of creating dual value that enhances community welfare and profitability simultaneously (Menka & Alam, 2025; Mogaji et al., 2021). This re-orientation brings CSR in line with larger development agendas such as the SDGs, national gender policies and makes corporations part of processes governing gender equality (Ramar, 2024). The newer generation of technology-based CSR programs is formed by the change in the way of designing, delivering, measuring and communicating CSR provided by digital technologies. E-learning solutions, financial technology, mobile platforms, and digital marketplaces widen access for women to markets, skills, and finance, thus hastening their interest in the field of entrepreneurship and employment. Technology in social entrepreneurship reduces barriers in the past by increasing access to networks, capital, and information, and allows women to expand ventures with larger socio-economic outcomes (Gochhait et al., 2025; Uzoamaka et al., 2024).

At the same time, corporations deploy technology as an enabler inside explicitly branded women-empowerment CSR programs. Case studies from Indonesia, Nigeria and India show that CSR-backed training, digital literacy, and market-linkage initiatives can increase women's income, confidence, and decision-making power in households and communities (Alfiyani et al., 2025; Patra & Bose, 2022; Uduji et al., 2024). However, impact is highly contingent on local cultural norms, targeting, and the extent to which initiatives are tailored to women's specific constraints and aspirations (Rajawat & Shukla, 2024; Ramar, 2024).



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) generally refers to a company's responsibility for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, beyond mere legal compliance and profit-making (Carby-Hall, 2025). It is commonly defined as a self-regulating business construct where companies willingly apply the social, environmental, ethical, and stakeholder issues into their business and relationships (Shayan et al., 2022). It is an indication of the transition toward the concept of business as a social institution with more responsibility to stakeholders and sustainable development (Ashrafi et al., 2020; Barauskaite & Štreimikienė, 2020; Lypovyi, 2025).

It is an integral part of the economic, legal, moral and discretionary (philanthropic) anticipations of the societal perception of companies at a specific point in time (Shayan et al., 2022; Shcherbatiuk, 2025). The firms are supposed to be profitable economically, comply with the law in legal terms, do what is right and fair ethically, as well as give voluntarily to the benefit of the community in philanthropy (Mohina, 2025).

Most modern writers adopt CSR as a broad term that entails other related concepts, including corporate citizenship, stakeholder management, sustainability, and the development of shared value (Carroll & Brown, 2018). It is thus not only an ethical requirement, but an instrument of strategic value; it can also help create a sense of legitimacy, reputation, and trust of stakeholders, and in addition, work towards long-term financial performance and competitiveness (Barauskaite & Štreimikienė, 2020).

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women's empowerment is commonly defined as expanding women's economic, social, political, and psychological capacities so they can exercise rights, access resources, and participate in decision-making on equal terms with men (Adhikary, 2025). It is now seen as both a human rights imperative and a prerequisite for sustainable development and SDG 5 on gender equality (Adeleye et al., 2024). Research links empowerment to better outcomes in productivity, income, nutrition, and poverty reduction, especially when women gain education, assets, and decision-making power in households and agriculture (Quisumbing et al., 2023).

Recent large-scale analyses show that empowerment is multidimensional and context-specific. In India, key empowerment dimensions have shifted over time from freedom of mobility (2005–06) to financial independence (2015–16) and, more recently, attitudes rejecting violence (2019–21), with younger cohorts increasingly more empowered than older ones (Singh & Singh, 2025). Multilevel analysis using the SWPER index finds that most variation in women's attitudes to violence and decision-making is at the community level, not just between states, highlighting the need for locally tailored interventions (Eom et al., 2025). In Pakistan, higher education, wealth, skilled work, media exposure, and being a household head are strong determinants of empowerment in decision-making and ownership (Abbas et al., 2020). New composite indices, such as the Female Empowerment Index (FEMI), similarly reveal substantial sub-national variation, with state scores in Nigeria ranging from very low to relatively high despite national gains (Rettig et al., 2020).

Technology and digital tools are emerging as important levers. Access to ICTs, social media, and digital platforms is enabling women to connect, organise, and advocate, while entry into tech fields challenges gender stereotypes and opens new leadership opportunities (Adhikary, 2025). Case evidence shows that mobile phones, online platforms, solar technologies, blockchain/AI, and IoT can enhance women's economic empowerment by enabling new business models, extending business hours (e.g., solar-powered cooling and phone charging for women-run micro-stores), and increasing access to markets, finance, and services. At the same time, a persistent digital gender divide, lower female ownership of phones, mobile internet use, and mobile money limit these gains, especially in low and middle-income countries (Tang, 2020). Fast-growing global research on women's empowerment under the SDGs, with recurring themes of autonomy, power, education, employment, income, and access to resources and credit as central drivers of empowerment and long-term economic growth (Adeleye et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a comprehensive literature review approach to examine the role of technology-enabled CSR in women's empowerment. The selected studies were organised into key themes, including digital literacy, financial inclusion through digital platforms, women's entrepreneurship and employment. Relevant peer-reviewed articles, reports, case studies, and research studies were collected from academic databases such as Google Scholar using keywords such as Technology-Enabled CSR, Women's Empowerment, Digital Literacy, Digital Financial Inclusion, and Women's Entrepreneurship.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED CSR IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy using computers, smartphones, and the internet to access information, communicate, and transact is described as "vital" for women's financial independence, education, and participation in social and political life (Kaur et al., 2025). It enables women to access online education and information, search and apply for jobs or start online businesses, use digital banking, mobile payments, and e-commerce for independent money management, and engage in civic and political activities through digital platforms (Sarode & Nirmal, 2025).



Rural research indicates that digital literacy will increase the capacity of women to engage in the economy, reach out to wider communities, and access government schemes directly in promoting gender equality and social inclusion (Meenu et al., 2025). A no-cost digital skills program based on empirical evidence of 6,989 poor, unemployed women in India reveals that digital skills training leads to greater economic and psychological empowerment due to higher employment, education and entrepreneurship intentions, and higher self-belief. Psychological empowerment mediates through the actual use of the acquired skills, whereas the perceived value of training enhances the economic outcomes (Mukherjee et al., 2024). Digital technologies can support flexibility, autonomy and well-being, but constant connectivity brings technostress and blurs work-life boundaries. Their real value for employees depends on digital literacy, organisational support, clear boundaries and employee-centred policies (G & Haorei, 2026a). Similar qualitative research in Pakistan also demonstrates that digital skills can make low-formally educated women self-reliant, build social networks, and have respect and influence in their families and communities, yet they require systematic training, government assistance, and affordable technology (Dilawar et al., 2024). Among the rural women, personalised modules in the local languages, peer support, and low-tech solutions have been found to be effective avenues towards socio-economic inclusion (Meenu et al., 2025).

CSR programs that combine digital literacy, advanced digital tools (e-governance, finance, job portals), and safe learning spaces can convert access to technology into real empowerment, especially when they address gendered barriers like norms, safety, time, and affordability (Pal, 2025). Integrating digital skill development into women-focused CSR thus directly supports women's economic independence, social participation, and long-term community development (Menka & Alam, 2025).

FINANCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Digital financial inclusion uses mobile phones, internet banking, and fintech tools to extend savings, payments, credit, and insurance to people excluded from formal banking, a group in which women are over-represented. Globally, 1.7 billion adults remain unbanked, and 56% are women, who adopt digital payments and internet banking at lower rates than men (Tay et al., 2022).

Studies in Africa and Asia show that mobile money, digital banking, and digital payment platforms substantially improve women's access to and use of formal financial services, i.e. in rural Kenya, digital finance via mobile money and related platforms has a strong positive impact on women's financial inclusion, with mobile money accounts used by nearly 60% of rural women, far exceeding bank account and ATM use (Amugune et al., 2025). Digital banking services (mobile, online, ATMs, agency banking) significantly increase access to savings, loans, and payments for women-owned enterprises in Narok County, Kenya, though low digital literacy limits the use of online banking (Melubo & Musau, 2020). At a global level, digital financial services reduce the gender gap in account ownership in low and lower-middle-income economies, increasing the number of accounts held by women and advancing SDGs 5 and 10 (Galindo-Manrique & Rojas-Vargas, 2025).

Digital payment platforms in emerging markets empower women and small business owners by enabling private, secure transactions, savings, credit access, and business growth without a male intermediary, helping women invest in education, health, and enterprises (Dudu et al., 2024; Tay et al., 2022). CSR that leverages digital platforms can directly target women's financial exclusion by subsidising access to mobile money and digital banking, integrating financial literacy and digital skills into CSR programs, designing women-friendly products (low-fee accounts, micro-loans, alternative credit scoring), investing in infrastructure and trust-building in underserved areas (Bala, 2024; Tay et al., 2022). During such initiatives, technology is deployed to increase women's access to services as well as to develop economic agency, accumulation of assets, and access to the formal economy (Amugune et al., 2025).

WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT

Technology-propelled CSR is increasingly gaining women entrepreneurship and employment as the main instruments of empowerment through digital tools, training and connectivity in marketplaces as means of developing sustainable livelihoods. Technology-based CSRs are undertaken to support rural women in receiving formal or semi-formal entrepreneurship by moving out of the informal sector. CSR-supported initiatives, such as skill development, microfinance, digital literacy, and market linkage support, have helped women initiate sustainable resource-based enterprises and can now be seen as active players in local economies in rural Rajasthan (Dadhich & Siddiqui, 2025). A larger overview of CSR and female empowerment in India reveals that one of the most visible CSR themes is entrepreneurship development, which is generally anchored on training, finance access, and mentoring of females who had previously been locked out of the economic services. Women-centred enterprise business models, like microenterprise and self-help group-based businesses done under CSR, are better at making beneficiaries have higher income, education, and health indicators over time (Ramar, 2024). AI can give employees, particularly women, more flexibility, lighter workloads and wider opportunities to work and learn. Whether it truly helps depends on how it is introduced: with proper AI training, clear policies, respect for privacy, and limits on stress and round-the-clock connectivity (G & Haorei, 2026b).

Women are also able to increase their employment through CSR and not just self-employment. A multi-industry study in India similarly shows that women-centred CSR, including skilling, enterprise development, and workplace equality, contributes to women's economic self-reliance and better labour-market participation, while also correlating with higher corporate profitability



(Menka & Alam, 2025). Digital platforms can help women in India to find new business models, expand access to markets, deal with financial issues and socio-cultural challenges, and become more financially independent, which means that digital entrepreneurship helps to enhance economic engagement, confidence, and decision-making (Verma et al., 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED CSR

Technology-Enabled CSR should be implemented by deliberately embedding digital technologies, including AI, big data analytics, IoT, and blockchain, into the full CSR, performance monitoring, verification, and communication to enhance transparency, stakeholder engagement, and impact measurement. These tools do not become purely efficiency-driven; companies need explicit corporate digital responsibility frameworks that set norms for data ethics, privacy, algorithmic fairness, and human-centric design, going beyond mere legal compliance (Lobschat et al., 2021).

In practice, firms can deploy digital platforms, dashboards, and ESG reporting systems to collect and visualise real-time environmental and social indicators, link them to recognised standards, and automatically generate more accurate and comparable CSR/ESG reports, thereby strengthening stakeholder trust and competitive positioning (Atanasov et al., 2023).

At the same time, organisations must proactively address risks linked to the digital divide, cybersecurity, AI-enabled discrimination, and growing e-waste streams by adopting ethics-by-design principles, implementing LMS-based CSR and digital-ethics training for employees, and formulating long-term digital sustainability strategies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (Kong & Liu, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This paper examined how technology-enabled CSR contributes to women's empowerment. CSR has evolved from a philanthropic activity into a strategic tool that links business performance with social outcomes, and digital technologies extend its reach and effectiveness. The evidence reviewed shows that digital literacy, digital financial inclusion, and technology-supported entrepreneurship and employment are three mutually reinforcing pathways to women's economic independence, self-confidence, and social participation.

The impact evidence from India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Pakistan shows that CSR-backed training, digital market linkages, mobile money, and digital banking can raise women's income, expand access to credit and markets, and strengthen their voice in household and community decisions. These outcomes are not automatic. They depend on local cultural norms, affordability, digital infrastructure, and how well programmes are tailored to women's constraints, such as safety, time, and language. The persistent digital gender divide, low digital literacy, and the small share of CSR funds earmarked for women limit the scale and sustainability of many initiatives.

For corporations, the findings support integrating digital literacy, women-friendly financial products, and market-linkage support into CSR strategy, and using digital tools for transparent monitoring, impact measurement, and ESG reporting. Firms should also adopt corporate digital responsibility frameworks covering data privacy, algorithmic fairness, cybersecurity, and ethics by design, so that technology does not create new forms of exclusion. For policymakers and development partners, cross-sector collaboration between government, businesses, and civil society can improve infrastructure, affordability, and alignment with SDG 5 and related goals. Future studies should use longitudinal and mixed-method designs to measure the long-term impact of technology-enabled CSR on women's empowerment. They should also compare outcomes across sectors and regions, examine the role of emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain, and explore how community-level and cultural factors shape programme success. In conclusion, technology-enabled CSR can be a meaningful lever for women's empowerment, but only when it is inclusive, context-sensitive, ethically governed, and grounded in women's own needs and aspirations.

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