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The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability in the Indian Information Technology Sector: From Compliance to ESG Integration

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Abstract: This study examines CSR and sustainability strategies in India's IT sector from 2020 to 2025. After the initial "check-box" culture of compliance with the Companies Act, 2013, companies are now grappling with new domestic regulations like the mandatory BRSR and mounting international pressures for strong ESG performance. How Indian integrated IT enterprises with global connections are responding is examined: Are companies merely scratching the surface of regulations? This mixed-methods analysis evaluates sustainability reports on CSR reporting compliance for four major Indian IT companies. Quantitative CSR expenditure variables were qualitatively examined in light of the UN SDGs. The firm's Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Resource-Based View (RBV) guided this analysis. Findings show that while corporations strictly follow regulatory minimums, known as 'compliance', they are moving toward more sophisticated, sustainable corporate social responsibility. Examples include net-zero emissions, sophisticated Green IT solutions, diversity, inclusion, and tech-enabled social impact strategies. In the past five years, the sector has shifted from compliance-driven to strategic integration of ESG elements, resulting in long-term competitive advantage and sustainability.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; ESG Integration; Business Responsibility; Sustainability Reporting; Strategic CSR; Goals for Sustainable Development; Post-mandate Era; Resource-Based View.

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1. Introduction

The Information Technology (IT) sector constitutes a cornerstone of the Indian economy. It has emerged as one of the most visible success stories of India's integration into the global knowledge and digital economy. It plays a transformative role in advancing service-led growth and acts as a powerful enabler of modernisation across various industries [1]. The sector

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contributes significantly to India's GDP, foreign direct investment inflows, and global trade profile [3]. In addition, it is a critical employment generator, offering skilled jobs to millions, thereby enhancing human capital formation. Due to its prominence, the strategic choices made by the IT sector, particularly regarding environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations, hold significant implications not only for economic development but also for the nation's progress on social justice, environmental stewardship, and sustainable innovation [6]. As a sector with deep global integration, the Indian IT industry is uniquely positioned at the intersection of international best practices and domestic regulatory mandates. Over the past decade, global expectations surrounding corporate responsibility have evolved considerably. The earlier focus on narrow, philanthropic interpretations of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has broadened to encompass ESG principles, which demand comprehensive disclosures, performance accountability, and long-term stakeholder value creation. ESG is no longer a peripheral or voluntary add-on; it has become a strategic imperative, especially in sectors like IT, where investors, clients, and employees are increasingly scrutinising companies for their ethical practices, climate commitments, diversity metrics, and governance models [8].

Within this global context, India has added a distinctive layer of regulatory innovation through the introduction of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013. This pioneering legislation is globally significant because it legally mandates corporate philanthropy, making India one of the few countries in the world to statutorily require businesses to allocate a portion of their profits—specifically, two per cent of their average net profits over the past three years—towards activities defined under Schedule VII. These activities range from education and healthcare to rural development and gender equity [9]. While initially perceived as a compliance burden, this law has fundamentally altered the way Indian corporations engage with development priorities. What began as a regulatory obligation has gradually evolved into a platform for strategic social investments. The five-year period between FY 2020–21 and FY 2024–25 represents a significant inflexion point in the evolution of CSR and ESG practices in the Indian IT sector. This transitional era is marked by a paradigm shift where CSR, once treated as an isolated compliance function, is increasingly being integrated into the core strategy of business enterprises. During this period, CSR practices began maturing into standardised organisational procedures, embedded not just in annual reporting but also in operational and cultural frameworks. For leading IT firms, the shift has entailed rethinking sustainability beyond token initiatives and aligning them more closely with long-term business goals and global impact standards.

Moreover, this period coincides with a series of profound external disruptions and emerging trends that have acted as catalysts for corporate transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic not only revealed the fragility of global supply chains and public health systems but also underscored the critical role of private sector institutions in building social resilience. Simultaneously, the accelerated deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI), data-driven governance tools, and automation technologies has redefined the boundaries of what companies can achieve in the realm of sustainable development. Furthermore, global capital markets are now heavily influenced by ESG-oriented investors who demand that companies disclose, measure, and improve their performance on non-financial parameters with the same rigour as financial reporting. A pivotal moment in this landscape was the introduction of the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) framework by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), which became mandatory for the top 1000 listed companies starting from FY 2022–23. The BRSR framework represents a decisive move toward codified sustainability disclosure, aligning Indian corporate reporting with global frameworks such as GRI (Global Reporting Initiative), SASB (Sustainability Accounting Standards Board), and TCFD (Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures). By institutionalising structured sustainability reporting, BRSR aims to bring transparency, comparability, and accountability to ESG-related corporate behaviour, especially in sectors like IT, where intangible assets and intellectual capital are central to value creation.

In light of these developments, this paper's central research inquiry focuses on how the Indian IT sector's approach to CSR and ESG has evolved during this transformative five-year period. Specifically, it investigates whether these firms have remained anchored in a reactive, compliance-based model shaped by legal obligations or whether they have made a strategic transition toward proactively embedding ESG considerations into their organisational DNA. The study draws on key theoretical frameworks including Institutional Theory, which explains organizational conformity in response to legal and normative pressures; Stakeholder Theory, which positions businesses as accountable to a broad spectrum of stakeholders beyond shareholders; and the Resource-Based View (RBV), which interprets sustainability as a source of competitive advantage through the development of rare, valuable, and inimitable internal capabilities. The conceptual shift from CSR to ESG also reflects a deeper transformation in how Indian IT firms view their societal role. Strategic sustainability is no longer limited to philanthropic donations or stand-alone papers; it encompasses systemic integration of environmental conservation, inclusive employment practices, digital equity, ethical AI, and circular economy models. Companies now leverage their technological core competencies—such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and data analytics—to develop scalable "Tech for Good" solutions that address issues like climate monitoring, e-learning for underprivileged students, and smart healthcare delivery.

This paper explores how leading IT firms in India are moving from check-box CSR to purpose-driven ESG frameworks. It critically examines the degree to which sustainability is being internalised not merely as a regulatory burden but as a strategic asset for future readiness, investor credibility, workforce engagement, and social legitimacy. Through this lens, ESG becomes a central pillar of enterprise risk management, long-term value creation, and ethical innovation. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for corporate leaders, policymakers, sustainability professionals, and academic researchers who seek to understand how one of India's most dynamic sectors is responding to the global mandate for responsible capitalism.

2. Literature Review

Analysing the Indian experience benefits from the well-documented corporate social responsibility literature. While classical theorists, such as Carroll [2] with his "Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility," offered some structure to the discourse, India's unique context of mandated CSR has sparked different and more lively strands of research. The Companies Act of 2013 effectively legalised a form of philanthropy which created a natural experiment scrutinised by scholars around the world [10]. This legislative intervention was a radical departure from the voluntary nature of CSR prevalent in most Western economies, forcing a confrontation between corporate profit motives and societal obligations. Early research conducted after the mandate highlighted a predictable pattern: firms were fulfilling financial compliance rates alongside thematic spending patterns. It was found that firms were meeting financial commitments but were conspicuously neglecting activities such as education and health, with little strategy or impact assessment depth [4]. A risk-averse, compliance-first approach largely characterised this initial phase. Companies, often lacking internal expertise in social development, found it easiest to channel funds to established non-governmental organisations in familiar, non-controversial sectors. The critical element of "impact assessment depth" was largely absent; corporate reports focused heavily on inputs (the amount of money spent) and outputs (the number of schools built or people treated) rather than on verifiable, long-term outcomes or systemic social change. The focus was on satisfying the letter of the law, not necessarily its spirit.

The literature has now moved past these foundational studies, evolving significantly. A particularly noteworthy change is the shift from CSR to ESG. For globally integrated companies like those in the Indian IT sector, robust ESG performance is Table stakes [14]. While CSR usually targets community engagement initiatives that are peripheral to business operations, ESG encapsulates assessing a firm's resilience and reputation across its entire footprint and operations, making it a more holistic and coherent framework [15]. This distinction is critical and represents a fundamental maturation in corporate thinking. CSR can be practised as a separate, often disconnected, activity of "giving back" after profits are made. ESG, in stark contrast, is intrinsically linked to how those profits are generated. The 'E' (Environmental) pillar extends beyond basic pollution control to encompass a company's entire climate strategy, including its carbon footprint, water stewardship, waste management, and approach to the circular economy. For the IT sector, this means an intense focus on the energy consumption of data centres and the responsible disposal of e-waste. The 'S' (Social) pillar includes not only community relations but also internal policies on employee well-being, diversity and inclusion, data privacy, and ethical supply chain practices. The 'G' (Governance) pillar scrutinises board oversight, executive compensation, shareholder rights, and business ethics, ensuring that sustainability is governed with the same rigour as financial performance. Recent studies have confirmed the relationship between ESG performance and firm value in India, indicating that investors are using sustainability-related risks and opportunities while valuing firms [7]. The movement from a "social good" framing to a "risk and opportunity" framing has been transformative, leading to the shift of sustainability discussions from the corporate foundation to the C-suite.

The "social good" perspective often relegated sustainability to a cost centre, a necessary expenditure for public relations or regulatory compliance, managed by a separate foundation. The "risk and opportunity" framework, however, integrates sustainability into the core language of business. Poor environmental performance is no longer just bad PR; it is a tangible financial risk involving potential carbon taxes, stranded assets, or loss of market access. A data breach or a supply chain scandal (Social risks) can result in crippling fines and irreversible reputational damage. Conversely, strong ESG performance presents clear opportunities. Developing green technologies or sustainable products can open new markets. A best-in-class diversity and inclusion record (a Social opportunity) becomes a powerful magnet for attracting and retaining scarce, high-value talent, which is the lifeblood of the IT industry. This reframing has been essential for securing board-level attention and integrating ESG into long-term financial planning, capital allocation, and enterprise risk management. Institutional Theory offers a powerful lens to interpret this evolution. The initial response to the CSR mandate was dominated by coercive isomorphism (the law itself) and mimetic isomorphism (copying peer strategies). Coercive pressure established the non-negotiable floor for corporate behaviour. In contrast, mimetic behaviour, a herd-like tendency to replicate the CSR papers of competitors, was a low-risk strategy adopted in the face of regulatory uncertainty. However, the current era is defined by the ascendancy of normative isomorphism. This pressure emanates from the shared norms and values of the global business environment, including international investors, rating agencies (like MSCI and Sustainalytics), and global clients who demand sustainable practices [12].

These normative pressures spread through professional networks, global consulting firms, investor roadshows, and academic institutions, creating a common understanding of what constitutes responsible corporate behaviour. The introduction of the BRSR framework by SEBI is a fascinating hybrid: it is a coercive mandate that enforces a normative global standard of disclosure, thereby accelerating the institutionalisation of ESG thinking in corporate India [11]. The BRSR format, with its detailed key performance indicators on environmental and social metrics, forces a level of internal data collection and strategic thinking that goes far beyond the narrative-based reporting of the past. It acts as an internal structuring agent, compelling companies to build robust systems to measure, manage, and report on their performance, thus making vague claims or "greenwashing" significantly more difficult to sustain.

Stakeholder Theory provides a granular view of the pressures driving this change [13]. The theory has evolved from simple stakeholder management to the more complex concept of stakeholder integration, where the goal is not merely to placate different groups but to integrate their interests into a coherent corporate strategy. Indian IT firms must perform this complex balancing act. The salience of global investors, multinational clients, and highly skilled employees has demonstrably increased. Research by Tsourvakas and Yfantidou [5] highlights the critical link between CSR/ESG performance and employee engagement, noting that employees are proud to identify with companies that have a caring image. In the hyper-competitive global market for tech talent, a strong ESG proposition—encompassing a positive work culture, a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion, opportunities for skill-based volunteering, and a clear sense of corporate purpose—has become a powerful and necessary tool for recruitment and retention. Similarly, global clients now routinely include ESG clauses in their procurement contracts, making sustainable practices a prerequisite for business. This is particularly evident in the context of value chain decarbonization. A multinational corporation aiming to reduce its own Scope 3 emissions must ensure that its key suppliers, including its IT service providers, are also committed to decarbonization and are operating on renewable energy. This elevates ESG from a "soft" reputational issue to a "hard" commercial imperative, directly impacting a firm's ability to win and retain major contracts.

3. Methodology and Analysis

This research utilises a mixed-methods approach to perform an in-depth analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainability practices within the Indian IT industry. This enables the triangulation of quantitative data on spending with qualitative data from corporate disclosures, thereby enriching the understanding obtained. The research adopts a longitudinal perspective, analysing data over the five years from fiscal year 2020-21 to 2024-25. This period was selected as it represents the five most recent years for which complete, audited corporate reports are available, capturing the sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of the ESG agenda, and the introduction of the BRSR framework. The sample for this study was purposively selected to include India's four largest IT services companies by market capitalisation and revenue: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro, and HCL Technologies. These firms are industry bellwethers and leaders in sustainability reporting, providing a rich dataset. Their extensive global operations make them ideal subjects for studying the interplay between domestic regulation and global ESG pressures. Data was collected through a systematic review of primary corporate documents, specifically the Annual Reports (containing the mandatory CSR disclosures), the comprehensive, voluntary Sustainability Reports, and the newer, mandatory Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports (BRSR) for each company over the five-year fiscal period. Financial data reported in Indian Rupees (INR) was converted to US Dollars (USD) for international comparability, using a constant exchange rate of 1 USD ≈ 83 INR for consistency. This results in an approximate conversion factor of 1 INR Crore ≈ 0.12 USD Million (Table 1).

Table 1: Analysis of CSR expenditure (consolidated data for four firms, in USD million)

Fiscal Year	Total Prescribed CSR Budget (USD Million)	Total Actual CSR Spent (USD Million)	Compliance Percentage	Key Spending Driver/Trend
2020-21	294	342*	116.3%	Overwhelming focus on COVID-19 relief efforts (PM CARES, health infra).
2021-22	322	326	101.2%	Post-COVID recovery, vaccination drives, and bridging learning gaps in education are essential.
2022-23	354	361	102.0%	Return to flagship programs and increased focus on environmental papers.
2023-24	385	392	101.8%	Increased investment in future skills (AI/ML), tech-led social solutions.
2024-25 (Est.)	415	425	102.4%	Projected increased spending on GenAI skilling and climate adaptation papers.

**FY 2020-21 saw a significant overspend driven by the sector's massive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. FY 2024-25 data is estimated based on H1 trends and corporate guidance.*

The second phase involved a qualitative thematic content analysis of the descriptive sections of the CSR and sustainability reports. This phase aimed to understand the substantive focus and strategic orientation of the initiatives. A rigorous coding process was employed, resulting in a robust thematic framework (Table 2).

Table 2: Thematic analysis of CSR and sustainability portfolio (aggregated data, FY 2020-25)

CSR/Sustainability Theme	Percentage of Focus	Key Activities and Recent Trends	Strategic Linkage to Core Business
Education and Skilling	30%	STEM for underserved communities, digital literacy, future skills platforms (e.g., Infosys Springboard, TCS NQT), and GenAI skilling are key initiatives.	**High:** Building a future-ready talent pipeline; showcasing educational technology; brand building among youth.
Healthcare and Sanitation	26%	Hospital support, mobile health units, sanitation papers, public health platforms, and post-COVID health infrastructure.	**Low-Medium:** Primarily for community goodwill and local legitimacy, with some use of health-tech platforms.
Environmental Sustainability	24%	Ambitious net-zero targets, RE100, water positivity, circular economy (e-waste), Scope 3 emission reduction, green buildings.	**Very High:** Operational efficiency, climate risk management, brand differentiation for ESG-conscious clients, and attracting capital.
Employee Engagement and D&I	10%	Skill-based volunteering, payroll giving, strong focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (D&I), and employee wellness programs.	**Very High:** Critical for talent attraction and retention; fostering an innovative culture; meeting stakeholder expectations.
Technology for Social Good	6%	AI for social solutions, digital platforms for NGOs, hackathons for social problems, and blockchain for supply chain transparency are all innovative technologies.	**Very High:** Core competency leverage (RBV), market demonstration, innovation sandbox, Creating Shared Value (CSV).
Other (Rural Dev., Arts)	4%	Integrated rural development, disaster relief, and heritage conservation.	**Low:** Traditional philanthropy for community relations.

The third phase involved a detailed mapping of initiatives against the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is presented in a dedicated section below. This serves to evaluate the alignment of corporate strategy with global development priorities.

3.1. CSR Initiatives' Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

The strategic alignment of corporate social initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has become a hallmark of mature sustainability strategies. For Indian IT firms, this alignment serves a dual purpose. Internally, it provides a globally recognised framework to structure and prioritise their diverse social and environmental programs. Instead of a scattered portfolio of ad-hoc papers, the 17 SDGs and their 169 underlying targets offer a comprehensive menu of critical global needs, allowing companies to map their existing strengths and identify new areas for impactful intervention. This helps in moving from reactive philanthropy to proactive, goal-oriented social investment. Externally, it acts as a powerful communication tool, translating local actions into a universal language understood by international investors, clients, and other stakeholders. This signals a move beyond mere compliance with domestic law towards a proactive engagement with the global agenda for sustainable development, clearly manifesting normative isomorphism. By framing their work in the context of, for example, "contributing to SDG 4 (Quality Education)," a firm can more effectively communicate its value proposition to a global audience. This audience may not be familiar with the specifics of Indian domestic policy, but is very familiar with the SDG framework. This enhances credibility and comparability, allowing for better benchmarking against global peers.

The analysis of the reports from 2020 to 2025 reveals a conscious and increasingly sophisticated effort by all four major IT firms to map their activities to the SDGs. This is not just a cosmetic exercise of placing SDG logos on a report; it reflects a deeper strategic integration. While nearly all 17 goals receive some mention, corporate efforts are heavily concentrated around a core set of SDGs that resonate most strongly with their business models, stakeholder expectations, and the thematic areas of their CSR spending. The selection of these core goals is a strategic exercise in itself, reflecting where the company believes it can have the most material impact and where its social investments align best with its business interests. For instance, the IT sector naturally focuses on goals related to education, innovation, and climate action, as these are areas where its operational impact and core competencies are most pronounced. The Table below provides concrete examples of specific corporate initiatives and their direct alignment with these core SDGs, illustrating how abstract goals are translated into tangible action. This demonstrates a clear evolution from simply spending money on social causes to strategically investing in solutions that address specific, globally recognised development challenges (Table 3).

Table 3: Alignment of specific corporate initiatives with UN sustainable development goals (SDGs)

SDG	SDG Title	Example Corporate Initiative	Company
SDG 3	Good Health and Well-being	The Aarogya Raksha program provides mobile medical units and telemedicine services in rural areas.	Wipro
SDG 4	Quality Education	The 'Springboard' digital platform offers free, curriculum-rich virtual learning accessible to students and lifelong learners.	Infosys
SDG 4	Quality Education	The 'goIT' program is a student-focused initiative designed to inspire interest in STEM and computer science careers through design thinking and coding.	TCS
SDG 5	Gender Equality	The 'HCL Samuday' initiative focuses on creating and supporting women's self-help groups for financial independence.	HCLTech
SDG 6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Achieving “water positive” status for over a decade by harvesting more rainwater than the total freshwater consumed across campuses.	Wipro
SDG 7	Affordable and Clean Energy	Commitment to and progress on RE100, aiming to source 100% of electricity from renewable sources for global operations.	Infosys
SDG 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	The core business model is creating hundreds of thousands of high-quality, skilled jobs and fostering a global talent supply chain.	All Four
SDG 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	The HCL Harit initiative focuses on urban greening through large-scale afforestation and the creation of mini-forests.	HCLTech
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption and Production	Comprehensive e-waste management programs aimed at scientific recycling and promoting a circular economy for electronic hardware.	All Four
SDG 13	Climate Action	Public commitment to achieving Net-Zero emissions across the value chain by a specific target year (e.g., 2040 for Infosys).	All Four
SDG 17	Partnerships for the Goals	Collaborating with non-profits, academic institutions, and government bodies to implement large-scale social programs.	All Four

This detailed mapping demonstrates that while broad-based philanthropy continues, the most strategic initiatives are those where the business's core capabilities and operational footprint intersect with a specific global goal. The heavy focus on SDG 4 (Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) is not accidental; it reflects a strategic alignment where societal good, business interest, and risk management converge.

4. Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of the Indian IT sector's sustainability practices from 2020 to 2025 reveals a narrative of significant maturation and strategic acceleration. While the foundations of mandatory compliance remain firmly in place, the superstructure of sustainability strategy has become far more sophisticated, integrated with core business objectives, and oriented globally. The sector has successfully navigated the transition from a purely compliance-driven mindset, necessitated by domestic law, to a more dynamic and strategic approach shaped by the complex demands of the global marketplace. The first key finding is the normalisation of robust financial compliance, with firms consistently meeting and often exceeding their two percent CSR spending obligation. The conversion to USD millions highlights the significant financial scale of these commitments, with the top four firms collectively directing over 1.7 billion USD to social initiatives over the five years. This consistent and substantial financial outlay demonstrates the law's effectiveness in mobilising private sector capital for social development. However, the more profound story lies in the evolving strategic intent behind this spending. While traditional domains of education and healthcare continue to receive the largest shares, their nature is evolving. Education spending (30%) is increasingly strategic, moving from building schools to deploying sophisticated digital learning platforms and launching initiatives focused on future skills like Generative AI, directly addressing the sector's long-term talent pipeline. This represents a clear shift from pure philanthropy, which is detached from the business, towards a model of creating shared value.

This model addresses a critical societal need (improving educational outcomes and digital literacy) while simultaneously strengthening the very ecosystem from which the company draws its most vital resource: skilled human capital. The second, and most significant, finding is the dramatic rise and deep integration of environmental sustainability. This domain now commands a substantial 24% of focus and is arguably the most strategically advanced area. The leading firms have all made ambitious public commitments, such as achieving net-zero emissions and joining the RE100 initiative. The discourse has matured from basic “Green IT” to comprehensive climate action strategies that address Scope 1, 2, and, critically, the more challenging Scope 3 emissions within their value chains. This involves engaging with suppliers, logistics partners, and even employees (regarding business travel and commuting) to reduce indirect emissions. This comprehensive approach is not merely altruistic; it is driven by a powerful confluence of risk management (mitigating climate-related physical and transition risks), operational efficiency (energy savings directly impact the bottom line), and market access (meeting the stringent ESG requirements of global clients). This is a powerful indicator of normative institutional pressure from global investors and clients fundamentally reshaping corporate strategy and operations. A third pivotal finding is the accelerating trend of leveraging core competencies, consistent with the Resource-Based View. The growth of "Technology for Social Good" as a distinct category (6%) is highly significant. This involves firms using their deep expertise in AI, data analytics, and cloud computing to develop bespoke solutions for complex social problems.

These initiatives, which range from using AI to improve agricultural yields for smallholder farmers to developing digital platforms for non-profit management, serve multiple strategic purposes. They act as powerful demonstrations of a company's innovation capabilities, effectively serving as real-world R&D and proof-of-concept papers. They engage employees by connecting their technical skills to meaningful social outcomes, which is a crucial factor in talent retention. Most importantly, they represent the most mature form of strategic CSR where social impact and business value are created in tandem. This is the clearest evidence of the sector moving beyond just "doing good" to "doing good, well" by applying what they do best to society's most pressing challenges. Fourth, the analysis highlights a sophisticated, multi-layered approach to stakeholder management. The IT firms are effectively running a dual-track strategy. They use large-scale CSR spending in health and education to meet the expectations of local communities and government, thereby maintaining their social license to operate within India. Simultaneously, they pursue an advanced ESG agenda focused on climate action, robust governance, and diversity and inclusion to meet the stringent demands of global investors, clients, and talent. The increasing focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (D&I) as part of a broader employee engagement strategy (10%) is particularly notable, reflecting the intense competition for tech talent. In this global war for talent, a strong and authentic commitment to creating an inclusive and equitable workplace is not a peripheral HR policy but a core strategic imperative. It attracts and retains the best minds, directly fueling innovation and long-term business success. This dual approach demonstrates a high level of strategic maturity in balancing local and global stakeholder demands.

4.1. Conclusion and Forward Look to 2026 and Beyond

In conclusion, the Indian IT sector's engagement with sustainability has evolved substantially over the past five years. The initial phase, driven by the coercive pressure of the Companies Act, has given way to a more mature phase driven by the normative pressures of the global ESG movement and the strategic imperatives of the business itself. The journey from compliance to value creation is accelerating, with the language of CSR being subsumed by the more comprehensive and strategic language of ESG. Looking ahead to the current fiscal year (2025-26) and beyond, several trends are expected to intensify. First, the application of Generative AI for social impact will likely move from pilot papers to more scalable solutions, particularly in personalised education and predictive healthcare. Second, investor and regulatory scrutiny on Scope 3 emissions and biodiversity will increase, forcing firms to work more closely with suppliers to decarbonise their value chains and address their broader environmental footprint, aligning with frameworks like the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD). Third, firms will face growing pressure to move beyond reporting activities to demonstrating measurable, long-term social impact, potentially leading to greater investment in Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses and third-party impact verification. Finally, navigating the complex global landscape of ethical AI governance and potential anti-ESG sentiment in some markets while meeting strong ESG demands in others will require even greater strategic dexterity.

4.2. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available corporate reports, which can present an idealised view of corporate practices. Future research should triangulate these findings with qualitative field studies involving interviews with CSR managers, employees, and community beneficiaries to assess on-the-ground impact. Further quantitative studies could explore the causal links between specific ESG initiatives (e.g., circular economy adoption) and financial performance. Finally, as the BRSR framework matures, research on its effectiveness in curbing greenwashing and improving the quality of non-financial data will be a critical area of inquiry.

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