

CSR IN TELECOM INDUSTRY IN INDIA- A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

In today's social and economic environment, issues related to sustainability and social responsibilities are gaining more importance day by day in every sector. As per New Companies Law, corporate are required to spend on corporate social responsibility activities out of their net profits. Thus, CSR which has largely been voluntary contribution by corporate, has now been included in law. The concept of CSR rests on the principle of give and take. Companies take resources of society in the form of human resources, raw material etc and by performing CSR activities, companies are giving something back to the society. CSR is titled to aid an organization's mission as well as a guide to what the company stands for and will uphold to its consumers (Garg, 2013). Therefore, the way in which telecom corporations accomplish their environmental and social responsibilities have serious consequences for entire spectrum of society. The telecommunications sector represents one of the strategic engines for economic growth, so CSR activities of telecommunications sector plays an important role for achieving sustainable business. Now-a-days companies are bringing more transparency in their balance sheet and have started incorporating CSR initiative in their annual report. One can easily notice a shift from corporate philanthropist to being socially responsible. Many companies might get involved in doing CSR due to their genuine care of their environment and society. Also, some companies will see it only as a means of gaining societal acceptance for their operations. This research paper aims at providing an understanding of concept of CSR, benefits of CSR in Telecom sector, analyzing the CSR initiatives in Indian telecom sector in reference to Bharti Airtel Limited and Idea Cellular Ltd.

KEYWORDS: Corporate Social Responsibility, Companies Act 2013, Telecommunication, Initiatives, CSR Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

By CSR is meant the company's sense of responsibility towards the community and environment in which it operates. To survive in today's modern business world, a company needs to take a

social stand. In present times, while making purchases consumers are looking for more than just high-quality products and services. Due to this, the importance of CSR is increasing very much in Indian Corporate world. Taking this into account, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified Section 135 and Schedule VII of the Companies Act 2013 as well as the provisions of the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules, 2014 to come into effect from April 1, 2014. With effect from April 1, 2014, every company, private limited or public limited, which either has a net worth of Rs 500 crore or a turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or net profit of Rs 5 crore, needs to spend at least 2% of its average net profit for the immediately preceding three financial years on corporate social responsibility activities. The CSR activities should not be undertaken in the normal course of business and must be with respect to any of the activities mentioned in Schedule VII of the 2013 Act. The CSR Rules appear to widen the ambit for compliance obligations to include the holding and subsidiary companies as well as foreign companies whose branches or project offices in India fulfill the specified criteria.

The activities that can be undertaken by a company to fulfill its CSR obligations include eradicating hunger, poverty and malnutrition, promoting preventive healthcare, promoting education and promoting gender equality, setting up homes for women, orphans and the senior citizens, measures for reducing inequalities faced by socially and economically backward groups, ensuring environmental sustainability and ecological balance, animal welfare, protection of national heritage and art and culture, measures for the benefit of armed forces veterans, war widows and their dependents, training to promote rural, nationally recognized, Paralympic or Olympic sports, contribution to the prime minister's national relief fund or any other fund set up by the Central Government for socio economic development and relief and welfare of SC, ST, OBCs, minorities and women, contributions or funds provided to technology incubators located within academic institutions approved by the Central Government and rural development projects. However, in determining CSR activities to be undertaken, preference would need to be given to local areas and the areas around where the company operates.

Companies can also collaborate with each other for jointly undertaking CSR activities; provided that each of the companies are able individually report on such projects. A company can build CSR capabilities of its personnel or implementation agencies through institutions with established track records of at least three years, provided that the expenditure for such activities does not exceed 5% of the total CSR expenditure of the company in a single financial year. The

CSR Rules specify that a company which does not satisfy the specified criteria for a consecutive period of three financial years is not required to comply with the CSR obligations, implying that a company not satisfying any of the specified criteria in a subsequent financial year would still need to undertake CSR activities unless it ceases to satisfy the specified criteria for a continuous period of three years.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Premlata and Agarwal, Anshika (2013) in their paper “Corporate Social Responsibility: An Indian Perspective” stated the policy for CSR works in India, that profitable companies with a sizeable business would have to spend every year at least 2 per cent of their three-year average profit on CSR works, effects and limitations of the policy. The paper mainly concentrated on the existing CSR policies of some companies. It did not use any statistical tools and techniques for the study.

Prabhakar, Rajeev and Mishra, Sonam (2013), in the paper “A study of Corporate Social Responsibility in Indian Organisation: An introspection”, studied the current status of CSR in India by reviewing the policy in India regarding CSR, initiatives taken by various companies. It explained various models of CSR. The paper also gave suggestions to accelerate the CSR initiatives and overcome challenges faced by companies in implementing CSR and concluded by stating that the Companies bill is a good initiative on the part of the government for initiating CSR activities.

Chatley, Pooja (2015) in her paper “Going Green: Methods and Initiatives By Telecom Companies in The Indian Telecommunication Sector” stated that devastating increase in energy consumption and rising cost of fossil fuel made the network operators to focus on ‘Go Green’ by using energy efficient technologies and alternate sources of energy. For this, telecom service providers and manufacturers have taken steps towards greening of telecom. Initiatives taken by various Indian telecom companies and global companies and methods to be adopted for going green by telecom companies were discussed in the paper.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Need and Significance of study:

All business stakeholders including investors, employees, managers and consumers have begun to understand how economic growth of a business or an industry is linked with environmental and social well-being. So, the present paper highlights the concept of CSR, benefits of CSR in Telecom sector, analyzing the CSR initiatives in Indian telecom sector during FY 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 in reference to Bharti Airtel and Idea Cellular Ltd. by providing a comparative view of two companies regarding their CSR activities.

Objectives:

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To understand the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility.
- To discuss some benefits of CSR.
- To analyzing the CSR initiatives in Indian telecom sector.

Method of Data Collection:

Data is the prerequisite of any research because on the basis of data collected any analysis and interpretation can be done. This research paper is based on secondary data and is descriptive and analytical in nature. In this, data of only two companies is selected for a comparative study. Since, Vodafone and Idea are merging and will become largest telecom company in India. So, data regarding CSR activities of Bharti Airtel, which is a leading global telecommunications company and Idea Cellular Ltd. (prior to its merger), has been collected.

Limitations of study:

This study is based on the secondary source of data. The limitation of this study is that it not being based on primary data due to

- Cost and limited financial resources
- Limited contacts and resources

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

According to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it is the responsibility of the corporations taking up commercial operations within society to contribute equally towards economic, social and environmental development that helps to create positive impact on society at large. It focuses on the fact that corporations need to focus beyond earning profits only. World Business Council for sustained development states that CSR is “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the

quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large” (Garg, 2014).

TELECOM INDUSTRY

India's telecommunication network is the second largest in the world by number of telephone users (both fixed and mobile phone) with 1.206 billion subscribers as on 30 September 2017. The telecom sector continues to be at the epicenter for growth, disruption and innovation for virtually any industry. Therefore, the way in which telecom corporations accomplish their economic, social and environmental responsibilities has serious consequences on the society.

Telecommunication has helped in the socioeconomic development of our country and has played an important role to narrow down the rural-urban digital divide to some extent. It also has helped to increase the transparency of governance with the introduction of e-governance in India. Some of the mobile telecom companies in India include Bharti, Idea, Vodafone, BSNL, Reliance Jio etc.

BENEFITS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- 1) Corporate social responsibility helps a company to build its reputation as a responsible business, which can also lead to competitive advantage.
- 2) By being a socially responsible business, it becomes easier to recruit new employees or retain existing ones.
- 3) A strong corporate social responsibility framework helps in building and nurturing trust between the company and clients.
- 4) CSR is something which helps in achieving long term results as well as business continuity.
- 5) A company demonstrating their engagement in those practices that satisfy and go beyond regulatory compliance requirements gets less governmental oversight.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY POLICY OF BHARTI AIRTEL LIMITED

Bharti Airtel Limited is a leading global telecommunications company headquartered in New Delhi, India and operates in 20 countries across Asia and Africa.

- 1) Focus areas: Bharti Airtel's CSR and welfare activities focus on promoting education; education, employment generation, sanitation, healthcare, Promoting gender equality, empowering women, disaster management and environment protection, among others.

- 2) Selection and Implementation of CSR Activities and Projects: The CSR Committee shall consider CSR proposals from Bharti Foundation or through any other eligible entity. In order to be considered by the CSR Committee, such proposals must contain various necessary details regarding projects to be undertaken and a confirmation about their eligibility under the Companies Act, 2013 and rules made there under. The CSR Committee will evaluate the projects and afterwards may approve certain projects / programs for implementation.
- 3) CSR Budget: The Board shall approve overall limits for CSR Activities to be undertaken by the Company. Within that limit, the CSR Committee shall approve individual projects / programs including contribution towards the Corpus Fund.
- 4) Location: All CSR projects / programs under this policy shall be undertaken in India. The CSR Committee shall decide on locations for implementation of the CSR projects / programs.

CSR ACTIVITIES OF BHARTI AIRTEL LIMITED

At Bharti Airtel, their agenda is to support inclusive socio-economic progress for the development of our country. Their focus areas comprise education, employment generation, sanitation, healthcare, disaster management and environment protection, among others.

- Bharti Foundation: Bharti Foundation was set up in 2000 with the vision “to help underprivileged children and young people of our country realize their potential”.
- Satya Bharti School Program: This program was launched in 2006 to provide quality education to students, completely free of cost, with a special focus on the girl child.

Key Performance Indicators	2015-2016	2016-2017
Schools	254	254
States	06	06
Students	40,676	43,527
Percentage of Girls	49%	49%
Percentage of children from SC/ST/OBC communities	75%	75%
Teachers	1,635	1,677
Percentage of female teachers	54%	66%

Source: Bharti Airtel Limited Annual Report

- Satya Bharti Learning Centre’s Program: This Program aims to mainstream Out of School Children back into schools.

Key Performance Indicators	2015-2016	2016-2017
Centre’s	459	223*
Children impacted	22,830	29,756

Children enrolled	5,302	2,363
Children mainstreamed	14,703	23,676
Percentage of girls	50%	50%
Percentage of SC/ST/ OBC students	96%	98%
Education volunteers	416	290

Source: Bharti Airtel Limited Annual Report

* 942 centre's have been closed as most of the OOSC's in these villages have been mainstreamed(number included in overall impact); in some villages the count of OOSC's have dropped to such a low figure that it has gone below the minimum numbers required to run a centre, as per Government norms.

50 Centre's had to be closed because of unavailability of qualified education volunteers.

- **Satya Bharti Quality Support Program:** This program was initiated in 2013, which provides need based interventions to improve the quality of the schooling experience for students and stakeholders in Government schools.

Key Performance Indicators	2015-2016
Schools (In four States*)	39
Teachers	953
Students	21,620

*Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi

Key Performance Indicators	2016-2017
Schools (In seven States*)	323
Teachers	5,133
Students	1,24,856

Source: Bharti Airtel Limited Annual Report

*Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Telangana, Goa and Jammu & Kashmir.

- **Satya Bharti Abhiyan:** Bharti Foundation launched the it to improve sanitation facilities in rural Ludhiana district and support the Government's agenda of Swachh Bharat Mission

Key Performance Indicators	2015-2016
Number of individual toilets handed over	12,723
Number of direct beneficiaries	63,050
Villages covered	559
Girls' toilets constructed in Government Schools	14

Key Performance Indicators	2016-2017
Number of direct beneficiaries*	86,582
Number of individual toilets handed over	17,628
Girls' toilets constructed in Government Schools	14

Source: Bharti Airtel Limited Annual Report

*Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Telangana, Goa and Jammu & Kashmir.

- **Helping the Disadvantaged:** A scholarship programme was started for underprivileged students of Footwear Design and Development Institute (FDDI), Chhindwara District, MP. Over 100 in FY 2015-2016 and 200 in FY 2016-2017 underprivileged students were granted scholarship.
- **Disaster Relief:** In 2015-2016, Team Kerala and Tamil Nadu (KTN) contributed to bring Chennai and Cuddalore back to normalcy. Their Bihar and Jharkhand Circles donated Rs. 958,735 to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the rehabilitation of victims of Nepal's earthquake. In December 2016, their network team worked round the clock to keep the services running in Tamil Nadu, which was affected by Vardah cyclone.
- **Blood Donation:** In FY 2015-16, their Gujarat team organized two blood donation camps; and was able to collect 50 units each. In FY 2016-17, fourteen blood donation camps were organized across the northeast states and Assam, where 520 units of blood were collected in one day.
- **Conversion of Indoor Sites to Outdoor:** Airtel has been partnering with Tower Cos to convert indoor sites to outdoor sites. Over 33,000 sites have been converted to outdoor till March 2016, reducing the energy consumption by about 25%. Over 48,973 sites have been converted to outdoor sites till March 2017.
- Among others, Bharti Airtel Limited also started other programs such as Higher education programs, Nyaya Bharti Program. Besides this, other initiatives included Airtel Delhi Half Marathon, Young Leader Programme, A Caring Touch, Joy of Giving, Project Green Cities, E-waste, E-bills etc.

Other Initiatives and Programs started in 2015-2016 at Bharti Airtel Limited

- **Digital Empowerment:** Their teams trained 360,000 women in all 13 districts of the state. Over 149,000 women were trained across 23 districts of Madhya Pradesh.
- **Infrastructure Sharing:** In FY 2015-16, 45% incremental sites were deployed as sharer sites, reducing the energy consumption by a minimum 30% over standalone sites.
- **Outdoor Site Deployment:** During the year, over 90% of the new sites were deployed as outdoor, eliminating air-conditioner usage.
- Among above initiatives, Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Holistic Welfare and Putting Faith in Green Energy were also taken.

Other Initiatives and Programs started in 2016-2017 at Bharti Airtel Limited

- Renewable Energy Solutions: Airtel’s green power wheeling agreements for the procurement of green energy of 88 Mn units per annum. 381 sites completed with 300 Wp solar on own and partner sites by switching off our air-conditioners and utilizing solar and natural cooling to reduce the energy demand. Among above initiatives, Airtel and Magic Bus, Pool2Park Campaign, Supporting the Community, Caring for the Elderly were also taken.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY POLICY OF IDEA CELLULAR LTD.

Idea Cellular is an Indian mobile network operator based at Mumbai, Maharashtra. In accordance with the notification issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs dated 27th February 2014 under Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, the Company’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is stated. Their CSR policy also conforms to the National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environment and Economic Responsibilities of business released by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India in collaboration with FCCI Aditya Birla Centre for Excellence (July 2011).

- 1) Vision: Their vision is to- “actively contribute to the social and economic development of the communities in which they operate. In so doing build a better, sustainable way of life for the weaker and marginal sections of society and raise the country’s human development index”.
- 2) Implementation process: All projects are identified in a participatory manner, in consultation with the community. Subsequently, based on a consensus, projects are ranked. Arising from this the focus areas that have emerged are Education, Health care, Sustainable livelihood, Infrastructure development, and espousing social causes. All of their community projects/programmes are carried out under the aegis of The Aditya Birla Centre for Community Initiatives and Rural Development.
- 3) Budgets: A specific budget is allocated for CSR activities. This budget is project/programme driven.

CSR ACTIVITIES OF IDEA CELLULAR LTD.

Idea Cellular Limited under its CSR initiatives emphasizes on Education, Health care, Sustainable livelihood, Infrastructure development, and supporting social causes.

- Solar Lamps to School Children: In this, Idea Ltd.in partnership with IIT Bombay works on to provide clean source of light to student and skill development in six states MP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, Delhi, UP, Bihar. The project outreached 3, 25,303 school children during FY 2015-16 and 1, 00,000 school children during FY 2016-17.

- Mid-Day Meal: Idea Cellular Ltd. in partnership with Akshaya Patra Foundation has taken initiative to provide mid-day meal to children in schools in Lucknow, Jaipur, Mysore, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Cuttack, Puri and Bhubaneswar. The project outreached 40,000 school children in each year during FY 2015-16 and 2016-17.
- Polio Non-Recurrence Campaign: Idea Ltd. in collaboration with Rotary Foundation (India) organized awareness rallies, health camps, administer pulse polio vaccination to children up to 5 years of age. The project outreached 17 Crores children in each round in each year during FY 2015-16 and 2016-17.
- Cochlear Implant: Idea Cellular Ltd. and its subsidiary companies support deaf-mute children through cochlear implant in Maharashtra. The project helped 21 deaf and mute children till FY 2016-17.
- Construction of Individual Household Toilets: Company in partnership with the Department of Rural Development, Government of J&K, supported for the construction of 2010 toilets in 10 Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana Gram Panchayats across 8 districts.

Other Initiatives and Programs started in 2015-2016 at Idea Cellular Ltd.

- Angrezi Seekho: Idea Cellular Ltd. started a project ‘Angrezi Seekho’ in partnership with Pratham Education Foundation in Delhi, UP, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The project outreached 2,800 children during FY 2015-16.
- Rehabilitation of Educational Institutions Affected due to Chennai Floods: One of the natural calamities in recent past was Chennai flood of year 2015. Idea Cellular Ltd. undertook an initiative for the rehabilitation of educational institutions. The project helped in rebuilding school infrastructure in 19 schools during FY 2015-16.

Other Initiatives and Programs started in 2016-2017 at Idea Cellular Ltd.

- KHEL-Knowledge Hub for e-Learning: Under this, e-learning was promoted in schools in MP, Mumbai and Kanpur. The project outreached 50 schools (around 7500 School children) during FY 2016-17.
- Restoring Eyesight of Treatable Blind Persons: Idea Cellular Ltd. in partnership with Vision Foundation of India organized eye camps and conducted eye surgery in AP, Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and West Bengal. The project outreached 6666 persons during FY 2016-17.

- Village Social Entrepreneurs in Healthcare: Idea Cellular Ltd. in partnership with Public Health Technologies Trust (PHTT) started this project in Haryana, UP, Kerala and AP. The project outreached 100 locations, 25 in each State during FY 2016-17.
- MPOWER: Under this initiative awareness about mental health among children and adolescent was generated in Mumbai. The project outreached 1000 children and adolescents during FY 2016-17.
- Reduction of Future Risks of Cardio-Vascular Diseases: Idea Cellular Ltd. in partnership with Mission Arogya Health and Information Technology creates awareness among school children (Class IX to XII) about the cardio vascular diseases in West Bengal. The project outreached 2762 Schools, approx. 5.52 lakhs children during FY 2016-17.
- Roshini: Digital & Economic Empowerment of Women: This project was started for the promotion of digital literacy and women empowerment in MP, Bihar and Rajasthan. The project outreached 300 rural women during FY 2016-17.
- Setting up Vocational Education and Training (VET) Centers: Idea Cellular Ltd. intends to address the skills deficit amongst India's youth by providing training to youngsters in Raipur, Nagpur, Vadodara, Udaipur, Bhopal and Kanpur. The project outreached 1800 youths during FY 2016-17.
- Providing Drinking Water in Drought Affected Marathwada Region: Marathwada region witnessed a severe drought in the year 2016. Company in line with ABG philosophy started this project which outreached 47 villages, 11415 families during FY 2016-17.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to carry forward its philanthropic activities, Bharti Foundation was set up in 2000. Bharti Airtel Ltd. undertook an integrated approach to the welfare of communities through their diverse initiatives in the field of education, employment generation, sanitation, healthcare, disaster management and environment protection, among others. Idea Cellular Limited under its CSR initiatives focused on education, health care, sustainable livelihood, infrastructure development, and supporting social causes. The main sectors which were taken up for CSR activities by both companies were education, health care, environment protection, digital literacy.

Analysis of above collected data shows that with respect to education sector, Bharti Airtel Ltd. has contributed a lot. With respect to health care sector, Idea has started a number of initiatives

and projects. In regard to environment protection, Bharti Airtel Ltd. has started a number of initiatives and programs. In case of digital literacy, both Bharti Airtel and Idea are taking initiatives. Thus it's very much clear from the results that both Bharti Airtel and Idea are taking up number of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, but Bharti Airtel is more into the implementation of CSR initiatives and it has taken up CSR initiatives in lot more areas. But, Idea has contributed a lot in health care sector and has started focusing on more corporate social responsible activities and taking up more initiatives than before.

CONCLUSION

Now-a-days, CSR has become a fundamental business practice and has gained much attention. It helps to provide opportunities for the corporations to contribute in various activities which directly or indirectly help welfare of the society. Taking up socially responsible initiatives is truly a win-win situation. It helps not only to appeal to socially conscious consumers and employees, but also helps to make a real difference in the world. So the notion of being socially responsible should go beyond being an obligation to be a necessity of their day to day lives. From the results it is very much clear that Bharti Airtel has taken number of activities in every field and Idea Cellular is also on the same path. So, it can be concluded that being a socially responsible company is the need of the today.

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