Journal of Social Review and Development, 2026; 5(3):113-118 ISSN NO: 2583-2816

# Advancing CSR and sustainable development goals through e-commerce platforms: Evidence from leading cases

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Received 2 Jul 2026; Accepted 04 Aug 2026; Published 19 Aug 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64171/JSRD.5.3.113-118

**Abstract**

E-commerce platforms are critical drivers of economic activity. They offer massive opportunities to address social and environmental challenges through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This paper analyses the role of leading e-commerce platforms in promoting CSR activities in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using the case study approach, this paper examines the CSR practices of Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Alibaba, majorly in terms of contribution toward sustainability, ethical business practices, and community development. The platform, in its key initiatives, includes Amazon's renewable energy programs about Climate Action (SDG 13), Flipkart's efforts in eco-friendly packaging related to Responsible Consumption (SDG 12), and Myntra supporting local artisans through ethical fashion based on Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). These platforms have shown the potential for impact by taking CSR into core strategies. However, high costs, supply chain complexities, and limited consumer awareness are some factors that hinder complete alignment with SDG goals. The paper highlights best practices and proposes actionable recommendations for e-commerce platforms, including adopting circular economy practices, leveraging technology for transparency, and fostering cross-sector collaborations. This study underlines the transformative role of e-commerce in promoting sustainable development, setting a benchmark for other industries.

**Keywords:** E-commerce platforms, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sustainability, Digital Economy

## 1. Introduction

In the past two decades, the e-commerce platform has wholly transformed the retailing landscape around the globe. E-commerce platforms, including Amazon, Alibaba, Flipkart, and Myntra, drive cross-border online trade, change the consumer's way of doing business, and lead to new business models, such as convenience, speed, and accessibility in doing business (Wulfert *et al*., 2024) [23]. These platforms are fundamental to the global economy, interacting with consumer purchasing behaviors, employment, supply chains, and even sustainability practices in full effect (Andreev *et al*., 2022) [3]. As they further increase their market presence, the role of e-commerce platforms also increases their responsibility toward contributing to society by making CSR efforts.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as a company's efforts to conduct its business in a manner that is socially and environmentally responsible while contributing to the well-being of society at large (Carroll, 1991) [7]. Considering the significant market influence and worldwide spread of e-commerce platforms, communities, industries, and environments can be influenced positively and positively by e-commerce. Despite this, CSR practices have remained relatively unexplored in e-commerce compared to traditional industries. As consumers have become increasingly more aware and the demand for ethical business practices has gained more momentum, integration of CSR into business strategy has become necessary (Bartok, 2018) [5].

A critical framework that deals with global challenges is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These are 17 global goals focusing on promoting prosperity, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion by 2030 (United Nations, 2015) [22]. The growth of e-commerce platforms has given digital giants a chance to contribute significantly to advancing such SDGs. For example, SDG 12 is sustainable consumption and production, SDG 5 is gender equality, and SDG 8 is economic growth directly related to leading e-commerce companies' operational practices (Ahmad *et al*., 2024) [1]. By aligning their CSR efforts with these global goals, e-commerce platforms strengthen their brands and contribute to achieving a more sustainable and equitable world.

This paper investigates the role of e-commerce platforms in developing CSR and SDGs by focusing on how their sustainability and social responsibility are integrated into core business practices. Utilizing a case study framework based on leaders like Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Alibaba, this paper talks about various CSR initiatives adopted by these companies, how they are aligned with SDGs, and their general impact on society and the environment. In doing so, the paper aims to provide insights into the best practices, challenges, and opportunities that e-commerce platforms face in fulfilling their CSR commitments while contributing to global sustainability.

The structure of the paper will be as follows: First, the theoretical background on CSR and SDGs will be discussed to establish the importance of these concepts in modern business practices. Then, the methodology section will outline the approach taken for the case study analysis of CSR practices by leading e-commerce platforms. After this, detailed case studies will illustrate specific CSR initiatives, their relevance to the SDGs, and what has been done. Finally, the paper will analyze the impact of these initiatives, provide recommendations for further enhancing CSR in e-commerce, and suggest future research directions.

## 2. Understanding CSR and SDGs

### 2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR, in other words, is a commitment by the business world to contribute positively to society beyond its core economic functions so that the activity will not harm the environment or society. CSR practices include a broad range of practices that reflect the ethical responsibilities of a company to its stakeholders, which include employees, customers, communities, and the environment (Bartok, 2018; Carroll, 1991) [5, 7]. These practices often include environmental sustainability, fair labor practices, charitable giving, and responsible sourcing, as cited by Kotter, 2006 [18].

CSR is generally divided into four levels of responsibility, as defined by Carroll's Pyramid of CSR: economic responsibility, legal obligation, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility. Each of these levels describes the extent of actions companies take to operate in an ethically responsible manner. Indeed, CSR was extended to include environmentally sustainable practices and benefitted society because of growing consumers. Investors demand that companies behave responsibly in this digital age (Jie *et al*., 2024) [15].

In e-commerce, CSR takes on many shapes and forms, such as reducing carbon footprints, fair labor conditions throughout global supply chains, diverse and inclusive workforces, and investments in community development programs. Due to the extensive reach that e-commerce holds, it will be able to make a mass difference, which puts e-commerce in an ideal position for CSR leadership.

### 2.2 The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are 17 goals that all the UN Member States adopted in 2015 to address the significant problems facing humanity, including poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change. The SDGs are part and parcel of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, intended to ensure a better and more sustainable future for all (United Nations, 2015) [12]. The SDGs encompass different social, environmental, and economic issues, making it imperative that the world collectively work towards attaining these goals.

Each of the 17 SDGs has specific targets and indicators that help the international community measure progress. The goals aim to ensure that nobody is left behind; thus, there is sustainable economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The most relevant SDGs for e-commerce platforms include:

- **SDG 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth-E-commerce promotes jobs, contributes to local development, decent working wages, and safety as offered to all workers and firms partnering with their concerns (ILO, 2019) [14].
- **SDG 12:** Responsible Consumption and Production – E-commerce can impact consumer behavior through sustainable products and eco-friendly packaging, reduced waste, and responsible consumption patterns (Geissdoerfer *et al*., 2017) [11].
- **SDG 13:** Climate Action-E-commerce companies can improve the environment through renewable energy sources, optimizing supply chains, and reducing carbon footprint in all business areas (Ramos *et al*., 2015) [20].
- **SDG 5:** Gender Equality- Many e-commerce companies promote gender equality by empowering women as entrepreneurs and ensuring fair representation in all its working sectors (Basuony *et al*., 2014) [6].

The SDGs present a framework by which e-commerce firms can align their CSR practices with global objectives. Addressing the goals means considerable impacts on both local and global scales toward overall success in achieving sustainable development.

### 2.3 Why E-commerce platforms are key players in advancing CSR and SDGs

In conclusion, e-commerce firms are at the core of driving CSR and SDG results since they stretch globally, allow innovative new business models to emerge, and command consumer buying behavior. Essentially a digital marketplace, an e-commerce firm does not come with geographical constraints and enables it to address millions of buyers and sellers operating around the globe. This allows it to scale societal and environmental change (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020) [12].

#### 2.3.1. International Reach and Influence

E-commerce sites are international, bringing suppliers and consumers worldwide together. This global dimension means that such sites can impact markets in different industries, from retail to technology, thereby increasing the possibility of having positive social and environmental impacts (Chaffey *et al*., 2019) [8].

#### 2.3.2. Technology and Innovation

More and more e-commerce firms adopt the most innovative technologies, like AI, blockchain, and Big Data, to ensure efficiency in all operations and satisfy the customers while avoiding negative environmental impacts. For instance, AI may be used to improve supply chains and predict the demand for environment-friendly products. Moreover, AI may assist consumers in purchasing environment-friendly products (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020) [12].

#### 2.3.3. Influence on Consumer Behavior

E-commerce platforms affect the behavior of consumers and nudge them toward sustainable consumption patterns by making recommendations on products, certification, and disclosure about environmental and social practices. The e-commerce industry can nudge consumers toward responsible consumption through eco-friendly products and transparent business practices (Ye *et al*., 2015) [25].

### 2.3.4. Corporate Scale and Resources

E-commerce companies, especially the more prominent players like Amazon, Flipkart, and Alibaba, have sizeable financial and technological resources to commit to long-term CSR projects. These e-commerce companies usually work with NGOs, government departments, and other companies to set up large-scale sustainability initiatives, like carbon reduction and waste management programs (Kolk, 2008) [17].

### 2.3.5. Job Creation and Economic Development

Direct and indirect employment is made possible for millions of people in the large-scale supply chains, logistics networks, and digital marketing operations of e-commerce platforms. Through diversity, equitable labor practices, and entrepreneurship, social inclusion is enhanced, and poverty and inequality are reduced along with gender parity (Arora *et al*., 2023) [4]. Click or tap here to enter text. Moreover, some e-commerce businesses allow small entrepreneurs and local artists to reach distant markets, boosting economic activities and employment opportunities for people in many underdeveloped areas.

Overall, the unique position of e-commerce in advancing CSR and contributions toward the SDGs is likely to occur given the scale of its operation, technological prowess, and massive impact on how consumers and businesses operate. Integrating CSR into core business models makes the former more sustainable while setting an example for others in pursuing positive social and environmental results.

## 3. Methodology

This case study was selected to analyze CSR initiatives in leading e-commerce platforms because such a method is well-suited to capturing CSR complexity and diversity while offering insight into motives, strategies, and the results of their practice (Hollweck, 2015) [13]. The criteria for these studies included the following platforms: Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Alibaba. These included their market influence, demonstrated by large-scale operations with significant global or regional impact, diverse CSR initiatives addressing multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the commitment to transparency, as illustrated by public access to CSR and sustainability reports. Data for this study was drawn from several sources, including reports on corporate sustainability and CSR that the platforms have published, academic literature peer-reviewed and industry analyses, and news articles that feature such CSR efforts in the media.

## 4. CSR initiatives in e-commerce platforms

There are increasing inroads into corporate social responsibility (CSR) among the business strategies e-commerce platforms employ to implement their strategies. Corporate social responsibility lends itself to positive social, environmental, and economic change; in this case, e-commerce platforms are adept at pursuing this due to their broad outreach worldwide. This section covers key CSR initiatives of leading e-commerce platforms regarding sustainability, ethical business practices, community involvement, and diversity. We look at platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Alibaba and take a case-by-case study by aligning their CSR initiatives with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### 4.1 Amazon: Commitment to sustainability and climate action

Amazon is one of the world's largest and most influential e-commerce platforms, and it has made great strides toward CSR, especially in sustainability and climate action. Amazon's most prominent CSR initiative is its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2040. The company has committed to powering its operations with 100% renewable energy by 2025, contributing to SDG 13: Climate Action (Amazon, 2020). Amazon has invested in the renewable energy project to further its environmental goals. They include solar and wind farms that intend to reduce the company's carbon footprint (Kaur & Singh, 2020) [16].

Apart from renewable energy, Amazon emphasizes sustainable packaging. The company initiated the "Frustration-Free Packaging" program, which nudges vendors to adopt recyclable and eco-friendly packaging. This aligns with SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, which focuses on reducing waste and promoting sustainable materials (Amazon, 2023) [2]. Additionally, Amazon supports sustainable logistics by using electric delivery vehicles in specific locations, which reduces the carbon footprint of its extensive supply chain (Fisher *et al*., 2019) [9].

### 4.2 Flipkart: Promoting sustainable consumption and empowering communities

Flipkart is one of the leading e-commerce platforms in India and has made giant strides in promoting sustainable consumption and community empowerment, two of the core pillars of CSR activities. Flipkart has aggressively adopted a plastic usage reduction policy to stop using plastic packaging by 2025. Flipkart has introduced alternatives such as paper-based packaging and reusable bags, achieving SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production (Flipkart, 2024) [10].

Apart from environmental sustainability, another CSR activity that Flipkart deals with involves community empowerment. The company operates a program known as "Flipkart Foundation," which aims to promote the welfare of underprivileged communities in India regarding education, healthcare, and skill development. The foundation operates several initiatives to achieve SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being to increase and enhance access to higher education and healthcare services among the underprivileged sections of the population (Soni, 2018). Flipkart also supports women entrepreneurs through initiatives like "Flipkart Samarth," which empowers rural women artisans and weavers by giving them an online platform to sell their products. This, in turn, helps achieve SDG 5: Gender Equality (Singh & Soni, 2019) [21].

### 4.3 Myntra: Sustainability and Ethical Fashion

Myntra is one of India's most prominent fashion e-commerce companies that considers sustainability and responsible business practices an integral part of its core CSR initiatives. The company has launched numerous lines of clothing made from organic cotton, recycled polyester, and other sustainable materials that encourage consumers to become more conscious and responsible in their consumption towards SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. "Myntra for Good" aims to impact sustainable fashion practices through partnerships with eco-conscious brands, according to Myntra (Myntra, 2021) [19]. Furthermore, Myntra has increased transparency in the supply chain and upheld the products within the platform of ethical labor standards. The service provider ensures wages, a safe work environment, and workers' respect in its relations with suppliers. This helps bring a decent sense of work towards SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth within the fashion business (Myntra, 2021) [19]. It supports other social responsibility initiatives, including the education and skill training programs targeted at the marginalized, as a direct input to SDG 4: Quality Education.

### 4.4 Alibaba: Green Logistics and Inclusive Growth

Alibaba is a global e-commerce giant that has been a leader in integrating CSR into its business strategy, especially in green logistics and inclusive growth. Alibaba has committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. Alibaba's green logistics program optimizes packaging, reduces warehouse energy consumption, and improves transportation efficiency to lower emissions (Alibaba, 2021). This initiative directly supports SDG 13: Climate Action and aligns with the company's broader commitment to SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

Beyond environmental sustainability, Alibaba strongly emphasizes inclusive growth by fostering entrepreneurship and small business development. Initiatives like Alibaba Entrepreneurs Fund and Taobao Villages empowered rural entrepreneurs, especially women, to start and scale their online businesses. These programs create job opportunities, reduce poverty, and promote gender equality in achieving SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth (Xiaolin *et al*., 2020) [24] besides digital inclusion, which has involved marginalized communities being incorporated into the internet and access to online business platforms and resources to increase the accomplishment of SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.

**Table 1:** E-commerce platforms having CSR initiatives and alignment with SDGs

| E-commerce platform | CSR Initiatives | Alignment with SDGs | Notable Impacts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amazon | **Amazon cares:** Disaster relief, healthcare, and education. Commitment to renewable energy and carbon-neutral delivery. Skill development programs for small businesses (e.g., 'Karigar' and 'Saheli'). | SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) | Provided relief supplies to disaster-hit areas and healthcare support for underserved communities. Achieved net-zero carbon emissions in multiple operations globally. Empowered local artisans and women entrepreneurs through market access. |
| Flipkart | **Flipkart foundation:** Promotes education, digital inclusion, and rural community upliftment. Sustainable packaging solutions (biodegradable materials instead of plastic). | SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) | Enhanced digital literacy in rural India; supported underprivileged children with scholarships. Reduced plastic waste by millions of tons annually. |
| Myntra | **'Myntra for Earth':** Promotes sustainable and eco-friendly products. Workforce development initiatives for diversity and inclusion, especially women in leadership. | SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) | Encouraged adoption of sustainable fashion; partnered with eco-friendly brands. Increased women's participation in corporate leadership roles. |
| Alibaba | **Anti-poverty fund:** Focuses on education, healthcare, and rural infrastructure development. Green Logistics initiative to reduce carbon emissions in delivery operations. Taobao Villages initiative: Encourages small-scale vendors. | SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 13 (Climate Action) | Lifted millions out of poverty in rural China through development projects. Reduced carbon emissions through innovative supply chain management. Increased employment opportunities and entrepreneurial growth in rural regions. |

***Source:*** Authors own creation

### 4.5 Common Trends in CSR Initiatives Among E-Commerce Platforms

CSR initiatives of the leading e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Alibaba show some common trends. First, sustainability is a key priority across all platforms, with efforts focused on reducing carbon footprints, promoting sustainable packaging, and supporting renewable energy initiatives. These actions are crucial in advancing SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. Secondly, there is much social impact in empowering marginalized communities, achieving gender equality, and improving education and health, which cuts across most case studies. All these activities contribute to SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, and SDG 4: Quality Education. The last element is the involvement of local communities, NGOs, and governments to make e-commerce CSR successful. They can upscale their efforts toward a common goal, such as reducing poverty, promoting digital literacy, and fostering entrepreneurship through partnerships. These contribute to SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

A comparison of the CSR initiatives would reveal that although all three platforms prioritize environmental sustainability, there is a significant variation in how they approach social impact and innovation. Amazon and Alibaba lead on climate action; Flipkart and Myntra excel in supporting small businesses and sustainable consumption. This demonstrates the business's potential to positively change the world with CSR initiatives and enhance brand reputation, consumer trust, and community well-being. Challenges include resource constraints, statutory impediments, and the possibility of greenwashing, which threatens actual sustainability.

## 6. Implications for Practice

### 6.1 For e-commerce platforms

**Invest in innovative technologies:** Adopt and develop new technologies to enhance sustainable operations, reduce environmental impact, and optimize resource efficiency.

**Involve stakeholders in CSR:** Empower customers, employees, and partners to collectively co-create corporate social responsibility projects that deliver outcomes that are not only meaningful but also measurable.

### 6.2 For policymakers and stakeholders

**Align regulations with SDGs:** Design and implement policies that promote businesses to align their CSR initiatives with SDGs.

**Foster cross-sector collaborations:** Help organizations partner across business, non-profit, and government sectors to realize more significant synergies toward multiplying social and environmental benefits.

## 7. Opportunities and Future Directions

Emerging trends such as AI-driven sustainability and circular economy practices open new opportunities for e-commerce platforms to enhance their environmental and social impact. By harnessing these technologies, platforms can optimize resource management and reduce waste, contributing to more sustainable business practices. Moreover, collaborative efforts between e-commerce platforms, governments, and NGOs can enormously enhance the influence of CSR in creating a more comprehensive approach to tackling social and environmental issues. Therefore, future studies should focus on the consumer's perspective on CSR to understand its impact on customers' purchasing behavior and loyalty. Additional insight might be garnered by research on the long-term effectiveness of CSR programs regarding how to sustain value created through responsible actions in businesses.

## 8. Conclusion

The e-commerce platform is the backbone of CSR and SDG, as it goes hand in hand with sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity. It presents best practices and challenges as a roadmap to harmonize business strategies with global aspirations. All stakeholders should come together to leverage the transformational capabilities of e-commerce for societal and environmental progress. E-commerce platforms, being globally influential brands, need to provide the best practices with well-integrated CSR at their core functions. Platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, and Alibaba display a way in which a business can effectively approach global issues, such as using renewable sources for energy and other sustainable approaches through packaging and e-inclusion through rural development, which relate closely to most SDGs, including SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality, and SDG 13: Climate Action. While there are developments, some challenges remain regarding transparency, greenwashing, and underserved markets. Solutions to these challenges can be seen by embracing innovation, deepening stakeholder collaborations, and harnessing technologies like AI and blockchain to amplify accountability and impact further. E-commerce platforms have the potential to help create a more inclusive and sustainable economy if they integrate CSR and sustainability into their operations. Their efforts can be a model for other sectors, showing the importance of ethical leadership and continuous innovation in achieving global well-being.

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