



# PUBLIC RECEPTION TOWARDS CSR PROGRAM AT PT BAKRIE SUMATERA PLANTATIONS TBK KISARAN

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines public reception of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk in Kisaran in 2025. The study is grounded in the view that CSR is not merely a form of corporate responsibility, but also a corporate communication practice through which the company encodes messages of care, legitimacy, and social closeness to surrounding communities. The novelty of this study lies in its use of Stuart Hall's reception theory to analyze CSR in a plantation context, an area that remains underexplored in Indonesian corporate communication studies, particularly through a phenomenological lens. This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of communities in interpreting the company's CSR practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 10 informants, supported by observation, documentation, and analysis of the company's CSR report. The findings show that the CSR program was constructed as a corporate message through seven main sectors: education, health, religion, infrastructure and environment, social and disaster response, sports and youth, and economy. Public reception was predominantly situated in dominant-hegemonic and negotiated positions, indicating that community acceptance was generally positive but not entirely uncritical. These findings confirm that the meaning of CSR is shaped not only by program implementation, but also by how communities interpret, evaluate, and negotiate their experiences with the company.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the contemporary business paradigm shows that companies are no longer judged solely by their economic achievements, but also by their ability to responsibly respond to social and environmental demands. In this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is understood as a strategic instrument that serves not only to fulfill social responsibilities but also to build legitimacy, maintain reputation, and strengthen the sustainability of corporate operations amidst increasing demands for public accountability (Andersson et al., 2022; Ashraf et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Thus, CSR is no longer simply understood as a philanthropic activity or administrative obligation, but rather as part of a broader relationship between corporations and society, continually negotiated in everyday social practices.

In the plantation sector, this relationship is even more complex because companies operate directly within local communities that are impacted by production activities and are also the targets of corporate

social programs. In situations like this, surrounding communities are not only beneficiaries but also key stakeholders determining social support for the company's existence (Baba et al., 2024; Baka et al., 2024). Therefore, CSR programs in plantation environments hold a highly strategic position, serving as a means of conflict mitigation, strengthening social capital, and establishing a social license to operate. However, CSR implementation does not always yield uniform acceptance. Top-down programs can create misalignments between the company's agenda and community needs, resulting in community acceptance ranging from full acceptance to conditional acceptance (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023; Gotsch et al., 2023).

From a communication science perspective, CSR can also be read as a corporate communication practice. Every social program designed, distributed, and publicized by a company conveys a specific message about concern, responsibility, legitimacy, and social closeness that it seeks to build with the public (Dalla-Pria & Rodríguez-de-Dios, 2022; Saputra & Hanutama, 2025). Therefore, the success of CSR is not solely determined by budget size, the number of programs, or administrative achievements, but also by the extent to which the corporate message is understood, accepted, and evaluated by the beneficiary community. In this context, the consistency between the company's narrative and the community's actual experiences is crucial in determining whether CSR is viewed as an authentic form of concern or merely a symbolic representation of the company (Doncel-Martín et al., 2023; Inversini & Derchi, 2024).

To understand the dynamics of this meaning, this study utilizes Stuart Hall's reception theory, which positions the audience as an active subject in interpreting the message. In the encoding-decoding model, companies encode when designing CSR as a representation of social concern, while the public decodes based on their lived experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and the history of their relationship with the company (Hall, 1980). Through this framework, public reception can be mapped into dominant-hegemonic, negotiating, and oppositional positions. This approach is relevant because it allows research to go beyond the question of whether CSR is implemented and to delve deeper into understanding how the program is interpreted by the public living around the company's operational areas. Thus, CSR is positioned not only as a program, but as a communication arena that brings together corporate messages with the social experiences of society.

Several previous studies have shown that the effectiveness of CSR is significantly influenced by the quality of corporate communication, community participation, and stakeholder involvement in its implementation (Sattayapanich et al., 2022; Yang & Basile, 2022). However, studies specifically examining public reception of CSR in plantation companies, particularly in the context of North Sumatra, are relatively limited. The most prominent limitation is that many CSR studies still focus on program evaluation, company image, or administrative impacts, while understanding the lived experiences of communities as a process of reception has not been developed in depth (Indira, 2022). This is where this research gap lies. This study positions plantation CSR as an arena of public reception, analyzed through a phenomenological perspective. Therefore, its contribution lies not only in program descriptions but also in understanding how the meaning of CSR is reciprocally shaped between companies and communities.

Empirically, PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk Kisaran runs various CSR programs through the "BSP Peduli" initiative, which covers education, health, religious affairs, infrastructure and environment, social and disaster response, sports and youth, and economics (Sahara & Angela, 2024). In this context, this study aims to analyze public reception of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk Kisaran's CSR program in 2025 using Stuart Hall's reception theory perspective. The novelty of this study lies in the integration between the reading of CSR documents as a construction of corporate messages and the lived experiences of the community as a decoding process at the local level. Thus, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of corporate communication studies, particularly in the reading of CSR as a communication practice whose meaning is negotiated by the public, while also providing practical input for companies to design CSR programs that are more dialogical, participatory, and contextual to the needs of the surrounding community.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed qualitative research to deeply understand the process of community interpretation of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's (BSP) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program in Kisaran. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore social realities formed through community experiences, interpretations, and interactions with the company's programs. Therefore, the focus of the research lies not on quantitative measurements of program success, but rather on how social meaning is constructed by the public as recipients of CSR messages and benefits (Creswell, 2021). The approach used was phenomenology, which aimed to explore the lived experiences and subjective awareness of the community in responding to the company's CSR program.

This research was conducted at PT Bakrie Sumatra Plantation Tbk (BSP), located on Jl. Ir. Juanda, Kisaran Timur Village, Kota Kisaran Timur District, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. Specifically, the research location included the company's operational area as well as the villages or residential areas surrounding the company targeted by the CSR program. The research period was 30 days, encompassing the preparation phase, field data collection, data analysis, and report preparation.

The subjects of this study were residents of the Kisaran region, located near PT BSP Tbk's operational areas, who had experience with the company's CSR programs. Ten community members were selected using purposive sampling. Selection was based on specific criteria, including residents living near the operational area, knowledge of, or prior involvement as beneficiaries, and willingness to provide in-depth information about their perspectives.

Data collection involved in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation (Gleeson, 2021). Qualitative data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive analysis model, which includes four stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers employed Source Triangulation (Flick, 2022).

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### The Construction of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's CSR Program for the Year 2025 as a Corporate Message

The construction of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's CSR program for the Year 2025 in the company report shows that the corporation's social activities are structured as a structured, measurable message, directed at sectors directly impacting the lives of the surrounding community. The document positions education, health, religious affairs, infrastructure and the environment, social and disaster response, sports and youth, and the economy as the primary areas of intervention, with a total realized activity cost of Rp1,767,602,238. This structure demonstrates that the corporate message is not only constructed through claims of concern, but also through the selection of sectors, types of assistance, and intensity of expenditures, which can be interpreted as representing the company's social priorities in its operational areas.

Table 1. The Construction of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's CSR Program for the Year 2025 as a Corporate Message

No	Program Areas	Main Activity Forms	Realisasi Biaya (Rp)	The Meaning of Corporate Messages
1	Education	Honorariums for teachers at Aek Salabat Estate Elementary School, support for research and internships for students, and assistance with educational infrastructure.	122.030.500	The company demonstrates its commitment to educational access and capacity building for the younger generation.
2	Health	JKN donations for 110 individuals over one year, blood donations for internal and community members surrounding the company.	54.832.500	The company builds an image of being present in basic health care and humanitarian solidarity.
3	Religiosity	Quran recitation facilities, assistance for religious activities and places of worship, Eid al-Fitr gifts for 1,200 people, and assistance with cleaning the H. Achmad Bakrie Grand Mosque in Kisaran.	845.679.200	The company emphasizes its symbolic closeness to religious values and the communal life of the community.
4	Infrastructure and Environment	Material and heavy equipment assistance for infrastructure and environmental improvements in villages surrounding the plantation.	130.970.139	The company demonstrates its concrete contribution to the physical and environmental needs surrounding its operational areas.

5	Social and Disaster Response	Proposal funding assistance, flood relief, and food security programs.	551.532.399	The company builds a message of social responsiveness and preparedness to address the urgent needs of the community.
6	Sports and Youth	Sports coaching and support for sports tournaments.	51.420.000	The company demonstrates its concern for the social development of the younger generation and community cohesion.
7	Economy	BPJS Employment registration and contribution payments for 75 self-employed workers.	11.137.500	The company positions itself as a supporter of job protection and the economic well-being of the community.
<b>Total</b>			1.767.602.238	Konstruksi pesan korporasi dibangun melalui kombinasi bantuan rutin, simbolik, dan responsif

The mapping in Table 1 shows that the company's CSR programs are not randomly structured, but rather grouped into areas that are socially and socially easily recognized by the public as basic community needs. Education, health, and economics address the dimension of improving life capacity, while religion, social issues, and disaster response address the dimension of social solidarity that is more closely connected to residents' daily experiences (Tupper & Karacaoğlu, 2025). Infrastructure and the environment, along with sports and youth, extend the company's message to both physical presence and social development in the surrounding plantation areas (McEvoy et al., 2024; Morfoulaki et al., 2023). This arrangement demonstrates that the corporation constructs its image as an actor that is not only economically productive but also present in various aspects of the surrounding community's life.

This understanding becomes clearer when considering education and health as the initial layer of the corporate message. In the education sector, the company distributed IDR 122,030,500 for honorariums for rural teachers, support for research and internships for students, and assistance with educational infrastructure. In the health sector, the company disbursed Rp54,832,500 through JKN donations for 110 people over the course of one year and blood drives for internal and local communities. This configuration demonstrates the company's efforts to build an image of concern for human resource development and basic health protection, two issues that are readily accepted as concrete forms of social responsibility.

The strongest emphasis was on the religious sector, which absorbed Rp845,679,200, the largest amount compared to other sectors. The report noted the provision of facilities for mothers and children to learn the Quran at the Nurul Yaqin Mosque, assistance with religious activities and repairs to places of worship, charity packages in the form of basic necessities for 1,200 underprivileged people ahead of Eid al-Fitr, and assistance with the cleaning of the H. Achmad Bakrie Grand Mosque in Kisaran from January to December 2025, totaling Rp420,000,000. This dominant allocation indicates that the company places religiosity as a crucial channel for building symbolic closeness with the community. This choice is relevant in the local social context because religious activities have a high resonance for the company's moral legitimacy in the eyes of the surrounding public.

This symbolic message is complemented by the infrastructure and environmental sectors, which demonstrate the company's presence in more tangible forms of assistance. Documents record the realization of IDR 130,970,139 for material and heavy equipment assistance for infrastructure and environmental improvements in villages adjacent to PT BSP Tbk's plantations. This form of intervention has strong communicative value because the results can be directly seen in the community's living space (Orazani et al., 2023). Thus, the company not only conveys its concern at the discourse level but also strives to demonstrate the benefits that can be visually verified by the program recipients.

The strength of the corporate message is also evident in the social and disaster response sectors, which totaled IDR 551,532,399. This amount includes Rp201,867,500 in proposal funding from January to December 2025, Rp62,965,000 in flood victim assistance, and Rp286,699,899 in food security programs. The large budget allocation for these areas demonstrates the company's desire to be perceived as an institution responsive to urgent needs while also caring about community social resilience. This message is

important because social assistance and disaster response are usually directly related to crisis situations, so the public tends to remember corporate interventions more strongly than administrative assistance.

The next layer is seen in sports, youth, and the economy. Despite smaller budgets, the sports and youth sector received Rp51,420,000 through sports coaching and tournament support. The economy sector received Rp11,137,500 through BPJS Employment registration and contribution payments for 75 self-employed workers. The presence of these two sectors shows that the company is trying to reach the productive age group and the working community, so that the CSR message does not stop at charitable assistance, but also targets social development and work protection, although on a more limited scale than other sectors.

The interpretation of this message construction is further strengthened when the report not only includes cost realization but also displays the 2025 CSR and Community Development budget of Rp1,725,558,325, along with a monthly work plan for January to December. In the budget document, education, religious affairs, economics, infrastructure, social affairs, disaster response, and the environment are detailed into scheduled program targets. In the work plan document, several activities appear to occur periodically throughout the year, such as teacher honorariums, mosque cleaning assistance, and the BPJS program. Others are more momentous, such as blood drives, mass circumcisions, holiday celebrations, and disaster relief. The presence of these planning elements demonstrates that the corporate message is constructed through a narrative of sustainability, not simply a momentary action separate from the company's annual agenda.

The budget and schedule structure ultimately demonstrates that the company combines three message styles simultaneously. Routine assistance creates a message of continuity, religious assistance creates a message of cultural and moral closeness, while social assistance, infrastructure, and disaster response convey a message of direct presence in the community's practical needs. This composition makes CSR appear as a corporate representation strategy that attempts to simultaneously encompass emotional, material, and symbolic dimensions. The corporate message emerging from this program structure serves as an important basis for understanding how society then accepts, negotiates, or even questions the meaning of CSR in the following subchapter.

#### **Public Reception of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's CSR Program in Kisaran**

Public reception of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's CSR program in Kisaran demonstrates that the program's meaning does not stop with the company's design and implementation, but is continuously shaped through the concrete experiences of the community who receive, witness, and evaluate its implementation in the field. Interviews with four informants revealed that each person interprets CSR through several interrelated dimensions, including program benefits, perceptions of company objectives, assessments of distributive justice, the level of community involvement, and the quality of the company's communication with the community. This diversity of dimensions emphasizes that audience reception cannot be understood in a single sense, as one informant may positively perceive the program's benefits while still maintaining specific concerns regarding equity or participation. This pattern allows for a more accurate reading of public reception within the spectrum of dominant-hegemonic acceptance and negotiation, reflecting on each informant's individual social experiences.

Table 2. Public Reception of PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk's CSR Program in Kisaran

No.	Informant	Theme	Interview Excerpts
1	Supriadi	Benefits of infrastructure and religious assistance	"There are several things we feel, firstly, about religion and infrastructure. Basically, every year, we receive assistance two or three times, even requesting materials to repair the road used by PT BSP. Basically, every year, we're given stone materials. In fact, in 2025, we were given heavy equipment like a glider twice to crush rocks and level the road. We also receive religious assistance. Every year, around Eid al-Fitr, we're given prayer mats, mukenahs (prayer robes), koko shirts (gamis), and basic necessities."
		Perceptions of distributive justice	"If we're talking about fairness, I admit it's unfair to the community because BSP doesn't provide for everyone here. However, we take turns receiving this 'BSP Cares' program. I think BSP's CSR capacity is only 100 packages, while here, there are around 400 families in the lower-middle class."

		Participation, communication, and corporate response	"There are times when we're not involved in planning, but when it comes to the program and communication, we are involved because we're from the village government. We also submit proposals, and then we meet with PT Peduli officials." BSP then asked us about our needs, and they responded to their final survey."
		General evaluation of CSR	"Generally, I think it's good. We, the community, are also impacted by this CSR program. I mean, if we get a share, at least we pray that PT BSP will be even more successful and beneficial."
2	Winda	Benefits of social and health assistance	"What I feel is in the social sector, namely the provision of basic food packages every Eid, and also my health insurance (BPJS) from PT BSP."
		Corporate goals and image	"Their goal is probably to further progress and also to create a more positive image for PT BSP in the eyes of the community."
		Perceptions of fairness and participation	"If you're talking about fairness, I think it's fair, yes, from your perspective. You weren't involved in the planning."
		General communication and evaluation	"It's clear that they're open, and in my opinion, this is good."
3	Gita	Disaster assistance and program benefits	"The program I've seen is PT BSP providing basic food packages to flood victims and fire victims. I've also benefited from that assistance. The most beneficial thing I've seen is the blood donation for Katarina Kisaran Hospital and the assistance every Ramadan. PT BSP provides basic food packages to communities in need."
		Program goals and orientation	"The goal is to help communities in need. In my opinion, PT BSP helps the local community more. Every time a disaster occurs, PT BSP helps. "In the case of floods and fires, PT BSP went out into the field to provide aid to the victims of the disaster."
		Corporate participation and communication	"In my opinion, they were the ones who planned it. I was just involved in distributing basic food supplies. It was clear and open, in my opinion."
		General evaluation of CSR	"In my opinion, CSR is more positive. As long as it's in place, there's no conflict, in fact, it's more positive, good, and safe."
4	Heni	Routine assistance and social benefits	"I've known about this CSR program since 2011. Every year, they routinely provide basic food supplies to the community in Aek Slabat State around Eid. We've only experienced this before Eid, when they provide basic food supplies. For us, this basic food supply is the most beneficial, even though the value is small, it can help those in need."
		Corporate goals, obligations, and reciprocal relationships	"Every company is required to provide CSR. The goal is probably to gain a good reputation in the community, and it's also one of the company's obligations. It's mutually beneficial, but CSR is mandated by law. Every company is obliged to give back to the community, so both the community and the company benefit."
		Perceptions of distributive justice	"If we want to be fair, it might not be possible, as they also have financial limitations, for example. They don't just give to one or two sub-districts; they also give to villages and districts. So, fairness is relative."
		General participation, communication, and evaluation	"I was involved because they communicated with us from the start before giving us the funds. They were quite clear and open. As far as I've seen, PT BSP's relationship with the local government is also good."

Table 2 shows that public reception of PT BSP's CSR program is shaped not only by the presence or absence of assistance, but also by how the community places that assistance within their lived experiences. All informants acknowledged that the company's programs provided certain benefits, particularly in the form of basic food aid, healthcare support, disaster relief, and village infrastructure improvements. This

similarity indicates that the company's underlying message as a community-building entity was well-received by local residents. Differences in reception began to emerge when informants assessed the equity, involvement, and interests associated with the CSR program.

Supriadi's position demonstrates a fairly strong, negotiated reception, as acceptance of the program's benefits coexisted with a critical awareness of its limited distribution. His experience with road materials, heavy equipment, and religious aid demonstrated that CSR truly addressed the needs felt by the village. This positive assessment did not translate into full acceptance, as he openly stated that the aid had not yet reached all residents in need. Awareness of the disparity between the size of the aid package and the number of lower-middle-class families suggests that, for him, CSR is not entirely synonymous with equal social justice.

Supriadi's reading becomes even more significant when he touches on corporate participation and communication. Her acknowledgement that villagers can submit proposals, meet with the company, and express their needs demonstrates a relatively open communication space. This assessment demonstrates that she does not reject the company's message as a caring corporation. The note that some proposals have not been fully responded to indicates that acceptance of CSR is accompanied by practical measures regarding the consistency of the company's follow-up. This position confirms that negotiation reception arises when residents acknowledge the program's benefits but continue to question its effectiveness and reach.

In contrast, Winda's reading aligns more closely with the dominant-hegemonic position, as she accepts the program's benefits and the company's image as relatively aligned with the official CSR message. The basic food assistance and BPJS membership are understood as concrete evidence of the company's presence in the community. Her assessment that CSR can improve the company's progress and improve its image in the eyes of the community is not seen as a problem, but rather as a natural consequence of helping residents. The lack of involvement in planning also does not develop into criticism that undermines her general assessment of the program. This situation indicates that the dominant meaning of CSR as a form of social care is accepted quite intact.

Winda's dominant acceptance is further evident in her assessment of the company's fairness and communication. She stated that the program was fair in her opinion, even though she was not involved in the planning stage. Statements like these indicate that the program's legitimacy is built more on the benefits it directly experiences than on procedural, participatory mechanisms. The assessment that the company's communication is clear and open also reinforces the impression that the company has successfully presented itself as a trustworthy social actor. The combination of benefits, openness, and generally favorable ratings reinforces its reception position within the dominant-hegemonic category.

A similar pattern of reception was evident in Gita's case. Her experience receiving basic food aid for flood and fire victims led her to understand CSR as a tangible form of assistance during a crisis. Her experience was further reinforced by her assessment of blood donation and Ramadan basic food aid as the most beneficial programs. The statement that the purpose of CSR is to help communities in need, coupled with the perception that the company primarily helps local residents, indicates that the corporate message of social concern is strongly received. This assessment veers toward dominant-hegemonic because there is almost no substantive objection to the CSR program's message.

Gita's acceptance became even stronger when she assessed the company's communication as clear and open, even though she admitted not being involved in the planning and only occasionally participating in distributing basic food aid. This limited role is not seen as a serious problem, but rather as part of the company's work mechanism that remains acceptable. The general assessment that CSR creates a more positive, better, and safer environment, even linked to the absence of conflict, demonstrates that the program is accepted as an instrument for strengthening social ties between the company and the community. This pattern confirms that the experience of direct assistance during a disaster significantly influences the strength of the dominant-hegemonic reception.

Meanwhile, Heni's position demonstrates a more institutional form of negotiation reception. She acknowledged that the regular distribution of basic food supplies before Eid al-Fitr is a tangible benefit that can alleviate community hardship, even if the value is not significant. Recognizing these benefits does not lead her to fully accept the CSR message without reservation. Instead, she emphasized that CSR is a company obligation and a legal mandate, and she views the relationship between the community and the company as mutually beneficial. This awareness demonstrates that Heni does not reject the benefits of CSR, but rather places them within a more realistic framework as part of both formal obligations and mutual interests.

Heni's reading further clarifies the nature of the negotiation when she discusses aspects of fairness and participation. She does not call the program entirely fair, but views distributive justice as relative, given the

company's limited funding and broad coverage area. Her assessment of the company's early involvement in communication and its openness suggests that the presence of dialogue is still appreciated. She assessed PT BSP's good relationship with the local government, which she considered positive, helped strengthen acceptance of the company, although it did not erase her awareness that CSR was also related to the company's own interests. This position demonstrates that negotiation reception is not synonymous with rejection, but rather with acceptance accompanied by a critical reading of the program's context.

The overall reading of the four informants can ultimately be explained through Stuart Hall's audience reception theory, which positions the audience as an active party in interpreting messages, not merely passive recipients. PT BSP, through its CSR program, encodes messages of social concern, corporate responsibility, and closeness to the surrounding community, while the informants decode them based on their life experiences. Winda and Gita tend to occupy a dominant-hegemonic position because they accept the basic meaning of the program as desired by the company, namely CSR as real, positive, and beneficial assistance for the community. Supriadi and Heni are closer to a negotiating position because they continue to acknowledge the company's benefits and openness, but add notes regarding equity, formal obligations, participation, and reciprocal relations between the company and the community. This configuration shows that public reception of PT BSP's CSR does not move in an oppositional direction, but is dominated by positive acceptance divided into dominant-hegemonic and negotiating readings.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk Kisaran's CSR program functions not only as a mechanism for distributing social assistance but also as a corporate communication practice that produces specific meanings within the community. When the company distributes programs in the education, health, religious, infrastructure and environmental, social and disaster response, sports and youth, and economic sectors, it is essentially encoding messages of care, responsibility, and social closeness to the local public. Within the framework of corporate communication, CSR programs are not merely administrative actions but rather representations of corporate identity designed to build credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders (Dalla-Pria & Rodríguez-de-Dios, 2022; Cornelissen, 2023). Therefore, when the community perceives basic food aid, BPJS support, disaster relief, or village road repairs as tangible and beneficial, such acceptance indicates that the corporate message has achieved a sufficiently strong level of social legitimacy.

However, the success of these corporate messages is not entirely determined by the company's intentions, but rather by the community's concrete experiences interacting with the CSR program. This is where Stuart Hall's reception theory becomes important. Hall (1980) emphasized that audiences are not passive recipients, but active interpreters who interpret messages based on their experiences, interests, and social positions. Winda and Gita's findings demonstrate that a dominant-hegemonic position emerges when their experience of receiving program benefits aligns with the company's primary message, namely, that CSR is a form of positive social concern. They not only recognize the program's benefits but also embrace the company's image as a party that helps the community. In this context, the decoding process occurs relatively in harmony with the company's encoding because field experiences do not create contradictions strong enough to shake the dominant meaning offered by the corporation.

Conversely, Supriadi and Heni's positions demonstrate that acceptance of CSR can be negotiated. They still acknowledge the program's tangible benefits, but this acceptance is not fully accepted without critical evaluation. Supriadi highlights the issue of equitable distribution, while Heni places CSR within the framework of formal corporate obligations and mutually beneficial reciprocal relationships. From Hall's (1980) perspective, this type of reading indicates that audiences partially accept the dominant meaning offered by the company, but simultaneously adapt and modify it to suit their own social realities. Thus, the reception of negotiations in this study is not a sign of CSR failure, but rather an indicator that communities possess the reflective capacity to distinguish between program benefits, implementation limitations, and the company's strategic interests. This finding aligns with the view that CSR effectiveness is largely determined by the extent to which the program accommodates community aspirations and needs, not simply by the success of its administrative implementation (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023; Yang & Basile, 2022).

The absence of oppositional positions in the final results also requires a critical examination. The absence of opposition does not mean that communities fully accept CSR without any remaining criticism, but rather indicates that the company still possesses a sufficiently strong reservoir of social legitimacy at the local level. The emerging negotiation positions, in fact, indicate criticism that has not yet developed into full-blown rejection. In other words, communities still view CSR programs as beneficial, even if not always fair, equitable, or participatory. This situation can be explained through the concept of corporate legitimacy, which is when a company maintains social acceptance by successfully demonstrating tangible benefits

perceived by the public, even though the public is aware of the limitations or corporate interests behind the program (Lindvall, 2023; Cornelissen, 2023). In the plantation context, where the relationship between the company and the community is both close and asymmetrical, the direct benefits felt by residents are often the primary factor mitigating potential oppositional readings.

These findings also demonstrate that the participatory communication dimension remains a weak point in corporate CSR implementation. Several informants acknowledged that communication was fairly open, but community involvement in the planning stage was not yet fully robust and equitable. This means that corporate CSR communications tend to be more successful in conveying benefits than in dialogue and program co-construction. In the CSR communication literature, this situation indicates that companies still operate in a predominantly representational communication pattern, demonstrating concern through programs, but have not yet fully established a deliberative space that positions communities as shared subjects in formulating social priorities (Sattayapanich et al., 2022; Fatawu et al., 2025). Dialogic and participatory CSR communication is crucial for communities to not only accept programs as assistance but also view them as the result of a fair and equitable relationship between the company and the local community.

More broadly, the results of this study confirm that public reception of CSR in plantation areas cannot be reduced to simple categories of success or failure. The meaning of CSR is evidently shaped through the interaction between corporate messages, community lived experiences, and the power structures surrounding both. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in confirming that Hall's reception theory remains relevant for interpreting corporate communication practices in local contexts, particularly in explaining how communities can positively receive CSR messages while remaining critical of corporate distribution, participation, and motives. Meanwhile, its practical contribution suggests that companies need to shift their CSR orientation from merely distributing aid to a more dialogic, participatory, and responsive communication model to the real needs of the surrounding community. Thus, the success of CSR is measured not only by what a company provides, but also by how communities interpret, assess, and perceive the company's presence in their social lives (Hall, 1980; Doncel-Martín et al., 2023; Inversini & Derchi, 2024).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations Tbk Kisaran's 2025 CSR program not only serves as a form of corporate social responsibility, but also as a corporate communication practice that constructs a message of concern, legitimacy, and social closeness to the surrounding community. Through the perspective of Stuart Hall's reception theory, the findings indicate that the public does not interpret CSR passively, but rather actively decodes it based on life experiences, perceived benefits, perceptions of distributive justice, and the quality of corporate communication. Public reception of the CSR program in this study is dominated by dominant-hegemonic and negotiation positions, indicating that the public generally receives the program positively, but some still provide critical notes regarding the equitable distribution of benefits, involvement in planning, and reciprocal relations between the company and residents. These findings emphasize that the success of CSR is not solely measured by program realization and budget size, but rather by the extent to which the program is interpreted as a relevant, fair, and contextual response to the needs of the local community. Theoretically, this study strengthens the relevance of reception theory in corporate communication studies, particularly in interpreting CSR as an arena for negotiating meaning between companies and the public. In practical terms, the results of this study demonstrate the importance of shifting CSR orientation towards a more dialogic, participatory, and sustainable model so that companies are not only present as providers of assistance, but also as social partners whose benefits are trusted and recognized by the community.

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