PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS OF WHERE AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

There is an emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, but research on how and where to communicate CSR is lacking. To investigate how and where to communicate CSR, an online survey instrument was developed to sample a total of 100 consumer panel members. A total of 31 items were included to measure the public's general expectations for CSR communication. Findings reveal that CSR needs to be communicated to internal stakeholders before external stakeholders and ensure employee commitment to the company's CSR initiatives. In communicating within the workplace, the development of human resources is most significant. In terms of corporate governance practices, financial reporting is the most significant. Likewise, reports on the community reveal mobilization of resources for social investment is the most significant. Whereas communication on environmental education activities is the most significant in CSR communication of the environment. In addressing the second objective, findings reveal that companies should play a role in society beyond economic benefit generation. The results show that society's concern is important in deciding where to communicate CSR. The study suggests that knowing where and how to communicate CSR that will appeal to the public will significantly affect the image and reputation of the company.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication, Corporate Organization, Employees, Stakeholders, Public Relations

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to find out the public expectations of how and where corporate organizations should communicate corporate social responsibility (CSR). This research is carried out with the adoption of fieldwork to know the expectations of consumers and the public about organization/company CSR activities. The study aims to ascertain what the Nigerian publics expect from companies' CSR communications and the appropriate channels (media) to communicate CSR. In recent times, there has been an emphasis on CSR activities (Kim et al., 2023; Onkila & Sarna, 2022). However, research has been carried out on how organizations/companies can utilize CSR to build and maintain relationships with the public (Agarwala et al., 2023; Singh & Misra, 2022), but research on how and where to communicate CSR is lacking.

Lu et al. (2023) and Lu et al. (2020) describe CSR as the standards set by companies in order to make their impact on society (the public). According to Nimani et al. (2022) and Adanlawo and Reddy (2018), the drivers for CSR are located in areas like

"increased brand value, greater access to finance, a healthier and safer workforce, stronger risk management and corporate governance, motivated people, customer loyalty, enhanced confidence, and trust of stakeholders" (Adanlawo & Reddy, 2018, p. 73). CSR initiatives can focus on social issues, environmental issues, or both (Aspal et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2021). CSR can be implemented as a project or by incorporating it into the business. According to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 2024), a dynamic CSR endeavor could encompass domains like:

1) the company's management openly expresses its beliefs and commitments to the community and its stakeholders;

2) companies actively participate in the growth of their local communities;

3) companies have policies for purchasing, including social and environmental concerns;

4) customers are informed about the proper usage of products;

5) companies lessen their ecological footprints during the production process;

6) consumers are educated on how products ought to be used.

The effectiveness of CSR in an organization is very paramount to the organization's performance (Sotti & Santucci, 2023; Khan et al., 2020). To achieve effective CSR communication, the opinion of the public is an important factor that helps the organization know how to communicate with the public and where to communicate. The purpose of an organization to communicate with the public is to know their view about the organization's activities, which can only be achieved through communication between the organization and the public. To investigate public opinion on where and how to communicate CSR, the study employed a survey method based on Champniss and Vila's (2011) recommendation to sample a representative of the Nigerian general public.

To achieve the study's aim, the following research questions were raised to guide the study on how and where to communicate CSR:

RQ1: What are the public expectations on where companies should communicate CSR?

RQ2: What are the expectations of the public on how companies should communicate CSR?

The major findings of the study indicate that society's concern is important in deciding where to communicate CSR. More so, the study reveals that CSR needs to be communicated to internal stakeholders before external stakeholders and ensure employee commitment to the company's CSR initiatives. This study offers valuable insights into the communication CSR in the community and reveals the mobilization of resources for social investment.

The study is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews literature in four categories; conceptual review, the principles of CSR, CSR in Nigeria, and how and where to communicate CSR. Section 3 explains the methodology used. Section 4 presents and discusses the results, and, finally, Section 5 outlines the conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual review

Corporate social responsibility can be viewed from explicit and implicit perspectives. According to Masum et al. (2020), CSR is about corporate policies with the objective of being responsible to society. Explicit CSR is voluntary, self-interest-driven, and has policies and strategies. Implicit CSR is a country's "formal and informal institutions" that give organizations an agreed share of responsibility for "society's interests and concerns". Implicit CSR are "values, norms, and rules," which have the effect of forcing businesses to deal with issues that stakeholders find significant. Businesses frequently play a direct role in the formulation and validation of these social responsibility requirements (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023; Chu et al., 2020).

According to the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) framework for social responsibility[1], CSR is a whole range of fundamentals that organizations are expected to acknowledge and to reflect in their actions. These fundamentals of CSR include, among other things, "respecting human rights, fair treatment of the workforce, customers, and suppliers, being good corporate citizens of the communities in which they operate, and conservation of the natural environment" (Kim et al., 2023, p. 2563). These principles are regarded as the foundation of an organization's philosophy as well as morally and ethically desirable ends. They also play a major role in influencing society's willingness to support the organization's long-term survival.

2.2. The principles of corporate social responsibility

Moral duties are practices that are exemplary or prohibited by the general populace, but not incorporated into law. Morals or qualities are changing and go under the watchful eye of the foundation of law. Feng et al. (2022) advocate for firms to perform on a path that is compacted with societal desires and awesome principles; respect morals/measures understood by society; and keep moral measures to fulfill corporate targets. According to Dartey-Baah and Amoako (2021), customers, who are mainly from society, are the main CSR drivers. Customers today have high standards, and businesses are being forced to create new values as a result of the increased competition. Businesses now need to recognize their "roles in society", and an increasing number of customers demand that businesses provide ethical products and values that benefit them (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Kaufmann et al., 2024).

Kim et al. (2021) and González-Rodríguez et al. (2019) argue that CSR engines are intangible values. Through the intangible values, the CSR concept maintains a favourable relationship between the organization and its interested parties. The external stakeholders also consider the company's reputation for making investments, purchases, or uses of its services. The majority of internal stakeholders are the staff members, who are far more content and confident in the organization's strong morale and dedication to assisting and resolving issues of public concern.

Latapí Agudelo et al. (2020) posit the idea of internal and external drivers as the main forces behind CSR. The leadership is internal, and it is generally regarded as ethical corporate culture and shared values, reputation, customer requirements and expectations, and moral and ethical aspects of responsible organisational behavior. The external

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[1] https://efqm.org/the-efqm-model/

CSR are macro, legal, political, and economic regulations. In the framework of the CSR concept, they facilitate the introduction and application of rules and regulations pertaining to things like resource availability, rising public expectations and requirements, environmental concerns, and chances for interaction between various social and organizational actors.

The company's business ethics will unavoidably change in accordance with CSR principles (Suhartati et al., 2024; Aspal et al., 2023; Nimani et al., 2022). These procedures are reliant on the formalized principles, the corporate culture that the management team establishes, and the individual values of the organization's members. Three facets of CSR are presented by Aslaksen et al. (2021): the development of programs that condense the codes of ethical behavior based on the identity, vision, and values that bind the company's members together. Four prerequisites are proposed by Chaudhuri et al. (2023) and Reddy and Adanlawo (2018) for embracing and putting the CSR principles into practice:

1. *Integration*. Corporate leaders must start the adoption and implementation of CSR principles throughout the entire organization in order to integrate them with the business strategies of the company.

2. *Innovation*. The corporate leadership views the company's CSR-compliant practices as a chance to foster innovation and establish corporate values.

3. *Accountability*. Business executives understand the set objectives, take ownership of them, and monitor and maintain them.

4. *Engagement*. The company's leadership engages in direct communication with important stakeholders and fosters an ongoing, innovative dialogue that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and information.

2.3. Corporate social responsibility initiatives in Nigeria

The activities and effects of multinational corporations (MNCs) in the extraction sectors of the Nigerian economy, particularly in the oil sector, gave rise to CSR initiatives in that country (Uhumuavbi, 2023; Inyang et al., 2023; Ekhator & Iyiola-Omisore, 2021). Due to the presence of MNCs and the availability of oil deposits, the activities of these companies are more significant in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Their activities in both urban and rural areas led to CSR violations like gas flaring and oil spills. The communities' primary sources of income, farming and fishing, were destroyed by these activities, which resulted in widespread poverty. MNCs have become quasi-government entities, with communities depending on them to solve their financial issues (Uduji et al., 2023; Inyang et al., 2023).

Uduji et al. (2024) stipulate that the expectations of CSR activities from oil multinational companies have intensified. Uduji et al. (2024) and Eyab et al. (2024) state that the expectations within the community will inevitably influence decisions made there as well as opinions of MNCs doing business there. Nonetheless, Adanlawo (2017) asserts that in order to assist businesses in putting CSR policies and practices into effect, it is critical to comprehend what motivates community expectations. In addition to providing more jobs for locals, the community where these companies are located expects MNCs to reduce poverty by building roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, pipe-borne water systems, electricity, and microcredit programs (Suhartati et al., 2024; Ekhator & Iyiola-Omisore, 2021; Yang & Basile, 2022).

MNCs operating in developing nations have been accused of environmental degradation and pollution by the communities in which they are situated (Uduji et al., 2023; Oguji & Okwuadimma, 2022). Numerous protests have been sparked by these issues; one such instance is the Niger Delta region, where host communities and MNCs have been embroiled in near-constant conflict. For instance, there is perpetual hostility between the Niger Delta communities of the Ijaws and the Ogonis and the MNCs that do business there. The area is still impoverished, undeveloped, and has a damaged ecosystem.

2.4. How and where to communicate corporate social responsibility

Companies have the responsibility to communicate with the public and also identify where this communication will be effective. Harrison et al. (2022) state that CSR builds the relationships that exist between companies and society. To build relationships between the company and society, effective communication is essential. According to Shen et al. (2020), communication can be approached in different ways; the company would choose how to publicize their activities or portray their responsible activities. Companies that do not know how to communicate with the public would not know where to communicate. For a company to know how to communicate, it needs to know how the public feels about its activities and the areas that need attention. Choosing the appropriate media (channel) to communicate CSR will go a long way in building and maintaining relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. This can be termed "media diplomacy", whereby the media is used to promote negotiation and conflict resolution. According to Liu et al. (2024), Sotti and Santucci (2023), and Yeung (2022), websites, CSR reports, and corporate advertising are common channels for CSR communication. Cornelissen (2020) presents three communication strategies that enable the company to know how and where to communicate with the public:

- the information strategy for stakeholders;
- the plan for involving stakeholders;
- the plan for responding to stakeholders.

One-way communication with the public is emphasized in stakeholder information strategies, suggesting that businesses are more interested in talking than in listening to stakeholders. This implies that the business, without the approval of a third party, must communicate with stakeholders about its good intentions and CSR-related actions. This shows that the business is in complete control of its communication initiatives. The stakeholder response strategy, on the other hand, is a two-way asymmetric communication strategy that allows stakeholders to react to CSR communication in order to facilitate a positive CSR report (Ang et al., 2022).

The main goal of dialogue with the public is to determine whether the public accepts the company's

CSR efforts. Following that, a better plan of action is devised to establish a CSR initiative that will meet the expectations of the general public. This dialogue between the company and the public is, therefore, instrumental in achieving effective CSR communication. The stakeholder involvement strategy enables dialogue, "participation, and involvement". The stakeholders participate actively in the communication process rather than only as recipients, which enables the businesses to stay informed and meet the stakeholders' high standards for innovation (Bag et al., 2024).

To ensure employee commitment to the company's CSR initiatives, Mu et al. (2024) and Yang and Basile (2022) advise that CSR activities should be communicated to internal stakeholders before external stakeholders. This approach builds strong employee commitment to CSR initiatives, which also establishes the foundation for reliable CSR communication with external stakeholders. There must be a two-way communication process for internal CSR communication to be successful and raise employees' commitment to CSR.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a representative sample of the general public of Nigeria. Survey instrument items were developed based on Champniss and Vila's (2011) recommendation. This study is quantitative in nature. A quantitative study, according to Nkomo and Adanlawo (2024), helps to understand the causal or correlational relationship between variables. Using the quantitative method, an online survey with the use of a questionnaire was employed to sample 100 consumer members. Interview is another alternative method to use, as it enables participants to share their views and opinions. The researchers opted for an online survey because of the chances of higher response rates, being less expensive and time-consuming (Xaba et al., 2024). To gauge the general public's expectations for CSR communication pertaining to fundamental CSR information on the workplace, corporate government practice, environment, and community, a total of 31 items were included. Four demographic questions on age, gender, educational qualification, and religion were also included.

To answer *RQ1*, a total of 21 items were formulated under four headings: workplace, corporate governance practices, environment, and community. *RQ2* was addressed with 10 items. Email invitations were deployed based on the 2022 census of customers's patronage representatives for gender, age, educational qualification, and religion. A total of 100 consumer panel members participated in the survey: 66% were female ($n = 66$), and 34% were male ($n = 34$). Age groups of 20–40 years old ($n = 71$), 41–60 years old ($n = 26$), and over 61 years old ($n = 3$) consisted of 3% of the sample; 34% have Ordinary National Diploma (OND)/National Certificate of Education (NCE) educational qualification ($n = 34$), 57% have Bachelor's educational qualification ($n = 57$), and 9% have Master's/PhD educational qualification ($n = 9$). About 52% were Christians ($n = 52$) and 48% were Muslims ($n = 48$).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below describes how effective communication is measured by 31 items. The first part of the table measures where the company should communicate with 21 items. The second part measures how the company should communicate CCSR with 10 items.

Table 1. Measures for effective CSR communication (Part 1)

No.	Measures	M	Std. dev.
Where company should communicate			
	Workplace		
1	Worker's participation in unions and society activities	1.97	0.48
2	Involvement of employees in management	2.04	0.50
3	Profit sharing and performance bonuses	1.37	0.48
4	Handling of dismissals	1.80	1.01
5	Development of human resources	2.82	1.19
6	Concern for health, safety and working conditions	1.31	0.47
7	Preparation for retirement	2.34	0.568
	Corporate governance practices		
8	Meeting with stakeholders	1.86	0.90
9	Board meeting	2.09	1.24
10	Financial reporting	2.11	0.00
11	Management structure, system and procedures	2.00	0.00
	Environment		
12	Management of environmental impact	2.00	0.46
13	Environmental management practices	1.30	1.20
14	Commitment to the environmental causes	2.68	0.33
15	Environmental education activities	3.87	0.49
	Community		
16	Relation with the local community	1.58	0.43
17	Relation with community organizations	2.25	0.51
18	Philanthropic social investment	1.56	1.01
19	Action strategies in the social area	2.27	1.31
20	Mobilization of resources for social investment	2.82	0.36
21	Recognition and support for social area	1.84	0.64

Table 1. Measures for effective CSR communication (Part 2)

No.	Measures	M	Std. dev.
	How company should communicate CSR		
22	Company should focus on solving social problems	2.22	1.20
23	Companies should use part of their budget for donations and social projects to advance the situation of the most unprivileged groups in society	1.94	1.06
24	Company should contribute money to cultural and social events	2.48	0.87
25	Company is concerned with the general well-being of society	2.79	0.84
26	Company is concerned with respecting and protecting the natural resources	1.75	1.05
27	Company should play a role in society beyond economic benefit generation	3.17	1.11
28	Company established procedures to comply with customers' complaints	2.33	1.22
29	Company should treat its customers honestly	2.02	1.05
30	Company should have employees who offer complete information about corporate products/services to customers	2.16	0.58
31	Company should know customers need	2.68	1.08

4.1. Where a company should communicate

Four elements are associated with "where company should communicate" CSR communication: 1) basic workplace communication, 2) corporate governance practices, 3) environment, and 4) community. To explore where the company should communicate CSR regarding the public expectation of CSR communication "where to communicate CSR" (*RQ1*), every item pertaining to where CSR should be communicated was observed.

The basic information about the *workplace* on a 1 to 2 scale, the consumer public wanted to be sure of worker's participation in unions society activities (M = 1.97), followed by involvement of employees in management (M = 2.04), profit sharing and performance bonuses (M = 1.37), handling of dismissals (M = 1.80), development of human resources (M = 2.82), concern for health, safety, and working conditions (M = 1.31), and preparation for retirement (M = 2.34). The public expectations on the development of human resources are significantly more than any other information in workplace communication (p < 0.001). Nonetheless, there were no significant mean differences among profit sharing and performance bonuses (M = 1.37) and concern for health, safety and working conditions (M = 1.31).

On the basis of where the company should communicate CSR on *corporate governance practices*, meeting with stakeholders (M = 1.86), board meeting (M = 2.09), financial reporting (M = 2.11), and management structure, system and procedures (M = 2.00). The public expectations of financial reporting are significantly more than any other information in corporate governance practices (p < 0.001). However, there is no significant mean difference among board meetings and management structure, system, and procedures.

On the basis of where the company should communicate CSR on the *environment*, management of environmental impact (M = 2.00), environmental management practices (M = 1.30), commitment to the environmental causes (M = 2.68), and environmental education activities (M = 3.87). The public expectations on where companies should communicate CSR are more concerned with environmental education activities reporting significantly to the environment (p < 0.001). However, there is a significant mean difference between environmental education activities and commitment to environmental causes.

On the basis of where the company should communicate CSR in the *community*, relation with the local community (M = 1.58), relation with community organizations (M = 2.25), philanthropic social investment (M = 1.56), action strategies in the social area (M = 2.27), mobilization of resources for social investment (M = 2.82), and recognition and support for social area (M = 1.84). The public expectations on the mobilization of resources for social investment are significantly more important than any other information (p < 0.001). However, there is no significant mean difference between relation with the local community and action strategies in the social area.

There was a gender difference in where the company should communicate CSR. Female participants showed more interest compared to their male counterparts about where companies should communicate CSR in all four factors on basic CSR information (F (1, 99) = 11.11, p < 0.001, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, mean female — $M_F = 2.82$, mean male — $M_M = 2.34$), corporate governance practices (F = 10.03, p < 0.001, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, $M_F = 2.00$, $M_M = 2.09$), and environment (F = 8.29, p < 0.001, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, $M_F = 3.87$, $M_M = 2.68$).

4.2. How a company should communicate corporate social responsibility

To explore how a company should communicate CSR regarding the public expectation of CSR communication, "how to communicate CSR" (*RQ2*), every item pertaining to how to communicate CSR was observed. The essential details about how to communicate, the consumer publics want to be sure if companies focus on solving social problems (M = 2.22), followed by companies should use part of its budget for donations and social projects to advance the situation of the most unprivileged groups in the society (M = 1.94), contribution to cultural and social events (M = 2.48), concern for general society wellbeing (M = 2.79), concern with respecting and protecting the natural resources (M = 1.75), role in society beyond economic benefits generation (M = 3.17), establishment of procedures to comply with customers complaints (M = 2.33), treatment of customers with honestly (M = 2.02), having employees who offer complete information about corporate products/services to customers (M = 2.16), knowing customers need (M = 2.68). The public expectations of a role in society beyond economic benefit generation are significantly more than any other information on how a company should communicate CSR (p < 0.001). Therefore, there is a significant mean difference between

concerns with respecting and protecting the natural resources (M = 1.75) and role in society beyond economic benefit generation (M = 3.17). However, there were no significant mean differences between companies that should have employees who offer complete information about corporate products/ services to customers (M = 2.16) and companies that should focus on solving social problems (M = 2.22).

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated where and how to communicate CSR to the Nigerian public. In finding out where to communicate CSR, four areas were identified: workplace (internal), corporate governance practices, community, and environment. Findings in the study reveal a significant CSR needs to be communicated to internal stakeholders before external stakeholders and ensure employee commitment to the company's CSR initiatives. In communicating within the workplace, the development of human resources is most significant. In terms of corporate governance practices, financial reporting is the most significant. Likewise, communicating CSR in the community reveals mobilization of resources for social investment is the most significant, followed

by action strategies in the social area. Whereas, communication on environmental education activities is the most significant in CSR communication of the environment.

In addressing the second objective, ten areas of focus were identified to communicate CSR. The findings reveal that companies should play a role in society beyond economic benefit generation. This area is the most significant of the ten. The company's concern with society's general well-being is the second most significant. The results show that society's concern is important in deciding where to communicate CSR. The results validate Adanlawo's (2017) study, which recommends community development as the core area to communicate CSR. Nevertheless, this does mean that other areas of communication would not have an impact on the company and society. However, we suggest that knowing where and how to communicate CSR that will appeal to the public will significantly affect the image and reputation of the company. The study focused on Nigerian consumer members; therefore, the findings of the study may not be applicable to society outside Nigeria. Future research could focus on the implications of where and how to communicate CSR to business and corporate organizations.

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APPENDIX. RESEARCH SURVEY

Dear respondent,

We are research scholars from South Africa. We are conducting research on public expectations of CSR communication. This questionnaire is designed to elicit your response. You are requested to spare your precious time to complete the survey as it will not take more than 10 minutes to complete it. Your responses will be treated confidentially and your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Section A: Socio-demographic information

Name of respondents (optional): _____

Age: _____

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Educational qualification: ☐ OND/NCE ☐ Bachelor's/Higher National Diploma (HND) ☐ Master's/PhD

Religion: ☐ Christian ☐ Islam ☐ Traditional

Section B: Measurement of effective CSR communication

Instruction: Please kindly tick (√) in the appropriate box that best represents your view on each statement. Do not tick more than one in any question (1 = Yes; 2 = No).

No.	Measures	Yes	No
Where company should communicate			
	Workplace		
1	Worker's participation in unions and society activities		
2	Involvement of employees in management		
3	Profit sharing and performance bonuses		
4	Handling of dismissals		
5	Development of human resources		
6	Concern for health, safety and working conditions		
7	Preparation for retirement		
	Corporate governance practices		
8	Meeting with stakeholders		
9	Board meeting		
10	Financial reporting		
11	Management structure, system and procedures		
	Environment		
12	Management of environmental impact		
13	Environmental management practices		
14	Commitment to the environmental causes		
15	Environmental education activities		
	Community		
16	Relation with the local community		
17	Relation with community organizations		
18	Philanthropic social investment		
19	Action strategies in the social area		
20	Mobilization of resources for social investment		
21	Recognition and support for social area		
How company should communicate CSR			
22	Company should focus on solving social problems		
23	Companies should use part of their budget for donations and social projects to advance the situation of the most unprivileged groups in society		
24	Company should contribute money to cultural and social events		
25	Company is concerned with the general well-being of society		
26	Company is concerned with respecting and protecting the natural resources		
27	Company should play a role in society beyond economic benefit generation		
28	Company established procedures to comply with customers' complaints		
29	Company should treat its customers honestly		
30	Company should have employees who offer complete information about corporate products/services to customers		
31	Company should know customers need		