
IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BRAND IMAGE OF MTN IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand image of MTN in Nigeria. The study viewed CSR from the lenses of economic SCR activities, social CSR activities and environmental CSR activities. Survey research design was adopted to carry out the research in Kaduna metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at 278 business men and women and other subscribers to MTN network. Questionnaire was used to collect primary data. With the aid of ordinary least square regression analysis, the data were analyzed and the result shows that economic CSR activities, social CSR activities and environmental CSR activities impact brand image of MTN Nigeria. The study concludes that economic, social and environmental CSR activities play important roles in determining brand image of MTN; and recommends that management of MTN Nigeria should find a way to innovate their CSR responsibility practices. By engaging in CSR initiatives MTN Nigeria will foster a brand image that will lead to increased customer base and increased profitability. The study also recommends that MTN should undertake more morally justified CSR initiatives that will help to strengthen community welfare and their brand image.

Keywords: brand image, corporate social responsibility, economic CSR activities, environmental CSR activities, social CSR activities

INTRODUCTION

Business organizations operate in an environment characterized by dynamism, complexity and uncertainty. Thus, managers take into consideration, the interests of many publics (stakeholders and society) in the performance of their duties. More than ever before, stakeholders demand that businesses functions in a responsible way. Business responsibility and its relationship to the community in which it operates and seeks to serve are more important than ever. There is a growing consensus that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has crossed the line from being business jargon to becoming a critical business function. This is demonstrated both in academic circles, with dozens of empirically studies and analyses published, and in managerial practice by the rising importance and publicity given to social responsibility issues (Dawood, 2019).

CSR is attracting a lot of interest and attention in the competitive world market. The importance of CSR may also be revealed in the fact that firms are spending millions on CSR (Abugre & Anlesinya, 2019). CSR is a key plank of reputation building and brand equity; it has thus, gained steam around the world. Moreover, globalization has opened the door to a variety of challenges for governments all over the world, and this has resulted in a growing visibility and corporate citizenship, which requires companies to play a part in the advancement of society. CSR has become unavoidable in today's environment, as it plays a critical part in corporate branding (Alam & Islam, 2021).

Brand image has been a critical concern for many businesses in recent years. Each firm's most valuable asset is its brand, which is evaluated in terms of brand equity. Companies can better their brand equity by presenting their products and conducting business operations in more unique and easily recognizable ways, charging higher prices and maintaining high quality standards. Branding is more than just assigning a product a name; it also allows businesses to differentiate themselves from the competition. A brand is a firm's mirror, it portrays every action that the firm engages in.

Companies' efforts to engage consumers in developing a picture of a brand, which leads to brand building aids in the formation of a good image of the organization, allowing for effective customer relationship management, which is a critical predictor of brand equity (Lee, 2019). Customers in today's world are concerned about more than just the cost and quality of products; they are also concerned about their environment and the society in which they live, and want to be a part of programmes that benefit the globe (Oyewumi et al., 2018). As a result, modern firms have realized that CSR builds brand equity and that it is now as vital as the manufacturing of their goods.

Businesses are held together by a social glue called trust. Business partners that trust each other spend less time and energy defending themselves from being exploited, and both sides achieve greater financial results in negotiations (Okwemba et al., 2014). When employees know that their employer trust them and that they can express themselves clearly, trust becomes vital to business. They will almost certainly be more driven to be productive and work to their full potential. Thus, this study seeks to examine the impact of CSR on brand image of MTN Nigeria. The specific objectives are to determine the impact of economic CSR and social CSR on brand image of MTN in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is a concept that is fast becoming an important subject of discussion in myriad business and academic corridors, as a tool for modern business management. Lindgreen et al. (2016) reported that most businesses are making serious attempts to define and integrate CSR concepts into their operations, as it is often considered the ethical side of corporate accountability and management. CSR is represents ongoing self-regulation activities and effort initiated by businesses to encourage ethical behaviour aimed at promoting quality work-life balances and prosperity of local communities and society within which they operate (Amin-Chaudhry, 2016; Holme & Watts, 2000).

Carrol (1991) argues that socially responsible firms consider environmental and legal consequences of their activities. They take the long-term wellbeing of the public into consideration and implement business activities with the aim of meeting, and even surpassing legal and environmental expectations. Marsden (2001) reports that socially responsible firms develop profitable businesses by considering both positive and negative environmental and societal impact of their actions.

Stoyanov (2017) and Rupp et al. (2006) rally around the general description of voluntary actions taken by firms to improve social and environmental conditions. Firm's willingness to respond to issues pertaining to economic, technological and legal concerns to achieve economic, social, environmental benefits is the domain of CSR. CSR as a commercial strategy began in the United States in the 1960s and has progressively become popular worldwide (Blowfield & Murray, 2014). The European Commission defines CSR as an enterprise's responsibility for its impact on society (Moon, et al., 2012). This definition identifies basic tenets of CSR, including attention to stakeholders, friendly disposition to social, economic, and environmental issues (Mugisa (2011). It pertains to companies' voluntary behaviours and performances that go beyond the scope of basic business relationships (Martinez et al., 2016).

CSR is a self-regulating practise that ensures that the firm is sensitive to its stakeholders (Kloppers & Fourie, 2014). To promote CSR, governments reward or recognize socially responsible firms, through awards and tax reliefs, in order to motivate them and also make them role models for other firms to contribute to social development (Chung & Safdar, 2015). CSR is associated with various benefits such as increased profitability, greater customer loyalty and trust, improved brand image, as well as combating negative publicity (Raut et al., 2017). It is on the basis of these benefits that a large proportion of enterprises working in the public sector have embraced CSR (Bondy & Starkey, 2014).

In view of the facets of CSR identified by Martinez et al. (2016) and Mugisa (2011), this study focuses on economic CSR activities, social CSR activities and environmental CSR activities as adequate dimensions of CSR. Economic CSR activities are essential instrument for firms to segregate their products from those offered by rivals besides boosting their brand image. Maldonado-Guzman et al. (2017) focuses on how a business can grow and generate profits by benefitting the community and our society. This means that firms which make profits through benefitting the society and continuously enhancing its business activities for sustainability will enjoy positive brand equity. Economic CSR activities promotes brand image since it involves job creation, technological advancement, fair payment system for employees, being profitable, provision of quality products and creation of excellent and safe working environment (Goswami & Prajapati, 2019).

Social CSR activities are concerned with ensuring there is fair treatment of all stakeholders, enforcement of code of conduct, pursue of morally correct decisions and adherence to standards. Organizations exercises social responsibility with good entities by its clients when equated to those that were solely focused on marketing and sponsorship activities. Social CSR boosts the brand image of an organizational body. Thus, social CSR is a master plan by which business entities utilizes their resources in order to create a good brand equity that guarantees them sustainable corporate rapport with their stakeholders (Manyange, 2013)

Environmental CSR activities on the other hand, refers to actions and behaviours of organizations that are environmentally friendly. Environmental CSR also aims to reduce business processes and activities that have damaging effects on the environment. Environmental CSR activities focus on minimizing use of resources and reducing wastes or managing waste effectively, through recycling and eco-friendly business policies. Environmental CSR is a common form of CSR. Environmental CSR activities may be carried out in several ways, including reducing harmful practices, such as decreasing pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, the use of single-use plastics, water consumption, and general waste. This can also be demonstrated by regulating energy consumption by increasing reliance on renewables, sustainable resources, and recycled or partially recycled materials; and by offsetting negative environmental impact by planting trees, funding research, and donating to environment-related causes.

Concept of Brand Image

Brand image is stakeholders' perception of a brand; and which is measured as brand associations held in their memory (Keller, 1993, as cited in Ateke et al., 2015). In the view of Dobni and Zinkhan (1990, as cited in Ateke & Nwulu, 2018), brand image is a reasoned or emotional perception consumers attach to a specific brand. Brand image can also be seen as the totality of consumers' perceptions about a brand, or how they see it, which may not be the same with the brand identity (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, as cited in Ateke & Nwulu, 2018). Keller (2003) states that brand image consists of functional and symbolic brand beliefs; it is a strong, favorable and unique brand association, which will result in positive attitude, perceived quality and positive overall effect.

Today's firms face aggressive competition on national and international fronts, such that they find it quite challenging to operate profitably. Ateke and Akani (2019) are of the view that this challenge is exacerbated by proliferation of products that are different only in brand names and an increasingly demanding customership. To gain and maintain competitive advantage in this milieu, differentiation is essential (Ateke & Akani, 2019), and corporate branding is one ploy firms use in this regard.

Corporate image management is thus concerned with forming a positive attitude among a firm's current and future consumers. In doing so, it becomes a source of competitive advantage ((Seyed et al., 2007). Chen et al. (2012) assert that when consumers perceive a company to have socially responsible behaviours, they engage in positive behaviours towards that company. Corporate image is complex in nature, resulting in a lack of clear measurement policy (Wanyama, 2020; Zhang, 2017). Zheng (2007) assessed corporate image from the constructs of insiders, business partners and the public; while Yu and Hu (2014), identified cognitive image and emotional image aspects of brand image.

Corporate branding, a concept closely associated with brand image basically involves advancing the brand name of a corporate entity instead of advancing the specific products of the firm. The scope of corporate branding is thus broader than that of product branding. Though corporate branding and product branding can take place concurrently, the activities and thinking directed at corporate branding are different from those expended on product branding (Ateke & Nwulu, 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Image

Tan et al. (2022) examined effects of CSR on brand equity and brand loyalty between public and private universities. The study also compared the direct effect of CSR on brand reputation; brand reputation on brand equity and loyalty; and the role of brand reputation as a mediator between public and private universities. The findings showed positive and significant, as well as direct and indirect effects of CSR on brand reputation, brand equity, and brand loyalty of private and public universities. The study also found that there was significant disparities between public and private institutions in the direct and indirect impacts of CSR on brand loyalty, as well as the effects of brand reputation on brand loyalty.

This study of Tan et al. (2022) make a unique contribution to literature by comparing direct and indirect effects of CSR on brand reputation, brand equity, and brand loyalty between public and private universities; in assessing the mediation role of brand reputation between CSR, brand equity, and loyalty through brand reputation; and in comparing this mediation effect between public and private universities. Furthermore, this research has practical implications for both public and private higher education institutions as they create their branding strategy.

Cherono and Maende (2022) investigated impact of CSR on brand equity of Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA). The results showed that economic CSR boosts KTDA's brand equity at a very low level. The results also established that philanthropic CSR substantially improves KTDA's brand equity. Finally, the findings proved that environmental CSR substantially enhances brand equity of KTDA. Similarly, Alakkas et al. (2021) examined how CSR activities facilitate brand-building and Firm-based brand equity (FBBE). The study revealed that CSR, marketing communication, brand identity and brand equity are positively associated. Thus, it can be surmised that CSR affects brand equity with the mediating effect of marketing communication and brand identity.

The foregoing report suggests that CSR will have positive significant impact on brand image, in view of our intention conduct statistical analyses, we hypothesizes as follow:

Ho₁: Economic CSR activities have no significant impact on brand loyalty of MTN in Nigeria.

Ho₂: Social CSR activities have no significant impact on brand loyalty of MTN in Nigeria.

Ho₂: Environmental CSR activities have no significant impact on brand loyalty of MTN in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a survey research design. This involved collecting data in order to test hypotheses. This type of design attempts to report things the way they are (Abiola, 2007). Survey research design clearly specifies who and what are to be measured and deals with both large and small population and samples chosen from a population to discover relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of variable. The information collected on the research objectives were described and used to form opinion and draw conclusion on the study.

The population of the study comprise customers of MTN Nigeria in Kaduna metropolis. This is an infinite and flowing population. The study thus derived a sample size that depicted the infinite nature of the population. Purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at 278 businesses men and women and other customers who use MTN network.

Questionnaire was the instrument used in data collection. Respondents were required to indicate their agreement or disagreement with questionnaire statements using a 5point likert scale. The data generated was analyzed using descriptive statistics (which include frequencies, percentages, the Ordinary least square (OLS) multiple regression method. Saunders et al. (2003) notes that descriptive statistics are used to describe (and compare) variables numerically. The descriptive results from the analysis was presented using Tables to provide accurate picture of the research findings, while the OLS was used to establish the impact of CSR on brand image. Also, postulated hypotheses were tested using the t-statistics of Ordinary Least Square (OLS) estimation techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined impact of CSR on brand image of MTN Nigeria with CSR as the independent variable and brand image as the dependent variable.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	BRI	ECO CSR	SOC CSR	ENV CSR
Mean	3.107500	3.422500	3.165000	3.377500
Median	3.210000	3.370000	3.215000	3.335000
Std. Dev.	0.328976	0.118989	0.822375	0.110265
Skewness	-0.831909	1.117306	-0.138064	1.037768
Kurtosis	2.044820	2.303151	1.449334	2.239489
Jarque-Bera	0.613443	0.913181	0.413468	0.814371
Probability	0.735855	0.633440	0.813236	0.665521
Sum	12.43000	13.69000	12.66000	13.51000
Sum Sq. Dev.	0.324675	0.042475	2.028900	0.036475
Observations	262	262	262	262

Source: Authors Computation, 2022 (Eview-9.0)

The summary of the descriptive statistics is captured in Table 1. It can be observed that brand image grew by about 3.1%. ECO CSR was found to be 3.42%, SOC CSR was found to grow by 3.37%, and ENV CSR had an average value of 3.16%. The skewness statistics which was used to show the direction of the normal distribution curve showed that, BRI and SOC CSR had a negative distribution and they all tailed to the left-hand side of the normal distribution curve. Their skewness values gave -0.83, -0.13 respectively. However, ECO CSR and ENV CSR were found to have positive skewness and tailed to the right side of the normal distribution. The Jarque-berra statistics which was used to show the normality of the data revealed that Brand Loyalty (BRL), ECO, and SOC are normally distributed at 5% level of significance. However, ENV was also found to be normally distributed, but at 10% statistical level.

Statistical Test of Hypotheses

The three hypotheses formulated to guide this study were tested using F-statistics. The F-statistics is a test of overall significance of variables in a regression model. It is used to denote whether the joint impact of the explanatory (independent) variable(s) actually have significant influence on the dependent variable. The decision rule for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis for any of these tests is based on the Probability Value (PV). If the PV is less than 5% or 0.05 (that is $PV < 0.05$), it implies that the regressor in question is statistically significant at 5% level; otherwise, it is not significant at that level.

Table 2: OLS Regression Results on CSR and Brand Image

Dependent Variable: BRL

Method: Least Squares

Sample: 262

Included observations: 262

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	1.212356	0.022989	52.73543	0.0121
ECO	0.113319	0.058207	1.94303	0.0495
SOC	0.542450	0.280098	1.93664	0.0099
ENV	2.853737	0.227271	12.55654	0.0006
R-squared	0.599856	Mean dependent var		3.107500
Adjusted R-squared	0.519569	S.D. dependent var		0.328976
S.E. of regression	0.006828	Akaike info criterion		-7.021867
Sum squared resid	4.66E-05	Schwarz criterion		-7.482146
Log likelihood	17.04373	Hannan-Quinn criter.		-8.031915
F-statistic	12.11533	Durbin-Watson stat		1.924874
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000198			

Source: Authors Computation, 2022 (Eview-9.0)

Table 2 showed that the F-statistic which is used to examine the overall significance of regression model showed that the result is significant, as indicated by the value of the *F*-statistic, 12.11 found to be significant at the 5.0 per cent level. That is, the F-statistic P-value of 0.001 is less than 0.05. The R^2 (coefficient of determination), used to measure the goodness of fit of the estimated model indicates that the model is poor in prediction. The R^2 value of 59.98 shows that ECO CSR, SOC CSR and ENV CSR jointly, have a fair impact on brand image of MTN Nigeria. It indicates that about 59.98 per cent of variation in brand image of MTN Nigeria is explained by CSR, while the remaining unaccounted variation of 40.02 per cent is captured by the white noise error term. Durbin Watson (DW) statistic was used to test for the presence of serial correlation or autocorrelation among the error terms. The model indicates that there is no autocorrelation among the variables as indicated by DW statistic of 1.92. This shows that the estimates are unbiased and can be relied upon for policy decisions.

The regression result in Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value for economic CSR activities is 1.94 whilst the tabulated (absolute) value is 1.96. Since the t-calculated is less than the t-tabulated ($1.94 < 1.96$), it thus falls in the acceptance region, hence, we reject H_{01} with the probability value of 0.0495. Therefore, economic CSR activities have significant impact on brand image.

The regression result in Table 2 also shows that the calculated t-value for social CSR activities is 1.93, while the critical value is 1.96 under 95% confidence level. Since the t-calculated is less than the critical value ($1.93 < 1.96$), it falls in the acceptance region, hence, we reject H_{02} with the probability value of 0.0099. Hence, social CSR activities have significant impact on brand image of MTN Nigeria.

Furthermore, the regression result in Table 2 also shows that the calculated t-value for environmental CSR activities is 12.55, while the critical value is 1.96 under 95% confidence level. Since the t-calculated is higher than the critical value ($12.55 > 1.96$), it falls in the acceptance region, hence, we accept H_{03} with the probability value of 0.0006. Hence, environmental CSR activities have no significant impact on brand image of MTN Nigeria.

The results revealed that economic CSR activities has significant impact on brand image of MTN in Nigeria. This was supported by Amin-Chaudhry (2016), who indicated that economic CSR activities positively relates profitability of companies, companies involved in economic CSR activities are perceived better social players. More so, the study revealed that social CSR activities have significant impact on brand loyalty of MTN in Nigeria. This is in line with studies by Al Mubarak et al. (2019) whose results showed a statistically significant relationship between CSR and brand image. This was further supported by the findings of Choongo (2017) that social CSR responsibility had a positive and significant effect on brand image. Finally, the results show that environmental CSR activities do not strongly impact brand image. The finding negates the report of Kinoti (2017) that green marketing practices had significant effect on brand image. The disparity in the results may be explained the difference in the social, cultural and economic conditions that prevail where the studies were conducted.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Firm undertake CSR to contribute to the wellbeing of the stakeholders and improve their brand reputation. Essentially, CSR activities benefits society, protect the environment and improve the economic life conditions of the peoples of a given society. In other words, CSR induce partners, business associates, clients and consumers to prefer products of a firm instead of those of competitors and at the same time improve not only their business results but also the enterprise's reputation and image. This study examined the impact of CSR on brand image of MTN Nigeria. OLS was employed to analyze data. The results revealed that economic and social CSR activities have significant impact on brand image of MTN in Nigeria; while the impact of environmental CSR activities on brand image was found to be statistically insignificant.

Consequently, the study concludes that economic, social and environmental CSR play important roles in determining brand image of MTN. This study thus shows that the brand image of MTN, as held by stakeholders, is a function of their (MTN) CSR activities. Thus, the study recommends that management of MTN Nigeria should find a way to innovate their CSR responsibility practices. By engaging in CSR initiatives MTN Nigeria will foster a brand image that will lead to increased customer base and increased profitability. The study also recommends that MTN should undertake more morally justified CSR initiatives which will help them strengthen community welfare and their brand image.

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