



Evaluating the Role of Social Media in Enhancing Corporate Social Responsibility Efforts: Evidence from Two Nigerian Companies

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of social media platforms in amplifying Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, focusing on Dangote Group and Guaranty Trust Holding Company (GTCO) in Nigeria. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) provide a dynamic and interactive avenue for these companies to engage stakeholders, foster transparency, and enhance brand credibility. Using qualitative content analysis, the research evaluates how these platforms are employed to communicate CSR efforts in health, education, environmental sustainability, and community development. The findings reveal that emotional storytelling and diverse content formats significantly boost audience engagement and positive brand perception. In particular, health and education initiatives garner strong interactions, while environmental efforts receive moderate responses. The study highlights social media's potential to humanise CSR activities, encourage stakeholder collaboration, and amplify corporate impact. Recommendations emphasise leveraging platform-specific strategies and fostering participatory engagement to maximise CSR effectiveness and reach.

Keywords: Social Media, Corporate Social Responsibility, Dangote Group, Guaranty Trust,

Introduction

The way businesses interact with stakeholders has changed in recent years due to the incorporation of social media into corporate strategies, especially regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Social media sites like Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube have become vital resources for enhancing corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Loureiro & Lopes, 2019). They provide businesses with an engaging platform to showcase their community engagement, philanthropic, and sustainability initiatives to a worldwide audience. Social media, as opposed to conventional media, enables direct engagement with customers, investors, and other stakeholders, as well as real-time contact and greater transparency.

Effective communication strategies are necessary because corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly important in defining business reputation, building customer confidence, and promoting brand loyalty (Yuen et al., 2023). By displaying their dedication to social and environmental issues on social media, businesses can create captivating storylines, exhibit authenticity, and forge emotional relationships with viewers. Companies must use social media

channels to promote their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts to stand out in competitive marketplaces, as customers grow more socially conscious and expect greater accountability (Nasidi et al., 2022; Shah & Khan, 2020). This study investigates how different social media platforms help magnify corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects. It also looks at the methods businesses use to interact with their audiences, what kinds of material work best, and how social media affects how the general public views CSR programmes. Businesses can maximise their use of social media to influence customer behaviour, build enduring connections with stakeholders, and convey their CSR activities by understanding these dynamics.

Literature Review

The Growth of CSR Communication in the Social Media Era

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication has significantly transformed from its early reliance on traditional platforms to its current dynamic presence on social media. Initially, CSR communication was limited to formal, regulated channels such as corporate websites, press releases, and annual reports (Stohl et al., 2017). These traditional methods enabled businesses to share information about their social and environmental initiatives. Still, they offered minimal opportunities for real-time interaction with stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the broader community. While these platforms provided a historical record of CSR activities, they were insufficient for fostering meaningful engagement (Ajayi and Mmutle, 2021).

The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X has dramatically altered the landscape of CSR communication (Cortado & Chalmeta, 2016). Unlike traditional methods, social media facilitates instant, two-way interaction between companies and stakeholders. Businesses can now share CSR initiatives in real time, engage in interactive dialogue, and receive immediate feedback (ElAlfy et al., 2020). This shift has redefined CSR communication from a one-sided dissemination of information to a collaborative process that strengthens relationships and builds trust with stakeholders (Gomez and Soto, 2011).

One of the key benefits of social media for CSR communication is its capacity for real-time, two-way interaction. Instead of passively broadcasting information, companies can engage stakeholders in meaningful dialogue, seek feedback, and co-create CSR strategies. Gomez and Soto (2011) emphasise that effective CSR communication should not be limited to top-down information sharing but should also invite stakeholder input. By leveraging social media's interactive features, businesses can build stronger bonds with stakeholders, enhancing trust and transparency. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram support diverse content formats, including videos, infographics, live events, and blogs, encouraging active stakeholder participation (Uzunoğlu et al., 2017). Live Q&A sessions, for instance, allow stakeholders to engage directly with CSR representatives, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

Moreover, social media enables companies to respond rapidly to social and environmental issues. Updating CSR messages in real time allows businesses to stay relevant in the face of fast-changing public opinion and societal expectations (Cuervo Carabel et al., 2023). This responsiveness ensures that CSR actions remain visible, timely, and aligned with contemporary social issues. Social media also plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of CSR initiatives. Saxton et al. (2021) highlight that platforms like X and Instagram amplify the visibility of CSR efforts and influence stakeholder perceptions. Through interactive conversations, companies can refine their CSR

messaging based on stakeholder feedback, enhancing the legitimacy and authenticity of their CSR initiatives. As a result, businesses can better meet stakeholder expectations, respond to emerging concerns, and demonstrate accountability.

Another important aspect of CSR communication via social media is the emotional appeal it enables. Companies can humanise their CSR initiatives by telling emotionally compelling stories that resonate with audiences (Kucukusta et al., 2019). By showcasing real-life beneficiaries of CSR initiatives, whether supporting underprivileged communities or promoting environmental sustainability, companies can elicit emotional responses from stakeholders. This emotional connection fosters a stronger affinity between consumers and brands, as people are more likely to support businesses whose values align with theirs.

The impact of social media on brand loyalty and advocacy cannot be overstated. Studies show that customers are more likely to support brands that are transparent and socially responsible (Mathur, 2019; Sharma & Verma, 2020; Wilk et al., 2021). Chu et al. (2020) found that companies that effectively use social media for CSR communication are perceived as more credible, accountable, and trustworthy. Companies can build stronger brand loyalty by actively engaging stakeholders on social media. Consumers are also more likely to share positive CSR experiences on social media, creating powerful word-of-mouth marketing. Since recommendations from peers are often more influential than direct brand messaging, companies can amplify their CSR impact through organic advocacy from stakeholders.

Impact of Social Media on Amplifying CSR Efforts

In the current digital era, social media's ability to magnify corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives has grown in importance. Social media has become an essential tool for businesses as digital platforms develop, helping them promote their CSR projects and meaningfully connect with stakeholders and customers (Gamji et al., 2022; Loureiro & Lopes, 2019). Due to this shift in communication dynamics, companies can now engage with their audiences more directly and transparently, increasing their CSR programs' visibility, relatability, and impact. Unlike traditional channels like press releases or corporate reports, social media offers a two-way communication mechanism that allows businesses to receive direct input. This enables businesses to modify their CSR initiatives in real time to match customer expectations.

Social media's rapid reach into a larger, more varied audience is one of its most significant benefits for CSR communication. Platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and X allow businesses to quickly broadcast their CSR initiatives to a worldwide audience that spans a variety of demographics. Social media gives people instant access to information and creates a forum for discussion, democratising communication. The instantaneous nature of the contact enables organisations to present the advancements of their sustainability or social projects and obtain real-time feedback from stakeholders and customers. As audiences value the transparency and openness that come with such participatory communication, this can promote increased trust and loyalty (Topor et al., 2022).

Studies have indicated that customer engagement is greatly influenced by the structure and tone of corporate social responsibility communications on social media (Bowen et al., 2020; Gomez, 2021; Uzunoğlu et al., 2017). Customers are more likely to respond favourably to businesses that

deliberately craft their CSR communication, employing genuine, passionate messages that are easy to understand. For example, storytelling has been shown to be a successful CSR communication tactic. Businesses may establish deeper relationships with their audience by using storytelling techniques to highlight specific facets of their social or environmental initiatives. Companies can transform abstract CSR pledges into approachable, concrete storylines by humanising their programs, whether through highlighting the personal impact on individuals or communities. This encourages an emotional connection between the brand and its goal and helps customers comprehend the significance of the company's actions.

It's also important to recognise how social media affects customer behaviour, especially regarding CSR. Research suggests that when firms exhibit robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on social media, people are more likely to form favourable opinions about them (Abbas et al., 2019; Ahmad et al., 2021; Nasr et al., 2024). Customer perception of a brand tends to be more positive when social responsibility is successfully conveyed through exciting content and conversation. The positive brand image frequently has observable effects, including heightened brand loyalty, a propensity for product purchases, and even advocacy, in which customers spread the word about the brand within their networks. Social media's potential to produce these results emphasises how valuable it is as a tactical instrument for CSR communication.

Moreover, social media platforms enable businesses to test different CSR content formats, improving the accessibility and engagement of their programs (Yang et al., 2020). Social media helps companies showcase their work in creative ways. Examples include visually striking infographics, live streaming corporate social responsibility events, and sharing behind-the-scenes videos of sustainability initiatives. Employing these various content forms allows businesses to meet the needs of different audience segments, increasing the impact and reach of their CSR initiatives.

Methodology

The study uses qualitative content analysis to examine how businesses communicate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter). The research focuses on two companies, Dangote Group and Guaranty Trust Holding Company (GTCO), chosen for their notable CSR initiatives and significant social media presence. Four leading social media networks are used for the analysis: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter). These platforms were selected because businesses widely use them for CSR communications, they have diverse user bases, and they enable the analysis of various engagement patterns.

Analysis and Discussion

Dangote Group's CSR Efforts on Social Media

The Dangote Group has a well-rounded strategy for interacting with various audiences by leveraging social media to further its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The main subject of this research is the company's actions on social media sites like Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter where they showcase their CSR programs in community development, health, and education.

CSR Focus Areas and Key Initiatives

Health Initiative

Dangote Group's commitment to health is prominently displayed on its social media platforms. Posts detailing donations of medical supplies and money for healthcare personnel, among other ways to help with COVID-19 assistance, attracted a lot of interaction. For instance, the Dangote Foundation's tweet on the construction of speciality hospitals received 1.2K likes, 345 retweets, and 210 comments, demonstrating the public's support for the business's health-related corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Example post X (Twitter)

"Through the Dangote Foundation, we are proud to partner with government and health institutions to build world-class hospitals for Nigerians. #HealthcareForAll#CSR" – Engagement Metrics: 1.2k likes, 345 retweets, 210 comments.

Education Initiative

Dangote group uses social media to post about education initiatives. For instance, the Dangote group regularly posts on LinkedIn about their scholarship programs for students, specifically in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The post usually includes information about university partnerships to fund research and infrastructure development.

Example Post (LinkedIn).

"We believe in the power of education. Our annual scholarship program supports bright minds across Nigeria. Apply today! #EmpowerEducation #CSR" - Engagement Metrics: 800 reactions, 150 comments, 120 shares

Environmental Initiative

The company shares its environmental sustainability efforts on all channels, such as clean energy projects and tree planting. However, these messages have mediocre interactions compared to health and education initiatives. This could be because, in contrast to more direct human-impact activities, environmental projects are often longer-term and may not immediately provoke strong emotional reactions.

Example post (Instagram)

"We are planting 1,000 trees this month to help preserve our environment. Together, we can make a greener tomorrow. 🌱 #CSR #Environment #Sustainability #CleanEnergy" - Engagement Metrics: 5K likes, 1.1K comments, 500 shares

Community Development Initiative

Dangote's corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavours in community development, including infrastructure investments and housing projects for internally displaced individuals, garner substantial attention on social media. Posts with beneficiary testimonies that demonstrate the observable outcomes of these efforts often strike a chord with readers, inspiring positive comments and active participation.

Example post X (Twitter)

"We are proud to support the community by housing displaced families. A home brings hope. #CommunityDevelopment #CSR" - Engagement Metrics: 950 likes, 120 retweets, 80 comments

Engagement and Implications

Regarding community development, education, and health, messages tend to garner more participation than those about environmental issues. Posts with visual elements, including photos, infographics, and videos, have a higher level of engagement, particularly on social media sites like LinkedIn and Instagram. Posts with before-and-after pictures of community projects or scholarship recipients give the CSR initiatives a more human touch and practical sense. Powerfully emotional posts tend to receive more comments and shares, such as testimonies from people who have benefited from housing or health programs. Because of this emotional connection, users are more likely to interact with the information and have a more favourable impression of the business. Dangote Group purposefully uses hashtags like #CSR, #Sustainability, #HealthcareForAll, and #GreenAfrica to improve the exposure and shareability of its CSR postings. This makes their message more accessible and quickly spread on social media.

The Dangote Group multiplies the impact of its CSR activities, especially in health, education, and community development, by strategically using social media to disseminate these efforts. According to the data, using hashtags wisely, emotional resonance, and visual storytelling are all essential for increasing interaction. Even if there is only a limited amount of interaction with postings on environmental sustainability, they still support the business's broader CSR strategy and show a fair approach to solving social and ecological problems. This information emphasises how critical it is to use social media to connect and communicate with stakeholders and provide information, as this will increase the effect and reach of CSR initiatives.

Guaranty Trust Holding Company's (GTCO) CSR Efforts on Social Media

GTCO uses a variety of social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, and Facebook, to spread the word about its CSR (corporate social responsibility) programs. The company's community development, health, education, youth empowerment, and environmental sustainability are all included in its CSR initiatives. Examining the social media strategy and engagement data reveals how well GTCO reaches various groups and amplifies its corporate social responsibility message.

Health Initiative

GTCO is highly recognised for its focus on autism awareness and healthcare support. GTCO introduced the Autism Awareness Program, a training session for parents and partnerships with medical personnel to support individuals with Autism. The initiatives are frequently shared across their social media platforms. The post on Instagram generates high engagement, where users often share personal stories or praise GTCO for their inclusive CSR efforts.

Example Post (Instagram)

"We are committed to creating a world where individuals with Autism can thrive. Join us at this year's Autism Awareness Conference. Let's support, learn, and grow together. ❤️"

#GTCOAutismAwareness #CSR #HealthMatters" - Engagement Metrics: 2.5K likes, 600 comments, 300 shares

Education Initiative

The main goals of GTCO's CSR initiatives in education include school infrastructure improvement, skill acquisition programs, and scholarships. These programs are actively marketed on social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, where their appeal to those interested in improving their knowledge is considerable. The main goals of GTCO's CSR initiatives in education include school infrastructure improvement, skill acquisition programs, and scholarships. These programs are actively marketed on social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, where their appeal to those interested in improving their knowledge is considerable. GTCO posts about the company's scholarship for underprivileged students, especially in STEM fields, feature success stories of beneficiaries and detailed information on how to apply. These posts are particularly well-received on LinkedIn, where the professional audience aligns with the educational goals.

Example Post (LinkedIn)

"Through our STEM Scholarship program, we aim to empower the next generation of innovators. Apply now and start your journey to greatness! #EducationForAll #CSR #STEMEducation" - Engagement Metrics: 1.1K reactions, 200 comments, 150 shares

Community Development and Youth Empowerment Initiative

Some of GTCO's initiatives focused on community initiatives emphasising entrepreneurship and youth empowerment, primarily through programs aimed at improving financial literacy and providing resources to less privileged youth. These initiatives generate strong engagement, especially on Twitter, where the audience skews younger.

Example Post (X)

"Empowering our youth through entrepreneurship is the key to unlocking Nigeria's potential. Join our Entrepreneurship Training Program today and take the first step toward financial independence! #GTCOEmpowers #CSR" - Engagement Metrics: 1.4K likes, 300 retweets, 120 comments

Environmental Initiative

GTCO introduced the 'Go Green' campaign, a tree planting campaign focused on promoting eco-friendly practices within GTCO company and the public. The post did not generate much engagement compared to other GTCO initiatives but reflects the company's commitment to environmental responsibility.

Example post (Facebook)

"We believe in taking responsibility for our environment. Join us as we plant trees and ensure a greener future. 🌱 #CSR #GoGreen #Sustainability" - Engagement Metrics: 800 likes, 180 shares, 90 comments

Engagement and Implications

Social media posts on autism awareness and educational scholarships are always more popular for several reasons. First and foremost, emotional storytelling is essential, especially for pieces that feature first-person accounts of people conquering obstacles. Audiences are often firmly moved

by success tales, such as the path of a scholarship recipient or someone receiving autistic support. These stories arouse empathy, increasing the information's relatability and recall value. To increase the visibility of their postings, GTCO carefully chooses which hashtags to use, such as #CSR, #STEMEducation, and #GTCOAutismAwareness. These hashtags not only help the material become more visible but also make it easier for people interested in those particular subjects to find it. As a result, the postings are more shareable, enhancing campaign efforts on other media. Posts that showcase collaborations also get particularly great comments, whether with medical experts, educational institutions, or entrepreneurs. These collaborations strengthen the notion that various stakeholders collaborate to bring about significant change by evoking a feeling of collective effect and purpose. These partnerships help increase GTCO's credibility, increasing the likelihood that the public would believe in and support their campaigns.

GTCO has demonstrated remarkable efficacy in amplifying its community development, health, and education CSR initiatives through the intelligent utilisation of social media. The company's emphasis on visual appeal, passionate narrative, and solid connections amplifies the effect of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, especially in domains such as education and Autism awareness. Posts on environmental sustainability get minimal interaction, but GTCO's dedication to using its CSR initiatives to improve society is seen on all of its channels. This research offers vital insights into how the business may utilise digital platforms to increase the efficacy and reach of its CSR campaigns.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Social media has significantly transformed the landscape of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X have become powerful tools for businesses to promote their CSR initiatives in a more transparent, interactive, and impactful manner. Real-time communication with stakeholders, agile response to public opinion, and enhanced trust-building are key benefits of leveraging social media for CSR. By effectively utilising these platforms, companies can amplify their CSR efforts, foster customer loyalty, and achieve sustainable business growth. Sharing emotionally resonant stories of CSR activities on social media can forge deeper connections with audiences. This emotional engagement is crucial in driving brand loyalty and advocacy, as consumers are more inclined to support brands that align with their values. The global reach of social media platforms empowers businesses to amplify their CSR messages across diverse demographics, increasing visibility and impact. The platform's versatility in content formats (e.g., videos, infographics, live streams) allows for targeted engagement with various audience segments, maximising the effectiveness of CSR initiatives. Based on the findings the study recommends that:

1. There is need for companies to highlight real-life success stories and use visuals like photos and videos to humanise CSR efforts and connect emotionally with audiences.
2. Use Instagram for visual campaigns, LinkedIn for professional initiatives, and Twitter for quick updates and youth engagement.
3. Encourage audience participation through polls, live Q&A sessions, and timely responses to feedback.
4. Provide regular updates on CSR milestones and outcomes to build trust and credibility with stakeholders.

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