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CSR as an Elixir for Enhanced Corporate Image: Experiences from the University for Development Studies, Tamale and C.K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Navrongo, Ghana

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Abstract:
This paper is centered on the ramifications of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on the corporate image of public universities in Ghana. It focuses on CSR activities of the C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences (CKT-UTAS) and the University for Development Studies (UDS), taking cognizance of the likely consequences of socially irresponsible behaviour. The proponents relied heavily on relevant previous studies, Acts of Parliament establishing the selected universities, information provided in technical reports, web pages of selected universities, and in-house journals of same.
It recognizes CSR as a strategic tool for enhancing the corporate image of a given organization and thus set out to investigate benchmarks within the higher education sub-sector and the sustainability or otherwise of CSR initiatives undertaken by the Management of UDS and CKT-UTAS. The findings revealed that per their respective mandates as enshrined in the Acts/Legislation establishing them, the UDS and the CKT-UTAS have a community development and/or poverty reduction focus. Invariably, they have been involved in several forms of community engagement or CSR activities especially within the universities' catchment areas. However, the two universities like most public universities in Ghana do not have a deliberate Policy Document on Corporate Social Responsibility. Consequently, the study recommends the formulation of a CSR Policy to provide the framework for university-wide CSR programmes and activities as well as the incorporation of CSR as a course of study within the universities' mainstream curricular.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, corporate image, Ghana, and public universities

1. Background

Organisations, as open systems, have a duty to carry out their operations with a community of stakeholders in mind; this underscores the essence of the concept of 'Corporate Citizen' which is key in the efforts by such entities to distinguish their 'Brand' from the competition. The establishment of brand image and brand loyalty is not so easy, and enterprises should implement Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and other practical activities to build trust, improve consumer satisfaction and as such enhance consumer loyalty to their brands (Ahmed et al., 2020; Sürücü *et al.*, 2019).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for most organisations was once a purely philanthropic activity to arouse public goodwill with no consequence on profitability. However, the perception has changed with CSR programmes ranking high on the corporate plans of most organisations (Kamau and Anami, 2010).

In recent times, research has shown that organisations, that blend their marketing activities with Corporate Social Responsibility activities, normally improve in a significant way their corporate identity and reputation or image. Moreover, when their CSR accomplishments and activities are linked to tse social needs of the community where they operate, they improve even more their marketing activities such as the brand image of their products or services (Sen *et al.*, 2006).

Furthermore, the CSR initiatives made by organisations can help considerably to stand out their products and services from the ones made by their main competitors, through the creation of an image of the positive brand and a higher level of corporate reputation (Ker-Tah, 2012). In order to do this, the Management of organisations have to adopt and implement CSR activities, and actions as well as integrate differentiation business strategies and invest in the

development of new products or services, and the creation of advertising and promotion campaigns (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006; McWilliams *et al.*, 2006). More so, while CSR points out a way for organisations to contribute to the well-being of the society, it also gives the opportunity to create a true competitive advantage and positive reputation for the corporate world (Smith 2007, Porter and Kramer 2006).

Thus, under the new circumstances such as globalization, privatization of educational institutions and competition in higher education industry, many higher education institutions are adapting a more business-like approach in order to compete and survive in the changing face of the industry (Weymans, 2010; Gumport, 2000; Goia and Thomas, 1996). And during the adaptation of this business-like approach, some institutions are discovering the importance of corporate image, corporate identity, corporate reputation and mainly CSR as a reputation and an advantage building strategy (Atakan and Eker, 2007; Stensaker, 2007; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Melewar and Akel, 2005). The branding and promotion of the corporate image of various organisations and corporate social responsibility practices are led by their public relations departments. And in many cases, the public relations function of an organization is responsible for guiding such activities/campaigns (Ondego, 1998).

In Africa, CSR seems to be driven by factors that differ from those of Western Europe and hence could be grossly misunderstood. The difference in CSR between countries in Africa and those in the West can be examined by looking at the various drivers for or causes of CSR in developing countries, like those in Africa. Although these drivers are not all unique to developing countries, together they build a distinctive picture of how CSR is conceived, incentivised and practiced (Dartey-Baah & Amposah-Tawiah, 2011). And it is questionable whether universities are concerned about corporate social responsibility performance. Most universities tend to focus only on teaching social responsibility in terms of corporate social responsibility initiatives and do not go beyond this by attempting to improve their communities (Atakan and Eker 2007).

According to Brew *et al.* (2015), many companies in Ghana through CSR initiatives are investing heavily in various sectors of the economy, particularly education, because of the government budgetary constraints. They concluded that mining companies have contributed greatly to the expansion of the infrastructural facilities (including education) in the Ashanti, Western and Eastern regions of Ghana. Research by Amoako *et al.* (2013) on how collaboration between industry players and academia can help improve CSR strategies in Ghana and the rest of Africa revealed that poorly designed educational curricula do significantly contribute to the low corporate support to education and other sectors in Africa.

It is conveyed that much of CSR support in Ghana has been to the construction of classrooms, school library complex, teachers' bungalows and sponsorship packages, especially to brilliant but needy students (Brew *et al.*, 2015; Ofori and Hinson, 2007). There is sufficient evidence that a high volume of the literature seems to focus on the impact of CSR activities of corporate bodies on educational institutions such as public universities in Ghana. The CSR activities of public universities in Ghana, however, remain unexplored, which is the essence of this study.

1.1. Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to ascertain the importance assigned to CSR by public universities with a focus on the University for Development Studies (UDS) and the C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences (CKT-UTAS). Specific objectives are:

- To assess Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategic tool for enhancing the corporate image of the University for Development Studies (UDS) and the C.K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences (CKT-UTAS).
- To explore practices/benchmarks within the higher education sub-sector and
- To examine the sustainability or otherwise of CSR Initiatives undertaken by the Management of UDS and CKT-UTAS.

2. Theoretical Framework

According to Freeman (1984), a company's stakeholders include just about anyone affected by the company and its workings. That view is in opposition to the long-held shareholder theory proposed by economist Milton Friedman that in capitalism, the only stakeholders a company should care about are its shareholders, and thus, it's the bottom line. Friedman's view is that companies are compelled to make a profit, to satisfy their shareholders, and to continue positive growth.

By contrast, Dr. Freeman suggests that a company's stakeholders are 'those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist.' These groups would include customers, employees, suppliers, political action groups, environmental groups, local communities, the media, financial institutions, governmental groups, and more. This view paints the corporate environment as an ecosystem of related groups, all of whom need to be considered and satisfied to keep the company healthy and successful in the long-term.

In his book 'Capitalism and Freedom,' economist Milton Friedman details the tenets of shareholder theory and states that corporations have no real 'social responsibility.' According to Friedman, it is up to the shareholders to be socially responsible, not the company itself. Freeman argued against this stance, stating that, "If you can get all your stakeholders to swim or row in the same direction, you've got a company with momentum and real power. Saying that profits are the only important thing to a company is like saying, 'Red blood cells are life.' You need red blood cells to have life, but you need so much more."

3. Review of Previous Relevant Studies

3.1. Corporate Social Responsibility as a Value Proposition

According to Coyle (2010), 'while there is no single, commonly accepted definition of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it generally refers to business decision-making linked to ethical values, compliance with legal requirements, and respect for people, communities and the environment'. He also subscribes to the European Union definition of CSR as 'a concept whereby organisations integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis'.

CSR is defined as the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectancies that society has of organisations at a given point in time (Valentine and Fleischman 2008). This definition is based on Carroll's study (1979) where he defined four components of social responsibility and broadened the scope of its understanding (Maignan, 2001; Popa, 2010). Carroll suggested that businesses must fulfill economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities in order to address their entire obligations to society. Economic responsibilities designate the obligations for businesses to be productive and profitable (Maignan, 2001), while legal responsibilities refer to the framework of legal requirements businesses need to meet while practicing economic duties (Carroll, 1979). Ethical responsibilities are the defined appropriate behavior by established norms that businesses should follow, and philanthropic responsibilities reflect the common desire to see businesses get actively involved in the betterment of society (Maignan, 2001).

World Business Council for Sustainable Development provides the most universal definition of CSR: it is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large.

In the current global market environment, social pressures on businesses have increased: the concern for CSR is expressed not only among academics but also by the public and shareholders (Popa, 2010). Unfortunately, many companies awoke to the importance of CSR only after being surprised by unfavorable public responses to issues they had not previously thought were part of their business responsibilities (Porter and Kramer, 2006). Particularly following negative public responses and global boycotts, there has been a trend toward promoting corporate change and emphasizing CSR within corporate business strategies (Filho *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, in the implementation process, companies realised that, if used properly, CSR strategies could be profitable and create value such as through competitive advantages and improvements in corporate reputations (Smith, 2007; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Husted and Allen, 2001).

In addition to the impact of CSR on competitive advantage, customer loyalty, staff morale and the ability to attract and retain staff (Webb, 2016), the OECD reports (Nieuwenkamp, 2016) that even access to finance will increasingly depend on companies' demonstrable commitment to ethical policies and practices such as sustainable design, social justice, the ethical treatment of animals and environmental responsibility. As a consequence, CSR metrics have become a standard feature of corporate annual reports (Waller and Lanis, 2009).

3.2. Corporate Image/Reputation

Corporate Image (CI) is comprised of creating a positive corporate personality, marketing communications and channels as well as constant feedback from the target audience. Worcester (2009), Pina *et al.* (2006), Meehan *et al.* (2006), Flavian, Guinaliu, Torres (2005), Abratt, Mofokeng (2001), Teng Fatt *et al.* (2000), Stuart (1997) and others emphasize the importance of creating and managing CI. These authors agree that CSR has a positive impact on CI.

Worcester (2009) notes that CI consists of product image, brand image and brand consumer image. Yeo, Youssef (2010) state that CI is a source of competitive advantage, due to the fact that CI can only be formed over a long time, it becomes difficult to imitate. Besides, CI creates consumer trust and deters competitors from entering the market.

Leblanc, Nguyen (1995) defines 5 elements which constitute CI: corporate identity, individuality, physical environment, service offering and contact personnel. Corporate identity contains company's name, logo, exceptional features, pricing, the quality and quantity of advertising. Malmelin, Hakala (2009), Chattananon, Lawley (2007), Wei (2002), van Riel, Balmer (1997), Stuart (1997), LeBlanc, Nguyen (1995), van Heerden, Puth (1995) and other authors emphasize the importance of defining CI and corporate identity. Wei (2002) states that CI is the impression stakeholders have towards the company, while corporate identity is the set of facts defining a company, its aims and culture. Physical environment is comprised of environment aesthetics, lighting, condition of furniture, buildings and other company's property. LeBlanc, Nguyen (1995) state that esthetic environment increases consumer satisfaction and raises CI. Chattananon, Lawley (2007), Stuart (1997), LeBlanc, Nguyen (1995) emphasize that room decorations, lighting and other features can be used to communicate CI to the consumers. Contact personnel are exceptionally important in forming consumer attitude towards company and its products, forming CI. Personnel should be friendly, courteous, caring, competent and of attractive appearance (LeBlanc, Nguyen, 1995). Contact personnel can have negative impact on CI if they dissatisfy customers by bad mood, poor attitude (van Heerden, Puth, 1995).

Service offering contains variety of services, service availability and service processes.

Corporate individuality consists of corporate philosophy, values and culture, strategic management, mission and objectives. Abratt, Mofokeng (2001) state that corporate individuality forms corporate identity, which forms CI. Spitzeck (2009) emphasizes that corporate individuality is formed by CSR elements such as protection of human rights, reducing pollution, etc. According to van Riel, Balmer (1997) corporates individuality which contains quality, integrity, value for money, technical innovation, social responsibility, service, reliability and imagination. Perfect corporate individuality is formed if all the aspects are kept at same development level. Yeo, Youssef (2010), Abratt, Mofokeng (2001), Teng Fatt *et al.*

(2000) emphasize that CI is influenced by information provided by the company itself and other groups. CI is studied from two perspectives: company's and consumer's.

The approach of the company is directed towards improvement of marketing activities while consumer's approach is based on his interpretation of CI and brand equity states that a crucial feedback exists: stakeholders are influenced by company's image forming actions and they form CI in their environment.

Lindgreen, Swaen (2010), Chattananon, Lawley (2007), Ward, Lewandowska (2006) emphasize that image of a socially responsible company creates and strengthens competitive advantages, improves brand reliability, enforces CI, raises customer loyalty, and creates emotional bond between the organisation and customers.

3.3. Navigating CSR/CI in Higher Education-An Overview

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its impact on Corporate Image (CI) of universities are centered on community engagements, strategic partnerships and the introduction of CSR modules in the curricular of some universities. Institutions of higher education have included CSR in their curricula, seeking to inform future generations of leaders of the benefits of socially responsible activities (Sherif, 2015).

In 2012, Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science launched two graduate courses in Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Entrepreneurship with several other Egyptian universities following suit: Suez Canal University and Port Said University as well as other private universities such as Heliopolis University and Nile University (Sherif, 2015).

Another example of partnership and collaboration with universities around the world is the Notre Dame University (NDU) Sustainability Project (2012-2015). Since 2010, NDU, along with European partners (University of Crete and the University of Athens in Greece, Dublin City University in Ireland, Stockholm University in Sweden, University of Padova in Italy, and the University of Bordeaux in France), has engaged as a partner in the Arab region in the Tempus project to Reorient University Curricula to Address Sustainability (RUCAS). Other partners from the Arab region involved in RUCAS include Université La Sagesse – Lebanon; Suez Canal University and Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development – Egypt; and the University of Jordan and the Hashemite University in Jordan.

Corporate social responsibility in universities had mostly been done through a programme of community service, both funded by internal or external funding sources (Sherif, 2015). Community service activities if performed well produces an image (image) of society. Image is an appreciation, a feeling that exists in society about a company or an institution. University social responsibilities included four main areas: (1) research, teaching, support for learning and public engagement, (2) governance, (3) environmental and social sustainability, and (4) fair practice (Menezes *et al.*, 2017). CSR was one of the university's strategies to gain reputation and competitive advantage to be successful in CSR strategy; CSR actions might be internalized and supported by management (Dahan & Senol, 2012).

4. Methodology

This study involved an exploration of relevant literature, Acts establishing the selected universities, content analysis of the selected universities' web pages, institutional reports and in-house journals. A qualitative analysis or discussion was then undertaken.

5. Findings/Observations

5.1. Corporate Social Responsibility as a Driver of Corporate Image @ CKT-UTAS

The Management Team of the CKT-UTAS braved the storm of the COVID-19 Pandemic to engage key stakeholders within the University's catchment area, shortly after the inauguration of the University in May 2020. These included major paramountcies such as the Navrongo traditional area, Chiana traditional area, Paga traditional area, Tongo and Kolgo traditional area, (www.cktutas.edu.gh accessed on Monday 7th March, 2022.)

One of the significant outcomes of such engagements was the grant of scholarships by Management to brilliant but needy students from each of the traditional areas afore-mentioned. Reciprocally, some of these paramountcies donated parcels of land for the future infrastructural development of the University and pledged their support for the University's activities.

Additionally, it has been the philosophy of the newly inaugurated Management to wave the required fees (cost of application forms) in respect of the online application process for prospective students. This is historic in recent practices in various tertiary institutions in Ghana where the sale of application forms constitutes a major component of their internally generated funds. (www.cktutas.edu.gh accessed on Monday 7th March, 2022)

This could be seen as a kind of social responsibility to all potential applicants that enables qualified applicants who would have been technically excluded due to their inability to afford the cost of application forms. Such candidates would also be automatically disqualified from benefiting from any scholarships and bursaries that are made available only upon enrolment or admission.

This gesture sets the new university apart from its competitors as it contributes significantly by making CKT-UTAS stand out in their services from the ones made by their main competitors, and creates an image of the positive brand and a higher level of corporate reputation. Additionally, Management has gone ahead to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Brighter Investment Co. Ltd, a Canadian Social Enterprise to support brilliant but needy students of the CKT-UTAS financially; including fee payment, residential facility user fee payment as well as the provision of stipends at predetermined intervals on terms and conditions to be agreed between Beneficiaries and the Company.

This gives more meaning to the policy of fee free application because if a prospective applicant is unable to apply because of his/her inability to purchase the application forms then such applicants on admission, most likely, will be unable to pay various fees and charges.

The above gestures and/or initiatives of Management no doubt constitute Corporate Social Responsibility, with ramifications for the corporate image of CKT-UTAS.

However, there is no documented framework such as a policy document or action plan to guide Management in the execution of its Corporate Social Responsibility. This is even more pronounced as there is equally no Public Relations (PR) Campaign strategy to incorporate CSR activities undertaken by Management. This is largely due to the fact that CKT-UTAS is a newly created university and Management requires some time to develop appropriate policies to address these issues.

5.2. Corporate Social Responsibility as a Driver of Corporate Image @ UDS

The University for Development Studies (UDS) is Ghana's first public University in the North. It was established by the Government of Ghana by PNDC Law 279 and gazette on 15th May, 1992, inter-alia to blend the academic world with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of northern Ghana in particular and the country as a whole (www.uds.edu.gh accessed on 7th March, 2022).

The pedagogical philosophy of UDS is said to have been borne out of a new thinking in higher education emphasizing the need for universities as teaching and research institutions to play more active role in addressing societal problems (especially rural areas) for speedy development. The University, by its mandate and constituency, has a pro-poor focus and this is reflected in its methodology of teaching, research and outreach services. The specific emphasis on practically-oriented, research and field-based training is aimed at contributing towards poverty reduction in order to accelerate national development (www.uds.edu.gh accessed on 7th March, 2022).

As a national University, its uniqueness is based on its location and multi-campus system, its vision and pro-poor nature which aims at addressing the conditions and structural causes of poverty, its community-technical-interface programme which combines academic work and community-based field practical works known as the Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP) and Community Based Education and Service (COBES). Beyond this, UDS undertook some CSR activities during its 25th Anniversary Celebrations in 2017. This included the donation of medical supplies to selected communities within the catchment area of the university. For Tamale, the Tamale Senior High School Clinic benefitted from this project under the Sagnarigu community which was selected within the UDS Tamale catchment area. Piisi was the beneficiary community from the Wa Campus and Gongnia Community Health Centre was the beneficiary of the donations earmarked for Navrongo in the Upper East Region.

The Campus-based Planning Committees, together with the Student Representative Council (SRC), organized a clean-up campaign on the various Campuses and on the precincts of selected health institutions within the catchment area of the university.

The University also recognized the contributions of some prominent chiefs towards the growth of the university i.e. through the donation of parcels of land for infrastructural development. In the forward to the Report on the 25th Anniversary Celebration of UDS, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Gabriel Ayum Teye remarked thus: In 2012, when UDS celebrated its 20th Anniversary under the theme 'UDS: 20 Years of Community Development through Higher Education', it told the world of how it had achieved community development through teaching, learning, research and community outreach. At 25, it assessed the impact of that 'Community Development through Higher Education' on National Development. Thus, it celebrated the anniversary under the theme 'UDS@ 25: Impact on National Development through Practical Higher Education'.

6. Conclusion

It can be inferred from the foregoing that CSR activities confer enormous benefits on the executing organization including higher education institutions such as CKT-UTAS and UDS. These include the following:

- UDS/CKT-UTAS can win the goodwill of their stakeholders through Corporate Social Responsibility activities.
- University Social Responsibility has a positive and significant impact on the university's image.
- Corporate Social Responsibility has a positive and significant impact on the University's performance.
- UDS/CKT-UTAS can have improved access to funding from socially responsible investors through CSR activities. The Memorandum of Understanding with Brighter Investment Co. Ltd and the allocation of parcels of land by some chiefs are evident examples. And
- Corporate Social Responsibility has a business commitment to enhancing economic development, quality of family life, and the broader community to enhance the reputation of the university and its competitive advantage.

Corporate Social Responsibility is intrinsically linked with the corporate image of an organisation. It is becoming increasingly impossible for organisations, including institutions of higher learning such as UDS and CKT-UTAS to satisfy their community of stakeholders without embarking on any form of socio-economic intervention. It is even more compelling not only because of the benefits that inure to any organization that undertakes CSR-related activities, but also in view of the dire consequences that socially irresponsible organisations suffer.

7. Recommendations for Management's Consideration

To realize the potential benefits of CSR enumerated above and for purposes of strategic positioning, we make the following Recommendations for implementation (either in full or in part) by Management:

- Formulation of a CSR Policy to provide the framework for University-wide CSR programmes and activities.
- Launch of a PR Campaign to be led by the Public Affairs Directorate. This campaign should focus on the CSR activities of UDS/CKT-UTAS as a strategic tool for gaining competitive advantage. It should be given extensive media coverage: print, electronic and on all social media platforms/handles.
- Closely aligned to this is the need to report CSR activities annually in the Vice-Chancellor's Report as well as global journals with a CSR orientation.
- Management should partner strategic stakeholders such as donor agencies (both local and foreign), Government of Ghana and/or state agencies, sister research institutions (both local and foreign) financial institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations, Traditional Authorities and internal publics such as staff and students through unions or associations, to wit, University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA), Senior Staff Association-Universities of Ghana (SSA-UoG), Teacher & Educational Workers Union (TEWU), Graduate Students Association of Ghana (GRASSAG) and Student Representative Council (SRC) to undertake CSR activities.
- We also recommend Management continues with their CSR Initiatives and expand the scope to include periodic medical outreach for communities within the universities' catchment area (the School of Medicine and Dentistry and the School of Nursing and Midwifery of the two universities should champion this).
- Deployment of students to assist with teaching science, technology and mathematics in senior high schools, especially a few months to the WASSCE examinations (the CKT-UTAS School of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education and the Faculty of Education of UDS should take this up aside the teaching practice sessions that will form part of their curricula).
- Undertake regular community engagements, undertake tree planting as part of the green Ghana project (to be led by the School of Agriculture of the two universities), and partner other institutions to conduct ground breaking research into socio-economic issues.
- The alumni of every institution, when well-organized, play very important roles in projecting and protecting the image of their Alma-mata. UDS has a solid Alumni base and though CKT-UTAS as a new university has, in the true sense, no alumni of its own, it can have a kind of 'pseudo' alumni made up of UDS alumni of the then Navrongo Campus which evolved into CKT-UTAS. Fortunately, a good number of this group has become lecturers and administrators of the new University and some of them are currently in Management positions (the Pro-V.C, the Dean of the School of Computing and Information Sciences and the first Deputy Registrar of the University). They should be proud to harness the efforts of past students of the Navrongo Campus of UDS to contribute to the development of CKT-UTAS and in carrying out some of its social responsibility and corporate image building efforts. Management should encourage staff of the University in this group to lead in this regard.
- Lastly but not the least, Management, through the Academic Board, should incorporate CSR into the curricular of the university. In the first instance, it could be taught as a course in the BSc. Accounting with Computing Programme in the case of CKT-UTAS and, the BSc. Social Change Communication in the case of UDS, and gradually integrated into mainstream curricula.

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