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The Relationship between CSR and CBBE in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Moderating Role of Customer Perceived Value

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ABSTRACT

Relying on the concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) to better understand sub-Saharan African urban marketplaces, this article puts forward a conceptual framework whose objective is to a) investigate the effect of CSR on multiple dimensions of CBBE and b) investigate the moderating role of customer perceived value (CPV). Survey data are from 501 consumers in Ghana and are analyzed using structural equation modeling. Findings suggest that engaging in CSR unquestionably improves all aspects of brand equity such as brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, and brand loyalty. We also find that the relationship between CSR and CBBE is moderated by CPV across all CSR-CBBE relationship. These findings have important implications for CSR, branding, international business and marketing in the Ghanaian marketplace.

KEYWORDS

Corporate social responsibility; consumer-based brand equity; developing economy; sub-saharan africa; Ghana

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive business landscape, firms find it difficult to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Research suggests that investment in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are strategic initiatives through which firms can position themselves as distinct from their competitors (Panda, D'Souza, & Blankson, 2019) and can positively influence their performance (Saeidi, Sofian, Saeidi, Saeidi, & Saeidi, 2015; Tarus, 2015). CSR activities go beyond profit motives and aim to protect the welfare of various stakeholders (Dahlsrud, 2008). While the relationship between CSR and firm performance has received attention (see Makanyeza, Chitambara, & Kakava, 2018; Tarus, 2015), we do not have a clear idea of how CSR affects a firm's brand equity (Mishra & Suar, 2010), especially in sub-Saharan African marketplaces.

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Worthy of note is that Mahmood & Bashir's (2020) study on CSR and brand equity in Pakistan reveal that brand reputation is a significant predictor of brand equity and that its predictive power is higher in the presence of CSR activities. Further, Poolthong & Mandhachitara's (2009) research on CSR and perceived service quality and brand effect in Thailand show that CSR initiatives do play an important role in service quality and which in turn, impact trust and brand effect. Moreover, Tantawi & Youssef's (2012) study in corporate social performance (CSP) and branding of retail banks in Africa, and more specifically, Egypt, uncovers the lack of association between CSP and brand equity. The authors go on to suggest to future researchers to continue to explore the relationship between CSP and brand equity (pp. 89). Referring to corporate social performance (CSP) as similar to CSR, the authors believe that CSP is important when examining place marketing and the challenges brought to bear in place branding. Still, the lack of clarity in the relationship between CSR and consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) coupled with the dearth of knowledge in the domain clearly attest to a gap in the literature.

One of the ways CSR can contribute to increased profitability, sales growth, or market share is by contributing to a company's consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). Increased brand awareness, distinct brand image, better-perceived quality, and increased brand loyalty contribute to CBBE (Keller, 2016). Previous research has suggested the importance of CBBE in influencing a company's competitiveness, survival, and profitability (e.g. Homburg, Klarmann, & Schmitt, 2010). Studies show that one of the ways through which companies can influence their brand performance, brand equity and CBBE in general is by strategically investing in CSR activities (see Cowan & Guzman, 2018; Lin & Chung, 2019). CSR activities also contribute to consumer knowledge, which subsequently influences their perceptions of service quality, trust and affective attitudes toward brands and their behavior in favor of the brand (Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009).

While it is important that companies are cognizant of their CSR actions, it is equally important to explore how consumers perceive this resource-intensive activity. Unless consumers consider CSR activities to be useful in their consumption process – either tangibly through better quality and reduced costs or intangibly by enhancing their pride of ownership and increased satisfaction – investment in CSR may not be favorable for the firm (Frimpong, Shuridah, Wilson, & Sarpong, 2020). In support of our assertion, Servera-Frances and Piqueras-Tomas (2019) conclude that CSR activities increase consumers' perceived value toward the firm as well as trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty toward the firm. The latter is taken up by Lee, Chang, and Lee (2017) who demonstrate that not only do CSR activities have significant positive influences on corporate reputation and customer loyalty but have significantly positive influences on brand image. Additionally, Moon, Lee, & Oh (2015) find that the positive influence of corporate social responsibility associations on social self-concept connection is stronger in collectivist culture than in individualist culture.

Responding to Tantawi et al.'s (2012) call for more studies on the relationship between CSP and brand equity in African marketplaces, and more so given the importance of CSR in companies' differentiation and positioning deliberations (Peloza & Shang, 2011) and specifically in developing economy marketplaces, the purpose of this study is to develop and then operationalize a framework that examines the relationship between CSR and consumer based brand equity (CBBE). More specifically, this study a) investigates the effect of CSR on CBBE in a sub-Saharan African

developing economy marketplace and b) explores whether the customer-perceived value (CPV) has any effect on this relationship. For the purposes of this paper, the term “consumer” or “customer” is used interchangeably throughout this study to avoid the unending repetition of the terms.

With an aggregate purchasing power in excess of \$5 trillion and the opportunity to serve about 1 billion new consumers in 2020 and beyond, the opportunity for firms in developing economy marketplaces is significant (Singh & Bharadwaj, 2017). Consumers in these marketplaces are resource-constrained in terms of income, access to basic necessities, and inadequate infrastructure (Singh & Bharadwaj, 2017). Tailoring CSR activities to the needs of consumers in these marketplaces could be a valuable strategy for firms to differentiate and position their product offerings and build brand equity while doing good for their consumers. This is especially important on a global scale as firms recognize the opportunities in developing and underdeveloped countries and compete for an increased share of the market. Two contributions to international marketing and international business literature become evident in this study and are highlighted next:

First, the results generate theoretical and practical value for researchers and managers currently engaged in CSR research and CBBE in sub-Saharan Africa. The results are also valuable for researchers or managers considering engaging in any of those activities.

Second, this paper joins other scholars to address the lack of studies investigating the effects of CSR in Africa. Specifically, while there exists some research on CSR in Africa (e.g. Abugre & Anlesinya, 2019; Ndhlovu, 2011) and corporate social performance (CSP) in Africa (Tantawi et al., 2012), to the best of our knowledge, there does not exist any study that investigates the CSR-CBBE relationship within the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Our study thus attempts to bridge the scholarly gap by situating the study in sub-Saharan Africa.

Further, to a degree, while this study is unique in terms of its objective of ascertaining the relationship between CSR and CBBE, other studies that bear resemblance are mostly in the context of the developed world (e.g. McDonald & Lai, 2011; Muniz, Guzmán, Paswan, & Crawford, 2019) and overlook developing economies in Africa.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we present the literature background pertaining to CSR and CBBE and our conceptual framework. Next, we discuss the hypotheses followed by our research method and analysis. We conclude with a discussion, followed by implications, limitations, and future research directions.

Literature background and hypotheses

CSR is defined as a continuing commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, its families, local communities, and society (World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), 1999). CSR encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time (Carroll, 2004). While CSR is a well-established concept in the Western world, its meaning, interpretation, and implication are evolving in developing country marketplaces. Broadly, CSR is considered as an add-on or a non-strategic activity in Western countries, aimed to highlight a firm’s interests and investments and the consumer’s wellbeing. This “additional” activity can be in line with the firm’s core

business or may be quite distinct. In contrast, a company's CSR activities in a developing economy marketplace may differ in terms of sustainable market orientation in the core business strategy (Bonsu & Polsa, 2011). This approach is in line with the unique and somewhat paradoxical nature of developing economy marketplaces, which are characterized by demanding, resource-constrained conditions with potentially vast opportunities.

There are some inconsistencies in the literature regarding the impact of CSR on firm branding, notwithstanding. In particular, while Yang and Basile (2019) find positive relationship between CSR and brand equity, the authors report that employee related CSR has a negative effect on brand equity. As well, Lin and Chung (2019) find that CSR has a positive impact on brand equity depending on brand size, segment, and identity as well as a type of CSR pursued. Further, Tantawi et al. (2012) find that there is lack of association between corporate social performance and brand equity in retail banks in Egypt. Despite the multiplicity of domains represented in the literature, not only are inconsistencies in authors' findings evident, but scholarship has overlooked the role of CSR in firm CBBE in developing African countries. This leaves both scholars and practitioners with insufficient evidence of the relationship between CSR and CBBE. These gaps in the literature inspired this study.

Based on the preceding literature review, we believe that firm engagement in CSR activities will contribute to an improvement in firm customer-based brand equity (CBBE) that consist of brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, and brand loyalty. Further, customer perceived value may also act as a mediator between CSR and CBBE. Thus, this paper proposes four hypotheses that explain the nature of these constructs and how they relate to one another. A conceptual framework is provided to illustrate these hypotheses (see Figure 1). We now outline our hypotheses that establish the link between CSR and CBBE in an African marketplace and emphasize the role of customer-perceived value (CPV) in enhancing this relationship.

Hypotheses development

While the broad argument that CSR affects brand equity is appealing, it is important that we consider the multidimensionality of the CBBE construct. There exist divergent views on the meaning and dimensions of brand equity because consumers view brand equity in unique and subjective manners (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). Brand equity refers to the total utility or value added to a product by virtue of the brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). This benefit of higher brand equity is accrued to the company in the form of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations/image, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). It is important that companies are aware of the relative importance of each of these aspects of brand equity so that they can efficiently allocate their resources to each. Moreover, factors positively affecting brand equity may be different in developing and developed marketplaces because of variations in the external business environment and in the societal needs, wants, and aspirations of consumers.

A typical firm can increase or achieve one or more of the four CBBE dimensions of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image/association, and brand loyalty through the pursuit of specific CSR initiative(s). For CSR to lead to CBBE, the customer

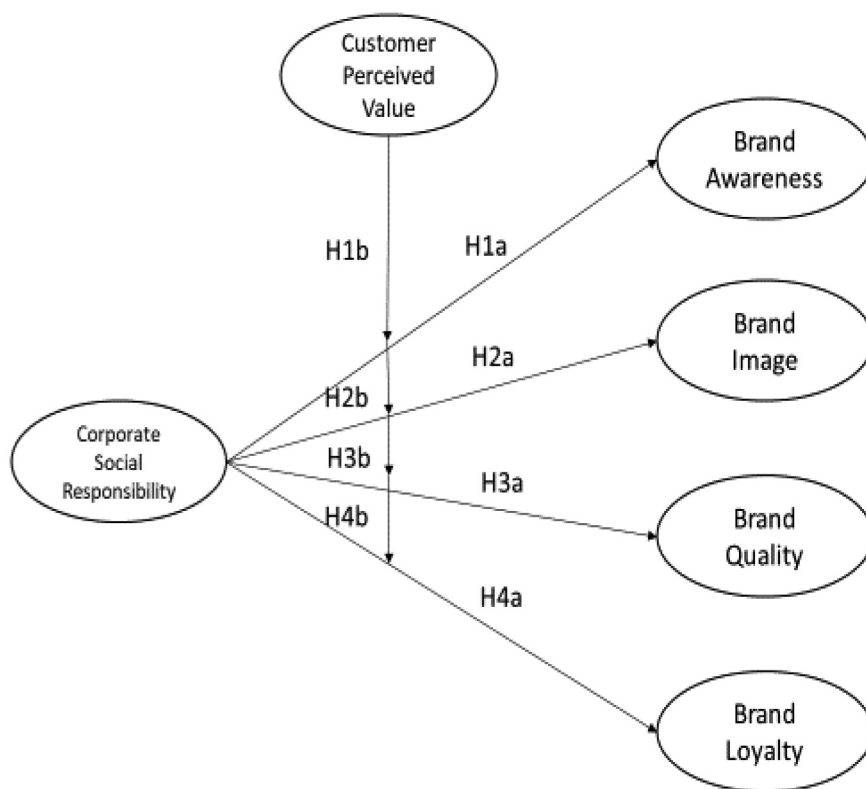


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and Customer-based Brand Equity.

must have been exposed to the firm's CSR initiative(s). The firm's CSR initiative(s) must be of value or importance to the customers in order to achieve CBBE. In other words, the potential of CSR to lead to or create CBBE depends on the customer perceived value (CPV) of the CSR. The relationships among these constructs are briefly elaborated next.

Corporate social responsibility

Although the subject of CSR has evoked a wide stream of interest and multiple conceptualizations from scholars, it is universally accepted to refer to all activities or practices of the firm that contribute to the general welfare of society. According to Frederick (1998), firms should have obligations to constituent groups in society other than shareholders and should pursue those obligations beyond the legally prescribed level. Conceptualizing along the same line is Wood (1991), who communicated the CSR idea in terms of interrelationship: business and society cannot be detached from each other because they are interwoven. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (1999) holds the view that CSR is the continuing commitment by firms to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, the local community and society at large. CSR activities broadly include one or more of the

following: cause promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, philanthropic donations (corporate philanthropy), community volunteering, and socially responsible business practices (Kotler & Lee, 2008).

Consumer-based brand equity

According to Keller (1993), CBBE is the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. Brand knowledge is the full set of brand associations linked to the brand in long-term consumer memory. CBBE thus refers to the peculiar responses of consumers that are generated toward a brand because of prior knowledge and associations of the brand. A review of CSR and the dimensions of CBBE from extant literature generates four key relationships.

Moderating role of CPV on CSR and CBBE relationship

The importance of CPV (customer perceived value) in understanding consumer behavior including behavior toward CSR initiatives has received prominence in the works of Parasuraman (1997) and Servera-Frances and Piqueras-Tomas (2019) among others. Lichtenthal, Wilson, and Long (1997) note that having the knowledge of CPV of a company's activities is critical as it can impact the company's competitive advantage. Acknowledging the scarcity of research activities in CSR and CPV, Servera-Frances and Piqueras-Tomas (2019) indicate perceived value as one of the most relevant topics in marketing research over the last few years. The authors define perceived value as a trade-off between what the customer perceives and the sacrifices he/she has to make. Perceived value has a subjective bidirectional nature to it in that it is not inherent to products, but it is experienced by the customer. It is relative and may vary between people, products, purchasing behavior and evolves over time (Gallarza & Gil, 2006). In building CBBE therefore, there is the need to understand the drivers of CPV (Keller, 1993). CPV is used to describe the overall perception of some activity or object regarding product utility, considering all benefits and costs of consumption (Chen & Tsai, 2008; Lai, Griffin, & Babin, 2009). Kotler and Lee (2008) write that CPV is measured as the difference between total customer value and total customer costs. Typically, total customer value may include a bundle of product, service, personnel, and image values. On the other hand, total customer costs refer to a bundle of monetary, time, energy, and psychic costs. According to Uddin (2012), customers usually estimate the expected perceived value in a typical exchange situation. Thus, firms need to understand the expectation of customers because perceived value relates to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions for repurchase. In other words, CPV directly relates to CBBE given that brand equity comprises customer brand awareness of a given cue or marketing stimulus or stimuli, customer-perceived brand quality, brand image or associations, and customer brand loyalty (Njite, 2005). In summary, therefore, one argues that for CSR to lead to CBBE, customers must perceive value in the firm's CSR initiatives as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, we test the following hypotheses reflecting the current wisdom as follows.

CSR and brand awareness

According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category. Awareness is conceptualized and measured in terms of recall and recognition (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), top of mind, brand dominance, brand knowledge, and brand opinion (Aaker, 1996). According to marketing scholars such as Kotler and Lee (2008), these associations may be activated by such brand elements as brand name, symbol, logo, and package, among many other marketing stimuli.

Brand awareness is necessary when the product is in the “promotion” phase of the life cycle (Aaker, 1996). Broadly speaking, CSR as a brand-building strategy is employed in the advanced phase of a product’s life cycle, after the company has established itself. However, as conceptualized in this paper, the sustainable product orientation of CSR in developing economy marketplaces could contribute to building a company’s brand awareness. An innovative product specifically catering to the needs of resource-constrained consumers could not only fulfil their product-specific needs but could also address larger societal constraints, thereby creating a unique value proposition (see for example, Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009). It is, therefore, asserted that CSR will positively predict brand awareness.

H1a: CSR is positively associated with brand awareness.

H1b: The relationship between CSR and brand awareness is moderated by CPV.

CSR and brand associations/brand image

The second aspect of CBBE is brand association, which is a representation of what a brand means for a consumer and constitutes “anything linked in memory to a brand” (Aaker, 1991, p. 109). Brand association is conceptualized as the totality of brand-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Kotler & Keller, 2009) which are linked in memory to a given brand (Aaker, 1991). Organizational association and product associations are the two broad types of associations (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Product association is further classified into functional attribute associations and nonfunctional associations. Functional associations refer to the tangible features of a product or service. Nonfunctional associations are intangible in nature and have to do with consumers’ need for safety and security (protection, order, and stability), social needs (affection, friendship, belonging), ego needs (prestige, status, self-esteem), and self-actualization needs (self-fulfillment).

Generally, in developed countries, brand image through CSR activities is created through frequent reminders of a product and other associated attributes through traditional media outlets. However, the content and medium of communication used to create a distinct brand image in developing economy marketplaces can be different (DeBerry-Spence & Elliot, 2012). Given the constraints associated with different means of communication in these marketplaces – such as lack of access to high-speed internet and low literacy levels of consumers, as well as infrastructural constraints such as electricity – companies operating in developing economy marketplaces must employ novel and innovative mechanisms to communicate their core value proposition and create a distinct brand image (Bonsu & Godefroit-Winkel, 2016; Mahmood & Bashir, 2020).

We argue that as firms pursue various CSR initiatives, brand associations among customers are enhanced. We use the foregoing discussion to propose the positive relationship between CSR and brand image or associations among customers. At the same time, one asserts that the relationship between CSR and brand image will be moderated by customer perceived value (CPV). Therefore:

H2a: CSR is positively associated with brand image.

H2b: The relationship between CSR and brand image is moderated by CPV.

CSR and perceived quality

The third dimension of CBBE is brand quality. Quality is a multifaceted paradigm that involves several factors that are subject to consumers' judgments (Zeithaml, 1988). The perceived quality of a brand is a measure of value to consumers, as it provides them with reasons to buy one product over another (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). Quality has thus been conceptualized as a matter of perception based on certain attributes or cues important to the consumer (Zeithaml, 1988). Research suggests a positive relationship between the ethical behavior of companies and perceived product quality (Folkes & Kamins, 1999). While CSR activities are often adequate in developed countries to enhance perceived quality, companies in developing economy marketplaces may have to go the extra mile to emphasize the effectiveness of their value proposition (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020). One argues that firm CSR initiatives can lead to increased quality perceptions among customers. Hence, one asserts that CSR will positively predict quality perceptions among customers and that the relationship between CSR and brand quality will be moderated by CPV. Consequently, we predict the following hypotheses:

H3a: CSR is positively associated with brand quality.

H3b: The relationship between CSR and brand quality is moderated by CPV.

CSR and brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is conceptualized by Aaker (1991) as the attachment that a consumer has to a brand. Similarly, Kotler and Keller (2009) conceptualize loyalty in terms of the commitment to re-patronize a preferred brand or product of a company. Customer loyalty is thus expressed in terms of systematic purchases of the same brand by customers. Thus, loyalty is a function of biased psychological processes with respect to one or more available alternative brands that are expressed over time by individuals to repurchase such brands (Uddin, 2012). Customer loyalty is accordingly measured by looking at the effectiveness of the relationship between repurchase intentions and relative attitude. Onlaor and Rotchanakitumnuai (2010, cited in Lee, Chang & Lee, 2017) showed that CSR – economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility and customer satisfaction have a major impact on customer loyalty, whereas the philanthropic component primarily affects loyalty. Drawing on the conceptualizations offered by Aaker (1996), we take the position that a brand's ability to command a premium price is also a key indicator of loyalty. To that end, brands that enjoy high loyalty from customers tend to enjoy high customer awareness and rank high in customer-evoked sets. Based on the

objectives of this study, we argue that firm CSR initiatives can lead to brand loyalty among customers. One, therefore, asserts that CSR will positively predict brand loyalty among customers while at the same time the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty will be moderated by CPV. Therefore:

H4a: CSR is positively associated with brand loyalty.

H4b: The relationship between CSR and brand loyalty is moderated by CPV.

Research method

Study setting

This research concentrates on Ghana's telecommunication industry as an illustration in sub-Saharan Africa in that the industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in the country. Further, the telecommunication sector is actively involved in CSR activities throughout the country (Kuada & Hinson, 2012; UGBS (University of Ghana Business School), 2018). This study is conducted in order to appreciate and predict the telecommunication sector's CSR deliberations and the latter's relationship with customer-based brand equity (CBBE). The Ghanaian telecommunication sector offers a challenging but potentially fruitful domain in which academic research can be conducted, largely because as noted by Frimpong et al. (2020, p. 6), although there is a high penetration of mobile telephony (estimated at approximately 137%), as well as an increasing trend toward the use of mobile money transactions, Ghana's telecommunication sector is highly competitive and can be described as "emerging" relative to developed economies such as the United States.

At the time of data collection in 2015, there were six telecommunication companies operating in Ghana: Kasapa (Expresso), MTN, Tigo, Vodafone, Zain (Airtel), and Glo.¹ However, following the merger of Airtel and Tigo companies in 2017, currently, in 2021, there are four companies operating in the country. These companies are heavily invested in CSR activities in areas related to education, health, environment, and economic empowerment (Oppong, 2016). Intense competition in the telecommunication sector in Ghana has motivated firms to invest in CSR as a key differentiating strategy by creating a favorable impression and evoking loyalty among consumers. To that end, given the importance of the telecommunication industry in Ghana's economy (Frimpong et al., 2020), we assert that an examination of telecommunication firms' CSR deliberations and branding activities is worthy of an empirical investigation.

Sample

As stated earlier, we base our research on mobile telephone users in Ghana. We prepared a draft questionnaire based on a pilot study and literature review. More specifically, a panel of eight experts made up of four marketing academics and four marketing executives from Ghana's telecommunication industry reviewed the draft questionnaire for clarity and consistency. Based on the reviewers' comments, the questionnaire was

revised and modified. The questionnaire was then pretested for clarity on 25 Executive Master of Business Administration Students at the University of Ghana Business School. Following the pretest, the wordings and sequence of the questionnaire items were slightly modified before final administration.

The survey data were targeted at the general public. In the absence of a sample frame and a reliable postal service, the study used the mall-intercept approach. The mall-intercept approach in Ghana has been used by researchers including Adokou and Kyere-Diabour (2017), Amoako (2017), and Afuic et al. (2020). Specifically, the mall-intercept approach was a non-probability convenience sampling method, where five hired graduate students and the lead author targeted respondents as they entered or exited open markets, malls, banks, bus stations, and post offices in the Greater Accra metropolitan area. Given that the study was interested in ascertaining the views of mobile network subscribers, respondents needed to be qualified in order to participate in the survey. First, potential respondents were asked whether they were subscribers of at least one mobile telecommunications network and whether they were willing to complete a set of questionnaires on the same. A “Yes” answer to both questions qualified one to participate in the survey. All the six telecommunication brands in Ghana – Kasapa (Expresso), MTN, Tigo, Vodafone, Zain (Airtel), and Glo were selected as stimuli for the study. These brands were selected as they represent different combinations of market factors such as price, market share, market strategies, reputation and country of origin. From the six listed brands, respondents were first asked to choose the one they were most familiar with, then to respond to all the statements in the questionnaire for that specific brand. Respondents were compensated with a cash gift of GHC10.00 (\$3.50 at the time of the study). More specifically, at the time of the study in 2015, one US Dollar was equivalent to two Ghana New Cedis and eighty pesewas (i.e. GHC2.80 = US\$1.00), hence, GHC10.00 = \$3.50 at the time of the study in 2015. Data were successfully collected from 501 respondents out of 804 initially approached: a 62.3% response rate in a one-wave data collection approach.

Demographics

Majority of the sample lies within the age group of 18–30 years (cumulatively 81.6%). The sample had a higher representation from women (52.9%) as compared to men (47.1%). Most of the respondents had earned a degree certificate (69.9%). In terms of subscription to telecommunication networks, 31.9% used only one network; 53.3% used two networks, and the remaining used three to four networks. We found that 20.6% of the sample had been with their network for 1–2 years; 37.1% have been with their networks for 3–4 years, and the remaining varied within the range of 5–10 years. The demographic details are outlined in Table 1.

Measurement

Scale items for CBBE (which included items related to brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, and brand loyalty) were adopted from Keller (1993) and modified to fit the study context following the pilot study. CSR items were borrowed from Kotler and Lee (2008) and were slightly modified to reflect the sustainability product orientation of the

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Survey (N = 501).

Profile	Measurements	Frequency	Percent
Age	18–30 years	409	81.6
	31–40 years	72	14.4
	41–50 years	20	4
Gender	Male	236	47.1
	Female	265	52.9
Education	Senior High School	21	4.2
	Degree	350	69.9
	Post-graduate Diploma	130	25.9
Number of networks subscribed to	One	160	31.9
	Two	267	53.3
	Three	58	11.6
	Four	16	3.2
Number of years with primary network	1–2 years	103	20.6
	3–4 years	186	37.1
	5–6 years	52	10.4
	7–8 years	67	13.4
	9–10 years	30	6
	Above 10 years	63	12.6

telecommunication companies. Items for customer-perceived value (CPV) were borrowed from Wang, Lo, and Yang (2004). The questionnaire used a 7-point Likert scale to measure the items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree).

Measure verification followed a multi-step approach. First, a principal component analysis was employed to ensure that the observed indicators load properly on their corresponding factors. The reliability coefficients for all constructs are between 0.77 to 0.87 (Table 2). The descriptive statistics and inter-factor correlations are depicted in Table 3.

Next, the data were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis using a structural equation modeling (SEM) procedure (AMOS – AMOS 27 software) using a variance-covariance matrix (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). All factor loadings were significant at $p = 0.05$. The fit indices for the six-factor structures ($\chi^2 = 1319.5$, $df = 237$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$; $NFI = 0.833$, $CFI = 0.85$, $IFI = 0.859$, $RMR = 0.127$, and $RMSEA = 0.096$) were moderate but acceptable (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Construct validity for the scale items measuring all six focal constructs was assessed using ϕ^2 , average variance extracted (AVE), and construct reliability (CR). All the AVE estimates are higher than 0.50 (except CSR), and the square roots of all AVEs are higher than the inter-construct correlations (ϕ) (except brand awareness and CSR which narrowly miss the mark). All the CRs were above 0.70 (except CSR) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006) (Table 4).

Notwithstanding some weaknesses in AVEs and square roots of AVEs, the results shown in Table 4 provide an indication of acceptable internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity, and construct validity for the scale items used in this study.

Common method bias

The data for each firm was cross sectional in nature and collected from the same source, therefore, the common method (same source) bias may be an issue. We addressed this issue at two levels. At the procedural level, the respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were assured. At the analysis level, we use the Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). As suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), all the items used in our

Table 2. Rotated Factor Structure.

<i>Brand Awareness</i>		1	2	3	4	5	6
BA3	I can recognize network X quickly among competing brands	0.713					
BA1	I am familiar with network X	0.681					
BA2	Some characteristics of network X come to my mind quickly	0.672					
BA4	Network X is different from competing brands	0.66					
<i>Brand Image</i>							
BI5	Network X has a unique brand image, compared to others		0.685				
BI3	I respect and admire people who own X		0.67				
BI1	I like the brand image of X		0.665				
BI4	I like and trust the company which makes X products		0.63				
BI2	Network X is well established		0.588				
<i>Perceived Quality</i>							
QP5	I trust the quality of products from X			0.811			
QP6	Products from X are of very good quality			0.768			
QP4	Products from X offer excellent features			0.733			
QP3	The quality of network X is very high			0.715			
QP1	I think network X has far better quality than other brands			0.581			
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>							
BL1	I am loyal to network X				0.775		
BL2	When shopping for telecom brands, X is my first choice				0.765		
BL3	I would love to recommend X to my friends				0.648		
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i>							
CRM	Network X donates a percentage of revenues for social cause.					0.757	
CSM	Network X supports campaigns to improve public health, safety, environment, or community well-being.					0.658	
<i>Consumer Perceived Value</i>							
VCSM	I value the price of network X's offerings.						0.737
VCV	I value the convenience of using network X.						0.69
VCRM	Using network X makes a good impression on others						0.673
VCCP	Network X is good value for money.						0.667
VCPH	Using network X makes me feel good.						0.6
Percentage variance explained (Total = 70.21)		5.25	6.78	45.38	4.18	3.8	5.92
Alpha score		0.864	0.869	0.88	0.85	0.77	0.86

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Brand Awareness	4.95	1.21	1					
2 Brand Image	4.99	1.16	.726**	1				
3 Brand Quality	4.8	1.26	.568**	.629**	1			
4 Brand Loyalty	4.7	1.36	.595**	.604**	.574**	1		
5 Corporate Social Responsibility	4.65	1.38	.487**	.509**	.468**	.414**	1	
6 Customer Perceived Value	4.98	1.27	.611**	.646**	.549**	.523**	.530**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

SD = standard deviation

Table 4. Assessment of Construct Validity: Correlation among Latent Constructs (Φ); AVE and CR.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	CR	AVE
1 Brand Awareness	0.785						0.865	0.616
2 Brand Image	0.833	0.758					0.870	0.575
3 Brand Quality	0.652	0.706	0.773				0.881	0.597
4 Brand Loyalty	0.686	0.691	0.654	0.815			0.856	0.665
5 Corporate Social Responsibility	0.697	0.740	0.631	0.656	0.636		0.576	0.405
6 Customer Perceived Value	0.708	0.743	0.632	0.603	0.764	0.746	0.862	0.557

The numbers in diagonal cells are $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$; lower diagonal numbers are inter-factor correlation (Φ) (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 5. CFA–Measurement Model: Structural Equation Model (AMOS) Estimates.

<i>CFA six factor model</i>		
<i>Brand Awareness</i>	Std. λ estimates.	p value
BA1	0.77	< 0.01
BA2	0.76	< 0.01
BA3	0.82	< 0.01
BA4	0.78	λ set to 1
<i>Brand Image</i>		
BI1	0.81	< 0.01
BI2	0.78	< 0.01
B13	0.76	< 0.01
B14	0.79	< 0.01
B15	0.64	λ set to 1
<i>Perceived Quality</i>		
PQ1	0.73	<0.01
PQ3	0.76	< 0.01
PQ4	0.80	< 0.01
PQ5	0.75	< 0.01
PQ6	0.82	λ set to 1
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>		
BL1	0.85	< 0.01
BL2	0.79	< 0.01
BL3	0.81	λ set to 1
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i>		
CRM	0.66	< 0.01
CSM	0.61	λ set to 1
<i>Perceived Value</i>		
VCSM	0.76	< 0.01
VCV	0.74	< 0.01
VCRM	0.74	< 0.01
VCCP	0.80	< 0.01
VCPH	0.69	λ set to 1

Global fit indices: $\chi^2 = 1319.5$, $df = 237$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$; NFI = 0.833, CFI = 0.858, IFI = 0.859, RMR = 0.121, and RMSEA = 0.096

study were included in a factor analysis (unrotated solution). Common method variance exists when a single factor emerges or accounts for most of the shared variance among the variables. The single factor accounted for only 33.72% of the variance. Therefore, one factor did not account for the majority of variance. These results demonstrate that common method variance is unlikely to be a major problem in the data.

Hypotheses testing

The hypothesized relationships were tested using a structural equation modeling (AMOS) procedure using variance–covariance matrix (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Bentler & Chou, 1987;). (see Table 5). Figure 1 presents the SEM model tested without the error terms (ϵ and δ). The estimates of structural relationships using the SEM analysis are presented in Table 6.

The global fit indices of the model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Bentler & Chou, 1987) are within acceptable range ($\chi^2 = 621.9$, $df = 6$, $p\text{ value} = 0.000$; RMSEA = 0.122; RMR = 0.136; NFI = 0.958; GF1 = 0.972; CFI = 0.961; IFI = 0.940). Thus, the structural path estimates (γ) provide support for all the hypotheses.

Table 6. Test of Hypotheses -structural Paths: Structural Equation Model (AMOS) Estimates.

Hypotheses	Weights	Sig. Level
<i>γ estimates</i>		
CSR -> Brand Awareness	0.470	0.000
CSR*CPV ->Brand Awareness	0.109	0.005
CSR ->Brand Image	0.495	0.000
CSR*CPV ->Brand Image	0.088	0.023
CSR -> Brand Quality	0.443	0.000
CSR*CPV ->Brand Quality	0.158	0.000
CSR -> Brand Loyalty	0.393	0.000
CSR*CPV ->Brand Loyalty	0.130	0.002
$\chi^2 = 621.9$, $df = 6$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$.		
NFI = 0.958; GFI = 0.972; CFI = 0.961; IFI = 0.940.		
RMSEA = 0.122; RMR = 0.136		

The results of the study are summarized below:

H1a: CSR is positively associated with brand awareness ($\gamma_{1a} = 0.470$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

H1b: The relationship between CSR and brand awareness is moderated by CPV ($\gamma_{1b} = 0.109$, $p\text{-value} = 0.005$).

H2a: CSR is positively associated with brand image ($\gamma_{2a} = 0.495$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

H2b: The relationship between CSR and brand image is moderated by CPV ($\gamma_{2b} = 0.088$, $p\text{-value} = 0.023$).

H3a: CSR is positively associated with brand quality ($\gamma_{3a} = 0.443$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

H3b: The relationship between CSR and brand quality is moderated by CPV ($\gamma_{3b} = 0.158$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

H4a: CSR is positively associated with brand loyalty ($\gamma_{4a} = 0.393$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

H4b: The relationship between CSR and brand loyalty is moderated by CPV ($\gamma_{4b} = 0.130$, $p\text{-value} = 0.002$).

Conclusions and implications

This paper tests the relationship between CSR and CBBE and investigates the moderating effect of CPV in the CSR-CBBE relationship in a sub-Saharan African marketplace, and more specifically, the Ghanaian marketplace. Findings suggest that engaging in CSR improves all dimensions of CBBE – brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, and brand loyalty.

The study setting is the telecommunication industry in Ghana and one of the fastest growing sectors in a highly competitive marketplace. The telecommunication industry is actively involved in CSR activities and has a large and diverse customer base that needs to be managed and served well to sustain the profitability of the industry. To that end, in order to explain and predict the outcomes of CSR activities within the context of firm brand equity, a more precise understanding of the customer and the underlying processes in CSR is needed (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009), hence, the present research. The conceptual framework tested in this study shows that CSR initiatives positively influence customer-based brand equity (CBBE) through multiple paths. Specifically, this study suggests that engaging in CSR improves all aspects of brand equity including brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, and brand loyalty. The research also finds that the relationship between CSR and CBBE is moderated by CPV across all CSR-CBBE relationship.

Overall, this study has strengthened and expanded the literature on CSR and CBBE. For example, the direct relationship between CSR and brand awareness, brand image and brand quality *first* is consistent with prior studies by Hafez (2018) who finds that CSR has a significant direct effect on the corporate image, brand awareness and brand equity. Further, the positive association between CSR and brand loyalty is evidenced in Servera-Frances and Piqueras-Tomas (2019) who conclude that CSR policies increase consumers' perceived value toward the firm as well as trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty. The findings reveal that the relationship between CSR and CBBE components is moderated by customer perceived value. Thus, by investing in CSR, a firm's brand effect is enhanced in the minds of consumers (Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009; Servera-Frances & Piqueras-Tomas, 2019). When CSR is implemented well in a firm, it can lead to the creation of a better brand equity for the company.

All our findings are in expected lines in the Ghanaian marketplace where the telecommunication industry is the leading sector in social, economic and philanthropic activities (UGBS (University of Ghana Business School), 2018). Overall, a key conclusion of the paper is the evidence that investing resources in CSR activities pays. Well thought-out CSR interventions improve the firm's customer-based brand equity, which in turn improves customer perceived value of the firm's brand.

Theoretical implications

This paper puts forward some important contributions to marketing and international business literature. First, this paper is an initial attempt at joining hands with scholars' (see for example, Abugre & Anlesinya, 2019; Afuic et al., 2020; Hafez, 2018; Ndhlovu, 2011; Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009) efforts at addressing the effects of CSR in developing marketplaces. Moreover, while there exists some research on CSR in Ghana (e.g. Abugre & Anlesinya, 2019; Kuada & Hinson, 2012), to the best of our knowledge, there does not exist any study that investigates the CSR-CBBE relationship within the context of the Ghanaian marketplace. Nyuur, Ofori, & Amponsah's (2019) research for example deals with CSR and competitive advantage in the Ghanaian context but does not examine the relationship between CSR and CBBE. Findings about the CSR phenomenon in a developing country marketplace could differ from that of developed countries because of the differences in stakeholder engagement, institutional norms, and social

context that are unique to developing country marketplaces (see Panda et al., 2019). In addition, unique combinations of regulatory infrastructure, corporate norms, civic organizations, and community groups result in differing CSR incentives and strategic choices in developing country marketplaces (Campbell, 2007).

Second, this study is in accord with Afuic et al.'s (2020) conclusion that CSR activities can impact customer retention in that it enhances credibility among consumers. Further, this paper's finding is in line with existing literature in developed countries that outlines the strategic role of CSR (see Bansal, Jiang, & Jung, 2015; Gelbmann, 2010). In other words, this study ascertains the relationship between CSR and CBBE, albeit, in a developing sub-Saharan African context.

Third, the study answers scholars' call for research to investigate the effects of CSR on consumer perceptions of brand equity (see Hur, Kim, & Woo, 2014). This is especially important because CBBE may be the missing link in the relationship between CSR and company performance (Afuic et al., 2020).

Managerial implications

This paper's findings could form the basis of further investigation into the subject matter for managers in their attempt to operationalize the relationship between CSR and CBBE. Still, some challenges exist in firms' attempts to reach some remote parts of the country as was noted by the majority of the experts in the pilot study. To that end, managers need to reevaluate their business model underpinning the expansion of their businesses in both urban and rural communities. Managers can enhance their partnership with rural small businesses to sell affordable phones and SIM recharger cards in rural communities (see also Christensen, Parsons, & Fairbourne, 2010). The underpinning issue here for marketing and international business managers is that telecommunications firms can network and partner with micro- and small firms with the intention of involving consumers as co-producers in marketing activities within the context of a "bottom-up" relationship. These policies may include investment in training of micro- and small business owners involved in the retailing of SIM cards and telephones, the staff of telecommunication firms, and customers as co-creators of affordable products and services.

Another implication for managers concerns community-based initiatives (e.g. MTN partnering with GIFEC² to build 75 additional masts at no cost to GIFEC) (see UGBS (University of Ghana Business School), 2018) pursued by telecommunications firms that are in line with their core businesses that could contribute to societal benefits while generating profit (Wilkie & Moore, 1999; Porter & Kramer, 2006). Our observations in the study setting revealed the establishment of the MTN³ Ghana Foundation in 2007 with the purpose of driving all MTN's CSR initiatives. Since its establishment, the Foundation has committed GHC 19.4 million (US\$ 3.8 million) into education, health and economic empowerment projects that has improved the livelihood for more than three million Ghanaians (UGBS (University of Ghana Business School), 2018). To that extent, our study is in line with existing research that calls for scholars to appreciate the importance of system-wide, mutually beneficial exchange, as well as intelligently designed, responsibly administered marketing systems capable of including and empowering disenfranchised populations and all stakeholders (Kotler & Lee, 2008).

Further, a “bottom-up” approach to managerial policy is one that must be encouraged by telecommunications firms to acknowledge the culture and idiosyncrasy within urban and rural marketplaces with the view of creating conducive environments for small business start-ups in the mobile telecommunication domain. Our observation in the study setting shows that there are significant goodwill initiatives, akin to CSR initiatives,⁴ from multinational telecommunication firms and local organizations aimed at creating employment opportunities for the people. This type of goodwill should be capitalized upon by telecommunications firms in their quest to capitalize on their efforts surrounding CSR and branding.

Limitations and future research directions

While acknowledging that our research is exploratory, the paper makes important contributions to marketing and international business literature. Still, the paper suffers from some limitations. First, the respondents are geographically concentrated around Accra, Ghana’s capital city. It is thus difficult to know the possible impact that respondents outside the Greater Accra region would have had on the current findings. Given that many CSR initiatives in Ghana are targeted at poor urban and rural communities, future researchers would benefit from situating a follow-up study comparing a rural community and an urban community. Because the data were collected solely in the Greater Accra metropolitan area, future research should endeavor to compare findings from other urban areas such as Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi, the second and third largest cities in Ghana, respectively, to enhance generalization. During the mall intercept (i.e. in front of malls, open market places, bus stations, in front of post offices, in front of banks and so forth) data collection activities, due to budget constraints, we used the non-probability sampling method of convenience sampling. This is a weakness of the current study that must be corrected using a probability sampling method in future research.

Second, we acknowledge that our samples are relatively more educated (see [Table 1](#)) than the average population in Ghana. However, our samples represent segments of the population who have knowledge about CSR and branding activities of mobile telecommunication firms operating in Ghana and can understand and respond adequately to the questionnaires in the surveys. At the same time, we must acknowledge that seeking the views of less-educated mobile phone users in the current study may have yielded different results.

Third, while Ghana serves as the study context within sub-Saharan Africa, future studies should be conducted in other African countries and other developing economies in view of the economic and idiosyncratic cultural differences between countries in developing economies. This will enhance the generalizability of findings across African and other developing country marketplaces.

Notes

1. We thank a reviewer who pointed out to us that currently there are four telecommunication companies operating in Ghana. It is important to mention that the data collection was undertaken in 2015 involving the six companies. Moreover, the survey respondents responded to the questions with the six companies in mind at the time of the study.

2. GIFEC stands for Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications.
3. MTN stands for Mobile Telecommunication Network – a Telecommunication company headquartered in South Africa.
4. Vodafone Ghana was adjudged the Best Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) organization of the year at the 5th Association of Ghana Industries (AGI) Awards held in Accra in 2016. Vodafone was awarded the prestigious title in recognition of its numerous transformational and community support initiatives such as Healthline Medical Call Center, Healthfest, Vodafone Scholars (Scholarship for girls studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), Vodafone employee Volunteerism Program, and charitable donations. In addition, the MTN “Heroes of Change” Program rewarded people making a difference in their various communities. In 2016, MTN Ghana Foundation was awarded the Corporate Philanthropist of the Year at the National Philanthropy Excellence Awards (UGBS (University of Ghana Business School), 2018).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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