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**CSR AS A PR STRATEGY: EXPLORING HOW GHANIANS PERCEIVE ITS ROLE IN
BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY**

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CSR AS A PR STRATEGY: EXPLORING HOW GHANIANS PERCEIVE ITS ROLE
IN BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY

BY

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DECLARATIONS

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I JESSIE RYAN, declare that this dissertation, except quotations and references contained in published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other degree or academic award in this or any other institution of higher learning.

Therefore, I bear the responsibility for any shortcomings.

Date..... 21 / 11 / 25

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I supervised the preparation and presentation of this dissertation in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of M.A. dissertation as laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communications (UniMAC).

Date..... 21 / 11 / 25

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Dr. George Asamoah

(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Mrs Judith Ryan, for her financial and emotional support throughout this journey. And I would also like to dedicate this to all the nice people I encountered in class.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincerest appreciation goes out to the Almighty God for the gift of life and purpose without whose guidance I could not have come this far. I also wish to express my deepest appreciation for the inputs and guidance from my supervisor, Dr. George Asamoah, a senior lecturer at UniMAC-IJ, who provided me with an excellent environment to work on my dissertation. I truly appreciate his guidance and supervision.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how Ghanaian consumers perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a public relations (PR) strategy and how these perceptions influenced brand loyalty. Although CSR has gained prominence within contemporary corporate practice, limited research in the Ghanaian context has examined consumer interpretations of CSR and the extent to which such initiatives shape attitudes toward brands. Guided by the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative exploratory design, the study sought to capture the subjective meanings consumers assigned to CSR and the implications of these meanings for corporate reputation and loyalty. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with seven participants of diverse ages and occupational backgrounds. The interviews were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The findings revealed that Ghanaian consumers largely understood CSR as the act of "giving back" to society through philanthropic activities, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and community support. CSR was perceived as enhancing a company's image by demonstrating social consciousness and moral responsibility. However, participants also expressed concerns about the sincerity of some CSR efforts, noting that certain initiatives appeared to prioritise visibility and publicity over genuine community impact. The findings further showed that while CSR contributed positively to perceptions of trust and credibility, it did not consistently translate into behavioural loyalty. Consumers appreciated socially responsible brands but prioritised factors such as affordability, product quality, and convenience in actual purchasing decisions. The study concluded that CSR functioned more effectively as a PR tool for image building than as a direct driver of brand loyalty. The study recommends that companies adopt more authentic, community-engaged, and sustained CSR initiatives, and that policymakers strengthen CSR guidelines to promote accountability. Suggestions for future research are also provided.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 Background of the Study

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has transitioned from a voluntary goodwill gesture to a strategic communication asset in contemporary business practice. Globally, and increasingly in Ghana, businesses use CSR to align with public values, demonstrate corporate ethics, and influence how consumers perceive their brand. As competition intensifies in sectors like telecommunications, banking, and FMCGs, companies are leveraging CSR not only to “do good” but to build meaningful, long-term connections with stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Nguyen, Pham, & Le, 2021).

PR plays a crucial role in framing and communicating CSR efforts. When CSR messages are aligned with stakeholder values, they foster deeper emotional bonds and loyalty (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013). However, the effectiveness of CSR is not simply about the act itself but about how it is received, interpreted, and experienced by stakeholders. In Ghana, studies suggest that while some consumers view CSR positively, others perceive it as a publicity stunt or a tool for corporate image repair (Tandaoh & Duffor, 2023). This points to the need for a more nuanced understanding of CSR’s communicative power beyond quantitative correlations.

Therefore, this study focuses on CSR as a PR strategy within Ghanaian businesses, exploring how its role in building brand loyalty and corporate image through the lived experiences of the Ghanaian consumer. The qualitative approach helps to explore how consumers interpret CSR efforts, what emotions and cultural values these efforts evoke, and how these perceptions shape loyalty toward Ghanaian businesses.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing prominence of CSR in Ghana, its impact on consumer trust and loyalty remains ambiguous. Many businesses assume CSR automatically leads to goodwill and repeat patronage, but this is not always the case. When CSR is perceived as inauthentic, it may backfire and harm brand trust (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001).

Existing research in Ghana is often heavily quantitative, focusing on measuring awareness levels or correlating CSR participation with consumer behavior. These studies rarely explore why consumers respond the way they do, or how cultural, emotional, and trust-related factors shape their interpretations. There is limited qualitative research that captures the narratives and lived experiences of Ghanaian consumers, leaving a gap in understanding the deeper meaning-making processes behind CSR reception.

This study addresses this gap by using a qualitative design to examine CSR as a deliberate PR strategy, focusing on how it is experienced and interpreted by consumers. This approach provides insight into authenticity, emotional resonance, and the underlying reasons behind consumer loyalty.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how CSR initiatives, when strategically used as PR tools, are interpreted and experienced by Ghanaian consumers, and how these interpretations shape brand loyalty and trust.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore consumer perceptions and interpretations of CSR initiatives by selected Ghanaian businesses.
2. To examine how CSR communication shapes consumer views of corporate and brand loyalty.

3. To understand the role of authenticity, emotions and cultural values in influencing consumer responses to CSR

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do Ghanaian consumers perceive and interpret CSR initiatives by major businesses?

2. In what ways does CSR communication influence consumer views of brand image and loyalty?

3. What emotions, cultural values and perceptions of authenticity shape consumer responses to CSR activities?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study offers both theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it applies Stakeholder Theory as the primary lens to explain how businesses use CSR to engage consumers, and integrates Social Identity Theory to explore how consumers emotionally connect with brands that reflect their values. Together, these theories help explain not just whether CSR builds loyalty, but why and how this connection forms.

Practically, the study provides Ghanaian businesses and PR professionals with evidence-based insights into the design and communication of CSR initiatives. By understanding how consumers interpret authenticity and brand values, companies can create CSR campaigns that genuinely strengthen trust and long-term loyalty rather than being dismissed as publicity stunts. The findings can also inform policymakers and industry bodies on guidelines for CSR communication transparency and impact assessment. Academically, it adds to the body of knowledge for future researchers and provides for new avenues of research under this umbrella.

1.7 Scope and Delimitation

The study focuses on CSR-active businesses in Ghana, with data gathered from consumers in Accra and surrounding urban areas. It explores CSR primarily as a PR and communication tool, not as a compliance measure or financial investment. While findings may have national implications, the study does not address CSR's legal, economic, or operational dimensions.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is categorized into five different chapters to help provide a comprehensive understanding of the scope and outcome of the studies. The introductory chapter comes first animating the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives and questions, significance, scope and delimitation of the study. Chapter two contains the review of related literature. Chapter three gives an elucidation of the research paradigm and its philosophical assumptions, the research approach and design, population, sampling technique, data collection procedure and analysis, ethical consideration, authenticity and trustworthiness. Chapter is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the findings. The final chapter, chapter five summarises and concludes the outcome of the study and offers recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review and critically analyze the existing body of knowledge relevant to the study of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a public relations strategy and its perceived role in shaping brand loyalty among Ghanaian consumers. A literature review serves multiple functions which includes providing conceptual clarity, identifying theoretical frameworks, synthesizing empirical findings, and highlighting gaps that justify the current study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). CSR has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past three decades, evolving from a narrow focus on corporate philanthropy to a broader view that positions it as a strategic and communicative practice. Researchers have examined CSR from multiple disciplinary angles, including management, marketing, communication, and sociology. For the present study, literature from public relations, consumer behavior, and African business contexts is particularly relevant.

This review is organized thematically to ensure clarity and logical flow. It begins by exploring the conceptual foundations of CSR, including definitions, models, and theoretical perspectives such as Carroll's pyramid and stakeholder theory. It then discusses CSR as a public relations and communication strategy, emphasizing its role in reputation management and corporate storytelling. Next, attention is given to consumer perceptions of CSR, focusing on issues of authenticity, trust, and skepticism, followed by a review of research linking CSR to consumer loyalty. The chapter also situates CSR within institutional and cultural contexts, with a particular emphasis on Ghanaian studies. Finally, the review synthesizes the literature to highlight contradictions, gaps, and areas where this study contributes, especially by adopting a qualitative lens to capture consumer meanings. By weaving together conceptual, theoretical, and empirical insights, this chapter lays the foundation for understanding how CSR operates not only as a business strategy but also as a communicative practice that shapes consumer relationships. It also demonstrates why

examining Ghanaian consumers' lived experiences is crucial for contextualizing global debates within local realities.

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has developed into one of the most influential concepts in business and management research, yet it remains contested and subject to multiple interpretations. Early discussions often framed CSR narrowly as philanthropy or charitable giving. Over time, however, scholars and practitioners began to see CSR as encompassing a broader set of responsibilities that firms owe to society. Archie Carroll's seminal work provides one of the most widely cited frameworks, presenting CSR as a four-part model that integrates economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll, 1991). At its base, firms are expected to be profitable to survive, but this is accompanied by the duty to obey laws, act ethically, and contribute to the broader welfare of society. Carroll's pyramid thus captures the multi-layered nature of CSR, moving beyond charity to embed responsibility at the core of corporate purpose.

Complementing Carroll's model is Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, which shifted attention from a narrow focus on shareholders to the broader network of individuals and groups affected by corporate activity. According to this view, organizations are embedded in webs of relationships with stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers, regulators, and local communities. CSR, therefore, is not merely an act of benevolence but a strategic tool for managing and sustaining these relationships. By responding to stakeholder expectations, companies can secure legitimacy, build trust, and maintain a "social license to operate." This framing explains why CSR has become an integral part of corporate strategy, especially in contexts where community acceptance and consumer trust are essential to business continuity.

The evolution of CSR globally reflects this shift from philanthropic gestures to strategic and institutionalized practices. In the mid-twentieth century, CSR was often equated with corporate donations or sponsorships. By the early twenty-first century, however, it was increasingly embedded in corporate governance, sustainability reporting, and public

relations strategies. CSR is now framed as a driver of sustainable development and competitive advantage. Importantly, this evolution has not been linear or uniform. The meaning and practice of CSR differ across regions, industries, and institutional settings, shaped by cultural expectations and socio-economic realities.

In Ghana and other developing economies, CSR takes on a particularly significant role because companies often operate in environments where state capacity to provide public goods is limited. Firms are thus expected not only to generate profit but also to contribute to community development, education, health, and infrastructure. This contextual reality means that Ghanaian consumers and communities often interpret CSR initiatives through both economic and moral lenses. A company's willingness to "give back" is seen as evidence of ethical responsibility and as part of its legitimacy as a corporate citizen. At the same time, skepticism may arise if CSR is perceived as self-serving or as substituting for inadequate government provision. In summary, the conceptual foundations of CSR combine Carroll's multi-layered responsibilities and Freeman's stakeholder perspective to provide a lens for understanding why firms engage in CSR and how publics evaluate it. These frameworks remain relevant for exploring CSR in Ghana, where cultural expectations, institutional realities, and community needs shape both the design of CSR initiatives and the ways consumers perceive their authenticity.

2.2 CSR and Public Relations

Corporate social responsibility is not only a set of practices but also a communicative process. For CSR initiatives to be meaningful, they must be communicated in ways that resonate with stakeholders and reinforce the organization's values and reputation. This makes CSR inherently tied to public relations (PR), since PR is the function that manages relationships between organizations and their publics.

Scholars have increasingly emphasized that CSR should be understood as a public relations strategy because it involves deliberate communication aimed at building mutual understanding and goodwill. Public relations provides the tools and frameworks through which CSR activities are framed, narrated, and disseminated to stakeholders. When

organizations communicate CSR authentically, they not only share information but also construct narratives that align the company's identity with social and ethical values (Gill, 2015). These narratives help stakeholders make sense of CSR activities, interpreting them either as genuine commitments or as reputation-polishing exercises.

Storytelling has emerged as a particularly important PR strategy in CSR communication. Through storytelling, companies can contextualize their CSR activities, highlight beneficiaries, and humanize corporate action. Gill (2015) argued that storytelling enhances engagement by connecting emotionally with stakeholders and demonstrating the lived impact of CSR initiatives. By weaving CSR into stories of community empowerment or social change, organizations can create a stronger emotional bond with their audiences, which is more persuasive than technical reports or press releases alone. At the same time, the role of PR in CSR communication has been critiqued. Some scholars warn that if CSR is treated primarily as a reputation-management exercise, it risks being perceived as manipulative or insincere (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011). When CSR campaigns appear inconsistent with a company's core values or practices, they may be dismissed as "greenwashing." Public skepticism often arises when the gap between what is communicated and what is practiced becomes too wide. This highlights the dual responsibility of PR: not only to craft persuasive messages but also to ensure transparency, consistency, and alignment with organizational behavior.

In today's media landscape, PR professionals must also manage CSR communication across multiple platforms. Digital and social media have transformed how CSR messages are received and interpreted. Unlike traditional media, digital channels allow for greater interactivity, stakeholder feedback, and scrutiny. Stakeholders can now publicly question, contest, or endorse CSR initiatives in real time. This creates opportunities for organizations to engage in dialogue but also raises the stakes for accountability. In this environment, PR practitioners are challenged to design CSR communication that is transparent, participatory, and responsive to stakeholder concerns. For Ghana and similar contexts, the PR dimension of CSR takes on added importance. CSR initiatives often address community needs such as education, health, and infrastructure, areas where government provision may be limited. Communicating such efforts effectively can strengthen an organization's

legitimacy and reinforce its role as a responsible corporate citizen. However, poorly framed communication or a failure to demonstrate tangible community benefits can easily lead to public skepticism. Thus, CSR as a PR strategy in Ghana must balance visibility with authenticity, ensuring that communication reflects real contributions to community well-being.

To conclude it all, CSR and PR are deeply interconnected. CSR provides the substantive actions, while PR supplies the communicative bridge that connects those actions to stakeholder perceptions. The effectiveness of CSR in shaping corporate reputation and stakeholder loyalty therefore depends not only on what companies do but also on how those actions are narrated, framed, and received in the public sphere.

2.3 Consumer Perceptions of CSR

While organizations may design CSR programs with strategic or ethical intentions, the effectiveness of these initiatives ultimately depends on how they are perceived by consumers. CSR does not create value in isolation; its impact is mediated by the meanings consumers attach to it. This makes consumer perception a critical factor in understanding CSR's role in shaping brand loyalty. One of the most consistent findings in the literature is that perceived authenticity determines whether consumers respond positively or negatively to CSR. When CSR initiatives are viewed as genuine expressions of corporate values, they tend to foster trust, goodwill, and supportive behaviors. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) showed that consumer reactions to CSR are highly contingent on perceived motives. If consumers believe that a firm is motivated by genuine concern for social welfare, they respond more favorably. On the other hand, if CSR appears self-serving or opportunistic, it can generate skepticism and even backlash.

Closely related to authenticity is the notion of trust. Trust develops when consumers perceive consistency between a company's words and actions. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) argued that trust is central to consumer-company identification, which in turn strengthens loyalty. CSR can function as a trust-building mechanism when it aligns with a company's broader values and when outcomes are visible and verifiable. For example,

CSR initiatives that directly benefit local communities, especially when communicated transparently, are more likely to be trusted than symbolic gestures or one-off donations. However, scholars also emphasize that CSR is not automatically met with enthusiasm. Skepticism is a common consumer response, particularly in contexts where CSR is perceived as “greenwashing.” Forehand and Grier (2003) observed that consumers are often quick to question the motives behind CSR initiatives, especially when they appear inconsistent with the firm’s core business or past practices. This skepticism is heightened in the digital age, where social media platforms enable consumers to share doubts, expose inconsistencies, and hold firms accountable. Thus, perceptions of authenticity and trust must be actively cultivated and they cannot be assumed.

Cultural and contextual factors also shape consumer perceptions. In Ghana, for instance, CSR is often evaluated not only in terms of corporate image but also in terms of tangible contributions to community well-being. Consumers tend to value CSR initiatives that address pressing needs such as health, education, and employment opportunities. At the same time, they may view CSR with suspicion if companies appear to prioritize publicity over meaningful impact. This reflects a broader cultural expectation that businesses, particularly large corporations, play a role in filling governance and service gaps left by the state. Another important dimension of consumer perception is emotional resonance. Research shows that CSR initiatives that elicit positive emotions such as pride, gratitude, or a sense of belonging are more effective at shaping attitudes and behaviors. Storytelling, as discussed in the previous section, plays a key role in fostering this resonance by connecting CSR activities to human experiences and values. Conversely, when CSR is perceived as abstract, distant, or irrelevant to consumers’ daily lives, its impact on perception is diminished.

I will conclude that, consumer perceptions of CSR hinge on authenticity, trust, skepticism, cultural values, and emotional connection. These perceptions ultimately determine whether CSR initiatives strengthen or weaken the relationship between a company and its consumers. For businesses in Ghana, this means that CSR must not only be well-designed but also deeply attuned to local expectations and communicated in ways that emphasize sincerity, transparency, and tangible community benefits.

2.4 CSR and Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is one of the most valued outcomes of corporate social responsibility. Loyalty reflects a consumer's commitment to repurchase or support a brand consistently over time, even when alternatives are available. From a business perspective, loyalty ensures a stable customer base and reduces marketing costs. From a public relations perspective, loyalty is evidence of strong relational bonds between a company and its stakeholders. Scholars have increasingly investigated how CSR contributes to these bonds and whether it can be a driver of loyalty. Several studies demonstrate that CSR positively influences loyalty, but usually through mediating factors. Ramesh et al. (2019) found that CSR's impact on loyalty was mediated by brand image and brand attitude. Consumers are more likely to become loyal when CSR initiatives enhance their perception of a brand's integrity and social value. Similarly, Pérez and del Bosque (2015) highlighted that CSR influences loyalty by building trust and positive brand associations, rather than by directly encouraging repeat purchases. These findings suggest that CSR's effect on loyalty is indirect but powerful, shaping the psychological foundations of consumer commitment.

Consumer-company identification (CCI) also plays a critical role in explaining how CSR translates into loyalty. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) argued that when consumers perceive congruence between their personal values and a company's CSR efforts, they develop a sense of identification with the brand. This identification fosters emotional attachment, which in turn enhances loyalty. For example, consumers who value environmental sustainability may feel a stronger bond with companies that invest in green initiatives, leading to repeat patronage and advocacy. However, the literature also reveals that the CSR–loyalty relationship is not always positive or consistent. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) showed that CSR could sometimes generate negative reactions if consumers question a company's motives or perceive its initiatives as irrelevant. This means CSR is not a guaranteed loyalty-building tool; it is contingent on authenticity, trust, and relevance. Moreover, cultural and contextual differences shape how consumers interpret CSR's link to loyalty. In collectivist societies, CSR that benefits the wider community may be especially effective in fostering loyalty, while in individualist contexts, CSR initiatives tied to personal benefits or identity alignment may carry more weight.

In Ghana, brand loyalty is closely tied to community expectations and corporate citizenship. Consumers often support companies that visibly contribute to pressing social issues such as education, healthcare, and youth employment. CSR initiatives in these areas are seen as aligning with cultural values of reciprocity and communal responsibility. Conversely, companies that neglect CSR or fail to communicate their efforts effectively may struggle to sustain loyalty, even if their products or services are competitive. This underscores the need for companies in Ghana to integrate CSR into their brand strategy not only as a philanthropic gesture but as a long-term relational investment. In summary, CSR influences brand loyalty through psychological pathways such as trust, brand image, and consumer-company identification. Its effectiveness, however, depends on how initiatives are perceived in terms of authenticity and relevance. In the Ghanaian context, CSR that resonates with local needs and cultural expectations is more likely to generate loyalty, positioning CSR as both a business strategy and a form of relational capital.

2.5 Institutional, Cultural and Contextual Influences on CSR

CSR is not practiced or understood in a vacuum. The institutional and cultural environment in which a company operates profoundly shapes the nature of its CSR initiatives and how stakeholders interpret them. Scholars have increasingly emphasized that CSR is context-specific, and that models developed in Western economies cannot be applied wholesale to developing countries without adaptation (Jamali & Karam, 2018).

From an institutional perspective, CSR is shaped by formal rules such as regulations, industry standards, and reporting requirements, as well as by informal norms such as cultural values and societal expectations (Jamali et al., 2020). In developed economies, CSR is often embedded in legal frameworks and enforced through stakeholder activism, government oversight, and media scrutiny. In contrast, in many developing countries, weak regulatory enforcement means that CSR often takes the form of voluntary, philanthropic contributions rather than institutionalized strategies. This can make CSR both more visible and more vulnerable to skepticism, since stakeholders may question whether firms are filling gaps left by the state or pursuing their own reputational goals.

Cultural values also play a significant role in shaping CSR. In collectivist cultures, which emphasize community and interdependence, CSR that benefits broader society tends to resonate strongly with stakeholders. In Ghana, for instance, cultural values rooted in communalism and reciprocity heighten expectations that businesses should contribute to societal well-being. Companies that invest in education, healthcare, or community infrastructure are often viewed as fulfilling not only corporate obligations but also cultural responsibilities. This dynamic means that CSR in Ghana is evaluated not just in economic or ethical terms but also in terms of how well it aligns with cultural norms of communal support.

Several studies confirm the significance of local expectations in Ghana. Ofori and Hinson (2007) found that leading firms in Ghana practiced CSR primarily in the form of community projects, philanthropy, and social investments. These activities were often aimed at addressing pressing needs in education, health, and poverty alleviation. Ansong (2017) similarly showed that CSR practices among Ghanaian SMEs enhanced not only reputational outcomes but also access to finance, suggesting that CSR is both a moral and instrumental strategy in the local context. Such findings highlight the dual character of CSR in Ghana: it is simultaneously a means of responding to community needs and a strategic investment in business legitimacy. At the same time, Ghanaian consumers tend to be cautious about CSR that appears overly promotional or disconnected from tangible impact. In a context where public services are often underfunded, communities expect companies to contribute meaningfully to social development. When firms publicize CSR without demonstrating clear benefits, they risk being accused of seeking visibility rather than genuinely engaging with community needs. This tension reflects broader debates in the literature about the fine line between CSR as reputation management and CSR as genuine social investment.

Another important contextual factor is the role of trust in institutions. In many developing countries, where public trust in government and regulatory agencies may be low, businesses are expected to play a more active role in social development. This shifts the weight of responsibility onto corporations and amplifies the scrutiny of their CSR initiatives. In Ghana, this has been particularly evident in sectors such as

telecommunications and mining, where companies are highly visible and expected to contribute significantly to community welfare. CSR practices and perceptions are deeply embedded in institutional and cultural contexts. In Ghana, expectations of corporate citizenship are heightened by communal values and the limited capacity of the state to meet societal needs. For firms, this means that CSR is not just a voluntary activity but an essential component of maintaining legitimacy and sustaining consumer trust. For researchers, it underscores the importance of studying CSR within its local context rather than assuming universal applicability of global models.

2.6 Empirical Studies in Ghana

Empirical research on CSR in Ghana has grown steadily over the past two decades, reflecting both the increasing prominence of CSR in business practice and scholarly recognition of its significance in the local context. Much of this research has focused on large corporations such as those in the telecommunications, mining, and financial services sectors, where CSR activities are most visible. Collectively, these studies provide insights into how CSR is practiced in Ghana, how it is perceived by stakeholders, and the extent to which it influences brand loyalty and consumer trust.

Ofori and Hinson (2007) conducted one of the earliest systematic examinations of CSR in Ghana, focusing on leading firms across industries. They found that CSR was primarily practiced in the form of philanthropy and community-based initiatives, such as building schools, supporting hospitals, and funding social programs. Importantly, these activities were often discretionary rather than mandated, reflecting the voluntary nature of CSR in Ghana's regulatory environment. The study concluded that while CSR practices enhanced firms' reputations, they were often not strategically integrated into core business operations. Subsequent studies have emphasized the evolving nature of CSR in Ghana. Hinson and Kodua (2012) explored CSR communication among Ghanaian companies and found that while firms increasingly publicized their CSR activities, communication strategies often lacked depth and interactivity. Many firms relied on traditional media to broadcast their CSR rather than engaging stakeholders in dialogue, leading to questions

about authenticity. This highlights the continuing tension between CSR as genuine social engagement and CSR as image management.

Empirical work has also examined consumer responses to CSR in Ghana. Abugre and Nyuur (2015) investigated how CSR activities influence consumer loyalty in the banking sector. They found that consumers were more likely to remain loyal to banks that invested in socially responsible initiatives, particularly those that addressed local community needs. The study confirmed that CSR can build loyalty but also cautioned that consumers are sensitive to perceived insincerity. Similarly, Kuada and Hinson (2012) showed that CSR could serve as a differentiator for companies in competitive markets, with consumers rewarding firms that demonstrate consistent social responsibility. Another strand of research has focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Ansong (2017) argued that CSR among SMEs in Ghana, though less publicized, had significant impacts on reputation and stakeholder relationships. For SMEs, CSR often took the form of informal practices, such as supporting local events or offering employment opportunities, rather than large-scale projects. These practices were nonetheless valued by communities and helped build goodwill, demonstrating that CSR is not limited to large corporations but also has relevance for smaller firms.

Sector-specific studies provide further nuance. In the telecommunications industry, for example, CSR initiatives such as supporting education and health programs have been highly visible and often linked to brand positioning. Studies suggest that these efforts contribute to consumer trust and loyalty, although the effectiveness varies depending on perceived sincerity and impact. In the mining sector, CSR has been more contentious, as community expectations are high and conflicts often arise when companies are perceived as failing to deliver on promises. These examples underscore the complex and sometimes contested role of CSR in Ghana's business landscape. Overall, empirical studies in Ghana highlight both the opportunities and challenges of CSR. On one hand, CSR has been shown to enhance corporate reputation, foster consumer loyalty, and build stronger stakeholder relationships. On the other, concerns about authenticity, communication strategies, and the integration of CSR into core business practices remain. These findings reinforce the

importance of exploring CSR not only as corporate practice but also as a communicative and relational process shaped by consumer perceptions.

2.7 Summary and Research Gap

This chapter has reviewed key theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR), public relations, consumer perception, and brand loyalty, with specific attention to the Ghanaian context. The review highlighted that CSR has evolved from philanthropic gestures to a more strategic and communicative practice. Frameworks such as Carroll's pyramid of CSR and Freeman's stakeholder theory provide useful conceptual foundations, showing that CSR encompasses economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities and must be understood within the web of stakeholder relationships.

The literature further established that CSR is closely tied to public relations, with communication serving as the bridge between corporate actions and stakeholder perceptions. Effective CSR communication, particularly through storytelling and transparent reporting, has the potential to build legitimacy and goodwill. However, poorly framed communication or inconsistencies between messages and actions can generate skepticism and accusations of greenwashing.

Consumer perception emerged as a central factor in determining the effectiveness of CSR. Research consistently shows that consumers respond positively to CSR when it is perceived as authentic, trustworthy, and emotionally resonant. Conversely, skepticism arises when CSR appears insincere or self-serving. These perceptions strongly influence whether CSR contributes to brand loyalty, typically through mediating factors such as trust, brand image, and consumer-company identification.

The review also emphasized the importance of cultural and institutional context. In Ghana, where communal values are strong and public services are often inadequate, CSR is viewed both as a corporate responsibility and as a contribution to societal development. Empirical studies confirm that CSR enhances reputation and can foster consumer loyalty in Ghana, especially in sectors such as banking, telecommunications, and mining. However, these

studies also reveal limitations, including the dominance of philanthropic approaches, one-way communication strategies, and a reliance on quantitative methods that do not fully capture consumer meanings.

Taken together, the literature indicates that while the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty is well established, significant gaps remain. In particular, little is known about how Ghanaian consumers themselves interpret CSR as a public relations strategy, or how these interpretations shape their loyalty to brands. Existing research often measures attitudes in broad terms without exploring the subjective experiences, cultural values, and meaning-making processes that inform them. This study addresses this gap by adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach to explore Ghanaian consumers' perceptions of CSR and its role in brand loyalty.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework that guided the study. Methodology is a crucial component of research because it provides the roadmap through which the research problem is investigated and the research objectives are achieved. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), methodology is not merely a set of techniques but an integrated system of assumptions, strategies, and procedures that ensure coherence between the research questions, the worldview of the researcher, and the methods of data collection and analysis. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explain the philosophical underpinnings, paradigmatic orientation, and methodological choices that shaped the study. It begins by presenting the research paradigm and the philosophical assumptions underlying the inquiry. It then discusses the research approach and design, followed by the population, sampling procedures, and data collection methods employed. The chapter also describes the instruments used in data collection, the techniques for data analysis, and the ethical principles observed. Finally, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research are presented.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the overarching worldview or belief system that guides how research is conceptualized and conducted. It embodies the researcher's assumptions about reality, knowledge, values, and the methodological strategies that are considered valid for inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Paradigms serve as a lens through which researchers view the world and determine how they engage with participants, collect data, and interpret findings.

This study is anchored in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism rests on the assumption that reality is socially constructed and that individuals assign meaning to their experiences

through interaction and cultural interpretation. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the interpretivist paradigm emphasizes understanding the subjective meanings people bring to phenomena rather than seeking universal, law-like explanations. It assumes that there are multiple, equally valid realities rather than a single objective truth. The interpretivist paradigm is appropriate for this study because the aim is not to measure the statistical impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on brand loyalty, but to explore how Ghanaian consumers interpret CSR activities and connect them to their sense of trust, commitment, and loyalty toward brands. Consumers may interpret the same CSR initiative differently depending on their background, values, or personal encounters with the company involved. For example, while one consumer may view a scholarship program as a genuine expression of corporate responsibility, another may dismiss it as a calculated public relations stunt. The interpretivist orientation makes it possible to capture this diversity of perceptions and to understand how meaning is negotiated among consumers. Moreover, interpretivism positions the researcher as an active participant in meaning-making rather than as a detached observer. The researcher's role is to enter the social world of participants, engage in dialogue, and co-create knowledge through empathetic listening and interpretation (Schwandt, 2015). This aligns well with the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which prioritize participants' voices and perspectives. By grounding the study in the interpretivist paradigm, the research acknowledges the richness of consumer narratives and ensures that the findings reflect the lived realities of Ghanaians who interact with CSR as a public relations strategy

3.3 Philosophical Assumptions

Every research project is built on a set of philosophical assumptions that shape the way reality, knowledge, and values are understood. These assumptions act as a foundation that informs the choice of paradigm, approach, and methods. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that clarifying these assumptions helps researchers achieve consistency between their worldview and their methodological decisions. In qualitative research, where the aim is to understand meaning rather than to measure variables, making these assumptions explicit is particularly important. The philosophical assumptions relevant to this study are ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological.

3.3.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality. From a positivist perspective, reality is seen as singular and objective, existing independently of human perception. Qualitative research, however, typically adopts a relativist ontology, which assumes that multiple realities exist, each shaped by individuals' experiences and contexts (Scotland, 2012). This study takes the relativist stance by recognizing that Ghanaian consumers construct their own realities of CSR. For instance, one consumer may view a company's donation to a health campaign as a sincere act of goodwill, while another may interpret it as a strategic tool to boost corporate image. Acknowledging these multiple realities allows the study to capture the diverse interpretations that exist within the consumer population

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. In an interpretivist framework, knowledge is not discovered objectively but co-created through dialogue between the researcher and participants. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) describe this as a subjectivist stance, where meaning emerges through interaction, context, and interpretation. This epistemological position is reflected in the use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, which create space for participants to articulate their experiences and for the researcher to probe and interpret them. Knowledge about CSR is thus generated collaboratively, with consumers' voices and perspectives at the center of the inquiry.

3.3.3 Axiology

This philosophical assumption relates to the role of values in the research process. Unlike positivist paradigms, which strive for neutrality, qualitative research acknowledges that values and subjectivity are inevitable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher's background, assumptions, and perspectives inevitably influence how the study is conducted and interpreted. This study therefore embraces reflexivity, with the researcher keeping reflective notes to monitor how personal biases and values may shape the process.

By being transparent about positionality, the study ensures that findings remain credible and faithful to participants' voices while acknowledging the influence of the researcher's interpretive lens.

3.3.4 Methodological Assumptions

This flows naturally from the ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions. If reality is multiple and socially constructed, and if knowledge is co-created and shaped by values, then a methodology that privileges depth, dialogue, and meaning-making is appropriate. This justifies the adoption of a qualitative exploratory design, the use of purposive sampling to select participants with relevant experiences, and the reliance on interviews and focus groups to generate rich narratives. It also explains the choice of thematic analysis, which allows patterns of meaning to emerge inductively from the data rather than being imposed by predetermined categories.

Taken together, these philosophical assumptions provide coherence and justification for the methodological choices made in this study. They explain why the research is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, why it follows an inductive approach, and why qualitative methods are most suitable for exploring how Ghanaian consumers perceive CSR as a public relations strategy and how these perceptions shape brand loyalty.

3.4 Research Approach

Research approaches represent the broad plan that links philosophical assumptions to methodological strategies. In social science research, three major approaches are often distinguished: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study adopts a qualitative approach because the central aim is to explore and interpret how Ghanaian consumers perceive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a public relations strategy and how these perceptions influence their loyalty to brands. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the focus is on gaining deep insights into participants' lived experiences rather than producing numerical generalizations. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, qualitative research emphasizes rich, descriptive data and seeks to understand the meanings individuals assign to phenomena. In this study, the meanings

attached to CSR are expected to vary widely, reflecting differences in personal values, cultural expectations, and social contexts. The qualitative approach also aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and the relativist ontological stance discussed earlier. It allows for the exploration of multiple realities by privileging participants' voices and experiences. To operationalize this, the study employs methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups, which encourage participants to express their thoughts in their own words. Within this qualitative orientation, the study follows an inductive reasoning process. Induction moves from specific observations to broader themes and theoretical insights (Bryman, 2016). Instead of beginning with hypotheses about how CSR influences brand loyalty, the study collects narratives from consumers and analyzes them thematically to allow patterns to emerge. Existing theories, such as stakeholder theory and social identity theory, serve only as sensitizing concepts, providing a backdrop against which findings can later be interpreted. In summary, the adoption of a qualitative approach ensures that the study captures the richness of consumer perceptions, while the use of inductive reasoning guarantees that the analysis remains grounded in participants' experiences rather than in pre-imposed categories.

3.5 Research Design

A research design provides the framework that translates philosophical assumptions and research approaches into a concrete plan of action. It specifies how the study will be conducted and ensures that the chosen methods are appropriate for addressing the research questions. Yin (2014) describes research design as a logical blueprint that connects the research problem to the data that will answer it. For this study, a qualitative exploratory design was adopted. Exploratory designs are particularly valuable when investigating phenomena that are not yet fully understood or when researchers seek to gain fresh insights rather than to test existing theories. CSR as a public relations strategy has been studied extensively in quantitative terms, often focusing on measuring correlations between CSR activities and consumer behaviors. However, there is relatively limited qualitative research that unpacks how and why consumers interpret CSR in particular ways, especially within the Ghanaian context. An exploratory design allows this study to move beyond surface-level associations and delve into the meanings, perceptions, and experiences that shape

consumer responses. The exploratory design also fits well with the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach underpinning this study. It provides flexibility, allowing the researcher to adapt data collection tools as new themes emerge during interviews and focus group discussions (Stebbins, 2001). For example, if participants raise issues of cultural values or community trust that were not initially anticipated, the exploratory design allows these areas to be pursued in greater depth. By using this design, the study prioritizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. The goal is not to generalize findings statistically to the entire Ghanaian population but to develop nuanced insights that reveal the complexity of consumer perceptions. These insights may then contribute to theory building and provide practical implications for businesses seeking to use CSR as a public relations strategy to strengthen brand loyalty.

3.6 Population and Sample Size

The population of a study refers to the larger group of individuals or entities from which a sample is drawn and to which the findings may be conceptually linked (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In qualitative research, the population is not defined in terms of statistical representativeness but in terms of relevance to the phenomenon being studied. For this research, the population consists of Ghanaian consumers who are aware of, or have encountered, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives implemented by businesses operating in the country. CSR activities in Ghana are visible across a range of industries, including telecommunications, fast-moving consumer goods, and beverages. Companies frequently invest in initiatives such as educational sponsorships, health campaigns, community development projects, and environmental sustainability programs. While some of these initiatives are highly publicized, others are experienced more directly by communities and consumers. By focusing on individuals who have observed or interacted with such CSR activities, the study ensures that participants are able to provide meaningful reflections on the central research questions.

The choice of Ghanaian consumers as the population is justified for several reasons. First, consumers are among the most important stakeholders in public relations, as their perceptions and loyalty can determine the long-term reputation and profitability of

organizations. Second, in contexts like Ghana, where CSR often substitutes for or supplements public services such as education and health, consumer perceptions are shaped not only by corporate communication but also by lived realities. For example, a scholarship scheme may not just be seen as a publicity campaign but as a tangible intervention that directly impacts families and communities. Again, existing research on CSR in Ghana has primarily examined organizational perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding how consumers themselves interpret these efforts. By situating the study within this population, the research remains aligned with its interpretivist paradigm and qualitative orientation. The goal is not to speak for all Ghanaian consumers, but to explore the multiplicity of meanings that individuals attach to CSR initiatives in relation to brand image and loyalty.

The exact number of participants is less important than the quality and richness of the data. Therefore, interviews and focus group discussions will continue until data saturation is achieved. That is the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from additional conversations (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In this way, the sample size will be determined by the depth of understanding gained rather than by numerical requirements.

3.7 Sampling Technique

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of participants from the broader population to provide information that addresses the research objectives. In qualitative research, sampling is not aimed at producing statistical representativeness but at securing depth, richness, and relevance of data (Patton, 2015). This study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that enables the deliberate selection of participants who are most likely to provide insightful perspectives on the research problem. Purposive sampling is justified in this context because not all Ghanaian consumers have knowledge of or interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). To meaningfully contribute to the study, participants must have at least some awareness of CSR initiatives, either through direct participation, observation, or exposure to corporate communication. For instance, a consumer who has seen a company's educational sponsorship program or who purchases products linked to charitable causes is in a better position to articulate perceptions of CSR

than one with no such awareness. By focusing on individuals with relevant experiences, purposive sampling ensures that data collected is both rich and contextually grounded.

In addition to purposive sampling, maximum variation sampling will be applied as a complementary strategy. Maximum variation involves selecting participants from diverse backgrounds to capture a wide range of perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, diversity will be sought in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, and occupational background. This is important because perceptions of CSR may be influenced by demographic and social factors. For example, younger consumers might interpret CSR differently from older generations, and rural residents may prioritize different CSR initiatives than urban residents.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection in qualitative research involves generating rich, descriptive information that captures participants' experiences and meanings. The choice of method must align with the research objectives and paradigm, ensuring that participants' voices are central to the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, two complementary methods will be employed which is the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

3.8.1 Semi- structured interviews

This will serve as the primary method of data collection. Interviews are particularly effective for exploring personal perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A semi-structured format provides a balance between consistency and flexibility. While the researcher will rely on an interview guide to ensure that key themes are addressed, there will be space to probe emerging issues and to follow the natural flow of conversation. Each interview is expected to last between 45 minutes and one hour, depending on participants' availability and willingness to share. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face where possible, but online platforms may be used to accommodate participants who cannot meet physically.

3.8.2 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions will be used as a supplementary method to capture group dynamics and collective interpretations of CSR. As Morgan (1997) explains, focus groups allow participants to interact with one another, stimulating discussion and enabling the researcher to observe how cultural meanings are negotiated in a social context. Each focus group will consist of six to eight participants and will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. This format provides an opportunity to explore areas of consensus as well as disagreement, revealing how social interaction shapes perceptions of CSR as a public relations strategy.

Both interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. Recording ensures that no details are lost and allows the researcher to engage more fully in the conversation without being distracted by note-taking. In addition, field notes will be kept to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and the researcher's immediate reflections. This combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups strengthens the study through methodological triangulation. While interviews provide detailed individual accounts, focus groups add a collective dimension, offering insights into how CSR is perceived not only personally but also socially. Together, these methods align with the interpretivist paradigm and ensure a comprehensive understanding of how Ghanaian consumers perceive CSR and its role in brand loyalty.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is a systematic yet flexible process of making sense of textual information, identifying patterns, and constructing meaning. Unlike quantitative approaches, which rely on statistical procedures, qualitative analysis emphasizes interpretation, context, and depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, the data generated from interviews and focus groups will be analyzed using thematic analysis, following the widely recognized six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases involve immersing oneself in the data, generating codes, organizing them into themes, refining and naming these themes, and finally weaving them into a coherent narrative grounded in participants' voices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic

analysis is particularly appropriate for this research because it provides a structured but flexible method of identifying recurring patterns in participants' accounts, while also allowing space for unique and context-specific insights. It enables the researcher to go beyond surface responses to uncover underlying meanings about how CSR is perceived and how it influences brand loyalty. The approach is compatible with the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding participants' subjective realities.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethics are central to qualitative research because the process involves close interaction with participants, who share personal experiences and perspectives that may be sensitive. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that ethical practice safeguards participants' rights, ensures respect and fairness, and enhances the credibility of the research. For this study, several ethical principles guided the research process, ranging from recruitment and data collection to data storage and dissemination of findings.

3.10.1 Informed Consent and Autonomy

Participation in the study was guided by the principle of autonomy, which recognizes individuals' right to make free and informed choices about their involvement in research. To uphold this principle, participants were provided with detailed information sheets outlining the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and the intended use of findings. Written informed consent was obtained before participation. Autonomy was further respected by allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any stage without explanation or penalty. They were also free to decline answering specific questions if they felt uncomfortable.

3.10.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained by protecting the information shared during interviews and focus group discussions. Audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were stored securely in password-protected files, while any hard copies were locked away. Only the

researcher had access to these materials. The content of discussions was treated discreetly, ensuring that participants' trust in the research process was preserved.

3.10.3 Anonymity

Anonymity was guaranteed by ensuring that participants' identities were not disclosed in any part of the research. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, and all identifying details were removed from transcripts, field notes, and the final dissertation report. This ensured that participants' contributions could be reported without linking them to their personal identities.

3.10.4 Non-Maleficence

Non-maleficence, or the obligation to do no harm, guided the researcher in protecting participants from potential risks. Although the study's topic was not inherently sensitive, it was acknowledged that reflecting critically on issues of corporate trust could evoke discomfort. To mitigate this, participants were informed that they could skip questions or stop the discussion at any point. The researcher approached all interviews and focus groups with sensitivity, monitored group dynamics to prevent undue pressure, and ensured a respectful and supportive environment.

3.11 Authenticity and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is used to establish the rigor and quality of a study. Unlike quantitative approaches, which rely on validity and reliability, qualitative inquiry emphasizes criteria that ensure findings are credible, consistent, and reflective of participants' realities. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four key dimensions of trustworthiness which is credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability all which guided the conduct of this study.

3.11.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the findings and is considered the qualitative equivalent of internal validity. To enhance credibility, the researcher employed prolonged

engagement and persistent observation by spending sufficient time with participants during interviews and focus groups to gain deeper insights into their perceptions. Member checking was also used, whereby participants were invited to review summaries of their contributions to ensure that their perspectives were accurately captured. In addition, triangulation was achieved by using both semi-structured interviews and focus groups, which allowed the researcher to cross-verify findings across different data sources.

3.11.2 Transferability

Transferability relates to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts or settings. Although qualitative studies do not aim for broad generalization, the provision of thick description detailed accounts of participants' experiences, contexts, and interpretations, enables readers to assess whether the findings are relevant to other situations. By carefully describing the research context, participant demographics, and the cultural backdrop of CSR in Ghana, the study provides sufficient detail for readers and practitioners to judge the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

3.11.3 Dependability

Dependability is concerned with the stability and consistency of the research process, and parallels the concept of reliability in quantitative research. To ensure dependability, the research maintained a detailed audit trail documenting all stages of the research process, including the rationale for methodological choices, changes during data collection, and steps taken in data analysis. This transparency allows other researchers to follow the logic of the study and to evaluate the soundness of its procedures. Additionally, peer debriefing was sought, whereby the researcher consulted with academic supervisors and colleagues to review and refine the methodological approach.

3.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the degree to which the findings are shaped by participants' voices rather than researcher bias or assumptions. To enhance confirmability, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, maintaining a reflective journal throughout the study to

document personal assumptions, reactions, and potential influences on the research process. This reflexive practice ensured that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than in the researcher's preconceptions. Furthermore, triangulation of methods (interviews and focus groups) and careful use of direct quotations in the findings provided additional evidence of confirmability.

By adhering to these four criteria of trustworthiness, the study ensured that its findings are not only credible and contextually rich, but also transparent, dependable, and reflective of the lived experiences of Ghanaian consumers. This strengthens the rigor of the research and enhances its contribution to both academic literature and practical understanding of CSR as a public relations strategy.

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework that guided the study on how Ghanaian consumers perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a public relations strategy and its role in shaping brand loyalty. The chapter began by situating the research within an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach, supported by philosophical assumptions that emphasize subjectivity, context, and meaning-making. This orientation provided the foundation for exploring participants' lived experiences in depth.

The chapter further detailed the research design, describing the population, sampling strategy, and justification for sample size based on the principle of data saturation. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were presented as the main data collection methods, supported by a researcher-developed interview guide. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, was identified as the analytic strategy, allowing the researcher to systematically organize data into themes while remaining sensitive to participants' unique perspectives.

Ethical considerations were addressed through principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, alongside confidentiality and anonymity safeguards, ensuring that participants' rights and dignity were respected. Trustworthiness was also established

through measures to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, thereby enhancing the rigor of the study.

By bringing together these methodological elements, the chapter established a transparent and defensible foundation for the research. The next chapter presents the analysis and discussion of findings, demonstrating how the methods outlined here were applied in practice to generate insights into the relationship between CSR, public relations, and brand loyalty in the Ghanaian context.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the findings of the study, which explored how Ghanaian consumers understand and respond to corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, and how these perceptions shape their sense of trust and loyalty toward brands. Drawing from the voices and lived experiences of participants, the chapter seeks to uncover not just what people think about CSR, but why they think and feel the way they do. The analysis is based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with seven participants from different professional and social backgrounds. Each participant offered unique insights that reflect the diversity of consumer perspectives in Ghana's market environment. Through careful reading and thematic analysis, patterns began to emerge, revealing how Ghanaians interpret CSR as both a moral and strategic act, and how they relate such acts to a company's image and authenticity. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the participants' demographic information to situate their voices within their social contexts. It then presents the findings under key themes that correspond with the study's research questions. Each theme is supported by excerpts from participants' narratives, interpreted alongside existing literature to provide a deeper understanding of the meanings behind their words. The chapter ends with a discussion of the major findings, highlighting what they collectively suggest about CSR as a public relations strategy and its role in building brand loyalty in Ghana.

4.2 Demographic Data/ Units of Analysis

The study drew insights from seven Ghanaian consumers who were selected through purposive sampling based on their familiarity with corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in the country. Although small in number, the participants represented a diverse group of individuals with varying backgrounds, ages, and professions, which allowed for a richer understanding of the different ways in which CSR is perceived across segments of

Ghanaian society. Among the participants were both males and females between the ages of twenty-one and their early thirties. They included a business journalist, a nurse, a personal assistant with a background in logistics and administration, a student, a business development professional, a medical practitioner, and a public servant. This diversity made it possible to explore CSR perceptions from multiple standpoints including professional, youth, and civic perspectives. It also reflected how exposure to CSR messages varies depending on occupational background and access to information sources such as traditional or digital media. For instance, participants in professional roles such as journalism, business, and healthcare tended to discuss CSR with reference to its broader social and ethical implications, while younger respondents, particularly students, associated CSR more directly with charitable giving or visible acts of community support. Those working within the public and corporate sectors, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of accountability, consistency, and sincerity in CSR execution.

The varied experiences and social positions of participants thus provided a nuanced view of how CSR is interpreted in Ghana. Their collective voices offer valuable insight into how different individuals relate to corporate responsibility efforts, not only as consumers but also as citizens and members of communities affected by corporate activity. The perspectives they shared form the foundation for the thematic analysis presented in the subsequent section, which examines how these meanings and experiences converge and diverge around key themes.

4.3 Presentation and Thematic Analysis of Findings

4.3.1 Understanding of CSR among Ghanaian Consumers

The first theme that emerged from the interviews centered on how participants understood the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Across the seven interviews, CSR was largely perceived as an organisation's *obligation to give back* to the society in which it operates. Participants consistently framed CSR as a moral duty, expressing the belief that companies benefit from society's resources and therefore owe it to the public to reinvest some of their profits in social development. This perception reflects the philanthropic and ethical dimensions of Carroll's (1991) model of CSR, where businesses are expected to

contribute to societal welfare beyond profit generation. For most participants, CSR was closely associated with tangible, visible actions such as donations, scholarships, community development projects, and health or educational support. One respondent, for instance, defined CSR as “the responsibilities companies owe to the society for the resources they use,” while another emphasized that it simply means “giving back to the people.” Although participants shared a generally positive view of CSR, their depth of understanding varied. Some respondents demonstrated a broader grasp of CSR as a multidimensional concept that includes environmental and economic sustainability, while others restricted it to charitable giving. A few participants noted that CSR could encompass ethical business practices and responsible operations, yet such interpretations were less common. Most consumers still equated CSR with philanthropy — a notion that has deep cultural roots in Ghana, where generosity and communal support are highly valued social ideals. This strong emphasis on philanthropy suggests that for many Ghanaians, CSR is primarily evaluated based on its visibility and direct impact rather than its integration into long-term business strategy. It also reinforces the idea advanced by Osei (2020) that CSR in Ghana is often perceived through the lens of social contribution rather than corporate governance or sustainability. At the same time, participants’ descriptions reflect a shared moral expectation: that companies operating within society must actively participate in addressing social challenges. This expectation positions CSR as a kind of social contract a form of accountability through which corporations justify their presence and earn public trust. Such perceptions highlight the moral and relational dimensions of CSR in Ghana, which extend beyond economic exchange to include a sense of communal responsibility and care.

This foundational understanding of CSR provides the context for how consumers evaluate corporate motives, sincerity, and trustworthiness. The next theme therefore examines how participants interpret the authenticity of CSR initiatives and the underlying motivations they attribute to companies engaging in such activities.

4.3.2 Perceived Authenticity and Motivation Behind CSR

A key theme that emerged from participants' narratives concerns how Ghanaian consumers interpret the *authenticity* of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and the motives that drive companies to undertake them. While nearly all participants appreciated CSR activities in principle, they often questioned the sincerity behind corporate efforts, suggesting that authenticity plays a major role in shaping how CSR is received and evaluated. Most participants expressed the belief that a company's CSR is only genuine when it produces visible, meaningful outcomes for the community. Many associated authenticity with transparency, consistency, and direct social impact. For instance, several respondents explained that they trusted a company's CSR efforts only when they could *see* concrete results such as the construction of schools, hospitals, or community projects. Others indicated that CSR feels genuine when it is need-based that is, when companies identify and respond to real issues affecting the communities in which they operate. This emphasis on tangible impact reflects the importance of visibility in building credibility for CSR in Ghana, where symbolic acts of generosity are often more highly valued than corporate policy reforms or sustainability programs.

However, participants also displayed a degree of skepticism toward corporate motives. Some believed that while CSR may benefit society, many companies engage in it primarily for publicity and brand promotion. A few described CSR as a "win-win" practice, acknowledging that companies might pursue it to enhance their reputation or gain public approval. This pragmatic view suggests that Ghanaian consumers are aware of CSR's dual purpose as both a social contribution and a strategic communication tool. Yet, for most participants, the balance between altruism and strategy mattered less than the perceived *authenticity* of the act itself. In other words, if the initiative genuinely improved lives, its promotional value was seen as acceptable. Another notable pattern in the responses was the association between authenticity and emotional sincerity. Participants felt that companies that appeared genuinely compassionate rather than self-serving inspired greater public trust. Authentic CSR, in their view, involved empathy, continuity, and commitment rather than one-time donations or heavily publicized events. Some participants noted that

companies that conduct CSR quietly, without excessive media fanfare, are often considered more credible than those that use CSR mainly as a branding exercise.

These findings align with stakeholder theory, which argues that organizations earn legitimacy by demonstrating care for their stakeholders beyond profit motives (Freeman, 1984). They also support the observations of Kim and Ferguson (2018), who found that perceived sincerity significantly affects consumer trust and brand reputation. In the Ghanaian context, this perception is intensified by cultural expectations that generosity should stem from moral conviction rather than commercial gain. Overall, the theme of authenticity reveals that Ghanaian consumers interpret CSR not merely as an act of giving, but as a reflection of a company's *character and integrity*. The genuineness of a company's CSR efforts, therefore, becomes a moral barometer through which consumers judge whether an organization truly values the communities it serves. This moral evaluation plays a crucial role in shaping the next dimension of the findings, how consumers learn about CSR and how the channels of communication influence their trust and engagement.

4.3.3 CSR Communication and Awareness Channels

Another theme that emerged from the data concerns how participants learn about and engage with CSR activities. Most participants stated that they encounter CSR information through traditional media, particularly television, radio, and newspapers. These channels were seen as credible and accessible, especially among older consumers and working professionals. Only a few participants mentioned social media, and even then, they viewed it as a secondary or supplementary source. The preference for traditional media suggests that CSR communication in Ghana remains largely conventional, with limited use of digital platforms to reach younger audiences. Participants believed that televised campaigns and news reports made CSR appear more official and trustworthy because they provided visual proof of community projects or donations. Some mentioned that they were more likely to believe in the authenticity of CSR when they could “see” the activity being covered by reputable news outlets. However, a number of participants also felt that companies rely too heavily on traditional media and should take advantage of social media to better engage the public. They argued that platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly

Twitter) could help companies build ongoing dialogue and transparency around their CSR efforts rather than communicating through one-way advertising.

This finding highlights a clear communication gap: while CSR awareness in Ghana is generally high, engagement remains passive. The dominance of traditional media reflects a top-down approach where companies broadcast their good deeds rather than invite stakeholder participation. As Kim and Ferguson (2019) suggest, CSR communication is most effective when it fosters dialogue rather than promotion. The limited use of interactive media therefore may reduce opportunities for consumers to connect emotionally with CSR initiatives or to feel part of the process. Overall, the findings suggest that Ghanaian consumers are aware of CSR mainly through mediated visibility rather than direct involvement. This reliance on traditional media reinforces the perception of CSR as a publicity activity, while also signaling the need for more interactive and transparent communication strategies.

4.3.4 CSR's Role in Building Trust and Corporate Image

Participants generally agreed that CSR contributes positively to how they perceive and trust companies. Many described CSR as an expression of care, suggesting that when a company invests in social causes, it demonstrates moral integrity and concern for the public. This perception often led consumers to associate CSR with credibility, goodwill, and ethical behavior. However, the extent to which CSR built trust varied. Some participants explained that while CSR improved their perception of a company's reputation, their actual trust depended on consistent behaviour and quality service. In other words, CSR could enhance an image but not fully compensate for poor products or unethical practices. Others noted that CSR influenced their willingness to support or recommend a brand because it made the company appear "people-centered" rather than profit-driven.

These responses reflect the dual nature of CSR as both an ethical commitment and a reputational tool. Consumers viewed socially responsible companies as more trustworthy because such actions symbolized accountability and social awareness. Yet, they remained cautious, recognizing that some firms use CSR strategically to manage public image rather

than out of genuine concern. This balance between admiration and skepticism echoes findings by scholars such as Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010), who argue that the effectiveness of CSR in building trust depends on perceived authenticity. In the Ghanaian context, where social responsibility is closely tied to moral expectations, CSR tends to reinforce public trust only when it aligns with consistent ethical conduct. Overall, participants saw CSR as a valuable means of improving corporate reputation, but not a substitute for integrity. It strengthened trust when it was genuine and sustained, suggesting that consumers interpret CSR as a reflection of a company's character rather than its marketing strategy.

4.3.5 CSR as a Driver of Brand Loyalty

The relationship between CSR and brand loyalty emerged as a nuanced but significant theme in participants' accounts. While most respondents acknowledged that CSR positively shapes how they view a company, not all believed it directly determines their purchasing decisions. Many explained that CSR can influence loyalty only when it aligns with personal values or delivers real community benefits. Several participants admitted that they feel emotionally connected to brands that demonstrate care for society, particularly those supporting healthcare, education, and women's empowerment. In such cases, CSR created a sense of shared purpose that encouraged continued patronage. Others, however, viewed CSR as secondary to factors like product quality, affordability, and customer service. For them, CSR improved admiration for a company but did not necessarily translate into repeat purchases. This distinction suggests that CSR fosters attitudinal loyalty, a positive emotional orientation toward a brand rather than behavioural loyalty, which reflects consistent purchasing behaviour. In Ghana's context, participants seemed more loyal to the values represented by CSR than to the brands themselves. CSR was seen as capable of deepening emotional connections and goodwill but insufficient on its own to sustain long-term loyalty. Its influence was strongest when consumers believed the company's actions were genuine, consistent, and socially meaningful.

4.3.6 Preferred CSR Focus Areas and Consumer Expectations

When asked which areas of CSR they valued most, participants overwhelmingly mentioned healthcare and education as their top priorities. Many explained that these sectors directly affect people's quality of life and represent the most pressing social needs in Ghana. Several respondents felt that companies contributing to hospitals, schools, or scholarships made the most meaningful difference because such initiatives have a visible and long-term community impact. Beyond these two dominant areas, a few participants highlighted environmental protection and women's empowerment as equally important. These were seen as emerging concerns that reflect broader social progress. For instance, some respondents felt that companies should invest more in addressing waste management and plastic pollution, while others stressed the importance of supporting women and young entrepreneurs through capacity-building programmes. Participants also expressed strong expectations regarding how CSR should be conducted. Many felt that companies should engage directly with communities to identify genuine needs rather than imposing predetermined projects. They emphasized that CSR should be continuous and need-based rather than seasonal or purely promotional. This expectation of participation and accountability underscores the cultural belief that corporate responsibility is a shared social duty, not merely a business gesture. In Ghana, the findings suggest that consumers evaluate CSR not only by its scope but by its relevance, sincerity, and continuity.

4.4 Discussion of Key Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that Ghanaian consumers interpret corporate social responsibility (CSR) through a mix of moral, social, and practical considerations. While CSR is widely recognized, its meaning and influence are shaped by cultural values, perceived sincerity, and the visibility of corporate actions. Collectively, the results portray CSR as both a moral obligation and a strategic communication tool that shapes public trust and loyalty in complex ways.

To begin with, the findings affirm that CSR in Ghana is largely understood through a philanthropic lens. Participants commonly associated CSR with giving back to society

through tangible acts such as building schools, sponsoring medical care, or donating to the underprivileged. This understanding mirrors the philanthropic dimension of Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid, which places discretionary social contributions at the apex of corporate responsibility. This persistent view highlights the gap between global corporate definitions of CSR which emphasize sustainability and stakeholder integration and how consumers in developing contexts perceive it. The issue of authenticity emerged as central to how CSR is interpreted and valued. Participants often questioned the motives behind CSR, distinguishing between actions driven by genuine social concern and those performed for publicity. Their judgments were based on visible impact and consistency rather than corporate statements. This finding resonates with Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory, which posits that firms earn legitimacy when they act in the genuine interest of their stakeholders. Similarly, Kim and Ferguson (2018) found that perceived sincerity and transparency are critical in determining whether CSR strengthens or undermines corporate reputation. The present study extends these ideas within a Ghanaian context, where moral expectations and cultural ideals of generosity heighten sensitivity to perceived insincerity in corporate giving.

Another key finding concerns communication and public awareness. Most participants reported encountering CSR through traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers. This reflects Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen's (2010) observation that CSR communication often remains one-directional, focusing on publicity rather than engagement. While traditional media coverage lends credibility, it also limits dialogue and participation. Participants noted that greater use of digital platforms could make CSR communication more transparent and interactive. The findings further revealed that CSR contributes to corporate trust and image, though with important qualifications. Participants perceived socially responsible companies as more credible and caring, which enhanced their overall reputation. However, they also emphasized that CSR could not compensate for poor service quality or unethical behaviour. Finally, participants emphasized that meaningful CSR must address community-relevant issues, particularly healthcare and education.

The findings suggest that Ghanaian consumers approach CSR with both appreciation and critical discernment. They value companies that demonstrate genuine empathy and sustained engagement rather than those that treat CSR as a publicity exercise. Authenticity, transparency, and community relevance emerged as decisive factors shaping public trust and loyalty. These insights reinforce the interpretivist understanding that CSR perceptions are socially constructed and context-dependent, influenced by cultural norms, moral expectations, and lived experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provided a synthesis of the entire study on how Ghanaian consumers perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a public relations (PR) strategy and its influence on brand loyalty. It summarised the key findings drawn from participants' narratives, presented the major conclusions of the research, and offered recommendations for corporate practitioners, policymakers, and future scholars. The purpose of this chapter was to link the findings back to the research objectives and theoretical perspectives outlined in the earlier chapters.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study explored how Ghanaian consumers interpreted CSR and how these interpretations shaped their perceptions of brand credibility, trust, and loyalty. Data from semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, producing rich insights into consumer attitudes toward CSR. The major findings were summarised under the three research questions that guided the study.

First, regarding how Ghanaian consumers understood and perceived CSR, the findings revealed that most participants associated CSR with the idea of "giving back to society." They viewed CSR as acts of social contribution rather than as an integrated component of a company's core operations. This understanding reflected the philanthropic orientation of CSR in the Ghanaian context, where visible community donations and charity projects were considered genuine demonstrations of social responsibility.

On how CSR was perceived to influence corporate image and reputation, participants indicated that CSR enhanced the perceived credibility and social value of a company. Firms that consistently supported community projects especially in health and education, were seen as socially conscious and trustworthy. However, some participants expressed skepticism, noting that certain CSR efforts appeared to serve promotional motives rather

than genuine societal concern. This ambivalence underscored the complex interplay between CSR authenticity and public trust.

Thirdly, with regards to the link between CSR and brand loyalty, the findings suggested that while CSR shaped consumers' general attitudes toward companies, it did not always translate into long-term behavioural loyalty. Participants admired socially responsible companies but often prioritised product quality, affordability, and convenience in purchase decisions. Nonetheless, a few participants admitted that CSR initiatives targeting health and education made them more inclined to support such brands. The study found that CSR in Ghana was largely perceived as a moral and ethical obligation that positively influenced brand image, even if its direct impact on consumer loyalty was limited.

5.3 Conclusions

The findings of this study contributed to a deeper understanding of how Ghanaian consumers perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its role in shaping corporate image and brand loyalty. Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and guided by qualitative inquiry, the study revealed that CSR was viewed less as a strategic business function and more as an ethical responsibility that companies owed to their communities. The first major conclusion drawn was that CSR in the Ghanaian context remained predominantly philanthropic. Participants equated CSR with visible community projects such as donations, educational scholarships, and healthcare support. The Ghanaian public's emphasis on tangible, short-term interventions reflected a cultural expectation that businesses should "give back" as compensation for their profits. The study also concluded that CSR played a symbolic role in shaping public trust and corporate image. Participants generally perceived socially active companies as credible and responsible, reinforcing the idea that CSR served as a communication tool that enhanced reputation. This supported the assumptions of the stakeholder theory, which posits that companies gain legitimacy when they meet the moral and social expectations of their stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). However, participants' skepticism about the sincerity of some CSR efforts also revealed the fragility of this trust. When CSR was perceived as publicity-driven, its reputational benefits diminished, highlighting the importance of authenticity and transparency in CSR

communication. The third conclusion was that CSR alone did not guarantee consumer loyalty, although it contributed positively to brand affinity. While participants acknowledged the goodwill of socially responsible companies, purchasing decisions were ultimately shaped by factors such as product quality, price, and accessibility. This finding echoed the conclusions of scholars such as Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010), who noted that CSR's influence on loyalty was often indirect, mediated through trust and emotional connection rather than direct behavioral commitment.

In essence, the study concluded that CSR served more effectively as a public relations strategy for image building than as a direct driver of brand loyalty. In the Ghanaian business environment, where CSR is still evolving from philanthropy to sustainability, its most significant impact lay in shaping perceptions rather than purchase behaviors. The findings underscored the need for companies to design CSR initiatives that are not only visible and culturally relevant but also authentic, continuous, and aligned with their core values.

5.4 Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are made for corporate organizations, policymakers, and future researchers. For corporate organizations, it is recommended that CSR initiatives be designed with authenticity, continuity, and transparency to reflect genuine concern for community welfare rather than publicity motives. Companies should integrate CSR into their overall business and communication strategies, ensuring that projects are culturally relevant, community-driven, and aligned with core corporate values. Efforts should also be made to enhance two-way communication by combining traditional and digital media to create dialogue and feedback channels that promote transparency and trust. Finally, organizations should adopt clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting CSR outcomes to demonstrate accountability and reinforce public confidence.

For future researchers, it is suggested that subsequent studies expand beyond urban contexts to include participants from rural and semi-urban areas, providing a broader understanding of CSR perceptions across Ghana. Future research could also explore the

role of digital communication and social media in shaping consumer engagement with CSR, and employ mixed-method approaches to examine the relationship between CSR authenticity, trust, and brand loyalty. Additionally, examining employee perceptions of CSR would offer valuable insights into how internal stakeholder attitudes influence the credibility and success of CSR communication.

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APPENDIX 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on how Ghanaian consumers perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a public relations strategy and its role in brand loyalty. The purpose of this interview is to explore your personal views and experiences. It should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question or to withdraw from the interview at any point without any consequence. With your consent, I will record the discussion to ensure accuracy. Your identity will be kept anonymous, and all information will be treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes. There are no right or wrong answers here so please feel free to share your honest opinions. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself (for example, your age, occupation, and general background)?
2. Which brands or companies do you regularly interact with or purchase from in Ghana?
3. When you hear the term corporate social responsibility, what does it mean to you?
4. Can you recall any CSR activities by companies in Ghana that you are familiar with?
5. Which company's CSR activities stand out to you the most, and why?
6. How do you usually find out about CSR initiatives? through traditional media, social media, or other channels?
7. What makes you believe that a company's CSR activity is genuine or sincere?
8. Have you ever felt that a company's CSR was mainly for publicity? Could you share an example?
9. In your opinion, do companies in Ghana do enough CSR for their communities? Why or why not?
10. Do CSR activities influence how much you trust a company? If yes, how?

11. How do CSR activities affect your perception of a company's overall image or reputation?
12. Have you ever recommended a company to someone because of its CSR activities?
13. Do CSR activities influence whether you continue buying from or supporting a company?
14. Can you describe a time when a company's CSR efforts made you more loyal to its brand?
15. On the other hand, have you ever stopped supporting a company because of how it handled CSR (or failed to)?
16. What kinds of CSR initiatives do you personally value the most (for example, education, healthcare, environment)? Why?
17. Do you think CSR in Ghana differs from CSR in other countries? If yes, in what ways?
18. What advice would you give to companies in Ghana on how to design or communicate their CSR more effectively?

Thank you very much for your time and insights. Your contribution is valuable and will help in understanding how Ghanaian consumers interpret CSR and its influence on brand loyalty.

Do you have any final comments or thoughts you would like to share before we end the session?