



SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)

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**STRATEGIC CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNICATION FOR
REPUTATION MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM GHANA'S OIL AND GAS
INDUSTRY**

BY

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DEGREE IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT**

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I declare that this dissertation is the product of my independent and original work and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for any other degree or qualification in this University or any other institution. I further confirm that all materials consulted and all ideas, data, and words drawn from other sources have been properly acknowledged through complete referencing.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

I certify that this dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision in accordance with the guidelines for supervision and dissertation formatting prescribed by the University of Media, Arts and Communication–Institute of Journalism (UniMAC-IJ).

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_28/12/2025

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, whose encouragement, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in my academic journey sustained me throughout this programme. I especially dedicate this dissertation to my mother, **Mrs. Mavis Abbey**; my sisters, **Faustina Abbey** and **Bernice Abbey**; my husband, **Delali Sowu**; and my son, **Nuna Sowu**, for their constant love, patience, and support. I also dedicate this work to every mentor, friend, and supporter who offered guidance, motivation, and reassurance at moments when it mattered most.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is strategically communicated as a public relations tool for reputation management in Ghana's oil and gas industry. The study was guided by Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory, which provided an analytical lens for understanding how corporate CSR communication practices shape stakeholder perceptions, trust, and organisational reputation. Using a qualitative approach and a multiple case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with sixteen participants, comprising four corporate representatives responsible for CSR/PR functions and twelve community stakeholders from beneficiary communities. The findings indicate that CSR strategies are largely driven by organisational priorities and reputational considerations, with stakeholder consultation often experienced by communities as largely informational rather than participatory. The study also found that organisations rely on both traditional channels such as community meetings and engagement through local leaders, and digital platforms such as social media to publicise CSR activities. However, gaps in communication timing, transparency, and follow-up weakened trust and contributed to scepticism, particularly where CSR initiatives were perceived as publicity-driven or inconsistently delivered. The study concludes that CSR contributes to reputational gains when communication is credible, timely, and aligned with community expectations, but reputational benefits are fragile when delivery and engagement processes are inconsistent. The study recommends strengthening participatory engagement, improving feedback mechanisms, enhancing communication clarity across stakeholder groups, and institutionalising monitoring and evaluation to improve CSR sustainability and reputational outcomes in the sector.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR Communication, Strategic Public Relations, Stakeholder Engagement, Trust, Corporate Reputation, Ghana, Oil and Gas Industry.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a critical component of strategic communication and reputation management across industries worldwide. In the global business environment, CSR is no longer viewed as a peripheral philanthropic gesture but as a strategic tool that shapes stakeholder perceptions and sustains long-term organizational. (Porter & Kramer, 2006)

CSR may be defined as a company's commitment to operating in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner, while recognizing the interests of its stakeholders (WBCSD, 2000) Similarly, reputation management refers to the efforts an organization makes to influence how it is perceived by various stakeholders over time (Fobrum, 1996). Organizations increasingly engage in CSR not only to fulfill ethical obligations but also to enhance their brand image and strengthen relationships with stakeholders through transparent communication.

In Africa, the CSR landscape is deeply intertwined with development challenges such as poverty, weak infrastructure, and socio-political instability. Multinational corporations, especially those in the extractive sectors, are under growing pressure to demonstrate accountability and contribute to socio-economic progress in host communities (Idemudia, 2011). In the oil and gas sector, this responsibility is amplified due to the environmental risks and socio-economic inequalities associated with resource extraction.

In Ghana, the discovery of commercial oil reserves in 2007 positioned the country as a significant player in Africa's petroleum economy. However, the operations of oil and gas firms have drawn increasing scrutiny regarding their social impact, environmental management, and communication with affected communities.

Companies such as Star Oil Ghana, Kosmos Energy, Vivo Energy, and Petrosol have developed CSR portfolios focused on education, health, infrastructure, and youth employment. These initiatives are typically promoted through sustainability reports, media relations, and stakeholder forums—key public relations (PR) mechanisms intended to enhance corporate reputation (Mohammed et al., 2022).

Despite efforts by oil and gas companies in Ghana to implement CSR initiatives, public perception remains mixed. Studies have highlighted community protests, environmental criticisms, and questions about the sincerity and effectiveness of CSR activities. For instance, Mohammed et al. (2022) found that while companies have developed various social interventions, the impact on communities varies due to factors like the level of community involvement and information asymmetry. This points to a critical gap in how CSR is communicated and strategically managed as a public relations function.

In many cases, CSR is implemented without proper alignment with broader communication strategies, reducing its potential to build trust and mitigate reputational risks. This observation is

consistent with research suggesting that CSR communication must be integrated into strategic public relations to enhance stakeholder engagement and credibility (Morsing & Schultz, 2006)

1.2 Problem Statement

CSR initiatives have become increasingly common in Ghana's oil and gas industry, with companies investing significantly in social interventions such as education, health, infrastructure, and youth employment. These efforts demonstrate a growing commitment to social responsibility among industry players. However, despite these visible investments, public trust in oil and gas companies remains inconsistent. Local communities continue to raise concerns about unfulfilled promises, environmental degradation, and a lack of genuine engagement. For example, Asare (2025) highlights how stakeholders often perceive CSR efforts as superficial or disconnected from their actual needs and expectations.

This discrepancy between CSR activity and stakeholder perception suggests a gap in how CSR is communicated and understood. In many cases, CSR messaging is not well integrated into broader public relations strategies, resulting in information asymmetry and mistrust. Effective CSR communication must go beyond reporting actions to fostering dialogue and transparency with stakeholders (Bhattacharya, Du, & Sen, 2010).

Despite this, few empirical studies in the Ghanaian context examine how CSR is framed and communicated strategically from a public relations perspective. Much of the literature focuses on CSR implementation or impact, but rarely investigates the internal communication strategies or PR frameworks that shape stakeholder perception. Addressing this gap is necessary to understand how CSR can be used more effectively as a strategic tool for reputation management in Ghana's oil and gas sector.

1.3 Research Objectives

General Objective:

To examine how CSR is used as a strategic public relations tool for reputation management in Ghana's oil and gas industry.

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the CSR strategies adopted by selected oil and gas companies in Ghana.
2. To assess how PR professionals communicate CSR initiatives to stakeholders.
3. To evaluate stakeholder perceptions of CSR communication and its impact on corporate reputation.
4. To identify challenges in using CSR as a PR strategy in Ghana's oil and gas sector.
5. To examine how internal factors such as leadership and communication resources influence the strategic use of CSR in PR efforts.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What CSR strategies are currently being implemented by oil and gas companies in Ghana?
2. How are these initiatives communicated to stakeholders through PR channels?
3. How do stakeholders perceive CSR communication, and how does it affect corporate reputation?
4. What challenges hinder the effective use of CSR as a PR strategy?

5. What internal factors influence the strategic use of CSR in PR campaigns?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to both theoretical and professional domains. Theoretically, it offers insights into strategic communication and stakeholder theory by analyzing how CSR is used to shape organizational reputation and stakeholder trust. It also complements legitimacy theory by exploring how oil and gas firms seek societal approval through strategic CSR messaging.

By situating CSR within public relations practice, the study provides a valuable framework for understanding how communication strategies affect stakeholder relationships in high-impact sectors.

Professionally, the findings will inform PR and corporate affairs practitioners on best practices for integrating CSR into communication campaigns. For instance, the study can guide PR professionals in designing more inclusive stakeholder engagement strategies, improving feedback mechanisms, and aligning CSR communication with broader crisis management or reputation recovery plans.

It may also assist organizations in training PR teams to adopt more dialogic and participatory approaches when communicating CSR activities, especially in communities where trust has been eroded.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

This study will focus on four oil and gas companies operating in Ghana. These companies were selected due to their active CSR portfolios, visibility in national CSR reporting, and established stakeholder engagement practices. The study will primarily target PR/CSR officers, media relations personnel, and community stakeholders.

Community stakeholders will be selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who have either directly benefited from or interacted with the CSR initiatives of the selected companies. The geographic focus will include areas where these companies are most active, particularly the Western Region, home to Ghana's major oil fields, and Accra, where most corporate communications offices are headquartered.

Limitations may include restricted access to internal corporate data and potential bias in stakeholder responses, particularly where corporate reputation is under scrutiny.

1.7 Justification of the Study

While several studies examine CSR in Ghana, few explicitly connect CSR communication to public relations strategies and stakeholder perception within the oil and gas industry. This research fills that gap by focusing not only on CSR outputs but also on how communicative strategies influence stakeholder interpretation and trust. It is timely given Ghana's growing oil economy and increasing demand for corporate accountability in high-impact industries. By examining CSR through a public relations lens, this study highlights the strategic role of communication in shaping stakeholder experience, deepening public understanding, and strengthening corporate reputation.

1.8 Operational Definitions

- CSR Communication: The planned and strategic dissemination of CSR-related content through various PR tools and platforms to inform and influence stakeholder perceptions.
- Stakeholder: Any individual, group, or institution affected by or capable of affecting an organization's operations (Freeman, 1984)
- Reputation: The collective perception of an organization's behavior, integrity, and performance over time. It reflects stakeholder judgments and can influence organizational success (Fombrun, 1996)

- Strategic Public Relations: A deliberate communication approach that aligns PR activities with organizational goals and stakeholder expectations to build long- term relationships.
- Internal Organizational Factors: Elements within a firm such as leadership, communication resources, and PR infrastructure that influence how CSR strategies are developed and communicated.
- Oil and Gas Industry: The sector that involves exploration, extraction, refining, transportation, and marketing of oil and gas products. In Ghana, this primarily refers to upstream activities concentrated in the Western Region and managed by companies under the oversight of institutions like the Petroleum Commission.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews and synthesises existing literature relevant to strategic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication and its role in reputation management, with particular emphasis on the oil and gas industry. The purpose of the chapter is to establish the theoretical, conceptual and empirical foundations that frame the present study and to identify gaps that justify further research within the Ghanaian context.

The review begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework underpinning the study, providing the analytical lens through which CSR communication and reputation are interpreted.

It then presents the conceptual framework guiding the relationships among strategic CSR communication, stakeholder perception, trust and corporate reputation. This is followed by an in-depth review of key concepts, including CSR, reputation management and strategic CSR communication. The chapter further examines relevant empirical studies, particularly within extractive industries and developing economies. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature and positioning the present study within these gaps.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the intellectual foundation for analysing how CSR communication influences stakeholder perceptions and corporate reputation. This study is informed primarily by Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory, both of which are particularly relevant to high-impact industries such as oil and gas, where organisational survival depends heavily on stakeholder approval and social acceptance.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was originally articulated by Freeman (1984), who argued that organisations must account for the interests of all stakeholders who can affect or are affected by corporate activities, rather than focusing solely on shareholders. Stakeholders include employees, customers, suppliers, host communities, regulators, civil society groups and the media. Freeman's work marked a shift from profit-centred models of business to more relational and socially embedded perspectives.

Subsequent developments expanded the theory by recognising that not all stakeholders exert equal influence. There was the need for the introduction of the stakeholder salience model, which categorises stakeholders based on power, legitimacy and urgency. This model is particularly relevant to CSR communication because it explains why organisations prioritise certain stakeholder voices over others when designing communication strategies. In extractive industries, host communities often possess high legitimacy and urgency but limited power, which can lead to consultative rather than participatory engagement practices. (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997)

Stakeholder Theory emphasises communication as a central mechanism through which organisations identify stakeholder expectations, negotiate interests and manage relationships. Effective CSR communication therefore requires dialogue, responsiveness and transparency. In the Ghanaian oil and gas sector, where community expectations are shaped by socio-economic vulnerabilities and historical marginalisation, stakeholder theory underscores the importance of inclusive communication processes that move beyond symbolic consultation.

Within this study, Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for examining how oil and gas companies engage different stakeholder groups through CSR communication and how these engagement practices influence trust and reputational outcomes.

2.2.2 Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy Theory is grounded in the notion that organisations operate within a broader social system and must align their actions with societal norms, values and expectations to secure ongoing acceptance (Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy is often described as a “social licence to operate,” particularly in industries whose activities pose environmental and social risks.

This identifies three forms of legitimacy: pragmatic legitimacy, which is based on stakeholder self-interest; moral legitimacy, which reflects normative approval of organisational actions; and cognitive legitimacy, which arises when organisational activities are perceived as inevitable or taken for granted (Suchman, 1995). CSR communication plays a central role in shaping all three forms of legitimacy by framing corporate actions in ways that resonate with stakeholder values and expectations.

In extractive industries, legitimacy concerns are heightened due to environmental degradation, land displacement and community livelihood disruptions. CSR communication is therefore frequently used as a legitimising strategy to demonstrate corporate responsibility, manage risk and pre-empt opposition. However, legitimacy is fragile and can be undermined when CSR communication is perceived as insincere or disconnected from actual practice.

In Ghana’s oil and gas sector, legitimacy challenges are compounded by governance concerns, unmet development expectations and community mistrust. Legitimacy Theory thus provides a useful lens for analysing how CSR communication contributes to or undermines corporate reputation, particularly when community perceptions diverge from organisational narratives.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study explains how strategic CSR communication influences stakeholder perception, trust and corporate reputation. At the centre of the framework is strategic CSR communication, conceptualised as the deliberate planning, execution and evaluation of CSR-related messages and engagement activities aimed at key stakeholder groups.

The framework proposes that strategic CSR communication shapes stakeholder perceptions by influencing how CSR initiatives are interpreted in terms of sincerity, relevance and impact. Positive perceptions enhance stakeholder trust, which in turn strengthens corporate reputation. Conversely, poorly communicated CSR initiatives may generate scepticism, weaken trust and expose organisations to reputational risk.

This framework recognises trust as a mediating variable between CSR communication and reputation, reflecting the argument that reputation is not built solely through actions but through how those actions are perceived and communicated. The framework is particularly relevant in extractive contexts, where trust deficits often exist between corporations and host communities.

The conceptual model guiding the study therefore links strategic CSR communication to stakeholder perception, trust and reputation management, providing a coherent structure for data analysis and interpretation.

2.4 Review of Key Concepts and Constructs

2.4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility has evolved significantly over time, moving from voluntary philanthropy to a strategic and integrated component of corporate governance. Early definitions framed CSR as discretionary corporate benevolence, while contemporary perspectives emphasise accountability, sustainability and stakeholder engagement.

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000) defines CSR as the ongoing commitment of businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of employees, local communities and society at large. Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid further conceptualises CSR as comprising economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. While this model remains influential, it has been critiqued for insufficient attention to environmental sustainability and power dynamics in developing economies.

Alternative models such as the Triple Bottom Line, which emphasises economic, social and environmental performance, and Shared Value, which links social impact to competitive advantage, have expanded CSR discourse (Porter & Kramer, *Creating Shared Value*, 2011). In extractive industries, CSR is often framed around environmental protection, community development and livelihood restoration.

In African and emerging economy contexts, CSR is shaped by weak regulatory enforcement, high community dependence and development deficits. Scholars argue that CSR in Africa often substitutes for state provision of social services, raising questions about accountability and sustainability (Idemudia, 2011). In Ghana, CSR expectations in the oil and gas sector are influenced by national development priorities, local governance structures and community perceptions of fairness.

2.4.2 Reputation and Reputation Management

Corporate reputation refers to the collective assessment of an organisation by its stakeholders based on past behaviour and anticipated future performance (Fombrun, 1996). Reputation differs from image, which reflects short-term impressions, and identity, which refers to internal self-definition. Reputation is cumulative, relational and difficult to control, making it both a strategic asset and a source of vulnerability.

Reputation management involves deliberate efforts to shape stakeholder perceptions through consistent behaviour, communication and relationship management. In extractive industries, reputational risks arise from environmental incidents, community conflicts, regulatory breaches and negative media coverage. The digital media environment further amplifies reputational exposure by accelerating information flow and stakeholder mobilisation.

CSR has been widely recognised as a key driver of corporate reputation, particularly when initiatives are perceived as authentic and impactful. However, reputational benefits are contingent on communication credibility. Overemphasis on publicity or inconsistent messaging can undermine trust and provoke stakeholder scepticism, especially in contexts where corporate motives are already questioned.

In Ghana's oil and gas sector, reputation management is closely tied to community relations, regulatory compliance and public discourse around resource governance. CSR communication therefore plays a critical role in shaping how companies are evaluated by diverse stakeholder groups.

2.4.3 Strategic CSR Communication

Strategic CSR communication refers to the planned and purposeful communication of CSR initiatives to align organisational goals with stakeholder expectations. Unlike tactical communication, which focuses on dissemination, strategic CSR communication emphasises planning, audience segmentation, message framing, channel selection, feedback and evaluation (Bhattacharya, Du, & Sen, 2010)

Morsing and Schultz (2006) identify three CSR communication models: stakeholder information, stakeholder response and stakeholder involvement. The involvement model, which emphasises dialogue and co-creation, aligns most closely with trust-building and reputation enhancement.

However, studies suggest that many firms, particularly in developing economies, remain reliant on one-way or limited two-way communication approaches.

In Ghana, CSR communication faces challenges related to digital access disparities, language diversity, media trust and community engagement structures. Traditional communication channels such as community meetings and radio remain influential, underscoring the need for context-sensitive communication strategies.

Strategic CSR communication is therefore central to reputation management, as it shapes how CSR actions are interpreted and whether stakeholders perceive organisations as trustworthy partners or self-interested actors.

2.5 Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on CSR communication indicate that transparent, dialogic and consistent communication enhances stakeholder trust and corporate reputation. Research in extractive industries highlights persistent gaps between CSR rhetoric and practice, with community stakeholders often excluded from meaningful participation (Osei-Kojo, 2023)

Studies in Ghana and similar African contexts reveal that CSR initiatives are frequently perceived as top-down and transactional, contributing to scepticism and reputational fragility (Idemudia, 2011). Limited empirical attention has been paid to the communicative processes underlying these perceptions, particularly from the perspectives of communication practitioners and community members.

2.6 Literature Gaps and Chapter Summary

This review reveals several gaps in existing literature. First, there is limited empirical research examining CSR communication as a strategic public relations function within Ghana's oil and gas sector. Second, stakeholder voices, particularly those of community members and communication

practitioners, are often underrepresented. Third, few studies integrate CSR communication, trust and reputation within a coherent analytical framework.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how CSR is strategically communicated, how stakeholders interpret these communications and how such interpretations shape trust and corporate reputation. The next chapter outlines the methodology adopted to investigate these issues.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological framework adopted to investigate how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is strategically communicated for reputation management within Ghana's oil and gas industry. The methodology is presented systematically to ensure clarity, coherence and transparency in the research process. It begins with the research design, followed by the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study, the population and sampling procedures, sources of data, data collection instruments, data collection procedures and the data analysis plan. The chapter further discusses researcher positionality and reflexivity, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and methodological limitations.

The methodology was carefully chosen to align with the study's aim of examining how strategic CSR communication contributes to reputation management within Ghana's oil and gas sector. In line with ethical requirements and supervisory guidance, the organisations involved in the study are anonymised and referred to as Company 1, Company 2, Company 3 and Company 4. The study focuses on both corporate actors responsible for CSR communication and community stakeholders who experience and interpret these communication practices, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of CSR communication processes and their reputational implications.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the set of beliefs and assumptions that guide how a study is conducted, shaping the researcher's view of reality and the nature of knowledge generation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019)

In social science research, philosophical positions are commonly categorised under paradigms such as positivism, interpretivism, realism and pragmatism. This study is anchored in the interpretivist paradigm and supported by a constructivist ontological position.

Interpretivism assumes that social phenomena are shaped by human interaction and subjective meanings rather than existing as objective and measurable realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the context of this study, CSR communication is not viewed simply as a set of corporate messages or activities, but as a socially constructed process shaped by the perspectives of CSR managers, public relations officers, community leaders and beneficiaries of CSR initiatives. The interpretivist stance allows the researcher to explore not only what CSR activities are communicated, but also how and why they are framed in particular ways.

For instance, the manner in which Oil Company 1 communicates an education-focused CSR initiative may be interpreted internally as a strategic reputational investment, while community members may interpret the same initiative as a moral obligation or social contract. Similarly, variations in how Oil Company 3 and Oil Company 4 present youth empowerment or environmental initiatives reflect differences in organisational priorities, stakeholder expectations and contextual realities. These differences demonstrate that CSR communication cannot be fully understood without engaging with the meanings stakeholders attach to corporate actions.

The study also adopts a constructivist ontological perspective, which holds that reality is not singular or fixed but is co-constructed through social interaction and dialogue (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). From this perspective, multiple realities coexist, shaped by cultural context, power relations and lived experiences. Communities may interpret CSR initiatives through the lens of unmet needs or perceived sincerity, while organisations may frame the same initiatives in terms of strategy, compliance or visibility. Understanding these differing constructions of reality requires a methodological approach that privileges context, interpretation and participant voice.

Alternative paradigms such as positivism and realism were considered but rejected. Positivist approaches emphasise objectivity, quantification and hypothesis testing, which would limit the exploration of trust, scepticism and meaning-making that emerged as central issues in this study. Realist approaches, which assume a single observable reality independent of interpretation, would similarly constrain the analysis. Interpretivism was therefore considered the most appropriate philosophical foundation for analysing CSR communication as a relational and socially embedded phenomenon.

3.3 Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative research approach, which emphasises depth of understanding, contextual interpretation and exploration of meaning rather than breadth of coverage or statistical generalisation (Silverman, 2020). Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for investigating perceptions, attitudes and experiences, all of which are central to understanding CSR communication and reputation management.

A quantitative approach relying on surveys and numerical indicators would not have adequately captured the symbolic and relational dimensions of CSR communication. While such an approach might measure awareness of CSR initiatives, it would not explain why some stakeholders perceive CSR communication as sincere while others interpret it as publicity-driven. A purely mixed-

methods approach was also considered but rejected, as it risked diluting the study's emphasis on meaning-making.

The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore how CSR communication strategies are developed, how stakeholders interpret these strategies and how communication practices influence trust and corporate reputation. It also allowed flexibility to probe emerging issues during interviews, such as communication gaps, sustainability concerns and perceptions of limited stakeholder participation, which later became central themes in the findings.

3.4 Research Design

The study adopted a multiple case study design involving four oil and gas companies operating in Ghana, anonymised as Company 1, Company 2, Company 3 and Company 4. Case study research is particularly useful when investigating how and why questions within real-life contexts, especially where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018)

CSR communication practices are context-specific and shaped by organisational culture, regulatory environments, resource capacity and stakeholder relationships. The case study design allowed the researcher to examine CSR communication practices in depth within each organisational context while also capturing variations across organisations. For example, differences between multinational-affiliated and locally owned firms provided insight into how organisational structure and resources influence communication strategies.

The use of multiple cases strengthened the study by enabling cross-case comparison and enhancing analytical depth. Although the findings are not statistically generalisable, they provide analytical generalisation through the development of concepts and insights that may be applicable to similar industries and socio-cultural contexts (Yin, 2018).

3.5 Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of corporate and community stakeholders directly involved in or affected by CSR communication practices within the selected oil and gas companies. Corporate participants were drawn from departments responsible for CSR, public relations and corporate communications, as these individuals are directly involved in designing and implementing CSR communication strategies.

Community participants were drawn from host communities that have benefited from CSR initiatives implemented by the participating companies. These included representatives of traditional authorities, assembly members, women leaders, youth leaders, school administrators and NGO representatives. The inclusion of both corporate and community stakeholders was essential for capturing a holistic understanding of CSR communication from both organisational and community perspectives.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed. This non-probability sampling method was chosen because it allows the selection of participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Palinkas, et al., 2015). A total of sixteen participants were selected for the study, comprising four corporate participants and twelve community participants.

The four corporate participants were drawn from Oil and Gas Company 1, Company 2, Company 3 and Company 4. They included both male and female participants between the ages of approximately 30 and 50 years, with professional experience ranging from five to fifteen years in CSR, public relations or corporate communications roles. Their positions enabled them to provide informed perspectives on CSR strategy development, communication planning and reputation management.

The twelve community participants included six males and six females between the ages of approximately 25 and 60 years. These participants occupied roles such as community leaders, assembly members, women leaders, youth representatives, school administrators and NGO representatives. Their diverse backgrounds enabled them to provide grounded interpretations of how CSR initiatives are communicated, understood and experienced within their communities.

The sample size was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation while ensuring diversity of perspectives. This is consistent with qualitative research literature, which suggests that saturation is often achieved within a range of 12 to 20 interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006)

3.7 Sources of Data

The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with corporate and community participants. Secondary data were obtained from CSR and sustainability reports, press releases, media publications, NGO reports and publicly available corporate communication materials.

The combination of primary and secondary data enhanced the depth and credibility of the study. Triangulating multiple data sources provided a more comprehensive understanding of CSR communication practices and their implications for reputation management.

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

The main data collection instrument employed in the study was a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A). This instrument provided flexibility for participants to express their views freely while ensuring that discussions remained focused on the research objectives.

The interview guide was organised into thematic sections covering CSR strategy development, communication channels, stakeholder engagement processes and reputational outcomes. Probing and follow-up questions were used to elicit detailed responses and clarify participant perspectives.

The semi-structured format also allowed for a conversational tone, enabling participants to share their experiences openly.

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in three stages. The first stage involved obtaining access and permission from the selected oil and gas companies. Formal letters were sent to introduce the study and request participation, followed by follow-up communication to facilitate approval. Once permission was granted, interviews with corporate participants were scheduled at mutually convenient times.

Entry into host communities was facilitated through traditional authorities, assembly members and opinion leaders, whose involvement was important in building trust with community participants. Data collection was conducted over a four-week period between November and December 2025. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, with local languages used where participants felt more comfortable. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Field notes were taken to capture contextual observations and non-verbal cues.

The final stage involved the collection of secondary documents, including CSR reports, press releases and media publications produced between 2021 and 2024. These documents complemented the interview data and strengthened triangulation.

3.10 Data Analysis Plan

The study employed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). An inductive approach was adopted, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being guided by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. This approach aligned with the interpretivist philosophy underpinning the study and prioritised participants' subjective meanings and experiences.

Data analysis began with familiarisation, involving repeated reading of interview transcripts and documents. This was followed by systematic coding of relevant text segments. Codes were iteratively reviewed and refined, and those with similar meanings were grouped into categories and developed into broader themes. A codebook was maintained to document codes, definitions and representative excerpts.

An audit trail was kept to document analytical decisions, and a sample of coded data was reviewed by another qualitative researcher to enhance consistency and credibility. The final themes formed the structure of the findings presented in Chapter Four and were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Two.

3.11 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As the researcher, my role in this study was that of an interpreter and facilitator of meaning. Recognising my background as a communication practitioner within the Ghanaian education sector, I maintained reflexivity throughout the research process. This involved continuous reflection on assumptions, interactions with participants and potential influences on interpretation.

To mitigate bias, interview questions were neutrally phrased, participant perspectives were accurately represented using direct quotations, and reflexive journaling was employed during data collection and analysis. This enhanced transparency and trustworthiness.

3.12 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation and member checking. Transferability was supported through rich description of the

research context and participants. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through audit trails and reflexive documentation.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the UniMAC-IJ Institutional Review Board. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and anonymised organisational identifiers

3.14 Summary

This chapter presented the methodological framework adopted for the study. A qualitative multiple case study design supported by thematic analysis was employed to explore CSR communication and reputation management within Ghana's oil and gas industry. The next chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets findings from interviews conducted with corporate and community participants within Ghana's oil and gas industry. It examines how corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies are developed and communicated, the nature of stakeholder engagement, and how these practices influence perceptions of corporate reputation. The findings are organised thematically to reflect patterns that emerged across participant accounts, providing insight into how CSR communication is experienced by different stakeholder groups within the sector.

4.1 Professional Background and Experience of Participants

The corporate participants (C1–C4) held roles within Public Relations, Corporate Affairs and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) departments and included both male and female participants. Their professional experience ranged between five and fifteen years, with ages spanning approximately **30 to 50 years**. Their responsibilities included developing CSR strategies, coordinating projects, liaising with stakeholders and managing CSR communication across platforms. Their insights reflect an organisational perspective shaped by strategic planning processes and corporate priorities.

The community participants (P1–P12) included both male and female participants comprising women's leaders, school administrators, youth representatives, NGO leaders and assembly members from communities that have benefited from educational support, environmental clean-ups, road safety campaigns, school infrastructure refurbishment and youth development initiatives. Some of the communities include La, Osu, Ashaiman, Tema, Shama, Bleamezado,

Axim, Akatsi and Akropong. The ages of community participants ranged between approximately 25 and 60 years, reflecting both youth and senior community leadership. Their varying levels of community involvement and leadership experience enabled them to offer grounded interpretations of how CSR activities are communicated, understood and received in their communities, while also highlighting the social and cultural contexts within which CSR communication occurs.

4.2 CSR Strategy Development and Organisational Priorities

This section addresses the research objective examining how corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies are developed within organisations operating in Ghana's oil and gas industry. The findings show that CSR strategy development within the companies is closely aligned with organisational priorities and long-term business objectives. Corporate participants explained that CSR planning is largely embedded within internal strategic and operational review processes, during which specific thematic focus areas are identified prior to implementation. Commonly mentioned focus areas included education, road safety, youth empowerment and environmental sustainability, which participants indicated align with corporate values and reputational considerations within the sector.

Participants described CSR priorities as being shaped primarily through internal strategic discussions before community considerations are incorporated. One corporate participant noted that CSR initiatives “usually come from our strategy meetings where we look at our focus areas like education and safety and then consider what the communities also need” (C1). Another participant emphasised the strategic and sustainability-driven nature of CSR decision-making, explaining that “CSR is part of our long-term planning, and we have to choose projects that fit our organisational goals and what we can sustain over time” (C3). Similarly, a third participant

acknowledged that while community needs are recognised, organisational priorities often guide final decisions, stating that “we listen to the communities, but the projects must align with our corporate focus and strategic direction” (C4).

Overall, these findings indicate that CSR strategy development within the oil and gas industry is predominantly corporate-led, with organisational priorities playing a central role in determining CSR focus areas. This reflects broader arguments that CSR has increasingly been integrated into corporate strategy as a mechanism for strengthening organisational legitimacy and managing stakeholder relationships. However, the strong emphasis on organisational objectives may limit the extent to which community needs directly influence CSR design, an issue that becomes more evident in discussions of stakeholder consultation in subsequent sections

4.3 Stakeholder Consultation during CSR Planning

Although CSR strategy development is largely shaped by internal organisational processes, corporate participants reported that stakeholders such as traditional authorities, assembly members and school leaders are consulted during CSR planning. These engagements were described by corporate participants as important mechanisms for identifying community priorities and ensuring that CSR projects are socially relevant and culturally appropriate. One participant noted that engagement with community leaders helps to validate CSR decisions, explaining that they “usually meet with community leaders to understand what the community needs before projects are rolled out” (C2). Similarly, another participant indicated that consultation is intended to promote acceptance and cooperation, stating that “engaging the chiefs and assembly members helps us align our projects with what the community expects” (C4).

In contrast, community participants perceived these consultations differently. While acknowledging that engagement meetings do take place, many community members felt that

such interactions function primarily as platforms for companies to communicate decisions that had already been made rather than opportunities for meaningful influence. As one community participant observed, companies “usually come with their plans already made and only inform us about what they intend to do” (P4). Another participant expressed a similar concern, noting that “even though they ask for our views, the projects rarely change to reflect what we actually suggest” (P7). These accounts suggest that stakeholder consultation is often experienced as symbolic rather than participatory.

This divergence between corporate and community perspectives indicates a misalignment in how consultation is understood and practiced. While companies frame stakeholder engagement as inclusive, community members interpret it as limited in depth and influence. This finding aligns with recent studies in Ghana which show that CSR consultations frequently lack meaningful co-creation and tend to prioritise organisational legitimacy over genuine stakeholder empowerment (Osei-Kojo, 2023)

4.4 Balancing Organisational Priorities and Community Needs

The findings indicate a persistent tension between organisational priorities and community expectations in the design and implementation of CSR initiatives. Corporate participants described CSR as a strategic tool used to enhance visibility, reinforce corporate identity and meet regulatory or industry expectations. In contrast, community participants emphasised the importance of CSR projects that address immediate and practical needs such as livelihood support, infrastructure development, educational resources and youth empowerment.

Community participants frequently expressed concern that CSR initiatives, although beneficial, did not always reflect the most pressing needs within their communities. One participant explained that while company interventions were appreciated, “sometimes the projects they bring are good,

but not the most urgent things we need at the moment” (P6). Another community member echoed this view by noting that “the company focuses on projects that look good, but our everyday challenges are often left out” (P9). These accounts suggest that community expectations are shaped by lived socio-economic realities, which may not always align with corporate CSR priorities.

From the corporate perspective, participants acknowledged the need to balance community demands with organisational capacity and strategic direction. As one corporate participant noted, “we try to support the communities, but we also have to consider what aligns with our corporate focus and what we can sustain” (C4). This highlights the organisational constraints that influence CSR decision-making and the selective nature of CSR project selection.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a misalignment between corporate-driven CSR priorities and community-defined needs. This tension underscores the importance of participatory planning mechanisms that enable communities to influence CSR design more meaningfully.

4.5.1 Use of Traditional Communication Channels

The findings show that traditional communication channels remain central to CSR communication, particularly at the community level. Corporate participants highlighted the continued reliance on stakeholder durbars, community meetings, radio announcements and official letters delivered through traditional authorities and institutional leaders. These channels were perceived as credible and culturally appropriate, especially in communities where interpersonal communication and traditional leadership structures are highly valued. One corporate participant explained that “we still rely on community meetings and letters to chiefs because these are respected channels, and people trust what comes from their leaders” (C3). Another participant similarly noted that “using community meetings helps ensure the information reaches people through channels they are familiar with” (C1).

Community participants largely confirmed the accessibility of these traditional channels, noting that they are familiar and trusted sources of information. However, some participants expressed concern about the timeliness of information delivery. As one community member observed, “sometimes we get the information late, especially when it comes to when a project will start” (P5). Another participant added that “the meetings are useful, but they do not always give us enough notice or details” (P8). These findings suggest that while traditional communication approaches remain effective in reaching communities, delays and limited detail may reduce their overall effectiveness.

The continued relevance of traditional media and interpersonal networks for community-level engagement was evident in participant accounts.

4.5.2 Use of Digital and Media-Based Communication Platforms

In addition to traditional channels, corporate participants reported an increasing use of digital and media-based platforms to communicate CSR activities. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, as well as corporate websites, were identified as key tools for sharing CSR initiatives, enhancing visibility and demonstrating accountability to a wider public. One participant explained that “for visibility, we publish our CSR activities on our social media pages so that the public can see what we are doing” (C2). Another corporate participant noted that “digital platforms help us reach audiences beyond the immediate communities” (C4).

Community participants, however, reported mixed experiences with digital CSR communication. While younger stakeholders and those in urban areas indicated that they occasionally follow CSR activities online, older participants and those in rural communities reported limited access to, or awareness of, digital communications. As one participant stated, “not everyone is on social media, especially the older people in the community” (P10). Another noted that “we mostly hear about

projects through meetings, not online” (P6). These findings highlight disparities in access to digital communication and suggest that reliance on digital platforms alone may exclude certain stakeholder groups.

The use of combined traditional and digital communication approaches reflects broader CSR communication research, which emphasises the importance of multi-channel strategies for reaching diverse stakeholder audiences

4.5.3 Communication Gaps in Timing and Transparency

Despite the use of multiple communication channels, the findings reveal persistent concerns regarding communication timing, transparency and follow-up. Community participants frequently reported that information about project initiation, duration and scope was unclear or communicated too late. One participant explained that “sometimes the project just starts, and we hear about it after things have already been decided” (P7). Another participant expressed frustration with limited follow-up, stating that “after the announcement, we do not always receive updates on what is happening next” (P9).

These communication gaps were perceived as affecting trust and contributing to misunderstandings about the intentions and scope of CSR interventions. Community participants suggested that delayed or incomplete communication created the impression that companies prioritised publicity over meaningful engagement. This perception points to an imbalance between corporate-controlled messaging and the information needs of community stakeholders who seek clarity and inclusion in CSR processes.

Such concerns are consistent with findings from CSR communication studies in Ghana, which highlight that inconsistent updates and limited transparency can undermine credibility and weaken stakeholder trust (Osei-Kojo, 2023)

4.6 Stakeholder Engagement Processes

This section addresses the research objective examining how stakeholders are engaged in corporate social responsibility (CSR) processes within organisations operating in Ghana's oil and gas industry. The findings reveal that while companies emphasise stakeholder engagement as a core component of CSR implementation, the nature and depth of engagement vary considerably across stakeholder groups.

4.6.1 Stakeholder Engagement as Consultation Rather Than Participation

Corporate participants described stakeholder engagement as a necessary step undertaken prior to the implementation of CSR initiatives. From an organisational perspective, these engagements were presented as opportunities to inform communities, manage expectations and secure local support. However, community participants experienced these interactions differently, often characterising them as consultative rather than participatory.

Community members explained that while they are invited to meetings and asked for their views, such engagements rarely translate into meaningful influence over final project decisions. One participant noted that companies "usually come and inform us of what they want to do, and even though they ask for our views, the project itself doesn't really change" (P2). Another participant similarly observed that "we are consulted, but most of the time the decisions have already been taken before the meetings" (P6). These accounts suggest that engagement processes are perceived as largely informational, with limited opportunities for co-creation.

This pattern indicates that although companies recognise the importance of community legitimacy, they have yet to fully embrace participatory engagement practices that empower stakeholders to shape CSR outcomes. Such consultative approaches reflect broader stakeholder communication patterns in which organisations operate within one-way or limited two-way engagement

frameworks, rather than collaborative models that enable shared decision-making (Morsing & Schultz, 2006)

4.6.2 Selective Engagement with Community Opinion Leaders

The findings further show that stakeholder engagement is often targeted at recognised opinion leaders such as chiefs, assembly members, school heads and women’s leaders. Corporate participants argued that engaging these leaders promotes orderliness, cultural appropriateness and efficient communication. However, community participants highlighted limitations associated with this approach, particularly the exclusion of broader community voices.

Several community members expressed concern that engagement with leaders does not always translate into inclusive participation. One participant explained that “most of the time they talk to the chief or the assemblyman, but the community members don’t get to contribute directly” (P10). Another participant echoed this concern, noting that “when they meet only the leaders, the views of the youth and ordinary community members are often left out” (P11). These perspectives suggest that selective engagement may inadvertently restrict the diversity of viewpoints incorporated into CSR planning.

This engagement model shapes both the flow of information and the nature of participation, potentially reinforcing power imbalances within communities and limiting opportunities for inclusive dialogue during CSR decision-making.

4.6.3 Inconsistent Feedback Mechanisms

Participants also reported inconsistencies in feedback mechanisms across the companies studied. Corporate participants described the use of post-project reviews, community meetings and communication hotlines as avenues for gathering stakeholder feedback. In contrast, community

participants expressed frustration that feedback, although sometimes requested, is rarely acted upon.

One community participant explained that “sometimes they ask what we think after the project, but we don’t see changes based on our feedback” (P8). Another participant similarly stated that “they collect our views, but nothing really changes the next time” (P9). These accounts indicate that feedback mechanisms are often perceived as symbolic rather than functional.

Weak or inconsistent feedback systems may limit organisational learning and negatively affect stakeholder trust, particularly when communities feel their concerns are acknowledged but not addressed.

Evidence from this study suggests that effective participation requires actionable feedback loops rather than one-off consultations or information-gathering exercises.

4.7 Perceived Impact of CSR on Community Wellbeing

This section addresses the research objective examining how corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives affect community wellbeing within Ghana’s oil and gas industry. The findings indicate that CSR interventions have produced noticeable social, educational, economic and infrastructural benefits for beneficiary communities. However, participants also highlighted limitations relating to sustainability and long-term impact.

4.7.1 Social and Educational Outcomes of CSR Initiatives

Community participants widely acknowledged that CSR projects have delivered tangible social and educational benefits. Participants frequently referred to the renovation of school infrastructure, provision of learning materials, scholarship schemes and mentorship programmes as interventions that positively influenced educational environments and learner outcomes. One participant explained that the provision of educational resources “has really helped the children and improved

learning in the school” (P5). Another participant similarly noted that “the support for the school has motivated both teachers and students to take learning more seriously” (P3).

Many referenced renovated school blocks, provision of teaching materials, scholarships and mentorship programmes, which participants associated with improved learning environments and community pride.

4.7.2 Economic and Infrastructure Support

In addition to educational benefits, participants highlighted economic and infrastructural gains associated with CSR projects. Community members reported short-term employment opportunities for local artisans and youth during project implementation, as well as improvements in community infrastructure such as water systems, sanitation facilities and basic amenities. One participant explained that “when they came to construct the facility, some of our young men got work to do for some weeks, and it helped many families at that time” (P12). Another participant added that “the infrastructure projects made life easier for the community, even if it was not permanent employment” (P10).

Although many of these economic opportunities were temporary, participants noted that they contributed to feelings of inclusion and recognition. These findings suggest that CSR initiatives can support local development and community wellbeing when they respond to context-specific needs, even when impacts are short-term.

4.7.3 Limitations in Long-Term Impact and Sustainability

Despite the reported benefits, community participants raised concerns regarding the sustainability of some CSR interventions. Several participants indicated that projects lacked follow-up, maintenance arrangements or long-term partnerships, leading to the gradual decline of benefits over time. One participant noted that “the project was good, but after some time no one came back

to check on it, so now it is not functioning well” (P9). Another participant similarly observed that “after the project is handed over, there is usually no follow-up to see how it is being maintained” (P11).

These concerns suggest that while CSR initiatives provide immediate benefits, insufficient attention to sustainability may undermine their long-term value. Such limitations have been documented in Ghanaian CSR research, which highlights gaps in monitoring, evaluation and continuity as persistent challenges affecting the durability of CSR outcomes (Osei-Kojo, 2023). The absence of sustained engagement risks weakening community trust and diminishing the perceived impact of CSR interventions.

4.8 CSR and Stakeholder Trust

This section addresses the research objective examining how corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices influence stakeholder trust within Ghana’s oil and gas industry. The findings indicate that CSR initiatives play an important role in shaping trust and corporate credibility; however, the level of trust generated is closely moderated by communication practices and stakeholder perceptions of organisational intent.

4.8.1 CSR as a Contributor to Stakeholder Trust and Corporate Credibility

The findings demonstrate that CSR activities contribute positively to the development of stakeholder trust, particularly when initiatives are sustained and visibly address community needs. Corporate participants viewed CSR as a means of demonstrating commitment to social development and strengthening relationships with host communities. Community participants similarly associated consistent CSR engagement with perceptions of care and responsibility. One participant explained that “when they support the school and the community, it makes us trust that the company really thinks about us” (P3). Another participant echoed this sentiment, noting that

“their continuous support makes us feel the company is serious about helping the community” (P5).

These accounts suggest that trust is built when organisational actions align with stakeholder expectations and are perceived as genuine. Such findings reflect broader reputation scholarship which argues that trust and credibility develop through consistent and socially responsible behaviour over time (Fombrun, 1996). In this context, CSR functions as a relational mechanism through which organisations demonstrate reliability and concern for stakeholder welfare.

4.8.2 Trust Moderated by Communication Clarity and Consistency

While CSR initiatives contributed to positive perceptions, the findings indicate that stakeholder trust was strongly influenced by the clarity and timeliness of communication. Community participants reported higher levels of trust when they received regular updates and clear explanations regarding CSR projects. Conversely, delayed or unclear communication weakened confidence in organisational intentions. One participant stated that “we appreciate the projects, but sometimes the lack of updates makes us wonder what is happening” (P11). Another participant similarly noted that “when information is not clear, it creates doubt even if the project is good” (P7).

These responses indicate that CSR initiatives alone are insufficient to sustain trust without effective communication practices. Communication quality shapes how CSR activities are interpreted and valued by stakeholders, particularly in relation to transparency, consistency and the provision of clear information.

4.8.3 Distrust Linked to Perceived Publicity-Driven CSR

Despite the trust-building potential of CSR, some community participants expressed scepticism regarding organisational motives, particularly when CSR activities appeared to prioritise publicity

over substantive impact. Participants noted that extensive promotion of relatively minor initiatives on social media sometimes undermined perceptions of sincerity. One participant observed that “sometimes they make noise about small things, and it makes us feel like they are doing it for the cameras” (P2). Another participant similarly commented that “when too much attention is given to publicity, it raises questions about their real intentions” (P9).

These perceptions suggest that overemphasis on visibility may erode trust by creating impressions of image management rather than genuine social investment. Similar concerns were evident in this study, where participants expressed scepticism toward CSR initiatives perceived as symbolic or publicity-driven. The findings therefore indicate that communication strategies must balance visibility with authenticity to sustain stakeholder trust.

4.9 CSR and Corporate Reputation

This section addresses the research objective examining how corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices influence corporate reputation within Ghana’s oil and gas industry. The findings indicate that CSR initiatives play a significant role in shaping reputational perceptions among both corporate and community stakeholders. However, reputational gains were found to depend on visible impact, community endorsement and consistency in CSR delivery.

4.9.1 Reputational Enhancement through Visible CSR Impact

Corporate participants articulated that CSR initiatives contribute positively to corporate reputation by visibly demonstrating organisational commitment to community and national development. Participants emphasised that tangible projects such as schools, infrastructure and social programmes enhance brand image and public perception. One corporate participant noted that “people respect the company more when they see the projects, and it makes the brand look good”

(C4). Another participant similarly explained that “visible projects help people associate the company with development and responsibility” (C2).

Community participants confirmed that organisations with consistent and visible CSR activities were generally viewed more favourably. These findings suggest that reputational value is closely linked to the visibility and perceived usefulness of CSR interventions. This aligns with reputation management scholarship which argues that organisations build reputational capital when socially responsible behaviour is observable and meaningful to stakeholders (Fombrun, 1996).

4.9.2 Reputation Strengthened through Community Endorsement

The findings further indicate that community endorsement plays a critical role in reinforcing corporate reputation. Participants explained that positive narratives shared by respected community figures, such as chiefs and opinion leaders, significantly influence wider public perceptions of companies. One community participant stated that “when our chiefs and leaders speak well about the company, everyone sees them positively” (P1). Another participant added that “people trust what their leaders say, so their support makes a big difference to how the company is viewed” (P4).

These accounts highlight the importance of stakeholder approval and social validation in reputational construction. When CSR initiatives are endorsed by community leaders, organisations benefit from increased credibility and trust beyond the immediate project beneficiaries. This observation reflects core principles of Stakeholder Theory, which emphasises the role of stakeholder support in shaping organisational legitimacy and reputation (Freeman, 1984).

4.9.3 Reputational Risks Associated with Inconsistent CSR Delivery

Despite the reputational benefits of CSR, the findings reveal vulnerabilities when CSR initiatives are inconsistently implemented, delayed or misaligned with community priorities. Community

participants described situations where reputational goodwill declined due to stalled projects or lack of follow-up. One participant explained that “they started something good, but when it was not completed, people began to question their seriousness” (P7). Another participant similarly observed that “when promises are not fulfilled, trust and respect for the company reduce” (P10).

These experiences suggest that reputational gains from CSR are fragile and can be easily undermined by implementation gaps. Inconsistent delivery not only diminishes the perceived value of CSR initiatives but also raises doubts about organisational commitment. Such concerns are consistent with Ghanaian CSR research highlighting the reputational risks associated with unmet expectations and weak project continuity (Osei-Kojo, 2023). The findings therefore underscore the importance of consistency and accountability in sustaining positive corporate reputations.

4.9 Cross-Cutting Issues

Several cross-cutting issues emerged across the findings presented in this chapter. First, while corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives were generally perceived as beneficial, the depth and sustainability of their impact were strongly shaped by the nature and quality of communication. Transparent and timely communication consistently enhanced stakeholder trust, whereas limited or delayed information contributed to scepticism and uncertainty among community members.

Second, stakeholder engagement processes were largely experienced as consultative rather than collaborative. Although engagement meetings were common, community participants often perceived limited opportunities to influence final CSR decisions. This dynamic affected perceptions of fairness, inclusion and ownership of CSR initiatives. Third, sustainability concerns cut across multiple areas of analysis, with participants repeatedly highlighting the absence of structured follow-up, monitoring and long-term maintenance of projects. Collectively, these cross-

cutting issues illustrate how CSR strategy, communication and engagement practices interact to shape stakeholder experiences and interpretations.

4.10 Alignment with Existing Literature

The findings align closely with existing global and African CSR literature, reinforcing established arguments regarding the importance of communication, stakeholder engagement and strategic alignment in CSR practice. The reliance on both traditional and digital communication platforms reflects patterns observed in CSR communication research which emphasises the need for multi-channel approaches to accommodate diverse stakeholder groups.

Similarly, the predominance of consultative rather than participatory engagement mirrors findings by Osei-Kojo (2023), who argue that CSR-related engagement in Ghana often remains symbolic rather than empowering. The social and educational benefits described by community participants are consistent with the research findings that CSR initiatives in African contexts frequently prioritise community empowerment through education and social development. (Abebe, Mesele , Dessaiegn, & Worku , 2024)

Concerns regarding sustainability and follow-up also echo broader critiques in the literature, which highlight that CSR interventions often emphasise visibility and short-term outcomes at the expense of long-term impact (Osei-Kojo, 2023). Overall, the findings both support and extend existing research by providing context-specific insights into CSR practices within Ghana's downstream oil and gas industry.

4.11 Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have theoretical, managerial and policy implications. Theoretically, the findings reinforce Stakeholder Theory by demonstrating that stakeholder perceptions and

experiences play a central role in determining the perceived success of CSR initiatives. The study also supports Reputation Management Theory by showing that trust and corporate reputation are strengthened when CSR activities align with stakeholder expectations and are communicated transparently.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest the need for organisations to deepen participatory engagement processes and strengthen feedback mechanisms in order to enhance legitimacy and trust. Improved communication planning, clearer timelines and sustained follow-up mechanisms may further enhance the effectiveness and reputational value of CSR initiatives.

From a policy perspective, the findings point to the potential value of clearer regulatory guidelines on CSR reporting and implementation. Stronger frameworks could encourage organisations to adopt more transparent, structured and sustainable CSR practices, ensuring closer alignment with national development priorities and stakeholder expectations.

4.12 Summary

This chapter has presented and analysed the findings from interviews with corporate and community participants regarding corporate social responsibility practices within Ghana's oil and gas industry. The analysis demonstrated that while CSR initiatives contribute to social, educational and economic benefits, their long-term impact and trust-building potential are influenced by communication quality, stakeholder engagement practices and consistency in implementation. The chapter also highlighted areas of alignment with existing literature and theoretical perspectives. The next chapter presents a discussion of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings of the study, draws conclusions based on the analysis in Chapter Four, and offers recommendations for practice and future research. It synthesises how corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, communication practices and stakeholder engagement processes shape community perceptions, trust and corporate reputation within Ghana's oil and gas industry. The chapter also reflects briefly on the findings through the lens of Stakeholder Theory and Reputation Management Theory, highlighting the role of stakeholder relationships and consistent organisational behaviour in shaping legitimacy and reputation (Fombrun, 1996). In addition, the chapter situates the study's conclusions within existing CSR scholarship, particularly research on participation and engagement in Ghanaian contexts (Osei-Kojo, 2023), before presenting practical recommendations and directions for future research.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The first major finding of the study is that corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy development within the selected oil and gas companies is largely influenced by organisational priorities and regulatory expectations. This reflects the view that CSR encompasses economic, legal and ethical considerations within organisational decision-making (Carrol, 1991). While corporate participants indicated that CSR project selection is informed by community needs

assessments, community participants revealed that consultation is often limited to information sharing rather than genuine participation. This suggests a gap between corporate intentions and community experiences of engagement, a pattern also identified in Ghanaian CSR research that highlights symbolic rather than substantive stakeholder involvement (Osei-Kojo, 2023)

The findings further showed that companies rely on a combination of traditional communication methods and digital platforms to disseminate CSR information. Community meetings, radio announcements and engagement through traditional leaders were widely recognised and trusted by community members, while social media and corporate websites were used primarily to enhance public visibility. However, inconsistencies in the timing, clarity and follow-up of communication were evident, with community participants indicating that delayed or unclear information weakened trust despite the presence of CSR interventions.

Stakeholder engagement emerged as an essential but insufficiently practiced element of CSR implementation. Although corporate actors described engagement with chiefs and assembly members as integral to project execution, community respondents perceived these interactions as largely symbolic, with limited influence on final decisions. This misalignment between organisational actions and stakeholder expectations affected perceptions of fairness and inclusion and shaped broader assessments of company credibility.

The study also found that the consistency of CSR initiatives influenced community trust and perceptions of organisational reputation. Irregular or incomplete CSR projects reduced confidence in company commitments, reinforcing the view that reputation and trust are strengthened through predictable and sustained organisational behaviour. Finally, internal organisational factors such as leadership support and coordination were found to shape the effectiveness of CSR communication, with stakeholders associating timely and transparent communication with sincerity and credibility.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication within Ghana's oil and gas industry is not only a functional activity but a strategic process that shapes stakeholder relationships, trust and organisational reputation. While CSR initiatives are positioned as development-oriented, their effectiveness is ultimately determined by how stakeholders experience communication and engagement rather than by the projects themselves. The findings indicate that CSR communication practices which remain predominantly top-down and consultative constrain opportunities for meaningful dialogue and shared ownership of development interventions.

The study further concludes that corporate reputation is strengthened not merely by the presence of CSR activities, but by the consistency, transparency and credibility of the communication processes surrounding them. Where communication is unclear, delayed or perceived as publicity-driven, trust is weakened despite positive intentions. In contrast, when CSR communication aligns with stakeholder expectations and demonstrates accountability, it contributes to sustained legitimacy and reputational strength. This supports the central argument of Reputation Management Theory that organisational reputation is built through consistent behaviour that resonates with stakeholder values (Fombrun, 1996).

Overall, the study concludes that CSR strategy and communication within the sector must move beyond compliance and visibility towards more inclusive and relational approaches. Long-term reputational gains depend on organisations recognising stakeholders not merely as recipients of information, but as partners whose perspectives shape credible and sustainable CSR outcomes.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that oil and gas companies move beyond largely informational forms of stakeholder engagement towards more participatory approaches that allow community members to meaningfully influence CSR planning and implementation. Creating spaces for dialogue and shared decision-making may enhance community ownership of CSR initiatives and improve perceptions of fairness and inclusion.

The study also recommends that companies strengthen their CSR communication practices by adopting more proactive and transparent approaches. Engagement with communities should begin at the planning stage of CSR initiatives and be sustained throughout implementation through regular updates and feedback. Combining traditional communication channels, such as community meetings and engagement through local leadership, with appropriate digital platforms may improve inclusivity while maintaining organisational visibility.

In addition, companies should improve internal coordination among CSR, public relations and community engagement units to ensure consistency in messaging and implementation. Clear communication structures and shared responsibility may reduce delays, enhance credibility and support stronger relationships with host communities.

Finally, the study recommends that organisations institutionalise monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the sustainability and long-term impact of CSR initiatives. Regular follow-up and learning from past interventions may strengthen accountability, inform future CSR decisions and contribute to sustained trust and positive organisational reputation.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This study suggests several areas for future research. First, future studies could explore the perspectives of government regulatory institutions such as the Petroleum Commission and the

Environmental Protection Agency, as these bodies play a critical role in shaping CSR governance, compliance and accountability within the oil and gas sector. Including regulatory perspectives may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how CSR expectations are formulated and enforced.

Also, further research could examine how digital transformation is reshaping CSR communication practices in Ghana, particularly in relation to stakeholder access, transparency and participation. As communication technologies continue to evolve, understanding how different stakeholder groups engage with digital CSR communication may offer valuable insights into inclusivity and effectiveness.

In addition, longitudinal studies could be undertaken to assess how CSR communication practices influence stakeholder trust and corporate reputation over time. Such approaches would enable researchers to examine changes in perceptions, sustainability of CSR outcomes and the long-term implications of communication strategies.

Finally, comparative studies involving other sectors such as mining, manufacturing or telecommunications could provide broader insights into sector-specific differences in CSR practice and communication. Comparative research may help identify contextual factors that shape CSR implementation across industries within Ghana.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A. Interview Guide for Corporate Participants

Section 1: Introduction

- Introduce the researcher and purpose of the study.
- Assure confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.
- Seek consent for audio recording.

Section 2: Background Information

1. What is your role or position in the company?

- What is your current position or role in the company/community? (Please specify both your title and your main responsibilities.)
- How long have you been working in this organization or involved in CSR-related activities?
- What is your gender?
- What is your age range? (e.g., 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, 56 and above)
- How many years of professional experience do you have in this sector?

Section 3: CSR Strategy and Implementation

2. How does your organization decide which CSR projects to implement?

Probe: Are there specific criteria or community needs assessments involved?

3. What are the main objectives behind your CSR initiatives?

Probe: Do these objectives align with your company's broader strategy or sustainability goals?

4. How does leadership support CSR activities in your company?

Probe: What level of involvement do senior managers or directors have?

Section 4: CSR Communication

5. What tools or channels (e.g., social media, press releases, CSR reports, community events) are used to communicate CSR projects?

Probe: Why do you prefer these particular channels?

6. How do you ensure that messages about CSR reach your target stakeholders effectively?

Probe: How do you measure the effectiveness of these communication efforts?

7. What challenges do you face in communicating CSR activities?

Probe: How do you overcome these challenges?

Section 5: Stakeholder Engagement

8. How are communities or beneficiaries involved in CSR decision-making?

Probe: Do you consult them before, during, or after project implementation?

9. In what ways does your company receive feedback from stakeholders?

Probe: How is this feedback integrated into CSR planning?

Section 6: Reputational Outcomes

10. Do you believe CSR activities have enhanced your organization's reputation?

Probe: Can you give examples of how this improvement has manifested?

11. How do stakeholders respond to CSR initiatives in terms of trust and corporate image?

Section 7: Conclusion

12. What improvements would you recommend for CSR communication within the oil and gas sector?

13. Any additional thoughts or experiences you would like to share?

B. Interview Guide for Community Participants

Section 1: Introduction

- Introduce the researcher and explain the study's purpose.
- Emphasize voluntary participation and confidentiality.
- Seek consent for audio recording.

Section 2: Background Information

1. What is your relationship with the oil and gas company operating in your area?
2. How long have you been aware of or engaged in their CSR activities?

Section 3: Awareness and Perception of CSR Activities

3. What types of CSR projects has the company implemented in your community?

Probe: Which projects have benefited you most?

4. How do you get information about these CSR projects?

Probe: Through media, community leaders, or direct company communication?

5. In your opinion, how well does the company communicate about its CSR initiatives?

Section 4: Community Involvement and Feedback

6. Are community members consulted when CSR projects are planned or executed?

Probe: Can you describe any engagement meetings or consultations?

7. How do you or others in the community share feedback with the company about its CSR projects?

Section 5: Reputation and Impact

8. How has the company's involvement in CSR affected its reputation in your community?

Probe: Do people trust the company more because of these activities?

9. What improvements would you suggest to make CSR activities more impactful and transparent?

Section 6: Conclusion

10. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding CSR activities in your community?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Study Title:

Strategic CSR Communication for Reputation Management: Evidence from Ghana's
Oil and Gas Industry

Researcher:

Abigail Abbey

Graduate Student

University of Media, Arts and Communication – Institute of Journalism (UniMAC–
GIJ)

Purpose of the Study:

This study seeks to explore how oil and gas companies in Ghana communicate their
CSR activities and how such communications influence their reputation among
stakeholders.

Your Participation:

- You are invited to take part in a 30–45-minute interview.
- You will be asked questions about CSR activities, communication practices, and
perceptions of CSR impact.

Confidentiality:

- Your name will not appear in any publication or report. Instead, codes will be
used to ensure anonymity.

- Audio recordings will be securely stored and destroyed after the research is
completed.

Voluntary Participation:

- Your participation is voluntary.
- You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or
penalty.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no known risks associated with your participation. However, your insights will contribute to improving CSR communication practices and enhancing community relations in Ghana's oil and gas sector.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this study, please contact:

Abigail Abbey

Phone: 0246088737

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Study Title:

Strategic CSR Communication for Reputation Management: Evidence from Ghana's Oil and Gas Industry

I, the undersigned, acknowledge that:

- I have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- I understand that my participation is confidential and that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.
- I consent to the interview being audio-recorded for research purposes.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____