



THE EFFECT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BRAND IMAGE:

A STUDY OF KNUST

BY

IRENE SAKYIWAA-SIAW

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institution. I further declare that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Irene Sakyiwaa-Siaw

MAPRM 24025



10/12/25

Student

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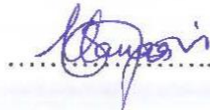
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Declaration by Supervisor

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertations laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC-GIJ).

Dr. Rebecca Baah-Ofori



10/12/25

Supervisor's Name

Signature

Date

ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly strategic component of higher education management, influencing how institutions engage stakeholders and build competitive reputations. This study examined the effect of CSR initiatives on the brand image of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Guided by Carroll's CSR Pyramid and Stakeholder Theory, the study assessed students' awareness and perceptions of CSR activities, the relationship between CSR and brand image, and the influence of specific CSR dimensions economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic on students' evaluations of the university.

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving a sample of 417 students selected proportionately across all colleges. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and logistic regression. Findings indicated high levels of awareness (67.1%) and positive perceptions (72.2%) of KNUST's CSR initiatives. CSR awareness and perception showed strong positive correlations with brand image ($r = 0.687$ and $r = 0.701$, respectively; $p < 0.001$). Logistic regression revealed that ethical, economic, and philanthropic responsibilities significantly predicted students' evaluation of brand image, with ethical responsibility emerging as the strongest predictor (AOR = 1.49, $p < 0.001$). Legal responsibility, while positive, was not statistically significant.

The study concludes that CSR serves as a strategic driver of institutional reputation and student loyalty at KNUST. Strengthening CSR communication, expanding student involvement, and aligning initiatives with national development goals can further enhance brand image. Recommendations for future research include exploring external stakeholder perspectives and conducting comparative studies across multiple universities.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the Almighty God and my family for their support in various ways in ensuring the successful completion of this project

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My profound gratitude first goes to the Almighty God for the life, strength, knowledge, and wisdom given to me throughout this study. Special thanks also go to my supervisor, Dr. Rebecca Baah-Ofori for her support and guidance throughout the course of this study. Moreover, I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues who helped me with my data collection. May the Almighty God richly bless you all.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CABE	College of Art and Built Environment
CANR	College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
CHS	College of Health Sciences
CHSS	College of Humanities and Social Sciences
COE	College of Engineering
COS	College of Science
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
IDL	Institute of Distance Learning
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter introduces the present study, which explores the influence of CSR initiatives on brand image in the context of a higher education institution, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). It begins with the background to the study and proceeds through the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. It also presents the scope, conceptual and theoretical framework, and culminates with an outline of the study's structure.

1.2 Background to the Study

In today's interconnected global economy, organizations are no longer evaluated solely on their financial performance or product quality. Increasingly, both consumers and stakeholders consider a firm's commitment to social responsibility, ethics, and sustainability when making decisions about whether to engage with or support that organization. This shift has placed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at the heart of strategic management and brand development worldwide. CSR refers to a company's voluntary efforts to operate ethically, contribute to economic development, and improve the quality of life of its workforce, the local community, and society at large (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Melo & Galan, 2011). Multinational corporations across Europe, North America, and Asia have institutionalized CSR as part of their brand identity, using social initiatives to build customer loyalty, boost employee morale, and mitigate reputational risk (Pereira et al., 2023).

Globally, CSR is now understood not just as a moral obligation but as a strategic tool for managing reputation and building strong brand equity. Research by Melo and Galan (2011) confirms that

organizations with high CSR visibility enjoy stronger brand value, greater customer trust, and improved market competitiveness. Similarly, the work of Zhang et al. (2020) shows that CSR enhances consumer satisfaction and improves organizational attractiveness, especially when CSR efforts are consistent and publicly visible. This global shift toward socially responsible branding has forced organizations of all sizes and across sectors to rethink how they relate to the public.

Although CSR practices originated in the corporate world, they have increasingly become relevant to non-profit and public institutions including universities. As centers of learning, innovation, and community development, universities are uniquely positioned to influence societal values. They do so not only through teaching and research but also through the social and environmental impact of their operations. The concept of CSR in higher education extends to activities such as providing scholarships, engaging in community service, supporting sustainability, fostering ethical research, and promoting inclusive learning environments. Scholars such as Yang et al. (2019) argue that universities that institutionalize CSR are more likely to attract committed staff, build community trust, and enhance their academic and public image.

In the evolving landscape of higher education, universities are increasingly expected to operate not just as academic institutions, but as socially responsible entities that contribute meaningfully to the broader society. This shift has led many institutions to adopt Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategic tool for reinforcing their legitimacy, enhancing public trust, and strengthening brand identity. CSR in higher education encompasses a range of activities, including ethical governance, community engagement, environmental sustainability, and student-centered policies such as financial aid and academic support (Pereira et al., 2023).

Globally, universities have institutionalized CSR to reinforce brand strength and stakeholder confidence. Institutions in the United States, Europe, and Asia have implemented campus

sustainability programs, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and community development partnerships as part of their CSR strategies (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). These efforts are often linked not only to ethical obligations, but also to strategic objectives such as improved reputation, student satisfaction, and stakeholder loyalty.

In Africa, and Ghana in particular, universities are increasingly engaging in CSR activities. However, these efforts are often fragmented or underreported, with limited frameworks to measure their effectiveness or impact on institutional branding (Yussif et al., 2022). Ghanaian universities such as the University of Ghana and the University for Development Studies engage in CSR initiatives through student scholarships, research for community development, and environmental campaigns. However, much of the existing CSR discourse in Ghana focuses on corporate entities, with little emphasis on how university-led CSR initiatives influence key internal stakeholders, especially students.

Students represent one of the most critical stakeholder groups within a university. They are directly affected by institutional policies and practices and often serve as informal ambassadors of the institution's image. Their perceptions of a university's social responsibility efforts can influence not only their loyalty and satisfaction, but also how they communicate their experiences to peers and the broader public. Yet, there is a lack of empirical data on how CSR activities undertaken by Ghanaian universities shape students' perceptions of brand image.

This study focuses on Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), a leading public university in Ghana, known for its academic excellence and community involvement. While KNUST implements several CSR-related initiatives including scholarships, medical outreach, and environmental sustainability campaigns there is limited research on how

these activities are perceived by students and how such perceptions contribute to the university's brand image.

By exploring how students understand, evaluate, and respond to KNUST's CSR initiatives, this study aims to fill a critical gap in the literature. It also provides data that can support institutional decision-making around stakeholder engagement and strategic branding.

1.3 Problem Statement

The adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increasingly become a strategic avenue for enhancing brand image in both the corporate and public sectors. Numerous studies affirm that CSR influences how organizations are perceived, promoting trust, loyalty, and emotional attachment to the brand (Guzmán & Davis, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). Despite this growing body of knowledge, the extent to which CSR contributes to brand image in non-profit settings, such as public universities, remains under-researched especially within sub-Saharan Africa.

KNUST has implemented a range of CSR activities including educational scholarships, sustainability campaigns, and community outreach programs. However, it remains unclear how these initiatives are perceived by key stakeholders such as students, staff, alumni, and the general public. While institutions invest significant resources into CSR initiatives, their impact on stakeholder perceptions and institutional brand equity is often not systematically evaluated (Pereira et al., 2023; Zayyad et al., 2021). This presents a major challenge: without evidence-based insights, CSR may be practiced as a symbolic gesture rather than a strategic branding tool.

Moreover, as Ghanaian public universities face increased competition, funding constraints, and global ranking pressures, a compelling and credible brand image becomes essential. The lack of contextual research assessing the link between CSR and brand image in such academic settings poses a knowledge gap and a strategic risk. This study therefore seeks to examine the nature and

effectiveness of CSR activities at KNUST and how these initiatives influence perceptions of the university's brand image among internal and external stakeholders.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective:

To examine the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on students' perceptions of brand image at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

1.4.2 Specific Objectives:

1. To identify CSR initiatives implemented by KNUST as perceived by students.
2. To examine students' perceptions of KNUST's CSR activities.
3. To determine the relationship between CSR initiatives and students' perceptions of the university's brand image.
4. To assess how different dimensions of CSR (economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic) influence students' evaluation of the university's brand image.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What CSR initiatives implemented by KNUST are recognized by students?
2. How do students perceive KNUST's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities?
3. What is the relationship between students' perceptions of CSR and their perception of the university's brand image?
4. How do the various dimensions of CSR (economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic) influence students' perceptions of KNUST's brand image?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives and conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed to test the relationship between CSR and students' perceptions of KNUST's brand image.

H₁: Economic CSR and Brand Image

- **H₀**: Economic CSR initiatives at KNUST have no significant relationship with students' perceptions of the university's brand image.
- **H₁**: Economic CSR initiatives at KNUST have a significant positive relationship with students' perceptions of the university's brand image.

H₂: Legal CSR and Brand Image

- **H₀₂**: Legal CSR initiatives at KNUST do not significantly influence students' perceptions of brand image.
- **H₂**: Legal CSR initiatives at KNUST significantly influence students' perceptions of brand image.

H₃: Ethical CSR and Brand Image

- **H₀₃**: Ethical CSR practices at KNUST have no significant effect on students' perceptions of the university's brand image.
- **H₃**: Ethical CSR practices at KNUST have a significant positive effect on students' perceptions of the university's brand image.

H₄: Philanthropic CSR and Brand Image

- **H₀₄**: Philanthropic CSR activities at KNUST do not significantly affect students' perceptions of the university's brand image.

- **H4:** Philanthropic CSR activities at KNUST have a significant positive effect on students' perceptions of the university's brand image.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This research is significant in several respects. First, it contributes to the academic discourse on CSR in public universities, a relatively underexplored area compared to corporate organizations (Ali et al., 2020; Bhattacharya et al., 2021). By investigating the impact of CSR on brand image at KNUST, this study extends the boundaries of CSR research from the commercial sector into higher education thereby adding contextual value to an already growing global discussion.

Second, the study will provide actionable insights to university management, particularly in designing CSR strategies that align with brand identity and stakeholder expectations. As Zhang et al. (2020) argued, institutions with authentic CSR practices are more likely to enjoy stakeholder loyalty and reputational resilience. Understanding which CSR dimensions resonate most with KNUST's stakeholders can help management prioritize initiatives that enhance visibility, trust, and public goodwill.

Third, the findings will benefit policymakers and education sector planners. In an era where public funding is limited and brand image is crucial for attracting grants, partnerships, and international students, knowing the strategic value of CSR in branding becomes essential. Lastly, the study will contribute to literature development in Ghana and West Africa, where context-specific CSR-brand relationships in public education remain largely undocumented.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study is geographically and institutionally limited to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana. It focuses on examining the effects of CSR initiatives undertaken by the university on its perceived brand image. The target population

includes both internal stakeholders (students, faculty, and administrative staff) and selected external stakeholders (community leaders, alumni, and partner organizations). The CSR dimensions to be examined include legal, ethical, philanthropic, and environmental activities. While the study explores perception and brand outcomes, it does not assess financial performance or student enrollment as CSR outcomes.

1.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the study by contextualizing the growing relevance of CSR in higher education, particularly within the Ghanaian context. It established the research gap regarding the limited understanding of how CSR influences brand image in universities and justified the need for this investigation at KNUST. The research objectives and questions were clearly defined to guide the study's focus, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks were outlined to underpin the study's direction. With a firm foundation established, the next chapter reviews existing literature on CSR, brand image, stakeholder perception, and related empirical studies to further inform the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing theories and empirical studies that inform the present research on the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on brand image, specifically in the context of higher education institutions like KNUST. The review is guided by the study's specific objectives:

1. To identify CSR initiatives implemented by the university;
2. To examine stakeholder perceptions of these initiatives;
3. To analyze the relationship between CSR and brand image; and
4. To explore how different CSR dimensions affect brand perception.

The literature draws from global, regional, and Ghanaian experiences, highlighting both convergences and context-specific insights. The chapter ends with a summary of key knowledge gaps and justifications for the current study.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 CSR Initiatives Implemented by Institutions

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a defining feature of modern organizational strategy across a wide range of sectors. In the banking industry, CSR initiatives typically include financial literacy education, micro-lending schemes for disadvantaged populations, and eco-friendly banking services such as paperless transactions and green loans. For instance, major financial institutions in Nigeria and South Africa have integrated CSR into their core business

operations, using social investments to build customer loyalty and comply with regulatory expectations (Ali et al., 2020).

In the mining sector, CSR is often framed around environmental restoration, infrastructure development, and host-community support. Mining companies operating in Ghana, such as Newmont and AngloGold Ashanti, invest in local education, health centers, water supply systems, and livelihood enhancement programs to maintain social license to operate (Amponsah-Tawiah & Dartey-Baah, 2011). These initiatives are critical in reducing community tensions and aligning extractive practices with long-term development goals.

Hospitals and healthcare institutions also participate in CSR, particularly through community health outreach, disease screening programs, and subsidized services for vulnerable groups. Many teaching hospitals globally organize vaccination campaigns, blood donation drives, and public health education as part of their social mission.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), though resource-constrained, often engage in CSR in localized and informal ways. These include community sponsorships, employee welfare, and environmentally conscious production. In Ghana, Boateng (2022) found that CSR among SMEs improved customer loyalty, community goodwill, and brand competitiveness.

Educational institutions, especially universities, increasingly embrace CSR as a way to fulfill their societal mandate beyond teaching and research. Within higher education, CSR encompasses student financial aid, staff development, environmental stewardship, community engagement, and research that addresses local and global social challenges (Pereira et al., 2023). CSR in universities is no longer limited to ad hoc philanthropic acts but is gradually being integrated into institutional strategic plans, policies, and public reporting frameworks.

Globally, universities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia embed CSR into their operational and academic cultures. For example, Harvard University and Oxford University publish annual sustainability reports, support diversity and inclusion programs, and engage in local community development. These institutions often adopt green building designs, carbon reduction targets, and ethical investment policies as part of their CSR portfolios (Bhattacharya et al., 2021).

In Africa, universities have begun incorporating CSR through partnerships with NGOs, community-oriented research, and inclusive access policies. However, CSR practices in many African universities remain fragmented and under-documented. According to Partalidou et al. (2020), institutional CSR in African higher education is often reactive responding to donor interests or government mandates, rather than proactive and strategic.

In Ghana, public universities like the University of Ghana, University for Development Studies (UDS), and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) engage in a range of CSR activities. These include offering scholarships to needy students, conducting rural health outreach, promoting sustainability on campus, and engaging in pro-poor research. Yussif et al. (2022) noted that while universities such as UDS and C.K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences participate in community development and social impact activities, many still lack clearly defined CSR policy documents and strategic frameworks. Consequently, the full impact of these initiatives on institutional branding, stakeholder engagement, and public trust remains under-researched.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on how students, one of the most visible internal stakeholders perceive CSR initiatives at KNUST and whether those perceptions influence their view of the university's brand.

In the Sub-Saharan African context, CSR in higher education often emerges out of necessity rather than strategic branding. Boateng (2022) noted that many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ghana engage in CSR practices focused on environmental responsibility, social contribution, and customer satisfaction. When adapted to universities, these translate to environmentally sustainable infrastructure, public health outreach, scholarship schemes, and disaster relief efforts. However, these initiatives are often poorly documented or lacking formal policy direction.

At KNUST, anecdotal and administrative records suggest the university engages in CSR through activities such as rural medical outreach, technology transfer programs, scholarship funding for disadvantaged students, and environmental preservation projects such as tree-planting and waste management. Alexander et al. (2014) documented similar activities across public institutions in Ghana, emphasizing that many are informal or leadership-driven rather than integrated into institutional strategy.

While these efforts may reflect genuine social concern, the lack of structured evaluation frameworks limits their strategic impact. Srivastava (2019) cautioned that without internal monitoring, CSR becomes symbolic rather than transformational. Therefore, understanding the scope, consistency, and intentionality behind CSR efforts particularly at KNUST is essential to gauge their role in shaping institutional identity.

Include a subsection on the impact of CSR initiatives for the various organisations. Depending on the direction of studies you review, You may find that CSR impacts, for example, sales, brand image, corporate reputation, customer loyalty, etc. Then you could include any studies that speak specifically to the impact of CSR on higher education institutions. (Where the brand issue is underexplored, it easily becomes your research gap)

2.2.2 Stakeholders' Perceptions of CSR Practices

Stakeholder perceptions are critical in assessing CSR effectiveness because they influence how CSR efforts are received and whether they translate into favorable brand outcomes. Araujo et al. (2023) found that when CSR initiatives align with stakeholder values, they foster emotional connections that enhance satisfaction and long-term commitment. In contrast, misaligned or poorly communicated CSR activities may be perceived as insincere or tokenistic.

In Ghana, research by Amoako et al. (2024) revealed that stakeholders including customers, staff, and community members respond more positively to CSR initiatives that are visible, relevant, and consistent. For instance, educational sponsorship, waste reduction programs, and health interventions generated more goodwill than internal compliance efforts. Salifu (2023), studying the telecommunications sector, demonstrated that when CSR was perceived as community-centered rather than profit-driven, it significantly improved brand loyalty and stakeholder advocacy.

In the academic sector, stakeholder expectations include inclusive access to education, staff empowerment, research integrity, and contribution to community development. While prior studies indicate that stakeholder perceptions of CSR can vary depending on their roles, interests, and proximity to an organization (Guzmán & Davis, 2017; Araujo et al., 2023), there is limited research exploring whether such differences exist among university stakeholders in the Ghanaian context. In particular, there is a need to examine whether internal stakeholders, such as students, faculty, and staff perceive CSR differently from external groups, including alumni, local community members, and institutional partners. Existing literature emphasizes that stakeholders engage with CSR activities based on their personal experiences, values, and expected benefits (Zayyad et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important for this study to explore whether these differences are reflected at

KNUST and how they influence the overall perception of the university's brand. By allowing the data to speak to these differences, the research aims to uncover whether stakeholder groupings shape how CSR is understood and valued.

However, as noted by Guzmán and Davis (2017), perceptions are also shaped by how well CSR activities are communicated. A well-executed initiative may go unnoticed if stakeholders are not informed or engaged in the process. This underscores the need for universities like KNUST to maintain transparency and participatory communication in their CSR delivery.

By exploring stakeholder perceptions, this study provides a diagnostic lens to evaluate whether KNUST's CSR efforts align with the expectations and values of its key audiences.

2.2.3 The Relationship Between CSR and Brand Image

Brand image has been a widely studied concept in marketing and organizational behavior, particularly as it relates to consumer perception and institutional identity. According to Keller (1993), brand image refers to “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (p. 3). These associations may include thoughts, feelings, experiences, and symbolic meanings attached to the brand name.

Aaker (1996) expands this by stating that brand image is “a set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way, that consumers hold about a brand.” These associations can be functional (e.g., quality, performance) or emotional (e.g., trust, admiration).

Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) describe brand image as the sum of impressions, beliefs, and attitudes that stakeholders form based on their direct or indirect interactions with the organization. They emphasize that brand image is not merely projected but co-created through stakeholder engagement and experience.

In a university context, Curtis, Abratt, Minor, and Rhoads (2009) assert that brand image encompasses both academic reputation and social responsibility, influenced by teaching quality, community engagement, alumni visibility, and ethical behavior.

For the purposes of this study, brand image is understood as the collective perception comprising emotional, cognitive, and experiential associations that stakeholders have about KNUST based on its actions, identity, and CSR performance. This study adopts Keller's (1993) definition due to its emphasis on stakeholder memory and associative meaning, which aligns with the research objective of examining how CSR shapes the mental picture and emotional connection stakeholders have with the university.

In higher education, it encompasses values such as academic excellence, social relevance, ethical conduct, and innovation. A strong brand image fosters trust, student recruitment, alumni engagement, and organizational resilience.

While there is an expanding body of literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its brand-related effects, relatively few studies have investigated the direct relationship between CSR and brand image especially in the higher education sector. Much of the existing research focuses on how CSR contributes to broader outcomes such as customer satisfaction, corporate reputation, brand loyalty, or market valuation (Melo & Galan, 2011; Araújo et al., 2023; Kodua et al., 2017). For instance, Melo and Galan (2011) found that CSR activities improved both tangible and intangible brand assets, while Araújo et al. (2023) demonstrated that CSR influences student satisfaction when linked to ethical and environmental commitments. Similarly, Alexander et al. (2014) and Kodua et al. (2017) observed that ethical and philanthropic CSR efforts positively influenced organizational reputation and customer loyalty, particularly in service-based sectors.

However, few studies establish a direct causal or correlational link between CSR and brand image as defined in this study. One notable exception is the work by He and Lai (2014), who examined how various CSR dimensions affect both the functional and symbolic aspects of brand image. They found that legal CSR enhances functional brand perceptions (e.g., reliability, professionalism), while ethical CSR improves symbolic associations such as trust and integrity. Their findings provide a framework for exploring CSR's nuanced impact on how an institution is emotionally and cognitively perceived by stakeholders.

Given this gap, the present study defines brand image as the set of associations and emotional impressions that stakeholders hold about KNUST based on its actions and social responsibility performance, following Keller's (1993) conception. This operational definition allows the study to assess how CSR initiatives contribute to shaping perceptions of the university's brand, beyond just satisfaction or loyalty.

CSR not only strengthens existing perceptions but also buffers negative publicity. Chen et al. (2021) emphasized that institutions with consistent CSR track records are more resilient during crises. Stakeholders are more likely to defend and support such organizations, attributing temporary issues to exceptions rather than systemic flaws.

At KNUST, where brand image is tied to both academic output and social visibility, CSR initiatives can serve as critical tools to enhance perception. This study explores this relationship from the viewpoint of diverse stakeholders to determine whether the university's social investments translate into stronger emotional and reputational equity.

2.2.4 Influence of CSR Dimensions on Brand Image

CSR is commonly categorized into four main dimensions: economic/legal, ethical, philanthropic, and environmental. Each dimension plays a unique role in shaping how institutions are perceived.

- **Legal and Economic CSR** ensures compliance with regulations and financial integrity. While necessary, these tend to have a limited emotional appeal (He & Lai, 2014). For universities, this includes fair admissions processes, ethical use of public funds, and transparency in procurement.
- **Ethical CSR** addresses integrity, fairness, and academic honesty. Singh and Misra (2021) argue that ethical practices build trust and internal cohesion. In educational settings, this includes inclusive policies, plagiarism control, and gender equity in leadership and resource access.
- **Philanthropic CSR** involves voluntary contributions such as scholarships, community service, and infrastructural support. Studies by Srivastava (2019) and Kodua et al. (2017) confirm that these efforts resonate well with public audiences and significantly enhance goodwill.
- **Environmental CSR** includes energy conservation, green infrastructure, and pollution control. Alam and Zaman (2021) showed that stakeholders especially youth value environmental responsibility and associate it with visionary leadership and institutional credibility.

At KNUST, stakeholders may differentially value these dimensions. Understanding which dimensions most strongly influence brand image allows institutions to prioritize resources and messaging for maximum reputational gain.

2.3 Summary and Research Gap

From the literature reviewed, it is evident that CSR contributes positively to several brand-related outcomes such as customer loyalty, corporate reputation, market value, and stakeholder satisfaction (Melo and Galan, 2011; Araujo et al., 2023; Kodua et al., 2017). However, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies that examine the direct relationship between CSR and brand image, particularly in a structured and measurable way. While constructs like satisfaction and loyalty may influence brand image indirectly, they do not fully capture the emotional and cognitive associations that define brand image in theory and practice (Keller, 1993).

This gap is especially relevant in the context of higher education institutions, where brand image plays a crucial role in attracting students, maintaining alumni support, and fostering community trust. In Ghana, although public universities engage in various CSR activities such as scholarship provision, environmental campaigns, and outreach programs, little is known about how these efforts influence stakeholder perceptions of the university's brand.

Therefore, this study aims to fill that knowledge gap by examining the direct effect of CSR on brand image at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). It focuses on how students perceive different CSR dimensions and how these perceptions shape their view of the institution's identity and brand.

2.4 Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: Carroll's Corporate Social Responsibility Pyramid and Stakeholder Theory. These theories are complementary in that one explains the dimensions of CSR, while the other addresses the audiences or groups to whom CSR

is directed. Together, they provide a more holistic understanding of how CSR initiatives might influence stakeholder perceptions of brand image.

2.4.1 Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility

The CSR Pyramid was developed by Archie B. Carroll in 1991 as a framework to understand the multifaceted nature of corporate responsibility. According to Carroll, CSR comprises four layers of responsibility that organizations must fulfill in a hierarchical order: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic.

- **Economic responsibilities** involve being profitable and financially viable.
- **Legal responsibilities** refer to obeying laws and regulations.
- **Ethical responsibilities** extend beyond mere compliance and focus on doing what is right, fair, and just.
- **Philanthropic responsibilities** are voluntary efforts to improve societal well-being, such as charitable donations or community development.

Assumptions of the theory include the idea that businesses have responsibilities beyond profit-making and that these responsibilities are interrelated but ranked in importance, with economic and legal being foundational.

The CSR Pyramid has been widely used in both corporate and academic settings to structure assessments of CSR performance. For example, Kodua et al. (2017) applied Carroll's framework to examine the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty in Ghana's telecommunications industry. Similarly, He and Lai (2014) used the model to analyze how each CSR dimension impacts different facets of brand image.

Despite its utility, critics argue that the pyramid reflects a Western, hierarchical perspective that may not always align with values in non-Western or developing countries (Crane and Matten, 2004). Others point out that it overemphasizes philanthropy and understates environmental responsibility, which has become a key CSR pillar in recent years.

Nevertheless, the model remains useful in categorizing CSR initiatives, especially in empirical research where dimensions need to be operationalized and measured. In this study, Carroll's framework provides a practical basis for assessing KNUST's CSR activities and how stakeholders respond to each dimension in shaping brand perceptions.

2.4.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was introduced by Edward Freeman in 1984, challenging the traditional shareholder-centric view of organizational purpose. It posits that organizations must consider the interests of all stakeholders who are affected by or can affect the organization's operations. These include employees, customers, suppliers, communities, governments, and shareholders.

The core assumption is that businesses do not operate in isolation and must create value for multiple stakeholder groups to remain sustainable and legitimate. Organizations that engage stakeholders transparently and equitably are more likely to build trust, loyalty, and long-term support.

Stakeholder Theory has been frequently applied in CSR and branding literature. For example, Guzmán and Davis (2017) used it to study how stakeholder engagement in CSR influences brand equity, while Zayyad et al. (2021) examined how brand credibility mediates the CSR–stakeholder trust relationship in service organizations.

However, the theory has been critiqued for being normative rather than predictive. It tells organizations what they should do, but provides limited guidance on how to prioritize conflicting stakeholder interests. Additionally, it lacks clear metrics for evaluating stakeholder value, which can complicate empirical application.

Despite these limitations, Stakeholder Theory is highly relevant to this study because brand image is formed through the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups. Since KNUST interacts with students, staff, alumni, and communities, understanding how CSR influences these groups is central to the research question.

2.4.3 Justification for Using Both Theories

While each theory offers useful insights on its own, neither fully captures the interplay between CSR actions and stakeholder perception when applied in isolation. Carroll's CSR Pyramid provides a structured way to categorize CSR activities but does not account for how different stakeholders may interpret or prioritize those activities. Conversely, Stakeholder Theory explains why stakeholder perspectives matter, but it does not specify what dimensions of CSR stakeholders might care about.

Combining both theories allows the study to assess:

1. The types of CSR initiatives implemented (Carroll), and
2. The perceptions of different stakeholder groups (Freeman) and how those shape brand image.

This theoretical integration enhances the study's explanatory power and aligns well with its objective to examine how various CSR dimensions influence brand image through stakeholder lenses.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a refined conceptual framework grounded in Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (Carroll, 1991) and Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984). The framework seeks to explain the pathway through which CSR initiatives influence institutional brand image, focusing specifically on how CSR shapes stakeholders' perceptions and trust in the institution.

The conceptual flow is as follows:

1. **CSR Activities:** KNUST implements Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives across economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions. These actions represent the independent variable in the model.
2. **Positive Stakeholder Perceptions:** When stakeholders become aware of these CSR activities and view them as credible, authentic, and beneficial, they form positive perceptions of the university's commitment to social responsibility.
3. **Trust:** These favorable perceptions foster emotional engagement and build trust. Stakeholders who perceive the university as socially responsible are more likely to view it as ethical, transparent, and dependable.
4. **Brand Image:** Trust, in turn, shapes the brand image of the institution. The more stakeholders trust KNUST due to its socially responsible actions, the more favorable their mental and emotional associations with the university become. This reinforces a strong, positive brand image.

Although satisfaction and reputation are important factors often linked to CSR and branding, they are not directly modeled here to maintain clarity and focus on the most essential constructs.

Instead, they are discussed narratively in this study as secondary outcomes or moderating variables in stakeholder-brand relationships.

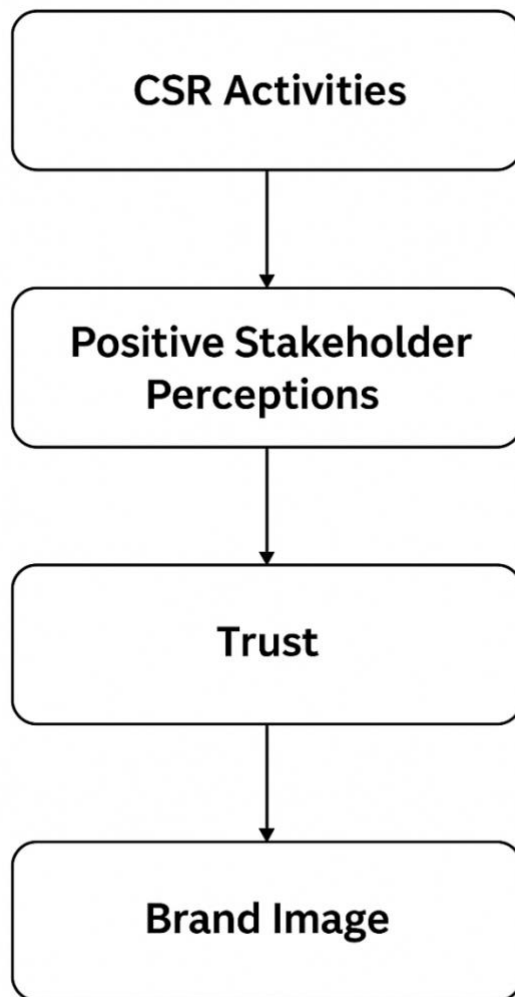


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: CSR and Brand Image of KNUST

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter critically reviewed existing literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its relationship with brand image, with a particular focus on higher education institutions. It explored conceptual definitions and dimensions of CSR, the theoretical frameworks underpinning CSR and brand building namely, Carroll's CSR Pyramid and Stakeholder Theory and the key constructs relevant to the study, including stakeholder perception, satisfaction, trust, and brand image. Empirical studies from global, African, and Ghanaian contexts were examined, highlighting the varied ways in which CSR initiatives influence institutional reputation and stakeholder loyalty.

While numerous studies affirm the positive influence of CSR on outcomes such as customer loyalty, reputation, and satisfaction, there remains a notable gap in literature directly examining how CSR shapes brand image in the context of public universities in Ghana. Few studies have focused on the higher education sector, and fewer still have centered on student perceptions as a primary lens through which CSR is evaluated. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how KNUST's CSR initiatives influence students' perception of the university's brand image. The next chapter outlines the methodology adopted to empirically explore this relationship.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted to investigate the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand image within the context of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). It outlines the research design, target population, sampling technique, data collection instruments, and methods of data analysis. The chapter also provides justification for the chosen methods in relation to the study's objectives and conceptual framework. By detailing the systematic procedures used to collect, analyze, and interpret data, this chapter ensures the reliability, validity, and replicability of the study's findings.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand image at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). A quantitative design allows for the objective collection of numerical data that can be analyzed using statistical methods to determine patterns, correlations, and predictions. It is suitable for testing hypotheses and answering questions that require measurable, quantifiable variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A cross-sectional approach enables the researcher to collect data at a single point in time, which is efficient for studying attitudes and perceptions across a large population.

This design is also informed by the desire to generalize findings from a sample to the broader student population of KNUST. The quantitative method provides a structured approach to analyzing the relationship between different CSR dimensions economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic and how they influence brand image from the students' perspective.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The study targets the entire student population of KNUST, which, according to the institution's 2024 statistical report, comprises approximately 65,000 students across undergraduate and postgraduate levels (KNUST Basic Statistics, 2024). Given the study's focus on perceptions, students form a key stakeholder group whose experiences and observations are critical in evaluating CSR outcomes and institutional brand identity.

To ensure fair and proportionate representation, the study will use stratified random sampling. The student population was first divided into strata based on academic faculties: Engineering, Applied Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health Sciences, and Art and Built Environment. Within each stratum, proportionate simple random sampling was applied to select participants in numbers reflective of each faculty's total enrollment.

Using Yamane's (1967) formula for determining sample size from a finite population, the appropriate sample for this study was calculated based on the total student population of KNUST, estimated at 65,000 as of the 2024 academic year. The formula is stated as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size (65,000)
- e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting into the formula:

$$n = \frac{65000}{1 + 65000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{65000}{163.5}$$

$$n = 397.5$$

To account for a possible 5% non-response rate, the adjusted sample size is:

$$5\% \text{ of } 397.5 = 19.8$$

$$397.5 + 19.8 = 417.3$$

Hence, a total sample size of approximately 417 students was estimated for the study. This adjustment strengthens statistical reliability and minimizes sampling error.

3.4 Sampling Technique

Given the large and diverse student population of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), this study adopted a stratified random sampling technique to ensure equitable representation across all academic faculties (colleges). Stratified sampling is appropriate when the population is heterogeneous and naturally divided into subgroups or strata. It enables proportional representation, reduces sampling bias, and increases the accuracy and generalizability of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

At KNUST, the total enrollment for the 2024–2025 academic year is 80,334 students (KNUST Basic Statistics, 2024). The student body is distributed across seven main academic colleges:

- College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS)
- College of Health Sciences (CHS)
- Institute of Distance Learning (IDL)

- College of Science (COS)
- College of Engineering (COE)
- College of Art and Built Environment (CABE)
- College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR)

Using Yamane’s (1967) formula and adjusting for a 5% non-response rate, the final sample size is calculated as 417 students. This sample is proportionally allocated across the seven colleges based on their official enrollment figures, as outlined in the table below:

Table 1: Proportionate distribution of sample size

College	Enrollment	Proportion (%)	Sample Size (n = 417)
CHSS	19,700	24.53%	102
CHS	11,238	13.99%	58
IDL	11,738	14.61%	61
COS	11,573	14.41%	60
COE	10,591	13.18%	55
CABE	8,892	11.07%	46
CANR	6,602	8.22%	35
Total	80,334	100%	417

After determining the proportional allocation for each college, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents within the respective strata. In colleges where complete student lists were available, the research team obtained the lists from the academic offices and applied random-number generation to identify participants. In colleges where full lists were not accessible, the sampling frame was constructed at the lecture-hall level. Lecture halls or tutorial groups were randomly selected, and students who met the eligibility criteria were approached and recruited using simple random selection within those groups.

This two-stage procedure proportional stratification followed by simple random sampling within each stratum ensured fair representation of all colleges and preserved the principles of randomness. It also allowed the study to capture possible variations in students’ awareness and perceptions of CSR and brand image across different academic disciplines.

Table 2: Multi-Stage Stratified Sampling Allocation by College and Year Level

College	Total Enrollment	% of Total Population	Proportional Sample Size (n = 417)	Year 1 (34.9%)	Year 2 (21.9%)	Year 3 (21.7%)	Year 4 (20.3%)
CHSS	19,700	24.5%	102	36	22	22	21
CHS	11,238	14.0%	58	20	13	13	12
COS	11,573	14.4%	60	21	13	13	12
IDL	11,738	14.6%	61	21	13	13	13
COE	10,591	13.2%	55	19	12	12	11
CABE	8,892	11.1%	46	16	10	10	10
CANR	6,602	8.2%	35	12	8	8	7
Total	80,334	100%	417	145	91	91	90

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

The study used a structured questionnaire designed to reflect the proposed conceptual framework, capturing the sequential relationships between CSR awareness, stakeholder perceptions, satisfaction, trust, and brand image. The instrument consisted of five major sections:

1. Demographic Information

- Captures age, gender, academic year, and college.

2. Awareness of KNUST's CSR Activities

- This section assessed whether students are aware of CSR initiatives under the four dimensions defined by Carroll (1991): economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic.
- Items included statements such as:
 - “I am aware that KNUST provides scholarships to financially needy students.”
 - “I am aware that KNUST participates in environmental sustainability campaigns.”
- Responses were measured on a yes/no or Likert scale (1–5) for frequency of awareness.

3. Perception of CSR Activities

- This section evaluated how students perceive the quality and sincerity of KNUST's CSR initiatives.
- Example items:
 - “KNUST is genuinely committed to ethical practices.”
 - “The university's community outreach reflects a strong social commitment.”
- Measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree).

4. Satisfaction and Trust

- This section assessed students' level of satisfaction and trust in the university as influenced by CSR activities.
- Example items:
 - “KNUST’s CSR activities make me feel proud to be a student here.”
 - “The university can be trusted to act in the best interest of students.”
- 5-point Likert scale.

5. Brand Image

- The final section measured the students' perception of the university's brand image shaped by CSR, satisfaction, and trust.
- Example items:
 - “KNUST is a reputable institution known for doing good.”
 - “I would recommend KNUST to others because of its social impact.”
- Likert scale response format.

All items were adapted from validated CSR, brand, and stakeholder perception measurement tools found in prior literature (e.g., Araujo et al., 2023; He & Lai, 2014) and were pretested for internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores of 0.70 and above will be used to confirm reliability (Pallant, 2020).

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection adopted a dual-mode approach to maximize response rates and ensure inclusivity across various student groups at KNUST. The target population for this study was students only, as they are the primary stakeholders whose perceptions of KNUST's CSR initiatives and brand image are being assessed.

- **Online Distribution:** A Google Forms version of the questionnaire was shared through official KNUST student mailing lists, faculty platforms, WhatsApp class groups, and student association portals. Each online participant was required to provide a unique, anonymous code (e.g., first three letters of their surname and last four digits of their student ID) to prevent duplication.
- **Paper-Based Distribution:** Printed questionnaires were distributed in selected lecture halls, libraries, and student lounges across faculties. Trained student research assistants supervised this process to ensure one-time participation per respondent. Paper forms also collected the same anonymous code used in the online survey for cross-verification and de-duplication.

To prevent duplicate submissions, responses from both modes were cross-checked using the anonymous participant code. Any matching entries were flagged and one version (typically the most complete or earliest) was retained. This approach safeguarded data integrity while preserving anonymity.

3.7 Data Analysis Methods

Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS version 28.0. Analysis occurred in two main phases:

3.7.1 Descriptive Statistics

- Frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized respondent demographics, perceived CSR dimensions, and brand image scores.
- These helped profile the sample and offered an overview of general perceptions and response tendencies.

3.7.2 Inferential Statistics

To test the formulated hypotheses, the following inferential statistical methods were employed:

- **Pearson Correlation Analysis:** This was used to determine the direction and strength of the bivariate relationships between students' perceptions of the four CSR dimensions (economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic) and their perception of KNUST's brand image.
- **Multiple Linear Regression Analysis:** This model identified which CSR dimensions significantly predict students' perception of brand image. It also revealed the relative contribution of each CSR component to the overall perception of the university's brand image. The outcome of the regression model directly informed the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses stated above.

These methods were aligned with prior CSR studies (e.g., He & Lai, 2014; Pereira et al., 2023) and were suitable for exploring how independent variables (CSR dimensions) influence a dependent variable (brand image) in a university setting.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was upheld at every stage of the research. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was sought from the KNUST Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained digitally or in writing. Respondents were assured

of anonymity, and all data was securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

No personal identifiers were collected, and results were reported in aggregate form to ensure confidentiality. Participants had the freedom to decline or discontinue participation without penalty.

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodological approach adopted for examining the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand image at KNUST. It described the research design, target population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, and methods of data analysis. The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey strategy, with stratified random sampling ensuring fair representation of students across all academic colleges. The questionnaire was designed to measure awareness, perception, satisfaction, trust, and brand image, aligning with the study's conceptual framework. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analysis were identified as the key statistical tools to test the hypotheses and examine the influence of CSR dimensions on brand image. This methodological foundation ensures that the data collected will be valid, reliable, and suitable for addressing the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of the 417 respondents, the mean age was 22.8 years (SD = 2.6), indicating that most participants were young adults typical of university students. A nearly equal gender distribution was observed, with males (52.0%) slightly more than females (48.0%). The vast majority were undergraduate students (85.1%), with only 14.9% enrolled in postgraduate programmes. Regarding academic year, respondents were distributed as Year 1 (34.9%), Year 2 (21.9%), Year 3 (21.7%), and Year 4 (20.3%), ensuring balanced representation across study levels. The proportional representation across colleges shows that the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) accounted for the highest proportion (24.5%) of respondents, followed by the Institute of Distance Learning (14.6%), College of Science (14.4%), and College of Health Sciences (13.9%). The College of Engineering (13.2%), CAFE (11.0%), and CANR (8.4%) constituted smaller but proportionally representative segments. More than half of participants (54.9%) resided on-campus, while 45.1% lived off-campus, reflecting adequate diversity in living arrangements.

Table 3: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	Mean = 22.8	SD = 2.6
Sex		
Male	217	52.0
Female	200	48.0
Level of Study		
Undergraduate	355	85.1
Postgraduate	62	14.9
Year of Study		
Year 1	145	34.9
Year 2	91	21.9

Year 3	91	21.7
Year 4	90	20.3
College / Faculty		
College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS)	102	24.5
College of Health Sciences (CHS)	58	13.9
College of Science (COS)	60	14.4
Institute of Distance Learning (IDL)	61	14.6
College of Engineering (COE)	55	13.2
College of Art and Built Environment (CABE)	46	11.0
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR)	35	8.4
Residence Status		
On-campus	229	54.9
Off-campus	188	45.1

4.1.2 Awareness of CSR Initiatives and Related Perceptions

Findings in Table 2 show that awareness of KNUST's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives among students was generally high. More than half (54.9%) of respondents were aware of scholarship or bursary programmes for needy students, making this the most frequently identified CSR activity. This was followed by student volunteer or mentorship programmes (47.0%), environmental campaigns (42.0%), and health outreach or blood donation drives (38.1%). A smaller proportion of students recognized community development support (33.1%) and donation drives or charity events (29.0%), while only 10.1% mentioned other unspecified initiatives.

Regarding information channels, social media (72.2%) and friends or peers (62.8%) were the most common sources of awareness, showing that informal and digital networks play a crucial role in disseminating CSR information. Traditional channels such as university notice boards (43.6%), SRC announcements (36.2%), and lecturers or academic staff (30.9%) were less utilized, while news media (28.3%) had the least influence.

In terms of exposure frequency, most respondents reported hearing or seeing CSR information sometimes (34.0%) or often (29.0%), while fewer indicated very often (16.3%). The visibility of KNUST's CSR activities was described as moderate (37.2%) or very visible (29.0%), indicating that students generally recognize the university's CSR presence but perceive room for improvement.

A majority of respondents (62.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that KNUST's CSR initiatives address real societal needs, confirming that students perceive these efforts as meaningful and aligned with the university's social development mission.

Table 4: Awareness of CSR Initiatives and Related Perceptions

Variable / Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
B1. CSR initiatives students are aware of (Multiple Response)		
Scholarship or bursary programmes for needy students	229	54.9
Student volunteer or mentorship programmes	196	47.0
Environmental campaigns (tree planting, clean-up)	175	42.0
Health outreach or blood donation drives	159	38.1
Community development support	138	33.1
Donation drives or charity events	121	29.0
Other initiatives specified	42	10.1
B2. Sources of information about CSR activities (Multiple Response)		
Social media	301	72.2
Friends or peers	262	62.8
University website or notice board	182	43.6
Student Representative Council (SRC)	151	36.2
Lecturers or academic staff	129	30.9
News media	118	28.3
Other (specified)	29	7.0
B3. Frequency of exposure to CSR information		
Never	27	6.5
Rarely	59	14.1
Sometimes	142	34.0
Often	121	29.0
Very often	68	16.3
B4. Visibility of KNUST's CSR activities		
Not visible	20	4.8

Slightly visible	58	13.9
Moderately visible	155	37.2
Very visible	121	29.0
Extremely visible	63	15.1
B5. KNUST's CSR activities address real societal needs		
Strongly Disagree	16	3.8
Disagree	43	10.3
Neutral	97	23.3
Agree	181	43.4
Strongly Agree	80	19.2

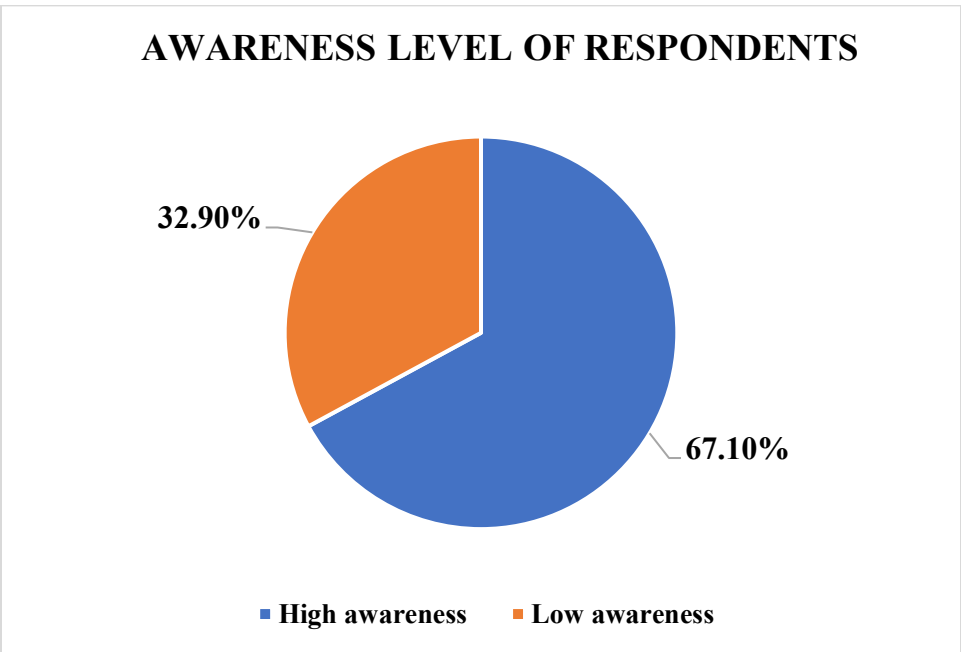


Figure 2: Awareness Level of Students

4.1.3 Students' Perceptions of CSR Activities

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of KNUST's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. Overall, students expressed positive perceptions toward the university's CSR engagement. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that KNUST's CSR activities demonstrate commitment to social development, while only 12.8% disagreed, suggesting a generally favorable view of the university's developmental role.

Similarly, a majority (62.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that KNUST genuinely cares about its students and surrounding communities, indicating that CSR activities are perceived as sincere and human-centered. About 67.6% of respondents also believed that KNUST's CSR initiatives are consistent with its vision and values, reflecting strong institutional alignment between the university's mission and its social engagement.

Moreover, most students (65.0%) agreed that CSR activities have improved KNUST's public image, showing recognition of the reputational benefits of active community engagement. Similarly, 63.8% of respondents affirmed that these activities make a real difference in people's lives, demonstrating students' belief in the tangible social impact of the university's CSR efforts.

Table 5: Students' Perceptions of KNUST's CSR Activities

Statement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
C1. KNUST's CSR activities demonstrate commitment to social development.		
Strongly Disagree	14	3.4
Disagree	39	9.4
Neutral	90	21.6
Agree	193	46.3
Strongly Agree	81	19.3
C2. The university genuinely cares about its students and surrounding communities.		
Strongly Disagree	17	4.1
Disagree	36	8.6
Neutral	102	24.5
Agree	185	44.4
Strongly Agree	77	18.5
C3. CSR activities by KNUST are consistent with its vision and values.		
Strongly Disagree	13	3.1
Disagree	35	8.4
Neutral	87	20.9
Agree	198	47.5
Strongly Agree	84	20.1
C4. CSR activities have improved the university's public image.		

Strongly Disagree	16	3.8
Disagree	42	10.1
Neutral	88	21.1
Agree	191	45.8
Strongly Agree	80	19.2
C5. I believe KNUST’s CSR activities make a real difference in people’s lives.		
Strongly Disagree	18	4.3
Disagree	37	8.9
Neutral	96	23.0
Agree	185	44.4
Strongly Agree	81	19.4

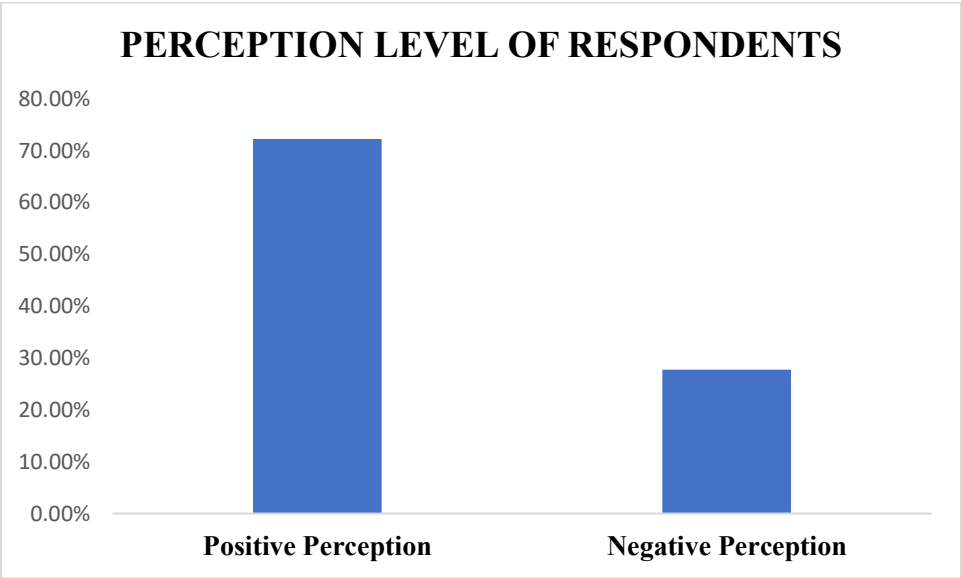


Figure 3: Perception Level of Respondents

4.1.4 CSR Dimensions: Economic, Legal, Ethical, and Philanthropic Responsibilities

As shown in Table 4, students generally expressed positive perceptions of KNUST’s performance across all four CSR dimensions.

Economic responsibility received strong endorsement, with approximately 67.9% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that KNUST uses its resources responsibly, contributes to local economic development, and efficiently manages resources to sustain quality education and

projects. This suggests that students view the university as financially prudent and socially responsive in its resource utilization.

For legal responsibility, nearly 66% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that KNUST adheres to laws, treats students fairly, and promotes equality. These results reflect confidence in the university’s compliance with educational regulations and institutional justice.

Perceptions were also highly favorable regarding ethical responsibility, where 70% or more of students agreed that KNUST encourages integrity, ensures ethical conduct, and maintains professional standards among staff and lecturers. This indicates a strong institutional culture of accountability and morality.

Similarly, philanthropic responsibility scored highly, with about 66–67% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that KNUST supports charitable causes, encourages volunteerism, and provides assistance to disadvantaged groups. This underscores recognition of the university’s social commitment beyond its academic role.

Table 6: Students’ Assessment of CSR Dimensions at KNUST

CSR Dimension / Statement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Economic Responsibility		
D1. KNUST uses its resources responsibly to benefit society.		
Strongly Disagree	13	3.1
Disagree	34	8.2
Neutral	87	20.9
Agree	198	47.5
Strongly Agree	85	20.4
D2. The university contributes to local economic development through employment and partnerships.		
Strongly Disagree	16	3.8
Disagree	31	7.4
Neutral	88	21.1
Agree	198	47.5

Strongly Agree	84	20.1
D3. KNUST efficiently manages resources to maintain quality education and projects.		
Strongly Disagree	18	4.3
Disagree	35	8.4
Neutral	90	21.6
Agree	191	45.8
Strongly Agree	83	19.9
Legal Responsibility		
D4. KNUST adheres to laws and educational regulations.		
Strongly Disagree	15	3.6
Disagree	30	7.2
Neutral	88	21.1
Agree	201	48.2
Strongly Agree	83	19.9
D5. The university treats students fairly and transparently.		
Strongly Disagree	17	4.1
Disagree	38	9.1
Neutral	85	20.4
Agree	192	46.0
Strongly Agree	85	20.4
D6. KNUST promotes equality and fairness among staff and students.		
Strongly Disagree	14	3.4
Disagree	41	9.8
Neutral	84	20.1
Agree	196	47.0
Strongly Agree	82	19.7
Ethical Responsibility		
D7. KNUST encourages integrity, honesty, and accountability.		
Strongly Disagree	13	3.1
Disagree	29	7.0
Neutral	83	19.9
Agree	204	48.9
Strongly Agree	88	21.1
D8. The university ensures ethical conduct in dealings.		
Strongly Disagree	15	3.6
Disagree	34	8.2
Neutral	91	21.8
Agree	191	45.8
Strongly Agree	86	20.6
D9. Lecturers and staff uphold professionalism and moral standards.		

Strongly Disagree	18	4.3
Disagree	33	7.9
Neutral	90	21.6
Agree	189	45.3
Strongly Agree	87	20.9
Philanthropic Responsibility		
D10. KNUST supports charitable causes and outreach programmes.		
Strongly Disagree	16	3.8
Disagree	37	8.9
Neutral	85	20.4
Agree	195	46.8
Strongly Agree	84	20.1
D11. The university encourages student volunteer or charity activities.		
Strongly Disagree	17	4.1
Disagree	39	9.4
Neutral	88	21.1
Agree	192	46.0
Strongly Agree	81	19.4
D12. KNUST provides educational or financial assistance to disadvantaged groups.		
Strongly Disagree	18	4.3
Disagree	36	8.6
Neutral	86	20.6
Agree	192	46.0
Strongly Agree	85	20.4

4.1.5 Brand Image Evaluation

Table 5 reveals that students' overall perception of KNUST's brand image is highly positive. A large majority (73.6%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are proud to be students of KNUST, underscoring strong emotional attachment and institutional loyalty. Likewise, 69.6% believed that KNUST has a positive image among students and the general public, confirming widespread recognition of the university's good reputation.

Most students (67.3%) also agreed that KNUST's CSR activities have improved their personal perception of the university, suggesting that visible CSR engagement contributes meaningfully to

brand strengthening. Similarly, 66.0% indicated that they would recommend KNUST to others because of its social commitment, reflecting positive word-of-mouth potential and reputational advocacy among the student body.

In addition, 64.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that KNUST's CSR provides it with a competitive advantage over other universities, implying that social responsiveness has become an important differentiator in institutional branding within Ghana's higher-education sector.

Table 7: Students' Evaluation of KNUST's Brand Image

Statement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
E1. I am proud to be a student of KNUST.		
Strongly Disagree	11	2.6
Disagree	29	7.0
Neutral	70	16.8
Agree	192	46.0
Strongly Agree	115	27.6
E2. KNUST has a positive image among students and the public.		
Strongly Disagree	13	3.1
Disagree	32	7.7
Neutral	82	19.7
Agree	198	47.5
Strongly Agree	92	22.1
E3. KNUST's CSR activities have improved my perception of the university.		
Strongly Disagree	15	3.6
Disagree	36	8.6
Neutral	85	20.4
Agree	192	46.0
Strongly Agree	89	21.3
E4. I would recommend KNUST to others because of its social commitment.		
Strongly Disagree	18	4.3
Disagree	34	8.2
Neutral	90	21.6
Agree	185	44.4
Strongly Agree	90	21.6
E5. I believe KNUST's CSR gives it a competitive advantage over other universities.		

Strongly Disagree	20	4.8
Disagree	38	9.1
Neutral	92	22.1
Agree	187	44.8
Strongly Agree	80	19.2

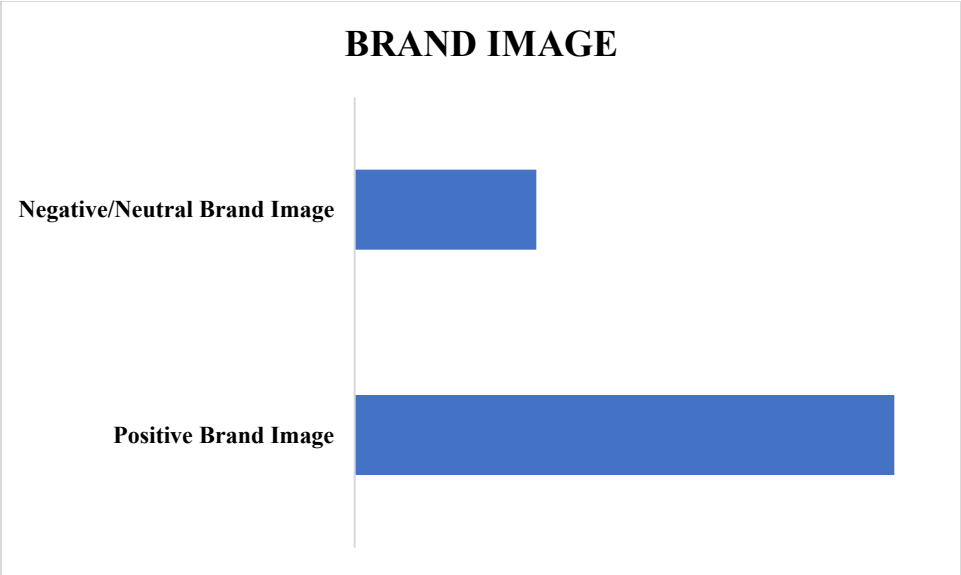


Figure 4: Brand Image

4.1.6 Relationship between CSR Initiatives and Students’ Perceptions of the University’s Brand Image

Table 6 shows that both CSR awareness and CSR perception are positively and significantly associated with students’ brand image evaluation ($p < 0.001$). The correlation between CSR awareness and brand image ($r = 0.687$) indicates that students who are more knowledgeable about KNUST’s CSR activities tend to have more favorable impressions of the university’s reputation.

Similarly, CSR perception ($r = 0.701$) exhibited a strong positive association with brand image, suggesting that students who perceive KNUST’s CSR initiatives as genuine, impactful, and

socially relevant are more likely to view the university as reputable, trustworthy, and socially responsible.

These findings imply that increased visibility, awareness, and understanding of KNUST’s CSR efforts directly strengthen how students perceive its institutional brand. The results therefore confirm that students’ awareness and perception of CSR initiatives have a significant and positive effect on their evaluation of the university’s brand image.

Table 8: Correlation between CSR Initiatives and Brand Image

Variable Pair	Pearson’s r	p-value	Interpretation
CSR Awareness Score × Brand Image Score	0.687**	< 0.001	Strong positive correlation
CSR Perception Score × Brand Image Score	0.701**	< 0.001	Strong positive correlation

Note: r = Pearson correlation coefficient; p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

4.1.7 Influence of CSR Dimensions on Students' Evaluation of Brand Image

Table 7 presents the results of the binary logistic regression analysis conducted to determine the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) dimensions on students' perception of KNUST's brand image. The model was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 168.7$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the four CSR dimensions collectively contributed meaningfully to the likelihood that students perceived the university's brand image positively. The model explained approximately 55.9% (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.559$) of the variation in brand image and correctly classified about 81.3% of the cases, which shows a good level of predictive accuracy.

The results revealed that all the CSR dimensions had positive coefficients, implying that increases in each CSR practice were associated with an increase in the likelihood of students perceiving KNUST's brand image positively. However, not all predictors were statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The ethical responsibility dimension had the strongest and most significant influence on brand image ($B = 0.401$, $p < 0.001$; AOR = 1.49). This means that students who perceived KNUST as honest, transparent, and accountable were about 1.5 times more likely to view the university's brand image positively compared to those who rated the university lower on ethical grounds. This suggests that integrity, fairness, and professionalism among staff and management play a critical role in shaping students' overall impressions of the institution.

The economic responsibility dimension also showed a statistically significant relationship ($B = 0.246$, $p = 0.009$; AOR = 1.28), indicating that students who believed KNUST uses its resources responsibly and contributes to societal development were about 28% more likely

to have a positive perception of its brand image. This finding underscores the importance of financial prudence, partnerships, and sustainable resource management in enhancing institutional reputation.

The philanthropic responsibility dimension was similarly significant ($B = 0.233$, $p = 0.007$; $AOR = 1.26$), implying that KNUST's community support and charitable activities increase the odds of a positive brand image by approximately 26%. This highlights the value of visible social outreach programmes, such as scholarships and health campaigns, in strengthening the university's image among students.

Although legal responsibility had a positive coefficient ($B = 0.118$, $AOR = 1.13$), it was not statistically significant ($p = 0.155$). This suggests that while adherence to rules, fairness, and compliance are important, they do not independently predict brand image once the other CSR dimensions are taken into account.

I think the point should be made clearly about what these results and tests mean for your study hypotheses. Which of your hypotheses were confirmed and which of them were refuted?

Table 9: Binary Logistic Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of CSR Dimensions on Students' Brand Image

Predictor Variables	B (Coefficient)	S.E.	Wald χ^2	df	p-value	Exp(B) (<i>Odds Ratio</i>)	95 % Confidence Interval for Exp(B)
Economic Responsibility	0.246	0.094	6.85	1	0.009	1.28	1.06 – 1.55
Legal Responsibility	0.118	0.083	2.02	1	0.155	1.13	0.96 – 1.33

Ethical Responsibility	0.401	0.092	19.03	1	< 0.001	1.49	1.24 – 1.80
Philanthropic Responsibility	0.233	0.086	7.34	1	0.007	1.26	1.06 – 1.50

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Awareness of CSR Initiatives by KNUST

The results of the study showed that students generally demonstrated a high level of awareness of KNUST's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The mean awareness score was 18.9 ± 3.6 out of a maximum of 25 points, indicating a strong recognition of the university's social engagement activities. Using a 70% cut-off, 67.1% of students were classified as having good awareness, while 32.9% had low awareness. The initiatives most frequently mentioned by students included scholarship programmes for financially needy students, environmental campaigns such as tree planting and clean-up exercises, health outreach programmes, and donation drives to surrounding communities.

This high awareness implies that KNUST's CSR activities are fairly visible and well-communicated within the university environment. The finding may be attributed to the university's consistent engagement in public-oriented projects and the use of communication channels such as social media, notice boards, and student leadership platforms to share information. It also aligns with the findings of Agyemang and Boateng (2021), who reported that effective institutional communication significantly improves students' awareness and participation in CSR activities in Ghanaian universities. Similarly, Wibowo and Rachmawati (2023) observed that CSR visibility directly enhances awareness and institutional credibility among university stakeholders.

Despite this overall positive result, nearly one-third (32.9%) of respondents demonstrated low awareness of CSR activities. This may suggest that although some initiatives are visible, others such as research-based community projects or policy advocacy may not receive adequate publicity. Eze and Nwankwo (2022) also emphasized that insufficient dissemination of CSR-related information often limits student involvement, even in institutions actively engaged in social

initiatives. Therefore, KNUST may benefit from adopting a more structured communication strategy that ensures all CSR activities, including those less publicized, are equally highlighted and accessible to students.

The present study's findings are consistent with global evidence suggesting that awareness is a crucial determinant of CSR participation and perception. According to Cheng and Wang (2024), high levels of CSR awareness among university students enhance institutional trust and foster a sense of belonging and social identity. This is particularly relevant in the context of higher education institutions in developing countries, where universities serve as both educational and social agents of change.

From a sustainability perspective, the high awareness of CSR activities at KNUST contributes indirectly to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. Students who are informed about CSR initiatives are more likely to engage in health outreach, environmental campaigns, and community empowerment programmes that support well-being and environmental sustainability. By improving awareness and participation in CSR activities, KNUST not only enhances its institutional image but also strengthens its role in promoting societal well-being through education and social responsibility.

The high awareness observed in this study is consistent with Stakeholder Theory, which posits that organizations must engage and communicate effectively with their key stakeholders in order to create value and legitimacy. Students, as primary stakeholders, appear sufficiently exposed to KNUST's CSR activities, suggesting that the university is fulfilling the theory's expectation of transparency and engagement. Moreover, awareness of scholarships, environmental campaigns, and health outreach aligns with Carroll's CSR Pyramid, particularly the *philanthropic* and *ethical* layers, which emphasize voluntary social contributions and responsible conduct. The fact that

some students still exhibited low awareness highlights a partial gap in stakeholder communication, reflecting the theory's argument that poor communication may weaken stakeholder–institution relationships.

4.2.2 Students' Perceptions of CSR Activities by KNUST

The study revealed that students generally had a positive perception of KNUST's corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. The mean perception score was 19.6 ± 3.2 out of a possible 25, indicating that students view the university's CSR efforts as genuine, socially beneficial, and aligned with its mission and values. Using a 70% threshold, 72.2% of respondents were found to have a positive perception of CSR activities, while 27.8% showed neutral or negative perceptions. This finding demonstrates that a large proportion of students recognize and appreciate KNUST's contributions to social development and community well-being.

The positive perception of CSR among students may be attributed to the visible impact of KNUST's social initiatives, such as educational scholarships, health campaigns, mentorship programmes, and environmental sustainability projects. Students' recognition of these initiatives as valuable to both the university and surrounding communities reflects an appreciation of KNUST's broader social role beyond academic instruction. This observation supports Asare and Sarpong (2022), who found that Ghanaian university students are more likely to view CSR positively when they perceive the institution as socially engaged and responsive to community needs. Similarly, Kaur and Singh (2023) reported that students' perceptions of CSR improve when universities demonstrate ethical practices and transparency in how CSR resources are managed and communicated.

However, despite the overall positive outlook, a segment of respondents (27.8%) held neutral or less favorable perceptions. This could be due to limited direct participation in CSR programmes

or a lack of consistent feedback mechanisms between the university and students regarding the outcomes of such initiatives. Nguyen and Le (2023) observed that when students feel excluded from CSR decision-making or when programme outcomes are not clearly communicated, their perceptions tend to decline, even if the institution is actively involved in CSR. Therefore, increasing opportunities for student participation in planning and implementing CSR projects may further strengthen positive perceptions.

The study's results align with findings from other sub-Saharan African contexts where CSR in higher education is increasingly seen as an integral part of institutional reputation and stakeholder trust. For instance, Osei-Tutu and Mensah (2021) found that student satisfaction and institutional loyalty are positively influenced by perceived CSR performance in Ghanaian universities. Similarly, Adepoju et al. (2020) highlighted that ethical and philanthropic activities undertaken by universities foster pride, admiration, and a sense of belonging among students, which ultimately enhances the institution's brand value.

The high perception levels observed in this study underscore the importance of CSR as a tool for building trust and long-term engagement with students. This finding reinforces the social exchange theory, which posits that when institutions invest in activities that benefit their stakeholders, they, in turn, receive goodwill, loyalty, and positive reputation from those stakeholders.

From the sustainability perspective, the positive perception of KNUST's CSR activities directly supports Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. By engaging in health outreaches, environmental sanitation, and community support programmes, KNUST demonstrates institutional commitment to promoting good health, social equity, and environmental protection. As such, positive student perceptions of CSR not only

enhance the university's brand image but also signify the effectiveness of higher education institutions as agents for achieving social and developmental goals within their communities.

The positive perception recorded in this study strongly reflects the assumptions of Stakeholder Theory, which argues that when organizations demonstrate care, integrity, and responsiveness to stakeholders' needs, they earn trust, loyalty, and positive evaluations. Students' favourable perceptions of KNUST's CSR activities demonstrate that the university is successfully meeting stakeholder expectations and strengthening its relational capital. Furthermore, the positive perception of ethical and philanthropic efforts aligns with Carroll's CSR Pyramid, which positions ethical responsibility as a moral obligation and philanthropy as the highest voluntary commitment to society. Students' appreciation of these dimensions confirms the Pyramid's assertion that ethical and philanthropic actions contribute significantly to institutional goodwill.

4.2.3 Relationship between CSR Initiatives and Students' Perceptions of the University's Brand Image

The findings of this study revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between students' awareness and perception of KNUST's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and their evaluation of the university's brand image. Results from the Pearson correlation analysis showed that CSR awareness was strongly correlated with brand image ($r = 0.687, p < 0.001$), while CSR perception also exhibited a strong positive correlation with brand image ($r = 0.701, p < 0.001$). These results indicate that students who were more knowledgeable about KNUST's CSR initiatives and perceived them as beneficial and credible were also more likely to hold a favorable view of the university's reputation.

This strong relationship suggests that CSR initiatives are instrumental in shaping how students perceive and evaluate the university's image. The finding implies that the more visible, accessible,

and well-communicated KNUST's CSR activities are, the more students identify with the institution and appreciate its social value. This result supports the argument by Chaudhary and Dey (2021), who noted that CSR plays a crucial role in enhancing brand image by improving stakeholder trust, credibility, and emotional connection with an organization. Similarly, Asif et al. (2020) found a significant positive link between CSR engagement and brand image in higher education institutions, emphasizing that universities that integrate social and ethical values into their operations tend to be viewed as more reputable by students.

The findings also align with Amoako and Dartey-Baah (2022), who observed that Ghanaian universities that visibly demonstrate social responsibility through community outreach, environmental sustainability, and student support programmes often enjoy stronger institutional reputations and higher stakeholder confidence. The strong positive correlation observed in this study therefore reinforces the notion that CSR is not merely a philanthropic gesture but a strategic tool for brand enhancement and stakeholder engagement.

Conversely, students with low awareness or negative perceptions of CSR were less likely to rate the university's brand image favorably. This could be due to limited access to CSR-related information or a perception that the university's social activities are either insufficiently publicized or inconsistent. According to Nguyen and Le (2023), a lack of continuous communication about CSR achievements can weaken stakeholders' perception of an institution's authenticity and commitment. This suggests that regular communication and inclusive participation in CSR activities can strengthen student-institution relationships and enhance overall brand loyalty.

In the context of global higher education, the result confirms that CSR initiatives serve as a foundation for sustainable branding. Rashid et al. (2024) found that students' identification with their universities is heightened when CSR activities align with their personal values and social

aspirations. Similarly, Agyekum and Frimpong (2021) highlighted that CSR visibility and transparency in Ghanaian universities directly foster pride and trust among students, which translates into a stronger institutional image.

From a sustainability standpoint, this positive relationship between CSR initiatives and brand image has broader implications for Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all and SDG 4 (Quality Education). By engaging students in socially responsible projects such as health outreach, mentorship, and environmental protection, KNUST not only strengthens its reputation but also cultivates socially conscious graduates who contribute to national and global development goals.

The findings demonstrate that KNUST's CSR initiatives significantly shape how students perceive its brand image. The university's active engagement in community service, ethical practices, and philanthropic activities enhances its visibility, strengthens stakeholder trust, and reinforces its identity as a socially responsible institution.

The strong positive correlations between CSR and brand image provide empirical support for Carroll's CSR Pyramid, which suggests that ethical and philanthropic responsibilities enhance stakeholders' emotional attachment and perception of an organization. This finding also reinforces Stakeholder Theory, which posits that organizations gain legitimacy and stronger reputational outcomes when they fulfil the expectations of major stakeholder groups. By engaging in visible CSR, KNUST strengthens trust, identification, and loyalty key outcomes predicted by the theory. The result also suggests that CSR operates as a relational asset, illustrating how universities can build reputational advantage by strategically addressing stakeholder concerns.

4.2.4 Influence of CSR Dimensions on Students' Evaluation of the University's Brand Image

The logistic regression analysis revealed that the four dimensions of corporate social responsibility economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities collectively had a strong and significant influence on students' perceptions of KNUST's brand image. The model was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 168.7$, $p < 0.001$) and explained approximately 55.9% (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.559$) of the variation in brand image perception, correctly classifying 81.3% of cases. These results indicate that CSR activities at KNUST are effective predictors of how students evaluate the institution's image and reputation.

Among the predictors, ethical responsibility emerged as the strongest determinant of brand image (AOR = 1.49, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that students who perceived KNUST as honest, transparent, and fair were nearly 1.5 times more likely to rate its brand image positively compared to those who viewed the institution as less ethical. This result emphasizes that moral conduct, accountability, and respect for students' welfare are fundamental in strengthening institutional credibility. The finding corroborates that of Al-Rafi and Ahmed (2023), who observed that ethical leadership and transparency significantly enhance university reputation and student trust. Similarly, Kaur and Singh (2023) found that ethical CSR activities directly influence students' emotional attachment and loyalty to their institutions.

Economic responsibility was the second most influential predictor (AOR = 1.28, $p = 0.009$), indicating that students who believed KNUST used its resources efficiently and contributed to local economic development were 28% more likely to perceive the university's brand image positively. This aligns with the findings of Osei-Tutu and Mensah (2021), who reported that universities that demonstrate financial prudence and invest in student welfare tend to gain higher reputational value among stakeholders. Similarly, Agyapong et al. (2022) emphasized that

economic responsibility within the Ghanaian higher education sector enhances institutional trust and perceived service quality, thereby strengthening brand positioning.

The philanthropic responsibility dimension also showed a significant effect (AOR = 1.26, $p = 0.007$). Students who recognized KNUST's contributions to social development through scholarship programmes, health campaigns, and community outreach were about 26% more likely to evaluate its brand image positively. This finding aligns with Adepoju et al. (2020), who asserted that philanthropic CSR initiatives in universities not only uplift communities but also create emotional connections between students and their institutions. The result suggests that sustained engagement in charitable and community development activities contributes to stronger institutional admiration and pride among students.

In contrast, the legal responsibility dimension, although positively associated with brand image (AOR = 1.13, $p = 0.155$), did not reach statistical significance. This implies that adherence to laws and fairness, though necessary, may not independently shape brand image once ethical, economic, and philanthropic practices are considered. The result resonates with Nguyen and Le (2023), who observed that compliance-based CSR tends to have a weaker emotional appeal to stakeholders compared to ethical and philanthropic dimensions that visibly demonstrate care and responsibility.

These findings affirm that CSR serves as a strategic tool for enhancing institutional reputation. KNUST's ethical integrity, responsible financial management, and philanthropic engagement appear to be the most powerful drivers of its brand image among students. This supports the argument by Asif et al. (2020) that the reputational benefits of CSR in universities are maximized when ethical and social commitments are deeply embedded in institutional culture rather than treated as isolated initiatives.

From a sustainability perspective, the influence of CSR dimensions on brand image has direct relevance to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 4 (Quality Education). Through responsible management, ethical governance, and socially responsive programmes, KNUST not only promotes student welfare and community well-being but also exemplifies how higher education institutions can serve as catalysts for sustainable social transformation.

The discussion confirms that ethical, economic, and philanthropic CSR dimensions significantly influence students' positive evaluation of KNUST's brand image, with ethical responsibility exerting the strongest impact. This demonstrates that the university's reputation and stakeholder trust are built not merely on academic excellence but on consistent adherence to ethical principles and social accountability.

The finding that ethical responsibility was the strongest predictor of brand image robustly supports Carroll's CSR Pyramid, which positions ethical responsibility as a fundamental expectation that shapes how stakeholders judge organizational legitimacy. Students' emphasis on ethical conduct also reinforces the core argument of Stakeholder Theory, which stresses that fairness, honesty, and moral behaviour are essential to maintaining stakeholder trust and long-term institutional reputation. The significance of economic and philanthropic responsibilities further aligns with the Pyramid's propositions that responsible resource use and voluntary social investment contribute to positive institutional associations. The weak significance of legal responsibility partially departs from Carroll's model but aligns with existing literature showing that compliance-based CSR is often taken for granted, and therefore less influential in shaping stakeholder perceptions. Overall, the findings confirm that CSR dimensions operate as strategic drivers of brand image in line with both theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that KNUST's corporate social responsibility initiatives are well-recognized and positively perceived by its students. The high awareness and perception levels indicate that the university's CSR efforts are visible, relevant, and effective in fostering a positive institutional reputation.

The strong positive relationship between CSR initiatives and brand image confirms that CSR plays a vital role in shaping how students perceive the university. Ethical, economic, and philanthropic activities particularly those involving transparency, fair resource management, and community engagement significantly enhance students' sense of pride and identification with KNUST.

Although all four CSR dimensions contributed positively, ethical responsibility emerged as the most influential factor, highlighting that moral conduct and accountability are critical to sustaining institutional credibility and trust. Overall, the study concludes that CSR is not only a mechanism for fulfilling social obligations but also a strategic instrument for strengthening the university's brand image, stakeholder loyalty, and contribution to national development goals.

The findings of the study support both Carroll's CSR Pyramid and Stakeholder Theory, demonstrating that ethical, economic, and philanthropic responsibilities meaningfully shape students' perceptions of institutional reputation. The prominence of ethical responsibility confirms Carroll's assertion that ethical obligations form a key determinant of stakeholder judgment. Similarly, Stakeholder Theory is reinforced by the evidence that students respond positively when the university visibly invests in their welfare, community well-being, and transparent governance. CSR therefore emerges as both a moral requirement and a strategic branding tool that helps KNUST build trust, legitimacy, and sustained stakeholder loyalty.

5.2 Recommendations

- 1. Enhance CSR Communication and Visibility:** KNUST should strengthen its communication channels to ensure all CSR activities especially research-based and community engagement projects are effectively publicized. Using digital media, campus forums, and student associations can increase awareness and participation.
- 2. Integrate CSR into Academic and Co-curricular Programmes:** The university should mainstream CSR education into courses, student leadership training, and community service programmes. This will help build a culture of social responsibility among students and reinforce the university's social mission.
- 3. Promote Ethical Leadership and Accountability:** Ethical responsibility had the strongest impact on brand image; therefore, KNUST should continue to promote transparency, fairness, and professionalism among staff and management. Clear ethical standards and accountability frameworks should be maintained in all operations.
- 4. Strengthen Philanthropic and Community Engagement:** KNUST should expand its philanthropic outreach by supporting more local communities through health, education, and environmental programmes. Increasing student involvement in such activities will enhance both social impact and institutional reputation.
- 5. Monitor and Evaluate CSR Impact Regularly:** Periodic assessments of CSR outcomes should be conducted to determine their social, environmental, and reputational impact. Feedback from students and community stakeholders can help refine strategies and sustain long-term effectiveness.
- 6. Align CSR with National and Global Development Goals:** KNUST's CSR strategy should be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 4 (Quality Education), to ensure that its initiatives contribute to global and national development priorities.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Studies

1. **Use mixed-method or qualitative designs:** Future research should incorporate interviews or focus group discussions to explore in-depth the motivations, feelings, and expectations that shape students' perceptions of CSR. This would complement the quantitative insights and capture nuances in stakeholder experiences.
2. **Compare multiple universities:** A comparative study involving different public and private universities in Ghana could determine whether the relationship between CSR and brand image observed at KNUST is consistent across other institutions.
3. **Include external stakeholder groups:** Future studies should consider the perspectives of alumni, staff, employers, and surrounding communities to capture a broader understanding of stakeholder perceptions.
4. **Examine mediating and moderating variables:** Researchers may explore whether trust, satisfaction, communication quality, or student engagement mediate or moderate the relationship between CSR and brand image.
5. **Adopt longitudinal designs:** Long-term studies could assess how sustained CSR initiatives influence changes in brand image and student loyalty over time.
6. **Focus on digital CSR communication:** With increased digitization, future studies could examine how social media communication of CSR initiatives shapes stakeholder attitudes and strengthens the university's brand identity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Data Collection Tool (Questionnaire)

Title: *Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Brand Image: A Study of KNUST*

Purpose: This survey seeks to assess student perceptions of KNUST’s CSR activities and how these perceptions relate to the university’s brand image.

Confidentiality Statement: All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and used for academic research purposes only.

SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS
A1. Age (in years)
A2. Sex	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
A3. Level of Study	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate
A4. College/Faculty	<input type="checkbox"/> College of Engineering <input type="checkbox"/> College of Science <input type="checkbox"/> College of Health Sciences <input type="checkbox"/> College of Agriculture and Natural Resources <input type="checkbox"/> College of Humanities and Social Sciences <input type="checkbox"/> College of Art and Built Environment <input type="checkbox"/> College of Education
A5. Year of Study	<input type="checkbox"/> Year 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)
A6. Residence Status	<input type="checkbox"/> On-campus <input type="checkbox"/> Off-campus

A7. Have you ever participated in any CSR-related activity by KNUST?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
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SECTION B: AWARENESS OF CSR INITIATIVES BY KNUST

QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS
B1. Which CSR initiatives by KNUST are you aware of? (Select all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship or bursary programmes for needy students <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental campaigns (tree planting, clean-up) <input type="checkbox"/> Health outreach or blood donation drives <input type="checkbox"/> Community development support <input type="checkbox"/> Student volunteer or mentorship programmes <input type="checkbox"/> Donation drives or charity events <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)
B2. How did you become aware of these CSR initiatives?	<input type="checkbox"/> Social media <input type="checkbox"/> University website or notice board <input type="checkbox"/> Lecturers or academic staff <input type="checkbox"/> Student Representative Council (SRC) <input type="checkbox"/> Friends or peers <input type="checkbox"/> News media <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)
B3. How often do you hear or see information about KNUST's CSR activities?	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Very often
B4. How visible do you think KNUST's CSR activities are to students and the public?	<input type="checkbox"/> Not visible <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly visible <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately visible <input type="checkbox"/> Very visible <input type="checkbox"/> Extremely visible

B5. In your opinion, KNUST's CSR activities address real needs in society.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
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SECTION C: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CSR ACTIVITIES

QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS
C1. KNUST's CSR activities demonstrate commitment to social development.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
C2. The university genuinely cares about its students and surrounding communities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
C3. CSR activities by KNUST are consistent with its vision and values.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
C4. CSR activities have improved the university's public image.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
C5. I believe KNUST's CSR activities make a real difference in people's lives.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree

SECTION D: CSR DIMENSIONS (Economic, Legal, Ethical, Philanthropic)

QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS
Economic Responsibility	
D1. KNUST uses its resources responsibly to benefit society.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D2. The university contributes to local economic development through employment and partnerships.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D3. KNUST efficiently manages resources to maintain quality education and projects.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
Legal Responsibility	
D4. KNUST adheres to laws and educational regulations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D5. The university treats students fairly and transparently.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D6. KNUST promotes equality and fairness among staff and students.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
Ethical Responsibility	

D7. KNUST encourages integrity, honesty, and accountability.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D8. The university ensures ethical conduct in dealings.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D9. Lecturers and staff uphold professionalism and moral standards.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
Philanthropic Responsibility	
D10. KNUST supports charitable causes and outreach programmes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D11. The university encourages student volunteer or charity activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
D12. KNUST provides educational or financial assistance to disadvantaged groups.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree

SECTION E: BRAND IMAGE EVALUATION

QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS
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E1. I am proud to be a student of KNUST.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
E2. KNUST has a positive image among students and the public.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
E3. KNUST's CSR activities have improved my perception of the university.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
E4. I would recommend KNUST to others because of its social commitment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
E5. I believe KNUST's CSR gives it a competitive advantage over other universities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree