

# Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Strategy for University Sustainable Competitive Advantage

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## **Abstract**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is generally presumed to be associated with companies in the full sense of the word, overlooking the important role of other institutions and organizations in achieving the objectives of the concept of CSR. This study's goal is to scientifically evaluate the link between corporate social responsibility and a university's sustainable competitive advantage. A conceptual model was created based on strategic corporate social innovation literature. The research was quantitative, and the variables were measured using the literature guide to build the research questionnaire. The analysis used structural equation modelling and the result revealed that Corporate Social Responsibility in relation to Customers or/and Students (CSRCS), Employees (CSRE), Government (CSRG) and Social stakeholders (CSRS) has a major impact on a university's sustained competitive advantage. Management and employees at universities can learn how to apply differentiation techniques to address community issues related to healthcare, economic, sociocultural, and

environmental. For quality research and community outreach that better fulfill social needs, innovative, quality-based approaches must be developed. The study extends the existing literature by empirically validating the relationship between CSR and a university's sustainable comparative advantage.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility, higher education, sustainable competitive advantage, university

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, universities have become increasingly concerned about how they can assist in directly combating the negative effects of pandemics such as COVID-19 by conducting research in a variety of domains relating to economics and health, as well as social and environmental challenges (Perrotta, 2021). By reconsidering the present business processes and developing novel inventive models to address the adverse impacts of pandemics (such as COVID-19) through study or collaboration with industry, universities, for example, can contribute significantly to the improvement of the nation's economic health (Islam et al., 2021). As a source of knowledge in the development of vaccines and medicines that are specifically designed to counter the effects of pandemics (such as COVID-19) on people's lives, universities have played an important role. The introduction of such products relies on innovation and breakthrough technologies to achieve such a goal, with the introduction of such products relying on innovation and breakthrough technologies to achieve such a goal (Kandeil et al., 2021; Rosa et al., 2021).

According to their current practices, private universities in Nigeria are blending with their local communities and are also taking a leading role in this regard, as evidenced by their recent responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is relevant to their students. The COVID-19 pandemic is currently affecting several universities, and strategies are being implemented to combat it. These strategies include developing innovative and creative processes for teaching and research to continue in a safe environment during these difficult times (Bao, 2020). As a result, most educational institutions have begun developing various e-learning programs and utilizing various online platforms in order to effectively and efficiently reach their various learners without jeopardizing the quality of education or negatively impacting students' educational experiences (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bao, 2020; DeVaney et al., 2020; Mohammad et al., 2020).

Innovating educational, research, and community engagement processes that can help make their countries better, grow their societies, and solve their problems are being promoted by universities all over the world. These processes are helping universities make a greater impact on the long-term development of their countries. This is accomplished via the encouragement of innovative educational, research, and community involvement procedures that may assist individuals in making positive social changes, growing their communities, and dealing with their challenges (Bayuo et al., 2020; Tetreva et al., 2021). Therefore, a limited research (Binsawad, 2020; Ramos-Monge et al., 2019; Tetreva et al., 2021) looked at the practical

application of corporate social responsibility (CSR) from the perspective of a higher education institution (HEI), leading to the coining of the phrase "university social responsibility" (USR). Studies of corporate social innovation in the setting of universities has just recently been conducted by Belayutham and colleagues (2019), and Bayuo and colleagues (2020) which lead to a new concept known as university social innovation (Belayutham and colleagues, 2019). However, according to McCKelvey and Zaring (2018), the majority of social responsibility research employs primarily conceptual, qualitative, or case-study methodologies, with no empirical or quantitative methodological investigations. Furthermore, experts in the fields of economics, and environmental studies were more involved in social responsibility research than experts in the fields of business, management, and or education (Foroudi et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is a paucity of research conducted from the perspective of strategic management. As a result, this paper combined theoretical literature on strategy, operations, and innovation management with empirical literature on university social innovation research fields from a cross-disciplinary perspective to explore university social innovation research fields. The study investigates the direct relationship between the dimensions of CSR (social, employees, government, and consumers, who are students) and achieving a SCA in the context of higher education, particularly at university level.

## **2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development**

In recent years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has piqued academic interest as a dimension of sustainability (Abernathy et al., 2017; Adhikariparajuli et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). Because the world is confronted with several difficulties, such as environmental and socioeconomic concerns, there is a great deal of interest in how individuals may contribute to the solution of these issues. A growing number of people from all types of organizations, including both small and large institutions, wish to get more involved in the contemplating nowadays world environmental challenges and contribute toward the solution (Chkir et al., 2020). A company's consideration of issues other than its traditional goals, which are primarily focused on conducting business and maximizing profits, is defined as fostering a more holistic view of corporate governance (Degli & Portale, 2011; Dusingize & Nyiransabimana, 2017; Rexhepi et al., 2013). Another frequently cited definition looks at corporate social responsibility through a hierarchical lens, categorizing it into four distinct layers: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (Amiri et al., 2015). The activities of a socially responsible organization should include corporate governance, business ethics, and community development. It should also implement relevant measures that demonstrate its engagement with its stakeholders, which includes the general public (Degli & Portale, 2011).

Universities, like their industrial counterparts, interact with their communities in a variety of ways. For example, they serve a wide range of people and play different roles as knowledge providers and changemakers in their communities (Bayuo et al., 2020; Benneworth & Cunha, 2015; Younis & Hammad, 2020). Universities are under more pressure than ever before to rethink their role in their communities, which has grown beyond simply giving students

educational opportunities. This is because of the outside opportunities and threats that all businesses face (Amiri et al., 2015; Ramos-Monge et al., 2019). Universities need to come up with unique strategies that show that they care about society by aligning their processes and activities like teaching and learning, assessment, research, and managing their functional areas with the public goal of improving the well-being of their society and taking care of the environment (Adamik & Nowicki, 2019; Ahmad, 2012; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011). There have been a few studies that have tried to think of university social responsibility practices as a group of things that universities do to be ethical and environmentally friendly, protect social and human rights, ensure long-term economic and human development, promote ethical behavior, train for social responsibility, and do socially responsible research (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

For competitiveness, the current difficult business environment has a lot of intense competition because there aren't a lot of resources, technology is quickly changing, and products have shorter life cycles. There are also a lot of changes in customer preferences, stakeholder needs, and the pressure to be involved in community service (Marin et al., 2012). Universities face a wide range of threats and challenges from outside because of factors like globalization, more staff and students moving around, international competition, and new educational technologies. Universities are also under more pressure from local governments to meet certain accreditation requirements and improve their international rankings (Bobe & Kober, 2015; De Haan, 2015; Dimitrova & Dimitrova, 2017; Mahdi et al., 2019; Steiner et al., 2013). As defined by the theory of resource-based view (RBV), competitiveness is no longer defined by a single thing in an institution. Instead, it's about combining internal resources and strengths into a package that is embedded in the institution's processes, activities, and levels and also stands out from what competitors are offering, allowing for a more long-term competitive position to be held (Adner & Zemsky, 2006; Bobe & Kober, 2015; De Haan, 2015; Khan et al., 2019; McWilliams and Siegel, 2011). Several studies have looked into how CSR and SCA are linked in the industry (Adamik & Nowicki, 2019; Marin et al., 2012; Marin et al., 2017; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 2006). As a result, some businesses were able to make some money. However, this view has changed in recent years to reflect a more systematic social engagement that promises benefits for everyone involved. If an organization has a good CSR strategy and uses it, its performance improves, and its SCA goes up (Khan et al., 2019).

Studying how university social responsibility and competitiveness are linked in the context of higher education has been done by academics in the field of study (Plungpongpan et al., 2016). Social responsibility strategies at universities were thought to be more effective and efficient when they were used with other parts of quality assurance, which led to accreditation from quality assurance bodies and a better competitive position than their counterparts (Plungpongpan et al., 2016). University social responsibility differentiation strategies should address both external and internal problems and weaknesses while also taking advantage of extrinsic opportunities, internal strengths, and resources (De Haan, 2015; Plungpongpan et al., 2016; Dimitrova & Dimitrova, 2017). People who study the relationship between social

responsibility and competitiveness do most of their work in the manufacturing industry, but those who study it in the higher education sector do most of their work from an environmental and educational point of view, not from a managerial point of view (Chen et al., 2015). To address this knowledge gap, the authors developed and proposed a hypothesis between CSR and SCA in higher education institutions. Taking into account the diversity of stakeholders at the university as well as the various ways in which the institution can affect society, the study investigates the four key dimensions of CSR in relation to social stakeholders; customers, defined in this study as those who directly received services from the university; employees; and finally, government, as identified by Turker (2009) in formulating the following hypothesis:

*Ha: Social Responsibility to Social stakeholders has a significant effect on university sustainable competitive advantage.*

*Hb: Social Responsibility to customers/students has a significant effect on university sustainable competitive advantage.*

*Hc: Social Responsibility to employees has a significant effect on university sustainable competitive advantage.*

*Hd: Social Responsibility to government has a significant effect on university sustainable competitive advantage.*

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Variables and Measurement*

After conducting a thorough review of the literature, the variables used in the study were identified and taken into consideration during the development of the research structure. The four dimensions of CSR was identified as an independent variable, and sustainable competitive advantage was identified as the dependent variable. The responses were graded on a five-point Likert scale adapted from Kaliappen, et al. (2017), with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (strongly agree). Respondents can use a Likert scale to select the response that best represents their feelings about a given statement or statement of fact. The constructs and items used were mostly taken from previously published literature. Turker (2009) identified four dimensions of corporate social responsibility, totaling 17 items, which have been adapted to fit in with university concepts, as shown in table 1. In addition, as shown in table 2, five items from De Haan (2015) were adapted to assess long-term competitive advantage in the university.

Table 1. Measurement Scale – CSR

<b>SN</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>University corporate social responsibility Scale</b>
<b>CSR in relation to social stakeholders</b>		
1	CSRS1	Our university participates in activities that aim to protect the quality of the natural environment.
2	CSRS2	Our university makes an investment to create a better life for future generations.
3	CSRS3	Our university implements special programs to minimize its negative impact on the natural environment.
4	CSRS4	Our university targets sustainable growth, which considers future generations.
5	CSRS5	Our university aids non-governmental organizations working in troubled areas.
6	CSRS6	Our university contributes to the campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of society.
<b>CSR in relation to employees</b>		
1	CSRE1	Our university encourages its employees to participate in the voluntary activities known as "community service".
2	CSRE2	Our university policies encourage employees to develop their skills and careers.
3	CSRE3	Our university management is primarily concerned with employees' needs and wants.
4	CSRE4	Our university implements flexible policies to provide a good work-life balance for its employees.
5	CSRE5	Our university's management's decisions relating to both teaching and non-teaching staff are usually fair.
6	CSRE6	Our university supports both teaching and non-teaching staff who want to acquire additional educational qualifications.
<b>CSR in relation to customers/students</b>		
1	CSRCS1	Our university protects students' (and any other person seeking the services of the university) rights beyond the legal requirements.
2	CSRCS2	Our university provides full and accurate information about its services to its students and any other person who requires such services.
3	CSRCS3	Our university placed students' satisfaction as a top priority.
<b>CSR in relation to the government</b>		
1	CSRCG1	Our university always pays its taxes and other levies on a regular and continuing basis.
2	CSRCG2	Our university complies with the legal regulations completely and promptly.

Table 2. Measurement Scale – SCA

SN	Code	University Sustainable Competitive Advantage Scale
1	SCA1	Our faculty has a favorable corporate social reputation, perceived by our internal and external stakeholders, better than that of colleges and universities.
2	SCA2	Our faculty holds a quality accreditation certificate that sets us apart from other colleges and universities.
3	SCA3	Our faculty offers unique educational programs that take into account the larger society and environment, which sets us apart from other higher education institutions.
4	SCA4	Our faculty conducts unique research and initiatives that consider the larger society and environment, which sets us apart from other higher education institutions.
5	SCA5	Our faculty provides unique community services that recognize the larger society and environment, which sets us apart from other higher education institutions.

### 3.2 Data collection, Population, Sample and Method of Analysis

Because of their extensive experience at privately owned higher education institutions, faculty members at Nile University of Nigeria, including those in leadership positions, were used as respondents. The response will be able to demonstrate how the university strikes a balance between societal needs and the cost of establishing and operating the university. At the time of data collection, there were 698 direct full-time faculty members working at the university, of which 248 were drowned as samples using the Krejcie and Morgan method (1970). Questionnaires were distributed, and 136 people responded, for a 54.8 percent response rate.

Smart PLS-SEM was chosen to analyze the data collected and used to test the research hypotheses as recommended by CSR scholar (Raza et al., 2020) and strategic and operations management studies (Adel et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2012). The advantages of using PLS-SEM have been reported in the literature (Hair et al., 2019; Raza et al., 2020).

## 4. Empirical Analyses

As stated previously in the methodology, the study hypotheses were tested using smart PLS, and the measurement model was used to assess the reliability and validity of the study variables. Table 3 shows the measurement model's results, which show how construct validity and reliability were established (See also figure 1). In accordance with the findings of Hair et al. (2020), the reliability of each construct was examined and validated by the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, with all of their values exceeding 0.7, as shown in Table 1.

Hair et al. (2014, 2020) found that the value of average variance extracted (AVE) associated to each factor should be more than 0.5 in order to assure the convergent validity of each component, which was proved in this study as shown in Table 3. Also, the measurement model presented a very low loading of 2 items (CSRE1 & CSRS3) out of the total 17 items adapted for the measurement of CSR, and they were deleted in the analysis.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Loadings Range	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Corporate Social Responsibility to Customers/Students (CSRCS)	0.717-0.871	0.737	0.848	0.652
Corporate Social Responsibility to Employees (CSRE)	0.730-0.881	0.876	0.910	0.670
Corporate Social Responsibility to Government (CSRSG)	0.897-0.911	0.776	0.899	0.817
Corporate Social Responsibility to Social Stakeholders (CSRS)	0.554-0.841	0.754	0.835	0.508
Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA)	0.831-0.897	0.922	0.941	0.763

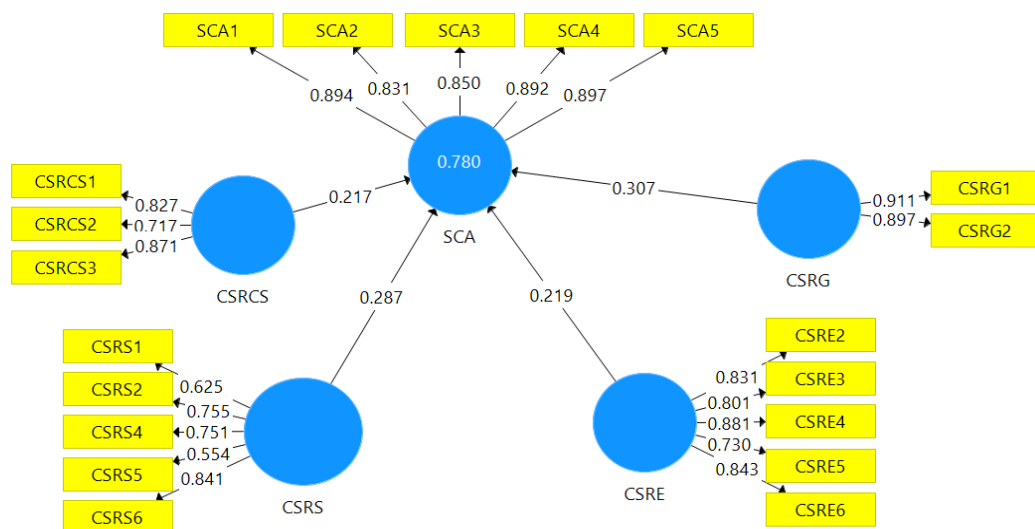


Figure 1. SmartPLS Algorithm Graph

All the hypotheses were tested and proved to be supported as shown by the beta coefficients and p-values in Figure 2 and table 4. The results demonstrated that CSR significantly influenced SCA as indicated from hypothesis (Ha) through hypothesis (Hd) by demonstrating



that corporate social responsibility to customers or students (CSRCS); corporate social responsibility to employees (CSRE); corporate social responsibility to government (CSRG); and corporate social responsibility to social stakeholders (CSRS) have a significant impact on a university's sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 4. Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values

Relationship	B	STDEV	T Statistics	P Value
Ha:CSRCS ->SCA	0.217	0.105	2.072	0.019
Hb:CSRE ->SCA	0.219	0.090	2.443	0.007
Hc:CSRG ->SCA	0.307	0.089	3.457	0.000
Hd:CSRS ->SCA	0.287	0.090	3.168	0.000

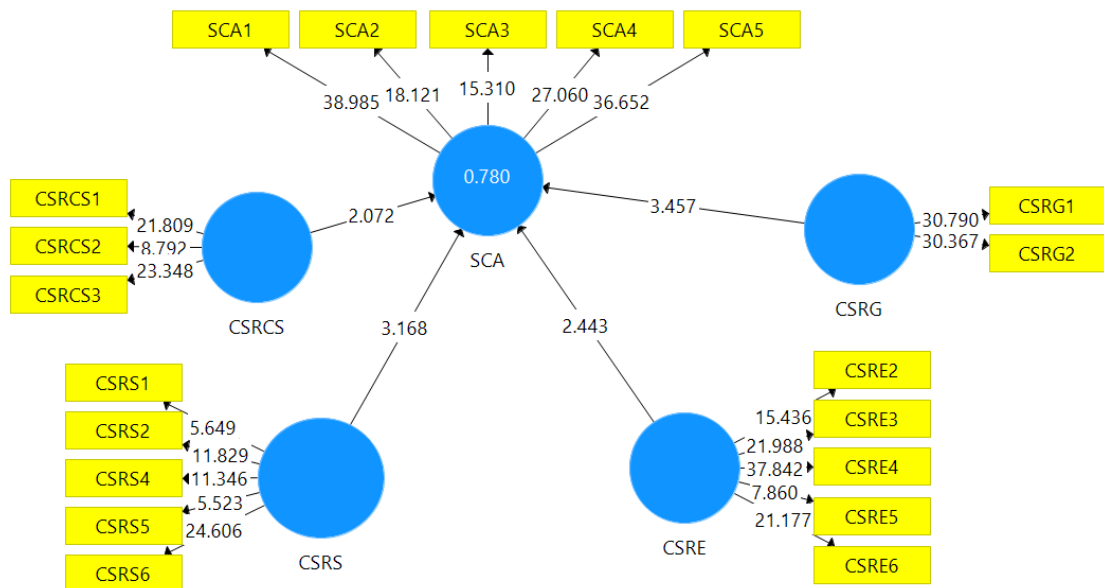


Figure 2. SmartPLS Bootstrap Graph

The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is the variance explained in the dependent latent variable by independent latent variables (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, Table 5 shows the value of R square as 78% and adjusted R square as 77% as a good indication of a parsimonious model.

Table 3. R<sup>2</sup> of the Dependent Variable

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R Square	0.780
Adjusted RSquare	0.771

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## 5. Findings, Implications and Recommendations

It was decided to investigate direct relationships between the dimensions of CSR and SCA in order to fill a research gap that had been identified in the literature. The findings reveal that corporate social responsibility has a significant impact on SCA. In other words, university administrators and staff can learn about how to use cross-disciplinary differentiation strategies that will help their institutions move from simply being socially responsible to being socially innovative, which will help them meet the needs of their communities by providing solutions to problems and challenges in their communities. Developing new, quality-based processes, programs, and services in education, research, and community outreach that better serve social needs in general and pandemic needs in particular can help keep this going. This can be done by involving staff in the development and implementation of socially responsible strategies for better social engagement in order to be recognized as quality-accredited and unique among their peers.

It is recommended that faculty leaders and managers, particularly those in the fields of engineering, technology, and the humanities, raise awareness about social problems among both teaching staff and students in their communities, as well as the critical role that educational and research services play in improving society from such problems. This can be achieved by meeting social needs through promoting innovative educational and research processes and services that have the potential to reinforce positive social change as a result of these developments.

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to develop and test a model of the impact of corporate social responsibility on universities' long-term sustainable competitive advantage. Several corporate social responsibility initiatives, including Corporate Social Responsibility to Customers/Students (CSRCS), Corporate Social Responsibility to Employees (CSRE), Corporate Social Responsibility to Government (CSRG), and Corporate Social Responsibility to Social Stakeholders (CSRS), have a significant impact on a university's ability to maintain a competitive advantage in the long term. The study builds on previous research on corporate social responsibility that has focused primarily on industries that have been shown to have an impact on higher education institutions. As a result of its findings, the study established a relationship between each of the five dimensions of CSR and SCA.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

A limitation that can be reported in this research is that it is focused on a single university and all respondents are from the same university. Future studies can replicate the study and

consider broadening the scope of the study. Since this study only considers a direct relationship between the variables under consideration, another study could consider examining the indirect relationship between the variables under consideration by including a mediator or by including a control variable to moderate the relationship.

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