

## The Role of Stakeholder Engagement in Enhancing CSR in Private Universities in Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of stakeholder engagement in enhancing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within private universities in Kenya, focusing on Instagram as a strategic communication tool. This research aimed to investigate how stakeholder engagement through Instagram can enhance CSR efforts in Kenyan private universities, providing insights into effective strategies for leveraging Instagram to drive positive social impact and promote responsible practices. Guided by stakeholder theory, a qualitative research design was employed, focusing on five prominent private universities in Kenya: Management University of Africa, KCA University, Kabarak University, and St. Paul's University. Semi-structured interviews with corporate communication experts provided in-depth insights into their CSR strategies. Additionally, a qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts identified patterns and trends in stakeholder engagement. The findings highlight that Instagram plays a key role in building a sense of community among stakeholders, including students, staff, alumni, and the community. Through transparent communication and interactive content, universities can foster trust and collaboration, essential for successful CSR initiatives. The study emphasizes understanding stakeholders' motivations and expectations to create effective engagement strategies. By utilizing Instagram's interactive features, private universities can enhance their CSR efforts, promoting social responsibility and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Instagram, Kenya, Private Universities, Stakeholder engagement*

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## INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder engagement plays an important role in enhancing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within universities. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an essential aspect of any organization that seeks to positively impact on society. Higher education institutions in Kenya have a crucial role to play in promoting CSR and sustainable development.

Social media platforms have become integral to communication and engagement strategies for organizations, including universities. According to Los and Bria (2013), social media affects all organizations across different dimensions: organizations' internal communication, working relationships, relationships with their stakeholder audiences, conversations with consumers, business model innovation, and organizational reputation and legitimacy. Multiple disciplines have analyzed this phenomenon from different perspectives, producing considerable knowledge.

According to Esposito et al (2021), universities have started to disclose their CSR practices and performances using different communication tools, such as sustainability reports, CSR reports, alternative non-financial reports, corporate websites, press, and others. However, these channels do not allow the opportunity to engage with internal and external stakeholders as they are based on a one-way interaction. Thus, social media (SM) has arisen as a new communication channel that employs "mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" (Kietzmann et al. 2011, p. 241). Social media has completely changed the communication paradigm, becoming a vital part of daily life. Social media has made it possible for universities and its stakeholders to have an honest and timely conversation about a variety of subjects, including CSR. Social media has been used by universities to develop a new paradigm for stakeholder participation and communication. Universities now have more ways to interact with stakeholders and get immediate feedback on their messaging thanks to social media (Bellucci & Manetti 2017). To satisfy society's growing need for openness in public administration, it is especially necessary to involve stakeholders on CSR practices (Aversano et al. 2020a). As a result, there is now a two-way transactional communication method replacing the one-way transmission approach to communication (seen in annual reports, sustainability reports, and university websites) for the dissemination of CSR information (Reilly & Hynan 2014). In this setting, academic institutions have begun interacting with stakeholders through social media by triggering two-way symmetrical interactions.

In Kenyan private higher education institutions, the potential of Instagram for stakeholder engagement and CSR initiatives has not been thoroughly examined. While Instagram offers significant opportunities for engagement, awareness-raising, collaboration, and monitoring, there is a lack of understanding of its specific impact on CSR activities in this sector. This research aimed to investigate how stakeholder engagement through Instagram can enhance CSR efforts in Kenyan private universities, providing insights into effective strategies for leveraging Instagram to drive positive social impact and promote responsible practices.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted across four private universities in Kenya: Management University of Africa, KCA University, Kabarak University, and St. Paul's University. These universities were selected due to their prominence and involvement in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, making them ideal for exploring how Instagram is used for CSR communication. The study employed a qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into CSR communication strategies. The research focused on understanding the role of Instagram in engaging stakeholders through CSR initiatives. Homogeneous and purposive sampling technique were used, targeting corporate communication experts from each university. A total of eight participants were selected based on their involvement in CSR communication, ensuring that the sample reflected a broad range of experiences.

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews and content analysis of Instagram posts. An interview guide was developed and piloted to ensure clarity and relevance, and probing techniques were used to gather comprehensive responses. Thematic analysis was applied to both the interview transcripts and Instagram posts, with a coding framework developed from the research objectives. The coding process was refined through a pilot test, and inter-coder reliability was assessed to ensure consistency in categorizing data. The data analysis followed Mayring's (2007) qualitative content analysis approach, which allowed for a systematic review of communication patterns. The findings were triangulated between interviews and content analysis to enhance credibility and validity. Patterns, trends, and key themes related to CSR communication were identified through this process.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the relevant authorities at each university, and participants provided informed consent with guarantees of confidentiality. Additionally, data collection adhered to Instagram's privacy policies, with appropriate permissions from the universities to access and analyze their social media content.

## RESULTS

### Response Rate

Four of the five private institutions that were chosen for this study each with two specified participants responded, bringing the total number of participants to eight. This response rate corresponds to 80% of the sample that was expected. While this is less than the full 100% participation, the 80% response rate is considered sufficient for the findings to be analyzed. Kuzel (1992:41) recommended six to eight interviews for a homogeneous sample and twelve to twenty data sources "when looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation." He linked his recommendations to sample heterogeneity and research objectives.

### Demographic Profiles of Informants/Respondents

The survey revealed that most of the respondents were male. The largest portion of the respondents had 2-5 years of working experience, followed by those with 6-10 years, and more than 10 years. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents worked in the corporate affairs department at their respective workplaces.

### **The role of stakeholder engagement in enhancing CSR in private universities in Kenya**

The analysis of semi-structured interviews and Instagram content reveals how universities leverage stakeholder engagement to enhance their CSR activities. A key theme that emerged from the interviews is the role of Instagram in fostering a sense of community among stakeholders. By sharing CSR activities and encouraging participation, universities create a shared sense of purpose and belonging among students, staff, alumni, and the broader community.

Participant 8 from Kabarak University highlighted this, saying, *"Our Instagram posts about CSR activities bring our community together. When we share stories of our students volunteering or our staff participating in community service, it creates a sense of unity and collective effort."* Participant 1 from Management University said that, *"Instagram helps us showcase our CSR activities in a way that involves everyone. Whether it's a blood donation drive or a charity run, our posts invite the entire university community to be part of something bigger than themselves."*

Another significant aspect of stakeholder engagement is the facilitation of two-way communication. Instagram provides a platform for dialogue, allowing universities to receive feedback, answer questions, and engage in conversations with their stakeholders. This interactive approach helps in understanding stakeholder expectations and concerns, which can inform and improve CSR strategies.

Participant 7 from St Paul's University stated, *"We use Instagram not just to share our CSR initiatives but also to listen to our followers. The comments and direct messages we receive give us valuable insights into how our efforts are perceived and what more we can do."* *"Two-way communication on Instagram helps us gauge the impact of our CSR activities. We often ask our followers for their input on upcoming projects, which makes them feel more involved and valued,"* said Participant 5 from KCA University.

Building strong relationships with stakeholders is crucial for the success of CSR initiatives. Through consistent and transparent communication on Instagram, universities can foster deeper connections with their stakeholders. Sharing behind-the-scenes content, success stories, and personal testimonials helps humanize the institution and make it more relatable.

Participant 2 from KCA University said, *"Instagram allows us to showcase the human side of our university. By sharing personal stories and behind-the-scenes looks at our CSR projects, we build stronger relationships with our stakeholders."* *"Our followers trust us more when they see the real impact of our CSR activities. By regularly updating them on our progress and showing tangible results, we maintain their trust and support,"* said participant 8 from Kabarak University.

The content analysis of Instagram posts further supports these themes. Universities used various strategies to engage stakeholders and build trust through their posts, one is that universities often posted about collaborative CSR efforts, such as group volunteering events or partnerships with local organizations. These posts emphasized collective action and the positive impact of the community coming together for a common cause. For example, a post from Management University of Africa showcased an event involving the students and staffs with the Kenyan Embassy in Tokyo, Japan which received high engagement and positive comments.

Personal stories and testimonials were prominently featured in Instagram posts. Universities shared narratives from students and staff involved in CSR activities, highlighting their experiences and the personal impact of the initiatives.

KCA University posted the only female cyclist who took part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> VC and CEO cycling tour which covered 1002 KM from Nairobi to Kisumu and back. The caption said, “We are proud of her courage, determination and trailblazing and hope she inspires women and girls to pursue their dreams.” #VcCyclingTour #WomenInspiringWomen #KcauLevelUp

## DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that stakeholder engagement is a crucial element in the successful implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. In private universities in Kenya, engaging stakeholders through Instagram has proven to be an effective strategy. This indicates that by sharing posts about CSR activities, organizations can bring their community together, fostering a sense of unity and collective effort. According to (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Samuels et al., 1996), stakeholder participation in organizational or project management is always taken into account from two basic perspectives. These findings are in line with their conclusions. First, from a normative standpoint, stakeholder engagement is seen as a moral issue since it takes into account the recognized stakeholders' legitimate interests, which calls for an operational framework policy in the Organisation that is stakeholder-oriented. The normative viewpoint offers a moral and ethical framework that the organization's human-centered values and economic imperatives both reflect in its objectives (Mainardes et al., 2011).

The analysis of semi-structured interviews and Instagram content reveals how universities leverage stakeholder engagement to enhance their CSR activities. A key theme that emerged from the interviews is Instagram's contribution to creating a feeling of community among stakeholders. Through sharing CSR activities and encouraging participation, universities create a shared sense of purpose and belonging among students, staff, alumni, and the broader community. Another significant aspect of stakeholder engagement is the facilitation of two-way communication. Instagram provides a platform for dialogue, allowing universities to receive feedback, answer questions, and engage in conversations with their stakeholders. This interactive approach helps in understanding stakeholder expectations and concerns, which can inform and improve CSR strategies. Building strong relationships with stakeholders is crucial for the success of CSR initiatives. Through consistent and transparent communication on Instagram, universities can foster deeper connections with their stakeholders. Sharing behind the scenes content, success stories, and personal testimonials helps humanize the institution and make it more relatable.

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## CONCLUSION

This study highlights that effective stakeholder engagement is key to enhancing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in private universities in Kenya. Instagram has proven to be a powerful tool for fostering real-time interaction and building a sense of community among stakeholders, including students, staff, alumni, and the broader public. By sharing transparent

updates on CSR activities and encouraging stakeholder participation, universities create a collaborative environment that drives collective efforts toward social responsibility. The study found that through consistent, interactive content, universities can build trust, credibility, and stronger relationships with their stakeholders. This ongoing dialogue not only promotes awareness but also fosters a deeper sense of commitment among stakeholders to the university's CSR goals. Ultimately, the use of Instagram as a CSR communication tool helps universities align their activities with broader societal goals, enhancing both their social impact and their reputation.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To further enhance CSR outcomes, private universities should integrate social media platforms like Instagram into their broader communication and engagement strategies. First, universities should invest in training their corporate communication teams on the best practices for leveraging Instagram's features such as live updates, stories, and direct engagement tools to promote CSR activities effectively. Universities can increase stakeholder participation by regularly showcasing behind-the-scenes insights, success stories, and measurable impacts of CSR initiatives. Collaborations with external partners such as NGOs, community organizations, and corporate sponsors can also amplify these efforts, allowing for larger-scale projects and a more significant social impact. Showcasing successful collaborations on Instagram could further attract attention and support from a wider audience, including potential donors and volunteers.

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