Appraising Communication Strategies in Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Engagement: A Study of Bingham University, Karu, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Communication strategies have become central to the appraisal of corporate social responsibility initiatives, particularly in promoting stakeholder engagement in the university context. This paper appraised the communication strategies utilised by Bingham University in its CSR initiatives and stakeholder engagement. The study is anchored on stakeholder theory and supported by participatory communication theory. A qualitative research design was adopted, using Key Informant Interviews (KII) as the method of data collection. A total of eleven (11) Participants were purposively selected based on their relevance and expertise in CSR-related communication and stakeholder engagement activities at Bingham University, Karu. Findings showed that the university undertakes a range of CSR initiatives in promoting stakeholder engagement. The communication strategies utilised were found to be a hybrid communication approach that combines formal and informal channels, supported by structured platforms such as the “community interface model" anchored by liaison structures and the “Town and Gown Committee”. These strategies were perceived to be effective when stakeholders are engaged early. However, the appraisal also revealed several challenges hindering its effectiveness. These were identified as limited funding, variations in literacy levels, the digital divide and increasing stakeholder expectations. The study concludes that while Bingham University’s existing communication strategies are functional, there is a need for the university to adhere to a clearly defined communication framework to ensure sustained stakeholder engagement. The study recommends the development and implementation of structured CSR communication frameworks to enhance coordination and incorporate external stakeholder feedback to improve overall effectiveness and long-term sustainability of stakeholder engagement efforts.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR initiatives, CSR Communication, Communication Strategies, Stakeholder Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Growing pressures in the current business environment have positioned Corporate Social Responsibility at the front and centre in organisational dealings both internationally and locally, even before the concept was adopted within academia and the business world. Among the most apt rationales for CSR in business is the

realisation that organisations would not survive without the thriving of individuals living near their communities. This was especially true during the early days of industrialisation and the post-industrialisation era, when many business tycoons understood that their existence could not be separated from helping the communities. Consequently, their support for schools, health initiatives, or social welfare was more practical than philanthropic, recognising that businesses do not thrive in unstable societies (Hassan et al., 2024).

According to scholars such as Elele et al. (2024), as public awareness continues to grow, organisations have increasingly become conscious of their wider responsibilities, which include their social roles, environmental responsibilities, and economic balance. Therefore, organisations like universities are no longer evaluated on the basis of what they do, such as teaching, researching, and delivering services alone, but also by their contribution to social development and meeting the expectations of the stakeholders. In light of this, Manishimwe et al. (2025) noted that higher education institutions need to do more than just produce knowledge and act as socially responsible institutions. Therefore, CSR has become not just an optional act but a necessity, as it allows universities to address negative views and build trust with their communities.

Bingham University is a private faith-based university located in the Kodape community in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. According to the National Universities Commission (2024), as cited by Shwarji et al. (2024), Bingham University is placed among the top 10 private universities in the national ranking in Nigeria, and as such, it is expected to contribute meaningfully to community development through various outreach and social responsibility initiatives. This shows that Bingham University operates within a socio-cultural environment where institutions are often measured not only by their academic performance but also by their social importance in the communities in which they operate. Bingham University, as noted in the study by Shwarji et al. (2024), engages in different CSR activities that are consistent with the mission and values of the institution, including outreach through healthcare services or medical outreach, educational initiatives, and faith-based social services. These initiatives, alongside academic performance, have made the university one of the major stakeholders in the community in which it operates and in the Nigerian higher education system. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the institution communicates its engagements to and interacts with the stakeholders.

Given this, Egbokhare (2023) argues that communication strategies for effective CSR and stakeholder engagement in universities have become more advanced in the 21st century because of the variety of stakeholder groups involved. Historically, and as noted by Zulkeifli et al. (2023), stakeholder engagement has been limited to providing stakeholders with information only about the organisation. However, in today's communication process, this has changed as the definition of stakeholder engagement now consists of engaging with them as partners who will help create value through shared agreement. In line with this, Abbas (2025) in his study noted that true stakeholder engagement goes beyond traditional CSR concepts and promises made by institutions; rather, it should include more inclusive approaches, such as raising awareness and community-oriented processes that focus on ethical participation from the university. This act also involves giving stakeholders the opportunity to participate in CSR programs, and most importantly, feedback and dialogue should be encouraged.

A similar point was also made by Adelabu et al. (2022), who noted that communication is the only thing that makes CSR visible. It shapes how stakeholders interpret the university's message, assess its contributions, and judge the credibility of its social commitments. Whether it is through media outreach, community meetings, official reports, social media, or campus events, the manner in which CSR is communicated plays a huge role in shaping stakeholder perceptions. When communication falters, this signals a gap, as stakeholders may leverage this and perceive the efforts of the universities as incorrect (Agbabiaka & Albert, 2025). This may not be due to a lack of CSR in universities, but rather a gap in not adopting the right communication strategy to pass on the exact information that needs to be communicated. This gap raises important questions about how stakeholders perceive university CSR initiatives. If the efforts are adequately communicated, what impact does this communication have on stakeholder trust and engagement?

While CSR practices have grown significantly at universities, there remains a clear gap in how these efforts are communicated. In cases where CSR activities are not communicated properly, they are shown as merely

publicity efforts rather than an engaging process for stakeholders. This often leads to low awareness, which in turn means that stakeholders do not know about the work the university claims it is doing. As a result, there is a gap between what the university does and what stakeholders think it does. In the case of Bingham University, this raises important concerns about whether its communication strategies are strong enough to create awareness, encourage stakeholder engagement, and build lasting relationships with them. This study contributes to existing research on CSR communication by examining the communication strategies employed by a private faith-based university in Nigeria. Specifically, it appraises the communication strategies utilised by Bingham University, Karu, in implementing its CSR initiatives and engaging with stakeholders.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Universities in Nigeria have increased in number over the years and positioned themselves as major contributors to national development through academic training and community development initiatives. In performing this function, most of the private universities have also undertaken corporate social responsibility activities aimed at creating a conducive relationship with their stakeholders, as opposed to the previous era where corporate social responsibility activities used to be carried out mainly by banks, telecommunication and oil and gas companies (Adebayo & Olatunji, 2024; Hassan et al., 2024). The success of these activities is not only defined by the activities of the universities but also by the level of communication between the institutions and various stakeholders. Despite the increasing resources invested in these activities, most of the universities have been faced with poor communication strategies. This makes stakeholder engagement seem inconsistent since most stakeholders are not aware of the activities undertaken by universities (Alikor & Anele, 2025). In a setting where legitimacy depends on visibility, poor communication of CSR efforts can weaken the impact which these universities strive to achieve. Without proper appraisal, it becomes difficult to determine whether these efforts are effectively creating awareness and engaging stakeholders. In view of the above inadequacies, the present study appraises the communication strategies utilised by Bingham University, Karu, in its CSR initiatives and stakeholder engagements.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of the study is to appraise communication strategies utilised by Bingham University, Karu, in its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and stakeholder engagements. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. identify the CSR initiatives undertaken by Bingham University.
2. establish the kind of communication strategies utilised by Bingham University in its CSR initiatives and stakeholder engagements.
3. evaluate the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilised by Bingham University in promoting stakeholder engagements.
4. identify the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of communication strategies for CSR and stakeholder engagement.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The following concepts have been reviewed in this section of the study for the purpose of clarity.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

The practice of Corporate Social Responsibility has existed long before it was given a specific name and a proper definition. While a large number of companies have adopted and engaged in CSR practices, Jach and Hankiewicz (2025) noted that several definitions of CSR have been proposed in the literature, but a major issue in the field of CSR is that there is no universally accepted definition of the concept. From the 1950s to the mid-1990s, Archie B. Carroll is recognised for providing an overview of the concept of CSR, but credits Howard R. Bowen as the father of Corporate Social Responsibility and the first scholar who explicitly defined the concept, which also marked the beginning of modern CSR, away from what it was called in his work

"Social Responsibilities of the Business " (Chaudhari, 2022). In the words of Bowen (2013), as cited by Kattani (2023), CSR refers to the social obligation of business leaders to follow due policies, make firm decisions or follow those actionable lines that align with the objectives and values of society. According to a Forbes survey conducted in 2013, more than 90% of businesspeople supported this definition (Shribman, 2024).

As a way to address the ambiguity of the CSR concept, Carroll (2018) created a more clearly structured model for understanding CSR. He defined CSR in four different categories or dimensions of responsibility: Economic, Legal, Ethical, and Philanthropic. Economic responsibilities define the fundamental expectations of a business as it relates to being financially successful. Legal responsibilities require an organisation to follow or abide by applicable laws and regulations in the country or state in which it operates. Ethical responsibilities relate to the manner in which a company conducts business in a fair and morally acceptable manner. Philanthropic responsibilities consist of those acts that a company voluntarily undertakes to promote the general welfare of the community in which it operates. The diagram below represents the four categories of responsibilities in a pyramid form.

Figure 1: CSR Pyramid



Source: Carroll (2018)

This definition represented a significant turning point in the field of CSR and CSR research, as the practice of CSR efforts would no longer be viewed simply as a charitable act or effort on the part of a company, but was now viewed as an integrated model of corporate obligations. However, in the context of higher education, Leoński (2025) noted that CSR takes on a distinctive form as universities are not profit-driven entities in the traditional sense, yet they are deeply embedded within society and are expected to contribute to social development. In this regard, the social responsibility of a university can be understood as its commitment to building meaningful relationships with different groups within society through various initiatives.

CSR communication

CSR communication, as defined by Zainon (2023), refers to the process of anticipating stakeholders' expectations, explaining CSR policy, and managing various communication tools. These tools aim to provide accurate and transparent information about a company's business operations to its stakeholders, which includes both social and environmental concerns. Most researchers have reached some level of consensus on the positive impact that CSR Communication has on enhancing corporate reputation, creating enhanced levels of stakeholder and employee engagement, and attracting foreign investment. In order for CSR to produce positive effects on an institution's reputation, they need to have an effective organisational communication strategy. At the same time, the organisation must also consider how its stakeholders create meaning and interpret CSR communication and CSR activities.

CSR communication is a continual process; it's an ongoing effort that evolves over time. However, Rasche et al. (2017) provided a foundation for what modern CSR communication should look like. They describe it as the way organisations communicate with their stakeholders about their role in CSR. This enables institutions to

develop a perspective for their relevant stakeholder and to increase recognition of their role concerning the development of the society in question. Through strategic channels of communication, including social media, newsletters, websites, PR, and community gatherings, the organisation can align its communication to suit the stakeholders and build good collaboration in order to make it possible for the successful accomplishment of the CSR initiatives. Nonetheless, the success of such channels will be determined by how they are used to build relationships with the stakeholders. While this is not constant, as Elele et al. (2024) noted, it is not the same across board but depends on the capacity of the industry and size. However, Ngu (2019) equally indicated that what really counts in CSR communication is not what an organisation talks about but what it actually does in fulfilling its promise. In other words, it's about what the old saying goes, "Talk the talk and walk the walk." For a company to be seen as credible, people need to believe it is actively contributing to society, both locally and globally.

Communication strategies

Communication strategies are designed plans through which specific goals are achieved. The first is that they must systematically distribute information, be persuasive, and include educational messages to close cultural gaps that may impede understanding. A view supported by Okocha and James (2024) emphasised the importance of defining the right message for the right audience, using repetitive, persuasive, and educational methods to ensure that the messages sent are received correctly.

Similarly, Herdiansyah et al. (2026) opine that a communication strategy will clearly lay out the objectives and identify the exact information that an organisation wants to communicate and who the target audience is. It outlines media activities, establishes time frames, selects the right communication channels, and evaluates the communication outcomes. Through these elements, organisations ensure that communication activities support their larger goals and meet stakeholder expectations. This goes beyond just sharing messages as emphasised by Okujeni et al., (2024); the require careful planning, understanding the audience, shaping the message, and ongoing evaluation of the outcome to determine if it has yielded results. Communication is the vehicle that creates and conveys action, but an effective communication strategy not only prompts action but also aims to generate results.

Stakeholder engagement

The term stakeholder gained popularity through the work of Robert Edward Freeman, who formally articulated the concept into a theory in 1984 (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder engagement focuses on pinpointing the tools or methods that can be used to maximise interaction with stakeholders; in some cases, it is referred to as dialogue. The theory defines stakeholders as "a group without whose support the organisation would cease to exist" (p. 5). It emphasises that organisations should look beyond simply maximising profits for shareholders and instead consider the interests of all stakeholders before making important decisions. The goal of stakeholder engagement is to establish a partnership between an organisation and its stakeholders so that both sides can engage in an open dialogue with one another, build trust through mutual respect and understanding, and share common interests.

Engaging with stakeholders in the university is also critical. It means maintaining a balance among the stakeholders, as justified by Ogunode et al. (2023), who stated that the main stakeholders of a university are of two types: internal and external. The internal stakeholders include students, university management, academic and non-academic staff, and the board of trustees, while external stakeholders include the environment, host community members, community leaders, community businesspeople, the government, and competitors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CSR in the higher education context

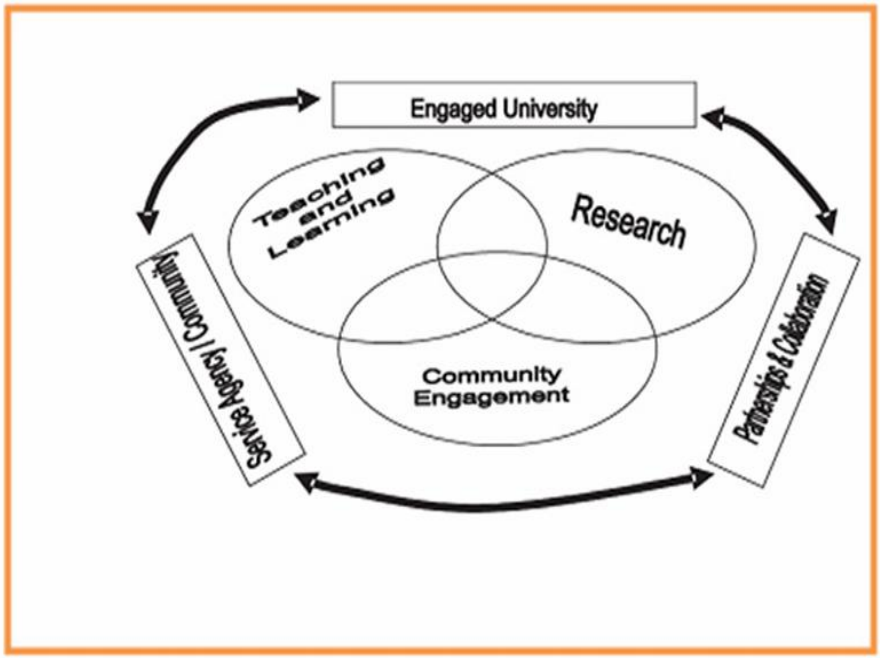
The rise of CSR in the 20th century came from the recognition by modern companies of the need to be socially aware in the early 1950s, especially after the Second World War. The 1950s also represented the beginning of

corporations' understanding of their legitimacy and public expectations (Carroll & Brown, 2018). In a study, Herdiansyah et al. (2026) revealed that globalisation and increased trade, along with the emergence of large corporations, had a strong influence on businesses' adoption of CSR policies. This implies that whatever initiatives companies decide to pursue on their own, they must establish international standards for corporate behaviour and social responsibility. This will help ensure the protection of people's rights and the environment.

While CSR is currently receiving more attention than in the past, many corporations have shown concern about society over time. Some researchers stated that CSR is considered a "motherhood issue" (Mohammed, 2024, p. 41) and, as such, has a great deal of interest among corporations. Over time, as social issues continue to gain attention globally, Okafor et al. (2025) argue that CSR, which was once largely associated with multinational corporations and the oil and gas industry, has increasingly gained relevance within higher education institutions. Similarly, universities, as key social institutions, are not only centres for learning, but they also contribute immensely to societal development and environmental impacts. This view concurs with Asemah et al. (2013) as cited by Adelabu et al. (2022), who noted that this expectation has led to the adaptation of CSR principles to the university environment, where responsibility is framed in terms of community engagement, ethical conduct, and sustainable development. Their study further highlights that CSR gives institutions an advantage in the competition, attracts more students, responds to the business needs of their supporters, and develops satisfied alumni.

In developing countries such as Nigeria, the role of universities in CSR becomes even more significant. This is premised on the notion that no institution can afford to exist in isolation without its host community. Zannu et al. (2024) likened this scenario to the benefit attached to those in a mutual relationship and, as such, requires a give-and-take process. The authors explained that community relations is the recognition that there is a relationship between businesses and society, which requires deliberate planning of multiple corporate actions to be taken into consideration. In short, when an organisation exists in a community, it has a reciprocal obligation to the host community. On the other hand, Onwuemele (2018) emphasised that universities are often regarded as agents of development, with expectations to contribute to educational access, healthcare delivery, and community empowerment. These expectations highlight the role of universities in addressing community needs through their engagement initiatives. However, the effectiveness of CSR in higher education depends not only on the existence of such initiatives but also on how effectively they are communicated to and experienced by stakeholders. Below is a flow chart of an infusion model of an engaged university.

Figure 2: Infusion Model of an Engaged University



Source: Onwuemele (2018).

In addition, Livala et al. (2023) suggest that universities can align their research missions with projects that deliver clear public benefits, support economic growth, and contribute to societal development. Such efforts not only serve key stakeholders but also create broader value for society as a whole. However, the implementation of CSR is often subjected to criticism and controversy. Some scholars, like Zannu et al. (2024), claim that there is an overwhelming business justification for CSR as companies gain various advantages through their operations, which have a wider and longer scope beyond the company's immediate and short-term profit-making objectives which can also be a distraction from the basic economic purpose of the corporations, while Ady and Zahroh (2024) contend that it is merely cosmetic and has become a major effort to pre-empt the role of governments as a watchdog over multinational corporations. Despite its role and all the criticisms, CSR has evolved significantly over the years, and remains a necessity for every organisation aiming to demonstrate corporate responsibility, especially in societies characterised by socio-economic developmental problems such as unemployment, healthcare services, infrastructural inadequacies, and educational decline.

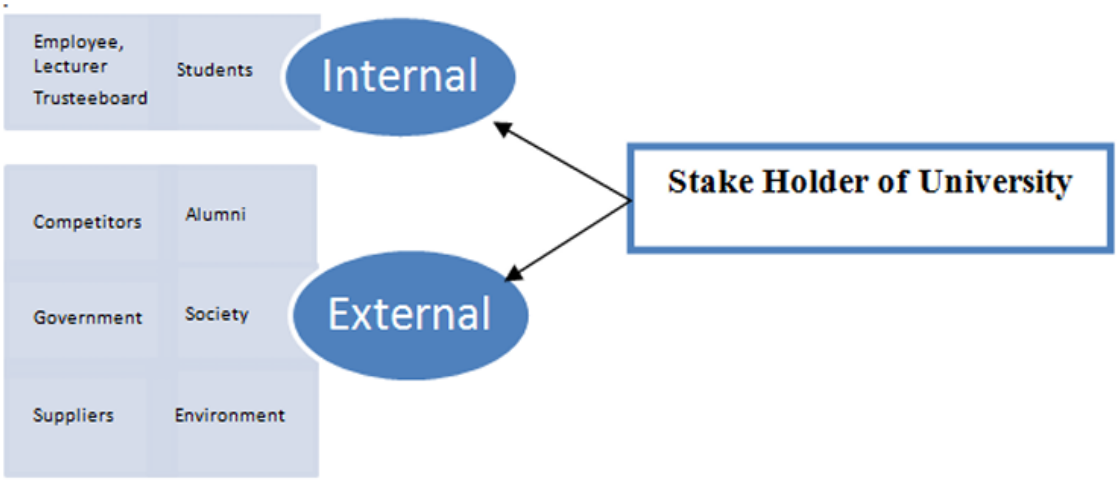
Communication strategies as catalysts for stakeholder engagement in CSR initiatives

A communication strategy involves a systematic process in the distribution of information. Studies by Shabrina (2023) have shown that the communication process involves being persuasive about a message, making it very educational and, most importantly, closing cultural gaps that may impede understanding. While CSR activities may be well-designed and socially beneficial, their success largely depends on the effectiveness of the communication programmes to the concerned parties.

In the same vein, Abba (2024) noted that for effective stakeholder engagement through communication, a development agent, for example, must identify the best channel for each message, determine which messages and tones are suitable for different audiences, and ensure that the chosen channel reaches target audiences in the language they best understand. Most importantly, they must identify who should carry or deliver this specific message to the audience while also considering the literacy rate of the recipient. Agreeing to this assertion, Koilakonda (2023) concurred that communication is now a two-way process that requires feedback from the receiver to the sender. This implies that during the communication process, both senders and receivers can continuously send, transmit and receive messages at the same time, leading to a more interactive flow of information and ideas. The findings of Koilakonda further highlight the importance of continuous feedback loops with stakeholders, as this allows the sharing of thoughts. In response to this, Gutterman (2023) highlighted that becoming socially responsible means having a good rapport system with stakeholders. While Nyitse and Agaku (2023) noted that when an organisation establishes a good stakeholder engagement process, it can and ought to become one of the valuable resources that will help in increasing the value of the organisation in the eyes of all stakeholders involved. The stakeholder engagement efforts must include the collection of relevant information about the concerns and suggestions of stakeholders, which might prove useful in terms of improving the effectiveness of the organisation, both in the light of individual stakeholders and in general.

On the other hand, Emeka-Okoli et al. (2024) opined that stakeholder engagement is also a great chance for a university to share first-hand information about its commitment and steps taken in regard to its CSR efforts. This process enables stakeholders to advocate for the legitimacy of the university when they are convinced of its commitment to sustainability. Thus, when it comes to universities' stakeholder engagement, it involves a proper dialogue between the university system and its stakeholders. These people take part in the university's work and thus are engaged in CSR initiatives via volunteering, advocating, and organisational programmes. They are directly affected by the university's activities and, hence, are critical for ensuring a harmonious relationship between the 'Town and Gown' (Ogunode et al., 2023). The diagram below illustrates a typical example of the stakeholders of a university.

Figure 3: Stakeholders of a University



Source: Hossain (2017)

To facilitate meaningful involvement in the school system, there must be effective collaboration and communication with all relevant stakeholders involved. Consequently, Livala et al. (2023) suggest that communication in the university environment is indispensable, as it serves as a tool and a bridge for relaying information and ideas between individuals, places, and objects. It also provides an avenue for the mutual existence of all major stakeholders within the institutional framework. The authors further highlight that many issues currently seen at some universities in Nigeria are attributed to poor communication between all stakeholders involved with the university, either directly or indirectly, with each other and the school itself. As a result, when the stakeholders fail to communicate effectively with the university, conflicts occur. In this case, it is vice versa, as it would restrain productivity and overall efficiency of the academic institution's environment. Considering the sensitivities involved in dealing with local communities in universities, communication cannot just focus on the provision of information alone; rather, it should be aimed at encouraging dialogue, cooperation, and even trust. Hence, the efficiency of any CSR programme does not only hinge on the type of activity being carried out, but also on the communication strategy applied.

Effectiveness of CSR communication strategies

In today's business world, CSR strategic communications is one of the most important elements of building trust, legitimacy, and lasting partnerships with different stakeholders. However, Citra et al. (2025) stated that there are unique challenges associated with CSR communication in today's communication environment. In an era characterised by information, the reduction of consumer confidence, and increased scrutiny of corporate motives poses a great challenge. Citra et al. (2025) further highlighted that 61% of consumers think that firms practice "greenwashing," which means that they mislead people in terms of their environmentally responsible actions. Moreover, media noise and platform diversification make it difficult to communicate messages, while stakeholders' distrust is heightened in the wake of corporate scandals and dubious CSR communication strategies.

In line with the above, Adiga (2024) stated that CSR communication allows companies to express their social and environmental values. It enables them to show stakeholders the responsible actions that they are taking; in turn, stakeholders respond and participate in joint activities with the company. When done well, CSR communications can improve the company’s reputation, influence customers’ buying decisions, create engaged employees, and ultimately, improve the company’s financial performance. On the contrary, if a strategy fails or appears to be misleading or disingenuous, stakeholders might react sceptically to such communication attempts. Researchers and practitioners have attempted to find out which form of CSR communication would resonate most strongly with audiences, which channels have the greatest effect, and whether the industry type and reputation would affect the outcomes.

A study conducted by Ajayi and Mmutle (2021) revealed that many firms employ both self-interested and

socially responsible intentions in communicating CSR, favouring information-based and unidirectional CSR communication styles. Nevertheless, the nature of stakeholder relations supports the theory that using dialogue-based and participation-driven CSR communication might yield better results. Communication plays an important part in making CSR visible; it helps stakeholders perceive the intentions of the university, appraise the contributions made, and assess the integrity of the social engagements undertaken by the organisation. This may take the form of media interactions, community forums, reports of various kinds, updates on social media platforms, or even events on campus; all forms of CSR communication affect the perceptions of stakeholders and allow universities to demonstrate their satisfaction of societal needs.

Challenges in CSR communication and stakeholder engagement

It is certain that corporations need to be concerned about a lot more than just meeting the requirements of their shareholders. In the Nigerian case, Okafor (2025) indicated that the CSR policy of an organisation is heavily influenced by the social norms and culture of the society within which the corporation operates. Overall, CSR is understood in developing countries as a means of assessing the implications of the actions of corporations on the communities. This resentment is mainly attributed to the fact that corporations make huge profits through utilising the country's natural resources without offering fair compensation back to the people of the country.

Lack of trust between private universities and their local communities was another challenge mentioned by Xue and de Leon (2025). Their study showed that many members of the community have low trust with regards to the strategy for CSR adopted by the universities. This is mainly caused by the lack of clarity on the objectives that are set to be achieved. This means that misunderstanding and insufficient communication were the reasons why community members did not view universities as trustworthy. This highlights that the successful implementation of CSR initiatives largely depends on perceptions of universities as having integrity, acting fairly, and behaving consistently.

The limitation of resources is another threat to CSR communication and stakeholder engagement. According to the evidence provided in a study carried out in a private university environment by Ogunode et al. (2024), it has been observed that despite the fact that there is a commitment of private universities to social responsibility, the system of financing (tuition-financing system) poses a limit on the amount of money available to implement social responsibility practices, since the source of most of their funds is through tuition fees for such practices. Insufficient funds remain a significant problem in both public and private educational institutions in Nigeria. The cost of education forces the university management to concentrate on basic functions, while social responsibility programs are inadequately funded. This resonates with what was pointed out earlier by Xue and de Leon (2025), that organisational activities are largely defined by the availability of the resources they have, which in turn determine the outcome of CSR efforts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study has two theories; the first is Stakeholder Theory, and it is supported by Participatory Communication Theory.

Stakeholder theory

The stakeholder theory was first used by Ansoff in 1965 and later gained popularity in the mid-1980s. The term "Stakeholder theory" was formally articulated as a theory by Robert Edward Freeman in his paper titled: *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, published in 1984. The theory defines stakeholders as "a group without whose support the organisation would cease to exist". The theory is built on the basis that organisations should look beyond just making profits for shareholders and reconsider the interests of their stakeholders before any important decisions are made. The theory was founded on key assumptions that identify stakeholders as a group without whose support the organisation would not exist, and as such, maintaining a continuous relationship with them becomes very crucial.

Since its inception, the theory has undergone several repositionings, ranging from being viewed as generally a part of business ethics and corporate social responsibility to a guiding principle in sustainable development

strategies. Earlier perspectives, such as those highlighted by Ndoh (2025), have initially emphasised how to balance the stakeholders' interests to achieve organisational goals. However, in the current context, this perspective has shifted and adjusted as stakeholders are no longer seen as merely an ethical addition, but as a strategic necessity. In this current stage, organisations cannot afford to overlook their key stakeholders or risk losing their reputation.

While it has many merits, certain scholars have subjected it to critical analysis. Scholars like Valentinov (2025) argue that rather than serving as a neutral or balanced framework, stakeholder theory may unintentionally reinforce pro-capitalist and pro-business ideologies. This broadness makes it difficult for organisations to prioritise stakeholders effectively, as virtually anyone can be considered a stakeholder. Another critical view of stakeholder theory is the belief that the theory operates in absolutes, leaving unsolved grey areas without a proper solution, as Phillips et al. (2026) state. In other words, corporations define stakeholder value without genuinely representing them. While Stakeholder theory presents a deep perspective and guidance to everyone, it is particularly relevant to this study as it relates to the university's CSR communication, which encompasses policies and practices concerning stakeholders. Most importantly, as identified by Leal et al. (2025), the theory highlights the central role of an effective communication strategy in stakeholder engagement, which is one of the main focuses of this study. Since stakeholder relationships are sustained through interaction, communication strategies become essential for creating awareness, enabling participation, and building trust. In summary, what this theory implies is that in order for an organisation to involve the interests of all its stakeholders, whether internal or external, it must act upon the interests, needs, and concerns of the host community because the host community is a key component in the very existence of the organisation.

Participatory communication theory

Participatory communication is based on the philosophy of Paulo Freire, the founding father of PAR, popular education, and critical pedagogy in 1970. Freire's philosophy on dialogic communication brought about new paradigms in opposition to the existing traditional top-down models of communication. The theory is built on the assumption that communication is not just a transmission of information from the dominant force to other individuals but rather a mutual exchange that involves a two-way process where both parties contribute meaningfully (Fernández-Aballí, 2020). Thus, while Freire is considered the progenitor of the theory, Obiakor et al. (2025) indicated that the theory has been refined in recent times by communication experts such as Jan Servaes, Thomas Tufte, and Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron, especially after the 1980s. The Participatory Communication Theory, as noted by Ajii (2026), stresses the need for an active and involved process of individuals and communities in the developmental process rather than passive beneficiaries.

Despite its usefulness, Waisbord (2008) posits that participatory communication theory is often difficult to implement in real time. The author further argued that genuine participation is often limited by organisational structures, power imbalances, time constraints, and resource limitations. In most cases, management controls decisions that are made even if organisations say they encourage participation. On the other hand, Wang and Huang (2025) added that participatory processes slow decision-making and create conflicts due to differing stakeholder interests and expectations. This theory is relevant to this study because it emphasises inclusive conversations and participation of stakeholders in the communication process, which is not the same as conventional communication models that use only message transmission. Participatory communication involves interaction, feedback, and shared understanding among stakeholders. These two theories together provided an overview for the Appraisal of Communication Strategies Utilised by Bingham University Karu in its Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and Stakeholder Engagements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research methodology using Key Informant Interviews (KII) as the data collection technique. The KII method was selected because it allows for the collection of nuanced information from key persons (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). A purposive sampling method was used to select participants based on their relevance and expertise in CSR-related communication and stakeholder engagement activities at

Bingham University, Karu. The participants were drawn from one key senior university administrative unit, seven public affairs units, and three student affairs units.

A total of eleven (11) participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Hennink et al. (2017) indicated that 9 interviews are typically enough to reach "code saturation," where you have identified all the main thematic issues in a study. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, allowing for direct interaction with participants. Each session lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted using audio recordings and moderator note-taking. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned unique codes (E01–E011) during data transcription and analysis. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of recurring patterns. The data collection took place from April 18th to 23rd, 2025.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Demographic Details of interviewees

S/N	Variables	Categories	Frequency
1	**Gender**	Male	9
		Female	2
		Total	**11**
2	**Years of experience**	1-3 years	1
		4-6 years	4
		7-9 years	4
		10 and above	2
		Total	**11**
3	**Professional Category**	Senior Administrative personnel	1
		Public affairs unit	7
		Student Affairs unit	3
		Total	**11**

Source: *KII 2026*

From the above table, the demographic information of the interviewees can be seen. In order to protect anonymity and confidentiality, they were classified based on their profession and not any official designation. The demographic factors are gender, number of years of experience, and professional classification. The research had more male respondents than female respondents. This was due to the fact that there were only two female employees available during the period of data collection.

RO1: CSR initiatives undertaken by Bingham University

An aggregation of the views of interviewees indicated that Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State engages in a series of CSR initiatives. The participants identified CSR activities as a top priority of the institution's mission. One of the most frequently cited contributions from the participants was that the university regularly carries out free medical outreaches across communities such as Karu, Kodape, Sayidna, Jos, and Kagoro, where the university campuses are situated. E03 highlighted that “these outreaches typically include general medical screening, X-rays, eye examinations with the provision of eyeglasses, consultations, and health education. These are driven through key institutional platforms like the College of Medical Sciences, the Zankli Research Centre in Karu, and the Jennifer Etuh Specialist Hospital in Kaduna State. The idea is simply leveraging our medical capacity to meet real community health needs”.

Another important CSR activity that is carried out by the university, as identified by the interviewees, is in the area of educational support and scholarships. These scholarships were described as a "transformative bridge," allowing indigent students to benefit across all of the programmes, both primary, secondary and tertiary. One

of the participants, E0-1, pointed out that "Bingham University offers up to 40% scholarships to indigent students, alongside a 20% scholarship provision for members of the ECWA community".

While another noted, “beyond tuition support, we take a broader ecosystem approach where the university provides laboratory equipment for secondary schools in Kodape, donating books to schools within Karu Local Government Area, and extending similar support to ECWA secondary schools nationwide through the ECWA Education Directorate"- E0-11.

Others highlighted community outreach and development, such as the sinking of boreholes, road maintenance, and environmental sanitation within Kodape and the surrounding areas. Participant E0-2 explained that “these may look basic, but they directly affect the quality of life and community perception”. It was also emphasised that the university prioritises "local economic inclusion" by giving preference to host community members in non-teaching roles and in the award of certain contracts. This view was supported by E0-6, who noted that “this is another way the university builds ownership and reduces friction”.

Finally, as explicitly mentioned by all, the university, within or outside the community, treats security as a "top priority". E0-3 highlighted, "We have a working relationship with the local vigilante groups and relevant authorities. In such an environment, security is everyone’s responsibility.” These answers indicate that the CSR practices of the university are evident, planned, and well organised.

RO2: Communication strategies utilised by Bingham University in its CSR initiatives and stakeholder engagements

During the interviews, the participants revealed that there were different channels through which the university interacts with its stakeholders. From the responses gathered, one recurrent discussion is that communication problems greatly contribute to the failure of CSR practices. Several participants emphasised that CSR efforts tend to fail when communication channels are weak.

The findings further reveal that the institution's strategy is built around a "community interface model", anchored by liaison structures and the "Town and Gown Committee". Similarly, E0-9 stressed that the community interface model used by the institution has ensured continuous engagement between the institution and the host community, not just when we have projects to execute, but as an ongoing relationship. One of the participants noted that the "Town and Gown committee" is not just a forum for the university and the stakeholders. “It's a forum for constructive dialogue, where the institution assesses the community's needs so it can intervene” (E0-5).

In specific terms, E0-3 opined that the university deliberately combines formal and informal channels because relying on one alone is ineffective in this context. Participants highlighted various forms, pointing out that they communicate to their stakeholders through "formal writing" which is passed through a “community leader", "Phone calls”, “Town hall meetings with Kodape stakeholders”, “religious platforms”, “follow-up reminder messages” and “Student-led outreach initiatives”. E0-5 added, “Once these messaging channels are acknowledged, the main aim of the CSR activity is accomplished. Then the university media department captures the activities that were done, documents them, and shares the news on social media and print media”.

One of the participants, E0-11, pointed out that CSR fails where communication is weak, so we try as much as possible to communicate clearly to our stakeholders in the best way possible. What ties all these voices together is that CSR communication through all these channels shapes stakeholder views, develops constructive dialogue, and helps the universities assess the community's needs and proffer solutions.

RO3: Effectiveness of communication strategies of Bingham University in promoting stakeholder engagement

In consonance with objective 3, the interview responses revealed by the university staff showed a strong consensus among participants that Bingham University's communication strategies are generally effective in promoting stakeholder engagement, although they are not without challenges, particularly when it comes to

relating to different stakeholders. The findings showed that the university values stakeholder engagement, as it cannot exist in isolation. In fact, it is a 50-50 act. One of the participants, E0-7, states that "The communication methods used by the university help keep everyone informed and involved in their activities." Another participant commented, "With regular updates and programs, stakeholders will be able to participate in the activities of the university" (E0-9).

Nevertheless, despite the effectiveness of these techniques, the participants also stressed the existence of certain barriers, which hinder the realisation of their potential. In particular, some participants mentioned that communication techniques are usually the most effective when certain factors are present. Namely, participants mentioned that communication is most effective when stakeholders are involved from the very beginning of the process, when communication is ongoing and includes face-to-face interaction, and when promises made match reality. The different views clearly demonstrate that even though the communication techniques used by Bingham University are effective, certain gaps should be filled in order to increase inclusiveness.

RO4: Challenges to effective implementation of communication strategies for CSR and stakeholder engagement

From the interviews, some of the challenges that have impeded the process of implementing communication strategies for CSR and stakeholder engagement have been found. Such challenges mostly stemmed from operations at the institutional level, including limited funding, which was one of the factors that act as barriers to the sustainability of the communication strategy.

Participants cited the difference in literacy levels of stakeholders as a key factor that hampers the process of implementation of the communication strategy. According to one of the participants, "Not everyone understands the message the same way because of differences in literacy levels" (E0-3).

Also, the problem of the digital divide was raised, as not all stakeholders can be effectively reached through online communication channels. In addition to that, it is important to stress the increasing expectations of the host communities concerning the sustainability and magnitude of the CSR activities. As one participant remarked, "Communities expect more consistent support, and it becomes difficult to meet those expectations at all times."

A few participants mentioned conflicts in the course of stakeholder engagement. These conflicts were described as arising from practical issues such as land disputes and demands that the host community knows vividly that the university cannot grant. Despite these challenges, participants emphasised that the university has consistently adopted strategies to manage such situations and reach mutual understanding. Another participant noted, "We have been able to manage the ups and downs and always find a way to come to an agreement E0-9." Importantly, participants stressed that while disagreements do occur, as is typical in any human society, they have not escalated into major crises. This suggests that while the challenges are not uncommon, they require deliberate planning and consistency to manage stakeholders effectively. Overall, improving internal capacity and adapting suitable communication approaches are critical to enhancing stakeholder engagement outcomes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings was presented thematically in relation to the four objectives of the study:

The first objective was to identify the CSR initiatives undertaken by Bingham University. The findings indicate that Bingham University engages in several CSR activities in its neighbouring community (Karu, Kodape, Sayidna, Jos, and Kagoro), particularly in areas such as free medical outreaches, educational support and scholarships, job creation, and community outreach and development, medical outreach, educational support initiatives, and faith-driven social services. The findings also reveal a broader ecosystem approach, evidenced by the provision of laboratory equipment to secondary schools in Kodape. In addition, the university places security as a top priority. This finding aligns with the position of Shwarji et al. (2024) that universities

engage in various CSR programmes that align with their mission and values. The result also confirms the observation made by Alsrehan (2025) that Universities are often perceived as instruments of development whose responsibility includes contributing to societal development through knowledge sharing and social investment. From this, it could be argued that the strategy of Corporate Social Responsibility that Bingham University has adopted is carefully chosen, with focus being put on areas where measurable positive impact can be made both inside and outside the institution's host communities. This provides an empirical account of what Bingham University does in practice, drawn from the accounts of its own personnel, and it is the basis for examining how these initiatives are communicated.

The second objective shows the communication strategy utilised by Bingham University. From the findings, the university deliberately adopts the use of a hybrid form of communication which involves formal and informal strategies of communication. Formal communication strategies involve the use of written forms of communication through the community interface model, leaders, and formal engagements through town hall meetings. Informal communication strategies include the use of phone calls, religious forums, reminders, and outreach initiatives initiated by students. This finding is in agreement with the position held by Adelabu et al. (2022) that communication makes CSR visible, as it influences the way stakeholders perceive the intentions of the institution. This implies that the communication strategy adopted by the institution takes into consideration the socio-cultural characteristics of the host community since it would be difficult to achieve effective stakeholder engagement using a single communication strategy. This is in confirmation of the postulated participatory communication theory as employed in this study, whereby communication is not the transfer of information from the dominating force to other people but a two-way process where each party contributes. One important factor that comes out clearly from these results is the institutionalisation of communication through the use of tools such as the community interface model and the Town and Gown Committee. Through these processes, communication between the university and the host community takes place continually and not only during the period of implementation of the projects.

The third objective was to assess the effectiveness of the communication strategies employed by Bingham University in promoting stakeholder engagement. The findings from this study have justifiably shown that stakeholder engagement forms an integral part of the operations of the university, as it cannot operate in isolation from its stakeholders but interacts continually with them. However, the strategies were described as effective subject to certain conditions: communication leads to greater stakeholder engagement where these conditions are met, such as when stakeholders are involved early. This is in agreement with the findings of Emeka-Okoli et al. (2025), which state that stakeholder engagement is a great opportunity for a university to share first-hand information concerning its commitment and measures it has taken regarding its CSR. This is in line with the assumptions of stakeholder theory proposed by Robert Edward Freeman, where stakeholders are identified as a group without whose cooperation the organisation cannot succeed. What this adds is that, in this case, effectiveness is linked to how and when strategies are used, not to which strategy is chosen alone. This contrasts with accounts that treat strategies as effective or ineffective in themselves. These judgements of effectiveness come from university personnel and were not tested against the views of community stakeholders

The fourth objective was to identify the challenges to the effective implementation of communication strategies for CSR and stakeholder engagement at Bingham University. Participants identified three main constraints: limited resources, differences in the literacy levels of stakeholders, and the digital divide, considering the fact that not all stakeholders can be reached online. Participants also reported that conflicts occasionally arise from problems such as land disputes and unfulfilled demands. This is consistent with the point held by Xue and de Leon (2025) that organisational actions are basically influenced by the resources available; the resources dictate the result of the organisational actions. The results further indicate that the university is employing the appropriate strategy to handle conflicts and engage the stakeholders.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study contributes to knowledge by providing an institutional-level account of how communication strategies are utilised in the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and stakeholder engagement at Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State. It adds evidence from a Nigerian private university

setting, extending understanding of CSR communication beyond the more commonly examined corporate sectors. The findings from this study highlight the importance of examining not only the communication channels employed by the institution but also the structures through which the university relates with its surrounding community.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to Bingham University, Karu, and therefore its findings may not be directly generalisable to other private universities with different institutional structures, CSR priorities, and stakeholder relationships. Consequently, the findings reflect the perspectives and experiences of university personnel rather than the direct experiences of host-community members and other external stakeholders. Future research should include community stakeholders' perspectives and compare surveys to test how far the institutional accounts align with community experience.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to appraise communication strategies utilised by Bingham University in its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and stakeholder engagement. Overall, the study demonstrates that Bingham University, as an agent of development, contributes to and actively undertakes a range of CSR initiatives, particularly in areas such as community health outreach, educational support, job creation and community development efforts. Given that communication is an indispensable tool, Bingham University deliberately uses a hybrid communication approach that combines formal and informal channels, supported by structured platforms such as the "community interface model" anchored by liaison structures and the "Town and Gown Committee". Communication efforts have supported ongoing stakeholder engagement and are termed effective when stakeholders are engaged early and there is clear alignment between what is promised and what is delivered. However, these strategies are often conditional and are not guided by a clearly defined framework, as their full potential is constrained by factors such as limited funding, the digital divide, differences in stakeholders' literacy levels, and occasional conflicts arising from issues such as land disputes and rising community expectations. These challenges highlight the complex environment within which CSR communication operates. Thus, there is a need for Bingham University to implement and observe a clearly defined communication framework, along with the continuous improvement of its current strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are recommended.

1. Although the university deploys communication strategies, it should formalise its approach by developing a clearly defined CSR communication framework. While existing strategies are functional, a more structured system would enhance consistency, coordination, and the long-term sustainability of stakeholder engagement efforts.

2. Feedback-oriented communication is an area that needs further elaboration. Platforms such as town hall meetings and liaison committees should be further strengthened to ensure that stakeholder input is not only received but systematically integrated into decision-making processes.

3. Given the variation in literacy levels and access to digital platforms, the university should design communication messages that are simple, accessible, and adaptable to different stakeholder groups. This may include the increased use of local languages, interpersonal communication, and community-based channels.

4. The university should develop proactive strategies for managing expectations and resolving conflicts, particularly in areas such as community demands and resource limitations. Clear communication about institutional capacities and limitations will help prevent misunderstandings.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted with the approval of both supervisors. The study observed appropriate ethical considerations in the conduct of key informant interviews, including respect for participants and the confidentiality of information provided.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of key informant interview records retained by the researchers. These records are not publicly available due to confidentiality considerations but may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to appropriate confidentiality safeguards and any applicable institutional requirements.

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