

# Corporate-Media Synergy: A Critical Analysis of Private Firms' Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives' Impact on Public Environmental Behaviours in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the urgent need for innovative strategies to tackle environmental challenges, focusing on the role of private corporations' corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Nigeria. It examines how firms like Dangote Group and MTNN use CSR, alongside mainstream media agenda-setting functions, to raise environmental awareness and promote sustainability. A literature review contextualizes the theories and assesses how environmental information is disseminated. Findings reveal a significant gap, with limited CSR-led environmental education and public awareness efforts in the media. The study calls for a renewed emphasis on corporate-media synergy, especially in the global south, to enhance private sector contributions to global environmental solutions.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility initiatives (CSRIs); mainstream media (MM); environmental issues (EI); public environmental sensitization (PES); corporate environmental responsibility (CER), environmental sustainability (ES).

## INTRODUCTION

Stability in environmental quality has remained a challenging issue to sustainable development with seven (for instance, numbers 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of the United Nations SDGs) out of the 17 SDGs goals focusing on environmental issues such as pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, deforestation, global warming, and ecological degradation (Aneja et al., 2024; Dada et al., 2024). According to the UN Environment Program (2024) reports, pollution is widespread because it transcends national boundaries. The effect is often fatal, causing 6.7 million deaths globally each year with environmental degradation exacerbating more on pollution (Hussain et al., 2024; Adio 2023). This means environmental degradation threatens global existence and therefore require international cooperation to address. Alao et al. (2024) argue that environmental pollution is particularly pressing in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, due to factors such as rapidly growing population, high levels of environmental indiscipline, poor waste management technologies, low income, and inadequate environmental awareness. These factors directly influence waste generation and management, underscoring the urgent need for decisive action such that involves private-public partnerships through CSR strategies. Machin-Mastromatteo (2023) emphasizes promoting community-driven and social initiatives in developing countries through industry and stakeholder collaboration particularly through media engagement. Similarly, Voyko and Voyko (2022) contend that environmental education and awareness are crucial for companies to continuously improve their environmental behavior and societal impact, advancing towards environmental sustainability.

Like many other developing countries in the global south, Nigeria faces numerous developmental challenges, with environmental issues particularly critical. These challenges include deforestation, pollution, waste generation and management, greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, and conserving biodiversity and natural spaces. According to Okechukwu (2024), a report on environmental sanitation in Nigeria projects a significant increase in solid waste. Failure to disseminate proper waste management and environmental education information could exacerbate these environmental problems. To avert these imminent disasters, environmental

advocates emphasize the need to use media for mass awareness at all levels (Hussain et al., 2024). This submission agrees with Ors's (2012) assertion that the media is a crucial tool for environmental education. Similarly, Nyagadza (2021) and Dyikuk (2021) argue that private corporations should develop and implement strategies to enhance public awareness about the importance of environmental sanitation and ecosystem preservation, which ultimately support global environmental sustainability efforts. This perspective is underscored by Voyko and Voyko's (2022) argument that much of the existing environmental harm results from business activities, including resource extraction, consumption, pollution from production processes, and waste generation.

Unfortunately, mainstream media coverage of environmental issues, particularly the contributions of private firms to environmental sustainability, is almost negligible compared to other sectors of the economy in the global south, especially in Nigeria. While Omitola's (2022) study highlights extensive reporting on health issues and poverty alleviation, research by Obasi and Msughter (2023) and Uzochukwu et al. (2014) indicates that the media in Nigeria pays significantly less attention to environmental sanitation and degradation. This disparity is further supported by a report from *GlobalVoices* (2023), which found that less than 0.1 percent of articles published by two Nigerian newspapers over two three-month periods addressed climate change, underscoring the inadequate media coverage of environmental challenges in the country.

The media's lack of debate and consistent agenda-setting on Nigeria's challenging environmental issues is not solely due to policy shortcomings (Okechukwu, 2024; Geng et al., 2023). It also partly arises from the private sector's reluctance to collaborate with mainstream media to raise awareness and address these problems. Ironically, these private firms often claim to champion environmental sustainability. As Fidelugwuowo (2024) argues, information should not only be made accessible but also presented in a way that encourages its adoption and enhances decision-making among the public. Therefore, efforts by mainstream media, in synergy with private corporations using their CSR initiatives, would create critical awareness among audiences and garner support for positive environmental habits and changes. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the engagement of private firms' CSR initiatives with environmental issues in synergy with the mainstream media's agenda-setting function. This is especially important to motivate mainstream media journalists to cover environmental news, as studies have documented the limitations of traditional media in fulfilling their normative roles due to commercial interests (Ajii and Damak, 2025; Hussain et al., 2024).

## LITERATURE

Growing concerns about environmental challenges and sustainability and the need for global awareness have sparked increased interest in eco-media. Omran and Yaaqbeh (2023) argue that the lack of significant progress in the corporate sector's response to climate change has exacerbated global environmental problems. This perspective conforms with Ilemona (2020), who asserts that Nigerian companies, particularly in the manufacturing and service industries, often fail to provide comprehensive environmental reports in their annual sustainability and social responsibility reports. Similarly, Olaniyi, cited by Gbenga et al. (2023), highlights that Nigeria has faced severe deforestation, resulting in soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, to cultivate environmentally conscious and responsive citizens and to enhance awareness and mitigation of environmental issues, this work underscores the importance of raising more public awareness about environmental sustainability; as effective public sensitization will aid in creating pollution-free environment across Nigeria's air, water, and land.

Situated in the West African region with a population of over 230 million, Nigeria is the fourth largest economy in Africa by GDP (The Eastleigh Voice, 2025), making it a significant case study. The Nigerian physical environment has suffered considerable harm due to greenhouse gases, bush burning, gas flaring, and the burning of fossil fuels (Dyikuk, 2021). Other human activities have led to substantial carbon dioxide emissions, widespread deforestation, reckless tree cutting, desertification from insufficient tree planting, and the extensive use of charcoal as a primary fuel source. The situation is exacerbated by improper waste disposal in unauthorized areas and an ineffective waste management system. The cumulative impact of these factors has left the Nigerian environment in an increasingly inhospitable state, demanding immediate and concerted action.

Supporting this assertion, Gbenga et al. (2023) and Pona et al. (2021) note that Nigeria faces various forms of pollution, including air pollution from industrial emissions, vehicular exhaust, and bush burning; water pollution from oil spills, flooding, and poor waste management; and land pollution from improper waste disposal, deforestation, desertification, and erosion. These issues have detrimental effects on ecosystems and natural resources, leading to increased environmental health risks. The extent to which Nigerian private firms' corporate social responsibility initiatives (CSRIs) using their corporate environmental responsibility (CER) have contributed to mitigating the ongoing environmental challenges that consistently affect society and the nation's development remains a subject of inquiry.

Building on the concept of CSR performance, private firms in Nigeria have been commended for tackling societal challenges such as healthcare and poverty. However, their engagement in environmental education in Nigeria remains largely unexamined (Ajii and Damak, 2025). This observation aligns with Ors's (2012) assertion that, despite many private companies actively addressing environmental and other issues, their initiatives in environmental education are insufficient. Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) highlight the growing importance of prioritizing environmental sustainability across various industries as essential for raising awareness on this matter. Also, Feller (2004) argues that it is crucial to challenge the prevailing norms in environmental issue reporting by introducing alternative strategies to mitigate environmental degradation.

Moreover, the extent of publicly available information, particularly concerning mass education and environmental advocacy efforts by private enterprises in Nigeria, remains grossly underexplored. Further, the scholarly exploration of private firms' involvement in environmental management has been notably sparse. Hence, raising awareness about environmental concerns and protection could significantly influence the public's commitment to positive practices thereby enhancing environmental sustainability. This holds considerable importance as many of the extractive and manufacturing industries have left a notable ecological footprint, significantly contributing to environmental degradation within Nigerian society through their diverse business operations (Ajii and Damak, 2025).

Banerjee (2008) argues that consistently publishing private companies' positive corporate citizenship and social performance reports does not necessarily indicate a genuine commitment to responsible corporate behaviour. Despite their claims otherwise, he contends that transnational corporations (TNCs) have not significantly altered their environmental practices in this new era and should not be viewed as the 'saviours' of the environment or impoverished populations worldwide. These corporations remain the primary creators and distributors of high-risk, harmful, and unsustainable technologies.

This study further verifies Banerjee's (2008) assertion by examining whether corporations make substantive and valuable improvements through their CSRIs and CER. The study uses the cases of Dangote Group and Mobile Telephone Network of Nigeria (MTNN) to explore the complexities of private firms' involvement in environmental sustainability. Mobile Telephone Network of Nigeria (MTNN) is part of a South African multinational telecommunications company operating in over 20 countries worldwide, including Nigeria and several countries in the Middle East. The firm has grown significantly, with its subscriber base reaching over 90.5 million in Nigeria as of April 2025 (Intelpoint, 2025). This highlights its substantial market presence (Awowede, 2024). On the other hand, Dangote Industries Limited is a leading business that meets the essential needs of food and shelter across Sub-Saharan Africa. Originating as a bulk commodity trading venture in the 1970s under the leadership of Aliko Dangote, it has grown into the foremost conglomerate in West Africa. Its footprint now spans 17 African nations, leading the cement market continent-wide. Dangote Cement Plc is one of the largest in West Africa and the premier Nigerian entrant in the Forbes Global 2000 Companies list (Dangote, n.d). Beyond cement, the Dangote Group extends its reach into various sectors across Nigeria and the broader African landscape, including sugar, salt, condiments, packaging, energy, port operations, fertilizer, and petrochemicals industries.

MTNN and Dangote Groups emerged as cases for this study due to their steadfast commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and their profound influence on society, particularly within Nigeria. Both entities have spearheaded impactful CSR initiatives, with MTNN articulating its dedication to leveraging its core business activities to advance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This commitment is enshrined in their vision and mission statements, underlining their resolve to collaborate with governments,

communities, and clients to realize the SDGs, thereby addressing poverty, environmental preservation, and fostering equality by 2030 (MTN Group, n.d).

## Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions based on the insights received from the literature review:

**RQ1.** How effectively do private corporations in Nigeria synergize with mainstream media channels public sensitization about environmental issues and promote environmental sustainability through their corporate social responsibility initiatives?

**RQ2.** To what extent do the CSR initiatives of the selected Nigerian private corporations align with environmental sustainability objectives, particularly in synergy with mainstream media outlets, and how does this impact public perception and behaviour regarding environmental practices in Nigeria?

Guided by the principles of enhancing corporate engagement, visibility, and accountability of CER on our physical environment, this study employs agenda-setting theory to investigate the intricate synergy between the mainstream media (MM) and CSRs concerning environmental sustainability. The media is responsible for setting the agenda and fostering increased awareness regarding environmental issues and sustainability. Considering the principles and the assertion that the media is pivotal in providing individuals with access to information they perceive as crucial to society and likely to influence people significantly, this study explores whether Nigerian corporations effectively use the MM for public sensitization about environmental issues.

To address this issue, we conducted a content analysis of three prominent Nigerian newspapers to assess the contributions of private businesses in Nigeria through their CSR initiatives. The core of this idea is to enhance public environmental sensitization (PES), emphasizing the importance of equipping individuals with the information, knowledge, attitudes, values, and abilities needed to safeguard and enhance the environment for a more sustainable future.

According to Gbenga et al. (2023), the media amplifies environmental information and molds public perceptions and attitudes toward these issues through agenda-setting. Furthermore, it catalyzes responsible behavior and champions initiatives, policies, and practices geared toward environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the assertion that businesses wield considerable influence in shaping and advancing societal objectives and aspirations, being integral components of society (Nsikan et al., 2015), prompts scrutiny, particularly regarding how private enterprises effectively communicate the environmental impact of their operations and impact environmental wellbeing. This scrutiny focuses on their claims of dedication to environmental conservation and the associated benefits. This aspect is critical, as private entities position themselves as conscientious corporate citizens driving societal progress by fostering public awareness of sustainability.

This study argues that public environmental sensitization and positive environmental behavior could be enhanced through effective synergy between the MM and private companies' CSRs. Such collaborations have the potential to improve performance in these areas, thereby promoting environmental sustainability.

To illustrate our point, we conducted a content analysis of CSR initiatives in private firms concerning environmental sustainability discourse, using the Agenda Setting Theory framework. The aim is to reinvigorate awareness about the potential impact of diverse perspectives on environmental issues through robust dissemination of information and public environmental sensitization. This holds particular significance in Nigeria, given its substantial environmental challenges. The main goal of this research is to cultivate environmental consciousness. To accomplish this, it investigates how private enterprises, specifically the Dangote Group and Mobile Telephone Network of Nigeria (MTNN), participate in CSR initiatives involving media-driven education and public environmental sensitization campaigns to promote positive environmental behavior and sustainability in Nigeria.

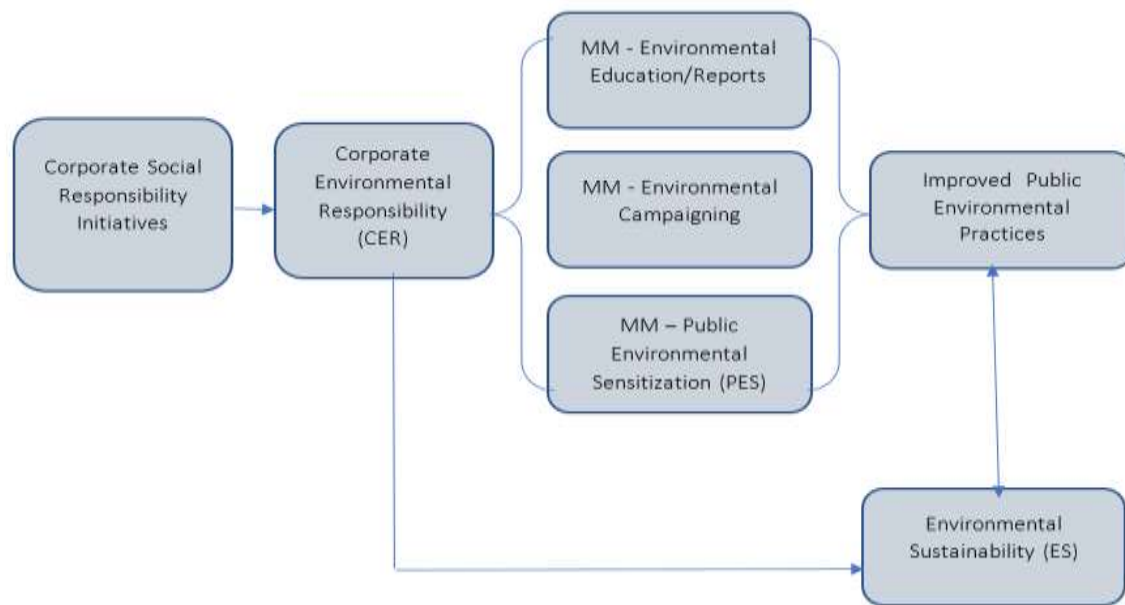


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model

Source: Authors

**Conceptual Model:** The corporate social responsibility initiatives (CSRIs) of private firms driven by their commitment to corporate environmental responsibility (CER), in synergy with the mainstream media's (MM) efforts in environmental education/reports, campaigns, and consistent public environmental sensitization (PES), will significantly raise environmental awareness leading to improved public environmental practices and thus, promote environmental sustainability (ES).

### Towards Conceptualization of CSR and Environmental Sustainability

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) encompasses a broad array of strategies, making it a complex and multidisciplinary field. The absence of a universally accepted definition of CSR is unsurprising, given its diverse applications and the lack of a shared understanding among scholars (Seele and Lock, 2015; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011; Ojo, 2008). Dahlsrud (2008) emphasizes that CSR's essence lies not solely in its formal definition but in how it is socially constructed within specific contexts. Bernard (2015) adds that CSR is shaped by its context, including the political and organizational landscape in which a company operates and its core objectives.

Dahlsrud (2008, p. 7), referring to Van Marrewijk, further notes that CSR needs to be tailored to the specific circumstances of each organization. Therefore, within the context of this study, we looked at Carroll's (2016) perception of CSR as the business people's methods and actions to ensure that society or stakeholders, other than the business owners, are considered and others are safeguarded. According to Nsikan et al. (2015, p. 152), CSR is a strategy businesses use to run their operations so that their economic, environmental, and social actions benefit and positively impact society. According to Dahlsrud (2008, p. 7) and Wan-Jan (2006, p. 182), CSR is the company's continued commitment to behaving ethically and contributing to economic development by improving the quality of life of the workplace and its families, as well as the local community and society in general (Development, 2002, p. 8).

Osagie (2017, p. 1) quotes Solihin's idea and associates the CSR concept with "3P (profit, people, planet)". He added that, besides profit, businesses' goals should include protecting the environment and ensuring human well-being. In the same vein, Dahlsrud (2008, p. 2) classified environmental dimensions of CSR as "a cleaner environment, environmental stewardship, and environmental concerns in business operations." This definition focuses more on the environment.

Our concept of the environment aligns closely with the observations made by Gbenga et al. (2023) and Williamson et al. (2019), who emphasize that it encompasses both the physical and social aspects surrounding

individuals, influencing them in various ways. This includes natural elements such as water bodies, landforms, flora, and fauna, as well as human-made contributions to improving quality of life (Sonko and Sonko, 2023).

Our concept of the environment issues includes all factors affecting humanity, from the land we inhabit to the air we breathe, from the natural landscapes to the constructed environments we create. Environmental sustainability, therefore, extends beyond the responsible use of resources to fulfill present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (Gbenga et al., 2023; Sphera.com, 2022; Visser, 2011).

Moreover, our conception of environmental sustainability involves harmonizing ecological, economic, and social objectives. This entails initiatives like reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy sources, fostering reforestation, and enhancing environmental cleanliness while ensuring equitable access to resources. This approach resonates with Ajii and Damak (2025) and Moldan et al.'s (2012) perspectives, which emphasize the management of both renewable and non-renewable resources alongside pollution control from a biogeophysical stance.

Gbenga et al. (2023) and Moldan et al. (2012) highlight that biophysical sustainability underscores the importance of maintaining or enhancing the Earth's life-support systems. Ultimately, the overarching goal of environmental sustainability is to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own, particularly concerning environmental conservation and protection.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on agenda-setting theory. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw propounded the theory. Originating from their observations during the 1968 presidential election in North Carolina, the theory underscores a significant correlation between public perception and media emphasis on pressing issues (Kim et al., 2017). According to Lule (2010), agenda-setting theory posits that the media shapes public concerns rather than merely reflecting them. Issues receiving extensive media coverage tend to dominate public discourse and action.

Consequently, the media plays a crucial role in determining the topics occupying the public's collective consciousness. When the press overlooks specific issues, such as environmental concerns, they risk being sidelined in public discourse. This dynamic underscore the notion that mass media plays a pivotal role in shaping societal priorities, leading to the development of agenda-setting theory (Zain, 2014).

This theory resonates with the understanding that mass media messages influence our cognitive processes, shaping our world perception (Feller, 2004). Mass media plays a dual role in shaping internal and external perspectives by defining agendas and providing frameworks for issue comprehension. However, amidst the backdrop of pressing global environmental challenges threatening lives, societies, economies, and biodiversity, a critical question emerges: do corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives of private firms effectively synergize with mainstream media in advancing the agenda-setting function, thereby facilitating meaningful discourse on environmental issues and fostering sustainability through public environmental sensitization?

Kim et al. (2017), Nwabueze et al. (2015), and Zain (2014) assert that the media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception by filtering and altering the information presented. This perspective suggests that media outlets influence public discourse by choosing which topics to prioritize and showcase in news articles or broadcasts. Acting as gatekeepers, the mass media determines which stories gain traction, often guided by perceived public interest. Consequently, topics that receive extensive media coverage are more likely to be deemed necessary by the public.

The agenda-setting theory is significant in this study because highlighting environmental issues and consistently presenting environmental information, along with engaging in public environmental sensitization, can significantly improve positive environmental attitudes. This approach can also promote the adoption of sustainable environmental practices among the public.

## Private Corporations' Engagement with CSR

Corporate social responsibility is context-dependent and may mean different things to different organizations. According to Dahlsrud (2008), Wan-Jan (2006), and Blowfield and Frynas (2005), various firms and professionals aiming to implement CSR may interpret CSR in distinct ways. Although they all use the term 'CSR,' it does not necessarily imply they are discussing the same concept. This means that different organizations may articulate the same idea using various perspectives, resulting in distinct practices or approaches to CSR engagement. For instance, while some managers argue that CSR is an excellent tool for branding and rebranding for a favourable corporate image and reputation, others have argued that businesses should practice social responsibility because it is the proper thing to do (Lantos et al. in Wan-Jan, 2006). This assertion depicts the notion that companies engage with CSR for reasons best defined by them, focusing on governance and social or environmental issues. This variation in presentations where different firms adduce and allude to their specific interpretation of the term CSR and make policy demands based on such a definition corroborates Dahlsrud's (2008) position that each business has specific CSR issues that they address because of the varied needs of the stakeholders that they engage with.

While some firms prioritize profitability, others in the private sector have embraced Corporate Social Responsibility as a moral compass to enrich stakeholders' interests and positively impact society or the environment. Amoako et al. (2019) emphasize that companies often undertake voluntary initiatives to uplift social conditions in their operational areas or boost their reputation and revenue. Drawing on Williams and Preston's perspective, Kamara (2020) maintains that CSR represents a mutually beneficial strategy for businesses and society, advocating for integration into business models to address environmental and social concerns alongside economic objectives. This position affirms the concept of shared values in business.

Further, on the basis of the shared value business concept, Babiak and Trendafilova (2011, p. 14) contend that businesses' efforts to enhance environmental performance have resulted in improved financial outcomes, with the environment emerging as a central focus in CSR initiatives. Supporting this, Seele and Lock (2015, p. 401) echo Kotler and Lee, highlighting managers' tendency to prioritize CSR for its potential to boost financial standing, albeit with social and environmental benefits as secondary considerations. This "business case" perspective signals a shift from viewing CSR as a mere obligation to recognizing it as a strategic imperative. Nonetheless, compelling evidence suggests a direct link between companies' environmental practices and competitive edge (Nsikan et al., 2015), enhancing their position in the market landscape (Feller, 2004). From this standpoint, all stakeholders within the corporate realm must unite in corporate environmental responsibility (CER) to advance sustainability efforts.

From a slightly different perspective, some studies claim that attention is gradually shifting from what Visser (2011, p. 8) termed "CSR 1.0" – the traditional understanding of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' – towards a new, integrated approach known as CSR 2.0, characterized as 'Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility' (Visser, 2011, p. 8). This CSR 2.0 model, as envisioned by Visser, emphasizes the connection to environmental sustainability (ES). It entails the responsibility to protect global ecosystems and conserve natural resources to ensure the well-being of both current and future generations. The concept of environmental sustainability (ES) corresponds with definitions provided by authoritative bodies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency and the United Nations, who define it as meeting present needs while protecting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Sphera.com, 2022). Consequently, understanding mitigating ecological and environmental challenges is at the heart of ES as envisaged in this study. This endeavor seeks to cultivate a greener world by safeguarding water and air from harmful pollutants, benefiting present and future societies, with significant ramifications for corporate practices.

According to Visser (2011, p. 2), it may be argued that CSR should not bear the weight of tackling challenging social, environmental, and ethical issues because it may lack the capability to do so. While businesses alone cannot solve global problems, it raises the question of the value of CSR initiatives that do not genuinely strive to address and reverse these issues, particularly those stemming from corporate actions. What happens when a company's nefarious activities, directly or indirectly, compromise the environment? As Ajii and Damak (2025) note, while a company's capacity to generate profit is unquestionable and should not be compromised, it is undeniable that some of its economic, social, and environmental impacts are decidedly adverse. Consequently,



there is a growing demand for businesses to demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental responsibility, especially when their operations have the potential to disrupt the ecosystem and the environment.

Kamara (2020) asserts that multinational corporations (MNCs) can significantly enhance employment standards, promote infrastructural development, and improve the overall quality of life in host countries by offering wages higher than local businesses typically provide. However, Greer and Bruno (1996) argue that the efforts of giant corporations to portray themselves as champions of sustainability and poverty alleviation, particularly amidst international political events, are primarily public relations tactics. Despite these claims, they contend that these corporations mainly focus on consolidating their global market dominance. Banerjee (2008) regards corporate social responsibility and sustainability as ideological movements designed to justify the influence and power of firms. Again, Greer and Bruno (1996) stress the necessity of critically evaluating the assertions made by these companies to ensure the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. Nonetheless, addressing the complex power dynamics between corporations and the public on environmental issues requires a genuine commitment to serving the public's best interests.

This study, therefore, offers a dual contribution. Firstly, it enriches the CSR literature by shedding light on potential synergy between private corporations and mainstream media to promote environmental sustainability through public environmental sensitization. In the same line of thought, Tarkang et al. (2023) aptly observed that access to vital information is crucial for the emergence of knowledge, which significantly contributes to skill development, community empowerment, and the interconnectedness of institutions involved in economic and environmental development. This contribution is significant because it provides an alternative perspective on environmental issues, re-awakening the consciousness of private corporations in Nigeria to explore and embrace their environmental CSR obligations. Secondly, the study evaluates the corporate environmental responsibility (CER) of two prominent private firms in Nigeria, namely the Dangote Group and MTNN, while scrutinizing the Nigerian mainstream media's role in advancing environmental education and fostering environmental awareness and sensitization.

Building on the above conceptual clarifications, it is evident that private enterprises possess the capability and potential to advance environmental efforts across various dimensions, focusing on increasing awareness about environmental issues and sustainability. Consequently, this study examines the collaborative efforts between private companies in Nigeria and the mainstream media to enhance public environmental sensitization and promote environmental sustainability (ES). This inquiry is notably significant considering the pressing need to address environmental challenges and ensure sustainability, particularly in the light of Daniel Esty's (Yale School of the Environment, 2024) assertion that the 2024 Environmental Performance Index highlights a spectrum of crucial sustainability issues, ranging from environmental pollution, climate change to biodiversity loss and beyond. It indicates a trend necessitating intensified global efforts to protect critical ecosystems and the well-being of our planet.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As indicated earlier, Dangote Industries Limited and Mobile Telephone Network of Nigeria (MTNN) were selected as cases for this research. The study uses a content analysis methodology incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative analysis was employed during the data collection phase, while qualitative analysis was used to interpret and discuss the findings. The quantitative methodological approach adopted involves a search of two secondary sources, which include the ProQuest Central database and online databases of the selected top three Nigerian mainstream newspapers: (1) *Punch*, (2) *Vanguard*, and (3) *Guardian*. These newspapers are considered the most widely read daily Nigerian newspapers (Media Landscapes, 2024), all of which have online versions. The content coverage of these newspapers was analysed to understand the extent to which private firms work in synergy with the mainstream media on public environmental sensitization with a case study of Dangote and MTN in Nigeria. First, ProQuest Central's online full-text database was searched using the same timeline and search phrases for all publication types (e.g., editorial, feature, letter to editor, and hard/soft news). Secondly, a general search through the newspapers' online web pages is conducted using search phrases such as *Punch* newspaper stories about Dangote and *Punch* newspaper stories about MTN Nigeria. This exact phrase was repeated for the *Guardian* and *Vanguard* from January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2022.



We cross-checked the results of the search gathered from the newspaper database with the ProQuest Central search, which gave 582 headlines, as seen in Table 1. The coding schema used in this study is inspired by the work of Ersoy and Miller (2020). However, we employed keywords and themes peculiar to this study to achieve the aim of the study. For instance, January to December were coded and grouped as *months*; 2020, 2021, and 2022 were coded and grouped as *years*. The *Guardian*, *Punch*, and *Vanguard* were coded and grouped as *newspapers*; Dangote Group and MTN Nigeria were coded and grouped as *firms*, while education, campaigns, news, and CSR were coded and grouped as *evaluation* (units of analysis). Thus, the four variables inputted into IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 were months, years, newspapers, firms, and evaluation, and their corresponding values are listed below. For instance, January to December were assigned values 1–12. 2020, 2021, and 2022 were assigned the values of 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

Similarly, *Punch*, the *Guardian*, and *Vanguard* were given 1, 2, and 3 values, respectively. Also, Dangote Group was assigned 1, while MTNN took on the value of 2. Finally, education, campaign, news, and CSR were assigned 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

## RESULTS

The following section presents an analysis of media coverage comprising 528 headlines about Dangote Group and MTNN. These headlines were sourced from the *Guardian*, *Punch*, and *Vanguard* for 2020, 2021, and 2022. The selection of headlines was carried out using a purposive sampling technique. The evaluation of these headlines centered on their relevance to categories such as environmental education, environmental campaigns, environmental news, corporate environmental responsibility reports, or press releases concerning Dangote Group and MTNN.

TABLE 1. Media content of months and years analysed

S/N	Months	2020	2021	2022	Frequency	Percentage
1	January	26	14	5	45	8.5
2	February	19	11	4	34	6.4
3	March	28	15	14	57	10.8
4	April	13	37	19	69	13.1
5	May	12	22	8	42	8.0
6	June	16	17	5	38	7.2
7	July	16	4	11	31	5.9
8	August	13	14	13	40	7.6
9	September	11	14	11	36	6.8
10	October	19	10	23	52	9.8
11	November	20	17	17	54	10.2
12	December	9	11	10	30	5.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Authors

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of media coverage across various months and years for both Dangote Group and Mobile Telephone Network of Nigeria (MTNN). April emerged as the month with the most significant media attention, constituting 13.1 percent, aligning with the peak business activity period of the year. Conversely, December marked the lowest newspaper coverage at 5.7 percent, reflecting a decrease in business activities as the year concluded.

TABLE 2. Yearly distribution of newspaper coverage of Dangote Group and MTNN

Year	Frequency	Percentage
2020	202	38.3
2021	186	35.2
2022	140	26.5
Total	528	100.0

Source: Authors

Table 2 describes the yearly distribution of the newspaper coverage of the two firms. In 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, media attention on the CSR activities of private companies in Nigeria surpassed that of the subsequent years, 2021 and 2022. This heightened coverage can be attributed to these private firms' active role in combating the pandemic, leading to increased reporting in the selected newspapers.

TABLE 3. Newspaper coverage of Dangote Group and MTNN

	Punch	Guardian	Vanguard	Frequency	Percentage
Dangote	102	71	118	291	55.2
MTNN	74	68	95	237	44.8
Total	176	139	213	528	100

Source: Authors

Table 3 presents the newspaper coverage of the firms under study. This table demonstrates that the *Vanguard* newspaper provides broader coverage of corporate activities compared to the *Guardian* and *Punch*. This finding might indicate a stronger inclination towards reporting matters of national and social significance. This assertion is rooted in *Vanguard* newspaper's reputation as one of the foremost national dailies in Nigeria, enjoying extensive circulation and readership throughout all regions of the country (Nwabueze et al., 2015, p. 177).

TABLE 4. Dangote Group and MTNN's newspaper coverage

	Frequency	Percentage
Dangote	291	55.1
MTN	237	44.9
Total	528	100.0

Source: Authors

Table 4 unveils the firms' newspaper coverage frequency and percentage scores. Dangote Group receives more extensive media coverage than MTNN. This is primarily due to the diversified nature of the Dangote Group, which boasts approximately sixteen subsidiaries. Consequently, the group's news coverage has a broader reach and is more extensive than MTNN's. MTNN, on the other hand, is a telecommunications company that focuses exclusively on airtime sales and related information and communication technology marketing.

TABLE 5. Evaluations based on the unit of analysis on the coverage of Dangote Group and MTNN

	Campaign	News	CSR	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Dangote	2	267	22	291	55.1	291
MTNN	0	218	19	237	44.9	237
Total	2 (0.4%)	485(91.9%)	41(7.8%)	528	100.0	528

Source: Authors

Table 5 shows the evaluation based on the unit of analysis of the media coverage of the two firms. Most of the headlines assessed were news reports, comprising 485 (91.9 percent) out of 528 headlines under examination. In contrast, the headlines on news stories related to CSR activities of the two companies occurred only 7.8 percent (41 in total). However, only 2 (0.4%) of the headlines were related to environmental campaigns initiated by the Dangote Group, as documented by the Guardian (Gbonegun, 2021) and Vanguard (Obasi, 2021). Notably, among the 528 headlines analyzed over three years for Dangote Group and MTNN, no reports, news, editorials, or features in the selected newspapers were dedicated to environmental education. Consequently, environmental education or awareness was conspicuously absent from the scope of units of analysis. This demonstrates that in three years, two private corporations under study hardly engaged in any CSR activity that would turn into news outlets. This finding is consistent with Hussain et al. (2024), Okechukwu (2024), Adio (2023), and Omitola's (2022) assertion that the mainstream media are failing in their agenda-setting role in environmental responsibility. Instead, both firms and the media focus more on reports about the economy, political stories, marketing, promotional activities, and other financial affairs (Fidelugwuowo, 2024; Okechukwu, 2024; Obasi and Msughter, 2023; Uzochukwu et al., 2014). This is similar to how private firms are engaged in greenwashing (Greer and Bruno, 1996).

In a seemingly contradictory turn of events, Dangote was heralded as the top of corporate social responsibility (CSR) excellence in infrastructure development. The Guardian's December 25, 2020, edition (Olatunji, 2020) and the December 23, 2020 edition of Punch (Asu, 2020) acknowledged the firm for CSR; this presents a paradox. While these reports laud Dangote for its CSR initiatives, an earlier account in Punch's October 27, 2020, edition says a different thing. In this instance, Ilaro youths in Ogun State, Nigeria, took issue with the Dangote group, citing a lacklustre approach to addressing health hazards within the CSR framework (Olatunji, 2020). This discrepancy raises questions about the consistency of Dangote's CSR practices and underscores the complexities of the public perception of the company's social responsibility endeavours. A Dangote truck was set ablaze during this coverage period due to negligence.

Further, reports emerged that a mere one thousand dollars (\$1000) were offered as compensation to the families of those who lost their lives due to Dangote's operational activities (NAN in Vanguard, 27 February 2021). Likewise, MTNN faced criticism for inadequate employee relations management (O'Peters, 2020). These revelations suggest that these companies fail to enhance people's and the environment's well-being. Hence, rather than the media reporting on information that would improve environmental sustainability, the CSR reports of the firm on the pages of the newspapers portray negative antecedents of the CSR initiatives of the selected firms.

Analysis of reports during the study period indicates that MTNN and Dangote Group are not actively involved in CSR initiatives related to education, public environmental sensitization, and environmental enhancement campaigns. This finding echoes Feller's (2004) argument that despite claims of substantial financial investments by private firms in CSR for environmental development, there is little concrete evidence to support these

assertions. Feller also argues that there is insufficient focus on disclosing information about environmental performance violations that fail to meet state or federal standards. Despite expectations that corporate environmental reports would use storytelling to justify problematic behaviors, companies disclosing violations and those avoiding disclosure generally offer limited commentary. Information about health, safety, and environmental violations often lacks explanations about causes, reasons, and remedial actions taken, consistent with Feller's (2004) observations.

TABLE 6. Unit of analysis crosstabulation

Firm		Unit of Analysis			Total
		Campaign	News	CSR	
	Dangote	2	267	22	291
	MTN	0	218	19	237
Total		2	485	41	528

Source: Authors

Table 6 provides a comprehensive crosstabulation analysis of the two prominent corporations, Dangote and MTNN, along with an analysis of news reports across four distinct analytical categories: environmental education, environmental campaigns, general news about the firms, and general news and reports concerning the CSR activities of these two companies. The findings indicate a notable disparity in media coverage from the selected three media outlets. Specifically, the data reveals a predominance of general news reports concerning the companies, with 485 instances (91.9 percent) surpassing environmental education and campaign reports. Only 41 (7.8 percent) news reports focused on the two firms' general CSR activities. At the same time, the coverage of environmental campaigns was limited to just two reports, and there were no reports on environmental education at all. Our cross-analysis explicitly targeting these two corporate firms reveals that the primary focus of these firms is not geared toward positively impacting the country's environment but rather the opposite.

This study reveals that a significant number of examined reports indicate that Dangote Group and MTNN lack a robust environmental focus, especially in championing environmental-related information and public environmental sensitization (PES) in the newspapers. Instead, their attention is directed toward business activities, profitability, image enhancement, and other related interests. Notable instances include news reports like Dangote Cement rakes in N162.9 billion in profits in six months (Business News Editor, 2020) and Dangote Cement's 'Bag of Goodies' to produce nine millionaires daily (Uzoho, 2020). Similarly, MTN is highlighted in headlines such as MTN grew profit by 38.81% to N202.1bn (Ogunfuwa, 2020); Julius Berger, MTN, and others rated in assets, performance, revenue, profits (Egwuatu, 2020).

In this study, we argue that every conscientious corporate entity collaborating with governmental bodies is expected to play a role in addressing societal concerns. According to Hussain et al. (2024), the looming environmental crisis endangers all, urging the media to foster consensus wherein all stakeholders, particularly private enterprises, engage in mitigating the issue. This anticipation stems from overarching principles that integrate economic, social, and environmental aspects, reshaping the landscape of corporate environmental responsibility, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability.

However, an analysis of the data gathered for this study reveals that the Dangote Group and MTNN adopt a stance suggesting that environmental issues and the overall welfare of the Nigerian populace are primarily the government's responsibility. This perspective resonates with the argument of Theodore Levitt and Milton Friedman, who advocate that a business's primary obligation is to maximize profits for its owners or shareholders (Development, 2002; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011; Carroll and Shabana, 2010; Henderson, 2001; Gabler et al., 2017).

Stakeholders demand that companies address the social and environmental effects of their actions. Numerous organizations have embraced corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to meet these demands. While firms like Dangote Group and MTN are committed to aligning with these values, aiming to conduct themselves ethically, minimize environmental harm, and fulfill broader societal responsibilities beyond mere profit-making, a significant query persists regarding the depth and effectiveness of their corporate environmental engagement, especially towards public environmental sensitization and sustainability.

We argue that the CSR efforts of corporate firms are primarily instrumental campaigns, serving as marketing tactics and PR strategies to enhance their image and financial standing rather than contributing meaningfully to environmental sustainability through massive education and campaigns. Our analysis questions the tangible and direct impact of MTN and Dangote Group's CSR policies and initiatives on environmental welfare, thus disputing their claims to be friends of the environment, especially given their lack of involvement in public environmental sensitization. These companies leverage CSR to drive sales, build customer loyalty, and enhance their corporate image rather than significantly benefit the environment. Despite their claims of contributions to environmental sustainability, the news reports from the evaluated media outlets do not support this assertion. Hence, the contributions of this study are unique in that public sensitization about environmental issues is essential yet lacking in the mainstream media as part of the CSR initiatives of private firms.

This result also corroborates Ors's (2012) assertion that although many firms claim to work on environmental concerns, their environmental education initiatives via the media are grossly insufficient. This is even more crucial in the Nigerian situation, granting villagers unrestricted authority to indiscriminately fell trees for domestic and commercial purposes (Dyikuk, 2021). This finding, therefore, emphasizes the importance of mass media education and sensitization initiatives regarding environmental issues as essential components for achieving eco-friendliness and environmental sustainability.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's results indicate that the two private companies examined over three years showed minimal involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities related to environmental concerns. This finding aligns with the observations made by Hussain et al. (2024), Okechukwu (2024), Adio (2023), and Omitola (2022), suggesting that mainstream media are failing to fulfil their duty in advocating for environmental stewardship. Instead, both businesses and the media prioritize reporting on economic affairs, political events, marketing endeavors, promotional campaigns, and other financial topics (Fidelugwuowo, 2024; Okechukwu, 2024; Obasi and Msughter, 2023; Uzochukwu et al., 2014). This behavior reflects tendencies toward greenwashing; a practice of falsely promoting a company's environmental efforts within these firms (Ha et al., 2022; Greer and Bruno, 1996).

A further examination of the annual sustainability reports from Dangote Group and MTN, coupled with a review of empirical evidence, demonstrates that these firms are actively contributing to philanthropic efforts (Inegbedion et al., 2022; Dunay et al., 2021; Ezeoha et al. 2020) as well as educational and health supports (Brimah et al., 2013; Adeyanju, 2012; Osemene, 2012). Nonetheless, the analysis of the content within the three newspapers under scrutiny has exposed a significant shortfall in their dedication to promoting CSR activities on environmental sustainability, particularly in terms of environmental advocacy (campaigns) and education or public environmental sensitization.

In the global context, a pressing concern exists regarding the corporate sector's response to environmental issues (Omran and Yaaqbeh, 2023). Despite increased awareness and calls for action, progress in mitigating environmental issues within many corporations has been slow and insufficient.

This study's finding is also consistent with Nyagadza's (2021) and Ors's (2012, p.1340) assertion that the present capacity of the media to contribute to environmental education in synergy with private firms, as is the case with other social issues, has not been sufficiently utilized. Ors (2012) asserts that the central objectives of environmental education are to enhance environmental consciousness across all segments of society and to foster enduring, positive shifts in behavior. Nyagadza (2021) also emphasizes the importance of government support

in promoting environmental sustainability (ES) within businesses, encouraging the cultivation of resilient production and consumption practices through their less visible influence.

Nsikan et al. (2015) establish that a firm's ability to raise awareness on environmental issues has a meaningful relationship with its competitive advantage, just as Feller (2004) maintains that a company's good environmental performance will not only enforce comparative advantage but also enhance the business's public image. This argument aligns with Nave and Ferreira's (2019) submission that a company should strive to differentiate itself in the market and strategically position its brand by embracing corporate social responsibility and corporate environmental responsibility. These statements underscore that a company's ecological practices can directly influence its stakeholders, enhancing its visibility and reputation. Consequently, any engagement in environmental sustainability becomes a mutually beneficial endeavor, upholding the business' shared value concept.

In contrast to this literature, our research uncovers that the two selected Nigerian firms, Dangote and MTNN, hardly engage in any CSR activities involving public environmental sensitization in synergy with the mainstream media, which would enhance positive environmental behavior and consequently, environmental sustainability. Further, our search of literature in line with our findings reveals that the current CSR initiatives of Dangote Group and MTNN concerning environmental issues as well as public environmental sensitization fall short of significantly addressing these challenges in Nigeria. These companies have not demonstrated enough responsible stewardship of the environment, hence the instrumental interpretation of their corporate social responsibility. This finding corroborates Blowfield and Frynas' (2005) argument that businesses gain pragmatic legitimacy when they benefit society, whether genuinely or through crafted perceptions using strategic PR, marketing, and advertising. Such actions not only suggest a focus on shareholder interests but also underscore an instrumental approach as these two firms are seen to be pursuing strategic goals rather than shared value approach.

Nevertheless, some firms prioritize corporate environmental responsibility to generate a positive societal impact. Conversely, others integrate it into their corporate strategies to boost their reputation and public image and financial gains. This practice, as described by Greer and Bruno (1996), Nyagadza (2021), and Ha et al. (2022), is termed *greenwashing*. Greer and Bruno (1996) argue that corporate greenwashing functions as a form of public relations rhetoric that private firms use. They highlight these businesses' significant influence over the global economy, striving to protect and expand their market shares (Le Goulven, 2024). These companies often position themselves as leaders in combating poverty and staunch supporters of environmental causes. However, as evidenced in this study, they frequently fail in essential duties such as public environmental sensitization; that is, raising public awareness, and educating the masses about environmental issues and sustainability.

In conclusion, while Dangote Group and MTNN contribute to philanthropy, their efforts in environmental education and advocacy are inadequate. There is a need for these corporations to synergize with the mainstream media to prioritize CSR activities that address environmental sustainability extensively. A stronger framework for CSR can play a vital role in ensuring that corporate environmental actions align more closely with environmental sustainability goals. This would not only benefit the environment but also enhance the corporate image, accountability, reputation and branding, and foster long-term success in public environmental sensitization and visibility.

### Implications of the Study

This study asserts that corporations' efforts to promote environmental responsibility can significantly enhance sustainability and achieve their environmental goals through increased public environmental sensitization (environmental education and campaigns). The mainstream media's agenda-setting function in synergy with CSRI of private firms can improve access to environmental information. This approach is fundamental to creating a platform for public awareness and educating the masses about protecting the ecosystem, thereby reducing environmentally harmful actions. It also provides individuals with the knowledge to address environmental challenges in Nigeria (Dyikuk, 2021).

Given the significant constraints due to a lack of basic infrastructure, such as electricity and internet connectivity in some urban and rural areas (Omekwu et al., 2023), newspapers present a viable solution. Unlike electronic

and social media, newspapers do not require electricity or internet access. Consequently, leveraging environmental campaigns and extensive media-based education can foster widespread awareness and understanding of environmental issues. Therefore, CSR executives in private firms should consider adopting this collaborative strategy to combat environmental problems and promote environmental sustainability.

## Conclusion and Way Forward

We already know from the literature that corporate environmental responsibility (CER) is a win-win for both the public and the companies that practice it (shared value). It is no exaggeration to state that CSR and ES are integral to company strategies. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, there is room for improvement when it comes to private firms fully embracing CER as a strategy for promoting environmental sustainability (ES), particularly in the domain of environmental education and awareness campaigns.

To address this, private firms in Nigeria should prioritize building stronger partnerships with mainstream media as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Through these initiatives, firms can engage more in aggressive PES and informally educate the public to positively influence their attitudes and behaviors toward accepting information from mainstream media. Meanwhile, the media can enhance their agenda-setting responsibility to increase the visibility of environmental information, thereby promoting better environmental sanitation practices among Nigerians. This synergy can be pivotal in raising critical awareness about environmental issues and sustainability.

Further, promoting ES necessitates urgent and robust media campaigns and public service announcements, emphasizing afforestation (tree planting) and effective waste management. Educating the public about detrimental practices such as indiscriminate tree felling, reliance on firewood and charcoal for energy, bush burning, and greenhouse gas emissions is also very crucial. This awareness can be achieved through the concerted efforts of private corporations and the media, which can widely disseminate this information. Such initiatives will enhance these corporations' eco-friendly reputation and bolster their brand equity (Hussain et al., 2024; Ha et al., 2022). Thus, this research highlights the significance of well-coordinated environmental campaigns, information dissemination, and educational initiatives in synergy with private firms' CSR initiatives.

Awad and Martín-Rojas (2024) and Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) note a growing trend where businesses are increasingly aware of their environmental footprint and are actively implementing management strategies to mitigate their impact. Companies such as Dangote Group and MTNN have taken steps towards environmental sustainability, yet there remains significant room for improvement in raising awareness about these issues. This study suggests that private firms in Nigeria should not only integrate environmentally sustainable sensitizations into their broader CSR initiatives but also synergize with the mainstream media outlets. Additionally, it recommends that firms explore CSR strategies by synergizing with the mainstream media to raise public awareness and foster a more environmentally conscious and proactive society through education, public awareness campaigns and other forms of partnerships throughout Nigeria. This position supports Abba-Aji et al.'s (2021) assertion and it is particularly essential in Nigeria where environmental pollution is a major societal challenge. Again the synergy between the corporate firms and the media will promote environmental sustainability; and when properly harnessed, these efforts can significantly enhance the capacity of private firms to address global environmental challenges and promote sustainability.

## Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

This study has some limitations, as it only considers the CSR activities and media coverage of top two corporations in Nigeria. However, the study provides valuable insights into CSR initiatives and the agenda-setting role of the mainstream media. Different societies develop distinct understandings of environmental pollution, sustainability, and social responsibility. A broader analysis of all CSR activities covered by the media would offer a comprehensive view of the need for environmental education and public awareness. Therefore, further research could examine how effectively mainstream or electronic media cover environmental issues in collaboration with other private firms in Nigeria or other Sub-Saharan African countries. Additionally, a deeper investigation could reveal which aspects of private firms are emphasized in mainstream or electronic media regarding environmental issues beyond their CSR initiatives.



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