

CONGREGANTS' PERCEPTION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES BY SELECTED CHURCHES IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is vital for organizations, including churches, to fulfill their obligations to their communities. In line with the mandate given by Jesus Christ, churches fulfill their social responsibilities by providing for the needs of their congregants and community members. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown presented challenges for Nigerian congregants, affecting their spiritual, social, and financial well-being. Despite these difficulties, churches actively engaged in CSR activities to alleviate the pandemic's impact. However, understanding congregants' perceptions of their churches' CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 lockdown remained a crucial knowledge gap. This study aimed to examine these perceptions through a survey of 1063 respondents from prominent Nigerian churches in Lagos, Oyo, and Ondo States, namely the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church, Baptist Church, and Seventh Day Adventist Church. The findings revealed that although the respondents were aware of the churches' CSR initiatives, they did not fully benefit or participate in the relief items provided. Nevertheless, congregants held a positive perception of the initiatives, believing in the churches' altruistic motives. While CSR initiatives had some influence on church attendance, the impact was limited. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of CSR initiatives for the survival of churches, as congregants are more likely to attend churches that genuinely care for their welfare. Understanding congregants' perceptions can help churches tailor their CSR efforts more effectively to meet community needs and expectations.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Congregants' Perception, Evangelism Campaigns, Selected Churches, COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown

INTRODUCTION

Fulfilling Jesus Christ's mandate to assist those in need is a core task of the Church, which extends to material and spiritual needs through evangelism (Diara & Uroko, 2019; Stiles, 2014). This includes not only preaching the gospel but also showing great social concern for

the vulnerable, as exemplified by Christ's compassion and mercy towards the marginalized. For example, during His earthly ministry, Christ modelled compassion and mercy for the poor, the sick and the needy, the oppressed, and the outcast of society. As part of its evangelism initiatives, the Church is expected to show great concern, compassion, and mercy for the sick, needy and oppressed. The Church is seen as responsible and fulfilling the commandments of Christ when they show great concern for this set of people. In Nigeria, many churches have embraced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, encompassing various projects such as scholarships, medical outreaches, and community empowerment programs. Invariably, these initiatives draw people closer to such Churches. Many of these initiatives of fulfilling Christ's commandments could be part of the Church's social responsibility drive. CSR has a significant role in furthering the relationships between religious organizations and the people. These endeavors stem from the Christian tradition's responsibility to love others and care for their welfare, reinforced by biblical teachings (1 Corinthians 12:12-16; James 1:27). This mandate forms one of the nuclei of religious-related corporate social responsibilities. Visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction in the context of this study could mean visiting the helpless and hopeless during difficult times and offering assistance to them. Christ mandated the Church to engage in this form of evangelism. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the world faced unprecedented challenges, leading to disruptions in socio-economic activities and increased vulnerability, particularly for the middle and low-income classes (Singh & Singh, 2020; Walmsley et al., 2021). Within a few months after COVID-19 spread from Wuhan, China, in December 2019, millions of people were infected globally, with an estimated 655 million global infection rate and more than 6 million deaths as of October 1, 2022 (WHO, 2022). In response, churches, along with governmental and non-governmental organizations, actively engaged in social action initiatives to alleviate the pandemic's impact. These interventions not only assisted the vulnerable but also highlighted the importance of CSR in addressing societal vulnerabilities and inequalities. As a matter of fact, it could be further argued that the pandemic heightened interest in CSR considerations from both governments and market Participants due to the exposure of major and broad vulnerabilities in society's operational environments.

Exploring CSR initiatives through religious lenses is vital, considering the increasing use of religion worldwide to garner support for policies and influence worldviews (Tucker & Grimm, 2001; Raimi, 2012, 2013). Despite the pandemic's effects and misinformation surrounding it, many churches took responsibility for assisting individuals and communities. This is referred to as a social action. Diara and Uroko (2019) state that social action refers to services that can be rendered by an individual or groups of people who are neither mandated in any way nor working to make a profit. This study sheds light on the role of churches in social action, the potential implications of non-engagement in social initiatives, and whether these actions are perceived as integral to evangelism. While some churches donated food items, money, clothing, beverages, and drinks to their communities, others donated medical equipment worth millions of Naira to the Federal Capital Territory to support the government's efforts at curtailing the virus (Adebayo & Govender, 2020).

Understanding congregants' perceptions of these CSR initiatives is crucial for assessing their

effectiveness and impact on evangelism. Despite the churches' efforts, there remains a dearth of empirical evidence on members' perceptions of social action initiatives by religious bodies. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how CSR initiatives during the pandemic influenced congregants' perception of evangelism in selected Nigerian churches. Additionally, the research explores the effectiveness and challenges encountered in implementing these CSR activities during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Research Questions

1. To what extent were congregants aware of specific CSR initiatives undertaken by the Church during the coronavirus pandemic?
2. What were the congregants' perceptions regarding their churches' CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 lockdown?
3. To what extent did the CSR initiatives influence congregants' attendance at the churches?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Church and Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR involves responsibilities, responsiveness, and performance from organisations to the society. Sessa et al. (2020) define CSR as a set of responsibilities that a company has towards its stakeholders to ensure a fair balance between the contribution made to the organisation and the consideration received in economic and social terms. In other words, organisations should give back to the society where they get the necessary materials needed to function properly. Sessa et al. (2020) define CSR as a set of responsibilities that a company has towards its stakeholders to ensure a fair balance between the contribution made to the organisation and the consideration received in economic and social terms. In other words, organisations should give back to the society where they get the necessary materials needed to function properly.

The discussion of CSR from religious lenses is justified because religion in contemporary times is becoming a potent tool used by governments worldwide to elicit support for policies and shape people's worldviews (Tucker and Grimm, 2001; Raimi, 2012; Raimi et al., 2013). This fact was corroborated by Finn (2011), who stated that religion has a vital role in corporate governance because the unbridled greed of boards, executive recklessness, corporate scandals, and poor ethical standards in the conduct of corporation affairs precipitated the global financial crisis. Therefore, there is a need to adopt a solid religious, ethical values such as honesty, transparency, responsibility, fairness, and integrity faith traditions. These fundamental values, he argued, cut across faiths and ethical boundaries and cannot be underplayed as they form part of the social contract that corporations sign with society.

Studies have shown the contributions of the Church to the emergence of CSR in pre -and post-industrialism. Tounés et al. (2011) propose two viewpoints: the earliest proponents of CSR were the Protestants in the United States of America, and Protestantism and Catholicism shared the credit. These groups advocated the religious philosophies of 'public service' and

'stewardship,' imploring the elites and aristocrats to support the society and the poor with wealth. Even Bowen (1953) noted decades ago that CSR drew mainly from the old doctrine of social responsibility in American society called paternalism, a typical nuance among the religious group. Christianity ethics or social views like public service, paternalism, and selfless service have been shaped by the historical realities in the scriptures (Old and New Testaments).

Years back, Weber (n.d) remarked that Protestantism contributed immensely to the development of business and the spirit of capitalism. Becker and Ludger (2007) corroborated the view above that the progressive attitudes of Protestants enhanced their leading role in the business in the South-West German region of Baden. This feat was achieved because the leader of Protestantism, Martin Luther, encouraged personal reading and interpretation of the Gospel (Becker & Ludger, 2007).

Besides, the greatest law in Christianity is love for others. Jesus was on a particular occasion and questioned what the greatest law was. Jesus answered: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31). The submission from the discussions so far is that the traditions of Christianity are largely the philosophical foundation of social responsibility in Europe and America, where social services gained prominence, a fact that Carroll (1999) alluded to while exploring the origin and evolution of CSR. The essence of church giving is mainly for evangelism, that is, to attract new members.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

CSR and the Church during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching effects on various sectors, including religious institutions. Studies have examined the impact of the pandemic on churches, such as Metreveli's (2022) exploration of the Georgian Orthodox Church's response to the pandemic. The study revealed the church's gradual acceptance of the pandemic's implications and the resulting risks. The article further explained how Georgian citizens did not immediately adhere to the preventive measures, as they were described as moving from "one of the world's least affected by coronavirus countries to one of the worst in the world per capita" (Metreveli, 2022 p.15). Therefore, this non-adherence led to an increased infection rate in the Church and death of various clerics.

Similarly, Hovorun (2020) examined the Russian Orthodox Churches' compliance with the COVID-19 precautionary measures. The article explored reactions to the pandemic among Russian Christians. These reactions were categorised into upper and lower levels. For the upper levels, the Russian Church leadership's response to the pandemic was coherent with the Russian government's. However, the lower levels, which consisted of lay persons, priests and bishops, often disobeyed the measures and standpoint of the State, and went as far as opposing the policies on the prevention of the virus. The study showed how these responses were typical of Russians, especially during the Russian wars.

Furthermore, Vukomanovic (2020) examined the Serbian Orthodox Church's interpretation of the precautionary measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article aimed to highlight the religious dimensions of the pandemic in Serbia and understand the adjustment process of religious leaders and their congregants. The findings from the study revealed that, like in Georgia, the Serbian churches also lost some congregants, including the highest clergy, Patriarch Irinej (Gavrilovic), to COVID-19. This resulted from the temporary cessation of the curfew sought by the Serbian Church to enable them to attend Easter Liturgy services. There was a severe crisis between the Church and the government in this regard as the Serbian Orthodox church believed Easter celebration was the greatest Christian festival to be celebrated. Nonetheless, their non-adherence to the COVID-19 measures led to a large virus spread among congregants. This study, thus, opens our eyes to the repercussions of disobedience to the State, as outlined by Jesus Christ in His Word.

Also, Ignatowski (2020) explored the Catholic Church's attitude to the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. The study discussed the restrictions placed by the Polish government and the Catholic Church's position on the lockdown imposed. The study revealed how the restrictions on religious activities in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic were the first in the country's history. Therefore, the pandemic period was unique in the lives of the religious faithful. More so, vaccination, which was made compulsory for all citizens, was rejected by some people. These people were, however, banned from entering the City. It should, however, be noted that the Catholic faithful's and their Bishops and Priests in Poland promoted and recommended the observance of the restrictions placed by the government. This result was evident in the high number of vaccinated in line with the government's directive. Thus, it could be stated that Catholic Church in Poland adhered to the government's instructions on the COVID-19 precautionary guidelines. Overall, these studies shed light on the consequences of adherence or disobedience to government measures during the pandemic.

Churches' use of CSR during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Discussions have arisen regarding how religious organizations, particularly churches, employed CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alasiri et al. (2021) investigated church organizations' service delivery and performance in Nigeria during the pandemic. The authors' objective was to unravel the strategies employed by Nigerian churches in carrying out their tasks in line with their missions and goals. The study employed the survey methodology and administered a structured questionnaire to a total of 463 Participants drawn from thirteen (13) religious organisations. The study revealed that online services negatively affected church attendance but prompted churches to enhance their social responsibilities to members and the community. It concluded that religious leaders play a vital role in supporting government initiatives, including vaccination campaigns, to combat the virus and contribute to the nation's development.

Gap in Literature

Existing literature on evangelism and churches' use of CSR in Nigeria has received limited attention, with only a few studies focusing on individual churches or, at most, two churches. Moreover, there is a significant lack of research in Nigeria that specifically explores how churches employed CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding the perceptions of congregants regarding these initiatives is crucial since they were the direct beneficiaries of the relief items. This study aims to address these gaps in the literature by examining the perception of congregants from four different denominations in Nigeria towards their churches' utilization of CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

This study was hinged on the stakeholder and self-perception theories. The stakeholder theory examines the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders in its internal and external environments. The theory is primarily concerned with how groups and individuals (stakeholders) affect the activities of an organisation as well as the managerial actions taken in response to stakeholders' concerns (Freeman, 1984). The crux of the stakeholders' theory is the belief that stakeholders can be affected by crisis outcomes from the organisation and vice versa. Stakeholders' attitudes towards an organisation are either supportive, neutral or opposed. The stakeholder theory's central premise is that organisations that properly manage their stakeholder relationships will live longer and perform better than those that do not. The theory essentially states that organisations that properly manage their stakeholder relationships would live longer and perform better

The companies are to be responsible to silent stakeholders such as local communities and the environment (Simmons, 2004). This theory is considered a critical basis for CSR development for corporate executives are required to concentrate not only on the benefits of shareholders or owners but also the benefits of stakeholders. These are undoubtedly relevant to transformational leadership (Waldman et al., 2006). Besides, stakeholder engagement must be balanced. To sum up, the stakeholder theory relates to CSR construction, transformational leadership, and stakeholder engagement factors.

Perception Theory

The Self-Perception theory is concerned with individuals and their actions. According to the hypothesis, people pick up on particular attitudes by watching other people's behavior. This suggests that people evaluate their own and other people's activities similarly. The notion was put up by Bem (1972) and is supported by two assertions. First, the claim contends that by comprehending one's actions and the context in which they occurred, one can gain insight into one's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. The second assertion argues that when individuals do not fully comprehend their behaviour, they behave like an outsider who interprets and extrapolates their inner traits from the behaviours and conduct of others. Bem (1972) further asserts that people develop their attitudes by analyzing their behaviour and drawing conclusions about which attitude is responsible for it. Mohebi and Bailey (2020) add that humans rely on their actions and the environments in which they take place to infer their inner

states, such as beliefs and attitudes. Concerning this study, the perception theory will reveal church members' behaviours and action towards CSR/evangelism initiatives of their respective Churches. Church members who observe that their church is involved in CSR and helping those in need, as instructed by Christ, will infer an interest in that church and get committed. Their perceptions of the Church's gesture will further provide insights into their attitudes and behaviours about the church.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The descriptive research design was employed in this study as it is most appropriate when researchers seek to describe individuals, groups, activities, events, or situations (Leavy, 2017). Hence, to describe congregants' awareness and perceptions of their churches' CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the study gathered quantitative data through a structured questionnaire. The congregants were selected from four purposively selected churches - the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church, the Baptist Church and the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church all based in South West, Nigeria. These churches were selected because their leaderships approved the distribution of relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. These churches also comprise a rich blend of orthodox and Pentecostal orientations. Furthermore, the random sampling was employed in selecting three South West States. The six South West states were arranged alphabetically - Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo and assigned numbers from 1 – 6. Even numbers were randomly chosen, hence, Lagos, Ondo and Oyo States were chosen. The total South West population for the selected churches was 9,484,000 (RCCG Gospel Rant, 2022, LFC, Membership Record, 2022, Nigerian Baptist, 2022, Adventist Nigeria, 2022). The Cochran's formula was employed to determine the sample size for each churches population:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

N is the sample size

Z is the confidence level 95% (1.96)

e is the desired level of precision (i.e. the margin of error),

p is the (estimated) proportion of the population which has the attribute in question

q is 1 – p.

Therefore, the sample sizes for RCCG, the Living Faith Church and Baptist Church were 384 each, while the sample size for SDA was 383. Using the proportionate sampling technique, the sample size for the study was 1146 (RCCG – 348; Living Faith Church – 372; Baptist – 408; SDA – 18).

The questionnaire underwent face and content validity by the competent senior Faculty in the Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University and three Faculty members in other

Nigerian Universities. In addition, a pilot test was conducted to further validate the instrument. Also, the Cronbach Alpha reliability test was conducted on the instruments and results revealed a positive consistency with values ranging from 0.821 – 0.911. Dasas (2017) notes that a rule in using the Cronbach Alpha test for reliability is that values from 0.7 imply good values. Data was analysed using descriptive and correlational statistics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Summary of the respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Denomination	State			Freq
		Lagos	Ondo	Oyo	
Female	Baptist	81	82	86	249
	RCCG	56	87	65	208
	SDA	4	3	2	9
	Winners	49	70	69	188
	Total	190	242	222	<u>654</u>
Male	Baptist	41	51	64	156
	RCCG	40	33	39	112
	SDA	2	3	4	9
	Winners	39	46	47	132
	Total	122	133	154	<u>409</u>
Age Range			Frequency	Per cent	
	20 – 30 years		627	59	
	31 – 40 years		284	26.7	
	41 – 50 years		112	10.5	
	51 – 60 years		37	3.5	
	61 – 70 years		3	0.3	
	71 years – above		0	0	
Total		1063	100		
Marital Status	Single		727	68.4	
	Married		311	29.3	
	Divorced		0	0	
	Widowed		25	2.3	
	Others		0	0	
	Total		1063	100	
Highest Educational Qualification	Primary School		18	1.7	
	O'Level/SSCE		125	11.8	
	NCE		15	1.4	
	OND/HND		117	11	
	Bachelors		523	49.2	
	M.A/MSc.		244	22.9	
	PhD		21	2	
	Others		0	0	
Total		1063	100		

Source: Authors' field survey, February, 2023

Table 1 reveals more female (654) respondents to male (409). In addition, it is evident that the majority of the respondents are mainly youths between the age ranges of 20 – 40 years. Hence, the youths dominated this study. A closer observation at the average age range in the churches for this study, it is evident that the youths dominate the membership of these churches, especially the Pentecostal churches. Nonetheless, there are responses from respondents within the age range of 51 – 60 years and 61 – 70 years. There was no respondent between the age range of 71 years and above. The highest educational qualification distribution of respondents imply that the respondents are educated to a great extent, and are expected to be able to provide responses to the questionnaire items meant for answering the objectives of the study.

Objective One: To examine congregants’ awareness of the church’s CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

Table 2: Respondents’ Awareness of their Church’s CSR-Initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

S/N	Statement	VGE F (%)	GE F (%)	LE F (%)	VLE F (%)	NE F (%)	\bar{x}	SD
1.	Extent of awareness of Church’s involvement in distributing palliatives and relief items during the COVID-19 Lockdown	408 (38.4)	318 (29.9)	159 (15)	62 (5.8)	116 (10.9)	3.79	1.3
2.	Extent which respondents benefitted from relief items during the COVID-19 Pandemic	236 (22.2)	317 (29.8)	186 (17.5)	97 (9.1)	227 (21.4)	3.22	1.4
3.	Respondents’ participation in other CSR activities embarked upon by churches during the COVID-19 pandemic	244 (23)	293 (27.6)	193 (18.2)	143 (13.5)	190 (17.9)	3.24	1.4
4.	Extent of awareness of some challenges faced by the Churches in distributing the relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic	223 (21)	242 (22.8)	234 (22)	127 (11.9)	237 (22.3)	3.08	1.4
	Average Weighted Mean						3.33	1.7

Source: Authors’ field survey, February, 2023

Key: VGE- Very Great Extent; GE – Great Extent; LE – Little Extent; VLE – Very Little Extent; NE – No Extent

Decision Rule: If mean is ≤ 1.49 =Undecided; 1.5 to 2.49=Strongly Disagree; 2.5 to 3.49=Disagree; 3.5 to 4.49=Agree; 4.5 to 5 = Strongly Agree. If SD value is less than $< \pm 2$ = true values; if SD value is greater than $> \pm 2$, reject the outcome.

The figures under very great extent and great extent were combined to represent a great extent, while figures under very little extent and little extent were collated to represent a little extent of knowledge. Table 2 presents the results indicating respondents' awareness of their churches' involvement in the distribution of palliatives during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The findings reveal that a significant portion of the respondents (68.3%) are highly aware, while

20.8% have a limited extent of knowledge regarding this involvement. On the other hand, 10.9% of respondents claim to have no knowledge of their churches' role in the palliatives distribution. The mean score of 3.79 suggests that respondents generally agree with their awareness of the church's palliatives distribution during the pandemic ($\bar{x} = 3.79$, $SD = 1.3$). This standard deviation ($SD = 1.3$) indicates an acceptance of the results, confirming respondents' awareness of their churches' involvement in the palliatives distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the study investigated the various relief items distributed by the church during the pandemic lockdown. The findings from the open-ended item indicate that respondents recalled food items, cash, medical assistance, hand sanitizers, free nose masks, household items, and toiletries among the relief items distributed to congregants.

Regarding the benefit received from the relief items (palliatives) distributed by their churches during the lockdown, 52% of respondents (553 individuals) reported benefiting, while 26.6% (283 individuals) experienced limited benefit. However, 21.4% (227 individuals) stated that they did not receive any relief items. The mean score of 3.22 suggests that respondents disagreed with the extent of benefit they received from the relief items ($\bar{x} = 3.22$, $SD = 1.4$). The standard deviation ($SD = 1.4$) indicates an acceptance of the results, confirming respondents' disagreement with the level of benefit.

To further test respondents' awareness of specific CSR initiatives embarked upon by their churches during the coronavirus pandemic, the study asked through an open-ended questionnaire item – respondents to list out these initiatives. To the respondents who agreed to benefitting from the churches CSR initiatives, the findings revealed that food items, cash gifts, medical assistance, general household items and toiletries as some of the major CSR-initiatives distributed by the churches during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the findings revealed other initiatives as (online) prayers, visitation, the donation of facemasks and hand sanitizers as well as pandemic sensitization (through social media and other online means).

Moreover, the study sought to determine respondents' participation in specific CSR initiatives embarked upon by their churches during the pandemic. More than half of the respondents (50.6%) actively participated, while 31.7% participated passively, and 17.9% did not participate. The mean score of 3.24 indicates that respondents disagreed with their participation in distributing these palliatives ($\bar{x} = 3.24$, $SD = 1.4$). The standard deviation ($SD = 1.4$) implies an acceptance of the results, possibly influenced by factors such as being recipients of relief items or movement restrictions due to the pandemic.

Additionally, the study examined respondents' awareness of challenges faced by the church in the distribution of palliatives to congregants. The findings show that 43.8% of respondents were aware of some challenges, while 33.9% were not very much aware, and 22.3% were not aware at all. The mean score of 3.08 indicates that respondents disagreed with their awareness of challenges faced by the church in the palliatives distribution ($\bar{x} = 3.08$, $SD = 1.4$). The standard deviation ($SD = 1.4$) confirms the acceptance of the results. The lack of full participation by some respondents in the distribution process might explain their limited awareness of the challenges faced by the church.

Objective Two: To determine congregants’ perceptions of these CSR initiatives as evangelism tools of the selected churches during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Table 3: Respondents perception of the motives behind the distribution of palliatives

S/N	Statement Item	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	U F (%)	\bar{x}	SD
1.	I believe that the Church had a hidden motive for distributing relief items to congregants during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown	213 (20)	180 (16.9)	280 (26.3)	261 (24.6)	129 (12.1)	3.08	1.3
2.	My Church’s concern and distribution of social welfare packages during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown were genuine	408 (38.4)	360 (33.9)	111 (10.4)	81 (7.6)	98 (9.2)	3.86	1.3
3.	The Church did well by providing relief items to congregants during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown	446 (42)	392 (36.9)	92 (8.7)	73 (6.9)	60 (5.6)	4.03	1.1
4.	I felt very pleased with the Church after I received relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown	301 (28.3)	378 (35.6)	138 (12.9)	134 (12.6)	112 (10.5)	3.59	1.3
5.	I am delighted with the way my Church engaged in taking care of people’s needs during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown	436 (41)	393 (37)	99 (9.3)	61 (5.7)	74 (7)	3.99	1.2
6.	The Church’s use of CSR during the COVID-19 lockdown increased my love for Jesus Christ	241 (22.7)	496 (46.7)	147 (13.8)	77 (7.2)	102 (9.6)	3.66	1.2
Average Weighted Mean							3.7	1.2

Source: Authors’ field survey, February, 2023

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree; U-Undecided
Decision Rule: If mean is ≤ 1.49 =Undecided; 1.5 to 2.49=Strongly Disagree; 2.5 to 3.49=Disagree; 3.5 to 4.49=Agree; 4.5 to 5 = Strongly Agree

If SD value is less than $<+ 2$ = true values; if SD value is greater than $>+ 2$, reject the outcome.

Table 3 presents the analysis of respondents' views on their churches' motives and actions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of respondents, 541 (50.9%), disagreed that their churches had an unfavourable motive for distributing relief items to congregants during the pandemic. However, 393 (36.9%) respondents believed that their churches had sinister motives, and 129 (12.1%) were undecided. The mean score of 3.08 indicates that respondents disagreed with the idea of their churches having sinister motives for the distribution of relief items ($\bar{x} = 3.08$, $SD = 1.3$), which is supported by the standard deviation value ($SD = 1.3$).

Regarding the genuineness of the churches' concern and distribution of relief materials, an overwhelming majority of 768 (72.3%) respondents agreed that their churches' actions portrayed genuine concern for the congregants' needs, while 192 (18%) disagreed. There were

98 (9.2%) respondents who were undecided. The results, thus, imply that rather than think that the Church had hidden motives, the majority of the respondents believe that the Church's actions – through distributing palliatives during the COVID-19 pandemic - portrayed genuine concern for congregants' needs. The mean score of 3.86 suggests that respondents agree with the churches' genuineness in providing relief materials ($\bar{x} = 3.86$, $SD = 1.3$), which is further supported by the standard deviation value ($SD = 1.3$).

Additionally, the study explored respondents' views on how well their churches performed through their CSR actions during the pandemic. A significant number of respondents, 838 (78.9%), agreed that their churches performed well by providing relief items, while 257 (15.69%) disagreed. There were 60 (5.6%) respondents who remained undecided. The mean score of 4.03 implies that respondents agree with their churches' good performance in distributing palliatives ($\bar{x} = 4.03$, $SD = 1.1$), supported by the standard deviation value ($SD = 1.1$).

Furthermore, the results from Table 3 revealed that 679 (63.9%) respondents felt really pleased with their churches after receiving relief items during the lockdown, while 272 (25.6%) were not pleased. There were 112 (10.5%) respondents who remained undecided. The mean score of 3.59 suggests that respondents agree with feeling pleased with their churches after receiving relief items ($\bar{x} = 3.59$, $SD = 1.3$). The standard deviation ($SD = 1.3$) confirms the acceptance of the results.

Moreover, the study probed respondents' perceptions of how their churches consciously engaged in taking care of people's needs during the lockdown. A majority of 829 (78%) respondents agreed and were delighted with the way their churches rescued congregants and the community through the provision of relief items, while 160 (15%) disagreed. There were 74 (7%) respondents who were undecided. The mean score of 3.99 indicates that respondents agree with the way their churches engaged in CSR to take care of congregants' needs ($\bar{x} = 3.99$, $SD=1.2$), supported by the standard deviation value ($SD = 1.2$).

Furthermore, results from Table 3 revealed that most respondents numbering 737 (69.4%) respondents agreed that the Church's use of CSR, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown increased their love for Christ while 224 (21%) respondents disagreed. However, there are 102 (9.6%) respondents who were undecided. A mean score of ($\bar{x} = 3.66$, $SD = 1.2$), thus, implies that respondents agree that the Church's use of CSR, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown increased their love for Christ. Also, the SD value ($SD = 1.2$) also implies an acceptance of the results.

Research Objective Three: To establish the extent to which the deployment of CSR tools would enable congregants attend the churches

Table 4: Extent CSR Initiatives encouraged congregants attendance to Church

S/N	Statement	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	U F (%)	\bar{X}	SD
1.	I benefitted from my Church's social welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown	320 (30.1)	407 (38.3)	190 (17.9)	73 (6.9)	73 (6.9)	3.78	1.1
2.	I am still attending the same Church that distributed palliatives and relief items to me during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown	376 (35.4)	377 (35.5)	94 (8.8)	139 (13.1)	77 (7.2)	3.81	1.2
3.	The Church's social welfare relief items during the COVID-19 lockdown increased my frequency in attending the Church after the lockdown	251 (23.6)	336 (31.6)	93 (8.7)	231 (21.7)	152 (14.3)	3.47	1.2
4.	The CSR initiative of my Church is one of the motivating factors for attending the Church	237 (22.3)	313 (29.4)	204 (19.2)	166 (15.6)	143 (13.5)	3.32	1.3
	Average Weighted Mean						3.6	1.2

Source: Authors' field survey, February, 2023

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree; U-Undecided
Decision Rule: If mean is ≤ 1.49 =Undecided; 1.5 to 2.49=Strongly Disagree; 2.5 to 3.49=Disagree; 3.5 to 4.49=Agree; 4.5 to 5 = Strongly Agree

If SD value is less than $< + 2$ = true values; if SD value is greater than $> + 2$, reject the outcome.

The analysis presented in Table 4 provides valuable insights into the impact of CSR-initiatives on church attendance and participation in church activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results indicate that a significant majority of respondents (68.1%) acknowledged benefiting from their Church's welfare packages during the COVID-19 lockdown. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the relief items distributed by churches in supporting congregants during a challenging time. On the other hand, 24.8% of respondents stated that they did not benefit from the relief items, while 6.9% remained undecided. The mean score of 3.78 (SD = 1.1) reflects overall agreement among respondents regarding the positive impact of the welfare packages, suggesting that those who benefitted were more likely to continue attending the church.

Furthermore, there were more respondents who are still attended the same Church where they received relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results from Table 4 revealed that 753 (70.9%) respondents agreed that they still attended the same Church where they were given relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, while 216 (20.3%) respondents no longer attended the Church where they received relief items. This indicates a strong association

between the relief assistance received and continued church attendance. However, there were 94 (8.8%) respondents who were undecided. A mean score of ($\bar{x} = 3.81$, $SD = 1.2$), thus, implied that respondents agreed that they still attend the same Church where they received relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the SD value ($SD = 1.2$) implied an acceptance of the results. The results implies that the majority of the respondents are still attending the churches where they received relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic. There could be some reasons for those who are not attending the Church where they received relief items as they might have relocated or were not in the Church during the time of administering this instrument. Another reason could be that these congregants stopped attending those churches when the palliatives were no longer distributed.

In addition, regarding the frequency of church attendance, the results reveal that 55.2% of respondents agreed that the Church's welfare initiative during the COVID-19 lockdown increased their church attendance. On the contrary, 36% of respondents disagreed that the welfare initiative influenced their frequency of church attendance. The mean score of 3.47 ($SD = 1.2$) suggests disagreement with the notion that the church's social welfare relief items significantly increased church attendance after the lockdown. Despite this, the SD value of 1.2 indicates an acceptance of the varying opinions expressed by the respondents. These findings suggest that while some respondents attended church more frequently due to the welfare initiatives, a substantial portion did not experience a notable change in their attendance patterns.

The analysis also explored whether CSR initiatives served as a motivating factor for attending churches. Results show that 51.7% of respondents agreed that the CSR initiatives of their churches played a role in motivating their attendance, while 34.8% disagreed. Additionally, 13.5% of respondents were undecided. The mean score of 3.32 ($SD = 1.2$) indicates disagreement with the idea that CSR initiatives significantly influenced attendance motivations.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that a vast majority of respondents were well-informed about their churches' distribution of relief items as part of their CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. This strong awareness signifies an agreement among respondents regarding their churches' CSR efforts. These results align with the stakeholder theory, as congregants exhibited a high level of awareness regarding specific CSR initiatives undertaken by their churches during the pandemic lockdown in 2020. This awareness is consistent with a study by Prempeh (2021), which observed a similar trend in Ghana, where congregants engaged in community-like behaviors by sharing relief items among themselves during the pandemic.

Moreover, the study reveals that not only were the congregants aware of these CSR initiatives, but some also actively participated in and benefited from the shared relief items provided by their churches. However, there were respondents who disagreed with the notion of benefiting and participating in the palliatives. This discrepancy in participation might be attributed to the restrictions on movement and limitations on gatherings during the COVID-19 lockdown, as

these measures were implemented to curb the spread of the virus. The restrictions could have hindered some congregants from actively participating in the distribution process.

The fact that a significant number of respondents did not partake in or benefit from their churches' CSR initiatives also suggests a lack of awareness regarding the challenges faced by their churches in distributing these palliatives. It is possible that these individuals were unaware of the complexities and efforts involved in the relief distribution process.

In addition, the findings showed that had positive perceptions of these initiatives. First, the respondents agreed that their church did not have any hidden motives as the initiatives were to alleviate their sufferings during the trying period. It also showed sensitivity and responsiveness on the part of the church. Little wonder the majority of the respondents further *disagreed* that their churches had genuine motives and not gimmicks. This further led them to feel pleased and delighted with the initiatives embarked upon by the churches. Mroz & Roszak (2022) opined that the mission of the church during tragic times, as the COVID-19 pandemic is to see how they can provide food, counselling prayers and other physical assistance to congregants. This is one of the mandates of the church. Hence, when churches carry out this mandate, it will be perceived positively and not seen as publicity or evangelism gimmicks. Therefore, congregants perceptions of their Church's use of CSR reveals that congregants had a positive perception of the initiative, as they believed that there was no hidden motive, rather it was a genuine show of concern towards congregants plight during that period. Hence, respondents displayed genuine happiness and appreciation to the Church for the CSR initiatives.

The third objective examined if the distribution of palliatives was a motivating factor in ensuring the respondents went to church. The findings had earlier revealed that some respondents benefitted from the relief items provided for and distributed by the church. Hence, they still attend the church where they received these palliatives. While receiving relief items during the COVID-19 pandemic may not be a germane reason that ensured they still attend the same church, it could be that it has been their church even before the pandemic broke out. This is further reflected in the number of respondents who agreed that their frequency to church increased as a result of the relief items received during the pandemic. The mean score implied that respondents disagreed to attending the church as a result of the CSR initiative distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Although CSR initiatives could influence respondents to attend their churches, however, such influence was to a little extent. Again, this implied that the majority of the respondents attend churches not necessarily because of the CSR-benefits, rather it could be because they want to impact lives. Therefore, other initiatives – beyond CSR – should be employed to encourage congregants to attend church services and participate in church activities.

Overall, the study's results emphasize the importance of effective communication and engagement between churches and their congregants to ensure widespread awareness of CSR initiatives and foster active participation. To enhance the impact of CSR efforts, churches may consider addressing the challenges of limited participation and disseminating information about the distribution processes more effectively. This can foster a stronger sense of community and collective support during times of crisis.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that CSR initiatives are germane to the survival of churches, as they depict the mandate of Christ given to believers. Although congregants might not necessarily attend churches as a result of the relief items they will get, nonetheless, they attend churches that care and show concern for members, as exemplified in the findings of this study. So, CSR is a cognitive tool that is necessary for the continuous survival of churches and could be a veritable tool to lead unbelievers to Christ. Congregants had a positive perception of their churches use of CSR during the pandemic.

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Declaration of Interest statement

The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

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