South American Publishing

SAP Gamification and Augmented Reality. 2025; 3:263
doi: 10.56294/gr2025263

ORIGINAL

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the metaverse: enhancing community engagement for Nigerian firms

Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) en el metaverso: mejorar la participación comunitaria de las empresas nigerianas

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Cite as
Uwhejevwe-Togbolo SE, Otuedon Ajueyitse M, Nkemejina Okoli A, Omenebele Kaizar V, Efanimjor P, Elugom Ubogu F. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the metaverse: enhancing community engagement for Nigerian firms. SAP Gamification and Augmented Reality. 2025; 3:263. https://doi.org/10.56294/gr2025263

Publication History
Submitted: 12-09-2024
Revised: 11-02-2025
Accepted: 08-06-2025
Published: 09-06-2025

ABSTRACT

The study explores CSR in the Metaverse and community engage. The study acknowledged that CSR has progressed beyond traditional patronage to become a tactical tool for businesses looking for sustainable growth and community engagement. This is predicated due to the introduction of Metaverse technology, which is a virtual, immersive digital space technology. The study made use of the stakeholder theory and social contract theory. It was noted that CSR in the Metaverse for community engagement presents firms with a transformative method to community engagement, enabling the firms to foster deeper connectivity with the community, which drive social impact, and promote inclusivity in the virtual spaces. The study concluded that CSR in the Metaverse has offered opportunities and challenges for Nigerian firms. Thus, Metaverse presents an advanced digital space technology where businesses can engage with all stakeholders, to foster social impact, and drive sustainable development amongst stakeholders. However, the successful implementation of CSR in this virtual environment requires fundamental key challenges such as digital availability, ethical apprehensions, and regulatory gaps. It was recommended in the study that Nigerian firms should investment in digital inclusion, transparent data practices, and policy advocacy to serve as actionable strategies for firms that are interested in navigating the difficulties of CSR in virtual environments.

Keywords: CSR; Metaverse; Community Engagement; Digital Space; Technology.

RESUMEN

El estudio explora la RSC en el Metaverso y el compromiso con la comunidad. El estudio reconoce que la RSC ha ido más allá del mecenazgo tradicional para convertirse en una herramienta táctica para las empresas que buscan un crecimiento sostenible y el compromiso de la comunidad. Esto se debe a la introducción de la tecnología del Metaverso, que es un espacio digital inmersivo y virtual. El estudio utilizó la teoría de las partes interesadas y la teoría del contrato social. Se observó que la RSE en el Metaverso para el compromiso con la comunidad presenta a las empresas un método transformador para el compromiso con la comunidad, permitiendo a las empresas fomentar una conectividad más profunda con la comunidad, que impulsa el impacto social, y promover la inclusión en los espacios virtuales. El estudio concluye que la RSE en el Metaverso ofrece oportunidades y retos a las empresas nigerianas. Así, el Metaverso presenta una tecnología de espacio digital avanzado donde las empresas pueden comprometerse con todas las partes interesadas, para fomentar el impacto social, e impulsar el desarrollo sostenible entre las partes interesadas. Sin embargo, la aplicación con éxito de la RSE en este entorno virtual requiere retos clave fundamentales como la disponibilidad digital, las aprensiones éticas y las lagunas normativas. En el estudio se recomienda que las empresas nigerianas inviertan en la inclusión digital, la transparencia de los datos y la promoción de políticas que sirvan de estrategias prácticas para las empresas interesadas en sortear las dificultades de la RSE en entornos virtuales.

Palabras clave: RSE; Metaverso; Compromiso con la Comunidad; Espacio Digital; Tecnología.

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has progressed beyond traditional patronage to become a tactical tool for businesses looking for sustainable growth and community engagement. Owing to the introduction of Metaverse technology, which is a virtual, immersive digital space technology for Nigerian firms like any other firm across the globe, will avail firms a unique opportunity to redefine their CSR initiatives for their organizations. The creating nature of Metaverse allows businesses to intermingle with stakeholders in innovative ways, thereby fostering profound acquaintances and driving social impact. However, notwithstanding its possibility, Nigerian firms face several challenges in leveraging the Metaverse for CSR.

One of the principal worries of the Metaverse is the digital divide, where limited access to technology and internet connectivity limits involvement in the new technology, particularly for firms located in the rural areas.[1] This gap thwarts reasonable engagement, making it problematic for firms to reach all stakeholders efficiently. Furthermore, there is also a data confidentiality anxiety that also arise due to ethical problems surrounding user data collection and security.[2] As businesses changeover into virtual spaces technology, certifying transparency and ethical data practices has becomes critical to maintaining trust. Additional challenge in this context is the regulatory uncertainty, because there are lack of clear policies governing CSR activities in the Metaverse especially in the Nigerian context.[3] In all there is need for a well-defined legal framework, otherwise, firms may struggle to navigate compliance requirements, which will lead to a potential risk in Nigerian firms CSR initiatives. Additionally, community engagement barriers exist, as promotion of honest connections in a digital environment can be difficult. Unlike traditional CSR efforts, where physical connections shape trust, virtual engagements require innovative methods to create meaningful relationships with stakeholders.[4]

In the light of graduating in the new technology world of the metaverse, several scholars have examined CSR in the Metaverse and its implications for businesses. the role of the Metaverse was highlighted in enhancing CSR initiatives for Nigerian firms, particularly in agriculture and accounting.[1] In another manner, the ethical use of data in CSR, advocating for transparency and user protection was also emphasized for improving Nigerian firms.[2] Also discussed are how Nigerian firms can integrate CSR into their core business strategies to drive impact and balance community engagement for the firm's productivity and growth.[5]

In the context of the research, the study seeks to address the challenges that will enable Nigerian firms to adopt strategies that will bridge the digital divide through the direct investments by Nigerian firms on digital literacy programs and infrastructure development. Alternative, Nigerian firms can address these challenges by strengthening data privacy measures through the implementation of robust cybersecurity frameworks. Thus, encouraging clear regulations of policies on CSR and the Metaverse in communicating engagement through the collaboration with policymakers, to enhance community engagement, through the introduction of using immersive technologies.

Despite all this challenges, the current study provides a framework for Nigerian firms to steer CSR in the Metaverse effectively for community engagement. This could be achieved through scrutinizing existing research and suggesting tortious tactics, which suggest perceptions into how firms can influence virtual environments to adoptive social impact while addressing ethical and regulatory worries. Through the introduction of tactical incorporation of CSR into the Metaverse, Nigerian firms can initiate justifiable development and create expressive community relationships.

DEVELOPMENT

CSR in Digital Spaces

CSR in digital spaces has grown significant consideration as firms gradually integrate virtual environments into their operations. Several scholars as highlight the role of digital presence in CSR, highlighting how Nigerian firms can leverage technology to foster sustainable commercial development.[6] A researcher maintains that digital knowledge is a critical factor of CSR, as it allows communities to access information and contribute to corporate initiatives.[7] In a separate manner, a discuss was made on the impact of digital inventions on organizational resilience, the discussant noted that firms adopting CSR in digital spaces technology will improve their adaptability which will lead long-term sustainability.[8]

Another study which examines the regulatory landscape of CSR in Nigeria, identifies that, there is a gap in the enforcement and policy coherence on the policies and regulations of the CSR.[9] Again, a research study in another vain, while exploring the legal framework for CSR, the research study pointed out that corporate bodies must integrate social, environmental, and economic concerns of the communities into their operations to achieve meaningful impact.[10] On the part of another scholar, the study highlights the diversity in CSR practices across Nigerian firms, noting that environmental institutions play a crucial role in shaping corporate responsibility.[11] It is therefore necessary for firms embrace CSR in the metaverse to improve firms' performance and community engagement.

Ethical Considerations

The term ethical considerations in CSR is paramount, principally in digital space technology where data privacy and security are seen as a critical concern. In a study conducted by a researcher, the study accentuates the importance of ethical performance in CSR, encouraging firms to show transparency and accountability in corporate project management.[12] While investigating discrepancies in CSR practices in a separate study, it revealed that ineffective stakeholder engagement and inadequate resources contribute to ethical challenges.[13] Consequently, in another study, the author engaged in the discussed of the perception of CSR among Nigerian firms, noting that many companies view CSR as philanthropy rather than a strategic initiative for firms' optimal growth and productivity.[14]

To address the ethical concerns, Nigerian firms must implement robust data protection measures and ensure compliance with international standards. Ethical CSR practices not only enhance corporate reputation but also foster trust among stakeholders, leading to long-term business sustainability.

https://doi.org/10.56294/gr2025263

Regulatory Frameworks

In Nigeria, the regulatory frameworks governing CSR continue to remain disjointed, posing lots of challenges for Nigerian firms seeking to implement responsible corporate practices. In a study conducted, the author critiques the weak enforcement of CSR regulations, disagreeing that legal transfer of foreign principles has cumulated to the inconsistencies in the policy implementation of CSR in Nigeria.[9] However, Adeyi examines the statutory provisions related to CSR, the author highlighted the need for clearer guidelines to ensure corporate accountability.[10] In the study of Opeyemi, the scholar explores the role of governmental policies in shaping CSR practices, noting that regulatory institutions must strengthen their oversight mechanisms to improve the known lapses of the policies with a view to strengthening regulatory policies on CSR in Nigeria.[11]

Consequently, in curbing policies and regulatory challenges association with CSR proper implementation, Nigerian firms should enhance CSR effectiveness in their various establishment, while also Nigerian firms must advocate for policy reforms that align with global best practices for effective CSR and community engagement. Thus, collaborative efforts between businesses, regulators, and civil society can drive the development of comprehensive CSR frameworks that promote ethical corporate behavior and sustainable development in our society and communities thereby improving the firm's productivity and growth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study employs the stakeholder theory and the social contract theory. These theories are important to as a stand-in to enable the study have a base for the CSR and the Metaverse in community engagement by Nigerian firms.

Stakeholder Theory

The study employed the Stakeholder Theory, this theory was propounded by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, the theory emphasizes the importance of engaging all stakeholders in CSR initiatives.[15] Freeman argues that businesses should not solely focus on maximizing shareholder profits but must also ponder on the interests of firms' employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and regulatory bodies. The theory was derived from freeman seminal work, on Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach, this work laid the foundation for the modern stakeholder engagement, advocating for a business model that integrates ethical considerations and social impact of firms.[15,16] In the context of CSR in the Metaverse, Nigerian firms must certify that their virtual engagements address the needs of all stakeholders. Consequently, this theory practically includes the development of inclusive digital platforms that permit varied stakeholders to participate in CSR activities, guaranteeing equitable access to virtual resources, and fostering transparency in corporate decision-making. Thus, integrating stakeholder interests into Metaverse-based CSR strategies, Nigerian firms will improve their trust amongst stakeholders, and enhance their brand reputation, thereby creating sustainable business models that align with societal expectations.

Social Contract Theory

The second theory used in the study is the Social Contract Theory, this theory is originally developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762, this theory was later refined by John Rawls in 1971 as a theory of justice, which argues that businesses have a moral responsibility to contribute positively to society.[17,18] Rousseau's perspective on the social contract suggests that individuals collectively should agree to form a society that is governed by mutual responsibilities and ethical principles. Rousseau's work accentuates the idea that businesses, as part of the society, must uphold ethical responsibilities beyond profit-making.[16] While Rawls expanded on the theory by introducing the principle of justice as fairness, promoting for equitable spreading of resources and opportunities.[18] In the context of Metaverse, Nigerian firms must certify that their CSR initiatives align with societal values, by also promoting digital inclusion, ethical data practices, and community-driven projects. Consequently, the practical implications of this theory include the implementation of fair policies that defend user rights in the virtual spaces, the adoption of ethical AI-driven CSR programs, and the formation of immersive involvements that substitute social good. In adhering to the principles of the social contract theory, Nigerian firms will build a stronger relationship with the communities where they operate, enhance corporate legitimacy, and contribute to long-term societal development. Also, Rawls' viewpoints on justice and fairness have been widely discussed in contemporary scholarship, including critiques and applications in digital governance where some support and other scholars are in different.

The theoretical perspectives of the theories give credence to integrating Metaverse in the CSR, owing to the fact that Nigerian firms can develop a robust CSR strategy that leverage the Metaverse to foster social impact, ethical business practices, and stakeholder engagement.

Impact of CSR on Nigerian Firms

Nigerian firms through the introduction of the CSR in the Metaverse are offer transformative opportunity to enhance their engagement with communities, with a view to drive social impact, and improve their business sustainability. The CSR initiatives into the Metaverse as allowed integration firms to create immersive experiences that will foster deeper connections with stakeholders which will give the firms an opportunity to addressing key societal challenges.

In a study conducted by some scholars, they assert that the Metaverse significantly impacts agriculture production and accounting firm performance in Nigeria, demonstrating how virtual environments can enhance CSR efforts.[1] By leveraging Metaverse technologies, Nigerian firms can improve transparency, accessibility, and stakeholder participation in CSR programs. The result of the study revealed that firms that use digital platforms for CSR initiatives are more likely to entice investors that are in support of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), thereby consolidating economic frameworks within Nigeria's crucial industries.[1]

Additionally, Nigeria's increasing interest in the Metaverse development, is a scholarly discuss by researcher, which aligns with the country's broader digital economy strategy.[19] The Nigerian governments has been persisted in the collaboration with global technology leaders, such as Meta, to provides Nigerian firms with opportunities to integrate CSR into the digital spaces, ensuring inclusive and sustainable development. This approach will enable Nigerian firms to address persistent social issues, such as digital literacy, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment, through innovative virtual solutions.

Therefore, deliberately integrating CSR into the Metaverse, Nigerian firms can bridge the digital divide, to foster ethical business practices, and contribute to long-term societal progress.[17]

Benefits of CSR in the Metaverse for Community Engagement

There are benefits of CSR in the Metaverse for community engagement. The CSR in the Metaverse presents firms a transformative method to community engagement, enabling the firms to foster deeper connectivity with the community, which drive social impact, and promote inclusivity in the virtual spaces. The Metaverse provides an immersive digital environment where firms interact with all stakeholders beyond geographical landscape without limitation, thereby creating opportunities for meaningful engagement and sustainable development of both the firm and the community. Giving this strong base as accentuated, one of the key benefits CSR in the Metaverse for community engagement is enhanced accessibility, thus, as the Metaverse allows businesses to reach diverse communities, including those in remote areas.[20] In addition, virtual platforms incorporation to businesses by Nigerian firms can offer educational programs, skill development workshops, and social initiatives programs that can empower individuals who may otherwise lack access to such resources. Firms that are integrating CSR into the Metaverse will also significantly improve their community ties and inspire creativity, thereby leading to increased productivity and sustainability.[1] Consequently, ethical CSR practices in the Metaverse can enhance stakeholder trust which will contribute to the overall success of the virtual corporate initiatives.[2] Following the same pattern of argument Okaro and Okafor acknowledged that Nigerian firms are beginning to recognize the nexus between CSR and environmental responsibility, by advocating for sustainable practices in corporate engagements of firms.[14]

Another advantage is collaborative stakeholder engagement, where firms can create submerge experiences that can strengthen their relationships with the communities where they operate. Consequently, virtual town halls, digital forums, and interactive CSR events will avail the businesses opportunity to engage with stakeholders in real-time, thereby fostering transparency and trust. Uwhejevwe-Togbolo et al. emphasize that ethical CSR practice in the Metaverse can enhance stakeholder trust and contribute to the success of virtual corporate initiatives.[2] While Benjamin et al., argue that firms using virtual reality for CSR can progress stakeholder participation and corporate reputation.[8] In another study which scrutinizes the regulatory landscape of CSR in Nigeria, the study identified gaps in the enforcement and policy coherence that must be tackled for effective Metaverse-based CSR for community engagement.[9]

Furthermore, the study acknowledged the environmental sustainability enables businesses to reduce their carbon footprint by shifting from traditional CSR activities to virtual spaces as promoted in CSR and Metaverse used technology. Thus, instead of engaging in physical events that need extensive resources, firms can host digital initiatives that minimize waste and energy consumption. Okaro et al., investigated how Nigerian firms are beginning to recognize the nexus between CSR and environmental responsibility, the study findings advocate for sustainable practices in corporate engagements of CSR in the Metaverse.[14] While Adeyi explores the legal framework for CSR, the study argued that corporate bodies must integrate social, environmental, and economic concerns into their operations to achieve meaningful impact of their business growth.[10] In another study conducted, the author highlighted that there is diversity in CSR practices across Nigerian firms, noting that environmental institutions play a crucial role in shaping corporate responsibility.[11]

Also, the Metaverse facilitates collaborative partnerships, allowing Nigerian firms to work with international organizations, NGOs, and policymakers to address social challenges. Virtual collaboration enhances knowledge-sharing and resource mobilization, enabling businesses to implement CSR projects that have a broader societal impact. Efanimjor et al. argued that CSR in the Metaverse must prioritize ethical data use and stakeholder engagement to safeguard long-term success.[1] While Uwhejevwe-Togbolo et al., stressed that firms participating in CSR and the Metaverse will significantly progress in their community ties thereby stimulating creativity amongst stakeholders, that will lead to increased productivity and sustainability of the firm.[2] In another study it was highlighted that digital presence through CSR initiatives in the Metaverse can bridge socioeconomic gaps and create equitable opportunities for marginalized communities.[13]

Consequently, Nigerian firms integrating the CSR into the Metaverse will strategically drive social innovation, that will foster inclusivity in community engagement by all stakeholders which will contribute to long-term societal development that will benefit all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

The CSR in the Metaverse has offered opportunities and challenges for Nigerian firms. Metaverse presents an advanced digital space technology where businesses can engage with all stakeholders, to foster social impact, and drive sustainable development amongst stakeholders. However, the successful implementation of CSR in this virtual environment requires fundamental key challenges such as digital availability, ethical apprehensions, and regulatory gaps. Nigerian firms must diagnose that while the Metaverse provides a platform for immersive and collaborating CSR initiatives, it also stresses strategic planning to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and compliance with developing digital policies. One of the primary challenges is digital availability, as many Nigerians still face barriers to internet connectivity and technological literacy. Again, adequate infrastructure and digital education are needed to put an end to marginalized communities being excluded from CSR initiatives in the Metaverse. In the

quest to conquer these challenges, firms must invest in digital inclusion through effective support of programs that enhance internet availability, providing virtual training, and collaborating with technology providers to bridge the digital divide gap. This should be through the encouragement of equitable access to virtual CSR initiatives, that can foster greater participation and engagement from diverse stakeholders.

Also, a critical concern is data privacy and ethical reflections in the Metaverse. As firms gather and process user data in virtual environments, the firm must maintain ethical standards to protect stakeholder interests. Thus, Transparent data performs essentially to maintaining trust and credibility. Nigerian firms should implement robust cybersecurity procedures, that adhere to international data protection regulations, and launch a clear policy on ethical AI usage. The prioritization of ethical standards in user interactions, firm will prevent data exploitation and enhance stakeholder confidence in their CSR efforts. Additionally, regulatory doubt poses challenge to CSR effect implementation in the Metaverse. The absenteeism of clear legal frameworks governing virtual corporate activities has led to compliance risks and operational inefficiencies. Thus, Nigerian firms are to engage in policy advocacy through collaboration with regulators, industry experts, and policymakers to establish comprehensive CSR guidelines for the Metaverse. In a bid for firm to contribute to the development of digital governance structures, firms should ensure responsible corporate practices which align with national and global standards.

Conclusively, Nigerian firms should strategically drive sustainable development and foster meaningful community relationships through the integration of CSR into the Metaverse. Thus, firms should also strategically address digital accessibility, ethical concerns, and regulatory gaps, to harness the potential of the Metaverse in other to create impactful and inclusive CSR initiatives. The study therefore, recommends that Nigerian firms should investment in digital inclusion, transparent data practices, and policy advocacy to serve as actionable strategies for firms that are interested in navigating the difficulties of CSR in virtual environments. Nigerian firms can leverage the Metaverse to enhance social responsibility and contribute to long-term societal progress through proactive engagement and ethical corporate practices,

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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