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Corporate social investment practices as 'soft technology': A case of selected Botswana firms

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ABSTRACT

The study on which this article is based sought to examine the motives and patterns of corporate social investment practices using the experiences of eight Botswana Stock Exchange listed firms. It followed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design utilizing a triangulation of documentary and archival records, and cross-sectional survey techniques. The study found out that although the motives for the practices were varied they were largely reactive and fragmented, and mostly driven by economic rather than business ethics imperatives. The article supports extant literature indicating the existence of growing publics' disillusionment with the apparent dissonance between corporates' historical institutional rhetoric and practice. Although the firms publicly portrayed themselves as good corporate citizens addressing wider societal challenges, in practice they engaged in the traditional 'giving back to community' donations. The article concludes that overall the practices served as 'soft technologies' for the (re)-figuration of corporate identities.

1. Introduction

Although corporate social investments (CSI) are not a new phenomenon to organisation science discourse they have continued to evoke fervent interest among both scholars and practitioners. The growing global and local publics' disillusionment with corporates' portrayed motivations to contribute to the public good has continued to provide impetus for scholarly engagement on the phenomenon. Although community engagements by firms have been defined and applied differently in both literature and practice, other concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship (CC), corporate social performance (CSP), corporate 'stakeholder' responsibility, corporate philanthropy and community relations have been constantly interchanged making any attempts at treating them as independent of the other effectively unconvincing and more of an academic exercise (Banerjee, 2007). Consensus on their definitions has remained elusive and their meanings essentially contested. This article borrows from Yates-Smith's (2013) categorisation of CSR, CC and CSI as subjective siblings embedded in global business and commonly referring to company initiatives focusing on improved corporate governance as a way of restoring trust and ensuring recognition of shareholder and consumer concerns.

The interest in the concept of corporate social investment among managers was based on the primacy of ethical business operations (Cierniak-Emerych and Zieba, 2014). This resonates with Carroll (1998) four-layered pyramid of corporate social responsibility; the economical, legal, ethical and philanthropic. CSR is 'the subset of corporate responsibilities that deals with a company's voluntary/discretionary relationships with its societal and community stakeholders' (Waddock, 2008) and representing the ethical and responsible methods of corporate operations and business practices (Harrington, 2012). It is more than strategic 'philanthropy' where companies give with an expectation of a positive return in support of their own interests (Fioravante, 2010). Although most of the documented CSI initiatives have tended to be voluntary or discretionary, they have also been largely triggered by the ever growing pressure from the increasing domestic and international expectations regarding business' enforcement of global rules and standards. In the Botswana context most firms are transnational and have increasingly tended to operate in fulfilment of global obligations and practices in their home countries (Gjølberg, 2009). The mediating effect of ethics on the intersection between the obligations and responsibilities of businesses and their impact on society has long been widely venerated

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(Carroll, 1998; Colombo and Gazzola, 2014; Jones, 2007; Scherer and Palazzo, 2008, as cited in Wettstein, 2012, p. 745; Schwartz & Saiia, 2021). A business that concerns itself with the ethical dimension of social investments protects its reputation and credibility by being perceived as a reliable and respected business partner (Colombo and Gazzola, 2014; Eger et al., 2019; Halter and Arruda, 2010).

Viewing CSI practices in the context of ethics is inspired by Freeman's (1984) normative stakeholder theory that posits that organisations have moral commitments toward stakeholders, concentrating on ethical requirements that build relationship between business and society (El-Gammal, El-Kassar and Messarra, 2018; Walker et al., 2008). While the firm pursues its profit motive this should also be driven by the desire to fulfil ethical norms. This implies that companies and managers engage in and be leaders in strong ethical values and practices (Carroll, 1998). Stakeholders expect corporate ethical behaviour to extend beyond both mandatory legal compliance and profit motives as the logic of profit maximization triggers amoral business behaviour (Kallio, 2008; as cited in Ählström, 2010, p. 70). Firms have an obligation to attempt to respect ethical values or principles as they pursue mission-driven objectives including an adequate profit margin, even if by doing so profits are sacrificed (Schwartz & Saiia, 2021). The way a company treats its stakeholders particularly employees and customers reflects its ethical standards and corporate governance (Halter and Arruda, 2010; Rossouw, 2005; as cited in El Gammal et al., 2018, p. 278). Duties and obligations to the environment must be part of the norms and code of conduct, and institutional design (Colombo and Gazzola, 2014; Singer, 2013; as cited in Goel and Ramanathan, 2014, p. 55).

This article acknowledges the contagious influence of the global appreciation and appropriation of the CSI discourse on the Botswana experience. At independence in 1966, Botswana was among the world's twenty poorest countries in per capita terms (Osei-Hwedie, 2004). However, the discovery of diamonds and growth of the beef industry and tourism sector supported by democratic governance and sound macro-economic management (Republic of Botswana, 2009) provided sufficient stimuli to steer the country to become an enviable example of economic growth and progress (Lindgreen et al., 2009). This has attracted a lot of foreign direct investment by multinational corporations making the country one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. In spite of the massive infrastructural and social development, there has also been over dependence on public expenditure (Republic of Botswana, 2009). Over the years, most of the economic activities in Botswana especially infrastructural developments have been state-funded. In addition, the country's massive resource endowment and good governance have not been matched by supportive economic diversification and related industrialisation drives and as a consequence, there has been high unemployment, poverty levels and inequality (for an upper Middle Income Country), exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (International Labour Organisation, 2020). In response to the challenges, the government through its Vision 2036, succeeding Vision 2016 which had been set in 1996, set developmental targets anchored on four pillars; Sustainable Economic Development, Human and Social Development, Sustainable Environment, and Governance, Peace and Security (https://vision2036.org.bw/). Anchored on a framework for "Achieving Prosperity for All," the Vision would spur her towards high income status by 2036 through localisation of participation by both the private and public sector. The Vision 2036 resonated with new sustainable development goals (SDGs) emphasizing community participation and involvement in poverty reduction through sustainable development (Musekiwa and Mandiyanike, 2017). Therefore CSI practices were also expected to support the sustainability agenda and thus complementing national efforts in the successful implementation of poverty reduction and citizen empowerment programmes (Osei-Hwedie, 2004). This is in contrast to their political deployment as 'soft apparati or technologies' or 'soft power' primarily concerned with placating stakeholders and/or promoting shareholders' interests (Hanlon, 2009; Maunganidze, 2021; Scherer and Palazzo, 2008; Sorour et al., 2021). The absence of a legal framework has rendered the CSI practices largely discretionary and often spasmodic. In many cases, charitable projects have not been driven by company policy or any strategic plans but just emerged from practice and environmental contingencies. Lack of obligatory responsibilities promotes ineffective discharge of CSI and consequently no accountability (Tamvada, 2020). However there have been documented exceptions particularly in the mining sector with initiatives pursued towards the development of communities in line with the national agenda (Mokwakwa, 2016; Solis and Moroka, 2011). By providing public goods such as housing, education, protection of the environment and limiting public ills such as corruption and inequality the deliberative and self-regulatory initiatives become communicative mechanisms for enhancing corporate image (Scherer et al., 2016: 276). CSIs take a political CSR dimension based on informal rules and 'soft law', rather than relying on formal regulation issued by governments (Maier, 2021). This is particularly relevant in the case of Botswana economy which has for many years been presided over by successive neo-liberal capitalist and developmental states.

Systematic CSI programmes remain undeveloped in greater part of Africa with only a few studies having considered the Botswana context (Maphosa and Maunganidze, 2021; Lindgreen et al., 2009; van Wyk, 2009; Solis and Moroka, 2011). Most literature on the subject has been developed in industrialised economies such as the United States America, Europe and Asia. As a way of filling in the gap and contributing to the scholarly debates in the field of business-society relations, the study on which this article is based applied a mixed methods research approach to examine the motives and patterns of corporate investments using a case of eight Botswana Stock Exchange (BSE) listed firms. The firms were each purposively selected from the following industry sectors; banking and insurance, private security, groceries retail, furniture merchandising, tourism and hospitality (hotel), building and construction and energy (see Table 1.). Notwithstanding the huge contribution of the mining and agricultural sectors, these were excluded from the investigation as their CSI practices were deemed extensively documented (BMF, 2009; BIDPA, 2012; Bolaane and Kanduza, 2008; Gwebu, 2012; Mokhawa, 2005; Mokwakwa, 2016, 2021; Ntoi-Molefe, 2021).

The rest of the article is structured as follows; firstly, an overview of the methodology is provided. Secondly, the paper considers the theoretical orientation that guided the analysis and discussion of results. Thirdly, study results are presented and discussed consistent with the research design and themes weaving through the discussion namely; the motives, patterns and influence of CSIs on re-figuration of corporate identities. Finally, the conclusions and implications for both research and practice are provided.

2. Methodology

The central question that guided the study was; to what extent and form have the various CSI practices served as a tool for the re-figuration of corporate identities? In response to the question, the general research approach vacillated between the Interpretivist and Post-positivist

Table 1
Terms adopted per firm.

Firm# and sector	Term/Nomenclature
#01-banking	Corporate social responsibility (CSR) Corporate social investment (CSI)
#02- private security	Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
#03- groceries retail	Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
#04 -furniture retail	Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
#05-hotel	Corporate social investment (CSI)/Community engagement/CSR
#06- building merchandising	CSR/Sustainability performance
#07- fuel and oils distribution	Community relations/Socially responsible investments (SRI)
#08-insurance	Corporate social investment (CSI)

strands and specifically followed an Exploratory Sequential 'Mixed' Methods design (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Data was collected in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana between 2016 and 2017. The process began with a qualitative approach utilizing mainly a documentary survey of official documents and archival records of CSI practices based on self-reports accessed via the firms' respective websites and as availed by firm representatives. Eight firms were purposively selected from the BSE register with an equal industry sector representation (see Table 1). Corporate social reporting is a way in which business corporations inform their stakeholders about their social performance through self-reporting. Often referred as 'sustainability reporting', 'corporate social accounting', 'corporate social disclosure' and 'corporate social auditing', this entails the preparation and publication of the social, ethical and environmental aspects of an organisation (Belal, 2008). This method was chosen because even if there may be variations in form and content, the reports are considered an accurate and credible representation of a company's impact on society. Prior to commencing the study, ethical approval was granted by the University of Botswana Institutional Review Board (UB IRB) and a research permit #TI 1/19/2 VI(17) of June 29, 2015 was obtained from the Botswana Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The researcher firstly conducted a content analysis of corporate documents extracted from websites such as corporate social responsibility and sustainability reports, and brochures and newsletters. Data was presented in narrative form and analyzed through a combination of pattern matching and illustrative method (Neuman, 2012). Building on insights from qualitative data, a cross-sectional survey was conducted and using close-ended questionnaires with managerial and non-managerial employees being selected through a cluster sampling technique. Four managerial and six non-managerial employees from each of the eight firms were targeted. Both categories of employees completed the same questionnaire. The questionnaires were availed to firm representatives mainly in the corporate affairs, human resource or public relations units who then distributed these to the respondents. This was also because their opinions varied with one's employment status and experience (see Tables 4 and 5- respondent distribution). A total of 80 closed ended questionnaires were distributed and 59 respondents comprising 20 managers (33.9%) and 39 non-managerial employees (66.1%) with a gender spread of 52.5% females and 47.5% males participated in the survey. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

3. Theoretical orientation

The theoretical orientation of the study was inspired by a combination of ideas drawn from the normative structuralism and critical post-structuralism. The normative structuralism, and specifically the 'Stakeholder Theory', considers CSI practices as representative of firms' fulfilment of obligations and responsibilities to stakeholders. For purposes of portraying themselves as good corporate citizens, this implies that firms are imbued with legal rights and obligations that are derived from a status akin to citizenship (Matten and Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Moon et al., 2005; Waddock, 2008). To be a 'good corporate citizen', citizenship values and principles that include respect for basic human rights need to be embedded in all the activities and processes of a company (Andriof and McIntosh, 2001). While citizens enjoyed full rights of citizenship that included economic, political and social justice, firms were equally expected to be entrusted with obligations expected of any 'responsible *corporate citizen*' (Mundlak, 2007: 721). Good corporate citizens were willing to 'go beyond what the law demands' (Edward and Willmott, 2008: 410). The normative stakeholder theory tends to impute positivism and determinism with respect to the motives and patterns of CSIs. This demonstrates that firms' pursuit of economic rationality was aligned with other values and interests of the community beyond profit-maximization (Hanlon, 2009). However such characterisation tends to portray CSI as a 'hard and rational' technology or tool serving the interests of all stakeholders.

As a counter-voice to structuralism, the article deploys Jacques Derrida's postmodern theory of deconstructionism. Postmodernism questions established social orders, dominating practices, ideologies, discourses and institutions (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). What is 'real' is not entities but the 'emergent relational interactions and patterning that are recursively intimated in the fluxing and transforming of our life worlds' (Derrida, 1981; Chia, 1996). In this article, 'texts' comprise the various CSI initiatives and practices pursued by firms and the goal of deconstruction is to expose the inherent contradictions residing in 'texts'. According to Linstead (1993, p. 57) 'deconstruction' entails 'a means of revealing the contradictions inherent within texts, a means of exposing their logo-centrism … and of revealing their inescapable qualities of difference and supplementarily despite repressive textual strategies'. As Martin (1990) puts it, deconstruction peels away the layers of ideological obscuration, exposes the suppressed conflict and focuses on multiple interpretations of a text in order to undermine all claims to objective truth. What is organised and representable can be set out in advance for our control and manipulation. This is particularly relevant for understanding the motives and patterns of CSI practices. In this study, an attempt was made to expose the blind spots and dilemmatic foundations on which CSI practices are founded. As Jones (2003) observed there was 'an *aporia*, an irresolvable contradiction: a tension between demands that pull organisations in two directions'-grappling with a divided duty of balancing economic motives with business ethics. Thus this article examines the extent to which CSIs have been deployed as 'soft technologies' or 'artefacts' for identity (re)-constructions and stakeholder management.

4. Results

4.1. Qualitative data

4.1.1. Company-specific narratives

A documentary survey of self-reported patterns of corporate social responsibility activities across the selected cases shows that although different nomenclatures were adopted, CSI was among the most popular (Table 1).

In the banking sector, firm (**#1**.)(Table 1), boasted of a remarkable record of social investment performance and regarded itself as one of the leading corporate givers in the financial services sector in Botswana with a cumulative contribution of more than P30 million invested in community projects in the first two decades of the new millennium. For example in 2014, the paid out a total of P3 million in forms of donations to the needy. The bank's CSR/CSI initiatives were driven more by its values and vision rather business interests such as profitability and competitive advantage (Table 3).

Firm **(# 2)**, one of the leading multinational security firms' CSR is anchored on three priority pillars; business ethics, health and safety, and human rights, which were guided by the UN Global Compact Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Although at a global level its CSR programs address wider societal issues such as the fight against Ebola in Sierra Leone, HIV-AIDS and promoting education of the underprivileged in South Africa, tree planting in Malawi and clinical and medical services in Mozambique, in Botswana there has not been any deviation from traditional pattern of donating to the underprivileged such as people living with disabilities. For example, the firm did not consider its vision of "Securing Our People'' as a Social Responsibility' (CSR Report 2008, p.11), as a reactive response to stakeholder pressure but was driven by its value system and pro-active planning.

Firm **(# 3)** represents one of the largest and fast growing grocery retail establishments in Botswana with branches in a number of other Southern African countries. Documents available showed that the firm had a strategic CSR model with activities tailor made in line with national deficiency trends. One of the unique features of its CSR programmes was the commitment to employ at least two locals living with disabilities in each of its branches. The firm claimed to be an active corporate citizen upholding values and principles in line with the country's development agenda as reflected by the various pledges made towards the Presidential Housing Initiative, witnessed by the construction of twenty-nine two roomed housing units out of a total pledge of one hundred and fifty.

In the furniture merchandising and retail sector, firm **(# 4)** claimed to execute its CSR activities based on community need assessment. However, apart from spasmodic small cash and household goods donations to the needy and destitute, at the time of the study, the firm had not engaged in any significant community development project. There was also no evidence of any existing policy to drive the initiatives.

Firm (**#5)** is a regional hotel group operating in three Southern African countries. Although its international character influenced its CSI practices, it claimed to have CSI programmes driven by its own locally conceived values of respect, dignity, integrity, honesty and passion. The nomenclatures; corporate social responsibility, corporate social investment and community engagement are used interchangeably. There were also claims that the initiatives were preceded by community needs assessment although there was no evidence of how this was done. However the firm's notable contribution to charity was recorded between 2013 and 2014, when cash donations amounting to over BWP 240,000 were made to organisations that included a Memorial Fund for People Living with Disability, and Destitute in two refugee camps.

Firm (# 6) is one of the largest retailers of building materials and associated products with branches in South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Malawi. At the time of the study it was listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Apart from a number of community development initiatives, one of its notable CSR or Sustainability programs was the recruitment of local people and store managers for all its branches. The firm's approach to corporate sustainability was informed by its own interpretation of the widely accepted triple bottom line approach: 'Profit, People, and Planet' (PPP) model which defines 'sustainability' as "maximising the Company's chances of continued existence in the future". Through its *Art-at-Heart Campaign*, the firm has contributed over R26-million worth of building materials to more than 2200 schools and child care institutions in Southern Africa with about 5% of the budget allocated to Botswana schools.

The energy sector was represented by firm (# 7), specializing in the distribution of automobile fuels and oils. Operating in 46 countries worldwide, one of its strategies was to maximize expertise in integrating midstream and downstream operations while maintaining local stakeholder trust. At the time of this study, the company was servicing more than thirty fuel retail outlets in Botswana. In order to ensure a consistent approach to community engagement the company rolled out a comprehensive Community Relations Policy in 2014, anchored on three action pillars; e*ngage, invest, and trust*. Through its Foundation the company pledged to fund local development projects in areas such as education, the environment, road safety, health and disability.

In the insurance industry, firm (# 8), was one of the few firms with pro-active CSI programmes. Since 2007, it had been allocating 1% of the Group's post-tax profits to its social responsibility activities making a meaningful impact on the livelihoods of local communities. The firm pledged to complement government efforts in the promotion of national development through its participation in poverty reduction projects. To remain commercially viable and socially relevant, it remained conscious of the impact of its activities on the environment. One of its notable contributions was BWP 500,000 (nearly US$ 50,000.00) sponsorship of the 2014 African Youth Games hosted by Botswana.

4.1.2. Motives and patterns of CSI practices

As presented in Tables 2 and 3, the motives and patterns for corporate social investments varied by sector. One pattern to emerge from the qualitative data was the prevalence of discretionary corporate conduct which was not necessarily a result of stakeholder pressure. There were incidences of paternalist philanthropy where firms did not regard communities as partners but passive recipients of their benevolence.

The pattern of CSI ranged from donations to needy individuals notably in form of cash, food hampers and clothing to a few large community infrastructural projects involving building and repairing schools and community halls. Paltry voluntary donations to charitable organisations especially during festive periods or as a response to requests were also prevalent. While most contributions to community development initiatives were relatively small, the banking and insurance sector were one exception. Few firms had explicit strategies, supporting budgets and structures. Engagement in citizenship or wider-society activities such as fighting against injustices, inequality, discrimination and human rights abuses in the workplaces were relatively scarce.

Table 2
Motives for corporate social investments.

Motive	Firm							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Company values and vision	X	x	x		x	X	x	x
Comply with international standards	X	x			x	X	x	
Response to Vision 2016	X	x	x		x			x
Response to President's Housing Appeal	X	x	x	x	x			
Stakeholder pressure	X				x		x	
Competitive advantage		x	x	x		X	x	x
Reputation and image	X	x	x		x	X	x	x
Business ethics	X	x	x		x	X	x	x
Profitability		x		x			x	x
Workers' rights and citizen rights treated the same	X		x			X		x
Improve working conditions	X	x	x		x		x	x

Key: 1 = Bank, 2 = Private Security, 3 = Groceries retail, 4 = Furniture retail, 5 = Hotel, 6 = Building and construction materials hardware, 7 = Fuel distribution 8 = Insurance.

Table 3
Pattern of practices.

Dimension	Firm							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Policies and strategies in place	x	X	x		x	x	x	x
CSR and CC used interchangeably	x	X	x		x	x	x	
Specific division/structure in place	x	X	x		x			x
Budget in place	x	X	x		x			x
Donations to charitable organisations	x	X	x		x	x	x	x
Donations to the needy individuals	x	X	x	X	x	x	x	x
Community welfare projects	x	X	x		x	x	x	x
Fighting against injustices, inequality, discrimination in the community		X	x			x		
Protect environment		X	x			x	x	x

4.2. Quantitative data

4.2.1. Survey respondent demographic distribution

Tables 4 and 5; represent the pattern of questionnaire responses by job category and working experiences. Overall, 20 managers (33.9%) and 39 non-managerial employees (66.1%) participated in the survey with a gender spread of 52.5% females and 47.5% males. The working experiences of respondents ranged from between one and five years to over ten years (Table 5.) with majority of respondents (59.3%) having less than 5 years of working experience.

Table 4
Respondent distribution by job category.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Managerial	20	33.9	33.9	33.9
Non Managerial	39	66.1	66.1	100.0
Total	59	100.0	100.0	

Table 5
Respondent distribution by working experience.

Length of service	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Between 1 and 5 years	35	59.3	60.3	60.3
Between 6 and 10 years	12	20.3	20.7	81.0
More than 10 years	11	18.6	19.0	100.0
Total	58	98.3	100.0	
Missing in the System	1	1.7		
Total	59	100.0		

4.2.2. *Motives for corporate social investments*

There were mixed responses to the question on the motives for CSI. Overall, both managers and non-managers agreed that most firms perceived implementation of the programs as more than just a social obligation. However, most managerial employees tended to confirm the official position instead of their own opinions. In spite of this, corporate values were considered CSI leading factor driving CSI with highest mean score of 3.81 (std. deviation = 1.137) (see Table 6). Tables 7 and 8, show that in order to retain competitive advantage, firms portrayed themselves as 'good' citizens in the eyes of both workers and local community with an overall rating of 55.9% and 69.5% respectively. As reinforcement to qualitative results, statistical analysis indicated that majority of firms did not consider stakeholder pressure as a critical factor with a mean score of 3.29 and standard deviation of 1.084. It was rated the least in the scale of factors at 44.3%. About 24% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the claim that firms engaged in CSI as a way of improving relations with unions. It appears that customers exerted more pressure on firms' strategies than employees.

4.2.3. *Pattern of CSI practices*

The nature and dynamics of the practices varied from charitable donations to specific needy individuals and vulnerable groups within communities such as orphans, the elderly to large developmental projects for the uplifting of the whole society. Barring the likely influence of lack of precise distinction between the different programme nomenclatures, Table 9 shows 59.3% of the respondents confirming the visibility of various CSI in their firms. Table 10 shows a relatively high aggregate performance record (mean score of 57.6%) of donations to both the needy individuals and charitable organisations. This is perhaps due to the relatively small cash injection required to support such activities which were also regarded 'quick harvests' in terms of attracting public attention. Most of the donations in cash, food and blankets were also in response to calls for assistance in response to natural disasters. However there was no evidence of any involvement in crime prevention and political activities. Firms did not consider investment wider society issues such as fighting against injustices, inequality or discrimination, part of social responsibility (see Table 10). This is also consistent with some of the firms' poor performance record in upholding workplace democracy within their own premises.

Table 6
Motives for CSI.

Motives	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Company values	59	1	5	3.81	1.137
Union relations	58	1	5	3.09	1.418
Competitive Advantage	58	1	5	3.71	1.043
Stakeholder Pressure	59	1	5	3.29	1.084
Reputation Enhancement	57	1	5	3.42	1.149
Morally Right	59	1	5	3.51	1.209
Economically Desirable	59	1	5	3.51	1.150
Legal Obligation	59	1	5	3.27	1.257
Valid N	55				

Table 7
Firm as good citizen in the eyes of workers.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	16.9	16.9	16.9
	Disagree	5	8.5	8.5	25.4
	Neutral	11	18.6	18.6	44.1
	Agree	23	39.0	39.0	83.1
	Strongly Agree	10	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	59	100.0	100.0	

Table 8
Firm as good citizen in the eyes of local community.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Strongly Disagree	9	15.3	15.3	15.3
	Disagree	2	3.4	3.4	18.6
	Neutral	7	11.9	11.9	30.5
	Agree	21	35.6	35.6	66.1
	Strongly Agree	20	33.9	33.9	100.0
	Total	59	100.0	100.0	

Table 9
Presence of **CSI initiatives.**

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**	
Valid	Yes	35	59.3	68.6	68.6
	No	16	27.1	31.4	100.0
	Total	51	86.4	100.0	
Missing	System	8	13.6		
Total	59	100.0			

Table 10
Pattern of involvement.

Area	N	Frequency	Percent %
Donations to individuals (cash, food and linen	59	36	61.0
Donations to charitable organisations (cash, food	59	32	54.2
Donations to refugee camp	58	10	17.2
Housing Appeal for homeless/destitute	59	30	50.8
Sports and recreation	59	15	25.4
Repair/rehabilitation of rural roads	59	10	16.9
Education and training (e.g scholarships)	59	28	47.5
Political activities	59	0	0
Development of SMEs	55	6	10.9
Human rights and injustices awareness in the community	59	4	6.7
Crime prevention	58	0	0
Community welfare projects	58	12	20.7
Industrial democracy	58	8	13.8
Protect environment	59	10	16.9
Other: co-creation of codes of ethics, client charters	59	6	10.2

4.3. *Discussion*

The motives for engaging in corporate social investments were mixed and multifarious. They included stakeholder pressure and reputation enhancement (Esbenshade, 2012; Lindgreen et al., 2009; van Tulder et al., 2009), improved stakeholder relations and competitive advantage (Waddock, 2008) and reflection of the company values (Dawkins and Ngunjiri, 2008). However, when viewed through the deconstructionist lens, such engagements were also regarded as 'soft technologies' for building reputation (Hanlon and Mandarini, 2015; van Tulder et al., 2009). This supports Rambaree (2021) argument that the practices were part of 'interpretative repertoires' used to construct versions of reality to enhance company image. Thus the normative stakeholder theory which had traditionally informed the mediating role of ethics in the relationship between business and society largely overlooked the complexity and ambiguity accompanying social responsibility and philanthropic engagements (Eger et al., 2019). Traditional approaches consider ethics as a duty and responsibility, viewing corporate giving as unconditional with no horizon of expectation (Jones, 2003). The engagements were discretionary and predicated on the general belief that ethical business cultures contributed to building positive moral capital. However this has challenges as CSI has always been a contested and aporetic field (Jones, 2007; Foschia, 2018). Consistent with Derrida's *deconstruction*, this article considers the tension and undecidability between the profit motive and fulfilment of normative social expectations. The discretionary nature, partiality and ethical subjectivity associated with the choice of CS1 beneficiaries across the sample frame raise both moral and political concerns.

Consistent with normative structuralism and the firms' pursuit of profit maximization, the relationship between business and community was ideally a transactional one in which CSI practices were a rational response by business to maintain a degree of congruency, or 'good fit' with its environment. However in practice, expressions of commitment to wider society issues such as fighting poverty and unemployment were not as objective and rational. Firms tended to engage the rhetoric of socially responsible behaviour when their legitimacy and profitability were threatened. In essence actions of organisations are often constructionist and contain multiple meanings (Haslam, 2007; Hassard and Cox, 2013). As presented in Tables 3 and 10, majority of firms have been indifferent to ethical problems in the workplaces and the wider society. This is in support of literature suggesting CSIs as essentially corporate 'political' activities (Hadani and Coombes, 2015; Sorour et al., 2021), symbolic behaviour (Shabana and Ravlin, 2016), superficial or aspirational talk (Christensen et al., 2013), soft power (Hanlon, 2009), 'myth and ceremony' (Bartley and Egels-Zandên, 2016) and rhetorical artefacts (Maunganidze, 2021). CSI practices represented a discursive construction serving as a 'text' to articulate a corporate meta-narrative for (re)-creating a state of harmony and unity between the business and society (Jeffcutt, 1994; Rambaree, 2021). This reinforced Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, as cited in Hassard and Cox, 2013, p. 13, p. 13)'s observation that policies were often not 'scientific facts' but products of constructed processes and artefacts of rhetorical representation. Initiatives such as the protection of the environment and co-creation of codes of ethics and client charters were advantage-gaining micro-practices aimed at making the process more durable, authentic and persuasive. Such strategic posturing was largely intended to mask and kill off possible resistance from stakeholders (Castree and Braun, 2001; Chia, 1996; Fischer, 2003). This resonates with Hanlon's (2009) argument that such practices were a 'predatory soft power'. However firms such as #7 and #8 were an exception demonstrating relatively genuine contributions to the national development agenda through sustainable environmental management and promotion of health and road safety. There was also evidence of attempts at engendering workplace democracy through the promotion of in-company non-union employee participation arrangements that actually proved to be a strong indicator of industrial citizenship reaching deep into the structure and design of the corporation (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008). Overall this makes good business sense for corporations to show some moral mettle as they would ultimately be judged by the extent to which they successfully co-evolved with the external environment.

Another striking result to emerge from the study is that although the firms tended to engage in relatively similar practices they flagged them under different nomenclatures; CSI, CSR, SRI, and CC, with firms such as #1, #5, #6, #7 (Table 1), even deploying more than one term. Such a constellation or 'cocktail' of descriptors were not an outcome of natural selection but discursive construction reflecting how the practices were packaged in different formats suitable to their business purposes (Rambaree, 2021). Such semantic calibration discursively (re)constructed organisational identity and image in the light of ever-changing global standards such as the ISO 9001 and UN Global Compact Principles. The oscillation between various terms was part of a 'soft technology' or 'soft power' in the management of stakeholder pressure and corporate reputation (Hanlon and Mandarini, 2015; van Tulder et al., 2009). For example, firm #1 considered its CSI activities as driven more by business ethics than economic interests. This supports literature (Belal, 2008; Kenny, 2007; Hadani and Coombes, 2015; Shabana and Ravlin, 2016), showing the practices being determined not only by community interests but the need to bolster market visibility through self-reporting. Firm #1 further claimed to prioritise "SECURING OUR PEOPLE'' AS A SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY' (CSR Report 2008, p.11) but at the same time failing to engender industrial democracy. This omission resonates with Derridian postulation of the limitations of attempting to create a fit between ethics and profit motive. The CSI practices reflected a grand strategy in the management of stakeholder pressure for the re-figuration of corporate identities. This supports Shabana and Ravlin (2016) and Vallentin's (2015) argument that corporations effectively sought to change stakeholder expectations and manipulate their perceptions through green-washing or 'corporate disinformation' (Laufer, 2003).

One of the challenges confronting CSI has been the poor social performance record in dealing with wider societal challenges (Hearn and Parkin, 1993). Ethics do not only border on issues of responsibility but transparency, social justice and fairness. This article supports earlier observations elsewhere in Africa, (Phillips, 2006 in Nigeria and Maphosa, 2009 in Zimbabwe), of the limits of voluntarism in dealing with wider society issues such as inequality and HIV-AIDS. Most organisations saw the immediate operating environment as fundamental to 'good' CSI practice as they largely focused on activities that made them 'look good' to their customers rather than paying attention to the traditionally neglected wider societal issues such as gender-based inequality and discrimination, political oppression and crime prevention (Phillips, 2006; Lindgreen et al., 2009). As shown in Table 10, only 6.7% of survey respondents confirmed attention to such wider society issues. As Wettstein's (2012) argued, the indifference to ethical considerations was partly explained by the overall peripheral role played by human rights in CSI discourse. Human rights obligations have not been considered a core issue in the framing of business-society relations across the sample frame.

Another important study finding was that although firms attempted to re-figure their identities by aligning business strategies to the pillars of the Vision 2036, the practices were ad hoc and reactive. For example there was no evidence of either proactive needs assessment instruments or supporting budgets and institutional structures driving the CSI practices. Essentially firms adopted a reactive approach such as responding to the Presidential Housing Appeal or donating items and cash to victims of natural disasters. Such behaviours serve as a form of 'insurance' which is all part and parcel of corporate political activity for presenting the firm as a good corporate citizen (Godfrey, 2005; Hadani and Coombes, 2015) and resonated with the executive management's own philanthropic ideology of symbolic 'voluntarism and charity' (Logsdon and Wood, 2002; Windsor, 2001). It is in the firms' best interest to portray a favourable image in order to deal with potential resistance from the environment and consequently enhancing corporate reputation.

5. Conclusions

The overall aim of this article was to examine the extent to which the corporate social investment practices of selected Botswana Stock Exchange listed firms were either genuine or symbolic representations of good corporate citizenship. The study on which the article is based sought to establish the motives and patterns of CSI practices. It found out that the practices were varied but mutually reinforcing. One of the challenges they faced was that they were also largely reactive and fragmented approaches to community engagement. Although the firms portrayed themselves as good corporate citizens complementing government efforts in addressing societal developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment and injustices, they were preoccupied with the small and traditional ‘giving back to community’ donations. Overall a few CSI practices across the sample frame were genuinely philanthropic while a majority were largely reduced to a ‘soft technology’ or grand strategy for the (re)-figuration of corporate identities.

One limitation of the study was its overreliance on firms’ ‘self-reporting’ narratives while underrepresenting the indigenous voices; that is, the views and lived experiences of communities particularly the actual beneficiaries. Future research that uses a much larger sample could be pursued to assess the impact of the practices on the benefitting communities incorporating one or more forms of triangulation into the qualitative research design. The scope and delimitation could be further widened to include emerging locally owned and controlled firms particularly the small to medium enterprises. Finally the article strongly recommends the need to institutionalise continuous dialogue and collaboration between government, business and communities in order to transform the corporate social investments into strategic tools for sustainable business practice.

Credit author statement

This is an original article based on a research project in which the author was the principal investigator and sole author of the article. The subsequent revisions to the manuscript are fully credited to the author. The author fully and independently participated in each of the following roles; project conceptualization, methodology, research supervision and validation of instruments and results, data curation, formal analysis, the draft and final writing, and editing process which were solely managed in line with the publisher, Elsevier and journal specifications. With respect to funding acquisition and project administration the author was part of a collaborative research project team funded under the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA)’s National Working Group Programme in Botswana.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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