

## Corporate Social Responsibility in Four and Five Star Hotels in Kenya

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Corporate social responsibility as a major aspect of societal marketing is under explored and under reported in the hospitality industry in Kenya. This article compiles primary and secondary data on corporate social responsibility in four and five star hotels in Kenya by adopting surveys and moreover exploring the hotels' websites and administering open ended questionnaires to a convenient sample of one hundred and two managers. The study concluded that the hotels have widely embraced corporate social responsibility as a tool for enhanced financial and non-financial performance.

Key words: Corporate social responsibility, hotels, financial performance, Kenya

### Introduction

A strategy is a general plan which guides decision making (Knowles, 1996). The term marketing strategy refers to all the activities and efforts that are put towards achieving marketing goals (Dittmer & Griffin, 1993). Ferrel & Hartline (2010) described a marketing strategy as a plan on how a firm will use its strengths to meet the needs of its customers. These strengths could come from the facility having advanced information technology, capable staff, superior location, modern equipment, brand name or adequate financial resources. Hult, Pride & Ferrel (2012) likewise stated that it is a plan that specifies a target market and a related marketing mix.

Corporate social responsibility is a marketing strategy which is underexplored in developing countries (Nyahunzvi, 2013) thus calling for clarification on its place in hotel marketing. It has been used to gain competitive advantages (Holme, 2010) and competitiveness through satisfying stakeholders such as customers (Planken, Nickerson & Sahu, 2013). Studies in Kenya, for example Cheruiyot & Maru (2012) contended that it can increase market demand and affect sales and marketing.

Corporate social responsibility, commonly referred to as corporate sustainability in tourism, is a business portrayal of ethics and social responsibility (Planken *et al.*, 2013). It focuses on financial performance, societal and environmental themes such as customer interests, corporate vision, corporate values, social issues, employee welfare and environmental issues (Nyahunzvi, 2013). Previous studies in non-hospitality organizations, for instance Planken *et al.* (2013), have identified community projects, environmental/ecological initiatives, donating to causes, sponsoring, improving working conditions and engaging in responsible business as common corporate social responsibility

practices. Planken *et al.* (2013) in addition discussed the following corporate social responsibility based marketing communication strategies; promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering and socially responsible business practice.


However, little has been researched on corporate social responsibility in the hospitality and tourism industry (Holcomb *et al.*, 2007) more so in Kenya. Its reporting is also generally poor in Africa with some developing countries lagging behind (Nyahunzvi, 2013). Subsequently scholars like Goyal, Rahman & Kazmi (2013) recommended that more studies be conducted in these countries. Holcomb *et al.* (2007) similarly found that though most hotels in the United States of America were involved in charitable donations, they still needed to disclose more on corporate social responsibility.

### Literature Review

Corporate social responsibility refers to the impact of an organization on the society and the observance of ethics. Ethics is "the study of how our decisions affect other people, people rights and duties, the moral rules that people apply in making decisions and the nature of the relationships among people" affecting stakeholders such as the society, shareholders, organizational policies and individuals (Stoner, Freeman & Gilbert, 1995, p. 124).

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The three authors added that “the tools of ethics include values, rights, duties, moral rules, human relationships and common morality as reflected by our actions through the respect we hold for others, property and mutual aid”.

Corporate social responsibility is also called Social Responsibility (SR), corporate citizenship or corporate sustainability (Holcomb *et al.*, 2007). Hsieh (2012) explained that sustainability is the protection of environmental resources for future generations and expounded that it is important since modern society calls for accountability among organizations that impact their environment-financial, social and environmental. Jones, Hillier & Comfort (2014) elaborate that legal, publicity, shareholder and environmental concerns have spurred increase in sustainability efforts among business leaders.

The International Organization for Standardisation, ISO 26000:2010 (2014) defined accountability as the “state of being answerable for decisions and activities to the organizations’ governing bodies, legal authorities and more broadly its stakeholders”; ethical behaviour as “behaviour that is in accordance with accepted principles of right or good conduct and is in consistent with international norms of behaviour”; sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”; and social responsibility as:

Responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment through transparent and ethical behaviour that contributes to sustainable development including health and welfare of society, takes into account the expectations of stakeholders, is in compliance with applicable law and is consistent with international laws of behaviour and is integrated throughout the organization and practices in its relationships.

Corporate social responsibility certification can give a firm face value (Wildes, 2008). The international organization for standardisation therefore acknowledged social responsibility and environmental awareness through the ISO 26000 guidelines which laid out how businesses can operate in socially responsible ways and the ISO 14001 awards for environmental management systems (EMS).

Corporate social responsibility is rooted to various theories. For example, the stakeholder theory acknowledged the input and crucial role of stakeholders in enhancing organizational success (Jones *et al.*, 2014). Stoner *et al.* (1995) moreover forwarded Andrew Carnegie’s two principles of corporate social responsibility- the charity principle that involves helping less fortunate members of society and the stewardship principle where the organizations take care of society. Furthermore,

corporate sustainability can be social, economic, environmental or a combination of these (Goyal, Rahman & Kazmi, 2013), famously called the triple bottom line (Dodds & Kuehnel, 2010). Planken *et al.* (2013) likewise posited that corporate social responsibility takes place in stages moving from economic concerns, and expanding to legal then ethical (environmental) and societal initiatives via corporate giving and volunteerism. They explained that it could involve communities by supporting educational efforts and the environment with social and community projects being the most common corporate social responsibility initiatives in developing countries. They thus recognised efforts such as community projects, environmental/ecological initiatives, donating to causes, improving employees working conditions, sponsoring sports, arts and education and engaging in responsible business by having codes of conduct. Nevertheless, corporate social responsibility could be internal-human resources and employees or external-other stakeholders (Jones *et al.*, 2006).

Corporate social responsibility is a strategic tool (Holcomb *et al.*, 2007; Holme, 2010) which can enhance the hotel’s competitiveness (Wildes, 2008) and financial and non-financial performance (Goyal *et al.* 2013), through building reputation, increasing profits and attracting investments (Nyahunzvi, 2013) after supporting customers and being good citizens (Planken *et al.*, 2013). Besides, it boosts employee satisfaction and loyalty (Holme, 2010). Holme outlined other benefits of corporate social responsibility which included economic considerations, ethical reasons, innovation, risk management and risk reduction, access to capital and increased shareholder value. Moreover, organizations which fail to embrace it may accrue costs from law suits, business closure and loss of customers (Stoner *et al.*, 1995). Thus as put by Jones *et al.*, (2006, p. 331), corporate social responsibility is linked to:

Improved financial performance and profitability, reduced operating costs, long-term sustainability for companies and their employees, increased staff commitment and involvement, enhanced capacity to innovate, good relations with government and communities, better risk and crisis management, enhanced reputation and brand value and the development of closer links with customers and greater awareness of their needs.

Studies covering responsible, employee and environmental corporate social responsibility have been conducted in the tourism and hospitality industry. One study on the legislation of alcohol and tobacco consumption across the world by Alexander (2014) recommended that employees be trained about responsible drinking among customers. Responsible drinking and smoking, labelled responsible marketing strategy highlight governments’ and

employees' efforts to promote healthy consumption of alcohol and tobacco in pubs (Jones *et al.*, 2006).

Social responsibility at the workplace is practised through non-discriminatory employment, fair treatment, conducive work environment, health, safety, employee volunteerism, work-life balance and ergonomics. Hiring people with disabilities in hotels is often directed towards fair treatment of people in society (Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014) consequently improving the image and reputation of the firm. Employee corporate social responsibility is nonetheless important because employees are directly and indirectly involved in its activities (Park & Levy, 2014). It could be a source of competitive advantage for hotels (Cheruiyot & Maru, 2012), pubs (Jones *et al.*, 2006) and tour operations (Dodds & Kuehnel, 2010) and can also enhance employees' sense of ownership with the hotel (Park & Levy, 2014) therefore influencing their stability and loyalty (Jones *et al.*, 2014). Hence, healthy staff relations can reduce turnover in the industry (Park & Levy, 2014) and benefit operations and customers through managing sanctions such as strikes which would otherwise interrupt production and output.

Environmental management is a different dimension of corporate social responsibility which has since evolved from the concept of constructing environmental friendly facilities, to saving energy, protecting the environment, developing environmental management systems and implementing ISO 14001. Chan (2009) attempted to provide guidelines on how hotels can learn how to successfully implement environmental management systems from their counterparts who were ISO 14001 certified. An environmental management system addresses how a facility affects its environment and consequently mitigates this impact (Chan, 2009). Chan further noted the pros of ISO 14000 which he believed reduces costs more so from waste, encourages and assures energy and material conservation and improves stakeholders' perceptions of the company. Chan too listed waste management, the 3 R principle (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle), water consumption, energy consumption, gas usage, fuel oil usage, air pollution and reduction strategies as some of the aspects of EMS. ISO 14000 was introduced in 1996, but newer versions have since been published.

Green hotels are an effort towards ethical business (Holcomb *et al.*, 2007). Greening refers to the use of practices and facilities which are friendly ecologically. Modern trends reveal that consumers prefer tourism facilities which adopt green practices (Hsieh, 2012). Slevitch, Mathe & Scott-Halsell, (2013) found that the green marketing of lodging facilities affects guest satisfaction. A similar study (Dipietro, Cao & Partlow, 2013, p. 780) on a green certified upscale restaurant also established that greening was a growing trend which attracted cus-

tomers to compliant restaurants. The researchers mentioned green practices such as "using renewable resources, conserving water and implementing recycling programs". They further suggested that restaurants should employ marketing strategies which promoted and supported their greening so as to gain competitive advantages. But customers do not know everything about the practice. Still, hospitality facilities may incur costs when going green and embracing EMS especially when they are forced to create trained departments and teams (Hsieh, 2012).

Another dimension of corporate social responsibility is the accommodation of customers with disabilities. Wan (2013) proposed that casinos provide products and services which enabled these customers to be involved in, participate and enjoy tourism products and services.

## Research Method

The study was a survey involving one hundred and two hotel managers who were conveniently sampled. The managers worked in four and five star hotels in Kenya. Primary data on the corporate social responsibility activities of the hotels was compiled from open-ended questions in the managers' questionnaires. Meanwhile, the secondary data was from the hotels' websites including the mission statements, press releases, reports and newsletters.

The validity and reliability of secondary data is determined through establishing the reputation of the source of secondary data and the methods used to collect the data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The researcher in this study consequently confirmed that the sources of secondary data were reputable by using data from the hotels' websites.

Data was analysed using content and narrative analysis. By analysing the literature collected and the questionnaires, all patterns, themes and categories that emerged from the data were identified. Content analysis involves determining the frequencies with which themes and words are repeated in qualitative data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Content analysis was therefore used to explore secondary data on the corporate social activities of the hotels. Meanwhile, narrative analysis involves the presentation of data in the form of written narratives especially when it is difficult to identify themes within the data (Lacey & Luff, 2001). Narrative analysis was therefore used to present written narratives on corporate social responsibility in hotels as derived from open ended answers in the managers' questionnaires. Thus, using the NVIVO software, the data was first coded, then noded, and finally arranged into themes which were later presented using a frequency table, written texts and written narratives.

## Results, Analysis and Discussion

As reported in Table 1, the corporate social responsibility activities of the hotels were determined. The hotels had sections on the websites titled either “sustainability” or “the environment”, “ecotourism”, “the community”, “the hotel’s conscious”, “responsible business”, “the hotel’s philosophy”, “corporate social responsibility”, “the hotel cares” and “the hotel’s dedication” under which corporate social responsibility was discussed. Only one hotel (7.14%) highlighted its corporate social responsibility efforts on its mission statement while only two (14.28%) discussed their corporate social responsibility efforts on the annual reports. Thirteen hotels (92.86%) did not display their mission statements on their websites but they simply went ahead to talk about the hotel, its history and offers. Holcomb *et al.* (2007) moreover identified five categories of corporate social responsibility reporting in hotels namely community, environment, marketplace, vision and values and workplace. Based on this criterion, table 1 depicts the corporate social responsibility practices of the hotels as reflected in their websites, annual reports and press releases.

As reflected in table 1, four hotels did not mention anything about corporate social responsibility on any of the mentioned media. 8 (57.14%) hotels reported on environmental management, 10 (71.42%) on the community, 3 (21.42%) on the marketplace, 7 (50.00%) on the vision and 4 (28.57%) on the workforce.

Majority of the hotels (n=10, 71.42%) catered for their communities and the locals in the following ways; sharing benefits of tourism with them; sustaining their culture and heritage; offering social support; supporting their projects related to education, cultural and historical preservation; providing hospitality training and education; volunteering; fundraising, offering grants, sponsoring marathons for charity involving employees and participating in sports sponsored charity games such as golf; building partnerships with them; donating discarded items, food, clothing and linen to the needy including children’s homes; donating blood, setting medical camps for free treatment and subsidised medical care such as maternal care, immunization and HIV/AIDS counselling and treatment to them; participating in hospital, old people and mental institution visits; raising funds for drought areas and running HIV/malaria/tuberculosis prevention and care programmes for them; showcasing, protecting and using their artists, materials, skills, designs and labour including staff uniform, costumes, textiles, fabrics, artifacts, handicrafts, sculptures, artwork in gift shops, dance, songs, musical and theatrical displays for guests; enhancing their economic development by encouraging self-employment ventures among them; organising

walking tours and nature based activities for guests which involve them, providing guest educational talks and cultural insights; promoting their suppliers; supporting their youth by providing leisure, career, educational and training opportunities, holding career talks with them and employing their school leavers; improving infrastructure such as roads, providing clean water and drilling water boreholes and wells; hosting community and seasonal events; organising employee visits to orphanages; giving donations in kind; providing vocational training for students in tourism; working with local schools through construction of schools, giving food and educational materials such as desks and e-learning, conducting environmental training for pupils and offering scholarship and sponsorships to needy students; serving Kenyan menu specialities to guests; contributing to faith by building places of worship; participating in corporate partnerships such as protection of children from trafficking, prostitution, abuse and child labour through raising posters, stickers and brochures; employing local orphans; promoting local talent and participating in humanitarian efforts during peace, conflict and natural disasters such as drought, famine and floods.

Most hotels (n=8, 57.14%) participated in the following environmental management programmes; saving energy by adopting sustainable energy technology including green energy such as solar and wind, energy efficient lighting, low energy-use devices and heat recovery systems; conserving water by treating and recycling it and using water conservation showerheads, toilets and tap aerators; managing waste through recycling organic water, recycling items such as paper, plastics, glass, metal, linen and garden waste as compost and encouraging the use of recycling bins, minimal packaging materials and biodegradable materials in supply; ensuring the consumption of local food for health, environmental friendliness and nutrition; adopting paperless processes; sustaining the natural environment by addressing deforestation, planting trees, conserving rivers, developing trails, having green spaces, adopting green marketing; using three R’s-recycle, reduce and reuse concepts while involving employees, communities and guests; having clean up exercises; controlling water, visual and air pollution by reducing carbon foot imprint and using friendly products such as chlorofluorocarbons and pesticides; preserving the environment in design, construction and planning of the hotels; protecting threatened plants, areas, animals and wildlife such as shrubs, indigenous birds, butterflies and turtles; training the community on environmental responsibility; planting tree seedlings for supply to local communities and using biological farms.

A few hotels (n=3, 21.42%) concentrated on the market place in the following ways; ensuring

responsible travel; showing concern for the community by using local suppliers and materials; teaching suppliers on quality; ensuring honesty, integrity and ethical practices; providing excellent customer services, being consistent and attentive to detail, and encouraging guest interaction and learning.

The vision related corporate social responsibility practices of some hotels (n=7, 50.00%) included; having vision; establishing values such as accountability, fairness, self-regulation, trust, quality, honesty, integrity, teamwork, innovation, gender equity and environmental protection by for instance maintaining a clean work environment; following ethical guidelines and observances such as corpo-

rate governance and business ethics; and supporting the national government through revenue.

A number of hotels (n=4, 28.57%) focused on their workforce through adopting the following initiatives; making employees environmental ambassadors; providing career planning, offering best staff training and advancement; ensuring fair treatment, fair and equitable benefits, and fair compensation and rewards; providing day care and family accommodation; establishing employee care and wellness programmes such as HIV prevention, reducing accidents and illness at work, promoting healthy lifestyles and optimising quality of life; providing dynamic and challenging work environments; and offering opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Table 1. Categories of corporate social responsibility.

Categories of corporate social responsibility reporting		F	%
<b>Community</b>			
	Charitable donations	10	71.42
	Donation in kind	10	71.42
	Community welfare	7	50.00
	Corporate giving	6	42.85
	Education	4	28.57
	Grants	4	28.57
	Local regeneration	1	7.14
	National welfare	6	42.85
	Volunteerism	7	50.00
	World welfare	5	35.71
	Sports	2	14.28
	Religion	1	7.14
	Health	3	21.42
<b>Environment</b>			
	Cultural heritage	3	21.42
	Energy management	7	50.00
	Pollution control	8	57.14
	Recycling	6	42.85
	Waste management	6	42.85
	Water management	6	42.85
	Animal welfare	1	7.14
<b>Marketplace</b>			
	Ethical advertising	1	7.14
	Providing a product of value	1	7.14
	Relationship with guests	1	7.14
	Relationship with suppliers	3	21.42
	Relationship with shareholders	1	7.14
	Supplier diversity	2	14.28
<b>Vision and values</b>			
	Accountability	1	7.14
	Clear purpose	1	7.14
	Code of conduct	2	14.28
	Enduring values	1	7.14

	Ethical behaviour	7	50.00
	Fairness	1	7.14
	Self-regulation	7	50.00
	Trust	1	7.14
Workforce			
	Advancement	2	14.28
	Fair and equitable benefits	2	14.28
	Career planning	1	7.14
	Compensation and rewards	1	7.14
	Day-care and family accommodation	2	14.28
	Diversity/equal opportunity	2	14.28
	Employee assistance programs	2	14.28
	Employee communication	2	14.28
	Health and safety	3	21.42
	Recruitment	4	28.57
	Training	4	28.57

After establishing the corporate social responsibility activities of the hotels, data from the open ended questions on its role in marketing the hotels was analysed. Qualitative analysis showed that the managers believed that corporate social responsibility was very important since it addressed the needs of various stakeholders.

Three managers (2.94%) wrote the following: *"...corporate social responsibility enhances compliance and engages in action that appear to further some social efforts beyond the interest of the firm. It also encourages positive impact though its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and all other members of the public. It creates awareness of the firm and communities living around..."*

*"...it is used to empower our local community and build up the hotel's brand purpose of caring for its community..."*

*"...corporate social responsibility plays a big role since the hotel is keen with the environment. The hotel helps the society and locals around the hotel..."*

Four managers (3.92%) held that it gave the hotel a good picture.

*"...it promotes good relations with the community and creates awareness within the surroundings..."*

*"...it creates long-term relations between the hotel and its stakeholders while creating good publicity for the hotel. It also strengthens the hotel's public relations, and is a way of giving back to the community. It establishes networks and relationships between the hotel and the public..."*

*"...it helps the hotel become known as participating in lifting the underprivileged. It thus improves the image of the hotel to the public. The hotel can market itself through sponsorship awards. The hotel can also be rated by the strength*

*of their corporate social responsibility activities... "...when we engage in corporate social responsibility, it is because we are a responsible business. We love to give back to the community that is hosting us in their locality. Through this, we are able to build a good rapport and a harmonious environment for business. It doubles up as a form of marketing since when we participate in a corporate social responsibility we are able to create awareness and also pass information to our target market..."*

One manager (0.98%) felt that corporate social responsibility contributed to the marketing of the hotel.

*"...it helps market the hotel by creating positive publicity, improves the hotel's reputation in the community. People would like to associate themselves with a brand that practices corporate social responsibility, increases customer retention, helps develop and enhance relationships with customers and suppliers, attracts, retains, maintains a happy workforce and employees of choice, helps differentiate the hotel from competitors and provides access to investments and funding opportunities..."*

Four managers (3.92%) thought that corporate social responsibility enhanced the market profiles of the hotels, created awareness of the product and subsequently impacted guests' behaviours.

*"...it exposes the hotel to a large number of people who in turn become interested with the hotel..."*

*"...the publicity that the hotel gets from participating in such activities makes the hotel more appealing to guests..."*

*"...it maintains existing customers and attracts new customers..."*

*...it enhances the market profile of the hotel..."*

Four managers (3.92%) agreed that corporate social responsibility attracted guests, particularly the locals.

“...it gives the hotel a good relationship with its neighbours and also gives the hotel and their guests a chance to serve the community if the community wishes...”

“...it plays a crucial role as it helps familiarise with the hotel's immediate neighbourhood thus creating good co-existence and a positive image to the locals...”

“...it gives a good name and relationship with the locals, therefore helping the hotel to get more resident business...”

“...it creates awareness of our products hence attracting clients and encourages good relationship between the company and the surrounding...”

Three managers (2.94%) nonetheless believed that corporate social responsibility improved their corporate images by increasing their networks in the corporate world and was therefore an avenue for getting the corporate guest.

“...it provides an avenue for the hotel to portray itself as a corporate body with its immediate environments...”

“...it helps build teamwork among participants, gives a chance to host different organizations in conferences and accommodation and in volunteer activities...”

“...the hotel promotes game activities, participating in social events such as heart walks. All these give a chance in interacting with different companies and other organizations and selling the hotel's hotels and lodges...”

Four managers (3.92%) thought that corporate social responsibility maintained existing customers and attracted new ones. They also believed that it bought customer loyalty and trust by improving customer confidence.

“...it also increases customer retention...”

“...it helps develop and enhance relationships with customers and suppliers...”

“...it buys customer loyalty and trust...”...it is used to enhance customer confidence...”

Two managers (1.96%) posited that corporate social responsibility contributed to brand building (strengthening the brands) and impacted on their performance.

“...it contributes to the hotel's brand building (strengthening the brand). It also conveys hotel's information to the public...”

“...it improves the hotel's goodwill and corporate image hence boosting the hotel's sales volume...”

## Conclusion

Corporate social responsibility is a modern and relevant marketing strategy for hotels. This study shows that four and five star hotels in Kenya have

embraced it as a tool for enhanced performance in response to legal, economic, societal and business demands. The results further reveal that it can be used to attract and retain customers including change advocates, the locals and corporate guests thus enhancing the hotels' competitiveness.

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