

# Public Opinion Towards Corporate Philanthropy of Tobacco Companies: Implications on the Performance of Tobacco Firms in an Emerging World

<sup>1</sup>Joy Ifeoma Enemuo, PhD; <sup>2</sup>BEN, Etim Udoh, PhD; <sup>3</sup>Lovlyn Ekeowa Kelvin-Iloafu, PhD; <sup>4</sup>Maureen Chiegeonu Arukwe, PhD; <sup>5</sup>Cross Ogohi Daniel, PhD; <sup>6</sup>Ifeoma Joanes Onodugo

<sup>1,2,3,4,6</sup>Department of Management, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Nigeria

<sup>5</sup>Department of Business Administration, Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja

## Abstract

Corporate philanthropy (CP) refers to all of the ways in which companies achieve a sustainable positive social and economic impact through strategic and generous use of finances, employee time, facilities, or their own products and services, to help others in the community and support beneficial causes. Although the strategic relevance of corporate philanthropy is widely adopted by many organizations, most tobacco firms undermine its altruistic motives because of the public perception and opinion towards it. This study examines the relationship between corporate philanthropy (CP) and corporate performance with specific references to opinion that the public have towards tobacco firms that practices corporate philanthropy in Nigeria. The research design adopted was a cross-sectional survey design. The population consisted of 515 general public drawn from Enugu, Lagos and Kano states of Nigeria. A total sample size of 443 was drawn from the population using a finite population formula of Krejcie and Morgan. The main instrument used for data collection was questionnaire, structured on 5-point Likert Scale and was manually administered to the respondents. A pilot study was conducted using test – retest method and tested with Cronbach Alpha reliability test. The result gave a reliability coefficient of 0.774, indicating a high degree of items consistency. Face and content validation of the instrument was done by five research experts from both the industry and academia. The hypothesis formulated was tested using Friedman chi-square statistics. The finding indicates that people have a positive public opinion towards the corporate philanthropy activities of tobacco firms in Nigeria, and CP contributed significantly to the effective performance of the organizations. It was advised that tobacco's firms corporate philanthropy (CP) should ideally be driven by strategic considerations. This is not to dismiss the other motivations for corporate philanthropy. Hence, the altruistic motives which expect nothing in return for a philanthropic gift other than social advancement should dominate the thinking in tobacco firms.

**Keywords:** Tobacco Firms, Corporate Philanthropy, Altruistic Motives, Public Opinion

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of corporate philanthropy is best explained by understanding its combinations of the meaning of its two concepts: “corporate” and “philanthropy”. First, corporate is defined as a public entity organized around a central theme driven by a collectivist culture of economic, legal, and social purpose. Secondly, philanthropy is

defined as a means by which organizations externally exhibit corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1979; Gan, 2006; Halme&Laurila, 2009). Moreover, the term simply put, is the love of his fellow men. Philanthropy, from a perspective of business, is through the lens of the social sector (Collins, 2009). Alternatively, according to Gan (2006), “Philanthropy, by its definition and in its early forms, assumes a certain degree of altruism and magnanimity”. This oft is referred to as “generosity of spirit” which creates a dichotomy for corporations today. Corporate Philanthropy (CP) by its very definition creates the sense of social responsibility with no strings attached. Corporate philanthropy is a phenomenon which associates the business sector with the social sector. Social historians and researchers see CP as a subset of a larger corporate social responsibility (CSR). Philanthropy provides an opportunity for corporations to establish an ethical and moral mantra within the organization (Gan, 2006; Madrigal & Boush, 2008). An organization is comprised of people who assume the responsibility of cultivating and maintaining a culture supportive of philanthropy and its range of objectives. Successful philanthropy – achieving the goal is as vital to an organization as the “core business” (Bruch & Walter, 2005). Philanthropic initiatives are complex and thus need to be developed, communicated, implemented, monitored, and lastly sustained, in order to guarantee its viability as a strategic tool. Only philanthropic activities that both create true value for the beneficiaries and enhance the company’s business performance are sustainable in the long run. Initiatives that don’t fulfill these two objectives are easily threatened in difficult economic situations

Firms utilizing philanthropic initiatives as part of an overall market development strategy must not look for an absolute monetary return, but to a certain extent a balance of returns comprised of social, ethical, and financial measures (Lockett, Moon, & Visser, 2006). Berger, Cunningham, and Drumwrig(2007) furthered this notion and professed, CSR “does appear to make business sense for some, but not all companies”. Notwithstanding, firms can use philanthropy as a means to an end through an ethical, enterprise-wide, and cogent focus. Academics and practitioners alike have been emphasizing the strategic relevance of corporate philanthropy. They argue that companies can and should strategically use their charitable activities to create win-win opportunities for themselves and for the beneficiaries of their philanthropy

Velasquez (2006) explains that pundits sometimes believes that business ethics is a contradiction in terms because there is an inherent conflict between ethics (philanthropic based) and self -interested pursuit of profits. Davidson (1994) further asserted strategic philanthropic such as the charitable giving is not intended to replace ethical corporate performance. Corporations seemingly have a duty to align themselves with philanthropic causes in a strategic investing behavior – with an eye on charitable good and the hope (or intent) of some business return. Burch and Walter (2005) reported two distinct categories of corporate philanthropy. “Marketing orientation” which represents the external strategies and tactics employed which readily focuses on the customer and other stakeholders who place demands and expectations on the firm. Alternatively, “competence orientation” suggests the need for internal strategies and assessments to ensure alignment of corporate philanthropic initiatives with their companies’ abilities and core competencies. Each of these orientations provide support to the theory of multiple factoring in that a value proposition is more than simply a customer focusing mantra.

Although the strategic relevance of corporate philanthropy is widely accepted, its effectiveness varies substantially. Few companies achieve significant lasting societal impacts with their philanthropy, and even fewer manage to accomplish both sustainable social effects and significant economic returns. In many emerging world like Nigeria, most tobacco companies’ philanthropic activities lack a cohesive strategy and are conducted in a piecemeal fashion, causing investments in corporate philanthropy to often simply dissipate. There has been negative perception and belief of the general public about the CP activities done by many tobacco firms around

the world, but whether it is the same situation in country like Nigeria remains inconclusive. In most cases, executives dismiss this ineffectiveness as an inevitable part of philanthropic engagement. By doing so, they misjudge the situation. There is no reason to treat a company's charitable activities less professionally than the core business. Specifically, the use of CP has been one of the strategies adopted by many profit making organizations. In this study, evaluation is made on the public opinion towards corporate philanthropy activities of tobacco companies. The implication of CP on corporate performance is also unravels.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Conceptual Framework

#### The Concept of Corporate Philanthropy

Derived from the Greek "philanthropos" and Latin "philanthropia", the term "philanthropy" literally translates as "love of humanity", or "useful to mankind". First coined by the fifth century BC playwright Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound*, the modern concept of philanthropy took shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and became a very fashionable activity among British and American traders and entrepreneurs. However, Wells (1998) claims that the first American philanthropists were actually Native Americans, as demonstrated by the value placed on concern for the common good within their cultures. Ricks and Peters (2013) state that individuals, rather than firms, originally engaged in philanthropic activities. However, this situation changed following a 1954 Supreme Court ruling (*Smith Manufacturing v Barlow*) which removed the legal restrictions for corporate philanthropy. The legal restrictions at that time reflected public and corporate sentiment, which suggested that the firm's primary social responsibility was to increase shareholder wealth through profit maximization. Often implemented as a component of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, corporate philanthropy (CP) today is a way for businesses to give back to local, national or even international communities, via charitable donations to nonprofit organizations. This "giving back" can take the form of financial (cash) donations or non-cash contributions such as time, expertise, or tangible (in-kind) goods. Morris (2013) suggest that there are two key types of CP: conditional charitable support based on purchases or a percent of pre-tax profits; and an unconditional form of giving in which there is no purchase-based promise or obligation to donate on behalf of the donor, thereby generating a variable charitable support value.

Leisinger & Schmitt (2011) argue that CP should generally address the roots of a social problem, rather than its symptoms (except in cases of humanitarian emergency), to demonstrate the values that a firm stands for. However, the participation of firms in philanthropic activities remains, for some at least, a source of contention. For example, Friedman (1970) argues that charitable contributions should be made by individual stockholders, rather than big business, as the latter's solitary social responsibility is to maximize wealth for shareholders. Tonello (2011) also suggests that some people still oppose CP today on the grounds that it consumes company resources, and is prone to further the goals of management rather than shareholders. Liket & Simaens (2015) offer three conceptualizations of CP as economic, ethical, and idealized practices; and conclude that the motives are usually highly contextual. Questioning the lack of empirical studies establishing the extent to which CP motives are altruistic or strategic in nature, Liket & Simaens suggest that this is consistent with the conceptual ambiguity and lack of clarity about the objectives of CP. Ricks and Williams (2013) also identify three key motives underpinning CP. These are:

- i. A *normative motive*, encouraging corporate philanthropy on the basis that all stakeholder interests are inherently valuable, even those with no specific financial or contractual arrangements with a firm;

- ii. An *enlightened self-interest motive*, in which a firm will help others primarily to promote its financial self-interest, without any specific plan and/or way of measuring the extent to which its CP is responsible for financial results; and
- iii. A *strategic motive*, in which the social and economic goals of a firm and the target recipients of CP are measurable, and can be realized simultaneously and complementarily

### **The Concept of Organizational (Corporate) Performance**

Research on performance has gone through many phases in the past three decades. Initially, they were focused mostly on financial indicators but with time, the complexity of the performance measurement system increased by using both financial and non-financial indicators. Although the concept of organizational performance is very common in academic literature, its definition is not yet a universally accepted concept. Many actions taken by firms do not seem to affect their financial performance much which has led scholars to widen the definition of firm performance. The concept of “scientific management” by Fredric Taylor in the early twentieth century laid the foundation for the modern concept of organizational performance. Organizational performance comprises the actual output or results of an organization as measured against its intended outputs (or goals and objectives). It is one of the most important variables in the field of management research today. Richard, Barnett, Dwyer and Chadwick (2007) view organizational performance as encompassing three specific areas of firm outcomes: (a) financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment, etc.), (b) product market performance (sales, market share, etc.); and (c) shareholder return (total shareholder return, economic value added, etc.). Organizational performance as the organization’s ability to attain its goals by using resources in an efficient and effective manner; effectiveness being the degree to which the organization achieves a stated goal, and efficiency being the amount of resources used to achieve an organizational goal. The term performance is sometimes confused with productivity. Ricardo (2012) explains that there is a difference between performance and productivity. Productivity being a ratio depicting the volume of work completed in a given amount of time while performance being a broader indicator that could include productivity as well as quality, consistency and other factors. Waiganjo, Mukulu and Kahiriri (2012) note that organizational performance may be measured in terms of its multiple objectives of profitability, employee retention, productivity, growth among many other objectives. Doyle (2004) contends that there is no single or best measure of organizational performance. He posits that profitability is the most common measurement used for organizational performance. Indeed, even the optimal definitions or measures of performance remain controversial. Fortunately, when these propositions are assessed, the results are often encouraging as practices that improve the commitment and attitudes of employees do indeed enhance many financial indicators of workplace performance (Gong, Law, Chang, and Xin, 2009).

### **Corporate Philanthropy and Organizational Performance: The Nexus**

Godfrey (2005) suggests that firms practicing strategic philanthropy generate intangible strategic assets such as reputational capital, employee commitment, and trust or acquiescence among regulatory institutions and legislative bodies. The extent to which a firm participates in strategic philanthropy is always limited to its strategic interests, thereby ensuring that the primary objective of any business (profit maximization or the generation of shareholder wealth) is adhered to. Godfrey argues that the key determinant of a CP program motivated by strategic reasons is “Does the philanthropic activity of the firm represent a genuine manifestation of underlying intentions, vision, and character, or is the activity simply designed to ingratiate the firm among the impacted community?”

Van Kranenburg and Zoet-Wissink (2012) appear to describe the strategic drivers as “impure altruistic” motives. They suggest that firms that engage in CP for impure altruistic reasons do so for a combination of self-centered and other-centered (societal) motives. Gautier & Pache (2015) also highlight a broad consensus in the literature that suggests CP serves the firm’s interests, albeit indirectly, in terms of reputation, prestige, or employee pride. They refrain from using the label “strategic philanthropy” in favor of a concept of “CP as community investment.” However, the core tenets appear very similar. For example, Gautier & Pache suggest that a firm can in the long run benefit from CP based on community investment motives, as the philanthropy will help foster a better environment for business through enhanced social cohesion, safety, education and infrastructure improvements.

Gan (2006) suggests that strategically-motivated philanthropy is symbolic of the conflicts that the managers of contemporary firms must explore, understand, and resolve. The strategic motivation for philanthropy therefore focuses a firm’s charitable efforts on a cause or issue that simultaneously provides a direct benefit for society, and indirectly supports a firm’s core business objectives. The study therefore hypothesized that:

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is a negative public opinion towards the corporate philanthropy activities of tobacco companies in Nigeria and it adversely affects the firms’ performance*

### **Theoretical Anchor**

This work hinges on stakeholders’ theory. In order for CP to be effective and meaningful, the interests of different range of stakeholders other than shareowners need to be taken into account by corporations. Stakeholder theory is based on the notion developed by Freeman (1984) that corporations consist of various stakeholders beyond their own shareholders and that they should be managed with those groups in mind. Generally, the term ‘stakeholder’ can include: Shareholders, who, unlike other stakeholders, have a direct equity interest in the company; Other persons with a financial interest in the company (financiers, suppliers and other creditors), or those in some other commercial legal relationship with the company (for instance, business partners); Persons who are involved in some manner in the company’s wealth creation (employees and consumers);

The Stakeholder theory focused on the managerial model of an entity and, as a result, narrowly defined ‘stakeholder’ as a group that impacts on the success of the organization in terms of production outcomes and transactions. The broader definition of the stakeholder view of the firm includes those who may affect or be affected by the organization employees, customers, local community, management, owners and suppliers and so on.

### **METHODS**

The study adopts a cross-sectional survey design method. Survey means to view comprehensively and in detail or the act of obtaining data for mapping. The sources of data comprised of primary source. The information from the primary source consists of responses from the questionnaire administered to the people that were randomly selected from the public in Enugu, Enugu State; Ikeja, Lagos State; and Kaduna, Kaduna State all in Nigeria. One set of questionnaire was used for the study. The information elicited includes information on educational background, qualifications, positions, gender, age and number of years of service. The population of the study is 515 general public and mainly those public that are exposed to tobacco products in Nigeria. Thus, using a finite population formula of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size was determined and a sample size of 443 was derived. The stratified random sampling sample technique was used. The major research

instrument used in gathering data for this study was structured questionnaire. This questionnaire had two (2) sections; question A was on general information concerning the respondents while section B directly addressed the research questions. Close ended questions were used. In order to ensure that the research instrument was valid, the researcher ensured that the instrument measured the concepts it was supposed to measure. The questionnaire was vetted by experts in the Faculty of Business Administration of the University of Nigeria. A pilot survey was used to test 15 respondents and their responses, comments and preliminary analysis were used to modify and fine-tune the instrument. To ensure reliability of the data, the researcher administered the questionnaire in batches that yielded nearly equivalent responses. To ascertain that the instrument is reliable, the test-retest was adopted. The outcome of the test-retest was determined using Cronbach Alpha and the result was 0.774. Since the result was very high, thus we assert that the instrument was highly reliable.

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Table 2 below shows that 78.37% of the distributed copies of the questionnaire were returned and used whereas 22.02% were not returned and were not used for the analysis

**Table 2: Distribution and Return of the Questionnaire**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Returned	435	98.2%
Not Returned	8	0.8%
Total	443	100

Source: Researchers Compilation of the Field Data Collection

Of the distributed questionnaires returned, two hundred and sixty (260) respondents representing 60.07% were male, whereas 175 respondents, representing 40.22% were female. This indicated that males were more than the females. The age distribution of the respondents showed that 94 respondents representing 22.00% were between the age of 25-30, 100 respondents with 23.08% were within the age bracket of 35-45, while 241 respondents representing 55.40% were within the age bracket of 45 years and above. This implies that greater proportion of the respondents fall within the age of 45 years and above. The collected data was presented using percentage tables, percentages, mean and standard deviations. The 5 Likert type questionnaires rating of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were assigned numbers 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The formulated hypothesis was tested using Friedman Chi-square at a significance level of 0.05 (5%). The decision rule was based on the sample mean greater than 3 for agreed and otherwise for disagreement.

**Table 3: Public Opinion towards Corporate Philanthropy and the Implications on Corporate Performance of Tobacco Firms**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>SA(5) Freq %</b>	<b>A(4) Freq %</b>	<b>U(3) Freq %</b>	<b>D(2) Freq %</b>	<b>SD(1) Freq %</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
CP encourages a favorable perception of the public towards Tobacco firms	214 49.19	102 23.45	38 8.78	40 9.20	41 3.85	435 100	3.93	1.34
CP from Tobacco firms helps general public to build brand association and loyalty for tobacco companies	89 20.46	164 37.71	59 13.56	72 16.55	51 11.72	435 100	3.39	1.30
There is enhanced image	84	160	72	69	50	435	3.37	1.28

from the general public towards Tobacco companies that uses CP and this improves their overall performance	19.32	36.78	16.55	15.86	11.49	100		
CP has more societal impact on the Tobacco organizations	104	147	51	78	55	435	3.38	1.36
	23.91	33.79	11.73	17.93	12.64	100		

Source: Compilation of the Field Data Collection, 2021

Table 3 shows the responses of the respondents on public opinion towards corporate philanthropy and the implications on corporate performance of tobacco firms. Four questions were formulated in that respect. As regards to the question on perception, 214 (49.19%) and 102 (23.45%) respectively of the respondents, strongly agreed and agreed that CP encourages a favorable perception of the public towards Tobacco firms, 38 (8.74%) of the respondents were undecided, while 40 (9.20%) and 41 (9.421%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, that CP encourages a favorable perception of the public towards Tobacco firms. It is penitent to note, that mean value of 3.93 shows the high level that signifies that CP encourages a favorable perception of the public towards Tobacco firms.

On the aspect of whether CP from Tobacco firms helps general public to build brand association and loyalty, 89 (20.46%) and 164 (37.71%) respectively of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that CP from Tobacco firms helps general public to build brand association and loyalty respectively. 59 (13.56%) of the respondents were undecided, while 72 (16.55%) and 51 (11.72%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed on the assertion respectively. In view of the mean of 3.39 based on our decision rule, it is penitent to note that the assertion is positive.

On the aspect on whether there is an enhanced image from the general public towards Tobacco companies that uses CP, 84 (19.32%) and 160 (36.78%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed on the assertion respectively. 72 (16.55%) of the respondents were undecided, while 69 (15.86%) and 50 (11.49%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that there is enhanced image from the general public towards Tobacco companies that use CP. In view of the mean of 3.37 based on our decision rule, it is penitent to note that the assertion is positive.

As regards to whether CP has more societal impact on the Tobacco organizations, 104 (23.91%) and 147 (33.79%) respectively of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that CP has more societal impact on the Tobacco organizations. 51 (11.73%) of the respondents were undecided, while 78 (17.93%) and 55 (12.55%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, on the above statement. The mean value of 3.38 shows the high level that signifies that CP has more societal impact on the Tobacco organizations.

The present study tested the hypothesis that on the public opinion towards corporate philanthropy of tobacco firms and the implications on the performance of the organizations. In testing this hypothesis, the data presented in Table 3 were tested using the Friedman Chi-Square test.

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is a negative public opinion towards the corporate philanthropy activities of tobacco companies in Nigeria and it adversely affects the firms' performance*

**Table 4: Friedman Chi-Square Test Result for the Hypotheses**

Statistic	Value
N	435
Chi-Square	171.221
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Source: SPSS Output, 2021

The result presented in Table 4 shows that the calculated Friedman Chi-Square value is 171.221.

This is greater than the critical chi-square value of 9.49. Having an asymptotic significance of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , this result is significant. Therefore, there is a positive public opinion towards the corporate philanthropy activities of tobacco companies in Nigeria and it significantly improved on the firms' performance. The finding of this study tally with the works of with the findings of studies carried out by Tonello (2011), and Liket&Simaens (2015), who posit that corporate philanthropy and CSR often encourage the growth of firms. Moreover, Gautier &Pache (2015) pointed out that provisions of gifts, instruments, donations etc by corporations go a long way in stimulating the image of such firms; hence, this finding aligns with Gautier &Pache (2015) outcomes. Contrarily, the findings from this study negates the works done by Gan (2006), and van Kranenburg and Zoet-Wissink (2012) who believe that CP is nothing than wasting of organizational resources. All the assertions collaborates the fact that structural, human and technical related causes are the major challenges that hinder the implementation corporate philanthropy in any organizations.

## CONCLUSION

This inquiry has continued applicability due to a keen interest to understand the dynamics between a firm's socially responsible culture and how philanthropy can be a strategic tool for stimulating corporate growth for tobacco firms. It is assumed that manytobacco organizations do not adequately view and utilize philanthropy validation. It is in the execution of a private profit sector corporate philanthropic initiative whereby the organization carries out its ethical mission. In a future study, an assessment of how philanthropy can be best-suited to add influence on tobacco organizations plans may add validity and credibility.

To minimize objections and maximize impacts, tobacco organizations should ideally be driven by strategic considerations. This is not to dismiss the other motivations for CP. Altruistic motives, in particular, which expect nothing in return for a philanthropic gift other than social advancement, are noble and can dominate thinking in tobacco organizations. Nevertheless, the alignment of tobacco organizations CP with the mission, goals, and objectives of the firm can not only reduce skepticism about motives, increase employee participation, and reduce stakeholder suspicions about ingratiation. It can also enable the firm to make a meaningful and direct social impact, while simultaneously indirectly benefitting its own bottom line in the long run through reputational capital, employee commitment, and trust or acquiescence among regulatory institutions and legislative bodies

Much attention has been paid to CSR, corporate reputation, and the intersections of ethics and public perceptions. There is need to advance a theory that would focus on how a tobacco organizations can use philanthropic initiatives to validate, differentiate, and make distinctive their strategic marketing process. Hence, further study should point to this direction which is one major limitation of this current study.

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