

The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility towards External Stakeholders on the Project Performance among Construction Firms in the UAE – Conceptual Study

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Abstract

When performing corporate social responsibility (CSR), the construction industry can be embraced by External Stakeholders, such as suppliers, government, customers, and thus, sustainable development of the construction industry can be attained. However, the construction industry involves multiple stakeholders; thus, balancing the interests of all stakeholders is difficult for construction companies. Therefore, an effective rule for decisions related to CSR behaviors is important for the strategic management of stakeholders. Scholars perform CSR studies from various perspectives, emphasizing corporate management and developing different evaluation systems accordingly. Nonetheless, most of these studies obtain feedbacks from the perspective of contractors without incorporating the expectations of various stakeholders, and thus, the interpretation can potentially lead to social desirability bias. The model-independent variables (corporate social responsibility (Suppliers) corporate social responsibility (Government) - corporate social responsibility (Customers)) on the dependent variable project performance in the construction industry in UAE.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility Social Responsibility (CSR), Government, Suppliers, customer, Construction industry

1. Introduction

The project level has to maintain the business activities of the company, and a construction company cannot independently exist without projects (Sabini & Alderman, 2021). The projects are important platforms for construction industries to exercise corporate social responsibility and it is a formal way for contractors to engage with stakeholders; hence, the demands and expectations of both sides can be concrete on a project (Singh, 2021). The project-level social responsibility strategy of construction corporations is related to time, which requires a specific social responsibility strategy (Ma et al., 2021). In addition, the corresponding social responsibilities of each stakeholder shall be clarified, and the project-level social responsibility strategy of corporations should be stipulated before the implementation of the project to provide good external conditions for smooth implementation of the project (Goel et al., 2020). During the daily operations of construction corporations, there is no unified definition regarding the stakeholders of construction corporations among domestic and foreign experts and scholars, or among their research findings (Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020). According to the stakeholders of construction corporations and corporate social responsibility (CSR), different research perspectives, research objects and research methods may make various experts have different definitions regarding the stakeholders of construction corporations (Park et al., 2021).

In order to define the stakeholders of a construction corporation correctly, a detailed analysis of existing research findings should be conducted, and stakeholders having the closest relations with the daily operations of corporations should be selected (Liao et al., 2016). The stakeholders of construction corporations accepted by foreign scholars are stockholders, staff, consumers, suppliers, government, communities where corporations are found, creditors, and managers (Lim et al., 2021). It is necessary to ensure that the selected strategic indicators can effectively characterize the fulfillment of CSR by construction companies (Lim et al., 2021). The principle of a comprehensive system: to ensure that the design of indicators includes the interests and demands of all stakeholders, after researching the relevance between various company project stakeholders (Wu et al., 2018). Over the past few decades, the construction industry has played a crucial role in the economic development of numerous countries (Anaman, & Amponsah, 2007). CSR is the responsibility of an organization for managing the impacts of its decisions and activities on the society and

environment, which has been a widely used approach for responding to emerging social and environmental issues (Baah et al., 2021).

However, CSR performance continues to be unsatisfactory in many industries, and the construction industry is no exception (Ajibike et al., 2021). For instance, construction companies are often involved in costly CSR activities related to the local community, such as providing free education or other philanthropic efforts or assisting host countries with infrastructure construction such as roads, bridges, or hospitals (Lu et al., 2018). The challenge that companies face is how to achieve high CSR efficiency, which refers to the ratio between the low input of the organization's resources and the high output of CSR performance (Yang & Basile, 2021). Specifically, the CSR efficiency performance of construction companies and reveal that the effect of marketization on CSR efficiency is complex and non-linear, which can be empirical evidence for the government to understand the current state of CSR efficiency in the construction industry, as well as to formulate more targeted measures to promote construction companies' efficient commitment of CSR (Kirby & O'Mahony, 2017). Furthermore, a valuable reference to benchmarking the "efficiency" of fulfilling CSR is provided to construction company managers, which can help them find self-improvement ways to improve their CSR efficiency (Jia et al., 2019).

A strategic approach to CSR is regarding a strategic competitive tool for an organization whereby socially responsible business behavior is an effective and necessary strategy to ensure survival in chaotic, competitive, and ever-changing environments (D'Anselmi, 2021). The construction industry has also shown that only a relatively few empirical studies have attempted to explore CSR to date (Pham et al., 2021). The issue of CSR in the construction industry is extremely important because of the vital impact brought by the construction activities on society and the environment (Khamis & Wan Ismail, 2021). In addition, the practice has shown that CSR can be a source of competitive advantage for construction firms if correctly implemented (Nguyen et al., 2021). A construction firm cannot build its CSR strategy without knowing what factors are crucial in order to successfully integrate CSR into its business strategies (Sun et al., 2020). However, not all classifications were organized by linking CSR practices directly to diverse stakeholder groups (Galbreath, 2018). The CSR performance issues to nine stakeholders, including employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers and partners, resources and environment, local communities, government, competitors.

Construction quality and safety were also addressed as one of the most important aspects of CSR practices and community (Butković et al., 2021). The stakeholders are groups and individuals who, directly or indirectly, influence or are influenced by the attainment of the company's objectives: employees, shareholders and other lenders, suppliers, customers, the public sector, and civil society (Ansong & Ayakwa, 2021). Therefore, CSR can be conceptualized as being related to what corporations should be responsible for in society (Green, 2021). Acknowledging that construction activities will always involve a balance of conflicting needs, CSR has been advocated by many government authorities as a necessary means for the construction businesses to act in a socially responsible manner (Smith, 2011). In the construction sector, the contemporary implementation of CSR would affect a multitude of stakeholders such as owners or developers, government agencies, construction enterprises, employees, and end-users (Bilciurescu, 2021). The factors influencing CSR implementation can facilitate the development of appropriate and effective policies by government agencies to encourage the adoption of CSR practices in the construction industry (Kar & Jha, 2021). Customers and employees increasingly expect organizations to possess CSR policies, and such policies are frequently issues as addendums to formal company reports (Abreu et al., 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1. CSR towards Suppliers

According to stakeholder theory, CSR essentially serves to manage some stakeholders, fulfill the expectations of diverse stakeholders, and build a bridge between corporations and general society (Grann, 2021). Accordingly, the authors had classified CSR practices by relating CSR practices to the respective stakeholders of construction enterprises however, not all classifications were organized by linking CSR practices directly to diverse stakeholder groups (Kim et al., 2021). For instance, by coupling project and corporate level CSR practices, translated CSR performance issues to nine stakeholders, including employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers and partners, resources and environment, local communities, government, competitors (Alkhalili & Namayanja, 2021, Alkadash & Aljileedi, 2020). The recognized that profitability; human resource benefits; innovation and technology development supplier-induced benefits (cost discount); collaborative advantage; investment attraction; award or certification; brand, image, and reputation benefits brought by the competitor's CSR practices can motivate organization's mimetic CSR actions (Zhang et al., 2018). Stakeholders are groups and individuals who, directly or indirectly, influence or are influenced by the attainment of the company's objectives: employees, shareholders and other lenders, suppliers, customers, the public sector, and civil society (Griffin, 2017). The management board and the supervisory board have overall responsibility for weighing up these interests, generally to ensure the continuity of the company and its affiliated enterprise, as the company seeks to create long-term value for all stakeholders (Hammouda & Basly, 2020). Therefore, the CSR policy should state the principles or commitments the company will voluntarily adhere to in its dealings with stakeholder

groups, specifying at least: a) the goals of its CSR policy and the support instruments to be deployed; b) the corporate strategy concerning sustainability, the environment, and social issues; c) concrete practices in matters relative to shareholders, employees, clients, suppliers, social welfare issues, the environment and diversity (McBarnet, 2009).

An alternative form of ripple effect can result from direct pressure throughout the supplier's a large company improving its CR performance may require all of its suppliers to adhere to the same standards, resulting in the suppliers implementing CR practices to retain business (Stigzelius & Herbert, 2009). The external dimension is wide-ranging and includes investors, local communities; business partners, suppliers, and consumers; human rights; and global environmental concerns. CSR, for example, puts the onus on companies to provide products that customers want in an efficient, ethical, and environmentally responsible manner (Jones et al., 2005). CSR is also seen to have a strong human rights dimension, which extends throughout the suppliers and thus increasingly has not only just a national but also a global reach (Yasin, & Correa, 2021). Managing the suppliers has long been a cause of economic and operational concern within the construction industry but many companies are coming under increasing pressure to ensure that their suppliers are meeting their social responsibilities (Jones et al., 2006). The tensions between CSR and commercial goals may merit very limited attention in CSR reports and while the companies may wish to portray CSR as integral to their business such harmony may not always be reflected at the operational level or in relationships with suppliers and sub-contractors (Grann, 2021). The internal and external support to CSR as suggested by the expert was consistent with top management support, participation of key stakeholders in the CSR process, government support, employees' involvement in the CSR process, and strategic collaboration with suppliers (Zhou et al., 2020).

2.2. CSR towards Government

The barriers were grouped into five perspectives, namely government policy, construction enterprise, the attributes of CSR, the stakeholder perspective, and the construction industry (Pham et al., 2021). The implications for government agencies in the development of relevant policies to encourage the adoption of CSR practices in the construction industry for construction enterprises, the findings have implications to their new or existing CSR practices in enhancing organizational competitive advantages and in achieving their goals to be socially responsible (ElAlfy et al., 2020). In the construction sector, the contemporary implementation of CSR would affect a multitude of stakeholders such as owners or developers, government agencies, construction enterprises, employees, and end-users (Ndiperu & Kiosani, 2021). Among these stakeholders, construction enterprises are the major and direct practitioners of construction activities; they need to balance the needs and concerns of various stakeholders to be socially responsible companies (Annor & Simons, 2021). The motivations can influence CSR practices through a theoretical lens, together with suggestions to overcome barriers to CSR implementation (Jamali et al., 2020). The factors influencing CSR implementation can facilitate the development of appropriate and effective policies by government agencies to encourage the adoption of CSR practices in the construction industry (Kar & Jha, 2021). The barriers of CSR implementation were contextualized into five perspectives: (i) government policy; (ii) construction enterprise; (iii) attributes of CSR; (iv) the stakeholder perspective; and (v) the construction industry (Zhang et al., 2019).

However, the construction, are requiring the construction firms industry to adopt specific CSR strategies if they are tendering for government work and increasingly private sector work (Ershadi et al., 2021). CSR research shows that many construction clients are not prepared to pay for CSR and do not see social and environmental initiatives on the construction projects they procure as adding value to their core business objectives (Edas, 2021). Moreover, the construction supply chain needs to adjust and adapt its CSR strategies to fit with the social, environmental, and economic profiles of the local communities in which they build (Singh, 2021). The CSR stakeholders not only include shareholders, clients, and employees but also suppliers, subcontractors, the community, and the government (Chedrawi et al., 2020). Therefore, the CSR stakeholders have relationships with or take an interest in the activities of the organization, such as the local community, government (local authorities), competitor, and environmental protection agency (Rutkowska & Pakulska, 2021). Accordingly, in the life cycle of construction projects, project-related CSR stakeholders include clients, suppliers/subcontractors, partners, employees, the local community, and governments (Zhao et al., 2016). Other subgroups such as the local community, the government (public authority), and non-government organizations are considered to be guided by "social" contracts, those stakeholders without contractual relationships with the company but are interested in its activities (Kivits & Sawang, 2021). Moreover, the construction industry plays a significant role in the social and economic development in both developed and developing countries through constructing buildings and infrastructure projects that meet the needs of the community in the short and long term (Moon & Lee, 2020).

In addition, it supports government efforts by achieving strategic development objectives, increasing gross domestic product (GDP), and offering employment opportunities (Zhang, 2021). The importance of supporting the government initiatives for affordable housing development coupled with the need for utilizing the CSR of project stakeholders and the significance of the role of partnership as an effective tool (Zhang et al., 2019). The different actors such as corporations, government institutions, the media, and consumers organize and negotiate knowledge about the meaning and expectations of corporate responsibility (Ruël, 2020). The internal and external support to CSR as suggested by the expert was consistent with top management support, participation of key stakeholders in the CSR process, government

support, employees' involvement in the CSR process, and strategic collaboration with suppliers (Scandeliu & Cohen, 2016). Furthermore, the valuable reference to benchmarking the "efficiency" of fulfilling CSR is provided to construction company managers, which can help them find self-improvement ways to improve their CSR efficiency (Wang et al., 2018). In addition, given that many construction companies from different countries are also facing the financial burden in fulfilling CSR, it is anticipated that the efficiency analysis of CSR can be used by other governments and construction enterprises in different countries (Liao et al., 2018). The stakeholders in the construction industry such as owners and managers in large and small construction organizations, professional consultants, and government agencies to contribute to achieving sustainable development goals (Kim & Nguyen, 2020).

2.3. CSR towards Customers

The main benefits of CSR in construction are perceived to be relational in terms of placating communities that may oppose projects and building engagement and loyalty from both employees and customers both internal and external stakeholders (Sfakaki, 2021). While these "softer" benefits are significant, the link between CSR and economic performance, both short and long-term do not appear to be well understood or established (Loosemore & Lim, 2017). This in turn suggests that CSR will continue to be seen as a marginal and low strategic investment priority in most firms, and given the reluctance to enforce CSR through their supply chains, isolated rather than spread through the construction community (Alshabebi, 2020). Most definitions of CSR cover combinations of the following themes; treatment of employees, supporting local communities, environmental performance, human rights, and ethical conduct with competitors, suppliers, and customers (Esteban et al., 2020). The CSR could therefore be considered as an "umbrella" term, incorporating the tenets of; environmental sustainability, business ethics, governance, public relations, stakeholder analysis, and relationship marketing (Butković et al., 2021). The CSR of stakeholders including employees, customers, community, and the environment that successful companies will be the ones that continually seek to raise their game and take a responsible approach to all their activities (Sehgal et al., 2020). The diffusion of stakeholder control can be achieved through the development of alternative sources of suppliers, product and market diversification (customers), geographical diversification, or workplace reorganization and bureaucratic mechanisms (employees) (Petrescu et al., 2021). The corporations that assume social responsibility and develop and offer products with a societal value can penetrate new markets, attract new customers, and, hence, benefit from doing well (Latif et al., 2020).

A responsible image allows corporations to differentiate themselves from their competitors demonstrate that a responsible image can positively affect the purchasing decisions of customers and strengthen customer loyalty as well as customer satisfaction (Chang & Yeh, 2017). Furthermore, a responsible image can enhance the attractiveness of a corporation as an employer, increase organizational commitment, entail positive effects on corporate reputation, and improve the relationships with local communities (Singh & Misra, 2021). The stakeholders identified can be summarized into eleven broad categories: employees, customers, shareholders, creditors, suppliers and partners, environment and resources agencies, local communities, government, competitors (Lu et al., 2021). The project-related CSR indicators, many indicators are associated with the enterprise level and according to the aforementioned definition of CSR, the social responsibilities the enterprise must fulfill include legal responsibility, economic responsibility, and ethical responsibility (Van Balen et al., 2021). These obligations are to meet the requirements of employees and customers, shareholders, and government that relate to the entire corporation (Dat et al., 2020). In the construction phase, the construction company must ensure project quality, time, cost and safety, and environmental protection goals (Liao, 2021).

2.4. Project Performance

Understanding the relation between CSR and project performance is important because the success of a company largely depends on its employees (Acharyya & Agarwala, 2020). The existence of standards for taking over social responsibility is particularly important in project performance and the more standardized the companies involved in the project treat these issues, the better CSR concepts can improve cooperation (Stuss et al., 2021). Project performance is a temporary organization completing project-related tasks and normally, it will be staffed with people involved in the project who come from different permanent organizations and perform services for the project, or influence the project (Goetz et al., 2021). The project performance will be selected for certain tasks and set up across the divisions of the corporation and the less the members of the group know each other, the more trust-building and developing activities are required to make the group highly functional (Terjesen et al., 2009; Alsaad & Almaamari, 2020).

The values of the company have an impact on the type of targets that will be defined, and hence on the proceeding in work processes and the project performance must provide the conditions for supporting success-focused project work with CSR (MacMillan, 2019). Project performance will show sustainable commitment only if this commitment benefits their interests (Gyampah et al., 2018). Additionally, the results indicate that there is a positive link between corporate social performance and project performance contributes positively to market value and financial performance and that CSR has been influenced a firm's performance through customer satisfaction (Ahmed & Almaamari, 2020; Al-Harethi & Al-Maamari, 2018; Aldoseri & Almaamari, 2020; Ullah et al., 2021). Many researchers examined the relationship

between each dimension of CSR and project performance also find a positive relationship to exist between an aggregate score for CSR activities and corporate performance (Awaysheh et al., 2020).

3. Conceptual Framework

The following model of the study that the role of corporate social responsibility (external stakeholders) constructs on project performance in the construction industry in UAE and the model-independent variables (corporate social responsibility (Suppliers)- corporate social responsibility (Government) - corporate social responsibility (Customers) on dependent variable project performance in the construction industry in UAE (as seen in Figure 1).

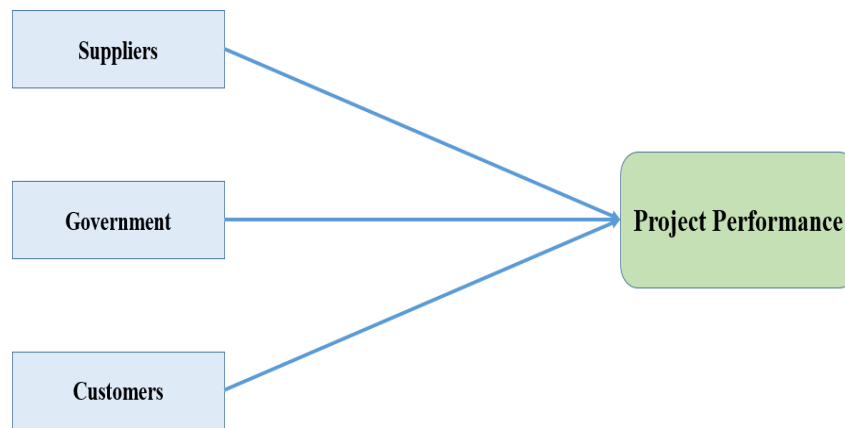


Fig. 1. Research model of this study

4. Conclusions and Recommendation

The factors that influenced the smooth implementation of construction projects were considered project stakeholders of construction corporations funding agencies, communities, government, staff, suppliers, stockholders, and owners. Thus, instructed construction corporations to stipulated project-level CSR strategy in the construction industry. However, there are still some limitations in this study that need to be further studied and responded to in the future to the CSR database developed and measurement in the construction industry. Therefore, a more reliable and authoritative indicator system for measuring CSR should be developed in the future. The CSR practices in the UAE for construction industries and explore differences in CSR processes between firms and countries. On the other hand, having different preferences in the importance ratings of CSR types is a natural consequence of changing characteristics of countries, company scales, and the activity types and activity areas of the case companies. Hence, identifying CSFs in advance will facilitate focused monitoring on only a few key areas of the CSR adoption effort, whereby construction firms will be able to achieve their mission consistently.

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