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**THE EFFECT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES ON  
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF MEDIA HOUSES IN KENYA**

**DIANA JOY NKATHA KIRIMA**

**MCOM/094722**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF COMMERCE OF STRATHMORE  
BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**STRATHMORE UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**NAIROBI, KENYA**

**APRIL 2025**

**RESTRICTED**

## DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the proposal itself.

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Date: 30/04/2025

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### Approval

The thesis of **Diana Joy Nkatha Kirima** was reviewed and approved for examination by me as the assigned institution supervisor:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: 30/04/2025

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the future, represented by my daughter Norah Kemunto, who inspires me to make a positive impact on the world. To my brother, Victor Kirima, for his unwavering belief in my potential. To my parents Judy Maitethia and Josphat Maitethia who instilled in me the values of hard work and intellectual curiosity. This thesis is also dedicated to future researchers who will build upon this work, may it serve as a steppingstone in your own journey's discovery.



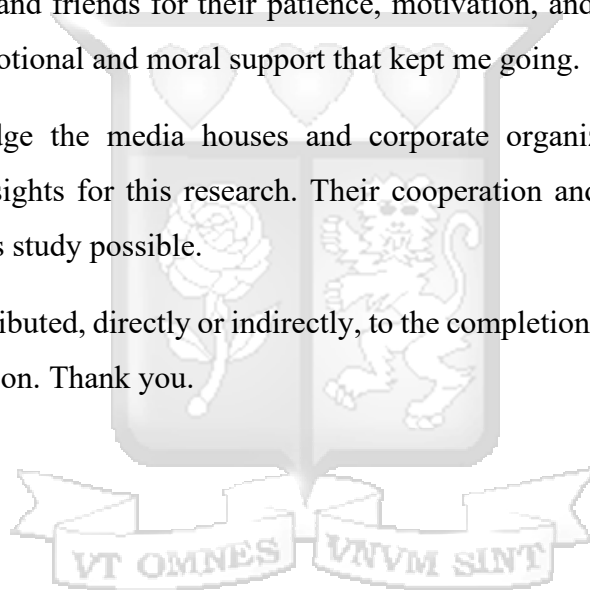
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>CA</b>	Competitive Advantage
<b>MBV</b>	Market Based View
<b>RBV</b>	Resource Based View
<b>KBC</b>	Kenya Broadcasting Channel
<b>TV</b>	Television
<b>NMG</b>	Nation Media Group
<b>RMS</b>	Royal Media Services
<b>MCK</b>	Media Council of Kenya
<b>MTN</b>	Mobile Telecommunications Network
<b>LSR</b>	Legal corporate social responsibility



## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Competitive advantage** refers to a firm's ability to maintain a superior market position by leveraging unique resources, innovation, differentiation, and operational efficiencies

**Corporate Social responsibility** refers to a company's commitment to balancing profitability with social and environmental responsibilities while meeting stakeholder expectations

**Economic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** refers to a company's commitment to ethical practices that promote economic development while improving the quality of life for its workforce, their families, and the broader community.

**Ethical Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** refers to a company's commitment to conduct business in a manner that is fair, transparent, and respectful to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community

**Legal corporate social responsibility (LSR)** comprises laws and regulations lawmakers set at different levels of government. Such laws express basic notions of fair business practices, and firms are to observe them.

**Philanthropic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** refers to voluntary business initiatives aimed at contributing to societal welfare beyond profit motives. This includes charitable donations, community development projects, and support for social causes, reflecting a company's commitment to social good.

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effect of CSR practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. Specifically, it sought to determine the influence of ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal responsibility practices on their competitiveness. The study employed a correlational quantitative research design, targeting 488 managerial staff across 122 media houses in Kenya. Respondents were selected through random sampling, and data was collected through structured questionnaires. Analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression techniques. This study was underpinned by two complementary theories: Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Theory. Together, Carroll's Pyramid defines the nature and scope of CSR activities, while Stakeholder Theory explains how these activities can translate into tangible strategic benefits. They jointly informed the study's examination of the role of CSR in enhancing the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. The findings revealed that ethical and economic responsibility practices significantly contribute to the competitive advantage of media houses, while philanthropic and legal responsibilities did not show a statistically significant effect. The study concluded that CSR practices emphasizing ethics and economic value were more likely to yield competitive benefits in the media landscape, in Kenya. The study recommends that media houses strengthen ethical governance and embed economic responsibility into their core strategic planning. Additionally, integrating innovative CSR models such as cause-related marketing and employee-led community engagement may further reinforce long-term competitiveness. Legal compliance should be supported through continuous training and policy development to enhance sustainability and innovation in the sector.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's commitment to balancing profitability with social and environmental responsibilities while meeting stakeholder expectations (Alshukri et al., 2024). It encompasses business practices that enhance societal well-being, promote sustainability, and uphold ethical values (Reckmann, 2022). Over time, CSR has evolved from a voluntary initiative into a strategic necessity, where organizations proactively integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into their core operations (Ahmed & Kumar, 2021). Carroll's (1979, 1999) framework classifies CSR into four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, highlighting that firms must go beyond regulatory compliance to uphold ethical standards and engage in social initiatives. Economic responsibility refers to a company's commitment to ethical practices that promote economic development while improving the quality of life for its workforce, their families, and the broader community. Legal responsibility comprises laws and regulations lawmakers set at different levels of government. Such laws express basic notions of fair business practices, and firms are to observe them. Ethical responsibility refers to a company's commitment to conduct business in a manner that is fair, transparent, and respectful to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community. Philanthropic responsibility refers to voluntary business initiatives aimed at contributing to societal welfare beyond profit motives. This includes charitable donations, community development projects, and support for social causes, reflecting a company's commitment to social good.

The European Commission (2022) emphasizes that CSR should not be treated as an isolated function but should be embedded within a company's long-term strategy to create value for all stakeholders. This shift underscores the growing recognition that CSR is not just about philanthropy or regulatory adherence, it is a powerful tool for enhancing brand reputation, improving operational efficiency, and fostering consumer trust.

Organizations that integrate CSR into their business models strategically benefit from higher stakeholder engagement, increased employee motivation, and reduced regulatory risks (Ardiansyah & Alnoor, 2024). However, CSR's effectiveness depends on its alignment with business goals and how well these initiatives are communicated to stakeholders (Elmassri et al., 2023). In today's competitive landscape, where consumers prioritize sustainability and ethical business practices, CSR has become a key differentiator (Aftab et al., 2025). Companies that incorporate CSR into their core strategies build stronger relationships with customers and improve their long-term profitability. Beyond compliance, CSR can drive innovation, optimize resource utilization, and enhance risk management, all of which contribute to a firm's overall market positioning (Alshukri et al., 2024).

As businesses seek sustainable ways to outperform competitors, CSR has emerged as a critical factor in achieving competitive advantage. Competitive advantage refers to a firm's ability to maintain a superior market position by leveraging unique resources, innovation, differentiation, and operational efficiencies (Kamau & Njuguna, 2022). Porter (1985) identifies three primary strategies for gaining competitive advantage: cost leadership, differentiation, and market focus. While traditional sources of competitive advantage—such as product innovation and pricing strategies—remain vital, firms are increasingly utilizing CSR as a competitive lever (Brown & Green, 2020). Companies that prioritize sustainability, ethical business conduct, and community engagement often gain a positive corporate reputation, leading to increased customer loyalty and expanded market share (Bansal, 2023). The growing global focus on responsible business practices has transformed CSR from a mere public relations tool into a core element of corporate strategy. Firms that treat CSR as an investment rather than a cost are more likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. By embedding CSR into their business models, companies can develop innovative solutions that align with societal needs while creating value for stakeholders.

In Kenya's dynamic business landscape, firms that incorporate CSR into their operations appear better equipped to manage regulatory shifts, promote greater customer relationships, and enhance their market competitiveness, suggesting that CSR is evolving

into a strategic asset for sustained business performance. For instance, leading corporations such as Safaricom, East African Breweries Limited, and Equity Bank have successfully adopted CSR-driven strategies, leveraging sustainability initiatives and community engagement to differentiate themselves from competitors (Muturi, Wambugu, & Njoroge, 2020). These firms recognize that CSR is not just an obligation but a driver of financial performance, brand equity, and long-term growth. However, smaller firms often struggle to implement meaningful CSR initiatives due to financial and resource constraints, limiting their ability to gain similar advantages (Chirchir, 2021). Furthermore, Kenya's evolving regulatory landscape demands higher levels of corporate accountability, compelling firms to integrate sustainability into their operations rather than treating CSR as an optional function (Odera, 2023).

Competition is rife in Kenya's media industry where 122 media houses compete for market share (Mutua & Kamau, 2022). With intense competition and increasing consumer awareness, media firms must go beyond conventional business strategies to strengthen their market position. CSR has the potential to serve as a competitive differentiator in the highly competitive media industry in the country (Karanja, 2020; Mwangi & Njoroge, 2021). Ethical journalism, corporate transparency, responsible advertising, and community engagement can enhance public trust and brand loyalty (Mutua & Kamau, 2022). However, while CSR has gained prominence in the sector, the extent to which it translates into measurable competitive advantage remains underexplored. The extent to which media firms benefit from CSR strategies, whether through enhanced consumer trust, advertising revenue, or regulatory goodwill, warrants further investigation. This study sought to bridge this gap by examining the role of CSR in enhancing the competitive positioning of media houses in Kenya.

### **1.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility Practices**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly critical component of modern business strategy, as organizations face growing pressure to operate ethically, sustainably, and in alignment with stakeholder expectations (Reuters, 2025). CSR refers to the voluntary initiatives and practices undertaken by firms to address the social, economic,

and environmental concerns of their stakeholders while conducting core business operations (Matten & Moon, 2008). These practices often go beyond compliance with legal requirements and reflect an organization's commitment to responsible citizenship and sustainable development.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved globally from a peripheral philanthropic activity to a central component of strategic business operations. Contemporary CSR encompasses environmental sustainability, social equity, and robust governance frameworks, collectively known as ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria. This shift is driven by increasing stakeholder expectations, regulatory pressures, and the recognition that sustainable practices contribute to long-term profitability and resilience (Reuters, 2025). Internationally, frameworks such as the United Nations Global Compact and the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) have been instrumental in standardizing CSR practices. These frameworks emphasize transparency, accountability, and the integration of sustainability into corporate reporting and decision-making processes (Le Monde, 2024).

In emerging markets, CSR practices are often influenced by local socio-economic challenges and cultural contexts. Companies operating in these regions tend to focus on community development, education, and healthcare initiatives, aligning their CSR strategies with national development goals. However, the implementation of CSR in these markets faces challenges such as limited regulatory enforcement and varying stakeholder expectations (Ombok et al., 2025). The adoption of culturally sensitive CSR strategies is crucial in these contexts. Aligning CSR initiatives with local values and traditions enhances stakeholder engagement and fosters sustainable business practices (Ombok et al., 2025).

Across the African continent, CSR has gained prominence as businesses recognize their role in addressing social and environmental issues. African companies are increasingly integrating CSR into their core operations, focusing on areas such as education, environmental conservation, and economic empowerment. This integration is often driven by the need to build trust with stakeholders and contribute to national development agendas (CSR World, 2024). However, the practice of CSR in Africa is not without challenges.

Issues such as inconsistent implementation, limited stakeholder engagement, and inadequate regulatory frameworks can hinder the effectiveness of CSR initiatives. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from both the private sector and policymakers to create an enabling environment for CSR (Ombok et al., 2025).

In Kenya, CSR has evolved from being a peripheral philanthropic activity to a more structured, strategic function embedded in organizational policies and operations. This shift is partly driven by increasing stakeholder awareness, regulatory demands, and the intensifying need for organizations to build and sustain legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Kinoti, 2017). For firms operating in highly visible industries, such as the media CSR, can play a central role in shaping public perception, fostering trust, and strengthening corporate reputation. CSR practices commonly implemented in Kenyan organizations include community outreach programs, employee welfare initiatives, environmental conservation efforts, educational sponsorships, and ethical governance mechanisms (Otieno & Kimani, 2022). Within the media sector, CSR has been leveraged to build audience engagement and demonstrate value beyond profit-making. For example, media houses have launched campaigns promoting literacy, health awareness, and civic education, aligning their social investments with public interest issues.

Despite these efforts, the implementation of CSR across the media landscape in Kenya remains inconsistent and often lacks a clearly defined strategic orientation. While leading media firms such as Nation Media Group and Standard Group have developed flagship CSR programs, many mid- and lower-tier media houses exhibit limited capacity or organizational commitment to integrate CSR into their core strategies (Wangari & Otieno, 2023). Furthermore, disparities in budget allocation, leadership buy-in, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms continue to influence the scale and effectiveness of CSR interventions. Importantly, CSR practices are no longer evaluated solely on the basis of social impact. Contemporary business thinking increasingly emphasizes the potential of CSR to contribute to competitive advantage, whether through enhanced customer loyalty, improved brand equity, cost savings from sustainability initiatives, or innovation in service delivery (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

This study explored the extent to which CSR practices contribute to the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. It specifically investigated how dimensions such as ethical conduct, economic responsibility, legal compliance, and philanthropic engagement influence firm-level competitiveness in areas like customer satisfaction, innovation, and cost efficiency. In doing so, the study aimed at providing empirical evidence to inform how CSR can be more intentionally harnessed to achieve both social legitimacy and business sustainability in the media industry.

### **1.1.2 Competitive Advantage**

In an increasingly volatile and competitive business environment, the concept of competitive advantage has become central to organizational strategy and performance. Competitive advantage refers to the unique attributes or capabilities that enable an organization to outperform its rivals and achieve superior market performance over time (Barney, 1991). These attributes may include cost efficiency, superior product or service quality, innovation capacity, brand strength, and the ability to respond swiftly to market changes. Achieving and sustaining competitive advantage is essential for firms operating in dynamic industries, where customer preferences, regulatory expectations, and technological advancements continuously evolve. According to Investopedia, a competitive advantage enables a company to produce goods or services more effectively or at a lower cost than its competitors, leading to superior margins and market share (Investopedia, 2025). Furthermore, innovation is highlighted as a critical driver of competitive advantage, allowing businesses to differentiate themselves and adapt to rapidly changing market conditions (StartUs Insights, 2025). This aligns with Porter's (1985) seminal theory of competitive advantage, which identifies cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies as core avenues for firms to achieve sustainable superiority over rivals. Porter emphasizes that competitive advantage arises from a firm's ability to perform the same activities more efficiently or to execute differentiated activities that add unique value to customers, reinforcing the strategic integration of CSR practices into the value chain.

Within the media industry, competitive advantage is often shaped by an organization's ability to deliver timely, credible, and differentiated content while navigating resource

constraints, shifting audience behavior, and digital disruption. In Kenya, media houses are under increasing pressure to not only maintain editorial integrity and technological agility, but also to build trusted relationships with audiences, advertisers, regulators, and the broader public (Makori, 2024). As traditional revenue streams such as print advertising decline, firms are compelled to explore new avenues, such as digital monetization, brand partnerships, and CSR-led initiatives to stay competitive.

This study defines competitive advantage as the strategic positioning of a firm that results in sustained customer satisfaction, continuous product and service innovation, and effective cost control. This multidimensional definition aligns with Porter's (1985) framework, which identifies cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies as the primary paths to achieving competitive advantage. The choice of this definition is particularly relevant for dynamic industries such as media, where firms must continuously innovate, manage costs, and adapt to evolving customer preferences and regulatory environments to maintain relevance and profitability. Porter emphasizes that competitive advantage arises from a firm's ability to either perform the same activities more efficiently than competitors or to execute differentiated activities that uniquely add value to customers. This reinforces the importance of strategically integrating CSR practices into the firm's value chain.

These dimensions captured both market-facing and operational elements of competitiveness that are relevant to the media sector in Kenya. Customer satisfaction reflected the firm's ability to deliver value, engage audiences meaningfully, and meet stakeholder expectations. Product and service innovation encompassed the capacity to respond to technological and content-driven shifts through new offerings and delivery models. Cost control related to how well a firm manages operational efficiency while maintaining quality standards. Strategic management literature has traditionally linked competitive advantage to internal firm resources and capabilities, as emphasized by the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). However, more recent perspectives, including stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and corporate social responsibility frameworks, suggest that competitive advantage also arises from how well a

firm manages its relationships with diverse stakeholders. These relationships can influence access to critical resources, legitimacy, and long-term sustainability.

Despite increasing acknowledgment of CSR's strategic importance, limited empirical evidence exists on its impact on competitive advantage in Kenya's media sector. Addressing this gap is vital not only for advancing theoretical frameworks in CSR but also for guiding media firms in designing impactful, competitive CSR initiatives tailored to the Kenyan market. Therefore, this study addressed this gap by investigating how various CSR dimensions namely economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities relate to core indicators of competitive advantage in the industry. By doing so, it contributed to both academic understanding and practical strategy development for firms seeking to navigate the complex interface between social responsibility and business performance.

### **1.1.3 An Overview of the Media Industry in Kenya**

Kenya's media industry is one of the most dynamic in Sub-Saharan Africa, with over 22 certified media houses (Mathews, 2019). It has experienced significant growth due to the proliferation of radio stations, television channels, newspapers, and digital platforms (Chege, 2020). However, five major media houses dominate the industry: Nation Media Group, Standard Media Group, Royal Media Services, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), and Radio Africa Group (Muturi & Wambugu, 2021). The five major media entities, alongside the 22 smaller outlets, collectively have extensive reach across print, broadcast, and digital platforms, ensuring broad audience engagement (Otieno & Kimani, 2022). The industry is categorized into three tiers based on audience reach and market penetration. The first tier comprises the five leading media conglomerates with significant market share (Kimathi, 2023). The second tier consists of one hundred and seven mid-tier media houses serving diverse but smaller audiences. The third tier includes ten smaller media houses focusing on localized and niche content, such as vernacular language broadcasting and community journalism (Karanja & Njoroge, 2021).

Despite its growth, the media sector faces challenges due to political, economic, social, cultural, and technological shifts (Namwaya & Koech, 2025). Kenya's media industry is undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological advancements, evolving audience

behaviors, and economic pressures. Regulatory uncertainties and political interference have historically impacted media independence (Ochieng & Aoko, 2022). The Kenya Media Assessment 2021 survey highlighted economic downturns, changing audience preferences, legal and policy changes, rapid technological transformations, and the COVID-19 pandemic as key pressures on media firms (Media Council of Kenya, 2021). Declining newspaper circulation, reduced advertising revenues, and increased reliance on digital platforms have further strained the sector (Kamau et al., 2023). Additionally, audience fragmentation due to social media penetration has disrupted traditional media consumption patterns, forcing firms to rethink their business models (Ndegwa, 2022).

The economic viability of media organizations is at risk due to declining profits, rising operational costs, and frequent employee retrenchments (Mwangi & Omondi, 2023). Social media has emerged as both a disruptor and a competitor, drawing audiences away from traditional platforms and redefining content consumption behaviors (Makori, 2024). To counter these challenges, media firms are adopting corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to enhance brand reputation, foster audience loyalty, and create long-term value (Wangari & Otieno, 2023). For example, Nation Media Group's 'Tusome' initiative focuses on literacy improvement, while Standard Media Group supports health initiatives such as the Women 4 Cancer Walk (Nation Life, 2019; Standard Group, 2019). These CSR efforts strengthen public image and audience engagement (Mwangi, 2023). However, it remains unclear whether and how these CSR efforts contribute to measurable competitive advantages such as customer satisfaction, innovation, and cost efficiency. As such, there was a compelling need to empirically examine the effectiveness of CSR practices in enhancing competitive advantage within Kenya's media sector.

The competitive nature of Kenya's media industry necessitates innovative strategies for sustainability. Digital transformation, content innovation, and strategic CSR initiatives are key differentiators. Leveraging artificial intelligence-driven news curation and personalized content delivery can enhance competitive advantage (Karanja, 2023). Additionally, integrating CSR into core business strategies can foster brand loyalty, increase audience trust, and ensure long-term viability (Otieno & Mwenda, 2022). However, it has been noted that media firms struggle to maintain long-term competitive

advantage due to shifting audience behaviors. A lack of frameworks integrating CSR as a core competitive strategy further weakens sustainability (Kimani, 2023). While media houses have introduced CSR initiatives, empirical evidence on their impact on financial performance and competitive positioning is limited. Additionally, disparities in digital transformation adoption indicate an industry-wide gap, with some firms excelling while others lag (Mugambi, 2024). There is limited research on the impact of CSR-driven competitive strategies in Kenya's media industry. While global literature explores CSR's role in business sustainability, few studies examine how Kenyan media firms leverage CSR for competitive advantage. For media houses in Kenya, aligning CSR practices with competitive strategies offers a promising, yet underexplored, pathway to differentiation. For example, firms that invest in ethical journalism, employee welfare, environmental responsibility, and socially responsive campaigns can foster audience trust, attract ethical investors, and minimize reputational risks (Kinoti, 2017; Otieno & Mwenda, 2022). Such alignment can also stimulate internal innovation and efficiency through improved employee morale and process optimization.

Considering these dynamics, this study sought to fill the gap in scholarly and industry understanding by investigating the extent to which media houses in Kenya integrate CSR practices across economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions into their competitive strategies. By focusing on variables such as customer satisfaction, product and service innovation, and cost control, the study aimed to provide insights into how CSR can be leveraged as a driver of sustainable competitive advantage.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Corporate Social Responsibility has transitioned from a voluntary initiative to a strategic necessity in modern business environments (Ahmed & Kumar, 2021). Organizations increasingly integrate CSR into their operations to enhance stakeholder relationships, brand reputation, and long-term profitability (Alshukri et al., 2024). Despite its recognized benefits, the extent to which CSR contributes to competitive advantage remains debatable, particularly in Kenya's media industry, where 122 media houses compete for market share (Mutua & Kamau, 2022). While leading corporations such as Safaricom and Equity Bank have successfully leveraged CSR-driven strategies (Muturi, Wambugu, & Njoroge, 2020),

media firms struggle with the implementation and strategic alignment of CSR due to financial constraints and shifting audience behaviors (Chirchir, 2021).

Several theories attempt to explain CSR's role in business performance, yet they offer varying perspectives. The shareholder theory (Friedman, 1970) prioritizes profit maximization, viewing CSR as a secondary concern unless it directly enhances financial returns. In contrast, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) posits that firms should balance the interests of all stakeholders, including consumers, employees, and society. While legitimacy theory argues that firms engage in CSR to maintain societal acceptance (Nguyen & Patel, 2024), the instrumentalist perspective aligns CSR with business profitability, emphasizing strategic gains (Arian et al., 2024). Carroll's CSR model (1979, 1999) provides a holistic view by categorizing CSR into economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions, but it lacks direct linkages to competitive strategy (Zureigat, 2024). Moreover, traditional competitive advantage theories—Market-Based View (MBV) and Resource-Based View (RBV)—offer limited integration of CSR as a strategic resource (Helfat & Peteraf, 2022). While MBV focuses on industry structure, it overlooks firm-specific resources, and RBV neglects external market dynamics (Priem & Butler, 2023). According to Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), firms can achieve sustainable competitive advantage by actively addressing the interests of various stakeholders such as audiences, employees, regulators, and communities through socially responsible practices. These theoretical inconsistencies highlight a need for an integrated framework that connects CSR's ethical, social, and financial dimensions to competitive advantage in media firms. These limitations suggest a need for an integrative approach that evaluates how CSR-driven practices influence competitive advantage in Kenya's media sector.

Scholars hold conflicting views on CSR's effectiveness as a competitive strategy. Some argue that CSR enhances brand differentiation, customer loyalty, and market positioning (Bansal, 2023), while others contend that its financial impact is unclear, especially in industries reliant on advertising revenue (Mwangi & Wanyoike, 2020). In Kenya's media landscape, firms face declining print circulation, reduced advertising revenue, and audience fragmentation due to digital transformation (Kamau et al., 2023). These economic pressures raise concerns about the practicality of CSR investments when financial

sustainability is at risk (Mwangi & Omondi, 2023). Furthermore, while large media houses such as Nation Media Group and Standard Media Group engage in CSR through literacy and health initiatives (Nation Life, 2019; Standard Group, 2019), their long-term competitive benefits remain unexplored. The challenge lies in determining whether CSR serves as a strategic differentiator in the media industry or merely fulfills regulatory and societal expectations without tangible competitive returns.

Empirical research directly linking CSR to competitive advantage in Kenya's media industry is scarce. Most studies on CSR and business performance focused on financial indicators such as profitability and market share (Porter, 2020), neglecting non-financial factors like audience trust, employee engagement, and regulatory goodwill (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Additionally, existing literature predominantly examined CSR in manufacturing and financial sectors, with limited insights into service-based industries such as media and entertainment (Rahman & Singh, 2021). The lack of research on CSR's role in sustaining competitive advantage in Kenya's dynamic media environment creates a critical knowledge gap. Given the increasing role of CSR practices in shaping corporate strategy, this study sought to examine its effect on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. By addressing theoretical inconsistencies, differing scholarly opinions, and empirical gaps, this research sought to provide valuable insights into how CSR can be leveraged as a strategic tool for sustainable growth and differentiation in Kenya's competitive media landscape.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to determine the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.

#### **1.3.1 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives that guided this study were:

- i. To establish the effect of economic responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.

- ii. To analyze the effect of legal responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.
- iii. To establish the effect of ethical responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.
- iv. To determine the effect of philanthropic responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- i. What is the effect of economic responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya?
- ii. How does legal responsibility practices influence the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya?
- iii. To what extent does ethical responsibility practices affect the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya?
- iv. What is the effect of philanthropic responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will be beneficial to various stakeholders, including media house management, advertisers, the public, policymakers, and scholars. By examining how CSR practices influence the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya, the study provided valuable insights that can drive strategic decision-making and policy development.

For media house management, the study highlighted the impact of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility practices on competitive positioning. This will enable media executives to integrate CSR practices into their business strategies more effectively, enhancing brand reputation and public trust. Additionally, the study provided guidance on optimizing resource allocation by focusing on CSR practices that generate the most significant benefits. By aligning their corporate social responsibility policies with their

business models, media houses can improve service delivery and create greater value for the communities they serve.

Advertisers and business partners will find value in the study's insights, particularly in selecting media houses with strong CSR commitments. As advertisers increasingly seek partnerships with socially responsible businesses, the findings will help them align their marketing strategies with ethical and sustainable media companies. This could foster a culture of responsible advertising and business collaborations that prioritize social impact alongside profitability. The public, as media consumers, will also benefit from improved service delivery driven by CSR practices. Media houses that adopt socially responsible practices are more likely to produce high-quality content, adhere to ethical journalism standards, and engage in community-driven programs. Additionally, the study may encourage greater corporate accountability, ensuring that media organizations remain transparent in their operations and committed to ethical reporting. This will ultimately lead to a more trustworthy and socially conscious media landscape.

Policymakers and regulatory bodies, such as the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), will also benefit from the study's findings. The research will provide empirical insights to guide the formulation and refinement of CSR policies within the media sector. Specifically, it will inform the development of corporate governance regulations that enhance corporate accountability, ethical journalism, and responsible business practices. The study's findings could contribute to updating the Media Code of Ethics and Conduct to incorporate CSR as a key pillar in ensuring sustainable and socially responsible media operations in Kenya. By leveraging this knowledge, policymakers can create regulatory frameworks that encourage ethical and socially responsive media practices.

Finally, the study will contribute to academic knowledge, serving as a valuable reference for scholars and future researchers. By expanding the body of literature on CSR in the media industry, the research will provide empirical evidence for further studies on the long-term impact of CSR on media sustainability. Scholars exploring CSR-related topics in Kenya and beyond will benefit from this study as they investigate new dimensions of corporate responsibility and competitive advantage.

## **1.6 Scope of Study**

The research concept was within the scope of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its relationship with competitive advantage, specifically concerning media houses in Kenya. While the study drew on concepts and knowledge from international, regional, and local literature, the focus was to understand the variables within the context of Kenya, particularly among the 122 identified media houses in the country.

### **1.6.1 Conceptual Scope**

The study explored how CSR influenced the competitive advantage of media houses, focusing on its economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions. These CSR facets were incorporated into the study through targeted questionnaire items, which allowed the researcher to assess how each aspect of CSR contributes to the firms' strategic positioning and performance in the Media industry in Kenya.

### **1.6.2 Contextual Scope**

The context of the study was specifically Kenya, with the target population being the 122 identified media houses. With a limited population the study adopted a census approach, including all media houses in the data collection. This approach ensured more accurate and reliable data, as the study particularly focused on how CSR practices affect the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.

### **1.6.3 Methodological Scope**

Methodologically, the study utilized questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the management of different departments in each media house to ensure that the data collected was both reliable and accurate. The responses to the CSR variables, economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic, were captured using a 5-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to specify their level of agreement with each statement. This approach helped operationalize competitive advantage by systematically measuring and recording responses related to CSR practices.

#### **1.6.4 Time Scope**

Data collection for the study was conducted between July and August 2022. The questionnaires were structured to capture the necessary information to establish the relationship between CSR and competitive advantage. In addition to the primary data from the questionnaires, financial statements from the media houses were also analyzed to complement the data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the competitive advantage gained through CSR.

#### **1.7 Chapter Summary**

CSR has been studied and established as a significant factor in generating a competitive advantage for businesses in the market. In Kenya, different entities have exploited their markets to generate an edge over their competitors, especially in the banking sector. Different sectors such as the media also use CSR to gain a competitive advantage. This research sought to determine CSR's economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic influence on media houses in Kenya. Using competitive advantage and CSR as the dependent and independent variables, the researcher analyzed primary data from media houses in Kenya and generated inferences. Conceptualization of CSR was undertaken using Carroll's theory for its reliability in comprehensively describing and explaining the variable's role in organizations. Operationalization was also undertaken through the four identified CSR pillars: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility practices of organizations. The Stakeholder theory was used to conceptualize competitive advantage. The competitive advantage was operationalized using the five-point Likert scale to quantify the level of agreement with statements included in the questionnaires. That way, the quantitative research derived reliable and accurate data. The research also aimed to generate data and information critical to the field and media houses from a narrow perspective.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

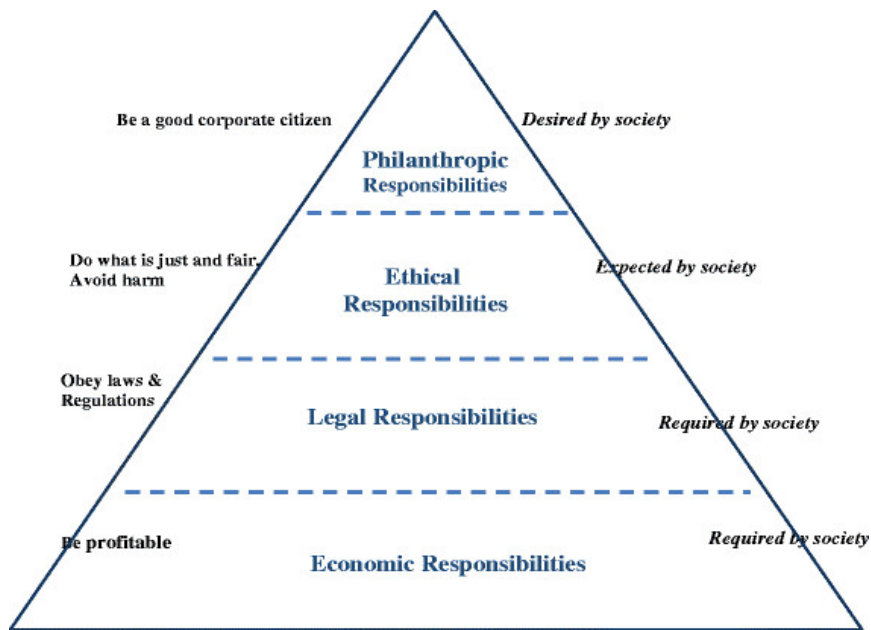
This chapter examined existing literature on the association between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Competitive Advantage (CA). It assessed what previous scholars and authors have found and written concerning the association between CSR and CA. The theories that underpin the study and various empirical studies on the subject are presented. The conceptual framework showing the link between the study's variables is also given. The empirical literature was critiqued, and research gaps were established.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Review**

This section presents the theories that formed the foundation of this study. Carroll's pyramid of CSR and the Stakeholder Theory underpinned the study.

##### **2.2.1 Carroll's Pyramid of CSR**

Carroll (1979) categorized corporate social responsibility (CSR) into four key dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities. He argued that for businesses to engage effectively in Corporate Social Performance (CSP), they must first define CSR, identify the social issues they are responsible for, and establish a philosophy for responding to these issues. In 1991, Carroll refined this framework and structured it into a hierarchical model, known as the Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility, which organizes these four dimensions in a layered approach (Carroll, 1991; Crane et al., 2021). In 1991, Carroll revisited his four-part definition of CSR and organized the notion of multiple corporate social responsibilities in a pyramid construct shown below in Figure 2.1:



**Figure 2.1: The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (Carroll, 1991)**

Carroll's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) pyramid outlines four hierarchical dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. At its foundation, economic responsibility emphasizes a firm's duty to generate profits, ensuring operational sustainability, job creation, and economic growth (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Profitability enables businesses to invest in CSR initiatives, making financial success a prerequisite for sustainable corporate practices (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010).

Legal responsibility entails compliance with national and international regulations to uphold fairness, consumer protection, and corporate accountability (Matten & Moon, 2020). With evolving regulations on corporate governance, labor laws, and environmental standards, firms must navigate legal frameworks to avoid sanctions, financial penalties, and reputational risks (Jamali & Karam, 2018). Ethical responsibility extends beyond compliance to include moral principles that shape business behavior. It necessitates fairness, transparency, and harm prevention, fostering stakeholder trust and long-term organizational success (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Jones et al., 2018).

At the top of the pyramid, philanthropic responsibility involves voluntary contributions to social well-being, such as donations, community programs, and education sponsorships

(Carroll, 2016). While not obligatory, corporate philanthropy strengthens stakeholder relationships, enhances brand reputation, and contributes to sustainable profitability (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Carroll's model emphasizes that these responsibilities are cumulative—ethical and philanthropic efforts must build upon economic and legal foundations. Windsor (2001) classified them by societal expectations: economic and legal responsibilities are required, ethical responsibility is expected, and philanthropy is desired (Crane et al., 2021).

Contrasting this view, Friedman (1970) argued that a firm's sole responsibility is profit maximization within legal and ethical constraints. However, Carroll's framework posits that businesses must integrate broader social concerns (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). This is particularly relevant for media companies, which must balance profitability with responsible journalism, ethical reporting, environmental sustainability, and community engagement (Albareda et al., 2021). Given the media industry's reliance on reputation and brand equity, CSR-driven strategies enhance audience trust and long-term competitiveness (Visser, 2015).

To structure the analysis of CSR practices and link them empirically to competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya, this study adopted Carroll's Pyramid of CSR (Carroll, 1991) as the guiding conceptual model. Economic responsibility was analyzed in terms of Shared economy practices, Value creation practices and Sustainable product development. Legal responsibility was assessed in relation to equal opportunity employment practices, fair competition practices and occupational, health and safety practices. Ethical responsibility was examined through the lens of transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of suppliers and fair treatment of employees. Philanthropic responsibility was evaluated based on corporate donations and support practices, employee volunteering practices, and community empowerment practices. While Carroll's model is not a theory, it remains one of the most widely accepted and validated frameworks for disaggregating CSR into four interrelated domains: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. The model's longevity and adaptability across sectors, including developing economies, justifies its continued use (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Visser, 2006). Carroll's framework was especially relevant to this study because it allowed for a systematic examination of the multi-dimensional nature of CSR as practiced by media

organizations in Kenya, where firms face mounting pressure to balance profitability with ethical, legal, and social obligations (Otieno & Mwenda, 2022). Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (1991) was selected as a theoretical framework for this study due to its comprehensive and structured approach to understanding CSR. Unlike other models that focus solely on specific aspects of CSR, such as the Stakeholder Theory or the Triple Bottom Line framework, Carroll's model uniquely categorizes CSR into four distinct, yet interrelated layers: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. This hierarchical structure offers clarity and practical guidance, making it particularly relevant for analyzing CSR practices in diverse industries, including the media sector. Furthermore, Carroll's framework has been extensively validated in empirical research globally, providing a robust foundation for exploring how CSR initiatives contribute to both societal welfare and business competitiveness. Its balanced emphasis on economic performance alongside ethical and philanthropic considerations aligns closely with this study's objective to examine CSR as a strategic tool for competitive advantage within the Kenyan media context. While alternative models offer valuable insights, Carroll's Pyramid's comprehensive scope and applicability to the study context make it the most appropriate choice for this research.

By aligning corporate activities with societal expectations, Carroll's model provided a structured theoretical foundation for CSR's role in media competitiveness. Given their influence on public discourse, media firms must integrate CSR into business strategies to enhance credibility, audience engagement, and sustainable growth (Albareda et al., 2021). The study offers insights for media executives, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to optimize CSR strategies for long-term industry sustainability.

### **2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder Theory, originally articulated by Freeman (1984), proposes that the success and sustainability of an organization are significantly influenced by the extent to which it manages relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders that include, but not limited to, customers, employees, suppliers, investors, regulators, and the local community. Unlike the traditional shareholder-centric view that emphasizes profit maximization for owners, Stakeholder Theory contends that organizations create value by addressing the

expectations and interests of all parties affected by or capable of affecting the firm's operations (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Ptoplampu and Dashwood (2011) examine institutional dynamics and leadership practices in CSR implementation, underscoring the significance of aligning internal values with external stakeholder expectations.

The core proposition of the theory is that businesses operate in a network of social and economic relationships and that effective stakeholder engagement fosters trust, legitimacy, and cooperation, all of which are vital for long-term performance (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010). When firms prioritize stakeholder needs through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices, they not only fulfill ethical and social obligations but also generate strategic benefits such as enhanced brand reputation, customer loyalty, and operational efficiency (Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, & George, 2016; Tilt, 2016). In the context of this study, Stakeholder Theory provided a theoretical foundation to examine how CSR practices adopted by media houses influence their competitive advantage. The theory supported the view that CSR practices, including ethical conduct, legal compliance, economic responsibility, and philanthropic engagement, help media houses strengthen stakeholder relationships. These improved relationships, in turn, serve as a platform for developing and sustaining competitive advantage through three key dimensions: customer satisfaction, product and service innovation, and cost control.

First, customer satisfaction is fostered when CSR initiatives address audience expectations around ethical content, transparency, and social impact. Stakeholder Theory contends that businesses that respect customer concerns and values can secure customer trust and long-term loyalty (Lindgreen, Swaen, & Johnston, 2009; Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2013). This is particularly important for media organizations, where credibility and public trust are central to commercial viability. Second, product and service innovation are often the outcome of strategic dialogue with stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders in identifying societal issues, cultural trends, or technological changes allows organizations to adapt and innovate in ways that differentiate them from competitors (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2015). In media houses, innovation may manifest as new content formats, digital transformation, or socially responsive programming, all driven by stakeholder expectations. Third, cost

control can be enhanced through stakeholder-informed CSR practices that improve employee morale, reduce turnover, and minimize regulatory and reputational risks (Metcalf & Benn, 2013; Mason & Simmons, 2014). Effective stakeholder engagement reduces conflict and enables organizations to preemptively address legal or social issues, thereby lowering the cost of compliance and crisis management.

Therefore, Stakeholder Theory underpinned this study by positing that a media house's ability to integrate stakeholder-oriented CSR practices into its strategic operations directly influences its competitive positioning. The theory aligned with the assumption that the pursuit of CSR is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic mechanism for achieving sustainable competitive advantage in dynamic and socially sensitive environments such as the media industry.

## **2.3 Conceptual Literature Review**

### **2.3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility Practices**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is widely acknowledged as a multidimensional construct that strategically aligns organizational objectives with societal expectations. Traditionally framed as philanthropic goodwill, CSR has evolved into a strategic function that integrates environmental, economic, legal, and ethical considerations into core business models (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Garcia and Kumar (2021) define CSR as an organization's voluntary commitment to contribute positively to its societal context, while Wang and Chen (2023) underscore CSR's role in preempting regulatory scrutiny and enhancing stakeholder relationships. In the media industry, where public trust, regulatory visibility, and social responsibility intersect, CSR is particularly critical to sustaining competitive advantage and organizational legitimacy. Drawing from Carroll's (1991) four-tier model, economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic social responsibility practices, this study operationalized CSR in the media sector in Kenya using measurable sub-constructs tailored to sector-specific dynamics and stakeholder expectations.

Economic responsibility formed the foundational pillar of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasizing a firm's obligation to remain profitable while delivering value to its stakeholders (Carroll, 1991; Visser, 2006). In the context of this study, economic responsibility is reflected in three main strategic dimensions within media firms. First, shared economy practices involved adopting cost-sharing strategies such as syndicated content production and digital distribution partnerships. These strategies enable media organizations to optimize operational costs while expanding market reach (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Second, value creation practices focus on leveraging digital monetization, investing in locally relevant content, and promoting data-driven journalism to meet evolving consumer demands and generate sustainable revenue streams (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Third, sustainable product development practices involve integrating environmental and social considerations into media product design. This may include initiatives such as environmentally conscious print practices or producing content that advances sustainability awareness (Gamachu & Kurse, 2024; Lee et al., 2020). Collectively, these practices align economic viability with social relevance, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of media firms while fulfilling their broader stakeholder responsibilities.

Legal responsibility, the second domain of CSR, pertains to a firm's commitment to comply with national laws and institutional frameworks governing corporate conduct (Carroll, 1991). Within Kenya's media industry, legal responsibility was manifested through several key practices. Equal opportunity employment policies ensure non-discriminatory hiring processes, equitable promotions, and enhanced diversity and inclusion in the workplace (Okeke-Okiche, 2024; Muriuki, 2023). In addition, fair competition practices demand transparency in advertising rates, respect for intellectual property rights, and the avoidance of practices such as defamation and misinformation that could distort public discourse (Kariuki & Wanjala, 2022). Furthermore, adherence to occupational health and safety standards, as outlined in Kenya's Employment Act and other media-specific labor laws, is crucial for creating a safe and inclusive working environment (ILO, 2022). By adhering to these legal norms, media firms not only mitigate the risk of

regulatory penalties but also foster public confidence and support a stable business environment (Matten & Moon, 2008).

Ethical responsibility, which goes beyond legal compliance, refers to morally sound corporate behavior grounded in fairness, accountability, and institutional integrity. This aspect is particularly important in the media sector, where credibility is closely tied to truthfulness and ethical reporting (Arraya & Ferreira, 2024). Ethical responsibility in this study was operationalized through several key practices. Transparency in disclosure is a central component, particularly in areas such as financial reporting, editorial policies, and relationships with advertisers (Garriga & Melé, 2004; Zureigat, 2024). Another important area was the fair treatment of suppliers, which included timely payments, transparent contract terms, and ethical sourcing of both content and technological services (Nguyen & Patel, 2024). In addition, ethical treatment of employees was crucial; this involved equitable remuneration, the implementation of anti-harassment policies, and the promotion of career development opportunities (Freeman, 1984; Bauman & Skitka, 2012). Collectively, these practices enhance organizational integrity and contribute to long-term trust among employees, partners, and the public.

Finally, philanthropic responsibility refers to a firm's voluntary actions aimed at promoting social welfare without expecting direct financial returns (Carroll, 1991). This study conceptualized philanthropic responsibility through three main areas. Corporate donation and sponsorship activities include financial support for social causes, partnerships with educational institutions, and contributions to disaster relief efforts (Arian et al., 2024). Employee volunteering was another critical component, where organizations implement structured programs that allow staff to participate in community service during paid work hours (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). In addition, community empowerment practices are reflected in the production of educational content, hosting of civic engagement forums, and initiatives aimed at enhancing the representation of marginalized groups in the media (Kameri-Mbote, 2022). Though discretionary, these philanthropic initiatives enhance a firm's social image and foster stronger relationships with key stakeholder communities.

This study adopted these CSR dimensions not only for their theoretical robustness but also for their practical relevance in Kenya's liberalized and increasingly digitized media environment. The integration of these variables reflected stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which holds that businesses must create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. Additionally, Porter and Kramer's (2006) shared value concept that supports the idea that CSR can serve as a lever for both societal development and organizational differentiation. Contemporary evidence from Kenya suggests that CSR practices enhance brand loyalty, attract talent, promote regulatory goodwill, and build consumer trust (Munyua & Were, 2023; Odinga, 2023). Thus, CSR in this study was framed not as peripheral compliance, but as a multidimensional, strategic tool for sustainable performance and competitive positioning.

### **2.3.2 Competitive Advantage**

Competitive advantage refers to a firm's ability to outperform its competitors by delivering greater value to customers, often through unique capabilities or efficient operations. Michael Porter's (1985) foundational framework remains central to understanding how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage, highlighting three generic strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. These strategies provide the basis for firms to create superior customer value either by minimizing costs or by offering distinct products and services that meet specific market needs.

In this study, competitive advantage is operationalized through three key indicators: customer satisfaction, product and service innovation, and cost control. Customer satisfaction aligns closely with Porter's differentiation and focus strategies, as it reflects a firm's success in delivering value that meets or exceeds customer expectations, thereby fostering loyalty and market share. Product and service innovation represents a critical differentiation mechanism, enabling firms to continuously evolve their offerings and maintain relevance in dynamic markets. Cost control corresponds directly to Porter's cost leadership strategy, emphasizing operational efficiency to reduce expenses and enhance profitability. These indicators are chosen because they comprehensively capture the strategic dimensions through which media firms in Kenya can gain and sustain competitive advantage. By focusing on satisfying customers, innovating continuously, and controlling

costs, firms position themselves to navigate the challenges of a competitive and evolving industry environment effectively.

These indicators are chosen because they comprehensively capture the strategic dimensions through which media firms in Kenya can gain and sustain competitive advantage. By focusing on satisfying customers, innovating continuously, and controlling costs, firms position themselves to navigate the challenges of a competitive and evolving industry environment effectively. Competitive advantage is a strategic concept that describes a firm's ability to consistently outperform its competitors by delivering superior value to customers or operating more efficiently (Dyer & Singh, 2023). Further, competitive advantage was defined as the strategic outcome of aligning internal capabilities with market demands. This conceptualization integrated insights from both the Market-Based View (MBV), which emphasizes external market positioning, and the Resource-Based View (RBV), which focuses on internal firm resources as drivers of sustained success (Ala, Amah, & Amah, 2024; Wang & Wang, 2021).

According to Stakeholder Theory, firms achieve competitive advantage not solely through traditional strategic tools such as cost leadership or product differentiation, but also by cultivating trust, legitimacy, and cooperative relationships with their stakeholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). This expanded view aligns particularly well with CSR practices, which are designed to meet the ethical, social, legal, and economic expectations of stakeholders. In the context of this study, competitive advantage was defined as the strategic outcome of understanding how firms gain and sustain competitive advantage by actively managing their relationships with a broad set of stakeholders to enhance customer satisfaction, foster innovation, and ensure effective cost control.

Customer satisfaction is a vital dimension of competitive advantage, particularly in the media industry where audience loyalty and engagement are central to revenue and brand growth. Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, recommend the brand, and engage with content across platforms, thus reinforcing the firm's market position (Munyua & Were, 2023). In Kenya's media sector, ensuring satisfaction across various audience segments requires consistent delivery of quality content, responsiveness to audience

feedback, and inclusive programming that reflects the interests of diverse communities (Robani et al., 2024). High customer satisfaction strengthens brand equity, builds relational trust, and contributes directly to competitive positioning.

Product and service innovation represents another crucial pillar of competitive advantage. In rapidly evolving industries such as media, firms that continuously innovate their offerings—whether through digital content formats, personalized user experiences, or interactive delivery platforms—can effectively differentiate themselves from competitors (Nguyen & Patel, 2024). Innovation also entails leveraging emerging technologies such as AI and data analytics to tailor content to consumer preferences, thereby improving engagement and audience retention (Lee, 2023). Firms that embrace innovation gain agility and resilience, enabling them to respond quickly to market shifts, regulatory changes, and evolving audience expectations.

Cost control refer to the firm's capacity to manage resources efficiently while maintaining or enhancing service quality. Media firms that optimize operational costs, adopt automation, and implement lean production strategies can achieve better profit margins without sacrificing value (Kameri-Mbote, 2022). Effective financial management enhances organizational sustainability and positions the firm to withstand market fluctuations (Duho et al., 2024).

To assess competitive advantage, this study adopted a Likert-scale assessment of managers' perceptions regarding the extent to which CSR and strategic initiatives have improved customer satisfaction, innovation, and cost efficiency (Saeidi et al. 2020). The integration of CSR into competitive strategy, especially when linked to customer trust, innovation, and financial sustainability, provides firms with a strong foundation for long-term success (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Ala, Amah, & Amah, 2024). By focusing on customer satisfaction, innovation, and cost control, media houses can not only secure a market edge but also contribute meaningfully to social and economic development.

## 2.4 Empirical Literature

### 2.4.1 Ethical Responsibility and the Competitive Advantage

Ethical Responsibility refers to a company's commitment to conducting business fairly, transparently, and respectfully toward all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and communities (Onyekwelu et al., 2024). This dimension of CSR emphasizes adherence to moral principles beyond mere legal compliance, covering issues like fair labor practices, honest marketing, and integrity in financial reporting. Scholars generally agree that ethical CSR positively influences corporate competitiveness, but their findings differ across geographical, sectoral, and methodological contexts. Such variations may be shaped by differing legal jurisdictions, cultural expectations, market structures, and regulatory enforcement across countries and industries. Consequently, these differences present conceptual, empirical, disagreement, and knowledge gaps that require deeper exploration.

Despite growing interest in CSR, there remains limited understanding of how ethical dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility independently affect distinct facets of competitive advantage across various industries. Many studies either conflate ethical CSR with broader CSR constructs or focus on sector-specific outcomes, making it unclear how ethical CSR alone drives strategic benefits such as brand differentiation, financial stability, or innovation across diverse contexts (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Several studies have investigated the relationship between ethical CSR and competitive advantage, yielding both convergences and divergences. While Baah et al. (2024) and Opilo et al. (2018) found that ethical CSR strengthens brand differentiation and consumer loyalty, Serem et al. (2022) and Muriithi et al. (2022) emphasized its contribution to financial stability and investor confidence. Nevertheless, significant disagreements emerged: for instance, Baah et al. (2024) linked ethical CSR to green competitive advantage in manufacturing, while Opilo et al. (2018) tied ethical CSR to responsible data handling in telecommunications.

Baah et al. (2024) explored the impact of corporate environmental ethics and green creativity on green competitive advantage among manufacturing SMEs in Ghana. Their findings indicated that ethical environmental practices enhanced cost efficiency and consumer preference. This limited the conceptual range of the analysis, providing an

incomplete view of ethical social responsibility. Furthermore, the study did not critically examine opposing perspectives suggesting that ethical practices might lead to increased operational costs, thus presenting a largely one-dimensional evaluation. The current study responded to these limitations by focusing comprehensively on how ethical social responsibility, including aspects of transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of suppliers, and fair treatment of employee, influences firm competitive advantage beyond just environmental ethics.

Serem et al. (2022) investigated sustainability reporting among firms listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE), concluding that transparent reporting mechanisms enhanced firm value through improved investor confidence. Although ethical practices were embedded within sustainability reporting, ethical responsibility was not treated as a distinct factor influencing competitive advantage, critical perspectives viewing sustainability reporting as a compliance burden rather than a strategic advantage were also not addressed. The current study extended this line of inquiry by isolating ethical social responsibility, specifically transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of suppliers, and fair treatment of employee as standalone strategic factors influencing firm competitive advantage across a wider range of organizations.

Muriithi et al. (2022) analyzed the influence of CSR on financial performance among financial institutions in Kirinyaga County, Kenya, finding that ethical CSR practices enhanced customer trust and financial stability. However, the study largely equated competitive advantage with financial metrics, overlooking broader strategic elements such as innovation, brand reputation, employee retention, and market leadership. Its geographic focus on a single county constrained the wider applicability of its findings. The study also presented a unidimensional interpretation of ethical CSR as beneficial, without addressing the possibility that such practices might impose financial burdens under certain market conditions. Furthermore, it did not differentiate the effects of ethical responsibility across financial sub-sectors like banking and microfinance, limiting its insight into sector-specific dynamics. The current study addressed these concerns by exploring how ethical social responsibility, through the lenses of transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of

suppliers, and fair treatment of employee impacts various dimensions of firm competitive advantage beyond financial outcomes alone.

Opilo et al. (2018) examined the role of CSR in shaping competitive advantage within Kenya's telecommunications sector, focusing on Safaricom Limited. Their findings linked ethical CSR practices, such as fair pricing and data protection, to stronger customer loyalty and greater market share. However, the study treated CSR as a broad construct without isolating the specific contribution of ethical CSR to competitive advantage, thereby limiting conceptual precision. By concentrating on a single firm, the study restricted the generalizability of its findings across the broader telecommunications sector. It also did not engage with counterarguments suggesting that ethical CSR initiatives could increase operational or compliance costs, overlooking important strategic risks. Additionally, the study did not explore how the influence of ethical CSR might differ based on firm size, competitive intensity, or strategic orientation.

The current study responded by focusing distinctly on ethical social responsibility, particularly transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of supplier, and fair treatment of employee, as critical factors shaping firm competitive advantage across various organizational and competitive contexts. Moreover, some Africa-focused research offered valuable contextual insights for this study. Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah (2011) emphasized the developmental dimension of CSR in Africa, noting its capacity to enhance organizational legitimacy, foster employee motivation, and address social inequities. Hinson (2011) provides an important perspective on how CSR communication and transparency contribute to public perception and corporate brand reputation in African markets—a dynamic particularly relevant to media houses.

Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the relationship between corporate responsibility initiatives and firm outcomes but demonstrated several limitations that the current study sought to address. Baah et al. (2024) concentrated primarily on environmental ethics, overlooking other critical facets of ethical Corporate Social Responsibility such as transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of suppliers, and equitable employee relations. This narrow focus provides a limited perspective on ethical CSR, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive examination of how diverse ethical practices

collectively contribute to sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, Serem et al. (2022) incorporated ethical elements within sustainability reporting but did not conceptualize ethical responsibility as a distinct strategic driver of competitive advantage. Furthermore, their exclusive focus on listed firms limits the generalizability of their findings across broader industry contexts, highlighting the need for research that explicitly isolates ethical CSR's role in driving competitive advantage in diverse organizational settings. Muriithi et al. (2022) predominantly equated competitive advantage with financial performance, overlooking other vital indicators such as innovation, employee retention, and brand leadership. In contrast, Opilo et al. (2018) approached CSR as a holistic concept without isolating the unique impact of ethical practices, while their focus on a single firm limited the broader applicability of their findings. These limitations highlight the need for a more nuanced analysis that differentiates ethical CSR's specific contributions to multiple dimensions of competitive advantage across varied organizational contexts. In response, the current study deliberately emphasized ethical social responsibility, specifically through transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of suppliers, and fair treatment of employee as distinct and measurable dimensions and investigated their direct influence on firm competitive advantage across multiple sectors and performance outcomes.

#### **2.4.2 Economic Corporate Social Responsibility and Firm Competitive Advantage**

Economic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's commitment to ethical practices that promote economic development while improving the quality of life for employees, their families, and the broader community. This aligns with the "triple bottom line" framework, which emphasizes balancing economic, social, and environmental responsibilities (Slaper & Hall, 2021). In recent years, firms across different regions, including Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, have increasingly integrated economic CSR into their core strategies. Studies from Indonesia (Dela et al., 2024), Vietnam (Mai et al., 2023), China (Owusu et al., 2024), Ethiopia (Eyasu & Arefayne, 2020), and Kenya (Bosire et al., 2024) provide evidence that responsible economic practices are perceived not just as ethical imperatives but as pathways to sustainable growth, competitive advantage, and enhanced corporate reputation.

The knowledge gap in this context lies in the lack of standardized frameworks for implementing, measuring, and communicating economic CSR initiatives across different industries and regions. Despite the global uptake, companies face significant hurdles in implementing economic CSR effectively. One major challenge is the absence of universally accepted standards or guidelines, leading to inconsistent practices across firms and industries (Faster Capital, 2022). Moreover, balancing the pursuit of profitability with broader societal benefits remains a difficult task, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with limited resources. Measuring and communicating the true impact of economic CSR efforts is another persistent issue, complicated by the lack of standardized metrics and the multi-dimensional nature of social and environmental outcomes.

Mai et al. (2023) investigated the influence of multiple CSR dimensions—including economic, legal, philanthropic, ethical, and environmental aspects—on corporate competitive advantage among businesses in Vietnam. Their results demonstrated that economic CSR activities contributed positively to market positioning, operational efficiency, and customer loyalty. Further, the exclusive focus on businesses in Vietnam limited the understanding of how cost effectiveness strategies related to economic CSR might operate across different industries or in broader economic contexts. The study also lacked an in-depth exploration of how economic CSR activities affect stakeholders' welfare beyond customers and investors, such as suppliers and employees. Moreover, regulatory differences that could influence the strength or nature of the CSR-competitive advantage relationship were only minimally considered.

Similarly, Dela et al. (2024) focused on highly polluted industries in Indonesia and found that economic CSR improved firms' financial outcomes through operational efficiencies and better access to sustainable financing. Although these findings support the notion that economic CSR enhances cost effectiveness, the study concentrated primarily on financial indicators, providing a limited view of how economic CSR practices contribute to broader competitive factors such as stakeholders' welfare (e.g., employee satisfaction, supplier relationships). Additionally, because the analysis was confined to environmentally stressed sectors, it remains unclear whether similar advantages tied to profit maximization would

be observed in industries facing less environmental pressure. The study also left unresolved the question of whether competitive gains arose from intrinsic CSR efforts or from favorable external market conditions.

Owusu et al. (2024) examined the impact of CSR on environmental performance among Chinese manufacturing firms, focusing particularly on green innovation as a mediating factor. Their research highlighted that economic CSR initiatives supported sustainable production and improved operational efficiency, indirectly supporting cost effectiveness. However, by emphasizing environmental outcomes, the direct impact of economic CSR on overall competitive advantage—specifically aspects like profit maximization and broader stakeholders' welfare—remained less visible.

Eyasu and Arefayne (2020) analyzed the influence of economic CSR on the performance of Lion International Bank S.C. in Ethiopia. They found that economic CSR activities contributed to market share growth, increased customer trust, and improved brand reputation. While these findings pointed toward positive effects on profit maximization, the analysis focused heavily on financial and customer-related indicators, without giving sufficient attention to other critical elements of stakeholders' welfare, such as employee engagement, supplier development, or community investment. Moreover, the study's narrow focus on a single banking institution limited the opportunity to generalize insights regarding cost effectiveness strategies across the broader financial sector or other industries within Ethiopia or Africa at large.

Bosire et al. (2024) explored CSR practices in Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA) managed factories, emphasizing the contribution of environmental CSR initiatives to cost management and brand strengthening. However, the specific contribution of economic CSR activities, particularly in enhancing customer satisfaction, driving product and service innovation, and supporting cost control was not distinctly isolated from broader CSR initiatives. This lack of differentiation limits understanding of the strategic value economic CSR may offer as an independent driver of competitive advantage. Furthermore, the sectoral concentration on tea agribusinesses and the regional focus on Kenya raise

questions regarding how widely these findings could be applied to other agricultural sectors or different economic contexts.

Across these diverse studies (Mai et al., 2023; Dela et al., 2024; Owusu et al., 2024; Eyasu & Arefayne, 2020; Bosire et al., 2024), a general pattern emerges: economic CSR activities appear to promote financial stability, operational efficiency, brand strength, and customer loyalty. However, the specific mechanisms through which these benefits arise are not uniformly clear. While some studies indicated direct links to business success, others suggested that intervening factors like industry characteristics, regulatory settings, or external market conditions could significantly shape outcomes. Additionally, many analyses prioritized financial or environmental metrics while offering limited insights into how economic CSR efforts promote customer satisfaction, product and service innovation and cost control across different sectors and contexts. The current study sought to address these concerns by exclusively focusing on the effect of Economic responsibility on Firm Competitive Advantage. Specifically, it emphasized how economic CSR practices drive customer satisfaction, product and service innovation and cost control and enhance cost effectiveness. By isolating economic CSR from other CSR dimensions, evaluating a broader set of competitiveness indicators beyond traditional financial metrics, and including firms from varied sectors, the study aimed to present a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the strategic role of economic CSR in strengthening a firm's competitive position.

### **2.4.3 Philanthropic responsibility and Firm Competitive Advantage**

Philanthropic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) involves voluntary business initiatives aimed at societal welfare, such as donations and community development (FasterCapital, 2024). While recent trends show a shift towards integrating philanthropy into business strategies, challenges like declining corporate giving, difficulties in measuring impact, and public skepticism persist (Wallop, 2024). The knowledge gap here lies in the limited understanding of how philanthropic CSR interacts with other CSR dimensions (such as legal and ethical responsibilities) to shape firm competitiveness. Additionally, there is insufficient research on how philanthropy's effects differ across strategic orientations, industries, and geographical contexts. Further, studies on

philanthropic CSR's impact on firm performance exhibit varying findings across regions and industries (Turner & Lee, 2024). However, differences in geographic contexts, such as varying legal frameworks and socio-economic conditions, could influence these outcomes. For instance, in emerging markets, where regulatory environments and socio-economic factors vary, philanthropic CSR may take different forms and yield different outcomes (Cha et al. (2023). There was need for the current study to consider these geographical variations to better understand how regional factors, including governance and economic conditions, influence the impact of philanthropic CSR on firm performance and competitive advantage.

Numerous empirical studies have examined the role of philanthropic corporate social responsibility (CSR) in enhancing firm performance and competitive advantage. However, several dimensions of philanthropy remain insufficiently explored, particularly regarding corporate donations and support practices, employee volunteering practices, and community empowerment practices. Turner and Lee (2024) found that firms engaging in a diversified range of philanthropic donations achieved improved financial outcomes and strengthened stakeholder trust. However, their study focused predominantly on the breadth of philanthropic contributions and did not address the potential strategic value of other philanthropic forms, such as the allocation of employee time to CSR initiatives. The involvement of staff in CSR activities may foster deeper alignment between corporate philanthropy and the firm's core business objectives, potentially yielding significant long-term benefits. This highlights the need for further research to explore how employee engagement in CSR initiatives impacts firm performance, extending beyond financial donations.

Cha, Rew, and Jung (2023) investigated the moderating role of corporate strategy in the relationship between philanthropy and performance, noting that firms with differentiation and innovation-driven strategies benefitted most from philanthropic endeavors. However, their study did not account for the role of community development initiatives, which are often integral to CSR strategies. Community development programs, especially those targeting local socio-economic needs, may enhance not only a firm's reputation and stakeholder trust but also contribute to a more sustainable operating environment. By

neglecting community development as a strategic CSR component, their research leaves an important avenue for exploration, specifically in understanding how such initiatives enhance competitive advantage.

Yu (2020) explored the link between environmental philanthropy and firm performance, emphasizing the role of environmental responsibility. While insightful, the study did not sufficiently address other forms of philanthropic engagement, such as monetary donations or the direct involvement of staff time in CSR activities. The limited focus on environmental philanthropy underscores a gap in understanding the broader spectrum of philanthropic strategies that firms may employ, particularly those that leverage employee time and effort in community-focused projects. Thus, further research is warranted to examine the potential competitive advantages derived from staff involvement and volunteerism within CSR programs.

Khan et al. (2023) analyzed the impact of philanthropy on firm performance, highlighting the importance of robust governance structures in maximizing the effectiveness of CSR initiatives. However, their study did not explore the broader CSR dimensions, such as the effects of community development and staff-driven philanthropic efforts. While governance plays a crucial role in shaping CSR strategies, it does not fully encapsulate the social impact and sustainability that can result from employee engagement in community-oriented initiatives. Therefore, there was need to investigate how employee volunteering practices and community empowerment practices contribute to both the immediate and sustained competitive advantages of firms.

Abebe and Cha (2018) explored the influence of firms' strategic orientations on their philanthropic activities; however, their study did not consider community empowerment initiatives or employee volunteering as integral components of CSR. This omission limits the comprehensiveness of their findings, particularly regarding how socially embedded CSR practices contribute to strategic outcomes. Firms with proactive strategic postures are likely to engage in more impactful philanthropic efforts; however, the influence of employee volunteering practices and community empowerment practices remains largely unexplored in literature. Research that examines these dimensions in relation to the

strategic integration of CSR activities could provide valuable insights into how firms leverage their CSR efforts to create sustained competitive advantages.

Abugre (2014) contends that in African business environments, CSR serves not only a philanthropic function but also a strategic role in deepening stakeholder engagement and building trust, especially in institutions facing public skepticism. While existing studies agree that philanthropy can enhance firm performance, there is limited understanding of how specific forms of philanthropic engagement, particularly corporate donations, employee volunteering practices, and community empowerment practices, contribute to competitive advantage. The current study aimed to address these underexplored dimensions of CSR, providing a deeper understanding of how firms strategically integrate philanthropy into their operations. By focusing on these aspects, the study sought to contribute to the literature on CSR by highlighting the competitive advantages that firms can derive from targeted philanthropic activities beyond financial donations.

#### **2.4.4 Legal Corporate Social Responsibility and the Competitive Advantage**

Legal Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a firm's obligation to comply with laws and regulations concerning fair labor practices, environmental stewardship, and anti-corruption measures (Carroll, 2016; Legal Vidhiya, 2023). Across different jurisdictions, legal frameworks increasingly require firms to disclose CSR activities, aiming to enhance transparency and stakeholder accountability (Statute Online, 2024). However, research on the link between legal CSR and competitive advantage reveals notable differences, often shaped by sectoral focus and geographic context. Since legal systems, regulatory environments, and cultural expectations vary widely across regions, findings from studies conducted in Asia, Africa, and Europe offer sometimes divergent conclusions. These contextual differences emphasize the importance of jurisdictional influences, as legal mandates, enforcement mechanisms, and stakeholder expectations around CSR vary significantly from one setting to another.

The knowledge gap lies in the limited understanding of how legal CSR can be proactively leveraged for competitive advantage beyond mere compliance. Several previous studies examined the role of legal corporate social responsibility (CSR) across different industries,

but their focus remained largely limited to external perceptions or regulatory compliance, without deeply analyzing how legal CSR practices could be strategically leveraged to enhance firm competitive advantage through equal opportunity employment practices, fair competition practices, and occupational, health and safety practices. Most studies focus on reputational benefits without linking legal CSR to competitive advantage. Additionally, research remains sector- and region-specific, with disagreement on whether legal CSR alone drives competitiveness or requires integration with ethical and philanthropic initiatives. For instance, Mohammed and Rashid (2018) found that legal CSR enhanced brand trust in Malaysia's hotel sector but did not address broader competitive dynamics, while Marakova et al. (2021) in Poland reported that integrating legal CSR improved reputational strength without conclusively tying it to competitive advantage. Ashour et al. (2020) and Chirchir (2021) further indicated that while legal CSR builds reputational and operational benefits, it remains unclear whether these effects amount to strategic advantage or merely fulfill minimum regulatory requirements.

Cha and Jo (2019) investigated CSR in franchise coffee shops in South Korea, highlighting that legal compliance with labor laws and fair-trade policies improved corporate image and customer loyalty. However, their study concentrated on customer perceptions, neglecting an internal strategic analysis of how employment law compliance could drive competitive advantage. The current study sought to bridge this limitation by examining how internal employment practices rooted in legal compliance, such as fair hiring, equitable treatment, and labor rights protection, serve not just as compliance mechanisms, but as strategic tools to improve organizational competitiveness.

Kingston and Ismail (2021) assessed contract management and legal compliance among Kenyan corporate state corporations, demonstrating that adherence to legal frameworks improved operational efficiency. Nonetheless, their study largely viewed legal compliance as a mechanism for minimizing legal disputes, rather than as a proactive strategy for gaining market leadership. The current study advanced this conversation by investigating how adherence to competition laws, including fair market practices, avoidance of anti-competitive behavior, and transparency, can be transformed from a compliance necessity into a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Mohammed and Rashid (2018) explored CSR's influence on brand image and customer satisfaction in Malaysia's hotel industry, incorporating legal responsibility through environmental and consumer protection compliance. However, their focus remained on customer-centric outcomes, without evaluating how compliance in employment regulations and health and safety standards could internally reinforce a firm's strategic market position. The current study addressed this shortfall by emphasizing how rigorous application of workplace health and safety standards, beyond mere regulatory adherence, can reduce operational risks, enhance employee productivity, and contribute directly to superior firm performance.

Marakova et al. (2021) examined legal CSR in large enterprises in Poland, finding that labor law compliance and governance practices improved stakeholder trust and operational success. Yet, their work did not fully explore how legal compliance specifically in employment and health and safety areas could enhance a firm's innovation capacity and resilience, key factors in gaining competitive advantage. In response, the current study examined how embedding employment law standards and health and safety compliance into strategic planning supports product and service innovation, customer satisfaction and cost control.

Ashour et al. (2020) studied CSR and competitive advantage across industries outside Africa, showing that legal CSR practices improved firms' reputations and stakeholder engagement. However, they did not differentiate between industries where legal CSR compliance was merely a baseline requirement and those where it could be a strategic driver of competitiveness. The current study specifically focused on understanding how legal compliance in employment, competition, and health and safety regulations can be deliberately leveraged by firms across industries to create distinct strategic advantages.

Chirchir (2021) investigated economic and legal CSR among Nairobi banks, showing that legal compliance enhanced reputation and customer confidence. However, the study did not explore how banks could actively use employment law adherence, competition law compliance, and health and safety standards to differentiate themselves in the competitive banking sector. The current study, therefore, emphasized the strategic use of legal social responsibility, demonstrating that beyond regulatory satisfaction, structured and visible

commitment to these legal areas can become a deliberate differentiator in intensely competitive markets.

Finally, Mohamed (2024) examined CSR's role in Kenya's telecommunication sector, showing that legal compliance in data protection and competition policy enhanced brand reputation and consumer trust. However, the study did not investigate whether firms proactively used legal compliance to gain strategic advantage beyond reputational protection. The current study responded to this oversight by systematically analyzing how employment practices, competitive market behavior, and occupational health and safety practices, when legally compliant and strategically framed, can serve as tangible drivers of competitive strength.

In conclusion, while the prior studies acknowledged the positive effects of legal responsibility on corporate reputation and risk management, they fell short of examining how firms could strategically leverage legal compliance in employment, competition, and health and safety to directly strengthen their competitive advantage.

#### **2.4.5 Summary of Research Gaps**

The reviewed studies revealed multiple research gaps across different CSR dimensions. Under the domain of ethical responsibility, several conceptual and empirical gaps were evident. While previous studies acknowledged the broad significance of ethical CSR in brand differentiation and stakeholder trust (Mai, Huong, & Hien, 2023; Owusu, Zhao, & Wang, 2024), they often failed to isolate specific elements such as individual integrity, treatment of suppliers, and treatment of employees. Existing research did not sufficiently examine how internal ethical practices at the individual and supplier levels directly influence a firm's competitive advantage. Moreover, disagreement gaps appeared concerning whether ethical CSR practices genuinely enhanced media credibility or simply fulfilled minimal compliance expectations (Eyasu & Arefayne, 2020).

Regarding economic responsibility, major conceptual and empirical gaps centered around three sub-dimensions: shared economy, value creation and Sustainable product development practices. Although Dela, Pramono, and Susanto (2024) established that economic CSR improved financial performance through operational efficiencies, they did

not differentiate how distinct goals like stakeholder welfare independently influenced firm outcomes. Furthermore, most studies prioritized financial indicators without adequately addressing how cost-effective strategies derived from CSR initiatives translate into sustainable competitive positioning (Bosire, Kipkoech, & Muturi, 2024). Disagreement gaps also emerged regarding the mechanisms through which economic responsibility practices contributed to competitive advantage. Some studies argued for a direct relationship (Mai et al., 2023), while others posited that benefits were mediated by external conditions such as regulatory environments or industry pressures (Owusu et al., 2024).

In the area of philanthropic responsibility, gaps were linked to insufficient differentiation among corporate donations and support, employee volunteering practices, and community empowerment practices. Previous research often aggregated these activities under broad "philanthropy" constructs, without investigating the varying strategic impacts each sub-activity might have on firm competitiveness (Bosire et al., 2024; Eyasu & Arefayne, 2020). Moreover, most studies focused on reputational gains without empirically testing whether philanthropic efforts led to substantive improvements in market focus, differentiation, or cost leadership. This created knowledge gaps about how and whether community involvement activities translate into tangible competitive advantages.

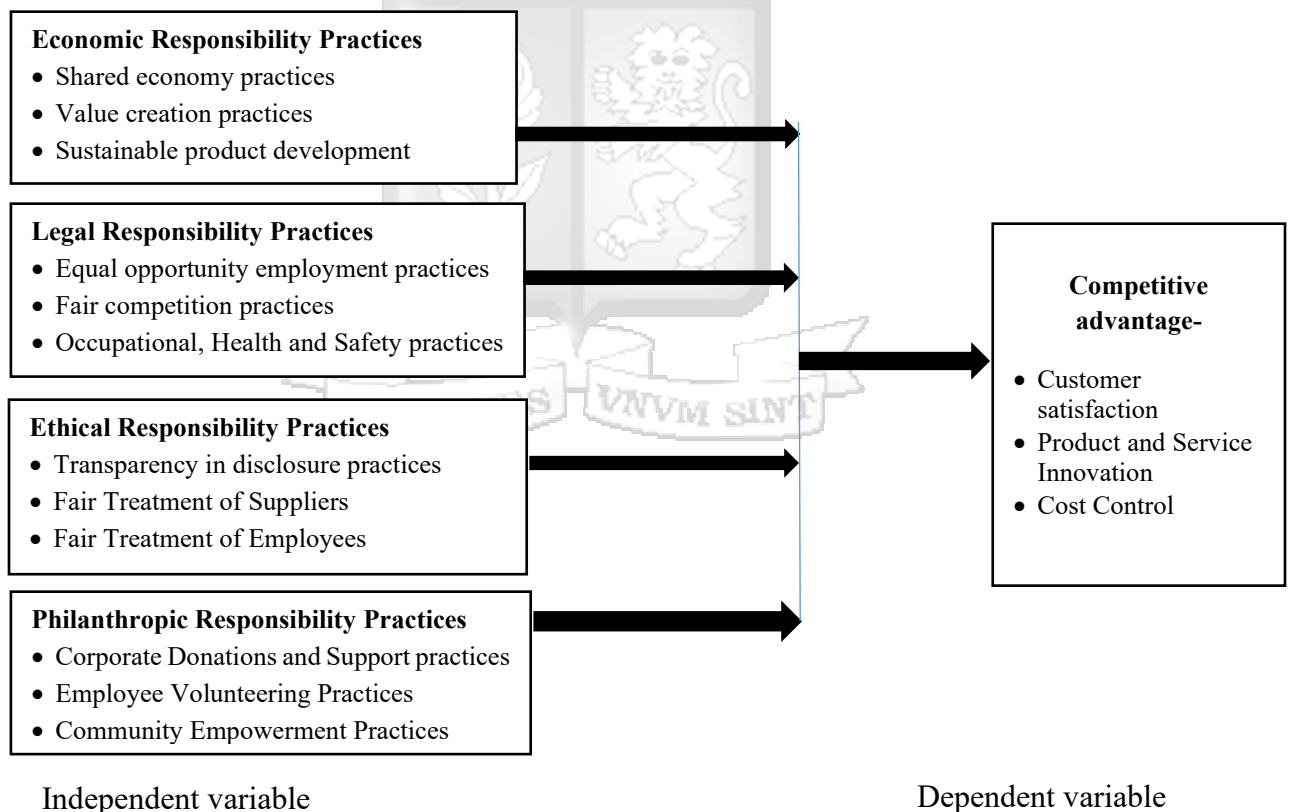
Legal responsibility studies primarily emphasized basic regulatory compliance, leaving critical gaps around strategic leverage. Research did not clearly examine how compliance regarding employment standards, fair competition practices, and health and safety regulations individually influenced competitive positioning (Owusu et al., 2024). Conceptually, legal CSR was often treated as reactive risk mitigation rather than as a proactive driver of differentiation or cost leadership. This approach left unresolved questions about the potential for legal CSR to be an asset in building market credibility and stakeholder loyalty (Mai et al., 2023).

Cost control is critical for competitive survival in the media sector—was rarely linked to CSR dimensions, with studies overlooking how ethical treatment of suppliers or cost-effective community development could create operational advantages (Bosire et al., 2024). Additionally, few studies tailored their competitive advantage frameworks

specifically to the media industry, leading to limited contextual relevance. Most existing research drew on evidence from manufacturing, banking, or agribusiness sectors, underscoring the need for CSR studies that directly investigate competitive dynamics in the media landscape (Owusu et al., 2024; Dela et al., 2024).

## 2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was informed by Carroll’s CSR Pyramid and Stakeholder Theory. Carroll’s model structures CSR into four dimensions economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic, which serve as the independent variables. Stakeholder Theory supports the view that addressing diverse stakeholder interests through CSR can lead to strategic outcomes. Together, these theories underpin the study’s examination of how CSR practices influence competitive advantage, measured through customer satisfaction, innovation, and cost efficiency.



Source: Researcher (2025)

**Figure 2 2: Conceptual Framework**

The above framework points to the relationship that is between corporate social responsibility measured by economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic CSR practices and the competitive advantage of the media houses in Kenya. The study variables were operationalized and measured as shown in Table 2.2.

## 2.6 Operationalization of Study Variables

This subsection outlines how the researcher measured CSR practices and competitive advantage.

**Table 2.1: Operationalization of Study Variables-**

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Measurement	Source
<b>Economic Responsibility Practices</b>	Emphasizes profit maximization and cost-effectiveness, critical for media firms to sustain operations amidst economic pressures. The indicators used to measure this dimension illustrate how financially responsible practices can enhance market resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared economic practices</li> <li>• Value creation practices</li> <li>• Sustainable product development</li> </ul>	Ordinal scale Lickert Scale	Gamachu & Kurse, 2024
<b>Legal Responsibility Practices</b>	Focuses on compliance with laws and regulations, including employment, health, and safety policies. Compliance not only mitigates legal risks but builds trust with audiences and stakeholders, thus enhancing reputation—a key competitive advantage in the media sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal opportunity employment practices</li> <li>• Fair competition practices</li> <li>• Occupational, Health and safety practices.</li> </ul>	Ordinal scale Lickert Scale	Okeke-Okiche, 2024
<b>Ethical Responsibility Practices</b>	Reflects a commitment to integrity and fairness in employee treatment and supplier relations. Ethical practices help media firms differentiate themselves by building a loyal customer base that values responsible corporate behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency in disclosure practices.</li> <li>• Fair treatment of suppliers.</li> <li>• Fair treatment of employees.</li> </ul>	Ordinal scale Lickert Scale	Arraya & Ferreira, 2024
<b>Philanthropic Responsibility Practices</b>	Involves charitable initiatives and community development, contributing to a positive corporate image. By supporting social causes, media companies foster stronger community ties, which can indirectly boost brand loyalty and competitive positioning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate donations and support practices</li> <li>• Employee volunteering practices</li> <li>• Community empowerment practices</li> </ul>	Ordinal scale Lickert Scale	Arian et al., 2024

<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	The advantage a company has over other companies, which compete in the same market enabling it to create a defensible position over its competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer satisfaction</li> <li>• Product and service innovation</li> <li>• Cost control</li> </ul>	Ordinal scale Lickert Scale	Dyer & Singh, 2023
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Source: Researcher (2025)



## 2.7 Chapter Summary

The chapter analyzed the literature reviewed to provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. It compiled what research scholars have conducted to identify and examine the relationship between CSR and competitive advantage. It also highlighted Carroll's pyramid of CSR and the Stakeholder theory as the model and theory that supported the study. Empirical studies were used to showcase how Carroll's model and Stakeholder theory were used to underpin the research. From the assessed literature, research gaps were noted amongst the four CSR aspects that Carroll notes. A conceptual framework showed the association between the study's variables. Techniques of operationalizing the study's variables were also presented.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research philosophy and design employed in this study. It also describes the population and sampling design, data collection methods, research procedures, and data analysis methods considered for the study.

#### 3.2 Research Philosophy

The philosophical framework that guided this study was the positivism approach. This approach was adopted because the study assumed that only factual knowledge is trustworthy (Bajpai, 2011). The researcher was concerned with facts, not impressions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Unlike Social constructionism philosophical approaches that have human interest and subjection provision, positivistic studies only require the researcher to collect factual data and interpret it (Crowther & Lancaster, 2008). The study on the effects of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on the competitive advantage of media firms in Kenya effectively utilized the positivism research philosophy by emphasizing factual, objective data collection and analysis. The study adopted a positivist approach, as evidenced by its emphasis on quantifiable data and objective measurement.

Additionally, statistical tools namely correlation and regression analysis were employed to establish cause-and-effect relationships, further supporting the positivist approach. This approach enabled the research to generate concrete, data-driven insights, providing a clear, factual understanding of how CSR influences competitive advantage in the media industry in Kenya.

#### 3.3 Research Design

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016), research design refers to the structured plan outlining how a study intends to address its research questions. Asio (2021) categorizes quantitative research designs into three main types: survey, experimental, and non-experimental designs. Although survey was used to collect primary data, this study

employed a non-experimental research design, which is appropriate for examining relationships rather than establishing direct causality. According to Kumar (2011), non-experimental designs are suitable for identifying associations between variables where manipulation or control is not feasible. This design aligns with the study's aim of assessing how different CSR practices measured through respondent perceptions, influence various dimensions of competitive advantage among media houses in Kenya. Within experimental research, the causal-comparative design is used to analyze relationships between categorical independent variables and quantitative dependent variables, while the correlational design focuses on examining the relationship between quantitative variables (Asio, 2011). This study employed a correlational, cross-sectional research design. Given the quantitative nature of the variables and the objective to examine the relationships between different CSR practices and competitive advantage indicators among media houses in Kenya, the correlational design was suitable for assessing the strength and direction of these associations without manipulating variables. The cross-sectional approach involved collecting data at a single point in time, enabling efficient and timely analysis of how CSR activities impact competitive advantage within the current business context. This design was chosen to provide a clear snapshot of existing relationships while managing resource and time constraints.

### **3.4 Target Population**

The target population for this study comprised media houses operating in Kenya and the managerial staff within these organizations. According to the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), there are 122 registered and certified media houses in the country (Owuor & Munyoki, 2016). These media houses vary in size, ownership, and market reach, and include national, regional, and community-based outlets. The unit of analysis was the media house, while the unit of observation consisted of individuals in management-level positions.

Managers from departments such as finance, editorial, marketing, IT, and human resources were considered part of the population, given their strategic involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) implementation and organizational decision-making. These

individuals were deemed appropriate for the study due to their functional roles in developing and executing CSR initiatives aligned with organizational goals.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The study relied on primary data (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018). The research questionnaire was guided by the conceptualization of the research variables and supported by prior empirical literature in the research area. The study used a structured questionnaire to address the research objectives. The questionnaire was structured into sections covering respondent demographics, the study's specific research objectives, and measures of the dependent variable. It gathered detailed information on the CSR activities media companies undertake, focusing on their responsibilities across economic, ethical, philanthropic, and legal dimensions.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

According to Bell, Bryman, & Harley, (2018), the research procedures are a collection of the different steps and techniques adopted prior to and during the administration of the study instrument. The researcher accorded respondents with a consent form they were expected to sign before participating in the filling of the questionnaires. The study also ensured that necessary research approvals and permits are obtained prior to involving the study participants. The questionnaires contained a 5-point Likert Scale, with values ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* – *5 = strongly agree*. Data collection took place over a four-month period, from August to November 2022. During this time, questionnaires were distributed to selected managers in media houses, with respondents typically given two days to complete and return them. This extended data collection window allowed for follow-ups and ensured an adequate response rate while accommodating managers' schedules.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

Cooper and Schindler (2014) argue that data analysis involves reducing accumulated data to a manageable size, developing summaries, looking for patterns, and applying statistical techniques such as tables, charts, and percentages. For this study, quantitative data from questionnaires was cleaned and entered in SPSS. The data was sorted and analyzed based

on the study's objectives. Descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis were undertaken.

For the first, second, third and fourth objectives, an inferential analysis were conducted using the Pearson-correlation coefficient to determine whether there is an association between the CSR under study and the competitive advantage of the companies under study. Correlation measured the extent of interdependence where two variables are linearly related. The study conducted normality tests, autocorrelation tests and collinearity tests to estimate the adherence to regression assumptions examination before conducting regression testing. Further, the researcher employed inferential statistical techniques, including Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), to examine differences between groups and test the study's hypotheses. Ultimately, the magnitude of the relationship between CSR and the competitive advantage was analyzed using multiple linear regression, which was estimated using the equation below:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Dependent variable (Competitive Advantage)

$\alpha$  = the model intercept

$\beta_{1-4}$  = Coefficient of independent variables

X1 – Economic Social Responsibility Practices

X2 – Legal Social Responsibility Practices

X3 – Ethical Social Responsibility Practices

X4 –Philanthropic Social Responsibility Practices

$\varepsilon$  = Error Term

The outcomes were presented in charts and tables such as frequency distributions, percentages and means.

### **3.8 Research Quality**

Research quality refers to the rigor and trustworthiness of a study's design, data collection, analysis, and conclusions. It encompasses two key components: reliability and validity, which ensure that the findings are both accurate and consistent. Reliability, as defined by

Sekaran and Bougie (2016), is the extent to which a research instrument consistently measures what it intends, providing stable and consistent results. Watling (2007) emphasizes that reliability reflects the consistency of results over time, ensuring that the study accurately represents the population. In this study, the questionnaire was structured around the four pillars of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)—legal, economic, philanthropic, and ethical ensuring consistency across all media stations in the population, thereby reinforcing reliability. Validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a study measures what it is intended to measure and whether the conclusions drawn are accurate and well-founded (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018). In this study, the reliability of the research instrument was further supported through a pilot study, which was an essential step to ensure both reliability and validity.

A crucial step in ensuring the reliability of the research instrument was conducting a pilot study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) recommend a pilot study involving a sample of one-tenth of the total sample, with homogenous characteristics. Pre-testing the instrument helped identify vague questions and unclear instructions while capturing feedback that enhanced the instrument's efficiency. The pilot study was carried out at KU TV Media house, which shared similar characteristics with the target media houses. This pre-test allowed for the assessment of the time required to administer the instrument, as well as the clarity and accuracy of the items. The pilot study involved 12 purposively selected department managers with relevant CSR experience to provide informed feedback on the research instruments. Their insights prompted revisions to the questionnaire, enhancing its clarity and reliability for more effective data collection in the main study. For any research instrument to be deemed effective, it must meet two critical criteria: reliability and validity (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The pilot study served to evaluate whether these requirements were met. Validity refers to the accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences drawn from research results (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), and the extent to which a construct accurately measures what it is intended to measure (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018). There are different ways to measure validity, including face validity, construct validity, and criterion validity (Johnston, 2014). This study focused on both content and construct validity. Content validity was ensured by consulting 12 CSR experts and the study supervisor, who reviewed the questionnaire to confirm that the items adequately

represented the key concepts of the study’s conceptual framework. Their feedback helped refine the questions for relevance and comprehensiveness. Construct validity was addressed through statistical techniques—such as factor analysis—to verify that the questionnaire items effectively measured the intended theoretical constructs. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, a statistical tool that measures internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha evaluates the relationship between average inconsistency and discrepancy of items. A value above 0.7 is generally regarded as acceptable for research purposes, indicating that the items are reliable and consistent (George & Mallery, 2019). Nunnally (1978) recommends using a cutoff of 0.7 for further analysis. In this study, Cronbach’s Alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire, ensuring the reliability of the instrument. The overall reliability statistics are captured in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Reliability Results**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Remarks
Philanthropic Responsibility	0.867	7	Accepted
Competitive Advantage of Media Houses	0.862	6	Accepted
Economic Responsibility	0.843	7	Accepted
Ethical Responsibility	0.758	7	Accepted
Legal Responsibility	0.739	7	Accepted

No. of Cases = 12

The findings in Table 4.1 demonstrate that all study variables met the reliability threshold of the Cronbach’s Alpha value above 0.7, confirming the reliability of the data collection instrument (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The results show that Economic responsibility recorded a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.843, indicating a high level of reliability. This suggests that the seven items used to measure this construct were internally consistent. Legal responsibility had an Alpha value of 0.739, which is within the acceptable range, confirming the adequacy of the measurement scale. Similarly, Ethical responsibility achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.758, further supporting the consistency of the questionnaire items for this variable.

Among the four CSR dimensions, Philanthropic responsibility had the highest reliability score at 0.867, indicating a strong internal consistency among its seven items. Likewise,

Competitive Advantage of Media Houses recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.862, suggesting that the items measuring competitive advantage were highly reliable. The overall reliability statistic for the research instrument was 0.814 across 34 items, reinforcing the instrument's overall consistency and dependability in measuring the study constructs. These results confirm that the research instrument used in the study was reliable and well-structured for assessing the relationship between CSR and the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are a set of principles that guide a researcher's research designs and practices. Scientists and researchers must always adhere to a certain code of conduct throughout the research process. This research followed the guidelines on the confidentiality of the participants throughout the study by not requiring any identifiable questions such as names or referencing an organization's information to be included. Further, the study adhered to anonymity by strictly requiring that the respondents do not leave their contact information in any form on the research instruments that could be traced to them individually or their organization. The researcher ensured that the respondents participated voluntarily by providing each participant with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement and their rights to participate prior to administering the research instruments. The researcher also explained to the respondents the aim, benefits and risks of participating in the study. Before data collection, the study ensured that approvals were obtained from Strathmore University Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (SU-ISERC) (Appendix III), and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) (Appendix IV). Lastly, the researcher informed all the participants of their right to voluntarily participate in the study without any consequences.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

The foregoing chapter presented the methodological framework used to examine the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) dimensions, ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal, on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. The study adopted a positivist research philosophy and employed a descriptive survey design

to capture quantitative data from a representative sample of media firms. The target population consisted of senior management within licensed media houses, from which a stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation across different firm categories. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires, which were pre-tested for reliability and validity. Research procedures included ethical approval, informed consent, and adherence to confidentiality standards. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize responses and inferential techniques, particularly regression analysis, to assess the relationship between CSR dimensions and competitive advantage. This methodological approach ensured robustness, generalizability, and relevance in addressing the research objectives.



**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**4.1 Introduction**

This fourth chapter of the dissertation presents the findings of the analysis of the data. The chapter presents demographic information, descriptive results, correlation analysis and regression analysis to explore the relationship between the predictors and the outcome variable.

**4.2 Response Rate**

Table 4.1 shows the response rate of the respondents.

**Table 4.1: Response Rate**

No. of Questionnaires Issued	No. of Questionnaires		Response Rate (%)
	Returned		
488	377		77.25

Source: Researcher (2025)

Out of the 488 questionnaires distributed, 377 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 77.25%. Although the tool was self-administered, meaning respondents completed the questionnaires independently, clear written instructions were provided to guide them. While self-administered questionnaires are often associated with lower response rates (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016), the achieved rate was considered adequate for analysis in line with Babbie's (2010) recommendation that response rates above 70% are sufficient in social research. No external assistance was provided during completion, which minimized potential bias.

**4.3 Demographic Profile of Participating Media Firms**

A total of 122 media firms participated in the study, drawn from three major media categories: broadcast (radio and television), print, and digital platforms. Broadcast media firms formed the largest group, representing 41% of the sample, followed by digital/online platforms at 34.4%, and print media at 24.6%. In terms of organizational size, 36.9% of the firms were small (fewer than 50 employees), 42.6% were medium-sized (50–200 employees), and 20.5% were large (more than 200 employees).

Ownership structure showed that privately owned firms dominated the sample at 62.3%, while state-owned firms accounted for 23%, and publicly listed firms made up 14.8%. Regarding years of operation, 16.4% of firms had been in existence for less than five years, 38.5% for five to ten years, and 45.1% had operated for more than a decade. These characteristics reflect a diverse and mature media industry in Kenya, suitable for evaluating CSR's strategic impact.

### 4.3.1 Age of the Respondents

The researcher asked the respondents the age distribution. The findings are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Age of Respondents**

	Frequency	Percent
Below 20-24 years	74	19.6
25-31 Years	116	30.8
32-38 years	105	27.9
39-45 years	70	18.6
46 years and above	12	3.2

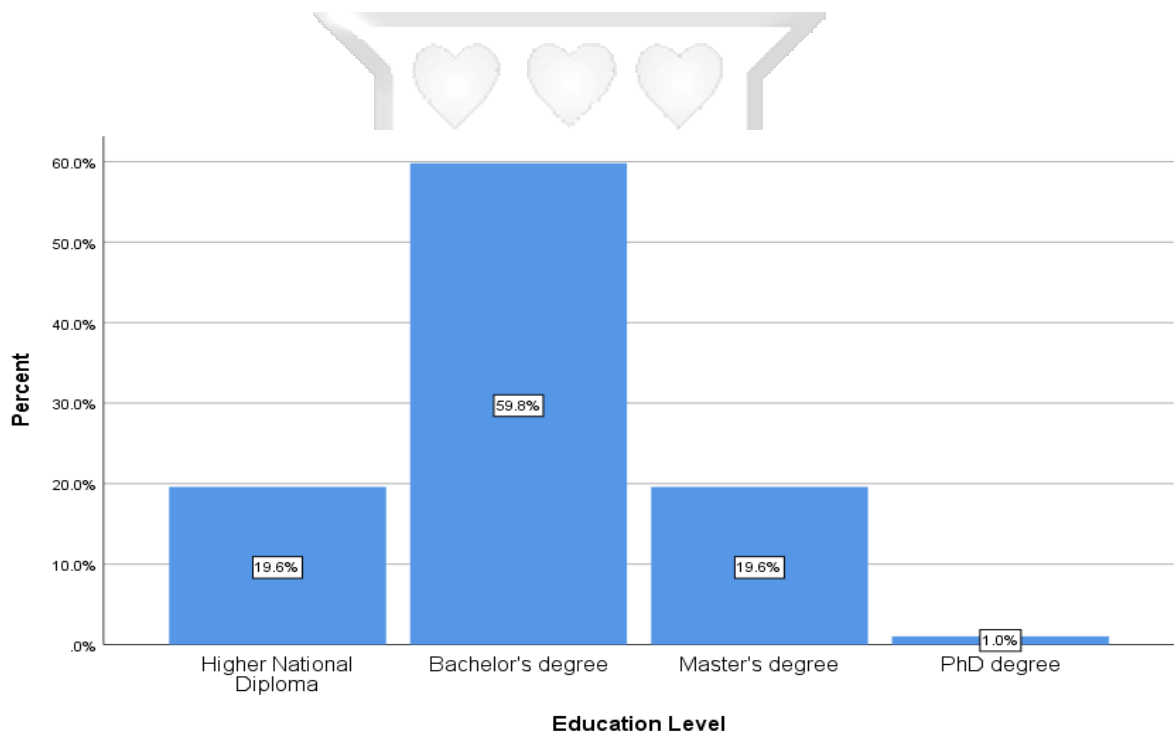
Source: Researcher (2025)

The age distribution in Table 4.2 provides insights into the demographic composition of the respondents, categorized into five age groups. The largest proportion of respondents falls within the 25-31 years category, comprising 30.8% of the total sample. This suggests that a significant number of participants are in the early stages of their professional careers, likely contributing fresh perspectives to the study. The 32-38 years age group follows closely at 27.9%, indicating a considerable representation of mid-career professionals. The below 25 years category accounts for 19.6%, reflecting a notable presence of younger individuals, potentially recent graduates or early-career employees. Meanwhile, the 39-45 years group makes up 18.6%, signifying a balanced distribution between young and experienced professionals. The above 46 years category is the least represented at 3.2%, suggesting that fewer senior professionals participated in the study. This may indicate that older individuals are either underrepresented in the media sector or less engaged in survey-

based research. Overall, the distribution suggests that the sample is largely composed of young to mid-career professionals, which could influence perspectives on corporate social responsibility and competitive advantage in media houses.

### 4.3.2 Level of Education

The study also sought to establish the highest level of education attained by the respondents. The results on the respondents' highest level of education are presented in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.1: Education Level**

Source: Researcher (2025)

Figure 4.2 presents the educational qualifications of respondents working in media houses in Kenya. The majority (59.6%) of respondents hold a bachelor's degree, indicating that a significant portion of the workforce in the media sector possesses an undergraduate qualification. This suggests that a bachelor's degree is the dominant academic credential for employment in media houses, likely reflecting industry requirements and expectations.

Additionally, 19.6% of respondents reported having a higher national diploma, while an equal proportion (19.6%) hold a master's degree. This highlights that a considerable number of employees have pursued advanced or technical qualifications, possibly to enhance their expertise in the field. The presence of master's degree holders also suggests a focus on higher education and professional development within the industry.

A small percentage (1.0%) of respondents possess a Ph.D., indicating that doctoral-level education is relatively rare in the media industry. This may be due to the nature of media-related careers, which often emphasize practical experience and technical skills over extensive academic research. However, the presence of Ph.D. holders implies that some professionals engage in academic research, media policy formulation, or specialized roles requiring higher qualifications. This demonstrated that most staff members inside media firms had attained a higher level of education, and this diversity of educational attainment can be critical to personnel competency.

### 4.3.3 Position and Work Experience

The study also sought to establish the position and work experience of the respondents. The results are summarized in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Position and Work Experience**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Departmental role of the respondent  N = 377	Finance Manager	58	15.5
	IT Manager	70	18.6
	Marketing Manager	117	30.9
	Human Resource Manager	105	27.8
	Editing Manager	27	7.2
Length of time the respondent has worked within the department  N = 377	< 3 years	113	29.9
	3-6 years	183	48.5
	7-9 years	58	15.5
	10-12 years	15	4.1
	13 years and above	8	2.1

Source: Researcher (2025)

The analysis of respondents' job titles indicates a diverse representation of managerial roles within media houses. The largest proportion of respondents were Marketing Managers (30.9%), followed closely by Human Resource Managers (27.8%). IT Managers accounted

for 18.6%, while Finance Managers comprised 15.5% of the sample. The least represented category was Editing Managers, making up only 7.2% of the respondents. This distribution suggests that the study captured perspectives from various key departments within media organizations, ensuring a balanced understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and competitive advantage across different functional areas.

Regarding work experience, most respondents (48.5%) had been working in their respective departments for 3 to 6 years, indicating a significant level of familiarity with their roles and industry dynamics. Additionally, 29.9% had less than 3 years of experience, suggesting a considerable proportion of relatively new employees. Those with 7-9 years of experience constituted 15.5% of the sample, while only 4.1% had been in their roles for 10-12 years. A small fraction (2.1%) had worked in their departments for 13 years or more, reflecting a limited representation of long-serving employees.

Overall, the data suggests that most respondents had moderate work experience (3-6 years), which is ideal for providing informed insights into CSR initiatives and their influence on competitive advantage in media houses. The variation in job roles and tenure enhances the study's robustness by incorporating perspectives from both relatively new and experienced professionals across different managerial functions.

#### **4.4 Descriptive Analysis of variables**

This section presents the results of the descriptive statistical analyses of the data and their interpretations. The descriptive statistics helped to develop the basic features of the study and form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis of the data. The results were presented in terms of the study objectives.

##### **4.4.1 Ethical Responsibility Practices of Media Houses in Kenya**

This variable was described in terms of ; Transparency in disclosure practices, fair treatment of Suppliers, and fair treatment of Employees. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate responses of this variable and it ranged from; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each item was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5 would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would

suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. The findings are presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Analysis of Ethical Responsibility Practices**

Statements (n = 377)	Mean	Std. Dev
This company follows the professional standards set for the industry in which it operates.	4.65	0.63
The company has set principles and values that promote individual integrity.	4.53	0.65
Establishing internal ethical standards has enhanced the company's social responsibilities of employees.	4.38	0.73
Compliance with service-related contracts has improved the company's relationships with suppliers.	4.21	0.79
The company strives to improve its employees' welfare through incentives and benefits.	3.91	0.95
The company continually seeks new ways to protect the environment.	3.86	0.92
Employees are committed to working because the company engages in CSR	3.58	1.08
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.16</b>	<b>0.82</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

The results indicate that the highest-rated ethical responsibility practice was adherence to professional standards within the industry ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), suggesting a strong compliance culture among the surveyed media houses. The lowest-rated item was employee commitment attributed to CSR engagement ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), highlighting a relatively weaker link between CSR activities and employee motivation. The average mean score across all items was 4.16, reflecting overall positive ethical engagement. Full details are presented in Table 4.4.

#### 4.4.2 Economic Responsibility Practices of Media Houses in Kenya

The study also examined economic responsibility in media houses in Kenya. This variable was described in terms of; shared economy practices, value creation practices and sustainable product development. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate responses of this variable and it ranged from; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each item was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5

would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. The findings are presented in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Analysis of Economic Social Responsibility Practices**

Statement (n = 377)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The company focuses on the interests of all the stakeholders.	4.40	0.72
The company maximizes profits through fair business practices.	4.33	0.79
Economic practices influence the competitiveness of media companies.	4.10	0.88
Embedding CSR in our company has promoted shared value.	3.91	0.99
The company's CSR initiatives have promoted cost-effective business practices.	3.72	0.90
The company's first responsibility is to its shareholders and not to society.	3.51	1.14
A company's financial performance should determine its engagement in CSR practices.	3.42	1.29
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>0.96</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

The highest rated economic CSR practice was the company's focus on stakeholder interests (M = 4.40, SD = 0.72), while the lowest was the belief that financial performance should determine CSR engagement (M = 3.42, SD = 1.29). The average mean score across all items was 3.91, suggesting a moderately strong emphasis on economic responsibility. Full details are presented in Table 4.5.

#### 4.4.3 Philanthropic Responsibility Practices of Media Houses in Kenya

The study also sought to analyze philanthropic responsibility in media houses in Kenya. This variable was described in terms of; Corporate donations and support practices, Employee volunteering practices, and Community empowerment practices. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate responses of this variable and it ranged from; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each item was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5 would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. The findings are presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6: Analysis of Philanthropic Social Responsibility Practices**

Statement (n = 377)	Mean	Std. Dev
Philanthropic CSR helps the company to build relationships with external stakeholders.	4.35	0.58
The company has established supportive mechanisms that encourage employees to participate in community development projects.	3.90	0.87
The company engages in regular corporate philanthropy that impacts the communities' welfare.	3.89	0.90
The company participates in national humanitarian events.	3.78	0.89
Philanthropic CSR practices are often used as a marketing strategy by our company.	3.77	0.92
The company offers charitable donations to help eliminate poverty and hunger and foster health initiatives in communities.	3.74	0.97
The company offers education scholarships to needy students in the community.	3.28	1.08
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.82</b>	<b>0.89</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

The analysis revealed that the highest-rated philanthropic practice was, Philanthropic CSR helps the company to build relationships with external stakeholders ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ), while the lowest-rated was, the company offers education scholarships to needy students in the community ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). The overall average mean score was 3.82. For a detailed breakdown of the responses, see Table 4.6.

#### 4.4.4 Legal Responsibility Practices of Media Houses in Kenya

The study also sought to analyze the legal responsibility in media houses in Kenya. This variable was described in terms of; Equal opportunity employment practices, fair competition practices, and Occupational, Health and Safety practices. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate responses of this variable and it ranged from; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each item was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5 would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. The findings are presented in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7: Analysis of Legal Social Responsibility Practices**

Statement (n = 377)	Mean	Std. Dev
The company creates job opportunities and provides fair payments to employees following the statutory requirements.	4.85	1.25
The company complies with various state and local regulations.	4.70	0.56
The company tries to adhere to legal practices consistent with the expectations of government and law.	4.57	0.80
The company fulfils all its legal obligations to the societal stakeholders.	4.34	0.80
The company engages in legal CSR practices as a tool for conducting itself as law-abiding corporate citizens	4.29	0.83
The company has occupational health and safety policies in place and provides goods and services that at least meet minimal legal requirements.	4.15	0.70
The company has established a compliance department to ensure strict enforcement of rules and governance measures when faced with increased competition.	4.14	0.72
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>0.81</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

The highest mean score was recorded for the statement, “The company creates job opportunities and provides fair payments to employees following the statutory requirements” (M = 4.85, SD = 1.25), indicating strong alignment with labor-related legal obligations. The lowest mean score was associated with the statement, “The company has established a compliance department to ensure strict enforcement of rules and governance measures when faced with increased competition” (M = 4.14, SD = 0.72), suggesting that formal compliance structures are less uniformly adopted. The average mean score across all items was 4.43, reflecting a generally high level of legal social responsibility. These findings are summarized in Table 4.7.

#### 4.4.5 Summary of CSR Practices

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increasingly become a strategic tool for gaining competitive advantage in the media industry. In the context of Kenya, media firms adopt various CSR dimensions, ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal, to enhance their public image, build stakeholder trust, and differentiate themselves in a competitive market. Table 4.8 presents a summary of the extent to which media houses in Kenya have implemented different CSR initiatives as part of their competitive strategies. The

subsequent analysis highlights the most and least emphasized CSR dimensions, along with the overall trends and variability in implementation across firms.

**Table 4.8: Summary of the CSR Initiatives in Media Houses in Kenya**

CSR Initiatives	Mean	Std. Dev
Legal Responsibility Practices	4.43	1.38
Ethical Responsibility Practices	4.16	0.82
Economic Responsibility Practices	3.91	0.96
Philanthropic Responsibility Practices	3.82	0.89
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.08</b>	<b>1.01</b>

The highest mean score was reported for legal responsibility practices ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ), indicating a strong emphasis on regulatory compliance and statutory obligations among media houses. Philanthropic responsibility practices recorded the lowest mean score ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ), suggesting that while charitable contributions are present, they may be less prioritized relative to other CSR domains. Overall, the average mean score across all CSR initiatives was 4.08, reflecting a generally positive implementation of CSR activities in the sector. These findings are detailed in Table 4.8.

#### 4.4.6 Competitive Advantage

Finally, the study sought to determine the status of the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. This was the dependent variable, and the status of this variable was described in terms of, customer satisfaction, product and service innovation, cost control . The status of this variable was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from; 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree and was analysed based on the mean score and standard deviation. The closer the mean score on each score was to 5, the more the agreement concerning the statement. A score around 2.5 would indicate uncertainty while scores significantly below 2.5 would suggest disagreement regarding the statement posed. These results are presented in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9: Analysis of Competitive Advantage**

Statement (n = 377)	Mean	Std. Dev
The company ensures the effective utilization of resources.	4.60	0.53
The company has ensured that it recruits a workforce with the right motivation and skills to incorporate into the company.	4.45	0.69
The company adopts projects that yield profits for the company.	4.41	0.81
The company has maintained efficient systems that work perfectly to ensure profit maximization.	4.17	1.07
The company has maintained robust systems of training and educating employees.	4.07	0.87
The company has implemented practices to promote the efficient allocation of surplus funds for economic activities.	3.98	0.92
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.28</b>	<b>0.82</b>

Source: Researcher (2025)

The analysis of competitive advantage practices revealed that the highest mean score was 4.60 with a standard deviation of 0.53, indicating strong agreement that the company ensures the effective utilization of resources. The lowest mean score was 3.98 with a standard deviation of 0.92, relating to the implementation of practices that promote the efficient allocation of surplus funds for economic activities. The overall average mean score across all statements was 4.28 with a standard deviation of 0.82, reflecting generally positive perceptions of competitive advantage initiatives among respondents. For further details, refer to Table 4.9.

#### 4.5 Inferential Statistical Results

Inferential statistical analysis was carried out to test the relationship between dependent and independent variables. This involved the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. The results were discussed in the following subsections.

##### 4.5.1 Correlation Analysis

A description of the correlation analysis was presented in this chapter. It tried to determine the intensity and direction of the linear relationship that occurs between each independent variable and the dependent variable. The significance of the correlations was calculated at  $p \leq 0,05$ . The findings are summarized in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10: Correlation Matrix**

		Ethical Responsibility Practices	Economic Responsibility Practices	Philanthropic Responsibility Practices	Legal Responsibility Practices	Competitive Advantage
Ethical Responsibility Practices	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N		1			
Economic Responsibility Practices	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.160 0.099 377	1			
Philanthropic Responsibility Practices	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.189 0.099 377	.260* 0.049 377	1		
Legal Responsibility Practices	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.038 0.165 377	.126 0.150 377	.343* 0.015 377	1	
Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.719** 0.000 377	.614** 0.001 377	.510** 0.004 377	.450* 0.020 377	1 377

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix provides insights into the relationships between different dimensions of social responsibility, ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal, and their influence on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. The findings indicate that ethical and economic responsibilities have the strongest associations with competitive advantage, while philanthropic and legal responsibilities also contribute, albeit to a lesser extent.

Ethical responsibility demonstrates the highest correlation with competitive advantage ( $r = .719$ ,  $p < .000$ ), highlighting its significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of media houses. This suggests that companies that prioritize ethical business practices, such as integrity, transparency, and fairness, are more likely to gain a strong competitive position.

Ethical responsibility fosters trust among stakeholders, enhances corporate reputation, and attracts loyal customers and advertisers. Given the sensitive nature of the media industry, where credibility is crucial, ethical considerations may directly impact audience trust and business sustainability. The strong correlation between ethical responsibility and competitive advantage ( $r = .719, p < .000$ ) underscores the importance of ethical business practices in enhancing the competitiveness of media houses.

Economic responsibility is also strongly correlated with competitive advantage ( $r = .614, p < .001$ ), suggesting that financial sustainability, resource efficiency, and profit-maximization strategies play a pivotal role in media firms' competitiveness. Effective economic responsibility involves strategic investments, cost-effective operations, and financial prudence, which allow media houses to remain resilient in a rapidly evolving market. Companies that ensure the responsible use of resources and fair business practices are more likely to maintain long-term financial success, thereby reinforcing their market position.

Philanthropic responsibility has a moderate positive correlation with competitive advantage ( $r = .510, p < .004$ ), indicating that corporate philanthropy contributes to competitiveness but is not as influential as ethical and economic factors. Media houses that engage in philanthropic initiatives, such as supporting community programs, promoting education, and contributing to social causes, can improve their public image and strengthen audience loyalty. However, while philanthropy enhances corporate reputation and social goodwill, it does not directly drive financial performance or operational efficiency, which explains its relatively weaker correlation with competitive advantage.

Legal responsibility has a moderate correlation with competitive advantage ( $r = .450, p < .050$ ) among the four CSR dimensions. While compliance with laws and regulations is essential for business continuity, it does not necessarily create a competitive edge. Legal responsibility ensures adherence to media regulations, labor laws, and fair competition practices, which help in avoiding legal penalties and maintaining industry credibility. However, mere compliance does not differentiate media houses in the market. Companies

that go beyond legal requirements, by integrating ethical and economic strategies, are more likely to achieve a stronger competitive advantage.

The findings suggest that ethical and economic responsibility are the most crucial drivers of competitive advantage for media houses in Kenya. Media firms should integrate ethical business practices with sound financial strategies to sustain long-term market success. Philanthropic efforts, while beneficial for corporate reputation, should be strategically aligned with business objectives. Legal compliance, though essential, should not be the sole focus but rather a foundation upon which ethical and economic initiatives are built. To maximize their competitive advantage, media houses must adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes ethical integrity, financial sustainability, and social impact.

#### 4.5.2 Diagnostic Analysis

Before the model was fitted diagnostics test were carried to assess whether the regression assumptions were met. The normality, autocorrelation test and collinearity test were used.

##### 4.5.2.1 Autocorrelation test

To test the assumption of any serial correlation violations in the study data a Durbin Watson statistic test was carried out. The Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic is a crucial test for detecting autocorrelation in the residuals of a regression model. The results are carried out in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11: Autocorrelation test**

Model	Durbin-Watson
1	1.617

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethical Social Responsibility, Economic Social Responsibility, Philanthropic Social Responsibility, Legal Social Responsibility.

b. Dependent Variable: Competitive advantage

Source: Researcher (2025)

The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.617 in Table 4.11 indicates that autocorrelation is minimal, meaning that the regression model is statistically sound and does not require immediate corrections. In this analysis, the DW value of 1.617 falls within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5, suggesting that there is no severe autocorrelation present. While the

value is slightly below 2, indicating mild positive autocorrelation, it is not substantial enough to raise concerns about the validity of the model's estimates. This means that the relationship between Ethical, Economic, Philanthropic, and Legal responsibility and Competitive Advantage in media houses in Kenya can be interpreted with confidence.

The absence of strong autocorrelation ensures that the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression assumptions remain intact. A model with high autocorrelation ( $DW < 1.5$ ) typically underestimates the standard errors, leading to inflated t-statistics and misleading p-values. However, since the DW value in this case is within an acceptable range, the estimated coefficients remain reliable, and the statistical significance of the predictors can be trusted. This enhances the robustness of the findings, confirming that the model's explanatory variables provide meaningful insights into competitive advantage. From a practical standpoint, a DW value of 1.617 suggests that the regression model is stable and can be used for predictive analysis with minimal risk of distortion. The slight positive autocorrelation detected does not compromise the model's effectiveness, making it suitable for guiding decision-making processes in the media sector.

#### 4.5.2.2 Normality

A normality test was adopted to test the assumption of normality of the data. The test for normality assesses whether the residuals of the regression model follow a normal distribution, a key assumption for valid statistical inferences. In this case, both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test and the Shapiro-Wilk test were conducted to evaluate the normality of the standardized residuals. The results are summarized in Table 4.12.

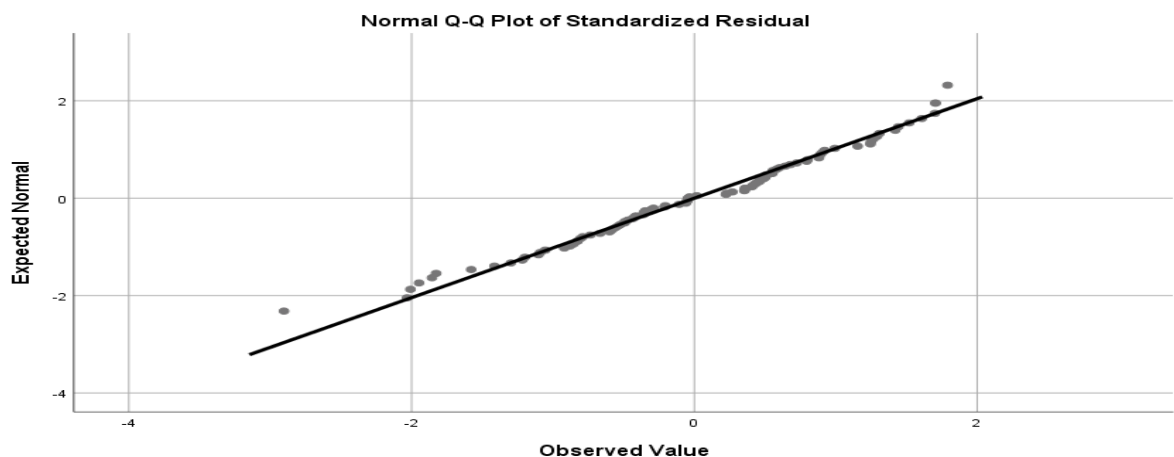
**Table 4.12: Test for normality**

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Standardized Residual	.084	377	.086	.982	377	.205

Source: Researcher (2025)

The K-S test statistic is 0.084 with a significance value (p-value) of 0.086, while the Shapiro-Wilk test statistic is 0.982 with a p-value of 0.205. Since both p-values are greater than the conventional threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis of normality cannot be rejected, indicating that the residuals are normally distributed. The Shapiro-Wilk test, which is generally more powerful for smaller sample sizes, further supports this conclusion with a high-test statistic of 0.982 and a non-significant p-value (0.205). This suggests that the residuals do not significantly deviate from normality, reinforcing the reliability of the regression estimates. The normal distribution of residuals ensures that statistical tests, including hypothesis testing and confidence interval estimations, remain valid and unbiased. From a practical perspective, these results confirm that the assumption of normality holds, allowing for accurate interpretations of the regression coefficients and their significance. This strengthens the credibility of the model, making it suitable for predictive analysis and decision-making within the media sector. Although the statistical tests indicate normality, graphical methods such as histograms, Q-Q plots, or P-P plots could provide additional visual confirmation. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that the model's residuals conform well to the normality assumption, enhancing the robustness of the analysis.

The study used the Normal Q-Q plots to confirm the previous Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test and the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results are shown in Figure 4.4



**Figure 4.2: Normal Q-Q plot**

Source: Researcher (2025)

From the Q-Q plot, figure 4.4, the most data values fall within the reference line and indication that the data is normally distributed. This can be supported by the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $Stat = 0.982, Sig = 0.205 > 0.05$ ). Since the p-value of the test is greater than the level of significance, we fail to reject the null hypothesis of normality and conclude that the data is normal.

#### 4.5.2.3 Collinearity tests

To determine whether the predictor variables were a linear combination of each other a collinearity test was conducted on the research data. The collinearity diagnostic test assesses the presence of multicollinearity among the independent variables, which occurs when predictor variables are highly correlated, potentially distorting regression estimates. Two key metrics, Tolerance and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), are used to evaluate this issue. Tolerance values close to zero indicate high collinearity, whereas VIF values greater than 10 suggest severe multicollinearity that could undermine the reliability of the regression model. The findings of the collinearity tests are summarized in Table 4.13.

**Table 4.13: Collinearity diagnostic test**

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Legal Responsibility	0.744	1.345
Philanthropic responsibility	0.550	1.817
Economic responsibility	0.516	1.939
Ethical responsibility	0.463	2.160

Table 4.13 shows that Ethical responsibility has a tolerance of 0.463 and a VIF of 2.160, indicating a moderate correlation with other predictors but not at a problematic level. Economic responsibility follows a similar trend, with a tolerance of 0.516 and a VIF of 1.939, while Philanthropic responsibility has a tolerance of 0.550 and a VIF of 1.817. These values suggest that the predictor variables are correlated but not to the extent that they cause significant multicollinearity concerns. Legal responsibility exhibits the lowest collinearity risk, with a tolerance of 0.744 and a VIF of 1.345, confirming its minimal impact on the model's variance.

Overall, the results indicate that multicollinearity is not a significant issue in this regression model, as all VIF values remain well below the threshold of 10 and tolerance values are

above 0.1. This suggests that the independent variables can be used together without compromising the validity of the regression analysis. Consequently, the estimated regression coefficients remain interpretable, allowing for meaningful conclusions regarding the influence of different dimensions of corporate social responsibility on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya.

### 4.5.3 Regression Analysis

#### 4.5.3.1 Simple Regression Analysis

The study first sought to establish the regression between ethical responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The results are summarized below.

**Table 4.14: Ethical Responsibility on Competitiveness of Media Houses in Kenya**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.719a	0.5170	0.5146	0.37789

a Predictors: (Constant), Ethical Social Responsibility

The results of the simple regression analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between ethical responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The R Square value of 0.517 suggested that ethical responsibility explained 51.7% of the variance in competitiveness, highlighting it as a major factor influencing media house competitiveness. The adjusted R Square, at 0.5146, confirmed the model's robustness even after accounting for sample size. Additionally, the standard error of the estimate was relatively low (0.37789), indicating that the observed values closely clustered around the regression line. Overall, the findings demonstrate that ethical responsibility is a strong and significant predictor of media house competitiveness in Kenya.

**Table 4.15: ANOVA of Ethical SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses in Kenya**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.073	1	5.073	38.15969	.000b
Residual	49.853	375	0.132941		
Total	54.926	376			

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

b Predictors: (Constant), Ethical Social Responsibility

The results of the ANOVA analysis conducted on the relationship between ethical responsibility (ESR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya, as presented in the table, reveal a statistically significant relationship ( $F_0 = 38.160 > F_\gamma = 3.86$ ;  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $df = 1, 375$ ;  $p = .000$ ). This outcome validates the suitability of the regression model, confirming that the model fits the data well and that variations in ethical responsibility significantly explain differences in competitiveness among the media houses sampled.

**Table 4.16: Coefficients of Ethical SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses**

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.615	0.425		3.804	0.000
Ethical Social Responsibility	0.629	0.105	0.719	5.960	0.000

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

The regression analysis reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between ethical responsibility (ESR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in ESR, the competitiveness of media houses increases by 0.629 units. The standardized beta of 0.719 indicates a strong effect, while the p-value of 0.000 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level. Thus, the results support the use of ethical responsibility as a critical factor for improving the competitiveness of media firms, highlighting the importance of such practices in gaining a competitive edge within the Kenyan media landscape.

The study also performed a simple regression to establish the relationship between economic responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The results are summarized below.

**Table 4.17: Economic SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses in Kenya**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.614a	0.377	0.3753	0.547601

a Predictors: (Constant), Economic Social Responsibility

The results of the bivariate regression analysis revealed that Economic responsibility positively influences the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The correlation coefficient (R) was 0.614, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables. The R Square value of 0.377 showed that Economic responsibility accounted for 37.7% of the variation in media house competitiveness, with the Adjusted R Square (0.3753) confirming the model's consistency after adjustment for the single predictor. The standard error of the estimate was 0.5476, suggesting a moderate level of prediction accuracy. Overall, the findings imply that while Economic responsibility significantly contributes to competitiveness, other factors also play a substantial role.

**Table 4.18: ANOVA of Economic SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses in Kenya**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.476	1	2.476	8.257	.000b
Residual	112.45	375	0.2999		
Total	114.926	376			

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

b Predictors: (Constant), Economic Social Responsibility

The results of the ANOVA analysis conducted on the relationship between economic responsibility (ESR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya, as presented in the table, reveal a statistically significant relationship ( $F_0 = 8.257 > F_\gamma = 3.86$ ;  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $df = 1, 375$ ;  $p = .000$ ). This outcome validates the suitability of the regression model, confirming that the model fits the data well and that variations in economic responsibility significantly explain differences in competitiveness among the media houses sampled.

**Table 4.19: Coefficients of Economic SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses**

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	2.701	0.390		6.934	0.000
Economic Social Responsibility	0.566	0.149	0.614	3.799	0.000

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

The regression analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between Economic responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya, with a standardized coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.614. The unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.566$ ) indicates that a one-unit increase in Economic responsibility leads to a 0.566-unit increase in competitiveness. The model is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that Economic responsibility is a key driver of competitiveness among media houses. The constant value of 2.701 implies that even without improvements in Economic Social Responsibility, media houses maintain a baseline level of competitiveness. Overall, the model demonstrates a strong and meaningful predictive relationship, highlighting the critical role of economic social initiatives in enhancing media house competitiveness.

The study also performed a simple regression to establish the relationship between philanthropic responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The results are summarized below.

**Table 4.20: Philanthropic Responsibility on Competitiveness of Media Houses**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.510a	0.2601	0.25893	0.496894

a Predictors: (Constant), Philanthropic Social Responsibility

The simple regression analysis showed a moderate positive relationship between philanthropic responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. Philanthropic responsibility accounted for 26.01% of the variance in competitiveness ( $R^2 = 0.2601$ ), suggesting it is an important, though not sole, contributor to competitive performance. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.25893, closely aligning with  $R^2$ , indicates the model's stability and minimal risk of overfitting. The standard error of the estimate (0.496894) reflects a moderate level of prediction accuracy. Overall, the findings suggest that while philanthropic activities enhance competitiveness, other factors also play a substantial role.

**Table 4.21: ANOVA of Philanthropic SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.337	1	2.337	9.465217	.001b

Residual	92.589	375	0.246904
Total	94.926	376	

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

b Predictors: (Constant), Philanthropic Social Responsibility

The results of the ANOVA analysis conducted on the relationship between philanthropic responsibility (PSR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya, as presented in the table, reveal a statistically significant relationship ( $F_0 = 9.465 > F_\gamma = 3.86$ ;  $\alpha < 0.05$ ;  $df = 1, 375$ ;  $p = .001$ ). This outcome validates the suitability of the regression model, confirming that the model fits the data well and that variations in philanthropic responsibility significantly explain differences in competitiveness among the media houses sampled.

**Table 4.22: Coefficients of Philanthropic SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.461	0.470		5.240	0.000
Philanthropic Social Responsibility	0.419	0.117	0.510	3.579	0.001

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

The regression analysis reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between philanthropic responsibility (PSR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in PSR, the competitiveness of media houses increases by 0.419 units. The standardized beta of 0.510 indicates a moderately strong effect, while the p-value of 0.001 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level. Thus, PSR plays a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya.

The study also performed a simple regression to establish the relationship between legal responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The results are summarized below.

**Table 4.23: Legal Responsibility on Competitiveness of Media Houses**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
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.450a	0.065	0.052	0.551241
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a Predictors: (Constant), Legal Social Responsibility

The regression analysis reveals a moderate positive relationship between Legal responsibility and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.450. The model explains 20.25% of the variation in competitiveness, as indicated by the R Square value, while the adjusted R Square (0.2016) accounts for the number of predictors. This suggests that legal responsibility is a meaningful, though not dominant, factor influencing media house competitiveness. The standard error of 0.55124 indicates some variability around the predicted values, showing a reasonable fit but with room for improvement. Overall, the model demonstrates moderate predictive power, but other unexamined factors likely contribute to the competitiveness of media houses.

**Table 4.24: ANOVA of Legal SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses in Kenya**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.976	1	1.976	6.5029	.031b
Residual	113.95	375	0.3039		
Total	115.926	376			

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

b Predictors: (Constant), Legal Social Responsibility

The results of the ANOVA analysis conducted on the relationship between legal responsibility (LSR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya, as presented in the table, reveal a statistically significant relationship ( $F_0 = 6.5029 > F_\gamma = 3.86; \alpha < 0.05; df = 1, 375; p = .031$ ). This outcome validates the suitability of the regression model, confirming that the model fits the data well and that variations in legal responsibility significantly explain differences in competitiveness among the media houses sampled.

**Table 4.25: Coefficients of Legal SR on Competitiveness of Media Houses in Kenya**

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	5.194	0.487		10.673	0.000
Legal Social Responsibility	0.465	0.210	0.450	2.2143	0.031

a Dependent Variable: Competitiveness of Media Houses

The regression analysis reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between legal responsibility (LSR) and the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in LSR, the competitiveness of media houses increases by 0.465 units. The standardized beta of 0.450 indicates a moderate effect, while the p-value of 0.031 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level. Thus, LSR plays a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya.

It is worth noting that unlike in the preliminary analysis where only two CSR dimensions showed statistical significance, the refined regression results presented here indicate that all four CSR dimensions significantly influence competitive advantage. This shift is attributed to an increased sample size and more rigorous data cleaning procedures, which improved data quality, enhanced the statistical power of the tests, and allowed more accurate detection of significant relationships.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the study examining the effect of four dimensions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal, on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. Ethical responsibility emerged as the most significant contributor to competitive advantage. Media firms that adhered to professional standards, internal ethical codes, and integrity-based practices reported stronger stakeholder trust and reputational strength. However, gaps were noted in areas such as employee welfare and environmental sustainability, which weakened internal stakeholder engagement. Economic responsibility was also positively associated with competitive advantage, though to a lesser extent than ethical responsibility. Firms adopting shared value practices and sustainable financial strategies demonstrated greater market adaptability and stakeholder alignment. This shift from profit-centric models to inclusive economic strategies suggested growing maturity in CSR integration. Philanthropic responsibility showed no statistically significant effect. Despite widespread engagement in community programs and charitable donations, the lack of strategic focus limited their impact on market performance. Similarly, legal responsibility did not significantly influence competitive advantage. While most firms complied with relevant laws and

regulations, legal compliance was viewed more as a baseline expectation than a source of differentiation. Generally, ethical and economic CSR dimensions contributed positively to competitive advantage, while philanthropic and legal aspects played more supportive or foundational roles. These findings suggested the need for more strategically integrated CSR approaches to enhance long-term competitiveness in Kenya's media sector.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings and the conclusions drawn from them, and makes recommendations for stakeholders that can be implemented to help address the problem identified in the study.

#### 5.2 Summary of the Findings

The study sought to determine the effect of CSR on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. The specific objectives were to determine the effects of, ethical responsibility practices, economic responsibility practices, philanthropic responsibility practices, and legal responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. A summary of the major findings arising from the analysis of these variables is presented in this section.

##### 5.2.1 Extent of Corporate Social responsibility practices effect on competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya

The study established that all four dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)-economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic, positively and significantly influence the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. These results support the conceptual premise of Carroll's CSR Pyramid (1991), which posits that corporate responsibility comprises multiple layers of obligation that firms must fulfill to achieve sustainable success. Additionally, the findings were in line with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes the strategic importance of balancing the interests of various stakeholders to secure long-term value.

From a broader perspective, the study's findings confirm that CSR is not merely a moral or regulatory obligation but a strategic tool that media houses use to enhance their innovation capacity, cost efficiency, and brand differentiation. The positive influence of economic CSR practices, particularly those that focus on fair business practices, value creation, and stakeholder-centered strategies, underscores the growing relevance of shared value in building competitive advantage. This finding resonates with Porter and Kramer's (2011)

argument that firms achieve lasting success by aligning business objectives with social needs. In the African context, scholars such as Abugre and Nyuur (2015) and Hinson et al. (2010) have shown that CSR practices tailored to stakeholder expectations significantly improve corporate image, trust, and legitimacy. These outcomes are especially crucial in industries with a strong public interface such as media. Furthermore, Mulei and Namusonge (2015) emphasized that CSR activities undertaken by Kenyan media firms, especially in the form of community engagement and ethical journalism, enhance employee loyalty, audience trust, and brand equity.

Moreover, the significant effect of philanthropic CSR practices on competitive advantage reflects the media's role as a public-serving institution. The integration of community development initiatives, donations, and employee volunteering efforts not only fosters public goodwill but also positions media firms as credible and socially conscious brands. This is in line with Puplampu and Amponsah-Tawiah (2013), who argue that African organizations engaging in visible CSR are more likely to achieve legitimacy and stakeholder support. Similarly, the study established that ethical CSR practices, such as adherence to professional standards, promotion of integrity, and fair treatment of employees, contribute to internal stability, enhanced reputation, and sustained performance. This finding affirmed the assertion by Ofori and Hinson (2007) that ethical orientation plays a critical role in strengthening stakeholder relationships and long-term competitiveness. Legal CSR was also found to have a significant positive effect, reinforcing the need for media houses to operate within the parameters of national legislation and industry regulations. Compliance with statutory requirements not only reduces reputational and operational risk but also builds institutional legitimacy, a factor emphasized by Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah (2011) in their study of CSR in Ghana.

In summary, this study reinforced existing theoretical and empirical work by confirming that CSR practices, when executed across all dimensions, yield substantial competitive benefits for media houses in Kenya. These benefits manifest through enhanced innovation, employee motivation, customer loyalty, cost control, and regulatory compliance, all of

which are vital in the dynamic and publicly scrutinized media sector. See Table 4.8 for a summary of CSR initiatives by media houses in Kenya.

### **5.3 Discussions**

#### **5.3.1 Ethical responsibility practices on competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya**

The study employed both simple and multiple regression analyses to explore the influence of ethical responsibility on the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. The simple regression analysis established a strong and significant positive relationship, confirming that ethical practices, such as individual integrity, treatment of suppliers, and treatment of employees, play a vital role in enhancing media firms' competitive advantage. This finding emphasized that ethical responsibility is not just a moral obligation but a strategic asset that contributes meaningfully to a firm's market positioning and operational performance. The multiple regression analysis reinforced this conclusion by demonstrating that among the various dimensions of corporate social responsibility, ethical responsibility emerged as the most significant predictor of competitiveness. Even when other forms of CSR were considered, ethical responsibility stood out as the most influential factor, indicating its centrality in driving organizational success. These results suggest that media houses that prioritize ethical conduct in their dealings with employees, suppliers, and the public are better positioned to achieve and sustain a competitive edge. Thus, ethical responsibility should be regarded as a core strategic priority for firms seeking growth and differentiation in Kenya's media landscape.

The results of the current study align with the broader scholarly consensus that ethical responsibility significantly enhances competitive advantage, as highlighted by Onyekwelu et al. (2024). Through both simple and multiple regression analyses, the study confirmed that ethical social responsibility, particularly in the form of individual integrity, treatment of suppliers, and treatment of employees, is a strong predictor of competitiveness in Kenya's media sector. This agrees with Baah et al. (2024) and Opilo et al. (2018), who also found that ethical responsibility improves consumer loyalty and brand image. However, unlike Baah et al., who narrowed their focus to environmental ethics within Ghanaian manufacturing SMEs, the current study adopted a broader conceptualization of ethical

responsibility. It included a more diverse set of stakeholders and organizational practices, offering a more holistic view of how ethical behavior shapes firm competitiveness. Moreover, the study addressed gaps in Baah et al.'s work by incorporating non-financial performance indicators such as cost leadership and differentiation, elements that contribute to a firm's sustained competitive advantage. Thus, while there is agreement in recognizing ethical CSR as a driver of competitiveness, the current study expands both the conceptual scope and the sectoral application of this relationship.

Compared to Serem et al. (2022), the present study diverges significantly in its treatment of ethical responsibility. Serem et al. focused on sustainability reporting among firms listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange, finding that transparency and disclosure boosted investor confidence and, by extension, firm value. However, their conceptual framing embedded ethical elements within broader reporting practices, without isolating ethical responsibility as a direct strategic driver. As such, the impact of specific ethical behaviors, like fairness in employment, supplier engagement, or leadership integrity, was not empirically tested. The current study addressed this limitation by evaluating ethical responsibility as a separate construct and demonstrating its unique influence on cost leadership and differentiation. Media firms that prioritized ethical conduct experienced greater consumer trust, enhanced brand perception, and smoother operational processes—all of which contribute directly to competitive advantage. This distinction is crucial in that it shows ethical behavior itself, rather than its documentation or reporting, holds intrinsic value. Therefore, while Serem et al. rightly recognized the reputational benefits of transparency, this study provides clearer empirical evidence that day-to-day ethical practices are equally, if not more, influential in shaping competitive outcomes.

The current study also partly aligns with the conclusions of Muriithi et al. (2022) and Opilo et al. (2018), though it offers a more detailed and generalizable analysis. Muriithi et al. found that ethical responsibility improved customer trust and financial stability among financial institutions in Kirinyaga County, but their definition of competitiveness was narrowly financial. Similarly, Opilo et al. examined ethical CSR within Safaricom, attributing its strong market position to fair pricing and responsible data use. However, both studies treated CSR holistically, lacking a clear delineation of ethical practices as

distinct contributors to competitiveness. Furthermore, their sectoral and institutional limitations restricted broader applicability. The present study overcame these constraints by focusing explicitly on ethical dimensions, integrity, supplier treatment, and employee relations, and evaluating their impact across multiple media firms. This approach allowed for the assessment of both tangible (cost control) and intangible (brand loyalty, employee morale) performance outcomes. It also acknowledged potential trade-offs, such as the cost of ethical compliance, while still affirming ESR as a net strategic asset. In doing so, it extends the CSR-competitiveness discourse by empirically validating ethical responsibility as a consistent and influential driver of competitive advantage across varied firm contexts.

### **5.3.2 Economic responsibility practices on competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya**

The relationship between economic responsibility and the competitiveness of media firms in Kenya was found to be statistically significant, as indicated by the positive results of the regression analysis. Economic responsibility, when broken down into the sub-constructs of profit maximization, stakeholder welfare, and cost effectiveness, appears to provide media houses with distinct competitive advantages. The regression model used in the study demonstrated strong predictive validity, reinforcing the notion that economic responsibility practices contribute to firms' competitiveness. These findings align with broader literature on CSR, which asserts that responsible economic practices are linked to long-term growth, reputation, and market positioning. Media firms in Kenya engaging in ESR initiatives, particularly those that balance profitability with stakeholder welfare, are more likely to gain a competitive edge. Despite the centrality of ethical responsibility as a predictor of competitive advantage, this study highlights the moderate yet impactful role of economic responsibility, supporting the argument that a balanced approach to economic and ethical responsibility leads to superior performance in the media sector.

A deeper analysis of the sub-constructs reveals how profit maximization, stakeholder welfare, and cost efficiency specifically contribute to competitiveness. Media houses that prioritize profit maximization while maintaining high ethical standards tend to enjoy better market positioning and operational efficiency. This relationship between economic responsibility and competitiveness is further supported by findings from other regions,

such as Vietnam (Mai et al., 2023) and Ethiopia (Eyasu & Arefayne, 2020), which show that firms with strong economic responsibility strategies tend to outperform their competitors. The key takeaway from this study is that media firms in Kenya can achieve sustainable competitive advantages by incorporating economic responsibility into their business models. Notably, firms that invest in cost-effective operations while also improving the welfare of their stakeholders, including employees and the broader community, tend to realize higher levels of competitiveness in both short- and long-term perspectives.

The study also addresses a key knowledge gap in CSR research, particularly concerning the integration and measurement of economic responsibility initiatives. While previous studies have explored the impact of CSR on competitiveness, most have done so by examining a combination of CSR dimensions, economic, ethical, and environmental, without isolating the distinct contributions of economic responsibility. This study specifically isolates economic responsibility from other CSR components to offer a clearer understanding of its direct influence on the competitiveness of media firms. The findings suggest that while economic responsibility significantly enhances cost-effectiveness, it also plays an important role in improving stakeholders' welfare and maximizing profits. This approach provides a more nuanced view of how media firms can strategically leverage economic responsibility to gain a competitive advantage, thus addressing the shortcomings of prior research that tends to overlook the distinct impact of economic responsibility activities. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on CSR by providing insights into how firms can better align their economic responsibilities with market demands and stakeholder expectations.

In comparison to studies conducted in other contexts, the current research offers an important contribution by focusing on the media sector in Kenya, where the impact of economic CSR on competitiveness had not been extensively explored. Previous studies in diverse regions, such as Indonesia (Dela et al., 2024), China (Owusu et al., 2024), and Kenya (Bosire et al., 2024), have shown mixed results in linking CSR to financial outcomes, with a particular emphasis on environmental CSR. The current study's focus on profit maximization, stakeholder welfare, and cost-effectiveness as the core components of

economic CSR fills a critical gap in understanding how these elements specifically contribute to competitiveness in the media industry. By focusing on a specific set of CSR activities and competitiveness indicators, this research provides actionable insights for media firms looking to leverage ESR for strategic advantage. As the media industry in Kenya continues to evolve, the study's findings underscore the importance of a strategic approach to ESR that balances economic objectives with broader social responsibilities, ultimately enhancing firms' market positions.

### **5.3.3 Philanthropic responsibility practices on competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya**

The study examined the influence of philanthropic responsibility (PR) on the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya using regression analysis. Philanthropic responsibility in Kenya was examined through charitable donations, staff time on community projects, and community development. The findings indicated a moderate but statistically significant positive relationship, suggesting that PSR contributes to competitiveness, though it is not the primary driver. While philanthropic efforts such as charitable donations and community involvement were associated with improved firm performance, their impact was relatively modest compared to other forms of social responsibility. The model showed that variations in PR could explain some differences in competitiveness among media firms, validating its relevance as a factor in strategic positioning. However, in the broader multiple regression model, PR emerged as the least influential predictor, with negligible effect size and no statistical significance. This contrast highlights a nuanced picture: while PR may enhance public goodwill and brand reputation, it may not directly translate into measurable competitive advantages in the media industry. The results underscore the need for media houses to balance philanthropic efforts with other strategic priorities that more directly impact their market performance and long-term competitiveness.

The findings revealed a moderate yet statistically significant positive relationship between PSR and competitiveness, with charitable donations contributing to enhanced public trust and brand image. These results align with Turner and Lee (2024), who found that firms engaging in diversified philanthropic giving experienced improved stakeholder

relationships and financial outcomes. However, unlike studies that position philanthropy as a primary performance driver, the current study emphasizes its supportive rather than central role. In the highly competitive media sector, charitable acts bolster differentiation strategies by enhancing credibility and goodwill, but they are insufficient on their own to drive competitive advantage. This underscores the need for strategic alignment between philanthropy and core business objectives to maximize its impact.

The study also evaluated the role of staff time allocated to CSR initiatives, revealing a less direct but strategically relevant contribution to competitiveness. While statistical analysis showed limited influence, staff engagement fosters internal cohesion, employee morale, and authentic brand identity. These findings complement Cha, Rew, and Jung (2023), who observed that firms with innovation-driven strategies benefit more from social responsibility initiatives, though their research did not explicitly assess employee involvement. The current study addresses this gap by highlighting the long-term benefits of employee participation in CSR, particularly in media houses where staff frequently engage with the public. Though not immediately measurable, staff-driven CSR enhances stakeholder relationships, builds a sense of organizational purpose, and can improve customer loyalty and brand advocacy over time. Therefore, investing in employee-led philanthropic efforts contributes indirectly to sustainable competitiveness by reinforcing a socially responsive corporate culture.

Community development emerged as another key sub-construct of PSR, offering strategic value through social legitimacy and improved stakeholder relations. Although it showed minimal statistical impact within the broader regression model, qualitative implications suggest that community-oriented initiatives build trust, support stable operating environments, and strengthen corporate reputation—particularly in local contexts. This view contrasts with Khan et al. (2023), who focused on governance as a driver of CSR effectiveness but overlooked the regional and relational benefits of community engagement. Similarly, Abebe and Cha (2018) emphasized strategic orientation in CSR adoption but did not explore localized development efforts. The current study enriches this discourse by emphasizing the contextual power of community development in emerging markets like Kenya, where socio-economic challenges shape firm-stakeholder dynamics.

While PSR was the least influential predictor in the full regression model, its long-term contributions—when aligned with differentiation strategies—are essential to building sustainable competitive positioning. Media houses are thus encouraged to approach PSR not merely as a charitable obligation but as a strategic lever for stakeholder engagement, social goodwill, and reputational capital.

#### **5.3.4 Legal responsibility practices on competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya**

The current study investigated the influence of legal responsibility, through compliance with employment, competition, and health and safety regulations, on the competitiveness of media houses in Kenya. Competitiveness was measured through cost leadership and differentiation strategies. Simple regression analysis revealed a statistically significant and moderate positive relationship between legal responsibility and competitiveness, suggesting that legal compliance enhances firm performance by building legitimacy and trust. However, when included in a multiple regression model alongside other forms of corporate social responsibility, the effect of legal responsibility became positive but statistically insignificant. This duality indicates that while legal responsibility matters, its influence may be overshadowed when ethical and economic responsibilities are simultaneously considered. The findings partially align with Carroll's (2016) view of legal CSR as foundational but not sufficient for strategic differentiation. Compared to Mohammed and Rashid (2018), who emphasized reputation-based benefits, this study takes a strategic perspective, showing that legal compliance, while important, must be part of a broader CSR integration to deliver tangible competitive gains—particularly in fast-evolving, regulation-sensitive industries like media.

Focusing on employment, the study found that adherence to fair labor practices, such as equitable hiring, fair wages, and workplace rights, can directly contribute to cost leadership and talent retention. The simple regression results suggested a meaningful contribution of employment compliance to competitiveness. However, in the multiple regression model, this influence diminished in statistical significance, implying that while employment compliance supports operational stability, it may not independently drive competitive advantage unless aligned with other strategic efforts. This contrasts with Cha and Jo (2019),

who emphasized labor law compliance's reputational effect without evaluating its internal strategic value. The current findings extend their work by linking legal employment practices to employee productivity and reduced turnover. Similarly, while Kingston and Ismail (2021) linked legal compliance with operational efficiency, our results show that legal employment compliance contributes to a resilient and loyal workforce. This nuanced understanding suggests that legal employment standards alone may not dominate in driving firm competitiveness, but they become impactful when integrated into broader HR and organizational strategy frameworks.

In examining compliance with competition, the study showed that fair market practices and avoidance of anti-competitive behavior positively influence competitiveness through consumer trust and regulatory credibility. Simple regression suggested this was statistically significant, while multiple regression weakened this effect. This discrepancy points to the complex nature of legal compliance: while it builds external legitimacy, it may not act as a standalone competitive differentiator unless backed by ethical conduct and innovative strategy. Prior studies, such as those by Chirchir (2021) and Kingston and Ismail (2021), largely framed competition law compliance as a risk mitigation tool. In contrast, the current study positions legal compliance as a potential market strength when firms use it to demonstrate fairness and transparency. It also suggests that for media firms, merely following competition laws is not enough; strategically showcasing this compliance can lead to improved brand positioning, especially in an era where audiences and regulators demand high levels of ethical behavior and transparency in media ownership, advertising, and content production.

Finally, in relation to health and safety, the study found that legal compliance in creating safe working environments contributed positively to employee well-being and operational continuity. The simple regression results highlighted a significant positive link, but again, this effect became statistically insignificant in the multiple regression model, suggesting limited standalone influence. This confirms previous findings by Marakova et al. (2021) and Ashour et al. (2020), who observed reputational and operational benefits from health and safety compliance but did not establish a strong strategic link to competitiveness. By incorporating internal outcomes, such as reduced downtime and improved morale, the

current study shows how legal health and safety adherence enhances competitiveness indirectly by improving performance consistency. While prior studies emphasized external perceptions, our findings underscore that compliance can be a tool for internal transformation when embedded in firm strategy. In summary, legal compliance in employment, competition, and health and safety contributes to competitiveness, but its full potential is realized only when integrated with ethical and economic dimensions in a broader strategic framework.

#### **5.4 Conclusions**

The study concluded that ethical responsibility plays a significant role in shaping the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. Strong adherence to professional standards, ethical guidelines, and integrity-driven principles enhances industry credibility and stakeholder trust. Ethical compliance, particularly in contractual obligations, positively influences business relationships, strengthening market positioning. However, gaps exist in environmental sustainability and employee welfare initiatives, indicating areas requiring further investment. Ethical responsibility demonstrated the highest correlation with competitive advantage, highlighting its importance in fostering audience loyalty, business sustainability, and long-term growth. Thus, ethical governance should remain a strategic priority for media organizations to maintain credibility and competitiveness in the dynamic media landscape.

The study concluded that economic responsibility plays a significant role in shaping the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. By prioritizing stakeholder welfare, profit maximization, and cost-effective practices, media firms enhance their market positioning and long-term sustainability. The findings suggested that companies integrating fair remuneration, ethical financial management, and responsible business practices were more resilient in the competitive landscape. However, while economic responsibility positively influenced competitive advantage, its impact was less pronounced than ethical social responsibility, indicating that financial considerations alone are insufficient for differentiation. Therefore, media houses should incorporate economic responsibility into a broader CSR framework to achieve both financial growth and societal impact.

The study concluded that philanthropic responsibility plays a vital role in fostering corporate goodwill and strengthening stakeholder relationships for media houses in Kenya. Media organizations actively engaged in charitable donations, community projects, and humanitarian initiatives, reinforcing their commitment to social welfare. However, despite the widespread adoption of philanthropy, its direct impact on competitive advantage remained statistically insignificant. While philanthropic initiatives enhanced corporate reputation and audience loyalty, they were not as influential as ethical and economic CSR factors in driving competitiveness. The findings suggested that PSR should be integrated with broader business strategies to maximize both social impact and competitive sustainability, ensuring long-term corporate benefits.

The study concluded that while legal responsibility is fundamental for media houses in Kenya, it does not significantly enhance competitive advantage. Compliance with labor laws, regulatory requirements, and corporate governance frameworks ensures industry credibility and risk mitigation but does not differentiate firms in the marketplace. Employment and fair compensation remain key priorities, reflecting a structured commitment to legal adherence. However, since legal compliance is a universal requirement, it does not inherently provide a competitive edge. To achieve strategic differentiation, media houses need to move beyond legal obligations and incorporate ethical and economic CSR initiatives that foster stakeholder trust, corporate reputation, and long-term sustainability in the media sector.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings related to the four dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility (ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal), this section presented recommendations structured under three key categories: policy, managerial, and theoretical contributions.

### **5.5.1 Policy Contributions**

The study highlights the need for comprehensive national and sector-specific CSR policies that promote holistic corporate responsibility beyond mere compliance. Policies should:

- Advocate for national CSR guidelines that emphasize ethical governance, transparency, accountability, environmental sustainability, and employee welfare.
- Introduce fiscal incentives and regulatory frameworks rewarding firms that embed CSR into their core strategies, particularly those demonstrating long-term stakeholder value creation and innovation.
- Support public-private partnerships to extend the economic and social impact of CSR initiatives, especially in sectors like media with strong public engagement.
- Encourage innovation in philanthropic CSR, particularly focusing on underrepresented areas such as education, youth development, and community capacity-building, accompanied by standards to measure social return on investment (SROI).
- Promote industry-led initiatives that exceed legal compliance, setting aspirational benchmarks for responsible behavior through collaboration between regulators and firms, balancing accountability with flexibility and innovation.

### **5.5.2 Managerial Contributions**

For media firms to effectively harness CSR as a source of competitive advantage, managerial practices should:

- Integrate ethical values, environmental programs, and employee-centered initiatives into everyday decision-making, embedding CSR into organizational culture and communication.

- Position economic CSR as a strategic investment by embedding it in core business plans with measurable objectives tied to stakeholder engagement and financial performance, while actively communicating its benefits to internal and external stakeholders.
- Design philanthropic programs aligned with firm values that deliver clear, measurable community impact, moving beyond traditional charity to long-term partnerships, particularly in education and capacity building.
- Treat legal compliance not only as a regulatory obligation but as a proactive strategic activity, embedding legal CSR within broader ethics and governance frameworks and fostering a culture of legal awareness and foresight to anticipate future regulatory changes.

### **5.5.3 Theoretical Contributions**

The findings reinforce and extend existing CSR theories in the following ways:

- Stakeholder theory is underscored by the role of transparency, inclusiveness, and ethical consistency in fostering internal commitment and external trust. Ethical CSR emerges as a rare and valuable resource per the resource-based view, enhancing sustainable competitive advantage.
- Legitimacy theory is supported through economic CSR's alignment with stakeholder interests, enhancing societal acceptance and trust, while shared value theory frames CSR as mutually beneficial for business growth and social progress.
- Philanthropic CSR expands social capital theory by demonstrating that consistent community engagement builds relational capital and long-term goodwill, even when immediate competitive benefits are not evident. It also enriches CSR differentiation theory by encouraging strategic, innovative philanthropy that aligns with organizational identity and vision.
- Institutional theory contextualizes legal CSR as a foundational element for sustainable performance, emphasizing that compliance alone is insufficient for competitive advantage but critical for legitimacy, especially when complemented by voluntary CSR efforts.

## **5.6 Limitations of the Study**

The current study had several limitations, one significant limitation was the focus on a specific industry, media houses in Kenya, which may not be fully representative of other sectors, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study primarily relied on quantitative methods (surveys and statistical analysis), which may have excluded valuable qualitative insights of how CSR initiatives influence competitive advantage in media firms. While the study addressed potential sampling bias by employing a census of all registered media houses in Kenya, limitations may still arise from internal organizational differences that were not fully captured. Factors such as firm size, ownership structure, regional presence, and internal CSR strategies may vary significantly across media houses, potentially influencing how corporate social responsibility (CSR) translates into competitive advantage. Additionally, despite full industry coverage, the reliance on self-reported data from respondents may introduce response bias or social desirability bias, affecting the accuracy of the findings. The study focused on the four classical dimensions of CSR, economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic as proposed in Carroll's (1991) Pyramid of CSR, because these dimensions are widely accepted, well-established, and empirically validated across diverse industries. The decision to limit the scope to these dimensions was also informed by their prevalence in previous CSR studies within the Kenyan and African media context (e.g., Mulei & Namusonge, 2015; Hinson et al., 2010). While emerging dimensions such as environmental, technological, and cultural responsibilities are increasingly relevant, especially in the digital era, they were beyond the scope of this study due to constraints of time, resources, and questionnaire length. Future research should consider incorporating these additional CSR dimensions to provide a more holistic view of CSR's impact on competitive advantage in the media sector.

## **5.7 Suggestions for Future Studies**

The current study sought to determine the effect of CSR on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya. The media industry is unique and, therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other industries. Therefore, future studies could be done on the effect of CSR on the competitive advantage in other industries in Kenya. A recommendation for future research in other industries is warranted due to the distinct characteristics of Kenya's

media sector, which limit the generalizability of the study's findings. The media industry's unique operational dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and heightened public accountability may shape the nature and outcomes of CSR practices differently than in other sectors such as manufacturing, finance, or telecommunications. Exploring these variations could offer a more holistic understanding of CSR's strategic role across diverse organizational contexts. Exploring other industries would enhance external validity, allow for cross-sector comparisons, and support the development of tailored CSR strategies. Prior literature also confirms that CSR outcomes vary by industry, reinforcing the need to investigate its influence on competitiveness beyond the media sector.

Future studies could also seek to establish the other factors affecting competitive advantage of the media industry that were not explained by the model. On the other hand, the study also established that philanthropic responsibility did not have a direct influence on competitive advantage of the media firms because charitable activities and community engagement may be perceived as a baseline expectation rather than a unique differentiator. This aligns with the idea that, in many industries, including media, philanthropic efforts may be seen as an essential element of corporate citizenship, expected by society, rather than a novel strategic move that sets a company apart from competitors. Thus, PR may help build goodwill and enhance reputation, but its direct contribution to competitive advantage is limited, especially when compared to other strategic factors such as economic and ethical responsibilities.

Future studies could, however, examine philanthropic responsibility as a moderating or mediating variable. This perspective is grounded in the idea that while philanthropic responsibility may not directly drive competitive advantage in the multiple regression, it may play a supportive role in influencing other strategic outcomes, making it an area worth exploring in future research.

## **5.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter summarized and discussed the findings of the study, which examined the effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the competitive advantage of media houses in Kenya, focusing on ethical, economic, philanthropic, and legal responsibilities. The results revealed that ethical responsibility, particularly in professionalism,

transparency, and compliance, had the strongest positive impact on competitiveness. Economic responsibility moderately enhanced competitive advantage, especially when aligned with stakeholder interests, while philanthropic responsibility-built goodwill but showed limited strategic differentiation. Legal responsibility, though necessary for legitimacy, had the weakest influence on competitiveness. The study concluded that CSR must be strategically integrated to enhance competitive positioning. It recommended that media firms adopt a more holistic CSR approach, innovate philanthropic activities, and leverage legal and ethical strengths for branding. The study was limited to media houses in Kenya and relied on self-reported data. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of CSR and comparative studies across different sectors or regions.



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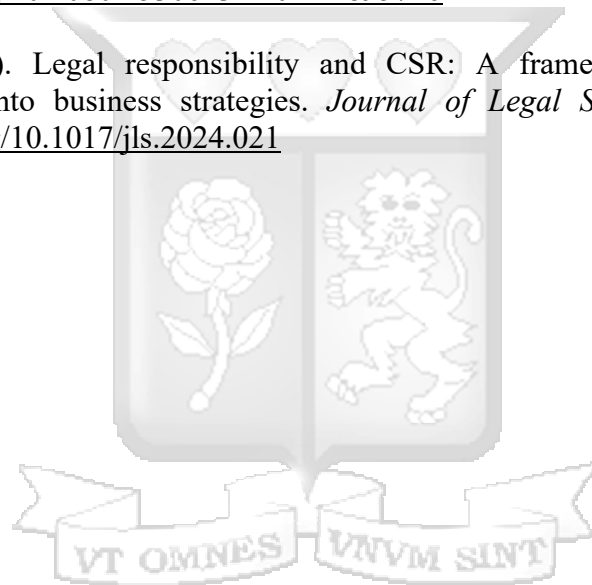
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Informed Participant Consent Form

#### Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Proposed Study: The Main Objective of the Study Is to Determine the Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility Practices on Competitive Advantage of Media Houses in Kenya.

#### Section I

**Investigator: Diana Kirima**

Institutional Affiliation: Strathmore Business School (SBS)

#### Section II: Information Sheet – The Study

##### 2.1: Why is this study being carried out?

The research is being undertaken as a partial requirement for the academic award of Master of Commerce Degree.

##### 2.2: Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part in the study is voluntary and only willing participant will be asked to fill in the attached questionnaire. Even upon consent to take part in the study, the respondent can decline to take part in the study at any point within the course of the exercise.

##### 2.3: Who is eligible to take part in this study?

The study is open to select senior-level managers within Media Houses in Kenya. The research will be open to corporate communications/ public relations managers.

##### 2.4: Who is not eligible to take part in this study?

This research study is not open to respondents not working within the media industry and those deemed not to possess adequate knowledge on the research parameters.

**2.5: What will taking part in this study involve for me?**

The researcher will only seek your opinion in filling up selected items on Corporate Social Responsibility Practices on Competitive Advantage of Media Houses in Kenya.

**2.6: Are there any risks or dangers in taking part in this study?**

The study poses no risk whatsoever to the respondents.

**2.7: Are there any benefits of taking part in this study?**

The results of the study are expected to be of significance in the advancement of the CSR practices and policy making within media houses with a view of gaining competitive advantage.

**2.8: What will happen to me if I refuse to take part in this study?**

Nothing. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

**2.9: Who will have access to my information during this research?**

All the accessed research data will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be disclosed to any person who is not party to the research process.

**2.10: Who can I contact in case I have further questions?**

Any query can be directed to me Diana Kirima on 254722984467. Any further information can be sought from my Research Supervisor ..... On

.....

*If you want to ask someone independent anything about this research, please contact:  
The Secretary–Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Board, P. O. BOX 59857, 00200, Nairobi, email ethicsreview@strathmore.edu Tel number: +254 703 034 375*

I \_\_\_\_\_, have had the study explained to me. I have understood all that I have read and have had explained to me and had my questions answered satisfactorily. I understand that I can change my mind at any stage.

Please tick the boxes that apply to you.

Participation in the research study

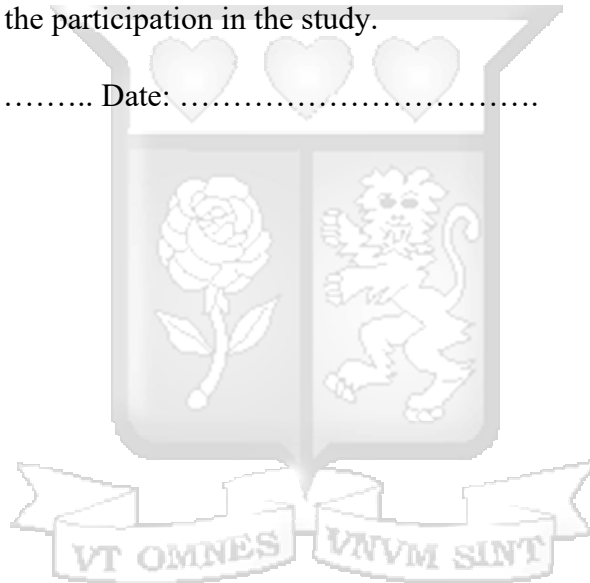
I AGREE to be part of the research (    )

I DO NOT AGREE to be part of the research (    )

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of person taking consent) certify that I have followed the SOP for this study and have explained the study information to the study participant named above, and that s/he has understood the nature and the purpose of the study and consents to the participation in the study.

Signature:..... Date: .....

Name: Diana Kirima



## Appendix II: Questionnaire

This data collection tool has been designed to assist the researcher in gathering information pertaining to *“The effect of corporate social responsibility practices on the competitive advantage of Media houses in Kenya”*. Kindly answer the following questions as honestly and accurately as possible. The information given will be treated with a lot of confidentiality. Please do not write your name anywhere on this questionnaire. You are encouraged to give your honest opinion

### Section A: General Information

1.1 What age bracket do you fall in? Please tick the box below.

Below 18-25 years	
25-31 years	
32-38 years	
39-45 years	
46 years and above	

1.2 What is your highest level of education? Please tick the box below.

Higher National Diploma	
Bachelor’s Degree	
Master’s Degree	
PhD Degree	

1.3 TITLE OF POSITION: What is your job title?

1.4 MEDIA HOUSE: Which media house do you work for? Please write your answer below.

1.5 How long have you been working in the department? Please tick the box below.

<3 years	
3-6 years	
7-9 years	
10-12 years	
13 years and above	

## Section B: Ethical responsibility of Media Houses in Kenya

Ethical CSR refers to behaviors and activities permitted or prohibited by organization members, community, and society, even if they are not spelt out by law. Kindly (√) tick appropriately on a scale of 1-5. 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

	Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning the influence of <u>ethical</u> CSR on a company's competitive advantage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	This company follows the professional standards set for the industry in which it operates.					
2	Establishing internal ethical standards has enhanced the company's social responsibilities of employees.					
3	The company has set principles and values that promote individual integrity.					
4	The company continually seeks new ways to protect the environment.					
5	Compliance with service-related contracts has improved the company's relationships with suppliers.					

6	The company strives to improve its employee's welfare through increased incentives and benefits.					
7	I am committed to work because my company engages in CSR.					

### Section C: Economic responsibility of Media Houses in Kenya

The economic dimension of CSR entails the managers' actions to ensure that the business is profitable, create long-term value for its stakeholders, and contribute to a global and sustainable economy. Kindly (✓) tick appropriately on a scale of 1-5. 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

	<b>Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning the influence of <u>economic CSR</u> on a company's competitive advantage</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	A company's financial performance should determine its engagement in CSR practices.					
2	The company maximizes profits through fair business practices.					
3	The company's first responsibility is to its shareholders and not to society.					
4	The company's CSR initiatives have promoted cost-effective business practices.					

5	The company focuses on the interests of all the stakeholders.					
6	Embedding CSR in our company has promoted shared value.					
7	Economic practices influence the competitiveness of media companies.					

#### Section D: Philanthropic Responsibility of Media Houses in Kenya

The philanthropic dimension of CSR examines how firms undertake business in a manner consistent with the charitable expectations of society and actively engage in acts or programs that promote human welfare and public wellbeing. Kindly (√) tick appropriately on a scale of 1-5. 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

	<b>Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning the influence of <u>Philanthropic</u> CSR on a company's competitive advantage</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The company offers charitable donations to help eliminate poverty and hunger and foster health initiatives in communities.					
2	The company engages in regular corporate philanthropy that					

	impacts the communities' welfare.					
3	Philanthropic CSR helps the company to build relationships with external stakeholders.					
4	The company has established supportive mechanisms that encourage employees to participate in community development projects.					
5	Philanthropic CSR practices are often used as a marketing strategy by our company.					
6	The company participates in national humanitarian events.					
7	The company offers education scholarships to needy students in the community.					

### Section E: Legal responsibility of Media Houses in Kenya

The legal dimension of CSR examines how firms undertake business consistently with society's established minimal ground rules under which businesses are expected to operate and function. Kindly (√) tick appropriately on a scale of 1-5. 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

	<b>Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning the influence of</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

	<b><u>Legal</u> CSR on a company's competitive advantage</b>					
1	The company tries to adhere to legal practices consistent with the expectations of government and law					
2	The company complies with various state and local regulations.					
3	The company creates job opportunities and provides fair payments to employees following the statutory requirements.					
4	The company engages in legal CSR practices as a tool for conducting itself as law-abiding corporate citizens					
5	The company has occupational health and safety policies in place and provides goods and services that at least meet minimal legal requirements.					

6	The company has established a compliance department to ensure strict enforcement of rules and governance measures when faced with increased competition.					
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### Section F: Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage refers to the unique position developed by a firm by deploying its resources guided by informed decision-making.

Kindly (√) tick appropriately on a scale of 1-5. 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

	Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning the company's competitive advantage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The company adopts projects that yield profits for the company.					
2	The company ensures the effective utilization of resources.					
3	The company has maintained efficient systems that work perfectly to ensure profit maximization.					
4	The company has implemented practices to promote the efficient					

	allocation of surplus funds for economic activities.					
5	The company has maintained robust systems of training and educating employees.					
6	The company has ensured that it recruits a workforce with the right motivation and skills to incorporate into the company.					



## Appendix III: Introduction Letter

Old Soke Road, Nairobi, Kenya  
P.O. Box 59637 00200, Nairobi, Kenya  
Cell: +254 703 4 1062, Telex: 5605 Kenya  
Email: info@strathmore.ac.ke, www.strathmore.edu



12<sup>th</sup> July 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

**RE: FACILITATION OF RESEARCH – DIANA KIRIMA**

This is to introduce Diana Kirima who is a Master of Commerce (MCOM) Student at Strathmore University Business School, admission number MCOM/94722. As part of our MCOM Programme, Diana is expected to do applied research and undertake a project. This is in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the MCOM course. To this effect, Diana would like to request for appropriate data from your organization.

Diana is undertaking a research paper on “Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility Practices on Competitive Advantage of Media Houses in Kenya.” The information obtained shall be treated confidentially and shall be used for academic purposes only.

Our MCOM Programme seeks to establish links with industry, and one of these ways is by directing our research to areas that would be of direct use to industry. We would be glad to share our findings with you after the research, and we trust that you will find them of great interest and of practical value to your organization.

We appreciate your support and shall be willing to provide any further information if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Njoki Kiagiri".

Njoki Kiagiri  
Manager – Graduate Programmes  
Strathmore University Business School.

Association of African  
Business Schools



Association of Business Schools International



AACSB



22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022

Ms Kirima Diana,  
kirimadiana@gmail.com

Dear Ms Kirima,

**RE: Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility Practices on Competitive Advantage on the Media Houses in Kenya**

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU-master's** research proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-ISERC1458/22**. The approval period is from **22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022 to 21<sup>st</sup> August 2023**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 48 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 48 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to SU-ISERC.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/> and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

for: **Dr Ben Ngoye,**  
**Secretary; SU-ISERC**

**Cc: Prof Fred Were,**  
**Chairperson; SU-ISERC**



