CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICE IN MTN NIGERIA

Ahmed Mohammed AUDU[a], Abdullahi Shehu ARAGA[b], Ama UDU[c]

[a,b,c]National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja.

Corresponding authors: [a]auduhmd05@gmail.com, [b]aaraga@noun.edu.ng, [c]audu@noun.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Corporate governance and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have gained immense significance in the contemporary business landscape, influencing organisations' operational strategies and ethical behaviour across various industries. The study focused on the impact of corporate governance on the corporate social responsibility of MTN Nigeria, which the MTN Nigeria Foundation manages. The study adopted an ex-post-facto research design, and the data used for analyses is mainly secondary data. After implementing the Autoregressive Distributed Lag technique, the findings of the study established the intersection between corporate governance and CSR. Board size and board gender diversity both exhibited a significant negative intersection with CSR in MTN Nigeria. The outcome of this study speaks to the need for a review of board composition.

Keywords: Corporate Governance; Corporate Social Responsibility; Sustainable Business Practices; Strategies; MTN Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving global business environment, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have emerged as essential pillars influencing the strategic and ethical conduct of organisations. These concepts have become increasingly significant as stakeholders demand greater transparency, accountability, and sustainable practices from corporations (Hermalin, 2022; Gillan, 2018). Nowhere is this more apparent than in developing economies such as Nigeria, where the telecommunication sector has witnessed rapid growth and transformation, serving as a critical driver of economic development, digital innovation, and social change.

The Nigerian telecommunications industry has grown exponentially over the past two decades, spurred by increased mobile penetration, digital connectivity, and regulatory liberalisation. As firms navigate this dynamic landscape, they face mounting expectations not only to achieve financial success but also to demonstrate commitment to social, environmental, and ethical standards. This evolving context underscores the strategic role of corporate governance in shaping CSR outcomes. Effective corporate governance provides a transparent and accountable framework for organisational oversight, aligning the interests of shareholders, management, employees, regulators, and society at large (McWilliams & Siegel, 2019; Carroll, 1991). Through sound governance practices, firms are better equipped to formulate and implement CSR strategies that enhance brand reputation, mitigate risk, and foster stakeholder trust.

Recent developments in international corporate norms have further elevated the relevance of CSR. For instance, the Davos Manifesto (2020) advocates a stakeholder-oriented approach to corporate purpose, encouraging companies to prioritise broader social impact over narrow shareholder returns. In line with this, the European Commission (2020) has proposed reforms to embed sustainability into corporate governance practices. This global shift highlights the increasing institutionalisation of CSR, necessitating deeper inquiry into the governance mechanisms that drive corporate responsibility, particularly in developing markets like Nigeria.

Despite the growing attention to CSR in the literature, a notable gap persists concerning the influence of specific corporate governance dimensions- particularly board structures on CSR performance. The board of directors plays a central role in shaping strategic direction, including CSR agendas (Ferrell et al., 2016; Eccles et al., 2014). Emerging trends, such as the appointment of Chief Sustainability Officers (CSOs) in the United States and proposals for sustainability-focused board committees in Europe, underscore the need for more nuanced studies exploring how governance attributes, such as board diversity and committee structures, influence CSR practices (Gupta et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2020).

While several studies have examined the governance–CSR nexus in sectors such as banking and construction in Nigeria (Abdulkadir & Alifiah, 2019; Ogiriki & Owota, 2022; Oluwatobi et al., 2024), research on the telecommunication sector remains relatively underdeveloped. This sector, given its scale, public reach, and impact on daily life, presents a unique context for investigating CSR implementation and its governance antecedents.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on MTN Nigeria, one of the largest and most influential players in the Nigerian telecommunications industry. Using a 12-year dataset spanning 2011 to 2022, this research investigates how two key corporate governance variables board size and board gender diversity affect CSR performance. These variables are particularly relevant given the growing recognition of diverse and well-structured boards as catalysts for improved oversight, stakeholder engagement, and ethical leadership.

By examining the intersection between corporate governance structures and CSR in MTN Nigeria, this study contributes to the broader discourse on responsible corporate behaviour in emerging markets. It offers a nuanced perspective on how governance mechanisms can be strategically leveraged to enhance CSR performance, promote stakeholder value, and align with global sustainability imperatives. Moreover, the findings are expected to inform policymakers, practitioners, and scholars on effective governance models that foster socially responsible corporate practices in Nigeria's rapidly evolving telecommunications landscape.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Howard Bowen's seminal work, Social Responsibilities of the Businessman (1953), served as the intellectual foundation for the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which has undergone significant evolution since the mid-1900s. Bowen was one of the first to argue that businesses have societal obligations that go beyond profit-making, and today, CSR is widely understood as the voluntary integration of social and environmental considerations into business operations and interactions with stakeholders. Although definitions vary, three fundamental dimensions consistently emerge in CSR literature: economic (profit generation), legal (compliance with laws), and ethical or discretionary responsibilities (actions beyond legal obligations) (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This framework was later expanded into a four-tier CSR pyramid- economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities- illustrating the multifaceted nature of corporate obligations (Oluwatobi et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2017; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

CSR, according to Sahut et al. (2019), includes actions that go above and beyond the call of duty to encourage stakeholder relationships, environmental stewardship, and human capital investment. Similarly, Abdulkadir and Alifia (2019) argue that corporate social responsibility (CSR) shows a business's moral dedication to boosting economic growth while raising the standard of living for workers, their families, and the community at large. Together, these viewpoints highlight that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a continuous moral and strategic obligation rather than just a compliance-driven endeavour.

The motivations behind corporate participation in socially responsible practices- usually presented as a choice between normative and instrumental approaches- are at the heart of one of the main discussions in corporate social responsibility. CSR is viewed by the instrumental view as a strategic instrument to enhance financial performance (Orlitzky et al., 2003). According to this viewpoint, the main reason CSR efforts are undertaken is because they have the potential to increase profitability through reducing operating expenses, reducing risks, and enhancing brand recognition (Orlitzky et al., 2003).

In contrast, the normative perspective sees CSR as a moral need (Maak & Pless, 2006). From this perspective, businesses should behave responsibly not because it increases profit but rather because it fits with more general ethical obligations to society. Ignoring financial returns, scholars like Maak and Pless (2006) contend that companies have a natural duty to support social justice, safeguard the environment, and maintain fair labour practices. Rooted in values-driven leadership and moral philosophy, this strategy encourages companies to evaluate success in relation to social and environmental contributions rather than only financial results.

Corporate strategy and stakeholder views benefit from this distinction. Companies driven mostly by pragmatic goals might be vulnerable to charges of greenwashing- presenting themselves as socially responsible while doing little meaningful change. On the other hand, those driven by normative reasons could find it difficult to defend CSR expenditures lacking direct financial benefit, which could have an impact on competitiveness in markets driven by profit.

Despite the arguments put forward by these scholars, many companies nowadays mix instrumental and normative drives in a hybrid manner. Doing so helps them to obtain both economic value and social influence- pursuing ethical, efficient CSR policies in line with long-term organisational objectives. This holistic perspective enables businesses to create confidence, control risk, and promote sustainable relationships with their stakeholders. In the end, the conflict between instrumental and normative goals highlights the intricacy of CSR. It challenges businesses to reflect not only on how they engage in CSR but also why, prompting deeper consideration of the role of corporations in shaping a more just and sustainable world.

Irrespective of the perspective of CSR, both internal and external motivations have been examined in research on CSR adoption Cheng et al., 2014; Weber et al., 2014). Although external motivations are important, internal factors- specifically, corporate governance characteristics- have become the focus of recent research as important predictors of CSR engagement (Hafenbrädl & Waeger, 2017).

2.2 Corporate Governance

Corporate governance has become crucial to ensure corporate entities' efficient, moral, and long-term management. It is generally understood to be the framework that governs how businesses are run, including the procedures, connections, and systems that govern how businesses function and are held responsible (Haslinda et al., 2016; Awad et al., 2024).

According to Abdulkadir and Alifia (2019), corporate governance is a collection of agreements, principles, and practices that form the framework of businesses. They contend that it provides guiding principles for how companies should be managed and guided to accomplish their goals and objectives, increasing corporate value and benefiting all stakeholders in the long run. Similarly, Pratama et al. (2020) define corporate governance as a collection of organizational structures, institutional arrangements, and decision-making processes that together dictate the allocation of power and accountability within the company.

Contemporary definitions of corporate governance have expanded to include the impact of corporate decision-making on nonfinancial stakeholders. According to Zaman et al. (2020), governance includes the arrangements of organizational procedures that affect both financial and nonfinancial results, as well as the frameworks that specify the rights and obligations of different stakeholders. This more comprehensive perspective recognises the ethical, social, and environmental aspects of governance.

By defining corporate governance as a system of internal and external checks and balances that encourage accountability and socially responsible behaviour, Abdelfattah and Aboud (2020) further enhance the conversation. This viewpoint is consistent with Solomon (2013), who highlights the function of governance in guaranteeing that businesses function in accordance with moral principles and public expectations.

Furthermore, corporate governance is ingrained in organisational strategy and culture and is not just a matter of compliance or regulations. A fundamental component of corporate management, governance establishes the connections between shareholders, boards of directors, management, and other stakeholders (Tricker, 2019; Oluwatobi et al., 2024). Key principles like transparency, disclosure, stakeholder engagement, fair treatment of shareholders, including gender equity, and a clear division of roles and responsibilities must all be followed for corporate governance to be implemented effectively (Lubis et al., 2025; Sloan, 2001).

In summary, corporate governance is a multifaceted concept that combines ethical, legal, and economic factors to guarantee that businesses are run in a way that is transparent, accountable, and in line with the interests of stakeholders. Its changing character is a reflection of the increasing awareness of how crucial inclusive, sustainable, and ethical business practices are in today's globalised economy.

Corporate governance variables are specific board attributes, such as board size, independence, and gender composition (Amorelli & García-Sánchez, 2021; Orazalin, 2019). Following earlier research, the study assesses board characteristics, including board gender diversity (Amorelli & García-Sánchez, 2021; Alshbili & Elamer, 2020; Pratama et al., 2020) and board size (Abdelfattah & Aboud,2020; Orazalin, 2019). The total number of directors on the board is used to calculate the size of the board. The percentage of female directors on the board serves as a proxy for board gender diversity. Empirical evidence shows that large board size enhances stakeholder representation and supports CSR initiatives (Chams & García-Blandon, 2019). Also, there is a positive link between board size and CSR engagement (Cook & Glass, 2018; Endo, 2020). Similarly, board gender diversity via the role of female directors has been found to influence CSR engagement (Francoeur et al., 2019; Furlotti et al., 2019; Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2018).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

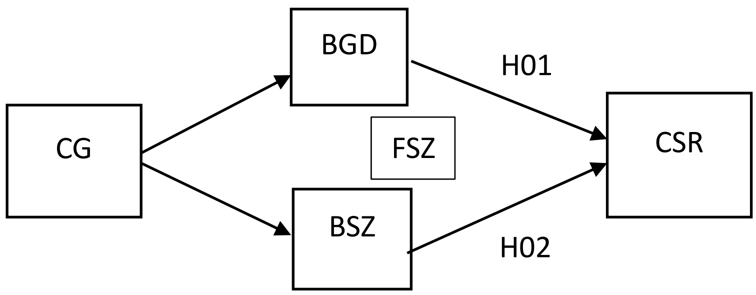

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework showing the link between Corporate Governance and CSR

2.3 Empirical Review

Corporate governance and corporate social responsibility are closely related (Ledi & Ameza-Xemalordzo, 2023; Zaman et al., 2020). Accordingly, corporate governance is considered the cornerstone of CSR (Alshbili & Elamer, 2020; Pratama et al., 2020; Abdelfattah & Aboud, 2020; Orazalin, 2019). Accordingly, a company's CSR intentions and potential are significantly influenced by the configurations of its CG structures (Lubis et al., 2025), and companies with strong CG strategies are more likely to participate in CSR initiatives (Oluwatobi et al., 2024; Ledi & Ameza-Xemalordzo, 2023; Zaman et al., 2020). This position is supported by the resource dependency theory, which contends that a robust board has a significant impact on the firm's strategic decisions and outcomes, including CSR (Ching & Tran, 2022; Abdulkadir & Alifiah, 2019; Orazalin, 2019). This underscores the importance of board characteristics in an organisation's strategic decision-making process, including CSR implementation. Therefore, board characteristics play a significant role in explaining CSR activities. Participation in CSR would be correlated with more efficient CG systems. The adoption of CSR activities is encouraged by CG mechanisms such as board size and board gender diversity (García Martín & Herrero, 2020). For example, Abdulkadir and Alifiah (2019) analysed governance dimensions and CSR disclosure in Nigeria's construction sector. Using regression analysis on five firms from 2013 to 2017, they found a positive relationship between board size and CSR disclosure. Similarly, Muhammad et al. (2017) examined 179 companies in Pakistan from 2009 to 2015 and concluded that board size, along with meeting frequency and independence, significantly influences CSR practices.

In the Vietnamese context, Ching and Tran (2022) employed agency and stakeholder theories to examine board attributes and CSR. Their findings revealed that larger board sizes positively impact CSR performance, while CEO duality and board gender diversity had statistically insignificant effects. In Malaysia, Sadou et al. (2017) demonstrated that firms with larger boards disclosed more comprehensive CSR information. Akbas (2016) further confirmed a positive relationship between board size and environmental disclosure among 62 non-financial Turkish firms.

Pratama et al. (2020) examined the relationship between corporate governance attributes (political connections, women's proportion, multi-ethnicity, family ownership, and the composition of the board and foreign ownership of the board) on corporate social responsibility disclosure quality among 353 public listed companies in the Indonesia Stock Exchange in the year 2017. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the relationship between corporate governance attributes and corporate social responsibility disclosure quality. The findings of the study show that political connections of boards of commissioners, the composition of boards of directors, and foreign ownership significantly influence corporate social responsibility disclosure quality. Lu and Wang (2021) explored global trends linking internal governance practices- such as CEO non-duality, ESG committees, and gender-diverse boards- to environmental and CSR performance. Their study confirmed that gender diversity enhances CSR outcomes. In the U.S., Lu (2019) utilised propensity score-matching to show that gender-diverse boards have a statistically significant positive effect on environmental performance, supporting the resource dependence theory. Li et al. (2017) examined the moderating effect of industry context and found that gender diversity on boards has varied CSR impacts depending on the firm's environmental risk profile. Likewise, Naciti (2019) studied 362 firms across 46 countries and concluded that board gender diversity and the separation of CEO and chair roles are positively associated with sustainability performance.

Hypothesis Formulation

Fewer studies have been carried out in this area concerning Nigeria. Existing studies such as Oluwatobi et al. (2024), Abdulkadir and Alifiah (2019), and Ogiriki and Owota (2022) are notable. However, these studies did not mirror the telecommunication industry in Nigeria, and as such, their conclusions cannot be final. Also, considering the impact of the telecommunication industry on the environment, it is important to establish the role corporate governance plays in fostering responsible business practices in the industry. Therefore, this study proposed the following hypotheses.

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between board size and the corporate social responsibility performance of MTN Nigeria.

H_{02}: Board gender diversity does not significantly influence the corporate social responsibility performance of MTN Nigeria.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The present study employs a combination of stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, and resource dependency theory to investigate the effects of board characteristics on CSR. According to the resource dependency theory, directors are likely to act as a link between a firm and its external resources, reducing uncertainty through the implementation of CSR, which is crucial for sustainable development (Oluwatobi et al., 2024; Ledi & Ameza-Xemalordzo, 2023).

According to the stakeholder theory, any entity’s long-term survival and sustainable growth rely on the cooperation of all stakeholders (Zaman et al., 2020). This theory’s central tenet is that a company’s goals and objectives can be accomplished by striking a balance between the competing demands and interests of different stakeholder groups, such as employees, clients, suppliers, auditors, shareholders, and the general public. Regarding a company’s CSR initiatives, such as environmental management, the effective and efficient use of natural resources, the abolition of discrimination, and the employment of minority groups, stakeholders have particular needs and expectations (Oluwatobi et al., 2024; García Martín & Herrero, 2020). In this sense, companies should implement decisions focused on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in a way that aligns with stakeholders’ expectations and needs to win their support (Orazalin, 2019). Thus, the stakeholder theory supports improvements in the implementation of CSR activities to satisfy the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.

According to the legitimacy theory, business organisations and society have a social contract (Alshbili & Elamer, 2020; Pratama et al., 2020). Business organisations use CSR activities to increase legitimacy and legitimise their actions to meet the contractual requirements of this relationship (Pratama et al., 2020). According to the legitimacy theory, corporate entities use CSR decisions to preserve and bolster their legitimacy (Orazalin, 2019). By investing in CSR initiatives like protecting natural resources, preventing unemployment and poverty, and promoting societal well-being and prosperity, telecommunications companies can, in this sense, defend their existence and gain social acceptance (Pratama et al., 2020; Orazalin, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Data

The study adopted an ex-post-facto research design, and data used in this study are mainly secondary data obtained from the Nigeria Exchange Limited (NGX) website. MTN Nigeria is listed on the NGX; this entails that the audited financial statement report is domiciled on the NGX website for public access.

Model Specification

This study employed the Autoregressive Distributed Lag regression model to evaluate the intersection between corporate governance and CSR performance of MTN Nigeria. The model of the study is functionally stated as follows:

CSR = f (BSZ, BGD)

The model is stated in algebraic form as follows:

$$\Delta CSR_y = \emptyset_0 + \theta_1 \sum_{j=1}^{p} \Delta CSR_{t-j} + \theta_2 \sum_{j=1}^{q} \Delta BSZ_j + \theta_3 \sum_{j=1}^{q} \Delta BGD_j + \theta_4 \sum_{j=1}^{q} \Delta FSZ_j + \gamma_0 CSR_{t-j} + \gamma_1 BSZ_j + \gamma_2 BGD_j + \gamma_3 FSZ_j + ECT_{j=1} + \varepsilon_t$$

Where;

CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility

BSZ = Board Size

BGD = Board Gender Diversity

FSZ = Firm Size

ECT = Error Correction Technique

e_t = error term also known as stochastic random variable.

Data Analysis Technique

This study employed descriptive and inferential statistics alongside pretest and post-test analysis. The main statistical tool of data analysis is the Autoregressive Distributed Lag

(ARDL) Technique proposed by Pesaran and Shin (1999). This is because the variables considered exhibited a mixed order of integration and the ARDL allows for a dynamic error correction model and can entertain mixed orders of integration in the time series (Haruna & Lawal, 2024).

4. DATA ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Pre-estimation tests

Table 1 Augmented Dickey-Fuller test for unit root

	Lag Diff	**T Stat**	**P-value**	**1%**	**5%**	**10%**	**Remark**
BSZ	D(BSZ(-1)) C	-6.164414	0.0001	-3.615	-2.941	-2.609	Stationary @ 5%
BGD	D(BGD(-1)) C	-6.031830	0.0000	-3.615	-2.941	-2.609	Stationary @ 5%
FSZ	FSZ(-1) C	-6.536136	0.0000	-3.615	-2.941	-2.609	Stationary @ 5%
CSR	CRS(-1) C	-6.563122	0.0000	-3.615	-2.941	-2.609	Stationary @ 5%

Source: E-views 10 Computation

Table 1 shows the stationarity result, which revealed that BGD and BSZ were found to be stationary at the 1st difference and order one (1), while FSZ and CSR are stationary at level and order 0. As observed, all the test statistics probability values are below the 5% critical values. This guided the choice of ARDL as the estimation technique.

Descriptive Statistics

The mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values of the data set are analysed to understand the structure or make-up of the raw data.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	CSR	BGD	BSZ	FSZ
Mean	86141931	1.800000	7.400000	1.20E+08
Median	22406875	2.000000	7.000000	50843958

Maximum	1.35E+09	3.000000	8.000000	1.46E+09
Minimum	1813805.	1.000000	7.000000	6963005.
Std. Dev.	2.30E+08	0.757865	0.496139	2.36E+08
Skewness	4.647956	0.343622	0.408248	4.744390
Kurtosis	24.99055	1.846939	1.166667	27.06092

Source E-views 10 Computation

According to Table 2, the average expenditure on CSR by the MTN Nigeria Foundation is 86141931 million naira with a standard deviation of 2.30% in the dataset, while the lowest and highest CSR expenditures made by the MTN Nigeria Foundation are 1.35 billion naira and a minimum of 1813805 million naira. The average BGD is 1.8%; this suggests that since 2011 an average of 1.8% of the board are women, the standard deviation from the mean is 0.76%, while the minimum and maximum women representation in the board is 1 woman and 3 women, respectively. The average number of board members (BSZ) is 7.4% with a standard deviation of 0.49%; however, the highest record of board members is 8 members, while the minimum number of board members is 7.

Correlation

The correlation matrix in Table 3 below shows the relationship between all pairs of variables in the model and the relationship between all explanatory variables and the explained variable.

Table 3: Correlation Table

	CSR	BGD	BSZ	FSZ
CSR	1	0.05355727017	-0.17993734424	0.93431399448
BGD	0.05355727017	1	-0.87287156094	0.09106332189
BSZ	-0.17993734424	-0.87287156094	1	-0.16830208163
FSZ	0.93431399448	0.09106332189	-0.16830208163	1

Source: E-views 10 Computation

As shown in Table 3, all the variables are perfectly correlated with themselves. Corporate social responsibility has a positive correlation with board gender diversity (BGD) and firm size (FSZ) while it has a negative (-0.179) correlation with board committee size. The implication is that an increase in BGD and FSZ will significantly increase MTN Nigeria Foundation's spending on corporate responsibility, while an increase in board size will reduce the foundation's spending on CSR.

Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) Short-run Model

Table 4: ARDL Short run Error Correction Model

ECM Regression

Case 3: Unrestricted Constant and No Trend

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	1.78E+09	2.35E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BGD)	3.98E+08	1.94E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BGD(-1))	2.02E+08	2.04E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BGD(-2))	3.09E+08	1.54E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BSZ)	7.89E+08	3.89E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BSZ(-1))	2.87E+08	4.15E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BSZ(-2))	7.13E+08	3.12E+08	0.000000	0.0000
D(BSZ(-3))	2.13E+08	78555805	0.000000	0.0000
D(FSZ)	1.236421	0.131855	9.377105	0.0000
D(FSZ(-1))	0.337456	0.160831	2.098207	0.0488
D(FSZ(-2))	0.427502	0.103594	4.126689	0.0005
D(FSZ(-3))	0.141155	0.068797	2.051757	0.0535
CointEq(-1)*	-1.213340	0.160605	-7.554824	0.0000

R-squared	0.977232	Mean dependent var	881933.9
Adjusted R-squared	0.965353	S.D. dependent var	3.55E+08
S.E. of regression	66163956	Akaike info criterion	39.12737
Sum squared resid	1.01E+17	Schwarz criterion	39.69919
Log likelihood	-691.2926	Hannan-Quinn criter.	39.32695
F-statistic	82.26487	Durbin-Watson stat	2.439503

Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000

Source: E-views 10 Computation

As shown in Table 4, the probability value (0.0000), which is lower than the study's 0.05 significant level, indicates that the model adopted for the study is significant and fit for use; this is evidenced by positive f-statistics of 82.26487. The ARDL short-run analysis shows that adjusted R^2 is 0.965353. This entails that about 97% of the variance of the dependent variable "corporate social responsibility" is explained by the independent variables (board size and board gender diversity) in the short run. The intercept, or constant, is significant in the short run with a $p<0.05$.

In the short run, board gender diversity has a positive coefficient and is significant in predicting CSR. Also, board committee size in the short run exhibited a positive coefficient and is significant at all lags. Firm size as a control maintained a positive coefficient and significant probability value at all lags.

These findings suggest that in the short run, board gender diversity and board committee size will significantly and positively impact the CSR of the MTN Nigeria Foundation. Also, firm size, which is a control variable, suggests that the size of the firm can impact the CSR of the MTN Nigeria Foundation.

Table 5: ARDL Bounds Test/Long Run Cointegration Test

F-Bounds Test			Null Hypothesis: No levels relationship	
Test Statistic	Value	Signif.	I(0)	I(1)
F-statistic	12.40769	10%	2.72	3.77
k	3	5%	3.23	4.35
		2.5%	3.69	4.89
		1%	4.29	5.61

Source: E-views 10 Computation

The results of the ARDL bound test, or long-run test, shown in Table 5, indicate that the F statistic with a coefficient of 12.40769, which is greater than the lower bound value of -3.23 and upper bound value of 4.34 at a 5% level of confidence. The null hypothesis “no levels of relationship” will be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis will be accepted; this indicates that a long-run relationship exists.

Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) Long-Run Error Correction Model

Table 6: Long Run ECM

Levels Equation

Case 3: Unrestricted Constant and No Trend

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
BSZ	-1.77E+08	50475721	-3.513284	0.0022
BGD	-93459534	34535318	-2.706202	0.0136
FSZ	0.999984	0.220845	4.527982	0.0002

EC = CSR - (-177335549.9039*BSZ -93459533.8263*BGD + 1.0000*FSZ)

Source: E Views 10 Computation

Test of Hypotheses

The test of hypotheses was achieved using the ARDL long-run estimates. Board gender diversity has a negative coefficient of -93459534 and is significant at 0.01 with 0.0136. The implication of this is that every percentage (1%) increase in board gender diversity will result in a negative significant decrease in the corporate social responsibility of the MTNN Nigeria Foundation in the long run. Thus, the null hypothesis (**H_{01}**) is rejected. Similarly, the long-run analysis reveals that in the long run, the board committee size has a negative (-1.77) and significant (0.0022) impact on the CSR of the MTN Nigeria Foundation, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis (**H_{02}**). The implication is that for the time the board size increases in the long run, the CSR expenditures of the foundation will drop while the remuneration allocated to the board will increase.

Post Estimation (Durbin Watson Autocorrelation Test)

The Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic is used as a test for autocorrelation in the residuals of a statistical regression analysis. The result shows a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.439503, which rightly falls within the acceptable range of 1.5-2.5, indicating the absence of serial correlation.

Discussion of findings

This study examined the nexus between corporate governance and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a strategic approach to sustaining the business operations of MTN Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) modeling technique, which is well-suited for exploring both short- and long-term dynamics among variables.

The long-run estimates revealed that both board gender diversity and board size exert a statistically significant and negative influence on the CSR activities of MTN Nigeria. This outcome diverges from the findings of Lu and Herremans (2019), Ching and Tran (2022), and Oluwatobi et al. (2024), who reported a positive association between corporate governance metrics and CSR engagement. Specifically, Oluwatobi et al. (2024), using the Panel-Corrected Standard Errors (PCSE) approach, identified a significant positive relationship between corporate governance indicators, such as board characteristics and CSR practices, thereby highlighting a contextual discrepancy that warrants further inquiry.

Conversely, the results of the current study are supported by the findings of Abdulkadir and Alifiah (2019), who observed that certain corporate governance elements- namely, board composition and audit committee structure- exerted a negative impact on CSR disclosure. These conflicting empirical outcomes suggest that the influence of governance mechanisms on CSR is not universally consistent and may be contingent upon institutional, regulatory, and cultural contexts.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings resonate with the stakeholder theory, which states that a company's goals and objectives can be accomplished by striking a balance between the competing demands and interests of different stakeholder groups. The negative correlation between gender diversity and CSR and board size does not necessarily mean that diversity or larger boards are bad. Instead, it emphasises that effective CSR requires the proper procedures, incentives, and cultural enablers because structure alone is insufficient (García Martín & Herrero, 2020; Abdulkadir & Alifiah, 2019). MTN Nigeria can reverse that negative trend and transform governance reforms into real social impact gains by empowering diverse directors, optimising board composition, and integrating CSR into governance and incentive frameworks.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of our research shed significant light on the relationship between corporate governance and corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies for sustainable business practices. The study established that board size and gender diversity exhibit a negative and significant impact on CSR. This finding has important policy implications including the need for Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to consider issuing guidelines or best practice thresholds for the ideal board size, weighing the benefits of diversity against the costs of coordination, given the detrimental long-term effects of larger boards on CSR outcomes. Also, gender diversity is still important for fair representation, but MTN Nigeria should combine more women on the board with official mentorship and leadership training to make sure new directors can make a meaningful contribution to CSR strategy.

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