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Assessing the impact of corporate social responsibility communication on nonprofit organisations in South Africa

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate whether the content of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) messages predicts communication outcomes in South African nonprofit organisations (NPOs). The study found a positive association between CSR message content and CSR communication outcomes. Additionally, CSR message content in nonprofit organisations is positively linked to their CSR communication outcomes. Furthermore, support for community-related activities positively impacts CSR communication outcomes, thereby explaining the correlation between CSR message content and communication effectiveness. The study lays the groundwork for non-profit organisations seeking optimisation of their CSR messaging to achieve a wider socio-economic impact on the public at large. These results underscore the importance for nonprofit organisations to strategically develop CSR messages that highlight their support for community-related activities. By emphasising such content in their communication efforts, organisations can enhance their CSR communication outcomes, potentially fostering stronger relationships with stakeholders and garnering increased support for their initiatives.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility, Communication, Developing countries, Nonprofit organisations, Message content, South Africa

Introduction

Nonprofit organisations are an important part of the global economy and are committed to improving communities and serve as key agents for poverty reduction (Dahie, 2019). Starting from the premise that the latter statement concerns the *raison d'être* of nonprofit organisations, we can conclude that in developing countries where governments have failed to provide essential services, these organisations are stepping in to fill the gap (Degenaar, Fourie, & Holtzhausen, 2022). We have observed an increase in the number of organisations focusing on societal interests. Fuseini, Sulemana,

Abdulai, Ibrahim, and Azure (2022) refer to them as the “sweethearts of development” as they play a critical role in addressing challenges where the state has failed to provide for the welfare of its citizens. These organisations are major forces in economies around the world, addressing a wide range of issues, from human and civil rights to poverty alleviation, support for the underprivileged (Svara, 2021) and the protection of children (Degenaar et al., 2022). In numerous countries, NPOs have been seen to collaborate with government and business sectors. For instance, in South Africa, there are over 270,313 registered NPOs (South African Government, 2023) whose roots date back to the pre-democratic era and are an integral part of the country’s socio-political landscape. They dedicate their time to various initiatives that target the youth, the elderly, children and women in the areas of social welfare, education and other related humanitarian activities. Their agenda, in this sense, is addressing the

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region's socio-economic challenges and largely focuses on charitable activities directed at those who are marginalised and disenfranchised. At the same time, it is crucial to keep in mind that over the years, nonprofit organisations have undergone numerous changes that have led Sande, de Langen, and Perez Salgado (2020) to propose business models that these organisations should follow. Therefore, it is evident that communication was moved into the centre of each organisation's strategic priorities. Be that as it may, it is important to note that NPOs still maintain a reserved approach to communication. In spite of this, organisations have only recently paved the way for more nuanced communication strategies aimed at securing their existence and sustainability. In fact, according to Rioplus (2006), stakeholder engagement is valuable as these individuals can act as change agents by communicating with their constituencies. It comes as no surprise that South African NPOs are expected to keep up with these evolving communication strategies and are tasked with identifying the best approaches to address the diverse needs of stakeholders.

Communication in NPOs raises a concern. Any attempt to bring stakeholders into the process often proves unwieldy. Despite various efforts being undertaken to improve communication within the NPO sector, research shows that some managers in these organisations may still overlook certain stakeholders. Instead, they prioritise their immediate audience, potentially putting their organisation's sustainability at risk (Oliver & Riley, 1996). Quite often, this inadvertently leads to a lack of understanding of the larger audience and their needs. NPOs need to be visible to the societies they serve so that stakeholders can notice and be aware of them. Degenaar et al. (2022) provide an example of how strategic integrated communication can be designed and implemented to improve in child protection organisations. The central focus of Degenaar et al. study is the importance of communication in achieving the organisation's goals of protecting vulnerable children. They highlight that communication is not seen as a strategic priority in NPO environment and that skilled communicators are often not hired. The argument put forward in this study is that the communication strategy can no longer present one image to the media and another to the stakeholders. In the Degenaar et al. (2022) study, we learn that communication encompasses various areas, all of which aim to ensure that organisations achieve their goals of raising awareness and achieving effective communication outcomes. The Degenaar et al. (2022) study exemplifies the ideal of successful communication, contributing to the nascent literature on CSR communication. Similarly, the study by Choto, Iwu, and Tengeh (2020) places greater emphasis on marketing communication rather than

CSR communication. Despite this emphasis, the survey found that NPOs primarily use marketing efforts to advocate for their causes rather than focusing on long-term sustainability.

The current study challenges the prevailing view that communication in nonprofit organisations is limited to strategic communication and marketing. It introduces the concept of corporate social responsibility communication and emphasises the importance of integrating germane CSR initiatives into an organisation's overall communication strategy. We argue that integrating CSR initiatives into a communication strategy is appealing and goes beyond the mere act of philanthropy. It requires recognising that this is a holistic approach supporting community-related activities where more than one goal is addressed. Essentially, it requires shifting from a dominant focus on positive communication outcomes to engaging in communication at the grassroots level and within the community. We refer to this type of communication focused on the community as community-oriented communication. This type of communication often involves conveying messages about corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, with the main objective being to communicate information about the company's CSR initiatives to its stakeholders (Morsing, 2006) and taking into account the type of information to be presented to stakeholders. It allows for an acknowledgement of how the crucial task of CSR communicators is to convey information about the company through verbal and non-verbal messages. The goal is to persuade the identified stakeholders and determine the appropriate vehicle for conveying the messages. We assert that effective CSR communication can directly impact the achievement of NPOs' communication goals through the design of message content. Therefore, it is important to note that how stakeholders respond to a particular message may be influenced by how it is crafted. It also follows that the message serves as a tool to raise awareness of organisational change (Kuchi, 2006) and such messages must reflect the mission of each NPO.

Although interest in CSR communication has increased in the literature, Jamali and Karam (2018) argue that the field of CSR communication remains relatively sparse and peripheral compared to the extensive literature on communication in other domains, such as integrated strategic communication. Our work builds on this foundation to determine the presence of CSR communication in South African NPOs. To our knowledge, real-life examples of its application are difficult to find, highlighting the neglect of NPOs and the importance of their visibility. Supporting this scarcity, the only recent data we could find in South Africa was from an unpublished doctoral thesis study

conducted by Tsinga Mambadja (2023) titled “Exploring the determinants of corporate social responsibility communication on communication outcomes of nonprofit organisations in Gauteng”. The respondents were employees of NPOs. According to the findings of this study, only 6.1% of respondents indicated that they were from a communication related department. This is not surprising because respondents in this study work for small NPOs. When asked about the communication channels used to communicate internally, the respondents indicated that communication regarding community-related activities is mainly internal, with limited effort expended on external stakeholders. The author identified three primary communication channels that were used internally to communicate CSR activities – office meetings, word-of-mouth and emails. Participants recommended websites, social media, or a hybrid strategy combining the two when asked about communication channels external stakeholders should use. From the results of this thesis, it becomes clear that communicating CSR initiatives is still an afterthought among South African NPOs. There are no proper guidelines on when and how to do it.

Referencing the aforementioned thesis within this paper serves as an endeavour to address the existing dearth of knowledge in this field. However, despite this contribution, it is worrying that CSR communication still receives little attention. This study aims to fill a theoretical gap by providing insights into how nonprofit organisations in South Africa can enhance their CSR communication and suggest key areas they should focus on when communicating with stakeholders. It examines the relationship between the content of CSR messages, support for community-based activities and the outcomes of CSR communication. The prioritisation of content in CSR messages can be an effective strategy for organisations to communicate their commitment to social responsibility to prospective investors and customers.

This study challenges the prevailing view that communication in nonprofit organisations is solely focused on strategic communication and marketing. Instead, it introduces the concept of corporate social responsibility communication emphasising the significance of incorporating CSR initiatives into an organisation’s overall communication strategy. This shift in perspective suggests that effective CSR communication goes beyond mere act of philanthropy. It involves recognising that supporting community-related activities can yield positive communication outcomes and have a significant impact at the grassroots and the local community levels. The findings of this study may be of great value to such organisations seeking to optimise their CSR messaging.

Literature and hypotheses

The ability of an organisation to provide information about its operations and activities has been one of the defining features of the success of CSR communication. CSR communication is a process by which organisations create and communicate information about their CSR initiatives and social responsibility to their stakeholders. It can be achieved by formulating the organisation’s CSR initiatives, anticipating stakeholder needs, formulating CSR policies and managing multiple corporate communication platforms.

In the literature, some studies have utilised Tonello’s (2011) framework for corporate social responsibility communication to explain CSR communication. Tonello’s framework frequently mentioned in studies focusing on CSR communication guided the theoretical framework for this study. It explains how effective corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication is based on understanding the what, where, and how of communication, as well as the the CSR activities and their impact on stakeholders. This gives rise to three elements: information, response, and participation. These elements are important to consider, especially when planning CSR communication, as they may determine how organisations engage with stakeholders and how they can achieve their communication objectives. Tonello (2011) emphasises the significance of information, arguing that organisations ought to establish communication channels to inform stakeholders about their CSR goals. It is expected that this approach will be an effective means of meeting the communication needs of NPOs. In his seminal work, Tonello presented several variables, including message content, support for community-related activities and communication outcomes, which serve as the foundation of the conceptual model for this study. By adopting Tonello’s model in this study, we examine how the model can guide NPOs seeking to communicate their CSR activities. Communication as a whole is essential, as it serves as a cornerstone for building trust and fostering long-term relationships with stakeholders. The Tonello framework can be a valuable guide for NPOs that want to create a robust CSR communication plan. The framework describes how to develop lasting relationships with stakeholders and achieve organisational goals. Figure 1 adopts this framework and illustrates how the components of the framework can be utilised to guide NPOs in deciding which priorities to focus on when communicating their CSR initiatives. The diagram includes arrows to indicate the likely relationships between the various constructs being investigated.

Figure 1 suggests that two factors contribute to the outcomes of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. These factors are the CSR message content

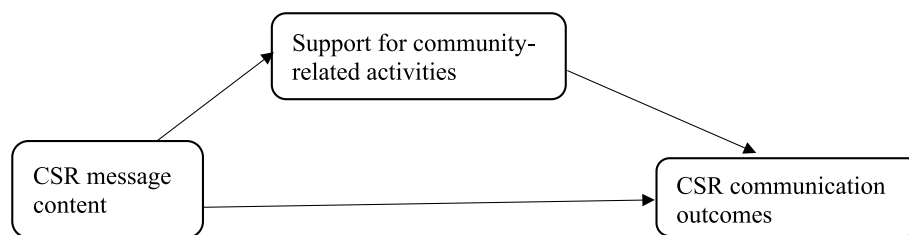


Fig. 1 Conceptual model of the impact of CSR message content on CSR communication outcomes

and support for community-related activities. Because Tonello (2011) emphasises the importance of CSR messages for shaping the outcomes of CSR communication, he propounded that the content of CSR messages has a significant impact on how organisations align their business strategies with social goals and how they communicate their commitment to social initiatives or causes.

Corporate social responsibility messages

With the recognition of communication as involving selecting and using appropriate and effective messages, it is clear that communication scholars are interested in how communicators choose and use messages (Clark & Delia, 1979). This points to the cruciality of messages for an organisation's effective communication strategy. Therefore, the entire communication system within the organisation can be improved by creating concise, clear and well-articulated messages. Tourish and Hargie (2004) define messages as signals and symbols that convey meaning. Communication messages are usually conveyed through a various ways, including visual, verbal, or tactile (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Generally, the message reinforces what needs to be communicated (West & Turner, 2022) by deciding which words to use and which features to convey to the receiver (Gauzente & Roy, 2012). This underscores the long standing recommendation of previous research (Gauzente & Roy, 2012; Taylor, 2015; Zanon & Teichmann, 2016) to develop and communicate messages that have an impact on receivers in terms of how they impact them.

Nonprofit organisations' success in communication is legitimised by how their messaging contributes to informing stakeholders about CSR programs and helps determine whether the CSR initiative benefits them. Having a strong presence and building awareness of their mission within the local community creates a competitive advantage that can lead to lasting relationships with potential donors (McKeon, 2020). Grounded in this understanding, Dunn and Harness (2018) argue that corporate social responsibility messages should focus on commitment to a social cause, the impact of that commitment on society and the compatibility of the social cause with the company's core business. For example, Otondo,

Van Scotter, Allen, and Palvia (2008) found that messages significantly contribute to communication outcomes. In this case, this study suggests that the message sent to target audiences may encourage support for a company's CSR initiatives, especially in the case of nonprofit organisations in South Africa.

Building on earlier discussions and considering insufficient research on this aspect of communication, our study proposes three hypotheses that may influence CSR communication outcomes. Fig. 1 serves as a basis for the three hypotheses presented below:

- H1: CSR message content is positively associated with support for community-related activities.
- H2: CSR message content is positively associated with CSR communication outcomes.
- H3: Support for community-related activities is positively associated with CSR communication outcomes.

Methodology

Data collection and sample

The questionnaires were distributed to nonprofit organisations (NPOs) listed in Schedule 3A of the South African Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) of 2015 (Public Finance Management Act. No. 1 of 1999). Based on the list of NPOs obtained from the PFMA, this study only focused on NPOs located in the Gauteng province of South Africa. A total of 245 employees completed the questionnaire as part of the realised sample.

The questionnaire

The authors developed a questionnaire for this study based on Tonello's (2011) framework for communicating corporate social responsibility in the workplace. The questionnaire covered several variables on how the respondents' organisation communicated with the public about its corporate social responsibility. Factors considered included the content of CSR messages, the channels and strategies utilised for CSR communication, the outcomes of CSR communication, internal company characteristics and external stakeholder characteristics that influenced CSR communication.

Following a factor analysis of the collected data from these questionnaire items, three constructs were identified, namely, CSR message content, support for community-related activities and CSR communication outcomes. The dependent variable (Y) was CSR communication outcomes and the independent variable (X) was CSR message content. (M) is a mediator that represents support for community-related activities. CSR message characteristics refer to messages used to demonstrate an organisation's commitment to the community, describe the societal impact of the organisation's activities on the community, and how organisations actively engage stakeholders in their activities concerning the community. The following items were used to evaluate the content of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) message: Your organisation's community-related communication usually contains content that ("illustrates the organisation's commitment to community well-being"), ("describes the societal impacts of the organisation's community-related activities"), ("is aligned with the organisation's main organisational activity") and ("provides information but also gives stakeholders opportunities to respond").

Support for the community-related activities construct pertain to statements that describe how the organisation or the organisation's industry is committed to supporting community-related activities. Respondents were then asked to rate the level of community-related support from both the organisation and their industry based on the following items: ("the organisation supports community-related activities.") and ("the organisation's industry supports community-related activities").

The CSR communication outcomes construct focuses on outcomes such as employee trust, consumer purchases and more positive employee attitudes towards the organisation. It consisted of the following items: ("stakeholders are likely to use our services"), ("stakeholders have become more loyal to this organisation"), ("investors have become more likely to invest in this organisation"), ("investors have become more loyal to this organisation"), ("staff have become more productive") and ("staff have become more positive in what they say about this organisation").

Participants' responses to questionnaire items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. In addition to the constructs to be tested in this study, the questionnaire included questions seeking respondents' demographic information.

Data analysis

For the analysis, SPSS version 28 was used for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Andrew Hayes' PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2013) tested indirect effects through a simple mediation model that included the

bias-corrected bootstrapping technique. The aim was to examine the role of support for community-related activities in mediating the relationship between the content of the CSR messages and CSR communication outcomes.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The survey included basic demographic questions, including questions related to the organisation's business activities, the respondents' departments, their employment history, and the organisation's size. Table 1 presents details of the realised sample of participants and their organisations. Based on the results of Table 1, the respondents represented a wide variety of relatively small organisations and a broad spectrum of positions within these organisations.

Correlation analysis

Before examining the interrelationships among the variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the association between the study variables. All variables of the study were positively associated with each other. Analyses were performed to determine the characteristics of the sample. The descriptive statistics, along with correlation results for both samples, are given in Table 1. In Table 2 the results of the correlation analysis are presented. Significant correlations were found between all three of the study's variables.

In addition, the analyses enabled an initial test of the research hypotheses regarding the correlations between the variables relating to the outcomes of CSR communication. The results of the correlation analysis showed significant positive correlations in the range of 0.390 to 0.568 (at $p < 0.01$). Given the presence of positive correlations in these constructs, a regression analysis was then performed to determine the strength of the predictive relationships between the variables.

Hypotheses testing

To better understand the elements of CSR communication, test hypotheses in mediation models and investigate the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable, regression analysis was employed. Regression analysis was further employed to evaluate direct and indirect-effect analyses. Figure 2 contains the results of paths tested by regression analysis.

As shown in Fig. 1, support for community-related activities can be considered a mediator (M) of the relationship between CSR message content (X) and CSR communication outcomes (Y). We used Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS to test the hypotheses. This macro was created to assist with the estimation of the equations we examined earlier and to obtain a

Table 1 Descriptive details of the sample of participants and their organisations

| Variables | Detail: Options/values | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|-----------|--------------------|
| The organisation's main business activity | Children/kids day and aftercare, home, teaching, welfare, protection services, feeding, counselling, empowerment, crèche, development | 57 | 23.3 |
| | Community-based actions, development programmes, counselling | 34 | 14.0 |
| | Disabilities | 21 | 8.7 |
| | Home-based care services, homeless shelters | 20 | 8.2 |
| | Elderly, old age, home | 16 | 6.5 |
| | HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses | 12 | 5.0 |
| | Healthcare services, patient healthcare and welfare | 11 | 4.5 |
| | Education | 11 | 4.5 |
| | Other: | 58 | Each less than 4.0 |
| | Management | 61 | 25.0 |
| | Practitioners | 28 | 11.4 |
| | social department | | |
| | Administration | 21 | 8.6 |
| | Caregiver | 16 | 6.5 |
| Respondent's department/position | Communication department | 15 | 6.1 |
| | Education, teaching (teachers/education) | 15 | 6.1 |
| | Community interventions, volunteer, care ministry | 12 | 4.9 |
| | Chairperson, committee member, associates | 11 | 4.5 |
| | Other: | 47 | Each less than 3.0 |
| Organisation's size | 0 to 10 | 115 | 47 |
| | 11 to 20 | 58 | 23.7 |
| | 21 to 50 | 40 | 16.3 |
| | 50 to 100 | 14 | 5.7 |
| | 101 to 200 | 8 | 3.3 |
| | 201 to 1000 | 5 | 2.0 |
| | More than 1000 | 2 | 0.8 |
| | Unspecified number | 3 | 1.2 |

Table 2 Correlation matrix

| Variables | CSR communication outcomes | Support for community-related activities | CSR message content |
|--|----------------------------|--|---------------------|
| CSR communication outcomes | 1 | | |
| Support for community-related activities | .390 ^a | 1 | |
| CSR message content | .568 ^a | .430 ^a | 1 |

^a Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval (CI). To analyse indirect effects, it developed 5000 bootstrap samples based on the mean and the 95% confidence interval. Hypothesis 1 predicted that the independent variable (CSR message content) is positively associated with the mediator (support for community-related activities). In hypothesis 2, the independent variable (CSR message content) is positively related to the dependent variable (CSR communication outcomes). Furthermore,

the study also predicted that the relationship between the mediator (support for community-related activities) and the dependent variable (CSR communication outcomes) is also positive. Figure 2 presents the results of the hypotheses testing.

The results in Fig. 2 reveal that the effect between CSR message content and CSR communication outcomes was positive and significant and satisfied all four criteria proposed by Zhou, Hirst, and Shipton (2012) for significant

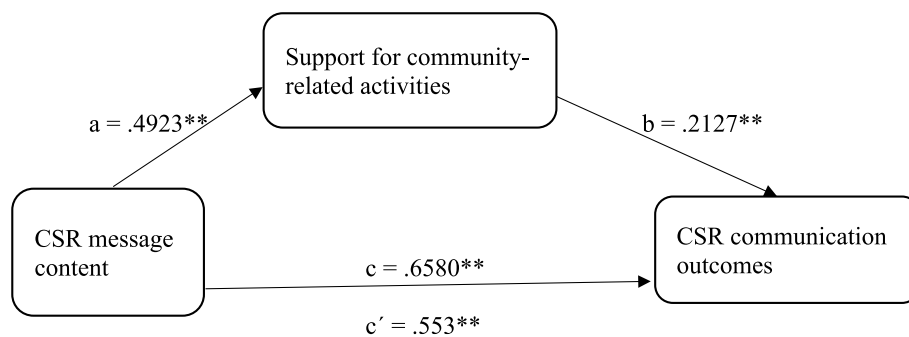


Fig. 2 Simple mediation model evaluating the direct and indirect relationship between CSR message content and CSR communication outcomes, with support for community-related activities serving as the mediating factor. ** $p \leq .01$

mediating effects: (1) there was a significant relationship between the independent variable (CSR message content) and the mediator (support for community related activities) (0.4923; $p \leq 0.01$); (2) the independent variable (CSR message content) was significantly related to the mediator (support for community related activities) (0.4923; $p \leq 0.01$); (3) the dependent variable (CSR communication outcomes) showed a significant relationship with the mediator (support for community-related activities) (0.2127; $p \leq 0.01$); and (4) the independent variable (CSR message content) decreased significantly (partial mediation) when the mediator (support for community-related activities) was held constant in the equation (0.553; $p \leq 0.01$). The 95% bootstrapping confidence interval (CI), which is more dependable due to its correction for bias (BC), did not consist of zero (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). This finding provides further support for the notion that support for community-related outcomes has a significant indirect effect (CI: upper limit=0.3081; lower limit=0.0220; SE=0.0748). As shown in Table 2, after support for community-related activities was identified as the mediator, the strength of the relationship between CSR message content and CSR communication outcomes decreased but remained significant (c-prime path coefficient=0.1049, LLCI:0.0220, ULCI:0.3081). As a result, support for community-related activities mediated the effect of CSR message content on the outcome of CSR communication across 5000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2013), supporting H3.

Discussion

The study examines how nonprofit organisations (NPOs) in South Africa can improve their corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication suggests key areas that will facilitate stakeholder engagement. The literature identified gaps in CSR communication, and South African NPOs may have unique characteristics compared to other emerging countries due to the country's history and

its heavy resilience to NPOs to assist in addressing societal challenges. One of the observed problems in South Africa is how NPOs use CSR communication haphazardly. At the same time, there is an observation of how NPOs associate communication initiatives with costs and thus take up their donor-generated funds. Therefore, our study can be deemed an original contribution to knowledge, which can potentially improve current practices in this area.

According to this study, CSR communication is a key focus area and has a critical impact on stakeholder support for the community-related activities of South African NPOs. In this study, we utilised Tonello's (2011) CSR communication framework to analyse three factors: CSR message content, support for community-related activities, and CSR communication outcome. The main objective was to test the basic concepts of CSR communication. We have suggested that CSR message content and support for community-related activities determine the ultimate influence of CSR communication. We argue that one strategy for achieving the outcome of CSR communication is to pay close attention to CSR message content.

We found a positive relationship between CSR message content and support for community-related activities in South African NPOs. This seems to suggest that the content of CSR messages is framed in a manner that reflects information describing the commitment of non-profit organisations to social responsibility. In particular, we argue that how stakeholders respond to these messages depends on how well they are crafted. This, we argue, highlights how NPOs can benefit from communication that guides changes and decision-making. In our study, we surveyed NPOs, focusing on a wide spectrum of activities of national and societal concern, including children's welfare, protection, and empowerment. We were particularly interested in whether the organisation has a CSR communication strategy and whether it has been implemented. Our findings suggest that

communication within these organisations is often haphazard, relying primarily on word-of-mouth (WOM). Having said this, we are however concerned that this may pose challenges as it could be difficult for these organisations to strengthen the stakeholder relations that CSR communication is expected to foster. This is primarily because CSR communication is intended to establish a framework for coordinating both internal and external stakeholders to maintain positive relationships and reputation (Cornelissen, 2020).

From our findings, we propose that effective communication for NPOs, may require a deliberate approach to delivering messages considering how they are interpreted by the receiver particularly when using word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth is a communication strategy that involves informal and verbal exchanges between individuals. In the marketing field, word-of-mouth is considered an effective strategy for persuading the target audience (Oliver & Riley, 1996). For a collectivistic developing country like South Africa, where the digital divide is a reality, WOM could prove to be an effective communication strategy for NPOs. It can help educate stakeholders about the activities of NPOs, build social networks, and, most importantly, provide stakeholders with information about NPO CSR activities. The collectivistic characteristics have been observed in other developing countries.

In a developing country, other communication strategies may prove difficult to implement, especially for small-scale NPOs, as is the case with the NPOs in our study. Looking at other communication strategies, especially those that other organisations regard as essential, it is evident that NPOs utilise these technologies to a limited extent. Interestingly, this trend does not only affect developing countries. Kamal (2020) conducted a study on non-profit organisations and found that even in a city like New York, NPOs have limited access to information and communication technologies. Kamal concluded that NPOs in both developed and developing countries face the same digital divide. In addition, Kamal found that board members of non-profit organisations recognise the value of technology and how it can help them advance their missions and goals. However, many of these organisations rarely incorporate information technology into their operations. According to Hackler and Saxton (2007), NPOs only use IT for their website, e-mails and Internet access. As shown in the literature, even in developing countries like South Africa, the situation is the same.

This study also found that CSR message content is positively related to CSR communication outcomes. Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) highlighted the importance of creating a message that appeals to potential donors

for nonprofit organisations and may lead to positive outcomes. According to Gauzente and Roy's (2012) research, messages ought to concentrate on conveying the appropriate words and features to the intended recipient. This is largely to avoid distortion. Notably, Jun, Ju, Park, Lee, and Kim (2023) contend that, regardless of intention, corporate message distortion is unavoidable and has unpredictable consequences. We argue that crafting clear messages to articulate an NPO's CSR can yield positive results. That said, we believe that this could bring benefits to a wide spectrum of small NPOs, including the ones identified in our research. It could help to gain financial support from donors while also gaining recognition from stakeholders. Our study demonstrates that including support for community-related activities in CSR message content leads to favourable CSR communication outcomes for NPOs operating in South Africa. The findings of Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) indicate that stakeholders have an affinity for organisations that are committed to important causes.

Practical implications

The benefits of our study's findings are target exclusively at nonprofit organisations, with a particular focus on micro-organisations. Nonprofit organisations' leaders seeking for ways to shape their messages to capture the attention of donors, should carefully consider the results of our study. The recommendations outlined in this study can help them do so. Moreover, this study contributes to the theoretical knowledge of corporate social responsibility communication within the nonprofit sector. This area has been neglected due to the prevailing belief that nonprofit organisations inherently provide philanthropic services, which raises the question of why they need to communicate with stakeholders in various areas. Philanthropy has long been associated with corporate social responsibility and dating back decades. Carroll (1979) was the first to imbue the concept of philanthropy into the discretionary domain of corporate social responsibility. We argue that nonprofit organisations can benefit from effectively communicating their corporate social responsibility initiatives to stakeholders. In our opinion, corporate social responsibility communication can create economic opportunities for nonprofit organisations. This can be achieved by increasing the visibility of nonprofit organisations' initiatives, which may in turn attract donors. Consequently, there is an opportunity to expand business, create new jobs and improve the well-being of others.

Limitations and future research

The present study has significant limitations. Firstly, the sample employed in this study was confined to

organisations in Gauteng Province making it impossible to generalise the findings. A more comprehensive picture of corporate social responsibility communication in the nonprofit sector could be obtained by including organisations from other provinces. While this study provides preliminary insights into the relationships between corporate social responsibility message content, support for CSR initiatives and corporate social responsibility communication, future research should expand on the findings of this study and provide further insights into the nature of these relationships in other organisational settings.

Conclusion

This study contributes to corporate social responsibility communication, notwithstanding the limitations mentioned above. The results indicate that support for community-based activities is an important mediator of the interaction between the corporate social responsibility message content and corporate social responsibility communication outcomes, ultimately leading to effective corporate social responsibility communication. The findings of this study may be valuable for scholars and organisations, as they provide insights into the relationship between corporate social responsibility message content, support for community-based activities and corporate social responsibility communication outcomes in South African nonprofit organisations.

Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---------------------------------|
| CSR | Corporate social responsibility |
| NPOs | Non-profit organisations |
| WOM | Word-of-mouth |

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Authors' contributions

SJ collected the survey data and wrote the first draft of the article; HB analysed and interpreted the data and contributed to writing the manuscript; DP gave critical feedback on the manuscript and recommended necessary revisions. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

Data that support this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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