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### Public perception and the oil industry: an analysis of oil employees' and Nigerians' opinions regarding Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's corporate social responsibility efforts

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PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND THE OIL INDUSTRY: AN ANALYSIS OF OIL EMPLOYEES'  
AND NIGERIANS' OPINIONS REGARDING EXXON MOBIL AND SHELL OIL'S  
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EFFORTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication  
in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
Liana L. Narcisse  
B.A., Spring Hill College, 2005  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study looked at oil industry employees' and Nigerians' perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations and the role the two-step flow model of communication plays in shaping these publics' impressions of the companies. Measures of participants' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) were developed using Carroll's 1971 three-dimensional model of CSR and Ketola's (2008) holistic model of CSR. This study found that for both companies participants had average to less-than-favorable perceptions of the companies' socially responsible behavior, according to the various categories of CSR. However, employees were more likely to view the companies more favorably than Nigerians; but, this difference was significant in only a few measures of CSR. This study also found that participants viewed Exxon Mobil as more socially responsible than Shell Oil. The two-step flow model of communication played a significant role in shaping a more positive perception of both companies, especially among Nigerians. Findings from this study can be used to help companies understand their weaknesses and strengths of their CSR campaigns. This study's findings will help companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil identify tactics for gain a socially responsible image and strengthen community support in antagonistic environments, such as Nigeria.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In today's market of abundance, providing a quality product is not enough. Today's socially conscious consumers want businesses to care (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006, p.1). In order to better market themselves to consumers, companies not only need to sell quality products, but also have a socially responsible image. As Walter Leach points out in *Land of Desire* (1993), in a land of abundance companies must look to also sell an image in addition to selling goods. Companies, like Starbucks, are more adept at selling a socially responsible image. As part of its socially conscious image Starbucks has simply switched using to biodegradable cups and selling coffee made from free trade beans (Starbucks, 2009). However, for some companies the task of presenting a responsible image is more complex. Companies in the oil industry companies are examples of companies that may struggle with creating a socially responsible image. In trying to secure the means for its production the oil companies can find themselves in the position of having to disrupt natural environments and being globally scrutinized as their businesses expands, which may lead to questions regarding the industry's ethical practices (Yoon, Zeynep, & Schwartz, 2006). Therefore, creating a socially responsible image becomes increasingly difficult and important for oil companies to counteract negative situational influences associated with its oil production process.

In an effort to help these companies better understand their corporate socially responsible images, this study will look at how members of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's key publics opinions the companies' as socially responsible behavior in Nigeria. This study will analyze the degree to which relationships between the oil companies and the Nigerian community are perceived as beneficial to Nigeria. Survey methods will be used to asses the perceived levels of social responsibility each company attains, as well as the different forms of CSR each company

is thought to exhibit in Nigeria. The study will ask participants to evaluate to what principles and to which degree of corporate social responsibility they believe Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil adhere. The study will also evaluate the significance of personal relationships in helping participants formulate their attitudes toward each company.

This study will help public relations practitioners understand the significance of personal relationships/community in establishing effective CSR campaigns, especially in industries facing hostile environments.

### A Profile of Nigeria

Officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigeria is an African country that rests on the Gulf of Guinea. With a land mass about twice the size of California (CIA, 2009), Nigeria is a nation of both economic and cultural riches but also economic and humanitarian despair.

Nigeria has both a unique land and history. Nigeria's diverse terrain includes an ocean coast, mountains, rain forest and savannah (CIA, 2009). The Niger and Benue Rivers come together to form the oil-rich Niger Delta. After gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, Nigeria has struggled to unify its citizens of various ethnicities. Although Nigeria remains a mainly rural country, the country is seeing an increase in urbanization. In the 1970s, populations in Nigeria's cities doubled due to the oil boom (Apter, 2005).

CIA (2009) records provide details that highlight Nigeria's diversity strife. Nigeria boasts the largest population of any African country, which also means more diversity. Although the official language of Nigeria is English, Nigeria is home to over 400 native languages. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo are the three main ethnic groups that comprise about 70 percent of the country's population. Other ethnic groups vary in size from as many as 300 members to 1



million members. The various ethnic groups often clashed and larger ethnic groups sought to control the government. As a result, in 1991 Nigeria moved its capital from the country's most populated city, Lagos, to Abuja, which is more inland than Lagos, in hopes detouring clashes and interferences from contrasting ethnic groups that make up Lagos (CIA, 2009). Although, Nigeria is diverse in so many areas, the country's religious practices are homogenous. The majority of Nigeria's population is identified as either Muslim or Christian. Even though, Christianity and Islam play a big role in the ethnic make up of Nigerians, a reported 10 percent of Nigeria's population practices traditional African religions (CIA, 2009).

While trying to unify a newly independent nation, Nigeria must combat numerous environmental concerns, some believe are heightened due to the presence of the oil industry (Apter, 2005). Soil degradation, rapid deforestation, urban air and water pollution and desertification are major areas of concern for Nigeria. Damage from oil spills and rapid urbanization has had a significant impact on the pollution of Nigeria's water, air, and soil (CIA, 2009).

In addition to the environmental concerns that face Nigeria, the country is also has several humanitarian concerns plaque Nigeria. Nigeria is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in infant mortality rates with 94.35 deaths per one thousand live births. Additionally, the average life expectancy for a Nigerian is relatively low when compared to developed nations, at 46.94 years old. Possibly contributing to the low life expectancy is the rate of diseases and limited resources present in Nigeria. Nigeria has an HIV/AIDS infection rate is 170,000 people, making Nigeria the third highest nation of HIV/AIDS infection (CIA, 2009). Nigeria's low health expectations are accompanied with a weak economic system. Nigeria has an average annual household income of \$930 (BBC News, 2008). This low figure is in contrast to the nation's oil wealth. Shell Oil and

Exxon Mobil are two of several major oil companies responsible for the 2 billion barrels of oil exported from Nigeria, daily (BBC News, 2009).

### A Profile of Exxon Mobil

Although the name Exxon Mobil is the result of a recent 1999 merger, U.S.-based Exxon Mobil has over 120 years of providing oil and petroleum products and services. Exxon Mobil is the umbrella corporation for Exxon, Esso and Mobil Oil. Both Exxon and Mobil are products of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company. The corporation not only has a long history, but also a diversified and strong business background. During the 1970's, Exxon Mobil set a corporate standard of excellence (Enis, 1978).

Exxon Mobil is powerful and diverse corporation. Exxon Mobil would rank as one the U.S.'s top ten industrial companies even if the company did not have international business. Additionally, if the company just focused on shipping oil, and did not drill or produce oil, Exxon Mobil would still be one of the world's largest companies (Enis, 1978, p. 8). Also, according to Enis (1978), if Exxon Mobil limited its production and business relations, it would still be one of the most powerful U.S. companies. With all of its components working together, Exxon Mobil is not only a strong domestic company, but an international competitor, as well.

Exxon Mobil's presence in Nigeria is fairly recent but not without controversy. In 1955, the corporation began oil exploration in Nigeria and began oil production in 1969 (Exploration, 2008). Exxon Mobil states of 1900 employees working for its Nigerian operations, 96 percent are Nigerian, making Exxon Mobil a contributor to the country's financial well-being (Exploration, 2008). However, Exxon Mobil's financial contribution to Nigeria has come under question. In 2003, the corporation decided to appeal a ruling that ordered Exxon Mobil to pay \$9.6 million dollars to Nigerian communities, as result of an oil spill, citing the spill did not

directly affect the communities (Nigeria Fines, 2003). Additionally, in 2008, the Nigerian government stated Exxon Mobil, along with Shell Oil owed back taxes/royalties totaling \$1.9 billion, a claim Exxon Mobil denies (Oredein, 2008). Exxon Mobil has been active in denying financial wrong doing in Nigeria, perhaps a lesson learned for the company's long history of utilizing public relations.

The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill remains a blemish on Exxon Mobil's record. Previous textual analysis of 2008 newspaper articles and press releases has shown the company is still struggling with this crisis. In 2000, *USA Today* covered the details of the on-going legal and financial battles between the state of Alaska and Exxon Mobil (Narcisse, 2009 p.13). Although, the company continues to face ongoing litigation regarding the Valdez oil spill, it continues to express regret over the incident on its website, (Exxon, 2009) saying, "The Valdez oil spill was a tragic accident that ExxonMobil deeply regrets. The company took immediate responsibility for the spill, cleaned it up and voluntarily compensated those who claimed direct damages."

Exxon Mobil states, "We must continuously achieve superior financial and operating results while simultaneously adhering to high ethical standards," (Exxon Mobil, 2009). In 1914, John D. Rockefeller made oil one of the first industries to embrace public relations with his hiring of publicist, Ivy Lee (Grower, 2007, p.7). Not forgetting its long history with public relations, textual analysis showed that between 1970 and 1992 Mobil Oil had over 1,000 non-product ads in op-ed section of the *New York Times* (Page, 1993, p. 33). This statement emphasizes that Exxon Mobil's understands the need to maintain a positive public perception, while simultaneously producing profit, in order to remain competitive. Through its long history of using public relations, Exxon Mobil has shown that it recognizes the importance of a

favorable public perception on the success of the company and has taken several steps to present itself as an ethical company.

### A Profile of Shell Oil

According to Shell.com, Royal Dutch Shell, which is incorporated in England and Wales, is the parent company of Shell Oil. In 1907, Royal Dutch Petroleum Company (Dutch) and The "Shell" Transport and Trading Company (British) merged to form Royal Dutch Shell, as a competitor to Rockefeller's Standard Oil (Shell, n.d.). Shell Oil operates in over 100 countries and produces two percent of the world's oil and 3 percent of the world's gas. In 2009, the company held a number one ranking in Fortune 500. Shell Oil also states, "Honesty, integrity and respect for people form the basis of the Shell General Business Principles" (Shell, n.d.).

Even though, Shell Oil was one of the first companies to begin exploration in Nigeria, it has had issues developing positive relationships with Nigerian citizens. In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court granted permission for the families of two slain Nigerian environmentalists to sue Shell Oil in New York. The families stated that Shell Oil planted murder evidence against the environmentalists, which led to their ultimate death by military tribunal (BBC, 2001).

Although Shell Oil promotes itself as a responsible corporation through its website and press releases, outside opinion on this matter is wavering. A 2009 textual analysis of newspaper articles, company websites and press releases showed that even though Shell engages in the same socially responsible behaviors as Exxon Mobil, Shell continues to struggle with promoting a positive self image in American newspapers when compared to Exxon Mobil (Narcisse, 2009).

Shell Oil has struggled to promote itself in a positive light in U.S. media and it also has a long and complicated history in Nigeria. Using effective public relations and CSR initiatives can help Shell Oil create a more supportive environment for production.

## The History of Oil in Nigeria

Oil exploration in Nigeria began in the early 1900s, when Nigeria was considered a British colony. In 1908, while under British rule Nigerian Bitumen Corp., German company, began oil exploration along the Nigerian coast. However, the beginning of World War II called for an end to Bitumen Corp.'s exploration in Nigeria. Oil exploration in Nigeria was not on pause for very long. In 1936, Shell D'Arcy was granted rights for oil exploration. Due to strained economic environment during World War II, Shell joined forces with British Petroleum, to form Shell-BP. Shortly after, in 1957, Shell-BP discovered oil in Nigeria, leading to oil production and increased exportation (Apter, 2005; BBC News, 2009).

On October 1, 1960, shortly after Shell-BP's discovery of oil, Nigeria gained its independence from Britain. With its newfound independence, Nigeria opened itself up civil disputes and economic opportunity. Nigeria's Eastern Region seceded, which led to a three-year long civil war. In 1970, the Eastern region fell and Nigeria became united once again. Simultaneously, Nigeria was able to open itself up to more oil companies. Some of the companies that joined Shell in Nigeria during the 1970s were companies that would become present day Mobil Oil and Chevron Texaco, among others. As a result of the increased oil presence, Nigeria thought its best interest would be served by establishing the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC), followed by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to monitor oil company revenues and taxes (Apter, 2005).

Nigeria is not only home to several oil companies, but also many groups that protest what they claim to be unfair practices by oil companies. This has accelerated the risks and hazards of living in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta region. Nigerian rebel groups' protests have become violent, including bombings and kidnappings (BBC, 2010). Through the mayhem,

Nigeria has become OPEC's fifth largest supplier of oil (Tripathi, 2008). As a result of increased oil revenues in the 1970s, Nigeria faced an economic boom, which boosted the nation's image among Western nations and helped Nigeria become the first African country to pay off its debt (BBC, 2009). The money the government generated from oil revenues has made the oil industry salient in the minds of many Nigerian officials, causing the Nigerian government to pay less attention to agriculture issues, which may also have contributed to the country's economic imbalance (Apter, 2005, p. 246).

Several rebel groups that have engaged in bombing and kidnapping opposing oil companies' presence in Nigeria. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the primary rebel group, has decreased oil companies' production and Nigeria's expected revenues from these oil companies (CNN, 2009). MEND is a collective of Nigerian rebels opposed to foreign oil companies' presence in Nigeria. According to news coverage, MEND hoped its actions would bring attention to the disproportion between the oil wealth obtained from Nigeria and the substandard living conditions of the Nigerian people (BBC, 2008). In 2008 the effects of MEND's actions towards oil companies' occupation of Nigeria was felt world-wide, when for the first time a barrel of oil reached over \$100 (BBC, 2009). MEND's actions questioned the role of oil companies in the Niger Delta as companies producing a necessary commodity or as companies determined to produce a profit at the cost of a nation.

In August 2009, the Nigerian government awarded amnesty to rebel groups to call off their attacks. The government hoped the amnesty would allow production to go on uninterrupted and help the country's economy (CNN, 2009). As of October 2009, one of the leaders associated with MEND, Ateke Tom, accepted amnesty, however MEND officially had not, retaining the belief amnesty was a government hoax and that the system would continue to

benefit government and corporations, not the people of the Niger Delta (Nossiter, 2009).

MEND and other rebel groups' opposition to government/oil companies have created two contrasting beliefs about the role of oil in Nigeria. Figure 1 summarizes the highlights of oil exploration in Nigeria. Presently, no common ground has been reached between rebel groups, oil companies and the Nigerian government. In order to alleviate concerns among stakeholders, oil companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil need find a way to combat the negative images that are being perpetuated by the media and organizations, like MEND.

Messages from MEND may interfere with the effectiveness of oil companies CSR initiatives. In order to gain support from the community, companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil should engage in principles of CSR and how messages are spread throughout the community.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>1850's</b>	British establish a presence in Nigeria
<b>1908</b>	German company, Nigerian Bitumen Corp. begins oil exploration in Nigeria
<b>1914</b>	WWII-oil exploration ceased
<b>1936</b>	Shell D'Arcy granted rights for exploration
<b>1947</b>	Shell combines forces with British Petroleum (Shell-BP unit in Nigeria)
<b>1956</b>	Shell-BP discovers oil in the Niger Delta
<b>1958</b>	Shell-BP begins oil Production and exportation begins
<b>1960</b>	Oct.1 <sup>st</sup> Nigeria gains independence from Britain Lagos become capital Other oil companies invited to explore
<b>1961</b>	Mobil, Agip, Gulf Oil (now Chevron), Safrap (now Elf), Amoseas (now Texaco/Chevron) begin exploration in Nigeria
<b>1967</b>	Eastern Region seceded on May 30 <sup>th</sup> , leading to civil war
<b>1970</b>	Downfall of Eastern Region Civil war ends
<b>1971</b>	Nigerian National Oil Corp. (NNOC) established Nigeria joins OPEC
<b>1977</b>	Nigerian National Petroleum Corp. (NNPC) created
<b>1993</b>	BP returns to Nigeria, Gen. Abacha's takeover in November
<b>1995</b>	Ken Saro-Wiwa, writer and campaigner against oil industry damage to his Ogoni homeland, is executed
<b>2004</b>	Deadly clashes between gangs in oil city of Port Harcourt prompts crackdown by Nigerian military
<b>2006</b>	MEND attacks pipelines and other oil facilities and kidnap foreign oil workers. Nigeria pays off its debt to the Paris Club of rich lenders
<b>2008</b>	MEND calls off four-month cease-fire
<b>2009</b>	MEND rejects government offer of amnesty

**Figure 1. Timeline of Significant Events and History of Oil in Nigeria**



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Corporate Social Responsibility: An Introduction

Economist Howard Bowen first coined the term corporate social responsibility in the 1950s (Carroll, 1971). Bowen established modern CSR by questioning the responsibilities that business people expected to assume. He stated that businesses should act in a way that mirror society's goals and values (Carroll, 1971). Economic obligation refers to a company's contribution to the economic function of society. When businesses serve an economic function of society they allow for goods/services to be fairly traded. For example, paying a worker a fair wage will allow the same worker to buy something of equal value of the time he/she spent at work, leading to equality of trading time for money then for goods. Legal and ethical obligations highlight the role of fair hiring and labor practices. And philanthropic obligations include donations and sponsorships. Since Bowen scholars, such as Maignan and Ferrell (2004) have continued to develop CSR with practices like the introduction of stakeholder obligation in the 1990s as part of CSR. Stakeholder obligation draws upon the idea that businesses are in debt to members of society directly and indirectly affected by the business' practices (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). Since CSR practices affect not only the businesses but the communities in which they operate the need for an understanding of CSR and the role of businesses in society should serve as pressing issue for those in the public relations field.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and campaigns have become increasingly popular in business, as well as in various academic disciplines, including marketing, communications, business, and sociology. As Ketola (2008) explains, CSR combines philosophical, psychological, and managerial perspectives. According to Ketola (2008), the philosophical component of CSR relates to the company's stance toward social responsibility. A

company's mission statement is an example of the philosophical component of CSR. The psychological of CSR relates to the discourses a company engages in when deciding to implement a CSR program. The psychological component of CSR consists of anxiety a company feels to be perceived as ethical and these pressures caused internally within the company and/or externally, such as activist groups and public opinion. The final component of Ketola's (2008) understanding of CSR is the managerial component, which includes the actual actions that a company would take part. For example a sponsorship and using recyclable products would fall under the managerial component of CSR. In public relations, CSR is defined as "corporate philanthropy and strategic charitable giving" (Zhang & Swanson, 2006 p.14). The public relations definition of CSR emphasizes a company's mission and businesses practices, which draw upon Ketola's (2008) managerial and philosophical components of CSR. Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) define CSR as "...a company's activities and statutes related to its perceived societal or stakeholder obligations" (p. 2). Zhang and Swanson's (2006) explanation of CSR builds involves the sociological impact of CSR on a community. In marketing/business, CSR practices fall under the construct of cause-related marketing. Cause-related marketing refers to a business's contribution to a specific cause with the intention of leading customers to participate in revenue-producing activity with the corporation (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 59). Even though these definitions and variations of CSR highlight different aspects of CSR, they all emphasize the need for businesses to contribute to the communities in which they operate.

### CSR Models

Since CSR encompasses a variety of disciplines and can be applied through various businesses practices, scholars and professionals develop and use models to break CSR down into

basic components. Several models of CSR are available. However, Archie B. Carroll designed a model in the 70s, based on Bowen's literature on CSR, which is recognized by those in the CSR field as the foundation for CSR models. Ongoing studies of CSR have led to more complex CSR models, such as Ketola's (2008) multi-disciplinary model. Both models are useful in understanding the philosophies and practices behind effective CSR.

Carroll (1971) provided a three-dimensional conceptual model of corporate performance, to help identify how companies assess, address and respond to their social responsibilities. In addition Carroll's model identifies three aspects of CSR. These aspects include: a basic definition of social responsibility that goes beyond economic and legal concerns, identifying the areas of responsibility (i.e. environmental, discrimination, etc.) and a philosophy of response, which Carroll describes as the decision to react or "proact" to a situation (p. 499). Carroll describes socially responsible behavior as encompassing the following categories: economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, and discretionary responsibilities. A company's economic responsibility is to serve as the "basic economic unit" (Carroll, p. 500) of society. According to Carroll, in order to function as economic unit of society a company produces goods and services, as well as maximizes profit for its owner/stakeholders. The legal responsibilities of a company involve the company adhering to the policies set in place so it can function in society. Ethical responsibilities involve responsibilities/expectations of a company that go beyond legal responsibilities. Legal responsibilities are set by government, whereas ethical responsibilities are not necessarily written in the law and may not directly benefit the company, however the company chooses to participate in these actions strictly to benefit society. Finally, discretionary responsibilities are more or less voluntary and involve actions, such as philanthropic contributions or providing on-site day care for employees' children. Carroll (1971)

also points out what CSR path to proceed along are based on the following conditions: congruence between social need the company's need/ability to help, seriousness of the social need, interest of top executives, public relations value of involvement and government pressure (p. 501). Thus, before a company decides what CSR initiative to engage in, a variety of factors must be taken into consideration to make sure there is no disconnection between the company and its message to the community. While Carroll's CSR model offers distinct and broad categories of CSR practices, it leaves any practices that do not fall into one of the major categories into a discretionary category, thus hindering a full examination of CSR practices.

More recent attempts at classifying CSR practices have resulted in Ketola's (2008) multi-disciplinary corporate social responsibility model. Ketola's model categorizes companies based on the types of CSR initiatives they engage in while recognizing some companies may engage in two or more types of CSR initiatives. This model provides several categories that explain an institution's commitment to CSR. These categories are: suicidal, ideal, plutocentric, anthropocentric, biocentric, patriarchal, technocentric and matriarchal.

According to Ketola (2008), suicidal companies do not engage in socially responsible behavior and therefore have a short lifespan because they fail to satisfy the needs of their special interest groups and engage in irresponsible activities such as unregulated waste dumping. Ideal companies are limited in number and maximize their responsibilities in all areas of concern: economic, social and ecological. The Body Shop, a profitable company that produces a line of natural beauty products, falls in Ketola's ideal company category (Ketola, 2008). The Body Shop is committed to several CSR initiatives, including using environmentally-friendly products/packaging, support of HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence awareness as well its use of fair trade practices to produce incomes in developing nations (The Body Shop, 2010).

Plutocentric companies are abundant and practice market economy ethics by focusing on economic responsibilities, many local businesses fall into this category by financially supporting area charities and sponsoring events in the community. Anthropocentric companies emphasize social responsibilities over other responsibilities. Examples of anthropocentric initiatives are shown in hiring practices. Companies that hire handicapped people, minorities or people from disadvantaged backgrounds in an attempt to provide an opportunity to someone who may not have received an opportunity at all are participating in anthropocentric CSR activities.

Biocentric companies, such as environmental consulting companies or those that manage waste management treatments, promote ecological responsibilities. Patriarchal companies accept social responsibility in developing countries that they may neglect in developed countries. An example of a company utilizing patriarchal CSR is TOMS Shoes. While promoting an earth-friendly image on their website, TOMS Shoes markets itself as the company that donates a pair of shoes to a child in a developing country for every pair of shoes the company sells (TOMS Shoes, 2009). Technocentric companies focus on economic and ecological responsibilities while promoting the idea technology will help solve ecological problems. A textual analysis of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's 2008 press releases indicate oil companies' CSR initiatives would be categorized as technocentric (Narcisse, 2009). Matriarchal companies operate under the assumption social and ecological responsibilities are more important than economic responsibilities. There are relatively few matriarchal companies because of the lack of emphasis on profit. Matriarchal companies may make up for smaller profits by charging more than the fair trade price for goods. Ketola (2008) states matriarchal companies are financially irresponsible because in order to maintain themselves, they place their financial burdens on the public in the form of over-priced products/services and/or public funding. Ketola's (2008) model shows how

the industry of a company and its values can shape its CSR profile and create a role for the company to play in its community.

While Carroll's model lays the foundation for CSR, Ketola's model offers a more detailed and complex approach to CSR. Ketola's model references how a company presents its CSR initiative as part of its overall business practices/industry. While Carroll acknowledges the basic tenets of CSR, Ketola explains how a company's values and discourse will affect its CSR actions. Carroll presents CSR as a general model applied to businesses, but Ketola breaks CSR down into company-specific practices.

### CSR Studies

Understanding what types of behavior indicate CSR is just as important as understanding in what situations messages about CSR are considered effective. This information is particularly useful when indicating how companies will have their CSR campaigns reach their stakeholders.

CSR initiatives have been shown to have both positive and negative effects (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006, p. 15). Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) explain that the public must perceive the CSR as sincere and quality product must accompany the initiative if it is going to be useful in establishing a positive corporate image. If the product and message do not coincide, the CSR message will be ineffective and may be more harmful to the company than not using CSR. Using secondary analysis, Schoenberg (2007, p. 78) showed one of the benefits of effective CSR included increased employee morale. Increased morale leads to financial gain for companies because employees stay longer, which means less money spent on training and employees may even work for less because they feel good about the company they are working for.

In addition, Lin, Lim, Kiossis and Ferguson (2006) conducted experimental research to test the effectiveness of message sidedness and level of consumer involvement on creating a

favorable perception of a business CSR program. One hundred eighty-four students were divided into two groups, high involvement and low involvement based on the proximity of the student to the location of the institution. The study found CSR initiatives had a greater impact on participants with high involvement levels than those with low involvement levels. One-sided messages without refutation led to a higher opinion of the institution; prior knowledge of the company and source trustworthiness also play a role in increasing the positive effect of the CSR initiative.

Yoon, Gurham-Canli and Schwarz (2006) looked particularly at the effectiveness of CSR on businesses with negative reputations, (i.e. tobacco and oil). In a 2x2 experimental design, the researchers examined the effects of the relationship between level of salience of a company's CSR initiative and information source on the company's image. The study showed a main effect between salience and information source. Participants viewed both the fictional company and Exxon Mobil negatively when participants learned information about CSR initiatives from the company and more positively when the initiative was learned through a reputable outside source. The study also examined the advertising ratio to examine the company's perceived sincerity on its CSR effectiveness. The results showed the more money spent on advertising and less money spent on the CSR initiative, the more likely public perception of the company's motives will be negative. Yoon, Gurham-Canli and Schwartz (2006) concluded a CSR initiative is most beneficial when suspicion is low, and others outside of the company spread the word. The effect is more critical for industries that are traditionally viewed negatively, such as tobacco and oil companies, avoid self-promotion. Instead companies should rely on outside media sources or word of mouth to inform the public of their CSR programs (Yoon, Gurham-Canli & Schwarz, 2006).

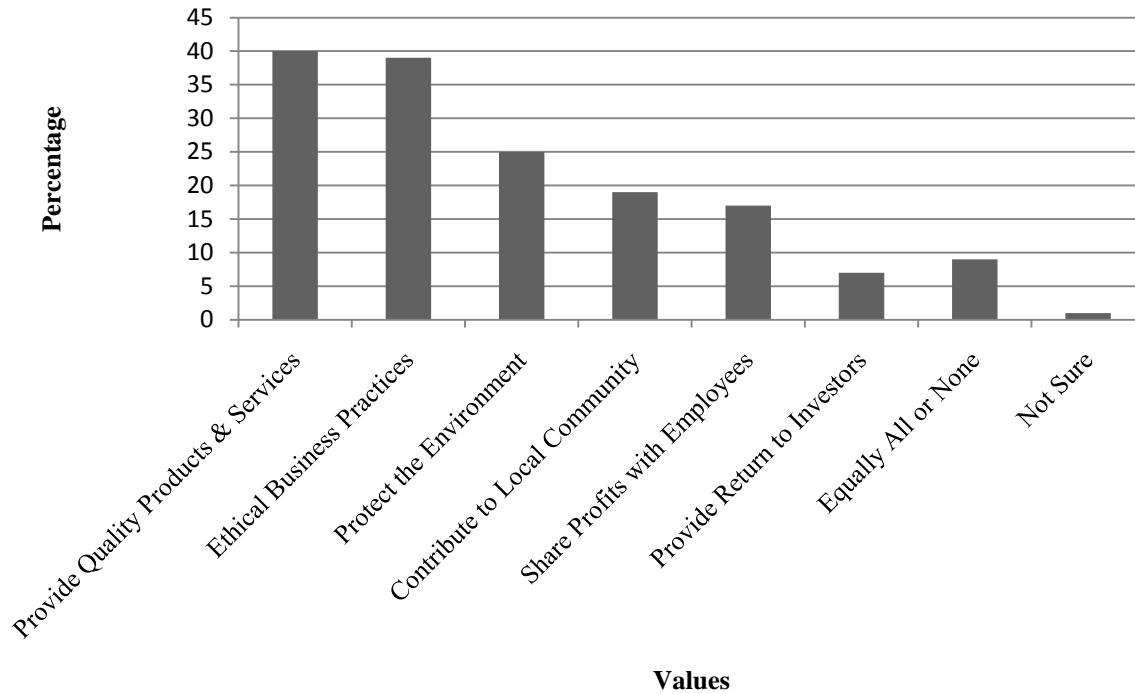
Consumers value socially responsible business. Since traditional advertising practices are not effective in shaping public opinion about responsible perceptions of companies, especially those that already possess negative reputations, these companies may choose to relay information regarding their responsible behaviors utilizing personal networks in their stakeholders' communities.

The sentiment of sharing a favorable reputation remains a popular concept. A content analysis showed 80% of a random sample of Fortune 500 companies has a webpage dedicated to at least one CSR program (Lin, Lim, Kioussis & Ferguson, 2006). Corporate social responsibility helps businesses gain market value through reputation building and customer satisfaction (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Business globalization has increased the demand for business transparency and attention to the concerns and expectations of citizens, consumers, public authorities and investors. A survey conducted (n=639) on behalf of Shell Oil, in which respondents contributed what values they think businesses should uphold, showed business ethics were second only to providing quality products. In the same survey, protect the environment, contribute to local community and share profits with employees all had a larger majority than provide return to investors (Shell, Hart 1999) (See Figure 2). The oil industry is taking notice what the public thinks is important business practices. In 2001, oil gas and mining companies collaboratively spent over \$500 million investing in various community enrichment initiatives (Frynas, 2005).

### Two-Step Flow Model: An Introduction

Using effective CSR helps companies build a positive image in the minds of their various publics. To start shaping a positive image, companies must first get members of their key publics





**Figure 2. Shell Oil Company Poll on Values the public think businesses should uphold**

talking about their CSR initiatives. One way of getting the word out about CSR initiatives is the use of media channels; however this practice may be perceived as self-promotion (Lin, Lim, Kioussis & Ferguson, 2006). In order to combat self-promotion and spread the message about their CSR initiatives, companies may disseminate information directly through the public themselves, in a process referred to as two-step flow communication.

Two-step flow refers to the process of using opinion leaders to disseminate information from media to members of the community, rather than using the media directly, as the hypodermic needle model suggests (Severin & Tankard, 2001). It was when studying the effects of the hypodermic needle model of communication on voter opinion Paul Lazarsfeld referenced what would become known as the two-step flow model of communication (Severin & Tankard, 2001). During his 1940 interview survey of Erie County, Ohio voters Lazarsfeld found voters

were not directly relying on media to figure out what political topics were important but discussing these topics with other voters seemed to heighten the importance of these political topics to the survey participants. The results from this study led researchers to begin questioning previous theories of communication, in which media had a direct influence on the public.

The surveillance function of mass media can help explain the media's limited influence in shaping public opinion. Contrary to the thoughts of previous mass communication theories, mass media does not control the public (Zaller, 1992). Instead certain members of the public choose to seek out information from media and use the information gained from media exposure to educate themselves and others in areas that affect their lives (Severin & Tankard, 2001). In the process of interpersonal communication, the surveillance function of mass media can be used to shape or solidify opinions regarding various topics.

In 1957, Elihu Katz went on to further examine the role of interpersonal relationships on opinion formation in *Two-Step Flow Communication: An up-to-date report on a hypothesis*. In this work, Katz examined three studies that are subsequent to the *People's Choice* voter survey. This study led Katz to conclude personal influences were more frequent and more effective in determining voting decisions than media (p. 63). Katz also identified the following as key components to the two-step flow model of communication: the impact of personal influence, the flow of personal influence and the opinion leaders, and the mass media. According to Katz, opinion leaders are more effective in influencing others in their community when the opinion leader is well-respected.

The importance of change agents/elites in shaping public opinion is a reoccurring theme among scholars. In Zaller's *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992), he develops his Receive-Accept-Sample model. While Zaller points out the weaknesses of public opinion

surveys and provides a background for understanding the formation of public opinion and helps identify attitudes that may be overlooked in traditional survey methods. Zaller recognizes there are people with more exposure to media and those with less exposure. Those with more media exposure to media may influence the attitudes of those with less exposure when information is out of the ordinary public's everyday thinking. In these circumstances, Zaller argues ordinary citizens will take cues from the well-informed opinion leader/elites in order to form an opinion on a subject. Zaller builds on the two-step flow model of communication by also addressing the conditions under which opinion followers are receptive to information and how measuring these attitudes of these opinions may be just as easily influenced by survey methods as opinion givers their communities.

Zaller also expands on the interpersonal relationships which makes help makes two-step an effective method of communicating public opinion. Zaller points out that in a 2000 study and a 2004 study at least a third of participants engaged in political conversations with others in an attempt to sway the other people's opinion on a political issue/candidate (p.85). Zaller also cited that individuals would often conform to the political opinions of individuals who are close to them (p. 97). The information gathered from these studies illustrates the significance of the second level of flow in the two-step flow model of communication in shaping public opinion. Opinion followers are more likely to be influenced by opinion leader when both the follower and leader are closely associated, which is the case with employees of and specific industry/company and individuals who share a strong cultural bond.

Applying two-step flow's influence on specific communities is referred to as diffusion theory (Severin & Tankard, p. 203). Diffusion theory can be useful in the application of two-step on a CSR campaign in a particular group of stakeholders. If a company were to identify

opinion leaders in public it wishes to inform of its CSR efforts it use diffusion theory use opinion leaders to shape the opinions and others, thereby shaping public perception of the company. Diffusion theory explains the process behind two step flow theory and helps illustrate how two-step flow can help alter public perception.

### Two-Step Flow Studies

According to Swann (2008), two-step flow involves having opinion leaders who take the time to understand information regarding certain issues and disseminate this information to his followers. The opinion leader of a particular group is not always the same. An opinion leader is identified by the following characteristics: he is recognized as someone with similar values, he is someone is knowledgeable about the subject, and he is someone who is known. Understanding the characteristics of an opinion leader shows how who an opinion leader varies depending on which social group one belongs to. Opinion leaders may be well recognized member, for example a local celebrity or community activist and on a more personal level a well –informed friend or leader in the work place. Leading to the conclusion employees required to work in Nigeria may hold different opinions than people with personal ties to Nigeria because their opinion leaders hold different perspectives. Additionally, members of different companies may also hold opposing opinions.

Sonia (2008) points out that the two-step flow model of communication is particularly useful in developing countries, such as Nigeria, where mainstream news media outlets are not readily available. Sonia (2008) refers to the two-step flow model in action as “the people’s media” and as the people’s “orator” (p.1). Sonia (2008) states that in Nigeria town criers and the obuzor/king serve as examples of change agents of two-step flow. These opinion leaders are effective in social activities such as women’s dance group meetings, drum beatings and church

meetings (p. 5). Sonia's (2008) research showed Ibusa, a rural Nigerian delta community, was more likely to engage in a government sponsored program as a result of interpersonal communication processes, such as two-step flow than a result of exposure to mass media messages. In order to examine the influence interpersonal communication processes and mass media, 1,700 Ibusa residents participated in a self-administered questionnaire. The responses from the survey conclude Ibusa residents' cultural pride related to an emphasis on value local and traditional forms of information sharing over newer and foreign mass media outlets.

Although Sonia's (2008) research attributes interpersonal communication models, such as two-step flow with having a significant impact on public opinion, research on developed communities call into question the significance of two-step flow. Troidahl and Van Dam's (1966) Detroit telephone survey indicated little difference in public opinion between individuals classified as opinion leaders and opinion seekers/others in the community (p.5). Responses from the surveys showed people were not asking others about public affairs policies and were not asked by others for their opinion. These findings left the researchers to conclude these participants were engaged more in opinion sharing than opinion shaping.

More recently in March 2000, a local Illinois telephone survey and content analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between agenda setting and two-step flow (Yang & Stone, 2003). The survey asked respondents if they relied on mass media or friends and family for information regarding public affairs and what issues they thought were the most important issues facing the country today. Sources for the content analysis included many local and several national newspapers, network broadcast news, and national magazines. The finding from this study showed 90% of the participants said they relied on mass media for news about public affairs. Only 20 % of participants relied on family and friends for news about public affairs.

Further analysis of the findings indicated the participants who were media-reliant shared similar opinions as the agenda set by the mass media (Yang & Stone, 2003).

Although Trodahl and Van Dam (1966) and Yang and Stone (2003) present research that argues against the significance of two-step flow as a contributor to the formation of public opinion, their research may ignore some cultural differences which emphasize the use of two-step flow as a contributor to public opinion. In order to create a cohesive image across nations, companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil, should take the initiative to understand how information/opinions regarding their images are formed and disseminated among various publics, including their own employees.

### Research Questions

The objective of this thesis is to further examine the role of two-step flow of communication on shaping key publics' perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations.

**RQ1:** Are the opinions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations different among different key publics?

**RQ2:** Is Exxon Mobil or Shell Oil more effective at shaping an overall positive socially responsible image?

**RQ3:** In what areas of CSR are Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil most effective at shaping a positive public perception?

**RQ4:** Are perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations influenced by the public's reliance on others for information?

**RQ5:** Do employees of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil and Nigerians use two-step flow communication to form their opinion of each company as socially responsible corporations?

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study looked at the perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as ethical corporations through the eyes of their employees/oil industry representatives and the Nigerian community.

### Design

A survey was conducted to examine the relationship between the two-step flow model of communication has on the perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations. This study used a survey divided into four sections. The first three sections used Likert-type items and open-ended questions to measure information sharing and media usage, perceptions about Exxon Mobil, and perceptions about Shell Oil. The final section contained questions regarding media usage. The independent variables include population (Exxon Mobil employee, Shell Oil employee and Nigerian community member). The dependent variable was the degree to which Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's practices in Nigeria are viewed as ethical, according the principles of CSR outlined by Carroll (1971) and Ketola (2008) and the significance of downward flow of information in shaping the reputations of these companies as socially ethical corporations. The entire format of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

### Procedures

The researcher used snowballing techniques to generate a convenience sample for each population. The researcher used SurveyMonkey.com to create an electronic version of the survey. The researcher emailed a link to the electronic version of the survey to Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil employees, who were identified through social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Social networking sites were also used to reach members of company/industry specific message boards as well members of social groups that shared a Nigerian interest. The representatives from each population were asked to pass the survey out to other members of their



population they thought would participate. The researcher also attended various community meetings that targeted the selected populations and handed out paper surveys.

### CSR Measures

CSR measures for each company were selected based on the CSR models developed by Carroll (1978) and Ketola (2008). Participants were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale (*1 = Very Negative to 5 = Very Positive*) their overall impression of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's impact on Nigeria according to basic CSR outlined by Carroll (1978). Participants were also asked to use a Likert-type scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree*) indicate degree to which they agreed Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil participated in various categories of socially responsible behavior in Nigeria as outlined by Ketola (2008). Higher scores on these scales would indicate a more favorable perception among participants of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's use of CSR in Nigeria.

Carroll's 1971 model of CSR dimensions were used to help identify three main areas of CSR behavior, which have laid the foundation for modern CSR models. Participants' perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's business practices of being ethical, economically beneficial to society and legally sound were evaluated using Likert-type questions.

Perceptions of CSR behavior were measured using Ketola's (2008) CSR model. Suicidal behavior was measured by asking if the companies engaged in irresponsible behavior in Nigeria. Matriarchal behavior was measured using an index of three questions regarding each companies' concern for the well-being for the people the Nigerian community and its environment. The researcher also reverse coded a question about each companies' desires to a profit to include in the Matriarchal index for Exxon Mobil ( $\alpha = .733$ ) and Shell Oil ( $\alpha = .739$ ). The specific questions for this index included: Exxon Mobil/Shell Oil contributes to the well-being of

individual Nigerian citizens, Exxon Mobil/Shell Oil contributes to Nigeria's environmental needs, and Exxon Mobil's/Shell Oil's main concern in Nigeria is to produce a profit (reverse-coded). An index was also created to measure technocentric behavior for Exxon Mobil ( $\alpha = .608$ ) and Shell Oil ( $\alpha = .716$ ). The specific questions included in the technocentric index were: Exxon Mobil/Shell Oil uses its profits to produce better technology, Exxon Mobil/Shell Oil contributes to Nigeria's environmental needs, and Exxon Mobil/Shell Oil's contributes to Nigeria's environmental needs. The questions for this pertained to the companies' contributions to Nigeria's economic and environmental needs, as well as their use of profits to produce better technology. The index for the ideal category for Exxon Mobil ( $\alpha = .710$ ) and Shell Oil ( $\alpha = .715$ ) contained questions regarding the companies' contribution to the betterment of the Nigerian people, its economic stability and environmental concerns. Ketola's (2008) anthrocentric category, which emphasizes the needs of people over all other concerns, was represented by asking participants the degree to which they think each Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil contribute to the well-being of Nigerian citizens. The plutocentric category was measured by asking the participants the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that the companies contributed to Nigeria's economic needs. The question referencing the companies' contribution to Nigeria's environment represents the biocentric category of CSR. Since the patriarchal category deals with companies that take a responsible lead in developing countries, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that each company engages in more responsible behavior in Nigeria than in North America/Europe. The questions on the survey mimic Ketola's model because they showed CSR initiatives can stand alone, as with the patriarchal and biocentric categories, or combine with other CSR behaviors to create different categories, as seen with the matriarchal and ideal CSR categories.

In addition to the Likert-scale questions participants were provided open-ended questions to discuss their views on Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's socially responsible behavior in Nigeria. These questions were asked in an open-ended format to give participants an opportunity to address issues the researcher may have overlooked and would be beneficial for future research.

### Sample

The study sample consisted of three populations (Exxon Mobil employees, Shell Oil employees, and self-identified Nigerians). Of the total sample surveyed ( $N=109$ ) 25.2 % were Exxon Mobil employees, 23 % were Shell Oil employees, and 50% were self-identified Nigerians. The employee and Nigerian categories were not mutually exclusive, however few participants who were Nigerian and worked in the oil industry categorized themselves as Nigerian. The average participant was Black/African American, 31 years old ( $SD = 10.1$ ), male and a student. The occupations of participants included students (18.3%), accounting/financial (16.7%), Oil/Drafting Technician/Engineer (15.0%), professional (11.7%) and PR/Marketing (7.5%); 18.3% of participants omitted their professional background and 12.5% fell into the category of miscellaneous. Forty-four percent of the participants were Black/African American, 34.9% were White, 4.6% were Asian, 1.8% were Latin/Hispanic, 11.8 % wrote in African/Nigerian and the remaining 2.8% were Pacific Islander/Native American/unidentified.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Research Question 1

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare the perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's socially responsible efforts in Nigeria. To conduct this test Nigerians' perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil were compared to oil industry employees' perceptions of each company. Another series of independent sample t-tests were conducted for each of Carroll's (1971) CSR dimensions and Ketola's (2008) CSR categories.

Questions comparing Nigerians' and oil industry employees' perceptions of Exxon Mobil according to Carroll's CSR dimensions did not yield any significant differences. In the ethical dimension Nigerians ( $M = 3.32, SD = .98$ ) viewed Exxon Mobil as more ethical than oil industry employees ( $M = 3.16, SD = .94$ ),  $t(97) = -1.24, p > .05$ . In the economical dimension Nigerians ( $M = 3.32, SD = 1.06$ ) viewed Exxon Mobil as more economically beneficial than employees did ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.01$ ),  $t(98) = .291, p > .05$ . Nigerians ( $M = 2.96, SD = .97$ ) had the same view of Exxon Mobil as employees ( $M = 2.96, SD = .89$ ) in the legal dimension,  $t(98) = .00, p > .05$ .

No significant differences were shown in the  $t$ -test results between Nigerians and oil industry employees in their perceptions of Shell Oil. Nigerians ( $M = 2.60, SD = 1.16$ ) viewed Shell Oil as ethical employees ( $M = 2.93, SD = 1.08$ ). However, Nigerians ( $M = 3.31, SD = 1.08$ ) did view Shell Oil as more economically beneficial than employees ( $M = 3.16, SD = .99$ ),  $t(90) = .71, p > .05$ . And in the legal dimension, Nigerians ( $M = 2.94, SD = 1.08$ ) again held the less favorable view of Shell Oil than employees ( $M = 2.81, SD = .99$ ),  $t(88) = .55, p > .05$ .

Similarly, questions about Exxon Mobil did not show significant differences between oil industry employees and Nigerians regarding the company's CSR efforts in Nigeria, according to Ketola's 2008 categories of CSR. However, a significant difference between Nigerians ( $M = 2.58, SD = 1.18$ ) and oil industry employees ( $M = 3.02, SD = 1.05$ ) was shown when participants were questioned about Exxon Mobil's participation in anthropocentric CSR efforts,  $t(97) = -1.96, p < .05$ . A significant difference was also found between Nigerians ( $M = 2.63, SD = .82$ ) and oil industry employees ( $M = 3.00, SD = .82$ ) in their views of Exxon Mobil as engaging in practices pertaining to Exxon Mobil as an ideal CSR company,  $t(98) = -2.22, p > .05$ . Again, the differences between the Nigerian sample ( $M = 2.70, SD = 1.17$ ) and employee sample ( $M = 3.10, SD = .99$ ) approached significance when respondents were questioned about Exxon Mobil's suicidal CSR practices,  $t(98) = -1.85, p > .05$ .

Results indicated minimal differences in opinion between Nigerians and oil employees regarding Exxon Mobil's several categories of CSR initiatives. Even though oil employees perceived Exxon Mobil as more matriarchal ( $M = 2.76, SD = .80$ ) than Nigerians ( $M = 2.47, SD = .85$ ), this difference was not statistically significant,  $t(98) = -1.73, p > .05$ . Employees ( $M = 2.69, SD = .98$ ) were also more likely than Nigerians ( $M = 2.40, SD = .93$ ), to view Exxon Mobil's efforts in Nigeria biocentric, even though the differences were insignificant ( $t(98) = -2.01, p > .05$ ). Additionally, no significant difference was found in Nigerians' ( $M = 2.52, SD = 1.02$ ) and employees ( $M = 2.56, SD = .97$ ) perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as patriarchal companies,  $t(97) = -1.53, p > .05$ . Nigerians ( $M = 2.94, SD = 1.14$ ) and employees ( $M = 3.22, SD = 1.05$ ) shared similar views of Exxon Mobil as a plutocentric company,  $t(98) = .291, p > .05$ . Similar to the participants views of Exxon Mobil as plutocentric company, no significant difference was found between employees ( $M = 3.00, SD = .75$ ) and Nigerians ( $M =$

2.79,  $SD = .76$ ),  $t(98) = 1.33$ ,  $p > .05$ . However, employees gave a higher overall rating in the technocentric category.

Mirroring the results from Exxon Mobil, questions pertaining to Shell Oil's CSR practices also showed minimal significant differences between Nigerians and oil industry employees. The matriarchal index of questions for Shell Oil showed significant differences between Nigerians ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) and oil industry employees ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .91$ );  $t(98) = 2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ . A significant difference of opinion between Nigerians ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) and oil employees ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) regarding Shell Oil's biocentric CSR practices in Nigeria was also found,  $t(89) = -2.32$ ,  $p < .05$ . These findings indicate oil employees are more likely than Nigerians to think Shell Oil practices in Nigeria are environmentally friendly and better for the enrichment of the Nigerian community.

However, there were many areas of CSR in which Nigerians and oil employees did not share a significant difference of opinion. For example, in the ideal category Nigerians' opinions ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) and oil employees' opinions ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) of Shell Oil was not significantly different  $t(98) = -1.54$ ,  $p > .05$ . The suicidal category was another category that showed no significant difference of opinion ( $t(90) = -1.40$ ,  $p > .05$ ) between Nigerians ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) and oil employees ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). The anthrocentric category also did not indicate significant differences between Nigerians ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) and employees ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $t(90) = -1.52$ ,  $p > .05$ . And although employees ( $M_2 = 3.04$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) gave a higher rating of Shell Oil as engaging in technocentric CSR activity than Nigerians ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) this difference was not significant,  $t(98) = -1.42$ ,  $p > .05$ . No significant differences between Nigerians ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) and oil industry employees ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) views of Shell Oil as engaging in patriarchal CSR practices,  $t(89) = -.091$ ,  $p > .05$ . And again in the

plutocratic category no significant differences of opinion were found between the Nigerian sample ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) and the employee sample ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $t(90) = -1.52$ ,  $p > .05$ .

These results show Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil have not produced significantly different CSR images between Nigerians and oil industry employees. The Nigerians' opinions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil CSR practices, outlined by Ketola's (2008) multi-disciplinary model of CSR, was relatively similar to those of the oil employees. Both companies shared minimal areas of significant differences of opinions. Exxon Mobil's significant differences were found in the suicidal and anthropocentric categories. Exxon Mobil's employees' remarks on the company's openness may help explain the seemingly contradictory significant higher employee rating in the suicidal and anthropocentric categories. Exxon employees know the company's objective is to produce a profit, which employees may not view as a bad business practice, but just being honest. Additionally, in the open-ended discussion questions Exxon Mobil employees expressed that they enjoyed their company and often stated, "It's a great place to work." The employee's satisfaction with their company may have made heightened the employees perception that Exxon Mobil does care about their employees and other communities. On the other hand, significant differences between Nigerians and oil industry employees' perceptions of Shell Oil were found in the matriarchal and biocentric categories. In the open-ended responses stated they often Nigerian participants relied on news from "back home" about Shell Oil, which is often negative. On the other hand, oil industry employees stated they relied on company/industry-specific information to gain information about Shell Oil. The differences in information gathering may explain the differences between groups on the topic because industry/company-specific communication may view the company more favorably or address issues the general public of

Nigeria is not aware. Tables 1, as well as figures 3 through 6, help illustrate these results. Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil showed no significant differences in the following CSR categories: ideal, technocentric, patriarchal and plutocentric.

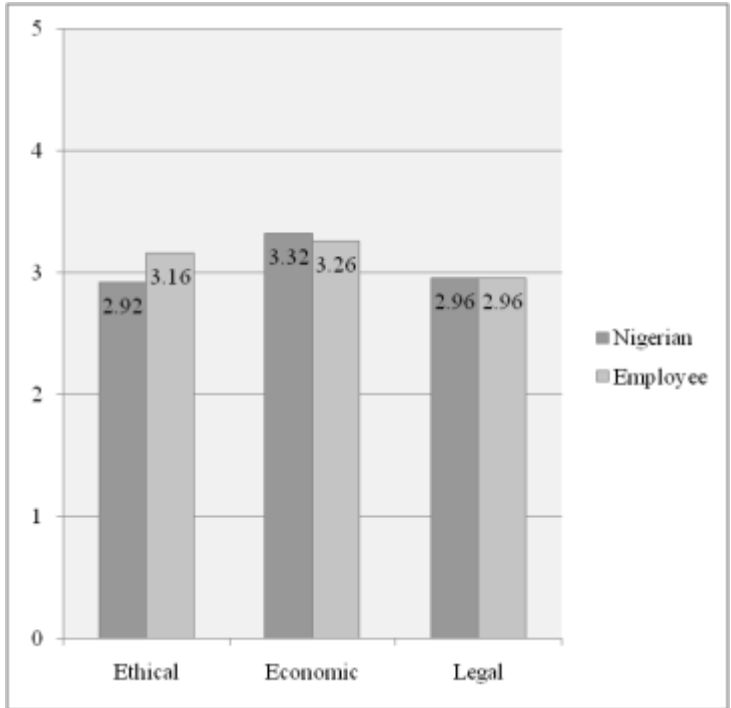
**Table 1. Average differences of opinion between target publics regarding Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's CSR reputation.**

Carroll's Dimension	Exxon Mobil					Shell Oil				
	Nigerian Opinion		Employee Opinion		<i>t</i> -statistic	Nigerian Opinion		Employee Opinion		<i>t</i> -statistic
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Ethical	2.92	0.98	3.16	0.94	-1.24	2.60	1.16	2.93	1.09	-1.40
Economical	3.32	1.06	3.26	1.01	0.29	3.31	1.08	3.16	1.00	0.71
Legal	2.96	0.97	2.96	0.89	0.00	2.94	1.08	2.81	1.00	0.55
Ketola's CSR Category										
Matriarchal	2.47	0.85	2.76	0.80	-1.30	2.5	0.95	2.78	0.91	2.11*
Suicidal	2.7	1.17	3.10	0.99	-1.85*	2.60	1.16	2.93	1.09	-1.40
Anthrocentric	2.58	1.18	3.02	1.05	-1.96*	2.63	0.85	2.95	1.00	-1.52
Ideal	2.63	0.82	3.00	0.82	-2.22	2.87	1.00	3.08	1.00	-1.54
Technocentric	2.79	.76	3.00	0.75	-1.32	2.86	0.85	3.04	0.90	-1.42
Biocentric	2.40	0.93	2.69	0.98	-2.01	2.28	0.85	2.23	1.00	-2.32*
Patriarchal	2.52	1.02	2.56	0.97	0.13	2.58	1.20	2.60	1.03	-0.09
Plutocentric	2.94	1.14	3.22	1.05	0.30	3.06	1.14	3.14	1.02	-1.52

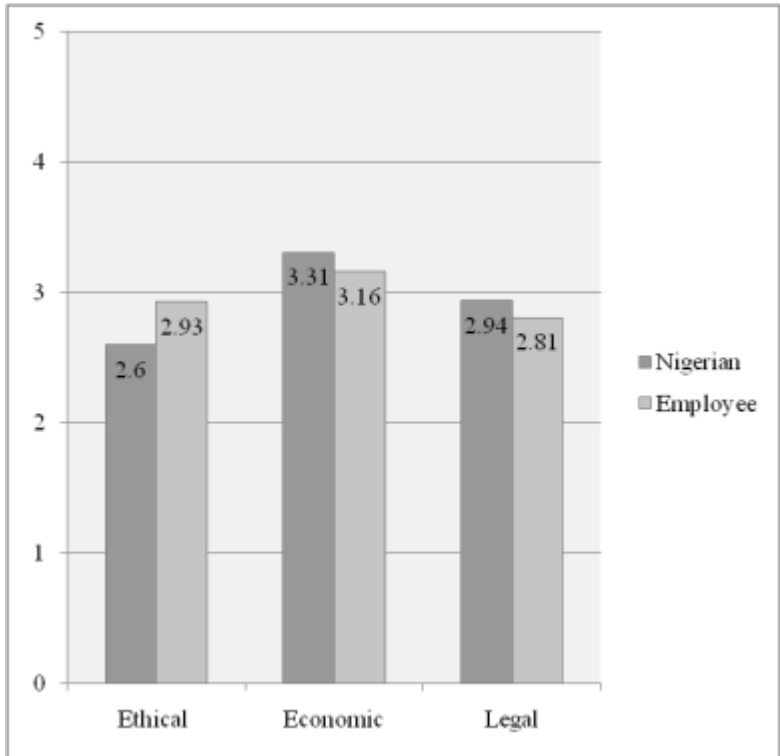
Note. \* $p < .05$

Note. \*\*  $< .00$

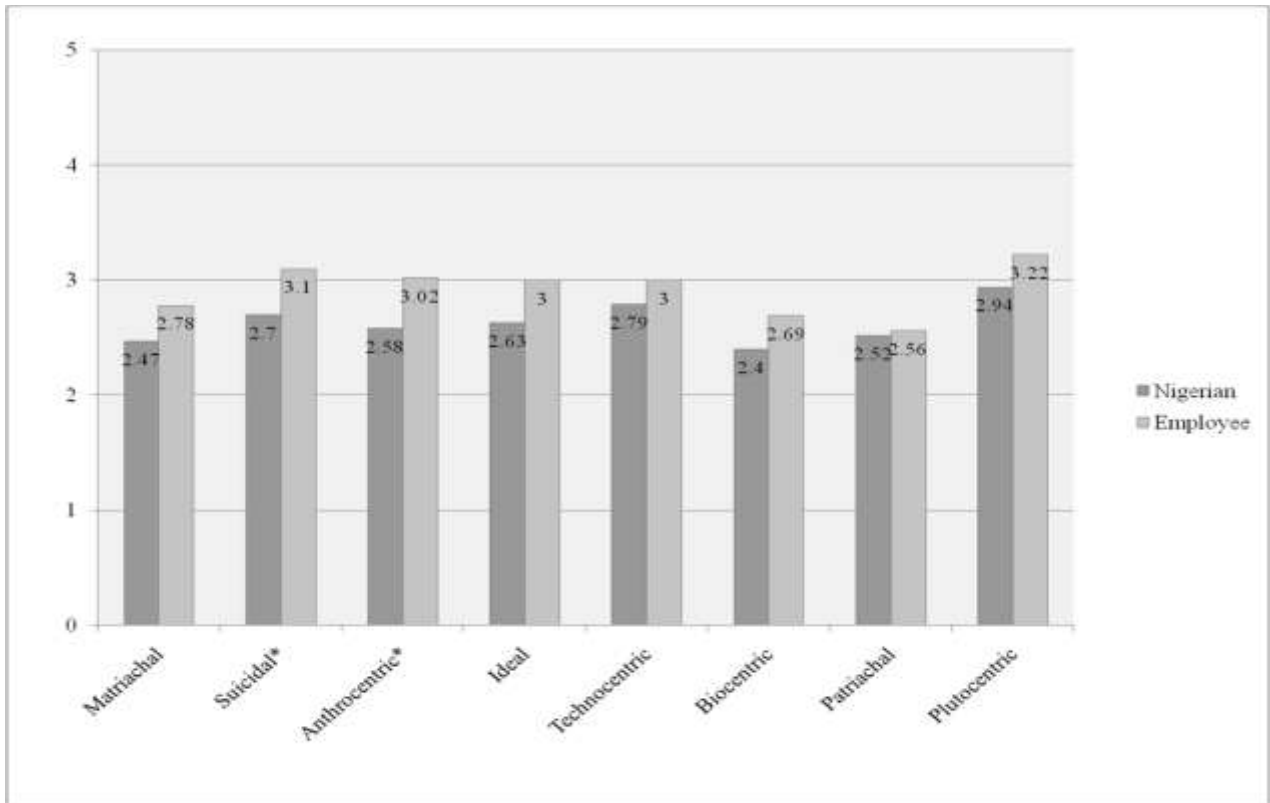




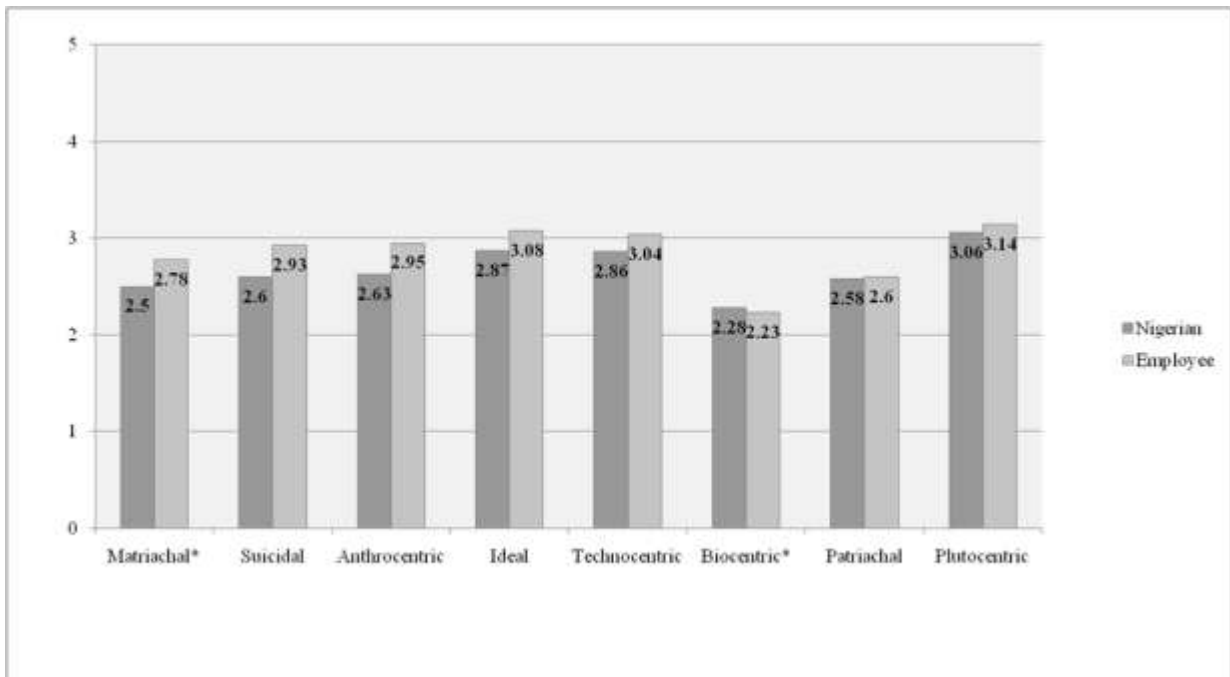
**Figure 3. Average differences of opinion between target publics using Carroll’s model for Exxon Mobil**



**Figure 4. Average differences of opinion between target publics using Carroll’s model for Shell Oil.**



**Figure 5. Average differences of opinion between target publics regarding Exxon Mobil using Ketola's model**



**Figure 6. Average differences of opinion between target publics regarding Shell Oil using Ketola's model**

## Research Question 2

A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine if participants viewed Exxon Mobil or Shell Oil as a more responsible corporate citizen. This test compared the companies to one another within each CSR category. A significant difference between the perception of the two companies were found in Carroll's (1970) ethical dimension of CSR as well as Ketola's (2008) anthropocentric and patriarchal categories. Tables 2, as well as figures 7 and 8, summarize these results.

Of Carroll's (1970) three components of CSR, the ethical dimension is the only one that showed a significant different public perception in favor of Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) over Shell Oil ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ),  $t(97) = 2.26$ ,  $p < .05$ . In the economical dimension public perception of Exxon Mobil ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and Shell Oil ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) was not significantly different. The same was also true in the legal dimension. Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) has a slightly more favorable perception than Shell Oil ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ), but it was not significantly different,  $t(98) = .732$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Just as in Carroll's (1971) model, participants gave the significant advantage of perception of CSR to Exxon Mobil over Shell Oil. Results indicated participants viewed Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) as significantly more anthropocentric than Shell Oil ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ),  $t(97) = -5.04$ ,  $p < .000$ . Statistics also show that participants favored Exxon Mobil ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) over Shell Oil ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) as engaging in more responsible behavior in Nigeria than developed countries than,  $t(97) = 6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) was also considered more ethical than Shell Oil ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ),  $t(97) = 2.26$ ,  $p < .05$ . Although these areas of CSR show a significant difference between the Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil, there were many areas of CSR where the public perceptions of these companies' behaviors were not statistically significant. For example, no significant differences were shown

between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil regarding public perception of several of Ketola's categories of CSR. Ketola's (2008) matriarchal category between Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) and Shell Oil ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ), ( $t(98) = -5.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the suicidal category, Exxon Mobil has a higher overall perception ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) than Shell Oil ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) but the difference was not significant,  $t(97) = .528$ ,  $p > .05$ . The similar trend was found in the biocentric category, ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = .97$ ;  $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = .95$ )  $t(97) = .638$ ,  $p > .05$  and the plutocentric category ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ;  $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ )  $t(97) = .528$ ,  $p > .05$ . Exxon Mobil had less favorable perception than Shell Oil in two of Ketola's CSR categories, but differences were not significant. In the ideal category Shell ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) has a favorable perception than Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .82$ ),  $t(97) = -1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ . The same trend was true in the technocentric category, Shell Oil ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) Exxon Mobil ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = .74$ ),  $t(97) = .181$ ,  $p > .05$ .

These statistics indicate that even when using two different models of CSR, there is not a major difference in the public perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations. However, when statistical differences are found the advantage goes to Exxon Mobil over Shell Oil, even though representatives from each company were almost evenly split in the sample (25.2% were Exxon Mobil employees and 23% were Shell Oil employees). Open-ended questions, which allowed participants to discuss the CSR differences between the two companies, provided some insight into why Exxon Mobil is favored over Shell Oil. Participants (mainly Nigerian participants) said they knew more about Shell Oil's CSR initiatives in Nigeria and felt Shell Oil provided more CSR programs to the Nigerian community than Exxon Mobil. However, participants felt Shell Oil engaged in more CSR practices and promoted their CSR programs more because Shell Oil had more to hide. Company organization may have also

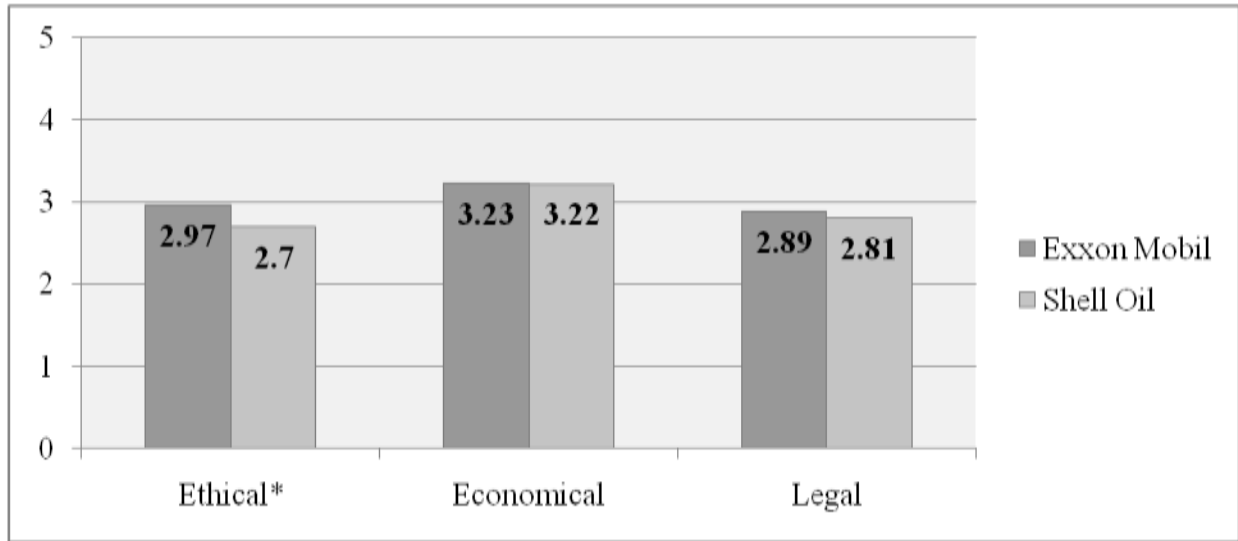
contributed to the differences between the companies. Exxon Mobil employees were more aware of their companies CSR efforts and accessible than Shell Oil employees.

**Table 2. A comparison of public opinion of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's adherence to the different categories of CSR outlined by Ketola (2008) and Carroll (1971).**

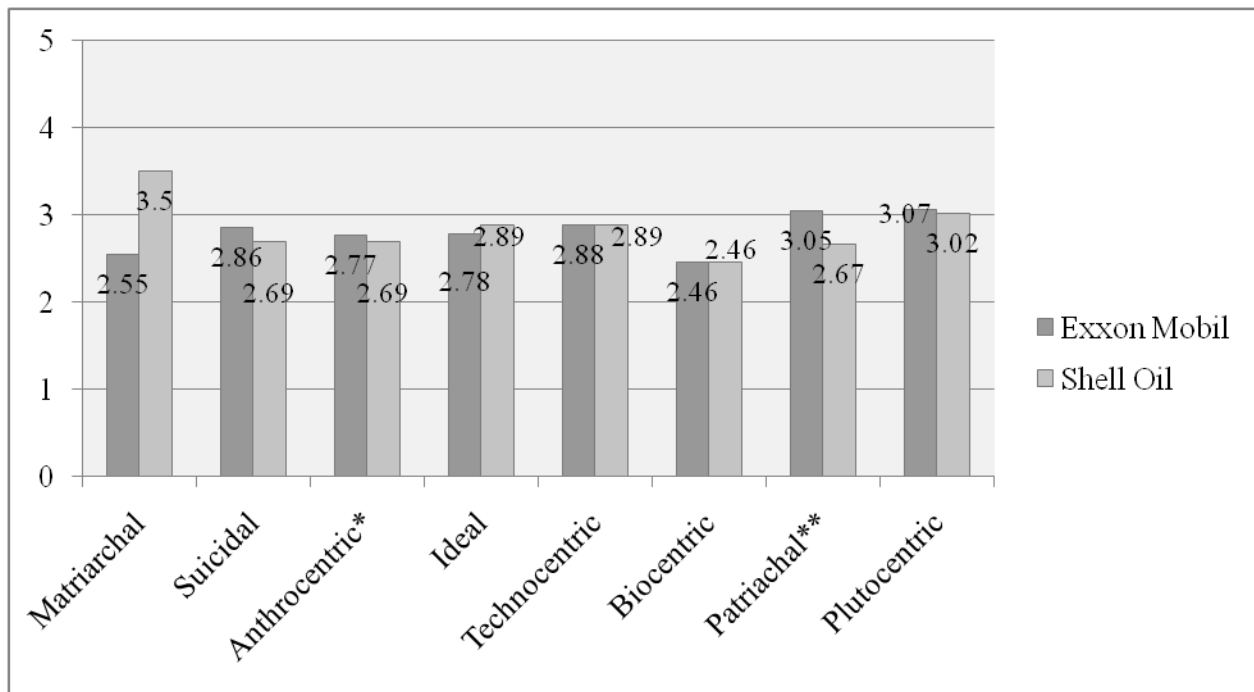
Carroll's CSR Dimension	Exxon Mobil		Shell Oil		t-statistic
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Ethical	2.97	1.00	2.70	1.11	2.26*
Economical	3.23	1.08	3.22	1.07	0.91
Legal	2.89	0.96	2.81	1.10	0.47
Ketola's CSR Category					
Matriarchal	2.55	0.84	3.50	1.10	-5.576
Suicidal	2.86	1.13	2.69	1.12	0.528
Anthrocentric	2.77	1.12	2.69	1.12	-5.04*
Ideal	2.78	0.82	2.89	0.98	-1.88
Technocentric	2.88	0.74	2.89	0.88	0.18
Biocentric	2.46	0.97	2.46	0.97	0.64
Patriarchal	3.05	1.07	2.67	1.04	6.35**
Plutocentric	3.07	1.04	3.02	1.06	0.53

*Note.* \* $p < .05$

*Note.* \*\* $p < .00$



**Figure 7. A comparison of perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's adherence to Carroll's CSR Model**



**Figure 8. A comparison of perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's adherence to Ketola's CSR Model**

Research Question 3

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss their overall impressions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations in Nigeria through two open-ended

questions. In the open-ended question section of the survey, several participants mentioned difficulty trying to distinguish their opinions of Exxon Mobil separately from Shell Oil. Instead these participants were more comfortable addressing the CSR efforts of the oil industry as a whole. However, many participants were able to address specific concerns about each company. More participants were more likely to respond and went into further detail when the question was about Shell Oil than Exxon Mobil.

When participants discussed Shell Oil they shared the idea that Shell Oil tried to contribute to Nigeria but also acknowledged the company's actions were not enough to compensate for the harm the company does or that the contributions were just to distract from the company's unethical practices. One Nigerian participant stated, "Shell does not care about my people or my country they [it] only wants people to think they [it] do."

Participants who provided their overall impressions of Exxon Mobil viewed Exxon Mobil as a profit-driven company that showed little concern for the Nigerian community. Participants acknowledged Exxon Mobil is contributing to the overall betterment of Nigeria, but these efforts were not enough to make up for the destruction the company is doing. T-tests results support the participants' sentiment in the area. The t-tests show Exxon Mobil has higher mean scores in seven CSR categories, however significant differences between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil were only found in three of Ketola's CSR categories.

Words regarding Shell Oil were harsher than those regarding Exxon Mobil, even though participants acknowledged Shell Oil did participate in community initiatives. Overall, participants were more effective in providing details regarding Shell Oil's presence in Nigeria than they were able to for Exxon Mobil. The overall tone for comments about Shell Oil was negative, with few positive comments. And the overall tone for Exxon Mobil the tone was more

apathetic/neutral. For every contribution mentioned by one participant another participant expressed dissatisfaction with the initiative. For example, one participant mentioned Shell Oil provides ample job opportunities in Nigeria and another participant stated although the company offers these opportunities many qualified Nigerians are left out of the job pool. Another example is when one participant mentioned how Shell Oil invests in community enrichment programs and another participant said the company should concentrate its efforts in the Niger delta, instead of the developed cities as it currently doing.

Although, several participants found it difficult to distinguish between the companies and instead referenced the oil industry as whole, there is a noticeable difference between how the Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil are perceived. This difference was adequately summed up by the following participant response:

They're [Exxon Mobil] another oil company. Not the worst, not the best. They don't make much "to-do" over their attempts to cover up the pollution they cause in rural communities (through community programming). Shell is generally considered to be the worst even though they probably do the most obvious community development and corporate relations. However, they're also considered to cause the most havoc environmentally and leave the biggest negative impact on communities (whether or not this is true, I do not really know, but that is the perception). Shell in the Niger Delta is like the devil; Exxon Mobil while not celebrated or loved, does not inspire these extreme negative feelings."

#### Research Question 4

The researcher conducted a series regression analysis to study the relationship between two-step flow and the samples' perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations. In this series of regression analyses the independent variable is the degree to how often participants asked others for their opinions about Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil. The more likely the participant was to ask others for their opinion then the less likely the participant is to be identified as an opinion leader. The dependent variable was the perception of the ethical



reputations of these companies. The perception of ethical images was identified as Carroll's (1971) three-dimensional model of corporate performance. This model was used in place of Ketola's holistic model of corporate social responsibility because this research question focused on the relationship between opinion sharing and the perception of a positive CSR image and not analyzing the components of a positive CSR image.

The regressions showed that engaging in the interpersonal opinion sharing part of the two-step flow of communication had a significant impact on the likelihood of participants viewing Exxon Mobil's practices as ethical, economically beneficial and legally sound. The relationship between Exxon's Mobil's ethical CSR image and opinion sharing was significant. Opinion sharing predicted the participants' perceptions of Exxon Mobil as ethical,  $F(1, 107) = 4.64, p < .05, R^2 = .03$ , indicating 3% of the variance was due to the frequency they asked others for their opinions. The influence of opinion sharing and participants' perception of Exxon Mobil as engaging in economically beneficial practices was also statistically significant,  $F(1, 108) = 6.1, p < .05, R^2 = .05$ . Similar findings were found when analyzing the participants' perceptions of Exxon Mobil as participating in legally sound practices,  $F(1, 108) = 3.40, p > .05, R^2 = .03$ .

The regressions showed that asking others for opinions had some impact on the likelihood of participants viewing Shell Oil's practices as economically beneficial and legally sound. Opinion sharing did not predict perceptions of Shell Oil as ethical,  $F(1, 101) = .567, p < .05, R^2 = -.00$ . However, opinion sharing did predict the participants' perception of Shell Oil as engaging in economically beneficial practices,  $F(1, 101) = 4.69, p < .05, R^2 = .04$ . Similar findings were found when analyzing the participants' perceptions of Exxon Mobil as participating in legally sound practices,  $F(1, 99) = 13.12, p < .00, R^2 = .12$ .

Overall, the more likely participants were to ask others for opinions about Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil the more likely the participants were to view the companies as largely more socially responsible. The favorable impact of opinion sharing could be aided by the participants' mistrust of the news media and therefore they rely on individuals who are close to them. Interpersonal communication may have greater effect on oil industry employees' perception of the companies because they so which to create the friction that would occur if they disagreed with others in the work place (Zaller, 1992). Table 3 offers a side by side comparison of the relationship between opinion sharing and socially responsible perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil.

**Table 3. Summary of regression analysis for opinion-seeking behavior on socially responsible images of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil.**

CSR Dimension	Exxon Mobil		Shell Oil	
	$\beta$	p value	$\beta$	p value
Ethical	0.03	0.03*	0.00	0.45
Economical	0.05	0.02*	0.04	0.03*
Legal	0.05	0.02*	0.12	0.00**

*Note.* \* $p < .05$

*Note.* \*\* $p < .00$

Research Question 5

In addition to asking participants about opinion sharing, participants also had the opportunity to discuss the role personal relations played in the formation of personal opinions about Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil. Because their industry overlaps with various sectors of society (government, private industry and the general public) employees of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil have numerous information sources regarding their companies at their disposal. These information sources include office communication, news media, and conversations with colleagues and friends/family Oil industry employees and Nigerians differed in their perception

of the role personal relationships play in keeping them informed on issues regarding Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil.

Employees at Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil stated they mostly rely on new media coverage and internal company communication to keep them informed of issues regarding Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's corporate social responsibility initiatives more so than networking/personal information sharing. Not all, but a few employees said they believed the news media wanted the companies to look bad; therefore the companies' contributions are often overlooked in favor of controversy and making the companies look irresponsible. Employees noted family member and friends often ask them for their opinion regarding issues brought up in the news about Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil since they work for the companies. Although, oil industry employees did not believe themselves to be personally influenced by a personal hierarchy of information sharing, some employees did note the importance of two-step flow.

When asked about the role personal relationships play in shaping others opinions towards Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil, one oil industry employee said, "...in many instances, when someone doesn't know much about a certain topic, he or she tends to choose thoughts and ideas heard among peers and associates." Oil industry employees did not think the two-step flow model of communication did not influence their perception of their company or other companies, but it did have an impact member of their communities. For example, one representative for Shell Oil noted that personal relationships had not influenced her perception of her company, but she did find having these personal relationships made her more influential when trying to gather support for projects in Nigeria. Internally, traditional corporate communication strategies, such as memos and reports seem to have a greater impact on informing employees, although

employees are aware of the effect of two-step flow of communication can have to less-informed and external publics.

Contrary to oil industry employees' reliance on the two-step flow model of communication to stay informed, Nigerians favored this form of information sharing over many traditional media forms. Nigerians in the United States and those currently living in Nigeria viewed personal information sharing as being more informative than reading a paper, because as one Nigerian participant said, "...sometimes the news reports only what they want to report." This statement echoes the oil industry mistrust of news media. However, Nigerians' expressed concern that the news media was being bought by big industry to cover up the truth about what is going on in Nigeria. Unlike the employees who commented that news media wanted the oil companies to look bad and presented only one side of the story. Nigerians who live in Nigeria, but live in the cities and may be removed from the situation in the Niger Delta feel getting information from other Nigerians who are informed or directly affected by the oil companies' presence in Nigeria is more accurate than news media or company-generated information. Nigerians who currently live in the United States, relied on two-step flow more than Nigerians who are living in Nigeria because they feel American news media does not accurately reflect the oil situation in Nigeria and getting information from people back home is the only way to stay truly informed. Today, staying in touch with people "back home" not only includes phone call and letters, but social networking sites, like Facebook, with groups dedicated keeping others informed about events and issues relevant to Nigeria. When the questionnaire asked participants to list resources they use to stay informed about Nigeria and the oil companies, Nigerian students listed Facebook as a source, in addition to traditional sources such as family and respected friends back home.

The regression analysis offered some support for the participants' view of the role of two-step on shaping corporate images. The regression analysis showed the more likely participants asked others for their opinions the more likely they were to view Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as engaging in ethical, economically beneficial and legally sound practices. This finding could be a result of the participants' mistrust of news media.

Although employees and Nigerians differed in their views of how influential hierarchy information sharing in shaping opinion about Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil, both sample groups shared a distrust American news media. One group saying American news media wants the companies to look bad and the other group saying the media only care about money and not about the people of Nigeria. This polarized mistrust of American news media may be an affect of two-step flow.

### Summary of Results

The findings from this study suggest Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil share many differences and similarities in the public's perception of their CSR image. T-tests for this study show oil industry employees were significantly more likely than Nigerians to view Exxon Mobil as having suicidal and anthrocentric CSR images. T-tests also indicate oil industry employees were significantly more likely to view Shell Oil as having matriarchal and biocentric images. When the researcher combined both sample groups, Exxon Mobil was shown to have a significantly higher reputation in Carroll's ethical dimension of CSR and Ketola's anthrocentric and patriarchal category of CSR than Shell Oil.

This also finds the two-step communication model may play a greater role than the public realizes in shaping their opinions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil. Although, oil industry employees say opinion sharing does not shape their perceptions of either company, some

employees noted opinion-sharing does have an effect on people when they are not fully informed and that it is more successful in gaining community support than other means of business communication. The Nigerian community actively seeks out opinions of others and as a result it is more likely to view the companies as positively engaging in CSR practices.

The two-step flow model of communication does play significant a role in contributing to positive reputations of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil. However, the companies' reputations are not overwhelming positive, but Exxon Mobil is shown as being more socially responsible, even though the study's participants were less aware of Exxon Mobil's CSR initiatives in Nigeria.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study finds there are some differences found between Nigerians' and oil industry employee' perceptions of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations and also some differences between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's CSR images. Findings from this study also show that opinion sharing does have an affect on how favorable participants viewed the companies and that Nigerians relied on two-step flow model of communication more heavily than oil industry employees when formulating opinions about Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil.

### Research Questions

Differences between the overall perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as ethical corporations were not drastically different. Overall, Exxon Mobil was favored more so than Shell Oil. Exxon Mobil's more positive news media coverage (Narcisse, 2009) may have played a role in helping Exxon Mobil appear as more ethical than Shell Oil, however, both Nigerians and oil industry employees cited a mistrust of American news media. The participants' mistrust of media is a phenomenon known as hostile media effect. Hostile media effect has been shown in different groups that feel their group is unfairly represented in the news media (Stalder, 2009; Roger & Shelly, 1994). While these studies focus on political groups, the same rational could be use to explain why oil industry employees and Nigerians share a distrust of news media. Oil industry employees and Nigerians are on two separate sides of the issue of oil companies' presence in Nigeria and as a result each group has its own centralized ideas on the issue.

Other possible explanations for the differences between the two companies' images to the companies CSR initiatives may be how the companies promote their CSR initiatives. Many Nigerians felt Shell Oil did a lot for the Nigerian community, but also felt the company engaged in CSR initiatives to try to distract attention from the negative consequences of Shell Oil's

presence in Nigeria. As Luo and Bhattacharya's (2006) research on positive and negative effects of CSR would have predicted Shell Oil's advertising and branding of its CSR initiatives may have created an atmosphere of mistrust around the company. Shell Oil's marketing of their CSR initiatives, rather than utilizing other means of communicating may have hindered the sincerity of the CSR initiative. The lagging Nigerian perspective regarding Exxon Mobil's presence in Nigeria may stem from the fact in the survey's open-ended questions, Nigerians were not aware of many of Exxon Mobil's CSR initiatives. Lin, Lim, Kiossis and Ferguson's (2006) experimental research indicate effective CSR image shaping is done when the publics are talking about and involved in CSR initiatives. Exxon Mobil's failure to stir up outside conversation about its CSR initiatives may be hurting its image in external publics. Shell Oil's well-known CSR works may be working against them because the information is presented to the company by Shell Oil, instead of a community member.

Minimal significant differences were found between oil industry employees and Nigerians views of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations. Exxon Mobil employees were more likely than Nigerians to view the company as suicidal, only concerned with profit but also that Exxon Mobil care about the well-being of the people of Nigeria. These two opinions of Exxon Mobil may at first seem to contradict each other but a closer examination of Exxon Mobil's corporate communication structure may help explain why these finding may actually go hand in hand. During the initial research proceedings the researcher had to contact several Exxon Mobil executives as well as had the opportunity to meet with many Exxon Mobil employees at various positions. Exxon Mobil executives were open to discuss the company the researcher and employees were generally happy with their employer with many citing as a "great place to work." This openness may help explain why employees were willing to admit the



company's main concern is profit, and because the company is so well-liked its employees would view the company as likely to care about the well-being of the people in other countries in which it operates. The findings from this study which show oil industry employees do not have a significantly higher perception of oil companies as socially responsible corporations than stakeholder negatively impacted by the companies' practices may prove to be problematic for Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil in the future, as higher perceptions of an employees' company of being socially responsible is associated with employee longevity and overall job satisfaction (Schoenberg, 2007).

Yoon, Gurham-Canli and Schwarz (2006) reiterate the importance of companies, especially those with negative reputations, to rely on outside sources to effectively shape a positive CSR image. However, results from this study show that according the employees and Nigerians Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil have not been successful in using out-side sources of information sharing, such as two-step flow to shape an image. Employees have failed to recognize two-step as a method of shaping their opinions about their companies and although the Nigerian community use two-step flow the perceptions derived from this information sharing in not significantly positive. The differences in how oil industry employees and Nigerians use the two- step flow model of communication mirrors previous research on the communication model in different cultures. Yang and Stone (2008) stated the influence of two-step flow in Western cultures may be diminished due to the homogeneity and prevalence of mass news media. In comparison to the influence of two-step flow on the opinions Western-minded people, Sonia (2008) found a contrasting effect of two-step flow in African cultures, particularly in Nigeria, which echo the findings in this study. Due to the combination of tradition, close cultural ties and

mistrust of Western news media, many Nigerians felt getting news from other Nigerians was more effective form of information gathering.

A comparison between the two companies on various measures of CSR shows few significant differences. The findings from this study indicate Exxon Mobil may not excel successfully portraying a positive CSR image. Research on shaping successful CSR images provides several reasons why Shell may be as successful in shaping a positive CSR image in areas where Exxon Mobil has not been.

Luo and Bhattacharya's (2006) research showed a favorable CSR initiative must be perceived as sincere and be associated with a quality product in order to produce a favorable CSR image. This study did not study the perceived quality of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's products so no inferences can be in this regard. However, this study did allow for participants to discuss how sincere they viewed each company as being. In the open-ended question portion of the survey participants expressed they did not view Shell Oil as being sincere in their CSR initiatives. Participants expressed concern Shell Oil was only trying to cover up unethical behavior with their CSR efforts or not properly addressing the concerns of the Nigerian community, for example having CSR programs in the cities of Nigeria rather than the Niger Delta, where Shell Oil's presence is more prevalent. Additionally, oil industry employees' perceptions of the companies may have been swayed by the lack personal communication and therefore lack of sincerity when exchanging information about Shell Oil and Exxon Mobil. Since oil industry employees said they rely on more on company publications rather than opinion sharing did not play a major in shaping their opinion about Exxon Mobil or Shell Oil, their companies could be perceived as more distant from their CSR initiatives. If companies held meetings to discuss their CSR initiatives or included a CSR updates portion in their regularly

held meeting they could potentially increase their internal CSR image and improve employee morale (Schoenberg, 2007).

Shell Oil's problem of sincerity could also translate to a problem of trustworthiness. Lin, Lim, Kiossis and Ferguson (2006) found trustworthiness of the sender of the CSR message if a factor in determining the positive perception of a CSR initiative. Since sincerity and trustworthiness often go hand in hand, a company, like Shell Oil is struggling with being viewed as sincere is probably struggling to produce a trustworthy image, as well. However, Lin, Lim, Kiossis and Ferguson's research also provides Shell Oil with an advantage over Exxon Mobil in shaping a positive CSR image. Their research showed prior knowledge of the company also helps to shape a positive CSR image. In the 1940s Shell Oil, began oil exploration in the Niger Delta and in the 1950's was one of the first companies to drill for oil in the region. Exxon Mobil did not establish a presence in the Niger Delta until the 1960s. Consequently, Shell Oil's longer presence in Nigeria would help explain while although Shell Oil struggles with perceptions of sincerity and trustworthiness, t-tests showed few differences between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's CSR images.

How key publics are informed may also help explain the differences between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's CSR images. In a 2006 study conducted by Yoon, Gurham-Canli and Schwartz, CSR messages were found to be more effective when the company is not viewed as being suspicious and the message of the CSR initiative is spread, worth of mouth or by outside media sources, but not advertising. Responses from the Nigerian sample of participants, such as "they [Shell Oil] just want people to think they care" indicate there is a level of mistrust. Additionally according to Yoon, Gurham-Canli and Schwartz's study, the fact participants were informed Shell Oil's CSR history and initiatives may not be helpful in helping in shaping a CSR

a positive CSR image if the company is promoting the CSR themselves rather than relaying on other information sharing techniques such as the two-step flow model of communication.

Although participants in this study relied on opinion sharing at varying rates in order to shape opinions of the companies, regression analysis support Yoon, Gurham-Canli and Schwartz's 2006 findings. Opinion sharing increased the favorable perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations. If companies invested their resources in indentifying opinion leaders and creating environments where information about CSR initiatives can be shared they may be more successful in overcoming negative reputations.

Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil share a different history in Nigeria. Because of Shell Oil's long history in Nigeria, it can be viewed as the one responsible for bringing the rest of the oil companies to Nigeria and creating controversy between the other companies, government and people of Nigeria. The t-tests show Shell Oil is struggling to have a CSR image internally and externally, even though it engages in just as many CSR practices and in the same areas as Exxon Mobil (Narcisse, 2009). Looking at options outside of branding CSR initiatives and advertising may be more beneficial to Shell's CSR image.

When asked to address concerns about their overall perception of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil as socially responsible corporations, the Nigerian sample shared they felt the oil companies contributed financially to Nigeria, which supports Carroll's economic dimension of CSR. These participants were also concerned by the companies' unfair hiring practices and lack of adherence to the regulations/laws of oil production and revenue, which fall into Carroll's ethical and legal responsibility dimensions of CSR. The participants' identification of concerns about the companies' behaviors that fell into Carroll's (1971) dimensions of CSR provides support for Carroll's model as a measure for CSR images. Additionally, support for Ketola's (2008) holistic

model was also found in the open-ended responses. Participants did not state one behavior as being more prevalent in their decisions regarding the companies' socially responsible images, this finding leaves the doors open to interpretation of a socially responsible image and may include varying degrees of different types of behavior.

### Implications

Companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil can use the information gathered from this study to objectively look at their CSR/PR campaigns to allocate a more effective of resources. For example, the companies could back on advertising of their CSR initiatives and focus more time and money getting to know members of their communities in which they operate, especially in developing countries and hostile environments, like the Niger Delta. Findings from this research can help those in the public relations/pubic affairs profession, especially those in the oil industry, to understand the weakness and strengths of their industry.

When companies can look at their CSR reputation objectively and identify the weaknesses and strengths of their CSR initiatives and from effective CSR campaigns they can engage in the benefits associated with having a favorable CSR reputation. Black and Hartel (2003) identify public relations advantages of having a favorable CSR reputation. These benefits include the opportunity for open dialogue with stake holders that go beyond traditional public relations tools, such as press releases.

Using Carroll's 1971 three-dimensional model of CSR and Ketola's (2008) holistic approach helped this study create a quantifiable and objective measure of the perception CSR among different publics. Having a quantifiable and objective measure of different categories of CSR practices will help public relations and public relations professionals see how effective their

CSR campaigns have been in shaping a socially responsible corporate image in the eyes of their key publics.

### Limitations

Despite the researcher's best efforts this study had implementation and design limitations. When implementing the study, the researcher relied on a convenience sample for this study because the populations were so unique and difficult to reach. However a larger probability sample would have helped gain more insight into the variations of perceptions of CSR and help create a better representation of the populations. In regards to the Nigerian sample, the finding would have been stronger if the participants were members of the Niger Delta region. Additionally, many members of the Nigerian sample were students or worked at an accounting firm, which is unrepresentative of the members of the people of Niger Delta. Probability sampling could have increased the validity of the oil industry employee sample, which consisted of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil employees. A non-sample limitation of the study is that the study did not evaluate actual CSR initiatives that the companies actually produced; instead the study investigated overall perceptions of the companies. Evaluating actual CSR initiatives would have provided more concrete application.

In regards to the design on the study, the researcher had issues regarding the Likert-type and open ended questions. The researcher decided group Ketola's CSR categories by behaviors associated with that particular category because the general population would not have been likely to identify Ketola's CSR categories by their names. However, the behaviors associated with Ketola's CSR categories were not mutually exclusive. Additionally, the Nigerian participants' limited knowledge of Exxon Mobil proved problematic because participants could not elaborate on their thoughts of Exxon Mobil as a socially responsible corporation. Limited

knowledge of Exxon Mobil may have also skewed participants' ability to distinguish between the companies, therefore contributing the lack of differences between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil. However, without Exxon Mobil-specific questions, the researcher would not have been made aware of Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil's different levels of awareness.

### Future Research

Future research on this subject would address the weaknesses limitations of the current study. For example, future research could look the evaluations of specific CSR initiatives and how they are perceived among various publics. This type of research would offer a more in depth analysis of the reputations oil companies specifically in the Niger Delta would also be helpful in helping oil companies establish working relationships in Nigeria. Additional future research from the employee perspective would follow-up on Luo and Bhattacharya's (2006) research and examines the differences between Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil employees' evaluations of the quality of their companies' product and their perceptions of their companies as socially responsible corporations.

The differences this study found between oil industry employees and Nigerians brings up the interesting topic of how different stakeholders perceive a particular CSR initiative. Further research on this topic would examine the variety of sources stakeholders use to form an opinion of a company. Research on the comparisons between how these sources portray the company as well as the stakeholders' perception of the company's socially responsible image would also enhance the findings from this study. Quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of the two-step flow model of communication over other forms of outside information sources, such as news media would help provide support to the qualitative data obtained from this study, in which participants said they did not trust the media and preferred other sources for informing

themselves. More in-depth studies on different populations as well as the influence of various sources on opinion shaping would help answers questions this study raises.

### Conclusions

In early 2010, after MEND reneged on truce between the organization and the government, Shell Oil had three oil stations sabotaged with leakage problems (BBC, 2010). The leakages created a dangerous work environment and put Nigerian community at risk. MEND denied being directly responsible for the leakages, but did say it did support acts against Shell Oil because the organization felt the company and Nigerian government could not be trusted (BBC, 2010).

Situations like this could be avoided if companies would not only engage in socially responsible practices, but also work on actively establishing relationships with community members and building responsible images in the community. CSR has become a more than a public relations strategy. It has become a business obligation. CSR as a public relations tool can help companies pacify the demands of stakeholders and maintain a competitive public relations edge. Companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil can benefit from CSR to help stabilize their presences in hostile environments, like the Niger Delta. This study shows that despite the importance of effectively presenting a company's CSR initiatives Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil have not managed to use their CSR initiatives to make a significant impact on their internal and external publics. This study also shows tailoring messages are presented to different publics and using personal relationships can help increase the effectiveness of presenting CSR initiatives, which can in instances of corporations like Exxon Mobil and Shell Oil not be economically beneficial, but in hostile circumstances, such as the situation with MEND in the Niger Delta, the effective use of CSR can also save lives.



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**APPENDIX: SURVEY**

**Media.**

Select the option that best represents your habits.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Others ask me for my opinion about matters in the news	1	2	3	4	5
I ask others for their opinions about matters in the news.	1	2	3	4	5

1. Where do you receive your information regarding Exxon Mobil’s presence in Nigeria?

2. Where do you receive information regarding Shell Oil’s presence in Nigeria?

Please mark how often you use each of the media sources.	Never	1-2 times a week	3-4 times a week	5-6 times a week	Everyday
Cable news programming (Fox News, MSNBC, CNN etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
local broadcast news	1	2	3	4	5
Local/regional newspapers ( <i>The Times Picayune, The Advocate</i> )	1	2	3	4	5
national newspapers ( <i>the New York Times, USA Today, Wall Street Journal</i> )	1	2	3	4	5
Online newspaper publications	1	2	3	4	5
Radio broadcasts	1	2	3	4	5
Entertainment news ( <i>The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, etc.</i> )	1	2	3	4	5
Company/organization specific publications, such as newsletters	1	2	3	4	5
Blogs	1	2	3	4	5
Social groups i.e. friends, family, co-workers	1	2	3	4	5
Other. Please describe. _____	1	2	3	4	5
Other. Please describe. _____	1	2	3	4	5

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## Exxon Mobil.

<b>Circle the option that best represents your opinion about the follow topics.</b>	<b>Very Negative</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Very Positive</b>
Exxon Mobil's practices are ethical.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil's practices are economically beneficial to society.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil's practices are legally sound.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Circle the option that best represents the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Exxon Mobil.</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Exxon Mobil engages in irresponsible practices in Nigeria.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil contributes to the well-being of individual Nigerian citizens.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil contributes to the Nigeria's economic needs.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil contributes to Nigeria's environmental needs.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil contributes engages in more responsible behavior in Nigeria than in North America/Europe.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil uses profits to produce advanced technology.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil's main concern in Nigeria is to produce a profit.	1	2	3	4	5
Exxon Mobil's main concern in Nigeria is to contribute to the community.	1	2	3	4	5
The news media accurately portrays the ethical behavior of Exxon Mobil.	1	2	3	4	5
My colleagues hold an accurate image of Exxon Mobil.	1	2	3	4	5
My family/friends hold an accurate image of Exxon Mobil.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Circle the option that best presents how you feel about the following topic.</b>	<b>Very Negative</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral/ Unbiased</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Very Positive</b>
News coverage of Exxon Mobil's practices in Nigeria is...	1	2	3	4	5

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## Shell Oil.

<b>Circle the option that best represents your opinion about the follow topics.</b>	<b>Very Negative</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Very Positive</b>
Shell Oil's practices are ethical.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil's economically beneficial to society.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil's practices are legally sound.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Circle the option that best represents the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Exxon Mobil.</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Shell Oil contributes to Nigeria's financial well-being.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil engages in irresponsible behavior in Nigeria.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil contributes to the well-being of individual Nigerian citizens.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil contributes to Nigeria's environmental needs.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil contributes engages in more responsible behavior in Nigeria than in North America/Europe.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil uses profits to produce advanced technology.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil's main concern in Nigeria is to produce a profit.	1	2	3	4	5
Shell Oil's main concern in Nigeria is to contribute to the community.	1	2	3	4	5
The news media accurately portrays the ethical behavior of Shell Oil.	1	2	3	4	5
My colleagues hold an accurate image of Shell Oil.	1	2	3	4	5
My family/friends hold an accurate image of Shell Oil.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Circle the option that best presents how you feel about the following topic.</b>	<b>Very Negative</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral/Unbiased</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Very Positive</b>
News coverage of Shell Oil's practices in Nigeria is...	1	2	3	4	5

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**General Discussion.**

1. What are your overall impressions of Exxon Mobil’s presence in Nigeria?
  
2. What are your overall impressions of Shell Oil presence in Nigeria?
  
3. What are your thoughts on the role professional associations play in shaping other’s attitudes towards companies?
  
4. What are your thoughts about the role personal relationships (friends, family members, members of the same community organization) play in shaping other’s attitudes towards companies?

**Demographics.**

Select the option that best represents you.

Current Exxon Mobil employee. Years employed:\_\_\_

Former Exxon Mobil employee. Years since employed:\_\_\_ Years since employment:\_\_\_

Current Shell Oil employee. Years employed:\_\_\_

Former Shell Oil employee. Years since employed:\_\_\_ Years since employment:\_\_\_

Nigeria/Nigerian descent. Years lived there:\_\_\_ Years since lived there\_\_\_\_\_

Gender:  Male  Female

Age:\_\_\_\_\_ (in years)      Occupation:\_\_\_\_\_

<input type="checkbox"/> Black/ African American	<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Asian American	Other. Please specify_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Latino	<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American	

-End of Survey-

## VITA

Liana Lanae Narcisse is a native of Lacombe, Louisiana. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in psychology from Spring Hill College in May 2005. While at Spring Hill College Liana became involved in several community programs, which left her compelled to continue to give back to her community. Following graduation and Hurricane Ike, which significantly impacted the Spring Hill community as well as Hurricane Katrina, which devastated her hometown, Liana joined Volunteers of America, Greater New Orleans, as a case manager and often worked with organizing community outreach efforts.

Liana's early career in the non-profit sector determined her research interest while at LSU. Liana wanted to combine her passion for community betterment with her interest in public relations, which led her to the subject area of corporate social responsibility. While investigating this topic, the disruption in the Niger Delta and the complicated relationships between members of the community and oil companies became very evident. Because the interaction between these two publics often had negative and far-reaching effects, Liana wanted to investigate the relationships between oil companies and key publics in order to understand how these publics can co-exist.

During her time at LSU, Liana has continued to push herself. She has served in the public relations capacity with the American Diabetes Association and Big Buddy Program Teen 360. While attending graduate school and continuing her work with non-profits, Liana also managed a successful boutique.

Following completion of her degree, Liana hopes to find a career that will continue to challenge her and combine her passion for people and community.