

Corporate social responsibility communications on social media and consumers' brand engagement: a case study of hotels in Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate how the communication of the three major types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (i.e. environmental, societal and stakeholders' CSR) on Facebook affect consumers' brand engagement. A preliminary content analysis on 100 hotels' Facebook was conducted to identify the current usage of Facebook for CSR communication among hotel firms in Hong Kong. Then, a consumer survey was conducted with 314 Facebook users in order to collect data for testing the conceptual framework. The empirical findings unveil that disclosure of societal CSR on Facebook has a strong explanatory power of consumer brand engagement, whereas that of environmental CSR was close to reasonable. This study provides insights into hotel firms' usage of Facebook as a platform for CSR communication. The findings might ease industry practitioners' apprehension of disclosure of CSR initiatives on Facebook.

Keywords: Brand engagement; CSR communications; Facebook; Hotels, Social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the business rewards brought by incorporating socially responsible behavior into the organizational strategy are increasingly recognized (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Holcomb, Upchurch & Okumus, 2007; Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2006), many tourism and hospitality businesses now voluntarily engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and communicate their CSR initiatives to the general public. Bonilla-Priego, Fony, and Pacheco (2014) research and report that eleven international cruise companies demonstrated their sustainability accountability and reported their CSR practices in the forms of written reports in the year 2011. Another recent study by Guix, Bonilla-Priego, and Font (2018) also reports that over one-third of the largest hotel groups in the world compile CSR reports that contain social, environmental and economic issues associated with their operations.

Although CSR communications in the hotel context have already been extensively researched (e.g., De Grosbois, 2012; Holcomb *et al.*, 2007; Kennedy Nyahunzvi, 2013), it is surprising that online CSR communications and particularly those available in social media were rarely investigated (Ettinger, Grabner-Kraeuter & Terlutter, 2018). As over 40% of the

world population now actively engage with social media (We are social, 2018), social media and particularly Facebook do enrich hospitality companies' capability in reaching their stakeholders for CSR communication. Facebook has been recognized as a dominant communication platform for hospitality companies (Hsu, 2012; Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014; McCarthy, Stock, & Verma, 2010). Facebook overtook other platforms such as Google with number of unique visitors per week and its referral conversion rates far exceed those from other online travel sites (McCarthy, Stock, & Verma, 2010). Features of Facebook such as profiles, fan page, event, advertisement allow hotels to find, connect, and communicate to their target markets (Hsu, 2012). While this notion was coined for several years and many hotels have already embraced Facebook to communicate hospitality companies' CSR practices (Kwok & Yu, 2016), to the best of the authors' knowledge, the question of "*what CSR messages were communicated by hotels on Facebook*" has never been investigated.

In addition to the dearth of research exploring CSR communications by hotels on Facebook, the examination of whether and how CSR communication influences consumers' engagement or engagement with the communicated hotel brands is another area which is largely overlooked by previous researchers (Serra-Cantalops, Peña-Miranda, Ramón-Cardona & Martorell-Cunill, 2018). According to Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006), brands can differentiate themselves and reinforce their positioning via communicating themselves as a "socially responsible" brand. Several literatures from the general management field also assert that complementing business operations with CSR practices can often result into better business performance (e.g., Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan, Bao & Verbeke, 2011). While some recent studies conducting in the hotel setting have empirically proven that the implementation of CSR practices can effectively enhance hotels' financial performance (Gao & Mattila, 2014; Kang, Stein, Heo & Lee, 2012), the question of "*whether (and which type of) CSR messages communicated by hotels can affect receivers' post-reading perceptions towards the communicated hotel brands?*" remains unknown at the moment of this writing.

In light of the existence of the aforementioned research gaps, using hotels in Hong Kong as the case study, this exploratory study is designed to achieve the following two objectives: (1) To identify the types of CSR message hotels in Hong Kong communicate to customers on Facebook; (2) To examine the relationship between each type of CSR message the hotels communicate on Facebook and customers' level of brand engagement. Unlike prior studies which mostly focus on one aspect, the current study makes an initial attempt to investigate how hotels communicate their CSR initiatives in three different domains – (1)

societal CSR referring to all corporate activities that contribute to the society's well-being (Turker, 2009); (2) *stakeholders' CSR* referring to all corporate activities that are related to owners, customers, employees and the community (Torres, Bijmolt, Tribo & Verhoef, 2012); and (3) *environmental CSR* referring to all corporate activities that emphasize the protection of global environment (Liu, Wong, Shi, Chu & Brock, 2014).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CSR research in tourism and hospitality

Being one of most extensively researched areas in hospitality and tourism, Font and Lynes' (2018) latest work shows that over 360 CSR-related articles have been published in refereed journals and conference proceedings between 2004 and 2017. The definition of CSR varies across different studies. Business in the Community (2018) defines CSR as managing a company's positive impacts on the society and environment through its operations and interaction with stakeholders such as investors, suppliers, employees and customers. Carroll (1979) states that the social responsibility of businesses encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations. Although CSR is generally defined based on the premise that companies are accountable for ensuring all aspects of their businesses have a positive impact on the society, several studies show that stakeholders often consider CSR as secondary to the business. For instance, Chang and Yeh's (2016) study shows that stakeholders of a Taiwanese airport prioritize service quality and corporate governance over employee management and work environment management. Leung and Snell (2017) also investigate and report that operators of Macao's gaming industry only emphasize the symbolic contribution of the gaming industry to the city's economy while other social issues like gambling addiction were largely overlooked.

One of the two major streams of research about CSR in tourism and hospitality is to investigate the benefit of incorporating CSR into a business's strategy. As part of a firm's internationalization strategy, Jung, Kim, Kang, and Kim (2018) theorize that CSR activities have the opportunity to contribute to image formation and adaptation to local markets. Another report published by Business for Social Responsibility (2006) shows that 67% of the executives strongly agreed that implementing CSR initiatives can improve customers' perceived corporate reputation, and this will further lead to a positive impact on brand preference (Alamro & Rowley, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 2006). In the hotel and tourism industries, previous

researchers note that the major benefits derived by CSR activities profoundly lie on a pronounced and favorable organizational image, higher market shares, higher market values and profitability, the ability to charge premium prices and easier access to financing (Martínez, Pérez & Del Bosque, 2014; O'Neill & Mattila, 2006; Wildes, 2008). Although customers' interpretations of CSR initiative vary considerably (Caruana, Glozer, Crane & McCabe, 2014), the effective communication of CSR initiatives can positively affect perceptions of corporate reputation and customer satisfaction. This in return will raise the likelihood to repeat business (Jarvis, Stoeckl & Liu, 2016), increase customer loyalty (Perez & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2015) and increase customer resistance to negative information (Xie, Bagozzi & Grønhaug, 2015). In view of these instrumental benefits, it is understandable to witness why many hotel managers now spend time and resources in the hotel's CSR initiatives.

Another major stream of research about CSR in tourism and hospitality is to explore the variation in the forms of CSR activities embraced by hotel and tourism businesses. According to a study conducted by Holcomb *et al.* (2007), 80 percent of the top ten hotel companies reported that the socially responsible acts performed by them are mostly related to charitable donations. Sixty percent were with diversity policy and fifty percent supported an employee volunteer program. Tzschentke, Kirk and Lynch (2008) conduct a similar study with independently owned lodging establishments in Scotland. Their empirical findings show that most of the CSR practices adopted by hotels in Scotland are related to the environment such as towel recycling schemes and the usage of eco-friendly products. Given that guests often value guest experience-related green practices more than those focusing on minimizing adverse ecological impacts, some hotels in China stipulated that sufficient sunlight, fresh air, clean drinking water, and green plants must be available in their property (Heung, Fei & Hu, 2006). Apart from those environment-related practices, promotion of local culture, employment of local people and purchase of fair-trade products are other typical examples of CSR practices which are prevalent among hotels in less-developed regions (Kasim, 2004).

2.2. Major types of CSR initiatives

2.2.1. Societal CSR

Referring to all activities that contribute to the society's wellbeing (Turker, 2009), societal CSR emerges at the time when companies faced increasing pressure both to maintain profitability and behave in socially responsible ways (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). The

measurements of a firm's societal CSR include assessing the extent to which that firm (1) supports non-governmental organizations working in problematic areas, (2) contributes to campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of the society, (3) makes investment for creating a better life for future generations, and (4) targets sustainable growth for the sake of future generations (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

The positive impact brought by societal CSR has been verified in various studies. Murray and Vogel (1997) assert that societal CSR activities could predispose people to a more positive impression towards the company. Thanks to the input by 293 undergraduate students, Ricks (2005) experiments and empirically verifies there is a positive relationship between corporate philanthropy activities and corporate brand association. Singh, Sanchez and del Bosque (2008) also demonstrate that CSR behaviors focusing on social interests are positively associated with the brand image. Using examples of many firms' active engagement in various activities to restore local communities after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami in Phuket, Henderson's (2007) study demonstrates that firms' sincere and generous outreach activities to the community in need can significantly enhance their brand image and consumers' evaluation.

2.2.2. *Stakeholders' CSR*

Defined as the management of a corporation's relationships with its stakeholders including government, customers, employees, suppliers and shareholders (Turker, 2009; Torres *et al.*, 2012), stakeholders' CSR comprises all CSR activities that are in relation to various stakeholders of the organization, such as owners, customers, employees and the community. The measurements of a firm's stakeholders' CSR include assessing the extent to which that firm (1) respects consumer rights beyond the legal requirements, (2) prohibits pornography, gambling, and drug abuse, (3) discloses full and accurate information about its products/services to customers, as well as (4) provides a healthy and safe working environment for employees (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

The benefits of stakeholders' CSR are acquired through strengthening or creating a positive relationship between firms and stakeholders (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Creyer and Ross (1997) found that stakeholder-related socially responsible acts are favored by customers. These acts will later be recalled and taken into consideration when customers make a purchase decision. Maignan and Ferrel (2004) noted that communication of CSR concerns and activities related to stakeholders could not only entice customers' awareness for CSR and enhance

customers' brand image, but also create a bond between the company and its stakeholders. Using panel data consisting of 57 global brands from ten countries, Torres *et al.* (2012) recently found that stakeholders' CSR can make a positive impact on global brand equity, stating that global brands respecting local communities' value would yield stronger brand equity.

2.2.3. Environmental CSR

In spite of its late emergence, environmental CSR has been coming to attention because of its visibility and feasibility (Pedersen, 2010; Williamson, Lynch-Wood & Ramsay, 2006). In short, environmental CSR includes practices such as pollution prevention, efficient use of energy and green production/service (Kalisch, 2002). The measurements of a firm's environmental CSR include assessing the extent to which that firm (1) promotes environmental protection and green consumption concepts, (2) embeds environmental-friendly design to protect natural landscapes and heritage, (3) implements consumption reduction program, and (4) implements programs that improve public security, fire control and food safety and reduce pollution (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

Since environmental CSR is easy to understand and is highly recognized by consumers and media (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011), a plethora of research demonstrates that corporates can enhance their reputation (Marin & Ruiz, 2007) or/and increase consumer satisfaction (Chen, 2010) by communicating their environmentally friendly brand image. Laroche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) find and report that consumers with a more ecologically friendly lifestyle have a strong purchase intention toward products by companies associated with ecologically friendly practices. Besides service-providers, Cheung, Welford, and Hills (2009) also note that manufacturers can also enjoy the increased consumers' purchase intentions and company evaluation resulted from environmental CSR.

2.3. Impact of CSR communications on consumers' brand engagement

In recent decades, a research stream highlighting the dynamics related to specific consumer/brand relationships has emerged (Aaker *et al.*, 2004; Fournier, 1998). Within this growing body of work, significant attention has been given to consumer brand engagement, which reflects a consumer's level of interest, confidence, integrity, pride, and passion in a certain brand in the brand (Bowden, 2009; Coulter *et al.*, 2003; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Recently published studies are shifting to concepts which explain this dynamic

more explicitly (Bolton & Saxena-Iyer 2009; Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010) because of the increasing recognition of consumers' active roles in brand-based processes (Pagani, Hofacker & Goldsmith, 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). The newly developed concept is being seen to be representing an important new metric for measuring brand performance. Recent research has emphasized the possible benefits of the construct, such as bringing organizations superior performance outcomes such as sales growth, brand referrals, cost reductions, enhanced consumer contributions to product development processes, co-creative experiences, loyalty and profitability (Bowden, 2009; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Brand engagement can be a process for both new customers and repeat customers, and can be experienced both online and offline (Bolton, 2011; Bowden, 2009).

Being a strategic tool through which organizations/brands can engage with their customers, Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava (2000) found that customers' positive experience with a CSR initiative can result in positive attitudinal and behavioral change towards the brand. The impact of CSR on customers' engagement was also affirmed in the works by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) as well as Du *et al.*, (2010). Du *et al.*, (2010) emphasized that effective communication of CSR can positively impact a brand's awareness, identification, and lead to consumer purchase, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth. Although some studies (e.g., Torelli, Monga & Kaikati, 2011) counter-argued that CSR communications may induce a negative impact on the brand evaluation if the brand is associated with self-enhancement concept, a majority of previous literature generally agree that CSR communication can positively affect consumers' brand evaluations (e.g. Du *et al.*, 2010; He & Li, 2010). With reference to the previous research findings, this study postulates that:

H1: Societal CSR message on a hotel's Facebook page will have a positive impact on consumers' brand engagement with the hotel.

H2: Stakeholder's CSR message on a hotel's Facebook page will have a positive impact on consumers' brand engagement with the hotel.

H3: Environmental CSR message on a hotel's Facebook page will have a positive impact on consumers' brand engagement with the hotel.

Figure 1 summarizes the research hypotheses in a graphical form.

*** Please insert Figure 1 here ***

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study 1: Preliminary Content Analysis

To achieve the first objective (i.e. to identify the types of CSR message hotels in Hong Kong communicate to customers on Facebook), an analysis on the content of posts available on Hong Kong hotels' Facebook pages was conducted. Although we acknowledge that hotels in Hong Kong have been embracing multiple types of social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest) for marketing and external communication, Facebook was the one and only platform which was used by all hotels in Hong Kong (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011).

In February 2018, the authors manually reviewed all posts published on 100 Hong Kong hotels' Facebook pages over the past two years (from 2015 to 2017). If any CSR-related post was identified, it was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. After extracting all CSR-related Facebook posts, the authors individually analyzed the content and then codified each post following Liu *et al.*'s (2014) definitions of societal, environmental and stakeholders' CSR.

3.2. Study 2: Consumer Survey

3.2.1. Samples and procedures

To achieve the second objective (i.e., to examine the relationship between each type of CSR message the hotels communicate on Facebook and customers' level of brand engagement), a web-based survey was conducted with 314 Facebook users. The online questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics, and it includes three sections. The questions in the first and second section embed the selected measurement scales with the wordings modified to fit the context of hotels' CSR communication on Facebook. The last section asked for the respondents' demographic information. The questionnaire was set in English in the first place, and it was translated into Chinese by the first author as well as another bilingual speaker harnessing the back-translation method.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 30 Facebook users. Having received the feedbacks from the respondents, some minor amendments on wordings and formatting were made. The convenience sampling approach was adopted to identify target respondents.

3.2.2. Measures of CSR communications and brand engagement

The current research employed and adapted the well-established scales to measure the three CSR communications and consumers' brand engagement (e.g., Kotler, 2008; Liu *et al.*, 2014; Matten & Crane, 2005; Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Pedersen, 2010; Turker, 2009). To be specific, the measure of environmental CSR was adapted from Holcomb *et al.* (2007). The measure of societal CSR was adapted from Clarkson (1995) and Holcomb *et al.* (2007), while the measure of stakeholders' CSR was adapted from Clarkson (1995) and Turker (2009). Pertinent to the dependent variable, the measure of consumers' brand engagement adapted from Hollebeek *et al.*'s (2014) study. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (representing "strongly disagree") to 7 (representing "strongly agree"). These scales have been validated in the previous literatures and have shown strong validity and reliability in the context of CSR communication (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Study 1: Preliminary Content Analysis

After analyzing all posts published on 100 Hong Kong hotels' Facebook pages over the past two years (from 2015 to 2017), this study found that the usage of Facebook as a platform to communicate CSR initiatives is prevalent among hotels in Hong Kong. Over eight percent (83%) of the analyzed 100 hotels in Hong Kong has published at least one CSR-related post in the previous two years. Though communicating CSR initiatives via Facebook is found to be a common practice, the frequency of CSR posting on Facebook is generally low. Among those hotels that communicated CSR initiatives on Facebook, around 34.94% have posted less than 10 CSR messages in the past two years (0.25 post per month). Over ninety percent (96.39%) have posted less than 60 messages (1 post per month), and only 3.61% have posted more than 60 messages in the past two years.

Table 1 shows the frequency of each type of CSR posts found on the hotels' Facebook page. Generally speaking, societal CSR (SCSR) messages and stakeholders' CSR (StCSR) messages have been posted most frequently in the past two years. Among these, 59 posts were found to include more than one type of CSR initiatives, exemplified by a post about the employees spending quality time together at a company's campaign of cleaning the beach, which includes both environmental and stakeholders' initiatives (i.e. the hotel participates in environmental protection activities and it provides a healthy working environment for the

employees). Among those environmental CSR (ESCR) messages, communicating the hotel's "promotion on environmental protection and participation in related activities" were the most prevalent type of ESCR messages published on Facebook (21.77%), followed by "implementation of special programs or usage of relevant facilities" (5.54%) and "special design of the hotel that protects the surrounding natural landscape and places of historical interest" (0.05%). For those SCSR messages, messages regarding the hotels' "supports for nongovernmental organizations working in problematic areas" account for the most (23.09%) while those on the hotel's "contribution to campaigns and projects promoting the well-being of the society" comes second (12.7%). Regarding StCSR communications, messages about the hotels' "provision of a healthy and safe working environment for employees" have the highest number (22.67%), followed by those for "highly valuing customer satisfaction" (12.70%) and "respect for consumer rights beyond legal requirements" (1.48%).

*** Please insert Table 1 here ***

Most of the identified CSR messages are posts combining photos/videos with texts. Examples of the texts of each type of messages are presented as follow (specific Facebook posts information will be available upon request).

ECSR messages: *"Join the global event Earth Hour and show your care for the planet. The lights in our restaurants and part of public areas in the hotel will remain dimmed from 8:30pm to 9:30pm this Saturday."*

SCSR messages: *"Can you imagine how many meals can we create with the 13 tones food donation in 2015 to Food link Foundation? The answer is approximately 20,800 meals. However, our ultimate goal is not to donate more, but to reduce the leftovers. Next time when you come to our restaurants, don't be shy and ask for a take away box if you cannot consume all ordered foods, our staffs are more than happy to help with taking away the leftovers."*

StCSR messages: *"Kiddie's Christmas Party. The three Hyatt hotels in Hong Kong have organized the annual Hyatt Kiddie's Party on last Sunday Hyatt Regency Sha Tin for our staff and their families to celebrate Christmas together. We have arranged numerous activities including booth games, magic shows, a selection of delicious snacks and drinks. Santa Claus has also distributed Christmas gifts to children."*

4.2. Study 2: Consumer Survey

4.2.1. Respondent Profiles

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Considering the gender of the respondents, 63.7% of the sample was female. In terms of age, 32.8% are 18 to 24 years old; 30.8% are 25 to 23 years old. Regarding the place of origin, 97.5% of the respondents were from Hong Kong, 1.6% were from Mainland China and 1% were from other countries such as South Korea. Regarding the respondents' education level, 72.9% had a bachelor degree, 4.1% earned a diploma and 13.4% completed a master degree or above. Pertinent to the respondents' personal monthly income, 43.3% had a monthly income of less than HK\$20,000 (US\$1= HK\$7.85). Finally, 40.8% had stayed in a hotel for more than twice in the past month.

*** Please insert Table 2 here ***

4.2.2. Measurement Model

Although all measurement items used in this study were adapted from previous literature (i.e. Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2014), an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS to specify the relationships between the observed measures and their posited underlying factors (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). Specifically, principal components analysis with varimax rotation was used to extract the maximum variance with each component so that the simplest possible solution with sufficient explanatory power can be found (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Four factors (with 24 items) were extracted based on the exploratory factor analysis results. One item of stakeholders' CSR (i.e., Pornography, drug abuse, and gambling are prohibited in this hotel) is removed because its communalities figure is lower than 0.5. Other than that, the content of each factor largely corroborates the original conceptualization. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to determine the adequacy of fit of the four-factor model and it is considered a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df=1.87$; GFI=0.902; CFI=0.960; TLI=0.951; RMSEA=0.053). In addition, Cronbach's α values of the constructs are higher than 0.7, indicating an acceptable level of reliability for each construct (See Table 3).

*** Please insert Table 3 here ***

4.2.3. Hypotheses Testing

The structural model constructed based on the three hypotheses was tested using AMOS 25. The results show that societal CSR message has a significant influence on consumers' brand engagement ($\beta=0.259$, $p<0.05$). Therefore, H1 was supported. However, the influence of environmental CSR ($\beta=0.016$, $p>0.05$) and stakeholders' CSR ($\beta=0.147$, $p>0.05$) failed to reach at the significant level. Thus, H2 and H3 were not supported.

*** Please insert Figure 2 here ***

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study examined how the communication of the three major domains of CSR initiatives on Facebook affects consumers' brand engagement in the context of hotels in Hong Kong. The results suggest that hotels can increase the level of their guests' brand engagement through communicating their CSR initiatives related to the society on social media. Recent research suggests that interacting types of CSR messages (as opposed to informing types) on Facebook bring companies benefits of public engagement and relationship building (Cho, Furey & Mohr, 2017). As the types of CSR messages embody strategies such as "announcing corporate partnership with community leaders and nonprofit organizations" and "highlighting corporate engagement with local communities" are related to societal CSR, these messages communicated on social media were found to have a significant influence on consumers' brand engagement.

The findings of this current study do not complement the notion that CSR initiatives related to the stakeholders and environment have the strongest impact on Chinese customers' brand preference among the three CSR domains (Kucukusta, Mak & Chan, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2014). One of the possible explanations could be because social media allow messages to turn viral through interactions (Kesavan, Bernacchi & Mascarenhas, 2013). Hence, the general public might consider corporate social media marketing as invasive (Cohen, 2012); and this negativity couples with publics' tendency to be highly skeptical towards certain types of CSR messages (Cho *et al.*, 2017).

The current study contributes to the growing body of CSR research in multiple ways. First, social media's role as a platform for CSR communication is lacking in the literature. Our findings contribute to the CSR communication literature by specifying which type of CSR message is more effective on social media. Second, a key gap in the literature lies in our

understanding of where an organization should focus its CSR efforts on (O'Brien, Jarvis & Soutar, 2015). While the literature has suggested that the fit between an organization and a cause can positively affect the effectiveness of a CSR campaign (File & Prince, 1998; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006), there is insufficient empirical evidence to affirm the kind of fit that provokes more positive customer responses. This research marks one of the first efforts to demonstrate that compared to stakeholder's and environmental CSR messages, societal CSR messages are more effective in creating brand engagement for hotel companies. Third, despite the shift in the literature to establishing concepts that explain or predict the dynamics related to specific consumer/brand relationships explicitly (Bolton & Saxena-Iyer, 2009; Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010) because of the increasing recognition of consumers' active roles in brand-based processes (Pagani *et al.*, 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012), studies in the hospitality context mostly focuses on the end results CSR can lead to, e.g. brand preference (Liu *et al.*, 2014) without taking into account the underlying construct that affects these end results and its antecedent, i.e. brand engagement (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). This study bridges this gap by identifying which type of CSR communication is more effective in influencing consumers' brand engagement.

5.2 Managerial implications

The empirical results of this study provide hotel managers insights into how they can incorporate social media in the communication of CSR initiatives to obtain the instrumental benefits of the properties' investments in CSR. First, this study contributes to hotel managers' strategies by presenting a status quo of the social media usage for CSR communication among hotels in Hong Kong, i.e. most of the hotels do post messages related to their CSR initiatives on Facebook; the CSR domains most messages pertain to are societal CSR, stakeholders' CSR and environmental CSR respectively; and most of the hotels communicate the messages on the platform at a low frequency, which complements the notion that most companies are underutilizing the branding benefits possibly brought by CSR communication through social media, as well as the call for identifying CSR communication strategies that engage the external publics (Cho *et al.*, 2017). Hotel managers might adjust the mix of the types of CSR messages on social media in relation to the market according to the reference this study has provided.

Second, the results of the consumer survey suggest that hotels in Hong Kong should keep adopting social media as a platform for CSR communication especially for disclosing societal CSR initiatives because it can increase the level of customers' brand engagement, which is found to be an antecedent of the engagement concept (O'Brien *et al.*, 2015). Hotel managers' apprehension of intensely using social media for CSR communication is attributed to the possible public skepticism. The positive relationship between disclosing societal CSR initiatives on social media and consumers' brand engagement found by this study affirms hotel managers that they could utilize social media for the communication more frequently than they do now, especially when social media are found to "work better" than traditional corporate websites in CSR communication because they can reach the "critical mass" much more easily through "sharing", "liking" and "commenting" and fulfill consumers' preferences of information with a short response time in today's world (Kesavan *et al.*, 2013).

Third, since local consumers and local communities are stakeholders of local hotels (Muller, 2006; Werther & Chandler, 2010). Effective CSR communication can increase stakeholders' engagement with the hotel brands, and benefit the hotel's brand reputation and satisfaction. Last but not least, to minimize possible cynicism towards the hotels' motives when their CSR initiatives are disclosed on social media, hotel managers, when choosing what types of messages to communicate, can focus on the hotels' participations in local social issues that are related to their core business because these are interactive messages that customers would prefer (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Cho *et al.*, 2017; O'Brien *et al.*, 2015).

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This current study was conducted out of the growing scholarly attention towards the dynamics pertaining to the explicit interactions between companies and customers, as well as the prevalent usage of social media in hotels' external communication nowadays. Specifically, this study investigated how the three major domains of CSR messages as identified in the literatures will affect hotel guests' brand engagement as an antecedent of consumer brand engagement that activates guests' behavior intentions in the context of hotels' social media.

The study was started with a content analysis on the Facebook pages of 100 hotels in Hong Kong to identify the current situation of the social media's usage for CSR communication in the industry in the region. The results showed that most of the hotels were disclosing their CSR initiatives on Facebook at a low frequency, which suggest that hotel companies should

enhance their CSR communication on social media (Cha & Bagozzi, 2016; Kleinrichert *et al.*, 2012). Further, through a quantitative approach, a consumer survey with 314 respondents was conducted and it found that CSR related to the society has a significant predictive power towards the increase in consumers' brand engagement, whereas that of environmental CSR has a certain trend towards significance.

However, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other industries without further study. Besides, the sample size was relatively small and that most of the respondents are young and with a relatively low income, which may not represent the customers of Hong Kong hotels accurately. Thus, the results of this study may bear limited significance to Hong Kong hotels who seek to increase their brand engagement using Facebook to communicate their CSR initiatives. In addition, the convenience sampling method may suffer biases. Therefore, future research should take these hotel guests into account and use random sampling methods. Some interesting topics remain unexplored regarding hotels' CSR communication on social media. Future studies may investigate, with a bigger sample size and designated proportions of respondents, how consumers' brand engagement level differs with certain demographic characteristics or personal traits. Besides, as there is a variety of social media nowadays, future studies may also look into how the impacts of hotels' CSR communication on different social media on customers' brand engagement differ from each other. In light of the growing scholarly emphasis on studying the underlying construct from the customers' perspectives through which the instrumental benefits of CSR are resulted, future studies may, taking the results of this study into account, explore how the types of CSR messages on different communication platforms of hotel companies would affect brand engagement as well as the directionality between the components of the concepts.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, J., Fournier, S., & Brasel, A. S. (2004). When good brands do bad. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 1-16.
- Ahluwalia, R., Burnkrant, R., & Unnava, H. (2000). Consumer response to negative publicity: the moderating role of commitment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37(2), 203-214.
- Alamro, A., & Rowley, J. (2011). Antecedents of brand preference for mobile telecommunications services. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 20(6), 475-486.
- Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological bulletin*, 103(3), 411-423.
- Basu, K., & Palazzo, G. (2008). Corporate social responsibility: A process model of sense making. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 122-136.
- Bhattacharya, C., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer-company identification: a framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(2), 76-88.
- Bolton, R. N. (2011). Comment: customer engagement: opportunities and challenges for organizations. *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), 272-274.
- Bolton, R. N., & Saxena-Iyer, S. (2009). Interactive services: a framework, synthesis and research directions. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(1), 91-104.
- Bonilla-Priego, M. J., Font, X., & Pacheco, R. (2014). Corporate sustainability reporting index and baseline data for the cruise industry. *Tourism Management*, 44, 149-160.
- Bowden, J. L. H. (2009). The process of customer engagement: a conceptual framework. *Journal of marketing theory and practice*, 17(1), 63-74.
- Business for Social Responsibility. (2006). *Taking the temperature of CSR leaders*. Retrieved November 22, 2018, www.bsr.org/Meta/BSRleaders_survey.pdf
- Business in the Community. (2018). *What is Corporate Social Responsibility?* Retrieved November 22, 2018, from <https://www.bitc.ie/about-us/what-is-csr/>
- Carroll, A. (1979). A three-dimensional conceptual model of corporate performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 4(4), 497-505.
- Caruana, R., Glozer, S., Crane, A., & McCabe, S. (2014). Tourists' accounts of responsible tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 46, 115-129.
- Cha, M. K., Yi, Y., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2016). Effects of customer participation in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs on the CSR-brand fit and brand loyalty. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 57(3), 235-249.
- Chan, N. L., & Guillet, B. D. (2011). Investigation of social media marketing: how does the hotel industry in Hong Kong perform in marketing on social media websites? *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(4), 345-368.
- Chang, Y. H., & Yeh, C. H. (2016). Managing corporate social responsibility strategies of airports: The case of Taiwan's Taoyuan International Airport Corporation. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 92, 338-348.
- Chen, Y. (2010). The drivers of green brand equity: green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 93(2), 307-319.
- Cheung, D., Welford, R., & Hills, P. (2009). CSR & the environment: business-supply chain

- partnerships in Hong Kong & the PRDR of China. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 16(5), 250-263.
- Cho, M., Furey, L. D., & Mohr, T. (2017). Communicating corporate social responsibility on social media: Strategies, stakeholders, and public engagement on corporate Facebook. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 80(1), 52-69.
- Clarkson, M. B. E. (1995). A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 92-117.
- Cohen, D. (2012). *Brands, maintain a Facebook page, but don't bother me. Social Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/facebook-page-consumers/382017>
- Coulter, R., Price, L., & Feick, L. (2003). Rethinking the origins of involvement and brand commitment: insights from postsocialist Europe. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(2), 151-169.
- Creyer, E., & Ross, W. (1997). The influence of firm behavior on purchase intention: do consumers really care about business ethics? *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 14(6), 421-432.
- De Grosbois, D. (2012). Corporate social responsibility reporting by the global hotel industry: Commitment, initiatives and performance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(3), 896-905.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(1), 8-19.
- Ettinger, A., Grabner-Kraeuter, S., & Terlutter, R. (2018). Online CSR communication in the hotel industry: Evidence from small hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 68, 94-104.
- Fatma, M., Rahman, Z., & Khan, I. (2016). Measuring consumer perception of CSR in tourism industry: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 27, 39-48.
- File, K. M., & Prince, R. A. (1998). Cause related marketing and corporate philanthropy in the privately held enterprise. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17(14), 1529-1539.
- Font, X., & Lynes, J. (2018). Corporate social responsibility in tourism and hospitality. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(7), 1027-1042.
- Fournier, S. M. (1998). Consumers and their brands: developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343-53.
- Gao, Y. L., & Mattila, A. S. (2014). Improving consumer satisfaction in green hotels: The roles of perceived warmth, perceived competence, and CSR motive. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 42, 20-31.
- Guix, M., Bonilla-Priego, M. J., & Font, X. (2018). The process of sustainability reporting in international hotel groups: An analysis of stakeholder inclusiveness, materiality and responsiveness. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(7), 1063-1084.
- Gupta, S., & Pirsch, J. (2006). The company-cause-customer fit decision in cause-related marketing. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 23(6), 314-326.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Bain, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate Data Analysis (7th edition)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- He, H., & Li, Y. (2011). CSR and service brand: The mediating effect of brand identification and moderating effect of service quality. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 100(4), 673-688.
- Henderson, J. (2007). Corporate social responsibility and tourism: hotel companies in Phuket, Thailand, after the Indian Ocean tsunami. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 26(1), 228-239.
- Heung, V. C., Fei, C., & Hu, C. (2006). Customer and employee perception of a green hotel—the case of five-star hotels in China. *China Tourism Research*, 2(3), 246-297.
- Holcomb, J. L., Upchurch, R. S., & Okumus, F. (2007). Corporate social responsibility: what are top hotel companies reporting? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 19(6), 461-475.
- Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28, 149-165.
- Hsu, Y. L. (2012). Facebook as international eMarketing strategy of Taiwan hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(3), 972-980.
- Jarvis, D., Stoeckl, N., & Liu, H. (2016). The impact of economic, social and environmental factors on trip satisfaction and the likelihood of visitors returning. *Tourism Management*, 52, 1-18.
- Jeon, M. M., & Jeong, M. (2017). Customers' perceived website service quality and its effects on e-loyalty. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(1), 438-457.
- Jung, S., Kim, J. H., Kang, K. H., & Kim, B. (2018). Internationalization and corporate social responsibility in the restaurant industry: risk perspective. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(7), 1105-1123.
- Kalisch, A. (2002). *Corporate Futures: Social Responsibility in the Tourism Industry*. London: Tourism Concern.
- Kang, J., Tang, L., & Fiore, A. M. (2014). Enhancing consumer–brand relationships on restaurant Facebook fan pages: Maximizing consumer benefits and increasing active participation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 145-155.
- Kang, K. H., Stein, L., Heo, C. Y., & Lee, S. (2012). Consumers' willingness to pay for green initiatives of the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31, 2564-2572.
- Kasim, A. (2004). BESR in the hotel sector: A look at tourists' propensity towards environmentally and socially friendly hotel attributes in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 5(2), 61-83.
- Kennedy Nyahunzvi, D. (2013). CSR reporting among Zimbabwe's hotel groups: a content analysis. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 25(4), 595-613.
- Kesavan, R., Bernacchi, M., & Mascarenhas, O. (2013). Word of Mouse: CSR Communication and the Social Media. *International Management Review*, 9(1), 58-66.
- Kleinrichert, D., Ergul, M., Johnson, C., & Uydaci, M. (2012). Boutique hotels: technology, social media and green practices. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 3(3), 211-225.
- Kotler, P. (2008). *Marketing Management*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

- Kucukusta, D., Mak, A., & Chan, X. (2013). Corporate social responsibility practices in four and five-star hotels: Perspectives from Hong Kong visitors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 34, 19-30.
- Kumar, V., Aksoy, L., Donkers, B., Venkatesan, R., Wiesel, T., & Tillmanns, S. (2010). Undervalued or overvalued customers: capturing total customer engagement value. *Journal of service research*, 13(3), 297-310.
- Kwok, L., & Yu, B. (2016). Taxonomy of Facebook messages in business-to-consumer communications: What really works? *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 16(4), 311-328.
- Laroche, M., Bergeron, J., & Barbaro-Forleo, G. (2001). Targeting consumers who are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18(6), 503-520.
- Leung, T. C. H., & Snell, R. S. (2017). Attraction or distraction? Corporate social responsibility in Macao's gambling industry. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 145, 637-658.
- Liu, M. T. C., Wong, I. A., Shi, G. C., Chu, R., & Brock, J. L. (2014). The impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) performance and perceived brand quality on customer-based brand preference. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 28(3), 181-194.
- Maignan, I., & Ferrell, O. C. (2004). Corporate social responsibility and marketing: an integrative framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 32(1), 3-19.
- Malthouse, E., & Hofacker, C. (2010). Looking back and looking forward with interactive marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 24(3), 181-184.
- Marin, L., & Ruiz, S. (2007). I need you too! Corporate identity attractiveness for consumers and the role of social responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 71(3), 245-260.
- Martínez, P., Pérez, A., & Del Bosque, I. R. (2014). Exploring the role of CSR in the organizational identity of hospitality companies: A case from the Spanish tourism industry. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 124(1), 47-66.
- Matten, D., & Crane, A. (2005). Corporate citizenship: Toward an extended theoretical conceptualization. *Academy of Management review*, 30(1), 166-179.
- McCarthy, L., Stock, D., & Verma, R. (2010). How travelers use online and social media channels to make hotel-choice decisions.
- Mohr, L., Webb, D., & Harris, K. (2001). Do consumers expect companies to be socially responsible? The impact of corporate social responsibility on buying behavior. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35(1), 45-72.
- Muller, A. (2006). Global versus local CSR strategies. *European Management Journal*, 24(2-3), 189-198.
- Murray, K. B., & Vogel, C. M. (1997). Using a hierarchy-of-effects approach to gauge the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility to generate goodwill toward the firm: financial versus nonfinancial impacts. *Journal of Business Research*, 38(2), 141-159.
- O'Neill, J. W., & Mattila, A. S. (2006). Strategic hotel development and positioning: The effect of revenue drivers on profitability. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 47(2), 146-154.
- O'Brien, I. M., Jarvis, W., & Soutar, G. N. (2015). Integrating social issues and customer engagement to drive loyalty in a service organisation. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 29(6/7), 547-559.

- Pagani, M., Hofacker, C. F., & Goldsmith, R. E. (2011). The influence of personality on active and passive use of social networking sites. *Psychology & Marketing*, 28(5), 441-456.
- Pedersen, E. R. (2010). Modeling CSR: how managers understand the responsibilities of business towards society. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91(2), 155-166.
- Peloza, J., & Shang, J. (2011). How can corporate social responsibility activities create value for stakeholders? A systematic review. *Journal of the Academy Marketing Science*, 39(1), 117-135.
- Pérez, A., & Rodríguez del Bosque, I. (2015). Corporate social responsibility and customer loyalty: exploring the role of identification, satisfaction and type of company. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 29(1), 15-25.
- Porter, M., & Kramer, M. (2006). Strategy and society: the link between competitive advantage and corporate social responsibility. *Harvard Business Review*, 84(12), 78-89.
- Rahbar, E., & Wahid, N. (2011). Investigation of green marketing tools' effect on consumers' purchase behavior. *Business Strategy Series*, 12(2), 73-83.
- Ricks, J. M. (2005). An assessment of strategic corporate philanthropy on perceptions of brand equity variables. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(3), 121-134.
- Sawhney, M., Verona, G., & Prandelli, E. (2005). Collaborating to create: The Internet as a platform for customer engagement in product innovation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19(4), 4-17.
- Sen, S., Bhattacharya, C., & Korschun, D. (2006). The role of corporate social responsibility in strengthening multiple stakeholder relationships: a field experiment. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(2), 158-166.
- Serra-Cantalops, A., Peña-Miranda, D. D., Ramón-Cardona, J., & Martorell-Cunill, O. (2018). Progress in Research on CSR and the Hotel Industry (2006-2015). *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 59(1), 15-38.
- Simmons, C., & Becker-Olsen, K. (2006). Achieving marketing objectives through social sponsorships. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4), 154-169.
- Singh, J., Sanchez, M., & del Bosque, I. (2008). Understanding corporate social responsibility and product perceptions in consumer market: a cross-culture evolution. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 80(3), 597-611.
- Singh, S., & Sonnenburg, S. (2012). Brand performances in social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(4), 189-197.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics (5th ed.)*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Torelli, C. J., Monga, A. B., & Kaikati, A. M. (2011). Doing poorly by doing good: Corporate social responsibility and brand concepts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(5), 948-963.
- Torres, A., Bijmolt, T., Tribo, J., & Verhoef, P. (2012). Generating global brand equity through corporate social responsibility to key stakeholders. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 29(1), 13-24.
- Turker, D. (2009). Measuring corporate social responsibility: a scale development study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 85(4), 411-427.
- Tzschentke, N., Kirk, D., & Lynch, P. (2008). Ahead of their time? Barriers to action in green tourism firms. *Service Industries Journal*, 28(2), 167-178.

- We are social. (2018). *Digital in 2018: World's Internet users pass the 4 billion mark*. Retrieved November 22, 2018 from <https://digitalreport.wearesocial.com/>
- Werther Jr, W. B., & Chandler, D. (2010). *Strategic corporate social responsibility: Stakeholders in a global environment*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Wildes, V. J. (2008). How can organizational leaders really lead and serve at the same time? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(1), 67–78.
- Williamson, D., Lynch-Wood, G., & Ramsay, J. (2006). Drivers of environmental behaviour in manufacturing SMEs and the implications for CSR. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 67(3), 317-330.
- Xie, C., Bagozzi, R., & Grønhaug, K. (2015). The role of moral emotions and individual differences in consumer responses to corporate green and non-green actions. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(3), 333-356.
- Yuan, W., Bao, Y., & Verbeke, A. (2011). Integrating CSR initiatives in business: An organizing framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 101(1), 75-92.