Research Article • 10.2478/ijcm-2022-0012 IJCM • 59(1) • 2023 • 1-11

CSR strategy in the hospitality industry: from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis to recovery

Maria Johann †

Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: maria.johann@sgh.waw.pl

Abstract ***Purpose****. CSR strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the recovery process emerges as a new research area in tourism and hospitality. Hence, the purpose of this study is to assess adaptations of CSR strategy during the crisis.*
Design/methodology/approach. *Research aims concentrate on identification of a CSR strategy framework and its adaptations during the pandemic in a selected hotel chain. A single case study, based on a content analysis of such documents as ESG strategy and reports, annual and quarterly reports, and other data, has been employed.*
Findings. *CSR strategy has been embedded in the corporate strategy and has been strengthened during the pandemic as the crisis has affected the company and its stakeholders. CSR strategy has been adapted to meet stakeholders' needs, including employees, customers, communities, and environment.*
Practical implications. *During crisis, it is important to highlight and strengthen the company's commitment to sustainability; redirect strategy towards supporting businesses, employees, and communities; adjust the strategy to the evolving environment; provide safe tourism products; implement own sustainable and innovative programs and solutions; and prepare for recovery.*
Social implications. *CSR strategy contributes to sustainable tourism and is especially beneficial in a time of crisis due to the companies' ongoing commitment towards stakeholders.*
Originality/value. *The value of the study lies in practical implications regarding CSR strategy in the pandemic, its adaptability potential in the crisis circumstances, and preparation for recovery. The study contributes to crisis management in the hospitality industry, and its novelty is linked to the specific context of the pandemic.*

Keywords CSR, ESG, strategy, Covid-19 pandemic, crisis, tourism and hospitality, Hilton

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism sector is essential to the world's economy due to its significant impact on the global GDP and employment (WTTC, 2021, p. 4–5). It should be noted that travel and tourism grew faster than the overall economy over many years (WTTC, 2021, p. 5). Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a strong effect on travel and tourism worldwide causing huge losses across all the sector's industries. Additionally, global travel restrictions, public gathering restrictions, and social distancing, that substantially ceased tourism in March 2020, caused the most severe damage to the world's economy since WWII (Gössling et al., 2020). Between 2019 and 2020, the travel and tourism percentage of global GDP decreased from 10.4 to 5.5%. At the same time, 62 million of jobs supported by travel and tourism were lost (WTTC, 2021, p. 4–5). Hospitality has been among the travel and tourism industries greatly affected by the pandemic.

Research studies regarding the hospitality industry during the pandemic have been largely focused on such topics as the recovery of the industry, market demand, revenue losses, patterns in the industry, job losses, safety and health, employment, travel behavior, customers' preferences, and social costs (Davahli et al., 2020). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has also been among the discussed topics. CSR is defined as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society" […] "To fully meet their corporate social responsibility enterprises should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders." (European Commission, 2011). The concept of CSR has been thoroughly debated in the tourism and hospitality literature due to its importance to the sustainable tourism development (Achmad & Yulianah, 2022). Moreover, taking a company's perspective, investments in CSR contribute to enhancing relationships with stakeholders and to improving

†*Corresponding author*

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firms own performance (Franco et al., 2020). Importantly, CSR's impact on financial performance is increasing in the long run (Theodoulidis et al., 2017).

Specifically, the studies that have explored CSR in the hospitality industry in the time of the pandemic have mostly concentrated on the issue of CSR effects on stakeholders. According to prior results, CSR activities have an impact on consumer behavior (Shin et al., 2021), employee perception (Choi & Choi, 2021), and organizational commitment (Filimonau et al., 2020). It is also suggested that involvement in CSR activities can improve the stock performance and gain interest of stakeholders (Qiu et al., 2021). Moreover, supporting community has a positive impact on tourists' intentions to spread positive information about the company, which brings reputational benefits (Chen & Hang, 2021). Yet, there is not much research on CSR strategy adaptations during the pandemic. Strategic adaptability appears as an important issue, especially in a time of crisis, as companies are struggling to survive. It has been argued that organizational culture has an effect on adaptability in crisis management (Deverell & Olsson, 2010). It is also evident that companies strengthen CSR values after crises (Lauesen, 2013). However, the knowledge on CSR adaptations in crisis circumstances is limited. Thus, the research gap is related to the assumed CSR adjustments with respect to the main groups of stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and environment, during the pandemic crisis.

Interestingly, according to Gursoy and Chi (2020), the pandemic might have an impact on the hospitality research as scholars are expected to put more emphasis on developing solutions for the industry. The predominance of topics related to the industry recovery compared to others confirms this assumption (Davahli et al., 2020). CSR is one of the major domains worth further exploration due to its potential for generating new sustainable solutions. Considering also a change in travel priorities and travelers' expectations regarding sustainable experiences in a safe and healthy environment in the post-pandemic future (Accenture, 2021a, 2021b), it is evident that the significance of creating sustainable tourism products will gain in importance. Hence, CSR strategy and practices need to be investigated in a greater detail as necessary for developing such products and offering the desired experience to customers.

In the face of growing interest in the recovery strategies and developing new solutions for the hospitality industry, this study is focused on identification of CSR strategy and practices during the pandemic in the selected hotel chain, i.e., Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc. The study is addressing the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the framework of CSR strategy in relation to CSR direction, strategy, management, reporting, philanthropy, certification, and communication?

RQ 2: What adaptations have been made in CSR strategy in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to the main groups of stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and environment?

The research method involves a single case study based on a content analysis of such documents as: environmental, social, and governance (ESG) strategy and reports; annual and quarterly reports; as well as data published on the Hilton's corporate website and other relevant websites. Hilton has been selected for the study due to its ongoing commitment to sustainability and transparent sustainability communication, listing on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices as a global sustainability leader for several consecutive years and numerous rewards and distinctions received for sustainable management and practices. Several theoretical, social and practical implications are provided on the basis of the results.

BACKGROUND

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been broadly discussed within the ambits of tourism and hospitality literature during the last decade. Additionally, it is evident that a number of scientific books and articles, related to corporate social responsibility or corporate sustainability with respect to tourism or hospitality, has significantly increased in the past few years (Font & Lynes, 2019). A rising interest in CSR has been caused by its importance as a competitiveness driver (Porter & Kramer, 2006), a long-term growth stimulator (Chandler, 2020), and its role in sustainable development (Horng & Tsai, 2019). Moreover, the positive linkage between CSR and financial results has been confirmed by numerous researchers (Franco et al., 2020; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Theodoulidis et al., 2017), as well as other CSR positive effects.

The CSR concept has considerably developed since the 50s, when Bowen (1953) pointed out that enterprises have the obligation to implement policies reflecting social expectations. Since then, various definitions of CSR have been developed,

including, inter alia, the conceptualizations proposed by Frederick (1960), Carroll (1979), Clarkson (1995), and Johnson (2003). Carroll (1991) argued that the responsibility of the company involves several aspects, such as economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic, which need to be fulfilled in the given order. Moreover, the concept of CSR has been linked to the stakeholder theory, which was introduced by Freeman (1984). Hence, the duty of a company is to address the stakeholders' concerns and meet their needs (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Therefore, a large amount of extant literature has been focused on the stakeholders' perspective of CSR activities. Recently, much emphasis has also been put on the linkage between CSR, strategy, and financial results (Porter & Kramer, 2006, 2019). Thus, it can be stated that different focus areas have been emphasized in the CSR conceptualization over time, which could be classified into three dimensions: philanthropy, regulated CSR, and instrumental/strategic CSR (Hamidu et al, 2015). However, it has been argued that even the strategic approach to CSR is insufficient, and new business models need to be implemented to bring about a meaningful change to environment (Visser, 2011).

So far, most research studies regarding CSR have examined the effects of socially responsible practices in stable times. Although, there is evidence that companies with CSR strategies have better financial results than others in a time of crisis (Marti et al., 2015), the research on CSR in a turbulent time is relatively limited. Additionally, some studies have focused on the issue of strategy adaptation in crisis circumstances (e.g., García-Madurga et al., 2022; Martin-Rios & Pasamar, 2018; Peñarroya-Farell & Miralles, 2022), yet they have not been directly concerned with CSR. Moreover, the pandemic context of crisis appears to be a new research area for exploration. Thus, facing the COVID-19 pandemic, the present advancements on CSR include such works as the significance of CSR in the crisis circumstances (Bae et al., 2021), CSR organizational and managerial implications during the pandemic (Carroll, 2021), and ethical perspective of CSR (Manuel & Herron, 2020), as well as employees' perceptions of socially responsible activities (Choi & Choi, 2021) and the impact of such practices on consumer behavior in the pandemic time (Shin et al., 2021). However, it appears that CSR adaptations during the pandemic have not been thoroughly explored.

In tourism and hospitality research, various perspectives of CSR have been taken as a focal point for exploration. Specifically, internal and external stakeholders' approach has been the main focus of studies related to firm's CSR activities (Font & Lynes, 2019). CSR practices, reporting, and impacts have also been elaborated in the research studies regarding hospitality (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). It should be noted that various benefits related to CSR have been found. It is already evident that CSR positively impacts corporate reputation (Latif et al., 2020; Su et al., 2017) and brand image (Latif et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2014, Mohammed & Rashid, 2018). In addition, CSR activities have a significant influence on employees, including organizational identification (Boğan et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2016), organizational commitment (Zientara et al., 2015), job performance (Shin et al., 2016), and job satisfaction (Boğan et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2016; Zientara et al., 2015). Moreover, research results show the linkage between CSR and customer satisfaction (Latif et al., 2020; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013, Mohammed & Rashid, 2018; Qu, 2014; Su et al., 2017) and customer loyalty (Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013; Latif et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2014; Su et al., 2017). The stakeholders' involvement, as a result of CSR activities, has also been observed (Iazzi, 2020). Yet, it is important to note that besides benefits, CSR also represents costs that affect corporate financial performance. CSR brings higher benefits only when it generates stable relationships with firms' stakeholders (Franco et al., 2020). Notably, during the pandemic, a stakeholders' perspective has been a focal point of research (e.g., Choi & Choi, 2021; Filimonau et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2021), with limited emphasis put on CSR strategy and its adaptations to the crisis circumstances.

Numerous benefits related to CSR in the hospitality industry indicate the necessity of implementing CSR strategy within the framework of business strategy. Yet, CSR strategy is predominantly implemented by big companies, while socially responsible practices are less important in small business (Wood, 2017) as small and medium enterprises (SMEs) prioritize economic objectives (Worthington et al., 2006). Hotels that carry out CSR activities focus on environmental, economic, and social issues (Wang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, CSR practices are not equivalent to CSR strategy, which needs to be aligned with business strategy, and requires: orientation; structural, personnel, and value adjustments; definition, principles, and goals; stakeholders' identification; integration into processes; evaluation; communication; and control (Hardtke & Kleinfeld, 2010). Sustainability reporting is critical to a firm's CSR strategy (Vartiak, 2016). It is also an essential means of communication with stakeholders on how a company addresses their concerns (Moravcikova, 2015). Within the international hotel groups, three groups of hotels can be distinguished: those that issue sustainability reports on their corporate websites, those that provide some information about carried out activities, and those that do not discuss sustainability issues (Guix et al., 2019). Hence, it can be concluded that hotels that publish sustainability reports along with other information related to CSR strategy on their corporate websites communicate effectively with their stakeholders, and they can be perceived as more transparent in terms of their socially responsible approach. Thus, all information regarding hotels' sustainability performances have been published in sustainability

reports providing up-to-date information on CSR strategy, including that on adaptation strategy during the pandemic.

METHOD

A qualitative case study, which is an approach to research that "facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (Baxter & Jack, 2008), has been widely used by researchers in the social sciences (e.g., Acciarini, 2021; Cappa et al., 2022; Franco et al., 2022; Hayes et al., 2020). Notably, case studies are commonly employed in tourism research (Beeton, 2005). Specifically, case studies are used to test theory, make descriptions, and develop theory about various topics (Gustafsson, 2017), including strategy (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982). The subject of this study is CSR strategy and practices during the pandemic. A single case study method has been chosen because it allows a deeper understanding of the exploring subject and is less expensive and time consuming than a multiple case study (Gustafsson, 2017). The concept of the research has been discussed with two management professors from the university of economics along with an independent expert working in the hospitality industry. The data has been analysed by the author who has experience in tourism research, data analysis, and scientific writing. Based on the literature review, several hotel selection criteria have been listed, including: *recognized brand,* market leader, robust and consistent revenue growth, data availability on CSR strategy on a corporate website, commitment to sustainability, implemented sustainability strategy and management, sustainability reporting, CSR certification, philanthropic activity, awards for sustainable management, and transparent CSR communication. Once selection criteria have been specified, the selection process started. After thorough analysis, the Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc. has been chosen for the case study. At this stage of the research, it was confirmed that Hilton meets all the formulated requirements, i.e., Hilton has a recognized position in the hospitality industry; has implemented ESG strategy and corporate responsibility management system; has published corporate responsibility reports; has set up its own foundation; has been listed on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices as a global sustainability leader for several consecutive years; has received numerous certificates, awards, and distinctions for sustainability management; and has been communicating transparently with stakeholders on the corporate website.

This study has used a content analysis based on the Hilton's documents regarding CSR strategy during the pandemic and relevant data available on websites. The documents and data for the analysis have been carefully selected. As sustainability reports are critical to a firm's CSR strategy (Vartiak, 2016), the Hilton's ESG strategy and reports have been of great importance for the research as well as other financial documents and data.

Specifically, the study has employed a documentary analysis based on:

- ESG strategy and reports, including: Hilton 2019 Corporate Responsibility Report, Travel with Purpose (Hilton, 2020); Hilton 2020 ESG Report, Travel with Purpose (Hilton, 2022, April 8);
- Proxy Statement for Annual Meeting of Stockholders, including: Hilton 2022 Proxy Statement for Annual Meeting of Stockholders (Hilton, 2022, April 8);
- Annual and quarterly reports, including: Annual Report on Form 10-K (Hilton, 2022, February 16); Q4 2020 Earnings Release, (Hilton, 2021, February 17); Q4 2021 Earnings Release (Hilton, 2022, February 16).

Other data used in the case study comprise information acquired from:

- The Hilton's website: https://www.hilton.com (accessed on 20 April 2022);
- Hilton Effect Foundation's website: https://hiltoneffect.org/ (accessed on 25 April 2022);
- Global Sustainable Tourism Council's website: https://www.gstcouncil.org/hilton-lightstay-gstc-recognized-standard/ (accessed on 27 April 2022).

The content analysis consisted of two stages, (1) the analysis of the Hilton's CSR strategy regarding the CSR direction, strategy, management, reporting, philanthropy, certification, and communication; and (2) the analysis of the Hilton's CSR strategy in the pandemic with regard to employees, customers, communities, and environment.

The analysis of the Hilton's CSR strategy focused on identification of: the CSR direction (vision, mission statement, corporate culture, commitment to sustainability), strategy (ESG strategy, strategic goals, environmental and social targets), sustainability management (corporate responsibility management system designed to calculate sustainability performance), reporting (ESG reporting), philanthropic activities (foundation, areas: communities and environment, programs, partnerships), certification (ISO, GSTC-Recognized Standard, Dow Jones Sustainability Indices, and other awards and distinctions for sustainability management), and CSR communication (availability of information: corporate website, news room, social media).

The analysis of the Hilton's CSR strategy in the pandemic, with regard to main groups of stakeholders, including: employees, customers, communities, and environment, covered the following issues: employees (ensuring safe working conditions; support for employees and their families, motivation and incentive programs, communication), customers (ensuring safe and secure conditions in hotels; providing up-to-date information regarding travel restrictions and requirements), communities (societal impact: programs for communities, families and individuals affected by the pandemic), environment (environmental impact: sourcing of renewable energy; energy, water and waste reduction).

RESULTS

Hilton Worldwide Holding Inc., one of the largest hotel companies in the world, was founded by Conrad Hilton in 1919. The company's operations are organized in three segments: franchised hotels, managed by Hilton, and possessed or leased by Hilton or its partners. A broad portfolio of hotels and resorts includes 18 brands and 6,837 hotels operating in 122 countries and territories (Hilton, 2022, April 8, p. 4). Hilton's revenues have been rising over the years as a result of the company's expansion into new markets. However, the company's revenues have considerably dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic due to regulations restricting travel imposed in numerous countries. Hence, Hilton's total revenues decreased to $4,307 million in 2020, and $5,788 million in 2021 (Hilton, 2022, February 16), while they accounted for $9,452 million in 2019 (Hilton, 2021, February 17). Even though total expenses have dropped in the time of the pandemic, a net loss has been ascertained in 2020 (Hilton, 2022, February 16; Hilton, 2021, February 17). The crisis has forced the company to implement an adaptive strategy in response to the *pandemic* conditions.

The vision of the founder "to fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality" has been the driving force for the company over the years. The Hilton's vision is reflected in the mission statement, which is "to be the most hospitable company in the world—by creating heartfelt experiences for guests, meaningful opportunities for Team Members, strong value for owners and positive impact in our communities" (Hilton, ESG Report, 2022, April 8, p. 4). Each letter of the company's name represents one of its values. They comprise "Hospitality," "Integrity", "Leadership," "Teamwork," "Ownership," and "Now" (Hilton, Corporate, n.d.). Hilton has been an innovation and sustainability leader in the hospitality industry over time. The company's employees, named Team Members, are perceived as the most valuable asset and the heart of the business. Moreover, building strong and long-term relationships with suppliers, the company's partners, play a key role in the Hilton Supply Management (Hilton, ESG Report, 2022, April 8, p. 4).

The success of the company has been linked to sustainability over the years. In 2018, the Hilton's E*SG* strategy, "Travel with Purpose," has been launched to make a positive impact across the company's operations, its supply chain, and communities. The main commitment in the strategy has been focused on doubling the company's investments in social impact while reducing its environmental impact in half by 2030. Environmental targets are related to climate action and destination stewardship (carbon, energy, water, waste reduction); social targets are focused on human rights, diversity, equity and inclusion (employees, communities and conduct), and; governance targets include integrity and transparency (public affairs, partnerships, policies and reporting) (Hilton, ESG Report, 2022, April 8, p. 7).

The strategic goals have been adjusted to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (*SDGs*) (Hilton, 2020, p. 6) adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 (UN, 2015). The SDGs represent a collection of 17 global goals, planned to be accomplished by 2030, which are focused on such areas as "people," "planet," "prosperity," "peace," and "partnership," and are concerned with global challenges, including "poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, climate change, sustainable development, peace, and social justice" (UN, 2015). Thus, the Hilton's strategic framework has been based on the SDGs. Subsequently, "LightStay," the corporate responsibility management system, designed to calculate sustainability performance, was introduced in 2019 (Hilton, Corporate, n.d.). It measures, manages, and reports Hilton's environmental impact regarding energy, carbon, water and waste usage; and social impact including youth training, volunteer hours, local sourcing, and supplier diversity. ESG reports, developed in compliance with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), have been published each year to provide information on the progress towards accomplishment of the 2030 Goals (Hilton, Our Reporting, n.d.).

The Hilton Effect Foundation has been launched in 2019 to support the company's efforts to meet the 2030 goals. The foundation has been involved in partnerships with Youth Foundation and World Wildlife Fund, and its philanthropic activities have been focused on communities and environment. Hilton Effect Grants have been granted annually to nonprofit organizations to support communities in the areas of "Water Stewardship," "Veterans and Disaster Relief," "Inclusive Growth," and "Youth Opportunity." Additionally, the Hilton Effect Foundation has been investing in disaster relief and long-term resilience to underpin communities affected by climate-based disasters and other hardships (Hilton, 2020, p. 7).

The hotels belonging to the company's portfolio are certified with ISO 9001 for Quality Management Systems (QMS), ISO 14001 for Environmental Management Systems (EMS), and ISO 50001 for EMS. (Hilton, 2022, February 16, p. 13). Hilton was the first company in the hospitality industry that received the GSTC-Recognized Standard status for LightStay, corporate responsibility management system, awarded by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2019, November 18). Moreover, Hilton has been acknowledged as a global sustainability leader on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for several years and received SAM Gold Class Award by S&P Global for Industry-Leading Sustainability Performance in 2021. Hilton was also ranked 1st for its commitment to diversity and inclusion on the Top 50 Companies for Diversity list by the DiversityInc in 2021, and the 2nd in Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For in 2022. It has also been granted many other awards and distinctions for sustainable management (Hilton, Awards, n.d.).

Hilton's communication focused on CSR is well developed. Information regarding the ESG strategy is available on the company's website in the section "Corporate Responsibility." Detailed facts and data are provided in the subsections "Home," "Our Approach," "2030 Goals," "Environmental," "Social," "Governance," and "Our Reporting." Importantly, data on the Hilton's environmental and social impact are presented in the performance tables to highlight the company's results over the years. Additionally, news related to sustainable activities and achievements are presented in the Hilton's newsroom and in social media. (Hilton, Corporate Responsibility, n.d.).

Facing the COVID-19 pandemic, Hilton's strategy has been redirected to protecting people, protecting the core business, and preparing for recovery. However, the growth of the business has also been continued as new hotels have been opened in addition to the company's current portfolio (Hilton, 2021, p. 8–9). Moreover, the commitment "to drive responsible travel and tourism globally" has been emphasized, as well as the efforts towards meeting the 2030 Goals. It has also been claimed that the need for responsible leadership will be greater following the pandemic (Hilton, 2022, February 16, p. 12).

The company responded to the crisis by supporting its properties with crisis management involving crisis plans, crisis teams, and crisis communication. In the early stage of the pandemic, programs that focused on health, safety, and security have been launched, including Hilton CleanStay (a program aimed at delivering a new standard of cleanliness and disinfection in Hilton properties) and Hilton EventReady (a program aimed at delivering cleanliness protocols and customer service focused on meetings and events). The employees have received safety and security training resources (Hilton, 2022, February 16, p. 12–13). Team Member Assistance Fund has been activated to support employees and their families affected by the virus (Hilton, 2021, p. 11). Travel restrictions, requirements, and threats have been constantly tracked around the world to better respond to the crisis circumstances, and safety and security audits have been conducted (Hilton, 2022, February 16, p. 12–13). It should be noted that the pandemic has sped up the use of the Hilton's innovations, such as "Digital Key" and "Connected Rooms," ensuring a contactless experience in hotels (Hilton, 2021, p. 6).

Even though a time of pandemic was challenging, strategic investments in human capital management have been made under the umbrella "Thrive at Hilton Team Member," including a new mental wellness platform, supporting employees health and wellbeing, expanding recognition programs, launching flexibility programs, and developing training programs and programs that honor diverse talents. The employees have been regularly surveyed to adapt the programs to their evolving needs. Moreover, new gender and ethnic diversity commitment has been announced. Thus, both global representation of women and U.S. ethnic representation increased by 2% in 2021 (Hilton, Proxy, 2022, April 8, p. 4, 11, 27).

Furthermore, Hilton has continued its environmental impact by increasing sourcing of renewable energy, as well as food waste reduction and plastic waste reduction. In 2020, utility consumption decreased significantly due to reduced occupancy caused by travel restrictions. Yet, in 2021, a rise in the use of energy, water, and waste was observed as the number of visitors increased and business began to return to the occupancy level reached before the pandemic, however, lower than in 2019. It should be noted that utility consumption has dropped over the years as a result of the ESG strategy (Hilton, 2022, February 16, p. 13, 14). Since 2008, carbon emissions have been reduced by 49%, energy – 40%, water – 39%, waste – 70% (Hilton, Proxy, 2022, April 8, p. 10).

During the pandemic, the Hilton Effect Foundation has provided grants to numerous organizations involved in aid to communities affected by COVID-19, including World Central Kitchen (providing meals to communities, families, and individuals); Clean the World (promoting sanitation and hygiene); Project Hope (supporting medical teams); Direct Relief (delivering equipment to medical staff); and Consorzio Farsi Prossimo (supporting those who have been impacted in Italy) (Hilton Effect Foundation, n.d.). In addition, one million hotel room nights have been made available to the medical staff, and other services have been offered to those in need. Hilton has also been engaged in advocating Covid-19 relief legislation and aid for the hospitality industry (Hilton, 2021, p. 12, 15). All Hilton's undertakings have been communicated on the company's website and in social media.

DISCUSSION

Hilton creates a long-term stakeholder value through a sustainable business model, its culture of hospitality, and the ESG strategy. CSR strategy has been embedded into the Hilton's business strategy to ensure the creation of sustainable value. The company's commitment to the stakeholders is reflected in the mission statement; the strategic goals have been aligned with the UN SDGs; LightStay, the corporate responsibility management system, enables sustainability performance calculation, and ESG reporting meets the GRI standards. The Hilton Effect Foundation is focused on the environment and local communities development. Hilton's hotels are certified with the ISO standards for quality and environmental management. Hilton has also been listed on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for several years and has received numerous awards and distinctions for sustainability management. Moreover, Hilton's sustainable communication is transparent and well-developed as all documents and information on sustainable practices and activities are published on the corporate website.

The Hilton's global expansion, reflected in entering new markets and rising revenues over the years, is an evidence of a successful business strategy. Thus, it can be stated that Hilton's commitment to sustainable management has brought favorable results. This confirms the Porter and Kramer's (2006, 2019) observation on the CSR strategy's positive impact on the company's competitiveness, as well as Chandler's (2020) conviction about the importance of CSR strategy for the business's long-term growth. It is also in line with results regarding the relationship between CSR and financial performance (Franco et al., 2020; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Theodoulidis et al., 2017). Additionally, in the face of a relatively lower interest in implementing CSR strategy in tourism and hospitality (Van Wijk & Persoon, 2006), companies that focus on sustainability may gain a competitive advantage. Moreover, it is crucial to notice that the natural and cultural environment is the main constituent of tourism products; thus, its protection is required. So, it is obvious that CSR strategy is necessary in tourism and hospitality, and the development of sustainable products needs to be perceived as a crucial strategic objective of tourism and hospitality companies. Above all, it is evident that CSR contributes to sustainable development (Horng & Tsai, 2019), which is nowadays the main world's policy direction (UN, 2015).

The positive effects of CSR strategy in tourism and hospitality have been evidenced in numerous studies. However, findings with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic are limited and fragmented. The analysis of the Hilton's CSR strategy during the pandemic enables exploration of its strategic adaptability in a time of crisis. Importantly, the commitment to responsible travel and tourism has been highlighted, as well as the willingness to meet the 2030 Goals, which shows a strong belief in the CSR's role as a competitiveness (Porter & Kramer, 2006, 2019) and long-term growth driver (Chandler, 2020). This commitment is also in line with Lauesen's (2013) observation that crisis strengthens CSR values. The strategy has been redirected to protecting people and businesses, and preparing for recovery. The ongoing engagement in care for people reflects a company's approach of treating employees as the most valuable asset and the heart of the business. During the pandemic, the investments in human capital have been made, and new programs for staff have been launched. Safety procedures have also been implemented to ensure safe working conditions. Thus, it is not surprising that previous findings show the linkage between CSR and the organizational commitment (Filimonau et al., 2020; Zientara et al., 2015), and job satisfaction (Boğan et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2016; Zientara et al., 2015), as employees feel precious and appreciated.

Moreover, Hilton responded to the crisis by implementing programs focused on health, safety, and security, including Hilton CleanStay and Hilton EventReady, which were Hilton's own solutions regarding cleanliness and customer service. It should be also noted that company's pre-pandemic innovations, such as Digital Key and Connected Rooms, ensuring a contactless experience in hotels, have been visionary innovations in the face of the pandemic. In addition, travel restrictions and requirements have been constantly tracked to better respond to the crisis circumstances. All things considered, Hilton's adaptability to the changing environment has resulted in providing safe traveling conditions. This observation seems to be in line with findings concerning the positive impact of CSR on customer satisfaction (Latif et al., 2020; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013; Mohammed & Rashid, 2018; Qu, 2014; Su et al., 2017).

Evidently, Hilton has also continued its impact on environment by *increasing the usage of renewable energy sources* and reducing food and plastic waste, which has resulted in further decrease of utility consumption. The Hilton Effect Foundation's charitable activities have been directed towards supporting communities affected by the pandemic by providing essential aid to communities, families, and individuals in tourism destinations. Hotel rooms have also been offered to the medical staff and people in need. Hilton's ongoing efforts towards sustainability and the company's assumed responsibility for the social and environmental issues during the pandemic confirms the finding regarding the CSR's influence on the sustainable development (Horng & Tsai, 2019).

Summing up, the strategic response adopted by Hilton during the pandemic has considerably enhanced its proactive sustainability approach, which is in line with the Visser's conviction (2011) regarding the CSR importance and the necessity of

taking the leadership to bring about meaningful changes. Additionally, it is visible that CSR strategy is beneficial during a time of crisis due to the company's commitment towards its stakeholders and willingness to meet their needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has enormously affected tourism and hospitality, yet it has also offered numerous opportunities and challenges. In addition, a new research area for exploration has appeared as a result of the pandemic. This study has focused on CSR strategy and its adaptations during the pandemic in the hospitality industry, which has not been explored in the prior research. The study offers theoretical, social and managerial implications. It is suggested that developing relationships with the company's stakeholders is essential during a crisis, especially by implementing new solutions and programs adjusted to the crisis circumstances. The necessity of strengthening CSR strategy during crises has also been emphasized. Based on the study results, several recommendations regarding crisis management in the hospitality industry, especially with respect to the company's stakeholders, have been presented.

The study sheds a new light on the stakeholder theory and on developing sustainable value in the crisis circumstances. The importance of building relationships with stakeholders have been widely acknowledged; however, the ongoing crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented so far, posed numerous challenges and created the possibility to verify even the recognized theories. Thereupon, it can be observed that the crisis stimulated interest in developing new solutions and programs for the company's stakeholders, including employees, customers, and communities, hereby enhancing mutual relationships. Hence, it can be argued that building relationship capital during a time of crisis is indispensable for the company's survival, recovery, and future growth. The research results are also important for the sustainable tourism development due to the creation and implementation of new ideas regarding the social and environmental issues arising from the pandemic crises. Evidently, the continuous care for the needs of visitors, local communities, and environment lies at the heart of sustainable tourism.

Moreover, the study brings several managerial implications. Based on the research results, it is possible to draw several conclusions and make recommendations regarding CSR and crisis management in the hospitality industry. Primarily, CSR strategy, by definition, is concerned with developing sustainable value in cooperation with stakeholders. Thus, in a time of crisis, it is important to emphasize the company's dedication to sustainability and its responsibility for the social and environmental issues. Then, it is crucial to show the firm's ability to cope with a crisis, focus on protecting businesses and people, adjust the strategy to the evolving market environment, and meet stakeholders' needs. Therefore, continuous scanning of the environment is required. Importantly, safe working conditions need to be guaranteed and all the necessary support offered to employees. It is also crucial to provide safe traveling conditions by meeting all travel requirements and restrictions, and implementing own safety procedures. The crisis circumstances also offer opportunities for developing new sustainable programs, practices, and solutions beneficial for stakeholders, e.g., digital devices ensuring a contactless experience in hotels and online trainings for employees and local organizations. The efforts towards decreasing environmental impact and supporting communities affected by crisis should also be among the main priorities. For example, it is important to address the humanitarian needs arising from the crisis, such as food security, sanitation and hygiene, clean air and water, and economic security. Moreover, hotel rooms could be offered to the medical staff and those in need, as well as free meals, food packages, and hygiene packages. Importantly, all the company's undertakings need to be communicated on its corporate website and on social platforms.

Despite important implications, the study is not free from limitations. First, the study has been conducted in the context of the pandemic; therefore, the results cannot be extended to any crisis situation. Nonetheless, the results bring new insights to sustainable tourism for both researchers and practitioners. Second, the selected hotel chain's CSR strategy has solely been examined, which limits generalizability of findings. Even though a case study method does not allow testable generalizations, a thoughtful research design makes the case reliable and enables drawing valuable conclusions. Third, a content analysis used in this study has been based on documents and data published on the company's corporate website, yet the documents included the ESG strategy and reports as well as annual and quarterly reports, which comprise financial data and performance indicators. Noteworthy, the study offers several essential solutions for the hospitality industry affected by the pandemic crisis and is a good base for further research. In the face of rising uncertainty caused by the pandemic and other crisis situations, research regarding strategic adaptability aimed at developing sustainable value seems to be particularly important. Moreover, the extended number of observations would support the research outcomes. Hence, in the future, other case study analyses could be performed to identify the CSR strategy's adjustments during the pandemic and other critical events. It is also possible to conduct a quantitative research focused on CSR adaptation strategies and practices during the pandemic or any crisis circumstances in the tourism and hospitality industry.

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