

Hospitality management in times of crisis: a corporate social responsibility perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – From a hospitality and tourism perspective, the purpose of this study is to analyse the case of Jordan by looking at the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in the hospitality industry and their contribution to the management of the pandemic crisis, with a special focus on large hotels.

Design/methodology/approach – The method focuses on a qualitative study based on ten in-depth interviews with senior managers of five-star hotels in Jordan, fully used as quarantine facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings – The study reveals how and why the implementation of CSR practices contributes to the crisis management in Jordan, also highlighting the role of the managers and the hotels' organizational cultures.

Originality/value – Drawing from the unique case of Jordan, to the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study which analyses the close relationships between crisis and hospitality management from a CSR perspective, and the impact of organizational cultures and ethical strategies on local stakeholders.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility, COVID-19, Hospitality industry, Jordan

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In the current global business world, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is at the core of many firm-based strategies (Farrington *et al.*, 2017; Lin *et al.*, 2021; Yuan *et al.*, 2020). A company's ability to show its social and environmental activities is important and CSR initiatives positively affect corporate brand equity and credibility (Kim and Kim, 2014; Pratihari and Uzma, 2018; Bianchi *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the practice of CSR activities is a milestone for companies in creating and maintaining a healthy relationship with their stakeholders (Khojastehpour and Shams, 2020). According to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 1999), CSR refers to the commitment of businesses to contribute to sustainable economic development, and working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large, to improve their quality of life. In addition, McWilliams and Siegel (2011) define CSR as any *accountable* activity that allows a company to create a competitive advantage.

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Because of worldwide threats such as diseases (Jamal and Budke, 2020), people are not only worried about the risks that they face, but they are also concerned about the actions that companies adopt to deal with such events (Batten *et al.*, 2022; Maritz, 2020). Peters (2009) points out that CSR is implemented as an effective crisis strategy, preparing and preventing damage during the crisis. In this sense, companies with higher CSR activities are considered less sensitive to unexpected external events compared to those with lower CSR activities (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Hotels must have a CSR strategy because of what the world is going through in a pandemic such as COVID-19, which caused the cessation of global activity and affected financial markets (Mobin *et al.*, 2022; Rahman *et al.*, 2022) and all economic sectors, especially tourism (UNWTO, 2020). Hence, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of tourism CSR efforts and activities are more important than ever (Gao *et al.*, 2020) and the need for hotel support becomes evident in standing by the local, and vulnerable, stakeholders (Henderson, 2007).

In recent years, the tourism sector in Jordan has witnessed a rapid growth and it is one of the most vital sectors in the Jordanian economy (Jordan Investment Commission [JIC], 2018). The estimated population of Jordan is 10 million people, and around 5.3 million tourists visited Jordan in 2019 (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities [MOTA], 2020), before the pandemic. Furthermore, in 2019, the tourism industry employed a total of 53,488 people, including 20,918 in the hotel sector (MOTA, 2020), representing 4.5% of the Jordanian workforce (JIC, 2018). Moreover, Jordan has a tourism infrastructure with more than 2,200 institutions that include a group of different hospitality establishments with 610 hotels, of which 41 are five-star hotels (MOTA, 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the hospitality industry contributed to addressing the crisis derived from a pandemic by adopting the concept of CSR, paying special attention to the hotel sector in Jordan. This will help to fill a research gap in recent literature to understand the relationship between tourism, CSR and pandemic times in a lesser studied region as Jordan, in the Middle East. Moreover, we focus on the case of the five-star quarantine hotels to supply research evidence on large hotels' CSR management in times of crisis and its impact on the stakeholders. The hotel sector played an important role in helping to contain the pandemic and preventing the spread of infection by opening its doors to host the international arrivals from outside Jordan, for quarantine, in two phases. The first phase coincided with the beginning of the government's actions in fighting the pandemic on 16 March 2020, and it lasted 14 days; during this period hotels underwent health procedures adopted by the Ministry of Health, and it was a successful experience (Prime Ministry of Jordan, 2020). As for the second phase, hotels hosted those arriving from abroad, people who were stranded in countries where the pandemic was spreading. It started on 5 May 2020, in the Dead Sea and Amman hotels, and it continued until the cessation of the quarantine work on 23 September 2020 (Jordanian Ministry of Labour, 2020). This paper is particularly focused on hotels' management during these crisis periods.

2. The role of corporate social responsibility in pandemic crisis management in hospitality industry

2.1 The industry response to COVID-19

Tourism and hospitality studies focused on CSR have appeared in several specialist journals over the past two decades (Sainaghi *et al.*, 2017). The CSR strategy has drawn significant interest from both academics and professionals (Shim and Yang, 2016). Previous research shows that a company's accumulated efforts in CSR help to maintaining the organization's credibility even during crises (Schmietz and Epstein, 2005). In the framework of a pandemic such as the COVID-19, still scarce studies have examined the CSR related to the relationship

between the pandemic and the tourism and hospitality sector (Bae *et al.*, 2021; Carroll, 2021; Manuel and Herron, 2020).

According to Romagosa (2020), the flexibility of the tourism sector gives it the ability to adapt to unexpected events and the pandemic is an opportunity for developing a more responsible tourism (Chang *et al.*, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). In the same line, the pandemic offers an unexpected opportunity to curb the irresponsible and unsustainable growth of international tourism, especially in destinations which rely on international tourists (Hussain and Fusté-Forné, 2021). One of the effects of this crisis is the promotion of proximity tourism, that is, travel close to home. Businesses that survive the pandemic need to make their products adapted to future pandemics and to new consumers' interests, which include a demand for sustainable products (see also Sigala, 2020). Global tourism activity is concentrated in developed countries, and it is expected that proximity tourism will help restore the spirit of the sector. However, the situation in developing countries is less promising because they are also strongly dependent on international markets.

2.2. A corporate social responsibility policy to manage pandemics

In this context, He *et al.* (2021) explored the impact of socially responsible human resource management (SRHRM) on employees' fear of external threats during the outbreak of COVID-19 as part of the CSR management in the tourism and hospitality sector in China. Results showed that SRHRM had a role in overcoming employees' fears of the threats of COVID-19 by enhancing organizational trust in their institutions. This is a similar result observed in the study carried out by Choi and Choi (2021) which, based on hotels acting as quarantine facilities, revealed that CSR strategies contributed to manage financial challenges and job security, protect the local community and promote an image based on ethical management. This research adds texture to this conversation from the case of Jordan hospitality.

Further research by Giousmpasoglou *et al.* (2021) aimed to show the most prominent practices adopted by managers in luxury hospitality industry to manage the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The study showed that most of the participating hotels did not have plans for unexpected events, but started to develop response plans during the crisis which also included CSR strategies. Liu *et al.* (2021) stated that the measures were reducing costs, retaining and training employees, in addition to some CSR activities, including several health and safety practices. The measures also included the organization of training courses specialized in health and virus prevention for hospitality sector employees and the donation of preventive supplies to charities and social service institutions. Added to this literature, we observe that a better understanding of the concept of CSR during the pandemic is underexplored in the Middle East, and specifically we contribute to the literature from the unique case of Jordan.

3. Research design and method

The unit of analysis of the research are the five-stars hotels which functioned as quarantine facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and implemented CSR actions (MOTA, 2020). Ten five-stars hotels (out of 24), located in the capital of Jordan (Amman) and the Dead Sea, met these conditions. All of them are included in the study (see Table 1 and Table 2 below). We followed an exploratory qualitative approach to gather detailed and rich data from the participants, in this case, members of the hotels' management staff. The qualitative design offers multiple contexts for understanding the phenomena to be studied, where the researchers can respond directly to the needs and circumstances of the participants, as well as interacting with them in their language and way (Anderson, 2010). In the same line, Njite *et al.* (2011) use a "humanistic and qualitative framework" to analyse the management of CSR issues in ten small and independent hotels. In

Table 1.
Profile of the five-
stars hotels analysed

Hotel	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Classification	5*	5*	5*	5*	5*	5*	5*	5*	5*	5*
No. of rooms	79	236	412	346	250	345	440	285	178	279
No. of employees	100	260	320	350	230	330	450	300	200	300
Average room price/night	\$130	\$190	\$100	\$100	\$120	\$190	\$160	\$190	\$120	\$150
Hotel type	National private luxury, business	International private luxury	International private luxury, business	International private luxury, sun, beach	International private luxury, sun, beach	International private luxury, sun, beech	International private luxury, business	International private luxury, sun, beach	International private luxury, business	International private luxury
Ownership Category	National and International (N&IN)	International private luxury N&IN	International private luxury, business N&IN	International private luxury, sun, beach N&IN	International private luxury, sun, beach N&IN	International private luxury, sun, beech N&IN	International private luxury, business N&IN	International private luxury, sun, beach N&IN	International private luxury, business N&IN	International private luxury N&IN
Type of guests	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5
Hotel rank (in the national market)	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5	Top 5

Source: Own data

Table 2.

Main statistics of the
hotels' geographic
location

Hotel	Spreading	Europe	Asia	Middle East	America	Africa	Australia	Total	Spread in Jordanian cities
A	No. of Country	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
	No. of City	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	
B	No. of Country	6	9	4	7	–	1	27	1
	No. of City	7	16	5	21	–	2	51	
C	No. of Country	2	–	8	–	4	–	14	1
	No. of City	2	–	17	–	4	–	23	
D	No. of Country	5	10	7	–	6	1	29	4
	No. of City	24	21	32	–	26	2	105	
E	No. of Country	21	17	4	17	7	1	67	3
	No. of City	76	80	8	75	10	29	278	
F	No. of Country	15	6	6	2	5	–	34	3
	No. of City	26	30	8	4	7	–	75	
G	No. of Country	22	13	7	15	5	1	63	2
	No. of City	30	81	22	44	5	7	189	
H	No. of Country	38	17	8	32	16	5	116	2
	No. of City	129	51	20	159	25	16	400	
I	No. of Country	4	6	9	1	–	1	21	1
	No. of City	15	18	16	12	–	13	74	
J	No. of Country	24	12	9	12	1	3	61	2
	No. of City	77	106	17	58	1	17	276	

Source: Own data

this fashion, [Choi and Choi \(2021\)](#) in South Korean, [García-Sánchez and García-Sánchez \(2020\)](#) in Spain, [Mahmud et al. \(2021\)](#) in the USA, [Ramya and Baral \(2021\)](#) in India, [Pelikánová et al. \(2021\)](#) in Czech Republic are examples of CSR issues addressed during COVID-19 pandemic in hospitality and other business sectors, with a qualitative research framework.

3.1 Data collection and sampling

Building on a “humanistic and qualitative” framework ([Njite et al., 2011](#)), we performed in-depth personal interviews ([Patton, 2002](#)) to collect the data. The design of the interview departs from a review of the literature on COVID-19, CSR and the hospitality sector. The issues addressed were organized in a questionnaire, a common practice in qualitative research ([Kraus and Brtitzelmaier, 2012](#)), structured into six major blocks, which are as follows:

- (1) Block 0 collected basic information about the respondents and the hotels;
- (2) Block 1 was dedicated to the respondents' understanding of the CSR concept;
- (3) Block 2 referred to the hotel's business policy during the pandemic;
- (4) Block 3 focused on corporate governance issues and the hotel's CSR policy during the pandemic;
- (5) Block 4 was intended to understand the hotel's employment policy and internal communication within the context of pandemics; and
- (6) Block 5 gathered information on a global scale about the most important positive and negative CSR learning outcomes derived from the pandemic's consequences, as well as future strategic actions to be taken by hospitality industry decision makers.

To select the interviewees (see [Table 3](#)), we followed a purposive sampling technique to reach the staff members most qualified and knowledgeable about the topic of the research

Table 3.
Personal and
professional profiles
of the staff members
interviewed

Participant	Gender	Age	Position	Years in the position	Experience in Hosp/Y	Education
A	Male	36–50	Finance MGR	4	18	Engineering
B	Female	36–50	HR MGR	3	16	Tourism
C	Male	51–65	Night MGR	3	22	Management
D	Male	36–50	S&M MGR	5	19	Public relation
E	Male	36–50	HR MGR	2	14	Management
F	Male	36–50	Finance MGR Front Office	3	17	Fainan and acc
G	Male	36–50	MGR	3	16	English
H	Female	36–50	HR MGR	5	18	Management
I	Male	36–50	HR MGR	4	18	Management
J	Male	36–50	S&M MGR	5	20	Management

Notes: MGR stands for “manager”, HR for “human resources” and S&M for “sales and marketing”. The column “Participant” indicates the hotel represented (see also [Tables 1 and 2](#))
Source: Own data

(Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Data in [Table 3](#) shows, for example, that the professional experience in the hospitality sector goes from 14 to 20 years. The qualitative sample size is usually determined by the saturation point (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) indicated by the repetition of the information collected; usually, 10 to 30 interviews might be needed to reach saturation (Njite *et al.*, 2011), although less than ten may also suffice (Guest *et al.*, 2006). Interviews were conducted during the first half of September 2020. All the interviews were conducted by the first author in Arabic, the respondents’ native language, and then translated into English for analysis. The interviews lasted between 50 to 90 min, and an ethical protocol was followed in which the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees to make sure that no information was forgotten. Although only six interviews were needed to reach the saturation point, all ten participants were finally interviewed as, on one hand, we were interested to cover all the five-stars hotels active during the pandemic and, on the other hand, additional interviews contribute to strengthen the saturation and validate the content of the information collected (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Njite *et al.*, 2011). The list and features of the participants interviewed are observed in [Table 3](#).

3.2 Descriptive statistics

3.2.1 Profile of the hotels analysed. Data presented in [Table 1](#) show that although all the hotels studied were five-star, the size varied: 60% of them have 400 rooms, 20% have less than 200 rooms and 20% have more than 400 rooms. The total number of employees was as follows: 50% of the hotels are between 300 and 399, 30% are between 200 and 299, 10% are between 100 and 199 and 10% are over 400. Room prices were similar across all hotels, ranging from \$100 to \$190 per night. In addition, 90% of the hotels were part of international chains, while 10% were national.

All hotels are privately owned and operated. In terms of hotel categories, 40% are classified as luxury and business, 40% luxury, sun and beach and 20% only luxury. Regarding the type of guests, all hotels host both national and international visitors. The national and international geographic distribution of the hotels is shown in [Table 2](#). As for hotel distribution in Jordanian cities, 40% of the hotels studied were located in one city, 30%

in two cities, 20% in three cities and 10% in four cities. In relation to the international spread according to the number of countries, 10% are located in one country (national hotels), while for the rest, the international presence is the following: 40% of hotels spread between 2 and 30 countries, 10% spread between 31 and 60 countries, 30% spread between 61 and 90 countries and 10% spread between 91 and 120 countries. In this sense, hotels' spread according to the number of national and international cities is as follows: 10% are based only in one city, 40% of hotels spread between 2 and 100 cities, 20% spread between 101 and 200 cities, 20% spread between 201 and 300 cities and 10% spread between 301 and 400 cities.

3.2.2 Profile of the participants. According to the data presented in [Table 3](#), males made up 80% of the staff members interviewed, while females made up only 20%. As for the age structure, 90% of the sample was between 36 and 50 years old, while the remaining 10% was between 51 and 65 years old. They were all hotel senior management representatives, with 40% human resources managers, 20% financial managers, 20% sales and marketing managers, 10% night managers and 10% front office managers. In terms of years of experience in the hospitality sector, 50% of respondents had 17–19 years of experience, 30% had 14–16 years and 20% had 20–22 years, while years of experience in the same job position ranged between two and five years for all. The sample's educational background consists of 50% management, 10% tourism, 10% engineering, 10% public relations, 10% financial and 10% language.

3.3 Data analysis

Data were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner. Building on a grounded theory approach ([Glaser and Strauss, 1967](#)), used to produce meaningful output for the objectives of the research, the data analysis process began with the creation of general categories, under which a set of selected codes fall, and next, the data from the interviews were included and classified according to these categories and codes ([Corbin and Strauss, 2008](#)). As a result, next section includes a presentation of the results about the CSR practices in the Jordanian hospitality sector, followed by a discussion of these practices and their role in facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Results and discussion

Results showed that the CSR practices adopted by the hospitality sector during the pandemic contributed to curbing the crisis in a way that met the nature of the business, where the public often expects a responsible response from the hospitality sector to benefit public health ([Qiu et al., 2021](#)). In the sections below we present the main results of the interviews following the blocks of questions of the interview. [Figure 1](#) shows the relationships that were identified during the analysis, and it represents a contribution of this research to theory and practice. Next sub-sections describe these relationships within the context of the hospitality sector in Jordan.

4.1 Definition and understanding of the corporate social responsibility concept

A summary of the information collected from the hotel staff members interviewed is presented in [Table 4](#) below. According to the respondents, they are all familiar with the meanings behind the concept of CSR. They have focused on its social dimension (in 50% of the cases), the environmental dimension (30%) and the stakeholders management (20%). When asked about CSR, the first words that came to their mind were *collaboration* and *environment*, with equal proportions of 20.7% for each; *society*, *development* and *donations* ranked second, with 13.8%; and third place was occupied by *human resources* (10.3%);

followed in the fourth place by *volunteering* (6.9%). In terms of CSR policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 31.8% of the cases the hotels' CSR policies were suspended, in 22.7%, the CSR policies were continued, while 45.5% of the hotels analysed developed *ad hoc* CSR policies, based on the epidemiological situation faced at that moment.

According to these findings, CSR in the Jordanian hospitality industry can be defined as the commitment and contribution of hospitality institutions to serving and supporting the community, improving the environment, achieving the interests of all stakeholders and avoiding practices that harmed their interests. That is, CSR policies were accomplished by implementing and supporting CSR-related activities, in line with [Deresky and Christopher's \(2015\)](#) definition of CSR, which refers to activities in which companies attempt to balance their resources with the relevant beneficiaries in their social environment. [Mohr et al. \(2001\)](#) also defined CSR as the company's attempt to cut harmful effects and work to maximize its beneficial impact on society in the long run which contributes to the resilience and well-being of local communities.

As it is observed in the previous paragraphs, the most prominent keywords that came to the respondents' minds when talking about CSR matched with their earlier definition of CSR in the hospitality industry and they were aligned with the definitions of previous researchers. Thus, improving the CSR policy in response to COVID-19 crisis was undoubtedly a positive point that worked in the interests of the stakeholders. This result is consistent with what was stated by [Iyer and Jarvis \(2019\)](#) study about the hospitality industry which is often proactive in terms of practicing socially responsible activities to cut the negative effects of their business on society, while enhancing the positive ones.

4.2 The hotel's business policy and the COVID-19 pandemics

The information for this section is presented in [Table 5](#). Concerning the hotel's emergency plans for unexpected crises, all representatives responded that although they had hotel emergency plans, they were rather modest plans, not prepared to face crises of special magnitudes like the one generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the hotel's business policy during the COVID-19 pandemic period was adapted following the instructions of the government and the Jordan Hotel Association. Thus, most of the changes had an impact on the hotels' work policy related to the use of the facilities by both employees and visitors (56.7%), the hotels' staff workflow (23.3%) and the staff's initial interaction with guests (20%). All the hotels stated that the COVID-19 crisis has prompted them to consider developing a strategic crisis management plan to be more resilient to future crises. They also stated that a new marketing strategy should be developed and implemented

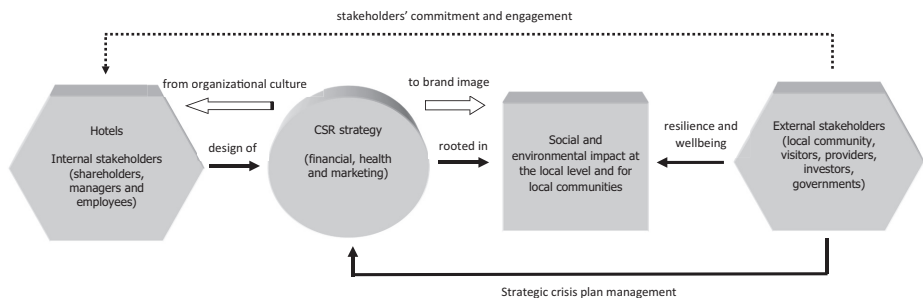


Figure 1.
CSR practices in
hotels during
pandemics

Source: Own data

Respondent	Familiarity with CSR concept	Summarized CSR definition	CSR – three keywords	CSR policy changed during pandemic	Evaluate the new CSR policy
A	Yes	A voluntary activity that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable for stakeholders	Human resources, natural resources, environment	Yes	Positive
B	Yes	When a hotel seeks to gain a competitive advantage by doing something positive for society other than economic activity	Collaboration, donation, development	Yes	Positive
C	Yes	The hotel's commitment to sustainably balancing of its interests and partners	Development, local community, donation	Yes	Positive
D	Yes	The responsibility of the hotel is to serve its community and anyone who supports or benefits from the hotel's services	Local community, environment, volunteering	Yes	Positive
E	Yes	The hotel's provision of services for the benefit of society and each party in contact with the hotel for mutual benefit	Employment, environment, sustainability of natural resources	Yes	Positive
F	Yes	The hospitality industry's dedication to achieving sustainable development through collaboration with communities	Donation, environment, ethics	Yes	Positive
G	Yes	Hotels commitment to fulfilling their responsibilities and duties to the society and environment to which they belong	Cooperation, development, symbiosis	Yes	Positive
H	Yes	The hotels' contribution to improving services and finding solutions to social and environmental issues	Local community, donation, employment	Yes	Positive
I	Yes	Hotels offer social services to help people live better lives and protect the environment	Local community, environment, volunteering	Yes	Positive
J	Yes	Orienting hotels to serve and develop the community through community-building activities	Cooperation, development, commitment	Yes	Positive

Note: The respondents (A to J) are the staff members of the hotels analysed (see [Table 3](#))
Source: Own data

Table 4.
Definition and understanding of the CSR concept

during the crisis, as the CSR policy during a pandemic is an effective marketing tool for hotels.

Based on these findings, the study concluded that hotels had no special plans in place, with predetermined rules, to deal with major crises or critical natural events in the hospitality sector, but rather standard protocols or plans, meant to help them solve typical daily emergency events involving public safety, minor accidents and first aid, such as fires,

Respondent	Emergency plan for unexpected crises	Changes in hotel's business policies during the COVID-19 pandemic	Contingency plans for crisis management	Develop a crisis management strategy	CSR during COVID-19 crisis as an effective marketing tool
A	Yes	Yes, according to the government and the Jordan Hotel Association's instructions	Yes	Yes	Yes, long-term period marketing
B	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, a tool for indirect promotion
C	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, it received widespread media coverage in Jordan
D	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, it is a sub-marketing objective
E	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, an indirect social marketing strategy
F	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, indirectly promoting and cultivating a diverse public
G	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, a marketing aid, as well as CSR marketing by encouraging competitors to practice it
H	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, a padded marketing strategy
I	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, secondary marketing strategy
J	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes, it is a type of social marketing

Table 5. Hotels' business policy and the COVID-19 pandemic

Note: The respondents (A to J) are the staff members of the hotels analysed (see [Table 3](#))
Source: Own data

sinking or injuries. This scenario could be explained by the fact that Jordan, in general, is a stable country in terms of health, environment and natural issues, and has never been exposed to such crises before, and there is insufficient previous experience in dealing with such events. To overcome the crisis, hospitality institutions that received visitors implemented new health and safety measures to protect their staff and guests ([Asaf, 2020](#)).

Hygiene measures have a positive impact on workplace safety, service quality and the performance of hospitality businesses ([Neal et al., 2000](#)). In the same fashion, [Khudri and Sultana \(2015\)](#) focused on the beverage industry in Bangladesh and found that the quality of the service provided (e.g. personal interaction, appearance, reliability, etc.) had a direct impact on the customers' preferences towards choosing a given shopping channel, and on their overall satisfaction level with the quality of service. The surfaces of hotels with high human contact have been found to be highly susceptible of contamination ([Park et al., 2019](#)), making them an easy means of transmitting viruses such as COVID-19 ([Chen et al., 2020](#)). According to [Wen et al. \(2018\)](#), one of the most common reasons for workers leaving their jobs is unsafe working conditions and dangerous work environments. Technological tools such as artificial intelligence and service robots in the hospitality industry, particularly in high-contact situations, may contribute to provide protection for both staff and guests ([Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2021](#); [Jiang and Wen, 2020](#)).

In this sense, COVID-19 prompted hospitality institutions to consider developing a strategic plan to manage crises that did not exist previously, due to the uniqueness and distinction of COVID-19 from other crises faced by hospitality institutions, and its unknown nature, which limits the institutions' ability to control the situation (Im *et al.*, 2021). According to Jiang and Wen (2020), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, health and safety measures will be widely used in the design of the marketing mix strategy in the hotel industry. The CSR practices positively influence future relationships with all stakeholders, as hospitality sector participation during the COVID-19 crisis contributed to reducing the spread of the pandemic. Also, the hotels left an imprint on the lives of people who were quarantined in the hotels. This is expected to increase customers' loyalty and recommendations of the hotel brands.

4.3 Corporate governance and corporate social responsibility policy

The information concerning the parties involved in the corporate governance and CSR policy actions undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic was collected with the block three of the questionnaire. In normal circumstances, and according to the respondents, the parties concerned with drawing up the guidelines for CSR actions are the hotel managers; additionally, 60% of the respondents added employees to the CSR strategies. In the context of decision-making for any CSR action, all respondents stated that it was necessary to consult and exchange ideas with external stakeholders, as there was constant communication between the hotel management and the stakeholders to secure them about any potential threat due to COVID-19. The government does not interfere with CSR activities; however, due to this exceptional circumstance the government intervened to preserve public safety.

Whereas these findings indicated that, in a normal situation, the body that decides the guidelines for the CSR policy for the hospitality sector is represented by shareholders, executive staff and employees, due to the current exceptional circumstances, the government has participated in these activities taking into consideration, consulting and exchanging ideas with external stakeholders to take any actions related to CSR. Findings are in line with existing evidence as leaders of hospitality establishments are focusing on the safety of business operations and services during crises, as well as trying to mitigate the effects of market shrinkage, as much as possible, to ensure resilience and sustainability (Israeli *et al.*, 2011). Senior management strives to develop corporate relationships by establishing or improving standards of integrity, honesty, transparency and cooperation with the stakeholders (Jones, 1995).

4.4 Employees and internal communication

In this section, we discuss the information collected with Block 4 of the questionnaire. The participants stated that they implemented flexible working policies during the COVID-19 pandemic to give employees more control over their work and personal lives, and they implemented adaptive working hours, and clear and direct communication channels between staff and managers for decision-making purposes. Moreover, they did not recruit any new employees, but rather trained existing employees to follow the new rules. They have implemented some incentives and rewards to compensate the staff dedication during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required people to work longer hours at times. Results revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive impact on the organizational culture of the hotels. Findings support existing evidence, like, for example, Mao *et al.* (2021) who recently reported that CSR activities played a significant psychological role in improving the efficiency, hope, flexibility and optimism of employees during the COVID-19 crisis.

In the same line, Siegel *et al.* (2007) stated that among the factors for the company's integration with CSR activities are the company's characteristics and the behaviour of

leaders. Results show that the hotels have implemented clear and direct communication channels between staff and managers. [Jiang et al. \(2020\)](#) also emphasized the importance for hotel managers to pay attention to employee needs, create an organizational environment that promotes public safety, provide motivational feedback to increase positive expectations and confidence of employees and demonstrate hotel's ability to respond to crises. One intriguing finding is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hotels' organizational culture, with all respondents agreeing that employees became more concerned with the rules to be followed, prouder of working in the hotel, more familiar with the hotel's mission and values and more supportive among them. This is consistent with [Donia et al. \(2019\)](#) study, who found that CSR activities boosted employees' commitment and engagement while also increased the levels of organizational identification.

4.5 Corporate social responsibility, COVID-19 and the Jordanian hospitality sector

Regarding the hospitality sector's concerns about CSR issues and future actions to be undertaken in this domain (see [Table 6](#)), the participants stated that the pandemic is expected to increase the hospitality sector's interest in social responsibility issues. Concerning the benefits of implementing CSR activities in the Jordanian hospitality industry during the

Respondent	Will pandemic increase the hospitality industry's interest in CSR issues?	Examples of benefits due to CSR practices during the pandemic	CSR negative effects due to the pandemic crisis	Attitude towards creating a special fund for CSR issues in times of crisis
A	Yes	Enhance the hotel's reputation	No	No
B	Yes	Increasing the value of hotel stock	No	Yes
C	Yes	Extremely satisfied customers	No	No
D	Yes	A positive marketing strategy for the hotel	No	Yes
E	Yes	Improving the ability to attract qualified employees	No	Yes
F	Yes	Increase customer loyalty and attract new hotel guests	No	No
G	Yes	Strengthen the bond between business and community	No	Yes
H	Yes	More government cooperation and facilities with the hotel	No	No
I	Yes	More effectively familiarize consumers with the hotel brand	No	No
J	Yes	High employee satisfaction	No	Yes

Table 6. CSR and COVID-19 crisis in the hospitality sector: benefits and strategic implications

Note: The respondents (A to J) are the staff members of the hotels analysed (see [Table 3](#))
Source: Own data

COVID-19 period, the hotels answered that there were many benefits, classified as follows: marketing benefits (36.3%), financial benefits (15.2%) and other benefits (48.5%). Respondents did not report any disadvantages or negative effects because of engaging in CSR activities during the crisis.

Regarding the establishment of a special fund for hospitality institutions, dedicated to CSR issues and to support the hospitality sector in times of crisis (see Table 6), 70% of the respondents opposed the idea, while 30% supported it. Those who supported it justified their position by stating that this fund is a retaining wall for everyone in such uncertain times, and that cooperation is the basis for overcoming failure, considering that all parties must agree with the conditions and controls for the use of this fund, as well as being under the supervision of competent authorities. Those who opposed to it argued that they preferred to work individually on CSR issues because every hotel has a philosophy expressing its own identity and social interests, and seeks to develop and serve the local community, and market itself socially with its own individual brand.

According to the findings, respondents anticipated that the pandemic would contribute to encouraging the hospitality sector to give greater priority and concern to CSR issues, particularly in times of crisis (Corey *et al.*, 2020). Results show that the benefits of implementing CSR practices in the Jordanian hospitality industry during the COVID-19 period can be grouped as marketing, financial and other benefits:

- *Marketing benefits:* Building and improving the hotels' position and reputation in the hospitality sector environment, increasing brand awareness and customer loyalty (Huang and Liu, 2020; Parida and Wang, 2018) because the practice of CSR activities creates social trust in companies.
- *Financial benefits:* Raising hotel shares' value, increase the percentage of future profits and attracting more investors (Qiu *et al.*, 2021), and they increase the sales of hotel services, thus supporting and improving long-term corporate financial performance (Feng *et al.*, 2018; Marti *et al.*, 2015).
- Other benefits include the relationships between the hotel and the stakeholders. For example, assisting the local government during COVID-19 and difficult times. Also, increasing hotels' ability to attract staff with high skills, morale and commitment (Mirvis, 2012).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CSR marketing became widespread in the hospitality industry (Gafni, 2020). For the companies which are more sensitive to the desires and needs of the society, previous research shows that this commitment is positively reflected on their performance, compared to those companies with a lower consideration for their stakeholders (Freeman *et al.*, 2018).

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to identify the CSR role adopted by the hospitality sector in Jordan in the context of a pandemic. Based on a qualitative analysis, the research has revealed social practices and cooperative measures undertaken by the Jordanian hospitality sector. The researchers discussed the multiplicity of CSR activities undertaken in the hospitality industry, within a framework defined by five-star hotels and the perspective of their senior management representatives, all of them well aware of the social role played by their hotels. Results revealed that this category of hotels actively engaged in CSR activities. Also, the qualitative approach implemented through in-deep interviews allowed for a robust understanding of a crisis management situation in the hospitality industry.

Moreover, the information collected during the pandemic crisis has revealed that it was a period crowded with many CSR activities, due to the benefits brought to their adopters. The study also provides insights on the hotels' role during the pandemic as an example of local engagement with the local community. Results are in line with the evidence provided by existing research on CSR activities during the COVID-19 (Bae *et al.*, 2021; Choi and Choi, 2021) and show their impact on all the stakeholders' involved (e.g. employees, guests, government). The CSR strategy contributed to increase the hotels' dedication, commitment and solidarity towards solving the effects of the crisis.

The findings also indicate that it is important to continue studying the CSR practices in the hospitality sector also in the post-COVID-19 period and compare them with the pre- and during COVID-19 pandemics, to determine whether the interest in CSR issues has actually increased or not as a result of the crisis and to measure the CSR impact on environmental, economic and social issues as well as on the different stakeholders. Moreover, results show that hotels' organizational culture, expressed by their mission and values, as well as their brands' identity, played a significant role in the implementation of CSR measures and plans to prevent future crises. This invites to further analyse the impact of organizational culture on CSR as well as the role of cultural differences in the CSR research in an international context.

5.1 Limitations

The study's findings must be viewed considering the limitations that could be addressed in future research. For example, the reduced number of the hotels included in the analysis was due to the epidemiological situation, which was more serious at the time of the study and raised some difficulties in performing the interviews with the hotels' managers. As these circumstances may have vanished now, expanding the analysis to other hotel categories, may yield richer and more diverse results. Also, because the study was limited to five-star hotels in Jordan, the generalization of the findings to other hotel categories or regions would require a larger design. Also, future research should expand the analysis to compare the results with the ones observed in other countries and regions, beyond the Middle East, which may provide a more complete picture of the hospitality sector's CSR scene during the pandemics.

5.2 Implications

The study takes a step forward in demonstrating that the CSR activities undertaken in the hospitality industry in times of crisis have benefited the hotels in a variety of ways, such as marketing, financial and social benefits. Therefore, decision makers should focus more on investigating the CSR activities developed by the business sector because of their numerous benefits to the companies themselves and their stakeholders. Qiu *et al.* (2021) found that social capital earned through caring for stakeholders works to support hospitality companies that are at risk because of the pandemic. Also, results may inform a new regulatory framework which based on the measures implemented by the hospitality and tourism industry, protects and promotes healthier and safer experiences which remain in place after the pandemics. The involvement of a business with the community is a signal of confidence for the external stakeholders, as it is also demonstrated by Daas and Alaraj (2019). In this sense, for effective decision-making process it is important to consider all the stakeholders involved, which as this paper also shows, are diverse, and the cultural differences that arise within the relationships between organizational cultures (El Haddad *et al.*, 2021).

Previous studies have analysed the role of CSR in different economic sectors and highlighted the differences between industries. With this paper, we add empirical evidence to the hospitality industry. Results of the paper show common patterns within the hospitality businesses in a specific geographical context, as it also happens with other sectors such as banking (Hanic and Smolo, 2022). However, differences between industries and regions require further comparative studies within other regions within Islamic and Middle Eastern countries. To the best of authors' knowledge, the issue of CSR in the hospitality industry during the crisis period, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic in Jordan, has not been addressed previously. As a result, this study could be the first to examine CSR practices in the hospitality sector during the COVID-19 pandemic in Jordan, and it could serve both as a reference and a new addition to the literature in this field. Results of this study could assist decision makers in the hospitality industry in considering and benefiting from the most prominent CSR practices in times of crisis, as well as in developing a strategic plan to face similar crises in the future and to be more flexible and responsive to disasters such as COVID-19 (Altuntas and Gok, 2021). The study emphasized the importance of collaboration and support between the hospitality industry and the government in addressing and dealing with the crisis and could serve as a guide and reference for future crisis management.

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