

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: York St John University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 19 (Business and Management Studies)</p>
<p>Title of case study: Corporate social responsibility: The disclosure-performance gap</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Dr Walmsley has worked on numerous studies relating to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) relating to the tourism and hospitality sector. The research that forms the basis for this case study was commissioned by the organisation ‘International Consumer Research and Testing’ on behalf of its members. The purpose was to inform consumers about the impacts of tourism, influence their selection of hotel groups and investigate different corporate policies and practices. The hope, on the part of the commissioning organisation, was that consumer pressure would challenge and change industry behaviour. In terms of providing information on CSR performance the hope was that this would benefit the hotels themselves by providing a common method of assessment.</p>
<p>1. Underpinning research</p> <p>The study was undertaken between 2009 and 2011 in collaboration with the commissioning organisation and the participating organisations (ten global hotel chains responsible for 64 individual brands). Normally it would have been difficult to ensure participation but given the scope of the study, and because the results were to be published across Europe in eight national consumer associations’ magazines (see references to the research below), the hotel chains on the whole did agree to participate.</p> <p>By developing in collaboration with the participating businesses an index (itself containing 39 indicators across 13 criteria for six different themes: corporate policies, labour issues, socio-economic issues, environmental issues, customer engagement, and transparency) and then testing this index, the study was able to provide insights hitherto absent from the sector into the extent of CSR practices in global hotel chains.</p> <p>The emphasis of this study was, in particular, to evaluate corporate social responsibility policies and their implementation in practice. Staff responsible for CSR in each hotel group were identified and approached in June 2010 with a questionnaire to measure the reporting of CSR policies against pre-defined criteria. The research team conducted a two month review of all public documents found in these hotel groups’ websites. Publicly available information not produced by the hotel groups themselves was not used in the content analysis unless it could be verified against internal data (e.g. lists of signatories to the UN Global Compact; ECPAT [End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism]; and OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises). All data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet with links to the original documents to retain trails of evidence.</p> <p>A further column was used to transcribe the hotel groups’ questionnaire results against the same indicators, including data from internal confidential documents for which confidentiality agreements were signed when required. Both sets of data were submitted to the hotel groups in August of that year and were analysed against score definitions, but neither the scores nor the definitions were sent to the company. The purpose was not to see if they agreed on the scoring mechanism, but whether the data themselves that formed the basis of the evaluation were accurate. Each hotel group received only its own data set. A further piece of the assessment jigsaw involved visits to a sample of hotels within each hotel chain. These were arranged for September 2010. Their purpose</p>

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was to verify the extent to which CSR policies were being applied in practice in individual establishments.

The study found that: corporate systems are not necessarily reflective of actual operations; environmental performance is eco-savings driven; labour policies aim to comply with local legislation; socioeconomic policies are inward looking with little acceptance of impacts on the destination; and customer engagement is limited. Generally larger hotel groups have more comprehensive policies but also greater gaps in implementation, while the smaller hotel groups focus only on environmental management and deliver what they promised. As the first survey of its kind in tourism, both the methodology and the findings have implications for further research.

3. References to the research

Font, X., Walmsley, A. Coggoti, S., McCombes, L. and Hausler, N. (2012) 'Corporate Social Responsibility: The Disclosure-Performance Gap', *Tourism Management*, 33: 1544-1553.

Font, X. and Walmsley, A. (2012) Corporate social reporting and practices of international hotel groups, in: R. Conrady & M. Buck (Eds) *Trends and issues in global tourism 2012*. Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.

4. Details of the impact

The results of the study were presented at the Internationale Tourismus Börse (ITB) in Berlin in 2011 (a major global tourism trade fair). Also, a chapter summarising the results was published in the annual ITB publication:

Font, X. and Walmsley, A. (2012) Corporate social reporting and practices of international hotel groups, in: R. Conrady & M. Buck (Eds) *Trends and issues in global tourism 2012*. Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.

There is, according to the lead author (Dr. Xavier Font, Leeds Metropolitan University), 'plenty of anecdotal evidence' of the impact the study has had on the industry. For example, the RIU Hotel Group has responded very positively to the findings. This company specialises in holiday resorts and city hotels with more than 100 establishments in 16 countries with 3.3 million guests annually. RIU is currently the world's 29th ranked chain, and the third largest in Spain in terms of revenue and number of rooms. According to a press release dated October 23 2013:

Six RIU hotels in Playa de Palma and Calas de Mallorca in Spain, as well as three hotels in Mexico (Riu Emerald Bay, Riu Cancun and Riu Caribe) have recently received the 'Travelife Gold Award', a recognition that certifies them as environmentally and socially responsible hotels. Over 50% of the chain's hotels are now certified with a 'Travelife Gold Award', taking it one step further in its Corporate Social Responsibility plan.

http://www.riu.com/en/Prensa/detalle_noticia.jsp?num=0

Commercial confidentiality precludes the provision of written evidence to attribute these developments to the study itself.

Impact case study (REF3b)**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

The commissioning organisation for the study was:

'International Consumer Research and Testing' (<http://www.international-testing.org/about.html>)

The most notable outputs from the research are in the consumer associations' magazines, the readership of which extends far beyond the academic community. The results were published between March to July 2011 in nine consumer association magazines:

Austria: Verein Fur Konsumenteninformation - <http://www.konsument.at>

Belgium: Association Belge des consommateurs Test-Achats - <http://www.test-achats.be/>

Denmark: Taenk/Forbrugerraadet (Danish Consumer Council) - <http://www.taenk.dk/>

Finland: Kuluttajavirasto - <http://www.kuluttajavirasto.fi/>

Italy: Euroconsumers Servizi SRL - <http://www.altroconsumo.it/>

Portugal: DECO-Protteste Editores LDA - <http://www.deco.proteste.pt/>

Spain: OCU-Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios Ediciones SA – <http://www.ocu.org/>

Sweden: Rad & Ron - <http://www.radron.se/>

Switzerland: Fédération romande des Consommateurs - <http://www.frc.ch/>