

# THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MICRO-LEVEL PROCESSES ON MESO-LEVEL PERFORMANCE: HOSPITALITY CASE

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## ABSTRACT

*The relevance and importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have long been recognized in the business sector. Previous research has shown that CSR has a positive impact on a company's financial performance, value, reputation, brand image, customer loyalty, and a variety of other factors. CSR has been studied from a variety of viewpoints, with the bulk of studies focusing on the meso-level dimensions of CSR. The number of studies on micro-level CSR processes has been so far limited but has recently increased. For CSR to be effective, it is necessary to understand the correlation of the processes on both levels. Purpose of the research: to investigate CSR micro-level processes and their impact on meso-level performance, with additional attention to the hospitality industry. Research methods: scientific publications analysis, analysis of previously conducted research and results, and other scholarly literature. Results of this study have indicated that the micro-level processes of the involved stakeholder groups, mostly customers and employees, have a direct impact on internal and external CSR initiatives and their meso-level outcomes, which might be both positive and negative. The results have also indicated the possible research gap, as the number of studies on micro-level CSR processes in hospitality has been so far limited, and the findings cannot be considered exhaustive and conclusive.*

**KEYWORDS:** *corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory, micro-CSR, hospitality industry*  
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## Introduction

The relevance and importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have long been recognized in the business sector, including the hospitality industry. Previous research has shown that CSR has a positive impact on a company's financial performance, value, reputation, brand image, customer loyalty, and a variety of other factors. CSR has been studied from a variety of viewpoints, with the bulk of studies focusing on the meso-level dimensions of CSR; on the other hand, the number of studies on micro-level CSR processes has been so far limited, especially for the hospitality industry, but has recently increased. For CSR to be effective, it is necessary to understand the correlation of the processes on both levels – micro and meso, multilayer models and frameworks have to be considered. Purpose of the research: to provide a review of research activities and existing management literature on micro-level CSR or micro-CSR with a focus on the hospitality industry, examining how the psychology of individual stakeholders and individual preferences and principles can influence meso-level CSR outcomes, as well as what the possible drivers, responses, behaviours, and stimuli are. Tasks of research: 1) to overview CSR and its components; 2) to analyse recent study findings on CSR development, micro-CSR, and stakeholder theory 3) to analyse the preferences, individual drivers, individual evaluation processes, individual reactions of the relevant stakeholder groups at the micro-level 4) to analyse research efforts in the field of micro-level CSR in the hospitality

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industry and to draw conclusions. Research methods: scientific publications analysis, analysis of previously conducted research and results, and other scholarly literature. Results of this study have indicated that the micro-level processes of the involved stakeholder groups, mostly customers and employees, have a direct impact on internal and external CSR initiatives and their meso-level outcomes, which might be both positive and negative. The results have also indicated the possible research gap, as the number of studies on micro-level CSR processes in hospitality has been so far limited, and the findings cannot be considered exhaustive and conclusive.

## 1. Overview of CSR

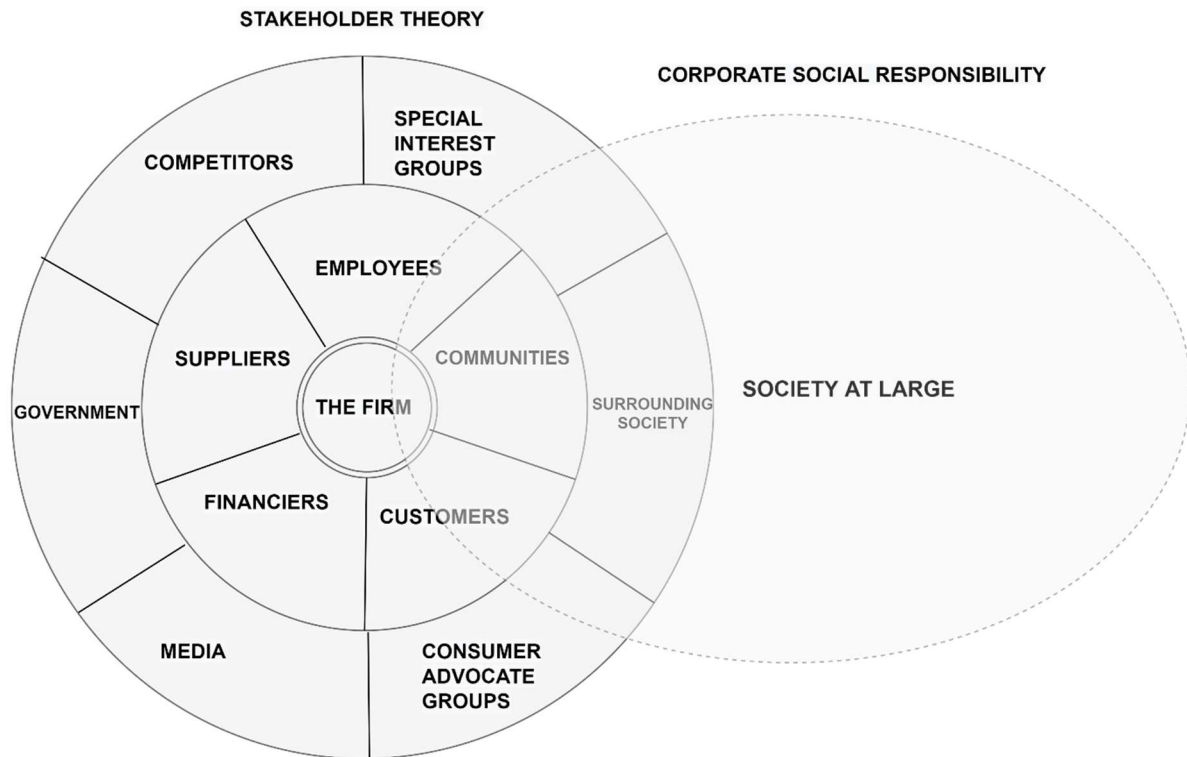
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a discussion topic in the business environment including the hospitality industry and tourism since early 1990 (Carroll, 1991), some may even argue that the concept of managerial responsibility is as old as business itself. Responsible enterprises have existed for more than a century before American economist H. Bowen coined the phrase "Corporate Social Responsibility" in his 1953 book "Social Responsibilities of the Businessman," and has been dubbed the "Father of CSR" ever since (Bowen et al., 2013). CSR became more widely acknowledged in the early 1990s when Donna J. Wood published Corporate Social Performance Revisited, which established a framework for analysing the impacts and outcomes of CSR activities, as well as expanding and building on early CSR models (Wood, 1991). According to Carroll's (1979) definition of CSR, a company's discretionary obligations are those areas of voluntary social involvement that are neither prohibited nor demanded of enterprises owing to their economic, legal, or ethical responsibilities. Carroll (1991) identified three ethical approaches to management: *immoral*, *amoral*, and *moral*; each orientation is closely related to individual moral philosophies, defined as management; in the case of amoral and immoral approaches, business operations are separated from private life ethical considerations, and thus such considerations have no role in the business environment; in the case of moral approaches, business operations are separated from private life ethical considerations, and thus such considerations have no role in the business environment. Commercial activities are isolated from private life ethical issues in moral systems, and hence such considerations have no bearing on the business environment. In summary, Carroll claims that the great majority of managers act "immorally" or "amorally," implying that they do not consider beyond themselves. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept has made a significant contribution to the debate about corporate behaviour. Elkington invented the term TBL in 1994 to describe a sustainability framework that balances a company's social, environmental, and economic impacts. Later in 1998, Elkington emphasized the need for effective and long-term collaborations between the private and public sectors, as well as stakeholders, in achieving excellent triple bottom line (social, environmental, and economic) performance (Elkington, 2018). Carroll's proposed (1987) taxonomy of *moral*, *amoral*, and *immoral* management has been used to demonstrate the parallels and distinctions between the micro-processes involved in CSR and the company's management overall. *Amoral* management is defined as managerial behaviour in which a company lacks ethical norms and communication, in which managers perceive the corporate environment without any ethical lens. *Immoral* management entails decisions, acts, and behaviours that are inconsistent with ethical ideals. *Immoral* management is motivated by self-interest and only cares about the company's bottom line; as such management believes that there is no place in corporate affairs for the same ethical and moral principles as in private life. Carroll believed that *moral* management is about fairness and justice and that their motivations are selfless; in contrast to the preceding, styles moral management focuses on ethical norms, professional standards of conduct, motives, goals, legal orientation, and overall operational strategy (Carroll, 1987).

Strand in the chapter "CSR and Leadership" of the book "Corporate Social Responsibility" introduced a new adaptation, in which businesspeople respond to a particular issue with *"don't care"* corresponding to Carroll's *"immoral"*, *"unaware"* corresponding to Carroll's *"amoral"*, and *"aware and care"* corresponding to Carroll's *"moral"*. Perhaps it can better illustrate the micro-processes and perceptions of the managers or businesspeople. The fundamental motive of immoral managers, according to Carroll, is selfishness, where "management cares solely about itself or the company's gains." Carroll assumes that amoral managers may have good intentions but act selfishly since "impact on others is not considered" while defining them (Carroll, 1991; Strand, 2015). This multifaceted perspective is critical since *no manager can be aware of every single stakeholder* who may be impacted by a decision. This is especially true for executives of international businesses with global stakeholders; managers must be "alert and concerned" about the areas where their decisions have the biggest influence on their stakeholders. Managers must master materiality assessments to identify the most significant issues and related stakeholders impacted by their actions to attain this "aware and care" condition for the most important concerns. CSR is defined as a company's commitment to long-term growth that benefits stakeholders, deliver economic advantages, and gives it a competitive edge while simultaneously meeting social and environmental needs (OECD, 2001). Corporate responsibility involves a shift away from the objective of "profit alone" and toward the creation of a larger social system. Customers' impressions of a company and their purchase decisions are influenced by its social responsibility. Businesses must utilize appropriate communication venues to inform customers about their CSR efforts (Campbell, 2007). CSR, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), is a voluntary, business-driven program that refers to actions that go beyond legal requirements. Public (international) legislation directly inspires the rules included in CSR codes. Today, CSR is one of the most important ways for businesses to convey their ideas and beliefs, both inside their processes and operations and in their contacts with other stakeholders (ILO, n.d.). United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) underlined that CSR can make a significant contribution toward tourism and hospitality sustainable development, can reinforce the sector's commitment to corporate responsibility and can be seen as a catalyst factor to create a renewed perspective on *"building back better"* (UNWTO, 2020). European Commission in supporting and encouraging companies to conduct their business responsibly, has developed key recommendations on CRS included in Sustainable Development Goals in the EU, *"maximising the creation of shared value for their owners/shareholders and their other stakeholders and society at large; identifying, preventing and mitigating their possible adverse impacts"* (European Commission, 2018). CSR is defined as the four-level framework listing the responsibilities of the business - economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic (Carroll, 1979), with the later iteration being *"corporate social responsibility encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given time"* (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). CSR is all the *"context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance"* (Aguinis, 2011). Studies have revealed that CSR is mainly researched in regards to CSR and correlation with financial performance, competitive advantage, CSR drivers and inhibitors, reporting and communication of CSR, CSR and stakeholders (Jiddi & Ibenrissoul, 2020). The majority of the studies on CSR in hospitality and tourism were conducted at the *meso-level* – analysing corporate performance and benefits, where the customers have been the most studied stakeholder (Guzzo et al., 2020). Micro-level studies in hospitality, employees' behaviours and attitudes, how individual perceptions and principles and values can benefit or hinder CSR activities, are still rare. The phenomenon itself can be referred to as *micro-CSR* (Freeman & Moutchnik, 2013). Micro-CSR, therefore, analyses the impact, interrelations, behaviour and influence of involved stakeholders on the individual level. Individuals, such as employees, are

crucial participants in achieving any hospitality company's goals, and neglecting their strategic role in maintaining a sustainable environment is irresponsible (Jones et al., 2017).

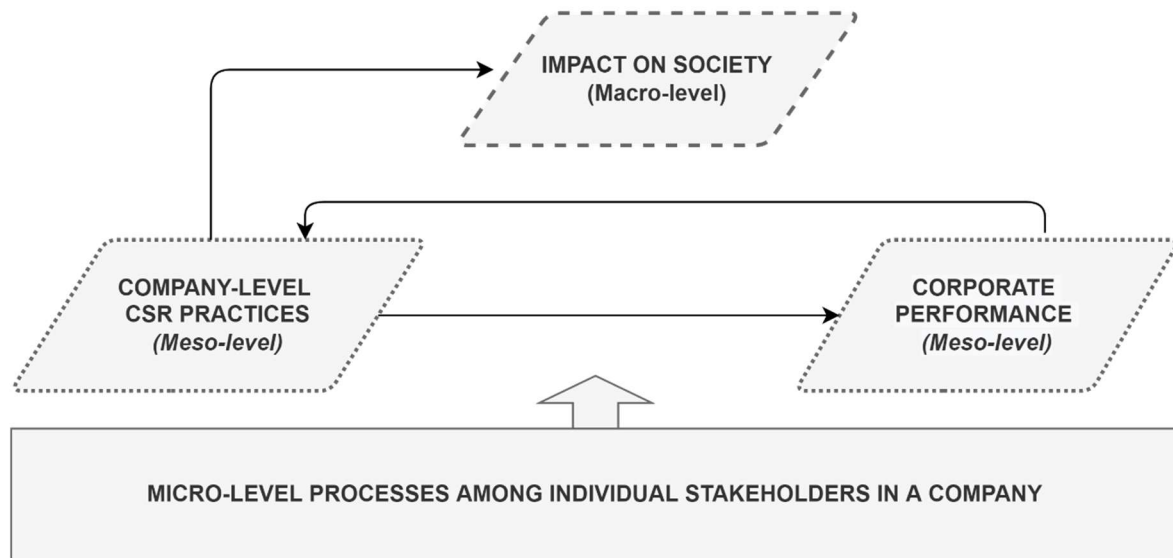
## 2. Stakeholder Theory and Micro-CSR

Stakeholder theory is a way of looking at business operations that highlights the interrelations that exist between a company and its stakeholders - customers, employees, business partners, communities, investors, environment. According to this theory, any business organization should *generate value* for all *stakeholders*, not just shareholders (Freeman & Reed, 1983). A stakeholder approach emphasizes active management of the corporate environment, relationships, and the promotion of common goals (Freeman & Mcvea, 2001). This theory suggests that the firm's stakeholders, their values, their relative influence on decisions, and the nature of the issue, are all very significant for predicting organizational behaviour and outcomes (Brenner & Cochran, 1991). Business organizations can use this framework as a tool to establish a link between stakeholder management and CSR or micro-CSR (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Business organizations should not be viewed as being owned and managed exclusively by their owners, with no involvement of any other stakeholders (Parmar et al., 2010). Hence CSR can be referred to as “company stakeholder responsibility” instead of “corporate social responsibility”, bringing a different iteration of the framework and placing the focus on *individuals* other known as stakeholders (Freeman & McVea, 2001; Freeman et al., 2004). Micro-CSR concepts are not so extensively researched, as the majority of the studies are still concentrating on the meso-level performance of the company, although in the recent years the number of studies on *individual-centric work psychology* in the CSR field is growing (Rupp & Mallory, 2015; Guzzo et al., 2020). The majority of the micro-CSR studies are focused on customers and employees, how they react to and apply CSR practices, the psychological drivers behind it, employee behaviours and perceptions, and individual contributions toward sustainable development (Jones et al., 2017). Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) have indicated the differences between the stakeholder theory and CSR, the stakeholder theory is largely addressing the company from within itself or from its perspective – as the company should operate beneficially for all of its stakeholders (Freeman, 1983). Contrary, CSR offers another perspective from the society at large, setting the focus on certain groups. (See Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Overlapping Area of Stakeholder Theory and CSR*  
 Source: Author, adopted from Freeman & Dmytriyeu, 2017

The interrelations between CSR and stakeholders suggest that both frameworks cover the company's responsibility towards the societies and communities, CSR is looking at it from the perspective of the society at large, taking the focus from the central element – the firm. Employees and customers are another group of stakeholders that overlap in both frameworks. CSR tends to address both from the societal point of view; stakeholder theory, on the other hand, addresses both of these groups from different dimensions, the company's responsibilities towards the employees and customers, as well as these stakeholders' responsibilities toward the company (Glavas, 2016). The micro-CSR definition is not presented comprehensively in academia, which might present many opportunities for the research but also might raise some challenges (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). At the micro-level CSR is focusing on how all the external and internal CSR initiatives are affecting all the external and internal stakeholder groups (Frederick, 2016). Micro-CSR reviews the processes on the individual level – stakeholders' psychological responses, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours to the business organization's CSR (Jones et al., 2017). Rupp and Mallory (2015) defined micro-CSR as *"the study of the effects and experience of CSR on individuals as examined at the individual level of the analysis"*. In their 2021 study, Ahmad et al., have noted that micro-level CSR is developing as a *"new organizational value"* and firms that recognize and adopt this *"new organizational value"* into their business operations are more likely to accomplish sustainability goals than their competitors. Findings of their study demonstrate that micro-CSR has a favourable impact on employees' pro-environmental behaviour, and that gender moderates this link, with females having a larger moderating effect than males (Ahmad et al., 2021)



*Figure 2. Micro-level Processes' Impact on Meso-level Performance*  
 Source: Author, adopted from Jones et al., 2017

Figure 2 shows a multidimensional framework of interrelations and the impact that micro-level processes among individual stakeholders might have on the meso-level performance, both on company-level practices and overall corporate performance. Jones et al., 2017, have explained the variability of scenarios and outcomes of micro-CSR, both *negative* and *positive* influences on meso-level performance. Some of the positive contributions state that micro-level processes of CSR are strengthening the human capital of the company through the beneficial employee treatment and work environment, thus making the company more attractive to the potential employees (Jones et al., 2016). Positive responses can also be observed in customers and employees from such CSR activities, that contribute positively to the aforementioned groups, thus reinforcing CSR investments (Bridoux et al., 2016). CSR initiatives may be enhanced greatly if they are being assessed as authentic, thus making the stakeholders a part of the decision-making process and actively participating in improving the overall company performance (Glavas, 2016). Micro-level processes can also strengthen the sense of pride, respect, prestige and self-identification of the individuals, which in turn will boost the performance-oriented behaviours of the involved stakeholder groups (Hameed et al., 2016). The most important negative aspects are the general *negative predisposition* of some stakeholder groups, such as customers and employees, toward CSR activities and social efforts. The negative reactions can be caused by the perceived inauthenticity or insincerity of the carried out CSR activities, active objection or general scepticism against some supported social causes, negative perception over the preference of one stakeholder group over another may cause lower engagement of the individuals and thus negatively influence the company performance (Bridoux et al., 2016; Glavas, 2016; Jones at al., 2016; Jones et al., 2017; Hameed at al., 2016; Unsworth et al., 2016; Voliotis et al., 2016). Types of CSR activities might be subdivided into two groups, internal and external, where **internal CSR** would encompass - *employee training, continuing education programs, safe working environments, diversity policies and practices, day-care programs, and ethical labour practices*; **external CSR** would list – *activism, philanthropic giving, community development programs, volunteerism initiatives, environmental sustainability programs, economic development efforts* (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Micro-oriented CSR studies are being conducted at the individual level of analysis, concerning how and why job searchers and employees perceive CSR initiatives, and how these reactions

and behaviours can influence corporate sustainability and overall company performance (Jones et al., 2017).

### 3. Foundation of Micro-CSR and Micro-CSR Research in Hospitality

Gond et al. (2017) in their systematic review of micro-CSR theory have identified and distinguished three directions of micro-CSR studies – 1) *individual drivers of CSR engagement*, 2) *individual processes of CSR evaluations*, and 3) *individual reactions to CSR initiatives*. The scope of the behavioural framework is too broad for the context of this study, but the main mechanisms, tools and reactions are going to be reviewed. As previously discussed, CSR initiatives and activities might result in different outcomes and provoke different reactions on the individual level in all stakeholder groups, based on the individual psychological traits, attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs (Bridoux et al., 2016; Glavas, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2017; Hameed et al., 2016; Unsworth et al., 2016; Voliotis et al., 2016). Gond et al., 2017 have identified three identification mechanisms in their framework – a) *social exchange mechanisms*; b) *social identity and organisational identification mechanisms*; and c) *signalling mechanisms*. Roeckelein (2006) assumed that individuals are engaging in different forms of relationships based on their estimates of risks and benefits, according to *social exchange theory*, which combines economics, psychology, and sociology. Gond et al., 2017 have derived social exchange mechanisms from the social exchange theory and have assumed that the same psychological processes can be applied to the employee stakeholder group, where which individual would expect interactions and mutual payback duties between the parties, thus making it a social exchange. Employees display more positive attitudes and behaviours toward the company when they perceive the exchange relationship to be more social, in opposition to transactional only (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). *Social identity and identification mechanisms* are the other group of reactions explaining the individual perceptions and behaviours from the perspective of the social identity theory, first proposed in the 1970s and 1980s by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, social psychologists (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), explains the desire to belong to a particular social group, which has emotional and evaluative significance. The other theory for the mentioned mechanisms is *organizational identification theory*, first defined by Albert and Whetten (1985), which proposes that individuals identify with the organizations to which they belong. Such affiliations most commonly are represented by the organization-employee relationship, where the employee is allying part of the self-identification with the organization, leading to a better alignment with organizational strategies and goals, higher work satisfaction and positive reactions to CSR initiatives (Dutton et al., 1994). *Signalling mechanisms* of the proposed framework are based on the signalling theory, which states that individuals (potential employees) possess no knowledge about the organization hence they are inclined to read the signals and cues from the potential employer when coming in first contact, thus trying to predict their future experience (Rynes 1991). Potential job takers may find companies that participate in CSR initiatives to be more trustworthy and desirable. Social policies and behaviours toward stakeholders are potential indicators of expected treatment as an employee (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Jones et al. (2014) assessed employees' expected pride from working for a CSR-focused company, perceived value fit, and expected treatment upon hire. Signalling mechanisms are most commonly used to describe how a company's external CSR efforts might affect potential employees. Managers believe in the business case rather than focusing on facts because they subscribe to a fair market ideology, which is the inclination to rationalize and idealize the market economic system. Even though managers who subscribe to a fair market ideology believe in the business case for CSR, they are no more likely to engage in CSR than managers who do not subscribe to such an

ideology since they also have fewer moral sentiments when faced with ethical dilemmas (Hafenbradl & Waeger, 2017).

Research efforts on micro-CSR in hospitality are rather limited, although in the recent years the number of studies has increased, with most of the micro-level CSR studies focusing on customers and their perceptions, researchers in the hospitality industry have just recently begun to look into the links between CSR and employee behaviour and attitudes (Guzzo et al., 2020). Jiddi and Ibenrissoul (2020) performed an analysis of 131 indexed articles, published between 2001 and 2020, and have concluded that the most addressed issues are as follows, 1) CSR and financial performance; 2) CSR practices, drivers, and inhibitors; 3) Reporting and communication of CSR; 4) CSR and stakeholder behaviour. The fourth cluster is seemingly addressing micro-level processes and employee and customer behaviour (satisfaction and loyalty) towards a company's CSR approach. Tsai et al. (2012) have concluded factors such as "state of affairs" and "novelty" were found to have a significant impact on employees' perceptions of their employers' CSR. Hotels generally have considered themselves socially responsible, but there were discrepancies with employees' perceptions and attitudes, and the employees were not able to recognize the value of their organizations' CSR initiatives. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that socially responsible behaviours and CSR initiatives and customer identification have a significant direct impact on consumer trust and satisfaction (Martinez & del Bosque, 2013). The hospitality industry is fragmented into smaller segments, such as casinos and gambling sector, accommodation providers, travel agents, transportations, and food and beverage businesses, each sector has characteristics of particular importance that might influence micro-level processes and attributes in a significant way, making stakeholder groups particularly sensitive to selected stimuli and aspects (Tsai et al., 2012). Serra-Cantallops et al. (2018) found that outcomes differed even among hotels, restaurants, and casinos, all of which are considered part of the hospitality industry. Glavas' (2016) article on the CSR and employee interrelations highlighted that hospitality studies need to look into not just the key outcomes of CSR, but also the underlying mechanisms and predictors that steer such connections. Guzzo et al. (2020) in their this study have classified 158 articles on CSR in hospitality, only 17 of them had employees as the main focus on the micro-level, and *only eight of the articles* were discussing accommodations providers (hotels), with no studies addressing the job seekers in the hospitality industry, although the research activities have long explored management and organizational psychology direction (Jones et al., 2016); especially taking into consideration historically high employee turnover rates for the hospitality industry (International Labour Office, 2010). Most studies about customers looked at how CSR initiatives affect work-related outcomes and used CSR perceptions as a predictor; only *three studies* looked into the perceived behaviour and attitudes, social norms, personal responsibility, information adequacy, motivations for environmental behaviour, self-identity, and moral obligations of consumers and civic behaviour (Guzzo et al., 2020). The lack of understanding about CSR micro-level drivers and evaluations can be challenging for several reasons - confusion about the mechanisms that explain engagement in CSR and why people react to CSR; limits understanding of how individuals experience CSR, which then has an impact on the effectiveness of CSR initiatives; relying solely on CSR reactions is a missed opportunity to comprehend the humanitarian attitude that underpins the CSR concept (Gond et al., 2017).

## Conclusions

The analysis of theoretical research shows that CSR has long proven to be a valuable and even mandatory tool to be utilised by hospitality companies, although the nature of CSR is voluntary and discretionary. The study has some limitations, the main of which is that it is theoretical, reviewing previously published articles, summarizing the findings and perhaps giving a different perspective or interpretation of the data, hence this study could not be



considered exhaustive and conclusive. Fundamental CSR theories are evolving, as well as new ethical approaches to management keep on emerging. Stakeholder theory might be used as a basis for identifying the stakeholder groups that are overlapping with CSR initiatives, which would allow identifying specific groups of stakeholders that should be studied at the micro-level. The majority of the CSR studies are focused on meso or macro-level CSR initiatives, while micro-level CSR studies represent only a small fracture of the academic research efforts. Micro-level CSR studies individuals of the selected stakeholder groups, not only how they are affected by CSR initiatives, but also how they can affect CSR outcomes, through their attitudes, moral principles, perceptions, and behaviours. The main conclusions would include:

1. The reviewed concepts suggest that the meso-level CSR outcomes in the hospitality sector from the individual perceptions and reactions might be both – positive and negative, depending on the particular stakeholder group and micro-level processes involved.
2. The impact of CSR initiatives might be different in the service sector in comparison to the manufacturing industry, hence the research activities in this field should be narrowly specified. For instance, even within one field of the hospitality industry, there are many distinctive sectors such as casinos and gambling, accommodation providers, catering businesses, travel agents and others. All sectors might present their unique attributes of particular importance and hence should be researched as separate objects.
3. In hospitality literature the number of micro-CSR studies is limited, hence it might be identified as a research gap in this particular field. According to the findings of this study, the hospitality industry's scholars have only lately begun to focus their research on understanding the linkage between CSR and employee micro-level behaviours and attitudes.

## Summary

*The relevance and importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have long been recognized in the business sector. Previous research has shown that CSR has a positive impact on a company's financial performance, value, reputation, brand image, customer loyalty, and a variety of other factors. CSR has been studied from a variety of viewpoints, with the bulk of studies focusing on the meso-level dimensions of CSR. The number of studies on micro-level CSR processes has been so far limited but has recently increased. For CSR to be effective, it is necessary to understand the correlation of the processes on both levels. Purpose of the research: to provide a review of research activities and existing management literature on micro-level CSR or micro-CSR with a focus on the hospitality industry, examining how the psychology of individual stakeholders and individual preferences and principles can influence meso-level CSR outcomes, as well as what the possible drivers, responses, behaviours, and stimuli are. Tasks of research: 1) to overview CSR and its components; 2) to analyse recent study findings on CSR development, micro-CSR, and stakeholder theory 3) to analyse the preferences, individual drivers, individual evaluation processes, individual reactions of the relevant stakeholder groups at the micro-level 4) to analyse research efforts in the field of micro-level CSR in the hospitality industry and to draw conclusions. Research methods: scientific publications analysis, analysis of previously conducted research and results, and other scholarly literature. Results of this study have indicated that the micro-level processes of the involved stakeholder groups, mostly customers and employees, have a direct impact on internal and external CSR initiatives and their meso-level outcomes, which might be both positive and negative. The impact of CSR initiatives might be different in the service sector in comparison to the manufacturing industry, hence the research activities in this field should be narrowly specified. All sectors might present their unique attributes of particular importance and hence should be researched as separate objects. The results have also indicated the possible research gap, as the number of studies on micro-level CSR processes in hospitality has been so far limited, and the findings cannot be considered exhaustive and conclusive.*

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