STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF CSR AND SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT ON TOURIST DESTINATION BRAND LOYALTY IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NATURE-BASED TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and social media engagement on destination brand loyalty. These concepts are not fully understood, especially in the context of sustainable development of nature-based tourism, which makes managing the negative impact on the environment more challenging. The study developed a parsimonious model to investigate the interrelationship between CSR and destination loyalty by incorporating social media engagement as a mediating variable to study the impact mechanism of tourists' CSR activities on tourists' destination brand loyalty in a nature-based tourism context. The data used was collected from 240 inbound and outbound tourists that visited a well-known marine park site in Malaysia. In addition, a Partial Least Square (PLS) based structural equation modelling (SEM) technique was utilized to analyse the data. The result showed that CSR and social media engagement had an influence over destination brand loyalty. These results suggest some practical implications for destination operators designing CSR activities as a strategic technique for ensuring sustainable success.

KEYWORDS: Corporate Social Responsibility, Media Engagement, Destination Loyalty

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Marine and coastal destinations, being one of the Nature Based Tourism Products, are one of the fastest growing segments of the global tourism industry (Marasinghe, Perera, Simpson, & Newsome, 2021). The European Union (EU) has recognized its potential to foster sustainable development, as documented in the EU Blue Growth Agenda (Dimitrovski, Lemmetyinen, Nieminen, & Pohjola, 2021) and the EU Blue Economy studies (European Commisision, 2019).

Furthermore, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly has established 169 targets to track progress toward global sustainability in 2015 as part of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that must be met by 2030. Among those is Goal 14: Life Below Water (the "Oceans' goal"), which was included in the list of SDGs, with the goal of harvesting oceans, seas, and marine resources sustainably and preserving marine ecosystems for future generations. These objectives were formulated as a result of worldwide interdisciplinary teamwork, and they explicitly allowed countries to choose their own context-appropriate solutions.

Andolina, Signa, Tomasello, Mazzola, and Vizzini, (2021) argue that attaining sustainable development is fraught with social and environmental difficulties, such as resource shortages, single-sector resource

management, and pollution. Ghaderi, Mirzapour, Henderson, and Richardson, (2019) added that these challenges of dealing with sustainability are to provide the best CSR activities for outbound operators and tourists.

In this case, customers of nature-based tourism are more aware and concerned about the importance of sustainability of the finite resources of the planet. While focusing on the importance of environmental health, preserving biodiversity of natural resources and reducing the negative impact, especially on marine life (Pham-Do & Pham, 2020; Wang, Paudel, & Caffey, 2020). Given their role in tourism, tour operators have made many attempts to implement distinctive social responsibility activities to meet stakeholder expectations (Olajide, 2014).

Similarly, an Interviewee & Commentary, (2020) CSR research paper reveals that consumers' interest in CSR is now on the rise. In fact, most studies confirmed that customers are of the belief that companies or businesses should engage in social initiatives and that the firms benefit from these activities (Lee, Ham, & Koh, 2019).

Earlier studies have shown a positive relationship between CSR and loyalty, but in most of cases there is absence of any mediating variable in their models. In a study by Chubchuwong, (2019) it was acknowledged that there was a lack of understanding of the association between CSR and customer loyalty.

Social communication emerged in various industries, including the hospitality and travelling context, for the purpose of disseminating information relating to corporate social responsibility (CSR) Despite widespread use of social media among companies, there is still a lot unknowns about its effects on customer loyalty especially within the tourism industry (Martnez, Herrero, & Garca-de los Salmenes, (2020). Furthermore, the relationship between CSR and social media engagement on destination loyalty is not fully understood, especially in the context of sustainable development of nature-based tourism. The aim of this research paper is to develop a parsimonious model to analyse the inter-relationship between CSR and social media engagement on destination loyalty is not fully understood, especially in the context of sustainable development of nature-based tourism and try to fill in the aforementioned gap in previous research papers.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the current study involves the use of questionnaire surveys distributed through social media platforms. A cross-sectional data collection method was applied in the administration of the questionnaire survey to collect data from 240 respondents through the application of convenient sampling technique.

The respondents of this current study included both inbound and outbound tourists that visited well-known marine parks in Malaysia in June 2021. In addition, the PLS-based structural equation modelling (SEM) technique was used to analyse the data and to examine the hypotheses formulated by the answers to the research questions.

FINDINGS

The result has shown that marine parks should invest in more CSR activities to send a positive message to visitors and stakeholders. They should also minimise the negative impact of their communications via an active use of social media platforms to communicate directly with their target demographic and customer

base. The research paper also shows that CSR and social media engagements are influenced by customer loyalty. These results suggest that there are some practical implications to the design of CSR activities by the destination operator that play a strategic role in ensuring its sustainability and success.

CONCLUSION

The empirical findings show that social media engagement has the ability to significantly mediate the relationship between CSR activities and customer loyalty in tourist destinations.

This study also revealed an active engagement of social media, which reflected the effect of the CSR activities of Marine Park, which in turn affected customer loyalty. This is in agreement with Mohammed and Al-Swidi, (2019), who acknowledged that CSR activities will directly influence consumers' choices and influence customers to actively engage in social media by sharing their holiday experiences with their friends and family.

CONTRIBUTION/PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This current study has both practical and social implications. Regarding the practical contribution, tourist/customer loyalty can be enriched with companies' investing appropriately in corporate social responsibility activities.

Besides, current findings will assist policymakers and DMOs in planning, creating and maintaining business continuity and improve the utilisation of social media to encourage customer engagement in order to sustain environmental protection. This study will also serve as a guide to planning some attractive CSR activities in protected areas of the marine park. It will also be of benefit to the tourist destination and ensure community sustainability.

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