

How Effective Are Asian Hotels in Communicating CSR Efforts Through the Property Websites? The Case of Hong Kong

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Abstract Among the areas in the field of hospitality, web-based CSR communication has been rarely investigated. Prior studies have identified various CSR content provided on hotel websites, but have not evaluated web-based CSR communication performance based on usability factors and interactive elements. Moreover, existing research focused more on Western-based hospitality organizations. Prior studies on Asian hotel industry have been minimal. This study was conducted to evaluate the web-based CSR communication practice in the Hong Kong hotel industry, and proposed a modified ICTR's website evaluation model to evaluate the Hong Kong hotel industry's web-based CSR communication performance. Results show that communicating CSR effort through the property website was not a popular practice among Hong Kong hotels and that international and local hotels tend to communicate CSR efforts through social media sites rather than through hotel websites. Most hotels in Hong Kong have poor overall performance in communicating CSR efforts through the property websites, especially the "Communication function" dimension, indicating that hotels in Hong Kong were not effectively communicating CSR efforts through the property websites.

Keywords CSR communication • Hotel • Property website • Hong Kong

1 Research Background

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not a clear concept and it lacks a single accepted definition (Kucukusta and Chan 2013; Taneja et al. 2011; Martínez et al. 2013). At present, there is a growing interest for the concept of CSR among hospitality organizations (Dawkins 2004) because implementing CSR programs would create various benefits for the organization, such as increased customer and employee loyalty and satisfaction level, improved brand image and reputation, and

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generation of long-term financial benefits (Lee and Heo 2009; Lee and Park 2009; McGehee et al. 2009). A research project conducted by Tsai et al. (2012) indicated that 70 % of the hotels in Hong Kong have implemented a CSR practice, proving that hotel organizations are increasingly becoming aware of the opportunities that implementing a CSR program presents (Jones et al. 2006; Moir 2001). However, proper action is not strong enough to generate benefits. Organizations need to speak up and communicate to the target audience. Hence, communication planning is one of the important elements of a CSR strategy.

Dahlsurd (2008) examined the existing CSR definitions and observed that basically, these definitions correspond and consistently refer to five dimensions: environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness. These five dimensions are popular and can be found in published reporting guidelines and CSR measure models. The most popular models adopted by researchers to measure CSR performance were coined by Carroll's (1979) "Corporate social performance model" (CSPM) and Elkington's (1999) "Triple Bottom Line" (TBL).

CSPM contains three aspects: social responsibility categories, social issues, and social responsiveness. As industries have to face different issues on certain period of time, they need to have different social issues added to the corporate performance model; and social responsibility strategies chosen by the management need to be added into the model to evaluate the corporate performance in terms of social responsibility which is called social responsiveness (Carroll 1979). TBL comprised three dimensions named people (measure the organization social responsibility, such as favourable practice regarding to labour and community), profit (measure the economic value created by organization and the economic benefit to community and society) and planet (measure the environmental responsibility such as reducing the environmental impact). This model has been widely adopted as various CSR reporting standards such as Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

In the past, companies communicated CSR efforts through expensive and inefficient traditional media, such as annual report, sustainability report, television advertising, and leaflets or newspapers (Wanderley et al. 2008). The invention and popularity of the Internet have provided an alternative. Compared with traditional CSR communication methods, using the Internet to communicate CSR is less expensive and more efficient. The Internet has allowed companies to present and update information for different audience regardless of time and space (Adams and Frost 2004; Frost et al. 2005; Wang and Chaudhri 2009). Given the advances in Internet technology and the growing number of Internet users, websites have become a popular medium for business organizations to communicate CSR efforts (Rikhardsson et al. 2002). Consequently, the focus of CSR communication research shifted from traditional CSR reporting to web-based CSR communication practice.

Research in the hotel industry is still in its infancy and has been developing toward the evaluation of web-based CSR communication in hotels through various approaches. Prior research had contributed to the knowledge of website evaluation, mainly from three approaches: (1) website functionality approach; (2) customer usability approach, and (3) website functionality and customer usability approach. Li and Wang (2010) claimed different approaches were required to evaluate

website because the objective of evaluation between users and owners were different. Many of the website evaluation studies related to the hospitality industry were developed from website functionality approach. Murphy et al. (1996) had conducted the first study to evaluate hotel website from functionality approach, which identified four dimensions to evaluate website performance including promotion and marketing content; service and information; interactivity and technology; and management. Morrison et al. (1999) had modified “Balanced scorecard model” (mBSC) developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992). This model comprised four perspectives which were technical, customer, marketing, and internal. Those dimensions were inter-linked and each dimension had included different critical success factors. However, the mBSC model had been developed for more than 15 years, and was lack of factors to measure the latest technologies such as Web 2.0 and multimedia. Information presented on websites need to be accurate, timely, and clear (Wang and Russo 2007), so they presented the ICTR (Information, Communication, Transaction and Relationship) model to evaluate the effectiveness of Destination Marketing System functions. Lu and Yeung (1998) claimed that the usefulness of websites was determined by the functionality or the ability to provide appropriate information; thus, without the evaluation features, the evaluation of web-based CSR communication performance is not complete. Outdated CSR information can negatively affect an organization’s reputation and may cause a company to be accused of “green-washing” its image (El-Dief and Font 2010; Laufer 2003). Holcomb et al. (2007) and Nyahunzvi (2013) looked for different CSR themes discussed in the websites. Hsieh (2012) focused on environmental issues, and de Grosbois (2012) concentrated on the CSR commitment and achievement data and examined the communication methods that hotels employed in presenting CSR efforts in the websites. Moreover, from the review of existing studies, the authors have observed that the CSR themes identified from hotel websites were related to society, economy, and environment. Among these three CSR themes, Holcomb et al. (2007), Hsieh (2012), and Nyahunzvi (2013) claimed that hotels tend to provide the least amount of information on environment.

Beyond the amount of CSR information provided in the websites, de Grosbois (2012) further investigated the volume of information on CSR commitment and achievement. She found that hotels present commitment goals for various CSR activities, but seldom provide the achieved data. Furthermore, Nyahunzvi (2013) compared the CSR communication practice in annual reports, mission statements, and corporate websites among Zimbabwe hotels and indicated that website was the least effective medium in communicating CSR efforts. Apart from the basic picture of web-based CSR communication practice in hotels that has been provided, these studies have several limitations. First, studies only focused on examining the CSR content provided in corporate websites, and most evaluated the CSR communication practice from a traditional CSR reporting approach, ignoring the usability and interactive elements of a website. Second, prior studies focused only on examining the largest hotels in non-Asian countries. Consequently, the result may not be applicable to the hotels in Asia and the small- to medium-sized hotels. Finally, these studies did not examine the types of information published on the hotel websites.

In order to evaluate the CSR communication performance on hotel website from a more comprehensive approach, this study proposed a modify website evaluation model based on the work of de Grosbois (2012) to measure web-based CSR communication performance of the hotel industry. Based on the above research gap, the purpose of this study was to examine Asian hotels' web-based CSR communication performance. The objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the web-based CSR communication practice in Hong Kong hotel; (2) to evaluate the performance of Hong Kong's hotel websites in communicating CSR effort from a functionality approach, and (3) to compare website performance in communicating CSR practices among three types of hotel in Hong Kong.

2 Methodology

This study evaluated the website performance in terms of communicating CSR practices based on content analysis of the websites of Hong Kong hotels. Content analysis is a technique employed to collect and analyse text, picture, symbols, themes, or ideas communicated (Neuman 2003). This method had been used by numerous studies on CSR communication practices (de Grosbois 2012; Hsieh 2012; Holcomb et al. 2007; Kucukusta and Chan 2013; Nyahunzvi 2013). Thus, it is an appropriate method to analyse the web-based CSR communication practices among Hong Kong hotels.

2.1 Model Development

The dimension used in this study was modified from the ICTR model of Wang and Russo (2007), which comprises five dimensions, with each dimension referring to a different level of website function. The model begins with the "*Information function*," followed by "*Communication function*," "*Transaction function*," and "*Relationship function*." All dimensions were supported by a "*Technical merit*." In this model, each level of website function was clearly divided, which facilitated adoption of relevant dimensions to evaluate a hotel's performance in communicating CSR efforts through the property website. As the objectives of this study were not examined the e-business and customer relationship environment, "*Transaction*" and "*Relationship function*" were excluded.

Among the three selected dimensions, "*Information function*" comprises five CSR themes and 30 relevant CSR topics that developed by de Grosbois (2012). The CSR themes and topics of de Grosbois (2012) were adopted because they were well developed and organized with detailed description of all CSR topics under each theme. Moreover, these CSR topics and themes were drawn from popular CSR reporting standards and organizations, such as GRI, WTO, and UNEP. A sub-theme "*Information Quality*" was added to determine the quality of CSR information in terms of accuracy and timeliness to avoid the "green-washing" image. It comprises

Table 1 Modified ICTR model

| | |
|---|--|
| Information (6 sub-dimensions, 36 items) | |
| <i>Social and community action (6 items)</i> | |
| Responsible products and healthy product choice | Raise awareness and involve employee/customers in CSR activity |
| Assistance for local/nation community | Assistance for international/global community |
| Protect heritage or local culture | Safe environment for the customer |
| <i>Environment action (9 items)</i> | |
| Minimize carbon footprint | Green building design and construction |
| Energy management | Green product |
| Waste management | Contribute to bio-diversity/eco-system |
| Improve air quality | Water conservation—water saving and reducing |
| Reduce pollution | |
| <i>Employment action (7 items)</i> | |
| Health and safety workplace | Career development opportunity |
| Fair and equitable benefit | Ensure equal opportunity |
| Learning and development opportunity | Work-life balance police |
| Employee assistance program | |
| <i>Diversity and disable accessibility action (4 items)</i> | |
| Increase diversity in workforce | Increase diversity among customer |
| Increase diversity among affiliates/suppliers | Accessibility for job applicant, employee and customer |
| <i>Economic action (4 items)</i> | |
| Contribute to local/global economic | Raise affiliate/supplier awareness of CSR practices |
| Sustainable purchase and supply chain | Cooperate with industry or other institution |
| <i>Information quality (6 items)</i> | |
| Created initiative program | Presenting the goal and commitment for CSR practice |
| Up-to-date information | Present received CSR award or/and recognition |
| Present CSR achievement | Providing monitoring and tracking system |
| Communication (6 items) | |
| Online forum | Direct email campaign |
| Comment box | Newsletter |
| Online survey | Interactive communication |
| Technical merit (8 items) | |
| Search engine recognition | Graphic |
| Internal search function | Raid access (the 3-click rule) |
| Photo | Language option |
| Video | No error link |

six attributes developed from previous literature on CSR communication on corporate websites. Additionally, technological advances, such as Web 2.0 tool and social media, were added under the communication function to ensure that the evaluation can reflect the reality.

As shown in Table 1, the “Information” dimension composed of six sub-themes, including five CSR themes and the information quality. This dimension aims to

Table 2 Hotel classification

| Types of hotel | Classification |
|----------------|--|
| International | The hotel is operating or/and managing properties worldwide |
| Regional | The hotel is operating or/and managing properties in the Asia-Pacific region |
| Local | The hotel is operating or/and managing properties in Hong Kong |

measure both the quantity and quality of CSR information on the website. This dimension aims to measure the website performance in using different methods to communicate with audience interactively. As there were 50 items in the revised model, the maximum score of the overall CSR performance was 50.

2.2 *The Target Samples*

The study population included 124 hotels in Hong Kong listed as members of the Hong Kong Hotels Association. To understand the web-based CSR communication performance of different hotels, the study categorized the 124 hotels into three groups—international hotels, regional hotels, and local hotels—on the basis of the number of countries they operate in. Details of hotel classification are listed in Table 2. Of the 124 hotels, 42 hotels were under international category, 32 hotels under regional category, and 50 hotels under local category.

All 124 hotels' official websites were inspected for CSR related information and documentations in March 2014. Once a website has such piece of information (the website had displayed CSR information regardless its functionality performance), the website's function for communicating with the audience would be further evaluated. Each criterion in Table 1 was scored by either 0 (criterion not found or missing) or 1 point (criterion found). As this study focused on property websites, the information listed on corporate websites were not counted. The underlying reason for the choice was the possibility that the information listed on the property websites could directly reflect the CSR practices of individual hotels and more accurate information could be collected. Moreover, the website section that hotels use to communicate CSR information was also recorded to understand the CSR communication pattern of the websites of Hong Kong hotels.

3 Finding and Discussion

3.1 *CSR Communication Practices at Hong Kong Hotel Websites*

From the content analysis of 124 hotel websites, this study identified three methods that hotels use to communicate CSR information, namely, individual property website, corporate or brand website, and social media (Facebook). In the individual

Table 3 CSR communication practices of the websites of 124 Hong Kong hotels

| Location | International (N = 42) | | Regional (N = 32) | | Local (N = 50) | | Total (N = 124) | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Property website^a | 19 | 45.2 | 8 | 25.0 | 6 | 12.0 | 33 | 26.6 |
| –Specific CSR section | 1 | 2.4 | 1 | 3.1 | 4 | 4.0 | 4 | 3.2 |
| –Hotel information section | 16 | 38.1 | 3 | 9.4 | 4 | 8.0 | 23 | 18.5 |
| –Award section | 4 | 9.5 | 7 | 21.9 | 5 | 10.0 | 16 | 12.9 |
| –Press section | 7 | 16.7 | 6 | 18.8 | 1 | 2.0 | 14 | 11.3 |
| –Career section | 1 | 2.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 4.0 | 3 | 2.4 |
| –Multi-section | 13 | 31.0 | 5 | 15.6 | 6 | 12.0 | 24 | 19.4 |
| Corporate website | 22 | 52.4 | 8 | 25.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 30 | 24.2 |
| No information | 1 | 2.4 | 16 | 50.0 | 44 | 88.0 | 61 | 49.2 |
| Facebook | 24 | 57.1 | 8 | 25.0 | 13 | 26.0 | 45 | 36.3 |

^aThe website section that hotels use to provide CSR information

websites, hotels mainly provide CSR information in five sections or locations: specific CSR section, hotel information section, award section, press section, and career section. Most of the individual websites adopted more than one section to provide CSR information. The CSR communication practices of 124 Hong Kong hotel websites are listed in Table 3.

Communicating CSR efforts through a property website was not a popular practice among Hong Kong hotels. Sixty-one out of one hundred and twenty-four Hong Kong hotels provided no CSR information on the property websites. The observation was particularly true among regional (16 out of 32) and local (44 out of 50) hotels. The result indicates that the website was not a popular medium in communicating CSR efforts. Thus, CSR efforts could be assumed not popularly implemented in Asia. Wan and Juslin (2009) found that Asia-Pacific organizations tend to limit CSR information and provide less disclosure on CSR efforts because these organizations did not understand the reason for implementing a CSR program. Of the 124 hotels, only 33 hotels provided CSR information in their property websites. Interestingly, 45 (36.3 %) hotels utilized Facebook to provide CSR information, and those Facebook pages were all created by the individual hotels and linked to the property websites. In essence, Facebook was the more popular medium used to communicate CSR information among Hong Kong hotels with 36 % of them currently using it.

For international hotels, more than 57 % of the properties in this study have provided CSR information through Facebook primarily because the property websites were controlled and managed at the corporate level. Fig. 1 is a screen capture of the websites of two hotels in Hong Kong which is under the same brand. This indicates both hotels have adopted the same template so these websites have similar design and provided similar information. This observation proved the existence of centralized control and management of the websites. International hotels in Hong Kong tend to provide a standardized website experience to the

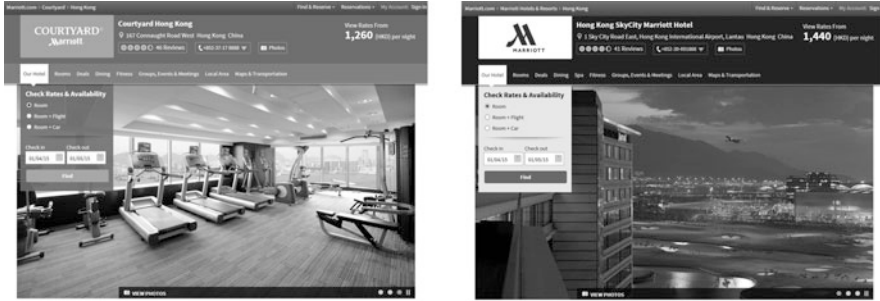


Fig. 1 Web pages of Courtyard Marriott and SkyCity Marriott Hotel [Sources Courtyard Marriott Hong Kong (2014), Hong Kong SkyCity Marriott Hotel (2014)]

audience. The properties have no authority to design and control the website content. However, with the emergence of social media, individual hotels have a platform to closely communicate with the target customers. Thus, most of the international and regional hotels used social media, instead of the property websites, to provide CSR information.

More than half of the local hotels provided CSR information on Facebook. Of this figure, 26 % provide CSR in Facebook and only 12 % provide CSR in the property websites. Local hotels have fewer resources at their disposal to communicate CSR through the property websites (Garay and Font 2012) and the cost required to communicate CSR efforts on Facebook is lower. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the local hotels provide CSR effort on Facebook rather than on the property websites. In order to further understand the web-based CSR communication practices in the Hong Kong hotel industry, this study examined the website sections that hotels use to provide CSR information. Most of the hotels provided CSR information in “Hotel information section” (18.5 %) and “Award section” (12.9 %). Only four hotels (3.2 %) have a specific CSR section in their websites. The CSR information provided in the “Hotel information section” tend to present CSR information under the “about us,” “rooms,” “hotel features,” “hotel service,” and “hotel activities” sections, and the user was required to click on each section before reaching the CSR information. Moreno and Capriotti (2009) noted that information in the websites were presented in a hierarchical level and organizations tend to present important information on the first level (information was presented in the homepage level, and users reach information in just one click), followed by less important information. Therefore, most of these hotels did not treat CSR information as important.

Using the “Award section” to provide CSR information was a popular practice among regional and local hotels, which was not the case for international hotels. Generally, hotel companies present the icon of the CSR award without any description. Only 6 out of 10 hotels provided a description of the award in the press release section. A CSR award could be an indicator of best practices and serves as a third-

party verification that confirms the reliability of a CSR effort (Hsieh 2012). Hotel companies could generate benefits from presenting CSR awards only if the target audience has a basic idea of the award the hotel received. In the case of Hong Kong, however, most of the CSR awards received by regional and local hotels were issued by local organizations, which foreign audiences were not familiar with. Hence, the CSR awards presented in the property websites without basic descriptions could not confirm the reliability of the CSR efforts. As a result, these hotels could be losing the benefit that could be gained from presenting the CSR award.

3.2 CSR Communication Performance of Hong Kong Hotel Websites

As shown in Table 3, out of 124 hotel websites, only 33 of them provided CSR information. Their overall performance was evaluated by the modified ICTR’s website evaluation model developed by Wang and Russo (2007). To facilitate understanding and interpretation, the CSR communication performance scores were converted to a rate of 100 %, the best practice performance score for CSR communication in the Hong Kong hotel websites were converted from 50 to 100. The overall CSR communication performances of 33 Hong Kong hotel websites were demonstrated in Table 4. In general, Hong Kong hotels showed poor web-based CSR communication performance. The average score of CSR communication performance in Hong Kong hotel websites was 28.30 out of 100 with the highest score of 56 and the lowest of 12. Most of the hotel websites scored between 20 and 27 (19 out of 33 hotels), indicating that Hong Kong hotels failed to utilize their websites effectively in communicating CSR efforts.

Information Function Most of the hotel websites had poor performance in providing CSR information. The average score of “Information function” was 18.61 out of 72, and the performance among these hotel websites ranged from 4 to 44.

Table 4 The web-based CSR communication performance in Hong Kong hotel

| Dimension | Average score | Range | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--------|---------|
| | | Lowest | Highest |
| Information ^a | 18.61 | 4 | 44 |
| Communication ^b | 1.82 | 0 | 4 |
| Technical merit ^c | 7.88 | 4 | 10 |
| Overall performance ^d | 28.30 | 12 | 56 |

^aThe maximum performance scores for Information function were 72

^bThe maximum performance scores for Communication function were 12

^cThe maximum performance scores for Technical Merit were 16

^dOverall performance refer to the overall CSR communication performance in website = a + b + c

This dimension comprises both the quantity and quality aspects. For the quantity aspect, these hotels were providing limited CSR topics from narrowed CSR themes. They revealed the tendency to provide CSR efforts that belong to the themes of “Social and community action” (87.9 %) and “Environmental action” (81.8 %), and seldom provide efforts related to other CSR themes such as “Economic action” (33.3 %) and “Employment action.” (21.2 %) Moreover, those hotels only provided limited topics under each theme. Due to the narrowed CSR theme and limited CSR topic provided in the websites, most of the Hong Kong hotels received low scores for this section.

Compared with the quantity aspect of CSR information, Hong Kong hotels showed better performance in the quality aspect. In this study, 51.5 % of the hotels received half weight or above performance score for this factor. Most of the hotels provided information regarding the CSR award and recognition (69.7 %), CSR commitment and goal (60.6 %), and CSR monitoring and tracking system (57.6 %). More than 50 % of the hotels provided up-to-date CSR information. However, only 33.3 % of the hotels provided information regarding the CSR achievement, indicating that there was still room for improvement. Hotels that did not provide information for CSR achievement in their websites could be causing a negative impact and avoid an image that undergone “green washing”, because audience could not confirm the accuracy of the CSR effort. de Grosbois (2012) provided possible reasons behind this observation, namely, the hotel company did not have certain systems to collect CSR achievement data, the performance was poor, and those hotels had never implemented the commitment as stated. Hotel companies need to be wary of the accuracy of their CSR efforts and understand that the quality of the information they provide could make or break their image and affect the trust of clients.

Communication Function The result of the “Communication function” was surprisingly low. All of the sample hotels in this study received a poor performance score in this dimension with the average score of this dimension was 1.82 out of 12 and ranged from 0 to 4. A possible reason for the poor performance in communication could be the lack of knowledge in communicating CSR efforts through the property websites and awareness of the importance of interactive communication. Of the 33 hotels, 30.3 % (10 out of 33) received 0 point in this dimension, which means that 30.3 % of the hotels distrusted CSR information in the website without providing any communication tools, such as direct e-mail, newsletter, or even the share function. Without a communication tool, the audience could not directly connect with the property website, and as such, hotels could be missing out on the opportunity to collect target audience comments and opinions regarding the CSR effort, which they can use to improve the existing CSR communication practice or even the CSR strategy. The remaining 23 hotels websites provided one to two communication tools in their website. There were more than 60 % of the hotels provided interactive communication tools. The Interactive communication tools refer to social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter through which users are allowed to share the CSR information provided in the property websites through the different social media or e-mail.

Technical Merit As mentioned previously, most of the hotels performed well in the “Technical merit” dimension. The average score of technical merit for Hong Kong hotel websites was 7.88 out of 16, and ranged from 4 to 10. Most of the hotels had good performance in website accessibility, such as search engine recognition (75.8 %), rapid access (90.9 %), link without errors (78.8 %), and language option (87.9 %). Nevertheless, some of the factors under technical merit are still overlooked by hotel companies, such as internal search function, video for CSR effort, and using graphic to present CSR achievement (only 6.1 % of the hotel had provided these functions).

4 Conclusions and Future Research

Apparently, property website was not a popular medium for communicating CSR efforts in Hong Kong hotel industry. Most of the international and local hotels tend to provide CSR efforts through social media, such as Facebook. Some hotels provided information on their CSR efforts through the property websites. However, these hotels seldom present the information in a specific CSR section. Most of the hotels present their CSR efforts in the hotel information section and award section. International hotels tend to present their CSR efforts in the hotel information section, whereas regional and local hotels tend to present their CSR efforts in the award section. However, many hotels present the icon of the CSR award without any description. Other than analysing the web-based CSR communication practices in Hong Kong’s hotel industry, this study evaluated the web-based CSR communication performance of Hong Kong hotels by modifying the ICTR website evaluation model (Wang and Russo 2007). Most of the hotels perform poorly on web-based CSR communication. Many hotels provided limited CSR information under narrowed CSR themes in the websites and seldom disclosed the achievement data. Moreover, many hotels performed poorly in communicating their CSR efforts, probably because they were not yet aware of the importance of interactive communication and the opportunity to build a relationship with the audience in the development of their CSR program. CSR efforts are not regarded as important information in the property websites, and the goal in providing information on CSR efforts in the website are mainly for marketing and customer approach.

Future research could include customers in evaluating the CSR communication performance in hotel websites to provide a more comprehensive knowledge in web-based CSR communication practice in the hotel industry. Moreover, the evaluation model for CSR communication performance in hotel websites needs to be modified and should take the volume of information as a consideration. Furthermore, this study only considered the CSR information in the property websites and excluded information provided in other web-based media. Parallel analysis of other web-based media used to communicate CSR efforts of hotels is suggested as a focus of future studies.

Acknowledgement This study was partly supported by a research grant funded by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (1-ZV77).

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