

Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Hotel Brand Perception

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DESCRIPTION

In an increasingly values-driven marketplace, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a defining element of brand perception in the hospitality industry. Hotels are no longer judged solely on the basis of luxury, price, or location. Today's guests particularly millennials and Gen Z travellers are asking: "What does this hotel stand for?" This shift in expectations has propelled CSR from a peripheral marketing tool to a core strategic driver that shapes consumer trust, loyalty and long-term profitability.

CSR in the hotel industry can manifest in various forms including environmental sustainability, community engagement, employee welfare, and ethical sourcing. Examples range from eliminating single-use plastics and conserving water, to hiring locally and supporting educational programs in underdeveloped regions. Hotels that align their operations with social and environmental values are increasingly favored by consumers who seek meaningful, responsible travel experiences.

A prime example of this transformation is seen in brands like Marriott International and Hilton Hotels, which have made visible commitments to reducing carbon emissions and improving local livelihoods. These efforts are not just about public relations they are strategic decisions that influence brand perception at a deep emotional level. When customers perceive a hotel as responsible and ethical, it triggers positive associations, often translating into higher satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Academic studies support this link. Research shows that CSR positively impacts consumer attitudes toward a brand, especially when initiatives are authentic and align with core brand values. A study found that customers who perceive a hotel as socially responsible are more likely to recommend it to others and return for future stays. This highlights the reputational value of CSR, which, in a service-centric industry, can be a significant competitive advantage.

Moreover, CSR contributes to employee engagement, which indirectly influences customer experiences. Employees who feel

that their company is committed to social good tend to exhibit higher morale, better performance, and stronger alignment with the brand's mission. In turn, these employees create more positive and empathetic customer interactions reinforcing the hotel's reputation for excellence and integrity.

However, CSR must be genuine, consistent, and transparent. Superficial or misleading claims often referred to as "greenwashing" can backfire, damaging brand trust and provoking public backlash. Today's consumers are savvy and well-informed. They can quickly detect whether a hotel's CSR efforts are truly impactful or merely cosmetic. This calls for measurable goals, third-party verification, and clear communication to stakeholders.

Digital platforms also amplify the impact of CSR on brand perception. Social media, travel review sites, and influencer marketing can rapidly spread both praise and criticism. When CSR initiatives are authentic and well-executed, they often go viral, giving hotels free, positive exposure. On the other hand, insincere efforts are equally likely to be called out, with potential damage to reputation.

Looking forward, CSR is likely to become even more integrated into the brand identity of hotel chains. Consumers are not just looking for places to stay they are looking for brands that reflect their values. Hotels that make CSR an intrinsic part of their brand storytelling will likely attract more loyal, emotionally invested customers. Furthermore, with growing investor interest in ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) metrics, CSR can influence not only consumer behavior but also financial and stakeholder outcomes.

In conclusion, corporate social responsibility has evolved from an optional initiative to a foundational aspect of hotel brand perception. As guests increasingly prioritize ethical considerations in their travel decisions, hotels must view CSR not as a cost, but as a strategic investment in brand equity, customer trust, and long-term success.

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