The Future of Tourism and Hospitality Management: Trends and Predictions

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Exploring the Current Trend of Tourism Social Enterprises: Going Beyond CSR

Introduction:

Over the past few years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has garnered considerable recognition and has become a crucial aspect of business operations across diverse sectors. In the realm of hospitality, the significance of CSR has been acknowledged, leading researchers to delve into its implications and advantages. However, amidst the evolving landscape of the tourism industry, a novel trend has emerged: Tourism Social Enterprises (TSEs). These enterprises transcend the conventional boundaries of CSR, embracing a more proactive and all-encompassing approach to fulfilling societal obligations. In this article, we will delve into the concept of TSEs, examining their distinctiveness from traditional CSR practices and how the Toronto School of Management (TSoM) integrates such important tourism trends into its tourism and hospitality management programs.

Understanding CSR in the Hospitality Context:

CSR encompasses a company's efforts and actions in fulfilling its perceived societal obligations. Brown and Dacin (1997) provide a comprehensive definition that emphasizes both the status and activities of a firm concerning these obligations. Scholars from diverse academic disciplines have devoted considerable attention to studying CSR, recognizing its significance and implications across various industries. In particular, the hospitality sector has been a focal point for examining the role and impact of CSR initiatives.

Boluk (2011) delved into the connection between CSR and value creation within the hospitality industry. This research sheds light on how implementing CSR practices can positively influence consumer behaviour and contribute to enhancing a business's reputation. By engaging in responsible and sustainable practices, hospitality businesses can attract socially conscious consumers who prioritize ethical considerations in their purchasing decisions. When consumers perceive a company as socially responsible, they are more likely to develop a favourable attitude toward the brand, leading to increased loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

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The link between CSR and value creation extends beyond the immediate impact on consumer behaviour. By integrating social and environmental considerations into their operations, businesses can enhance their long-term sustainability and financial performance. CSR initiatives that focus on reducing environmental footprints, supporting local communities, or promoting diversity and inclusion contribute to building a positive corporate image. This image, in turn, can attract investors, partners, and talented employees who share similar values and aspirations. Ultimately, CSR initiatives can drive innovation, create new business opportunities, and strengthen the overall competitiveness of the hospitality organization.

Moreover, the implications of CSR in the hospitality sector extend beyond the company level to the broader destination or tourism ecosystem. By engaging in responsible practices, hospitality businesses can contribute to the overall sustainability and well-being of the communities in which they operate. For example, responsible engagement can involve initiatives such as promoting cultural preservation, supporting local businesses and artisans, or investing in community development projects. In doing so, hospitality companies can foster positive relationships with local stakeholders, enhance the destination's reputation, and ultimately contribute to the long-term success of the tourism industry.

The Role of Stakeholders in CSR Tourism Management:

In the tourism and hospitality context, stakeholders play a crucial role in the effective management and implementation of CSR initiatives within a company. Hospitality scholars, such as Font and Lynes (2018), have emphasized the significance of stakeholders and their expectations in shaping an organization's CSR practices. Recognizing and engaging stakeholders becomes crucial for the successful implementation of CSR strategies that align with the needs and interests of all involved parties.

Stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry are diverse and encompass a wide range of individuals, groups, and organizations. They can include employees, customers, local communities, government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), suppliers, investors, and industry associations. Each stakeholder group has unique perspectives, interests, and expectations regarding the social and environmental impacts of tourism and the responsible behaviour of hospitality organizations.

One of the primary reasons stakeholders are essential in CSR management is their ability to influence a company's actions and decisions. Stakeholders often have the power to shape a company's reputation, success, and long-term sustainability. Their support, collaboration, or criticism can significantly impact a business's operations, customer base, and overall performance. Therefore, engaging with stakeholders and understanding their concerns, values,

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and expectations is crucial for hospitality companies aiming to develop meaningful and effective CSR strategies.

By actively involving stakeholders in the CSR process, companies can gain valuable insights and feedback. Stakeholder consultations, dialogue, and engagement allow organizations to understand the specific social, economic, and environmental issues that matter most to these groups. This understanding enables companies to prioritize their CSR efforts, identify areas for improvement, and develop initiatives that address the shared concerns and expectations of stakeholders.

Additionally, stakeholders can contribute to the successful implementation of CSR initiatives by providing resources, expertise, and support. For example, local communities can offer cultural knowledge and local partnerships; NGOs can provide expertise on social and environmental issues; and industry associations can offer guidance and best practices. By collaborating with stakeholders, hospitality organizations can leverage their collective knowledge and resources, ensuring that CSR efforts are both effective and sustainable.

Likewise, stakeholders act as a form of accountability for companies' CSR commitments. By actively engaging with stakeholders, organizations demonstrate their commitment to transparency, responsiveness, and ethical behaviour. This engagement helps to build trust and credibility with stakeholders, which is crucial for maintaining positive relationships and long-term partnerships. Regular communication and reporting on CSR progress and outcomes further reinforce this accountability, allowing stakeholders to assess a company's performance and impact on society and the environment.

In line with the recognition of stakeholders' crucial role in the tourism and hospitality industry, TSoM places great emphasis on educating its students about the significance of stakeholders in CSR practices. TSoM understands that future professionals in the field need to be aware of the diverse stakeholder groups and their expectations to effectively navigate the complex landscape of responsible tourism and hospitality.

At TSoM, students are provided with comprehensive education and training through tourism and hospitality courses that includes a deep understanding of CSR principles and stakeholder engagement strategies. Through coursework, case studies, and interactive discussions, students gain insights into the perspectives and interests of various stakeholders, such as employees, customers, local communities, and industry associations.

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Throughout the integration of stakeholder perspectives into the curriculum, TSoM ensures that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognize, engage, and respond to stakeholders in their future careers. This awareness allows students to consider the broader societal implications of their actions and decisions within the tourism and hospitality sector.

Apart from our extensive hospitality and tourism programs, TSoM fosters an interactive learning environment that encourages students to actively engage with stakeholders during their studies. Through industry partnerships, guest lectures, and networking events, students have the opportunity to connect with professionals, industry leaders, and representatives from stakeholder groups. These interactions provide students with firsthand insights into the challenges, expectations, and best practices related to CSR and stakeholder management.

Differentiating Tourism Social Enterprises from CSR:

While traditional CSR practices are often characterized as reactive approaches to fulfilling societal obligations, the concept of TSE takes a more proactive stance. In contrast to the fragmented approach of CSR, TSEs adopt a more comprehensive organizational structure to address social obligations, as highlighted by Saatci and Urper (2013). These enterprises recognize that social responsibility cannot be relegated to a separate department or treated as a mere marketing element; instead, it needs to be integrated into the core operations and DNA of the organization.

By incorporating social responsibility at the heart of their business model, TSEs prioritize the simultaneous pursuit of economic, social, and environmental goals. They view themselves as vehicles for positive change and aim to create sustainable impacts in the communities and destinations they operate in. Unlike CSR, which often involves addressing social and environmental concerns as an afterthought or in response to external pressures, TSEs are designed from the outset to address societal challenges and actively contribute to the well-being of communities.

One key aspect of TSEs is their holistic approach to social obligations. They go beyond simply implementing philanthropic initiatives or engaging in occasional CSR activities. Instead, TSEs weave social responsibility into their everyday operations, ensuring that their business practices and activities align with their mission and values. This integrated approach enables them to have a more substantial and lasting impact on the communities they serve.

Additionally, TSEs often adopt innovative and entrepreneurial strategies to address social and environmental challenges. They seek to generate sustainable revenue streams that support their social mission while also promoting economic growth and development. By adopting this

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proactive and business-oriented approach, TSEs can achieve financial viability and long-term sustainability, enabling them to continue making positive contributions to society.

The integration of social responsibility within the organizational structure of TSEs also fosters a culture of accountability and transparency. Stakeholders, including employees, customers, and local communities, expect TSEs to demonstrate a genuine commitment to social and environmental goals. By embedding social responsibility into their core operations, TSEs are better equipped to meet these expectations and build trust with their stakeholders (Alomari, 2021).

In parallel, the integration of immigrant and refugee employment within the context of TSEs adds another layer of significance to the discussion of social responsibility and stakeholder involvement in the tourism and hospitality sectors. While previous research has extensively explored the role of immigrants and refugees as a significant source of employees in the industry, there has been a lack of focus on their experiences within the TSE context.

To address this research gap, a qualitative case study was conducted at the Magdas Hotel in Vienna, Austria, which is a TSE that specifically employs refugees. The study engaged four groups of 20 stakeholders, utilizing on-site observation and in-depth interviews to gain insights into refugee employment experiences from a stakeholder perspective. By employing an analytical approach that incorporates stakeholder theory and the ethics of care approach rooted in feminist theory, this research sheds light on the employment dynamics and social impact of TSEs in the context of refugee employment.

The findings of the study contribute to the existing literature on tourism and hospitality by emphasizing several key points. First, employment emerges as a significant priority in the lives of refugees, highlighting the importance of creating employment opportunities that cater to their unique circumstances. Second, the study recognizes that employment in the hospitality sector can serve as a mutually beneficial avenue: refugees can contribute valuable skills to address labour shortages, while organizations need to foster a flexible and sensitive corporate culture and employment policies that accommodate refugees' specific needs.

Additionally, the study reveals that TSEs can serve as a starting point for refugee job seekers aiming to enter the hospitality sector. By providing financial, social, and professional support, TSEs create an environment that facilitates the integration and success of refugee workers. This not only benefits individual refugees but also contributes to the overall enhancement of the hospitality sector's reputation and the creation of a satisfying tourist experience.

The implications of this research extend beyond the empirical findings. The study emphasizes the importance of policy development and implementation based on an improved understanding of refugees' employment experiences. By considering the perspectives of various stakeholders, including refugees themselves, TSEs, and the wider community, policymakers can develop more effective strategies to address the challenges and opportunities related to refugee employment in the hospitality sector and within the framework of TSEs.

The integration of social responsibility within TSEs and the exploration of immigrant and refugee employment experiences within this context offer valuable insights for the tourism and hospitality industries. TSEs exemplify proactive and integrated approaches that enable businesses to effectively fulfill societal obligations while promoting economic growth and social well-being. By considering the perspectives and needs of various stakeholders, TSEs demonstrate the potential for creating a more inclusive and responsible tourism sector.

At TSoM, we prepare our students for their future careers in the hospitality and tourism industry by equipping them with an awareness of such important trends in these sectors. By recognizing the significance of social responsibility and sustainable practices, we aim to prepare future professionals who can contribute to the long-term viability and ethical development of the tourism industry. As the industry continues to evolve, the insights gained from research on TSEs and refugee employment experiences provide a solid foundation for future studies and policy developments. Together, we can work towards creating a tourism sector that is not only economically prosperous but also socially responsible and environmentally sustainable.

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Dr. Thabit Alomari is a highly respected tourism professional with over three decades of experience as a consultant and academic. He has made significant contributions to tourism research and policy development, focusing on human resource development, employment, and training within the industry. Holding three graduate degrees in tourism, Dr. Alomari is particularly interested in alternative forms of tourism, sustainability, social enterprises, and integrating technology like blockchain into the sector. As a senior management consultant, he guides organizations and drives positive change. With a profound understanding of qualitative research methods, he provides valuable insights and recommendations to students, clients, and colleagues. Dr. Alomari currently serves as a Faculty Member at the School of Hospitality and Tourism, Toronto School of Management.

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