

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE CASE OF ROMANIAN TRAVEL AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's voluntary activities "that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 117).

This paper focuses on the question "Are Romanian travel agencies aware and engaged in corporate social responsibility?" Using a direct marketing research approach we try to answer to this question by evaluating if the Romanian travel agencies are involved in social responsibility campaigns and if the travel agencies have any rules and procedures regarding equal opportunities in employment of women or people with disabilities. It is also investigated which are the main actions of social responsibility supported by the Romanian travel agencies and how the employees define social responsibility.

Key words: *tourism, corporate social responsibility (CSR), customer relations, marketing research*

JEL classification: L83, M14

1. Introduction and review of literature

Regarding the social responsibility concept there were many definitions and debates of what socially responsible means.

One of that says: "being socially responsible means that people and organizations must behave ethically and with sensitivity toward social, cultural, economic and environmental issues."

(<http://www.imasocialentrepreneur.com/social-responsibility>).

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The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) states: “In the wake of increasing globalization, we have become increasingly conscious not only of what we buy, but also how the goods and services we buy have been produced. Environmentally harmful production, child labor, dangerous working environments and other inhumane conditions are examples of issues being brought into the open. All companies and organizations aiming at long-term profitability and credibility are starting to realize that they must act in accordance with norms of right and wrong.”

Many articles reveal the fact that companies implicated in social responsibility actions have generated a positive impact on development, business and society with a positive contribution to the whole world (Font et al., 2012; Holcomb et al., 2007).

There is little research in tourism that assesses the state of CSR reporting although there appears to be growing interest in this field (Font et al., 2012).

Tourism-related companies currently engage in various CSR activities (Inoue & Lee, 2011). Some examples of these activities include community involvement, environmental management, customer relations, and employee relations (Holcomb et al., 2007).

CSR refers to a company’s voluntary activities “that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 117). Examples include the adoption of advanced human resource management programs, the reduction of environmentally hazardous substances, philanthropic activities, the production of products integrating social attributes, and support for local businesses (Inoue & Lee, 2011; Barnett, 2007; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

No matter the size of an organization or the level of its involvement with CSR, every contribution is important and provides a number of benefits to both the community and the business.

Contributing to and supporting CSR does not have to be costly or time consuming and more and more businesses active in their local communities are seeing significant benefits from their involvement (<http://www.industrymasters.com/academy/economic-models/corporate-social-responsibility.html>):

- Reduced costs
- Increased business leads
- Increased reputation
- Increased staff morale and skills development
- Improved relationships with the local community, partners and clients
- Innovation in processes, products and services
- Managing the risks a company faces.

Over the time, the needs and wants of the tourists have changed (Holloway, 2002), and they are becoming more socially responsible and aware of the importance of conserving nature (see for example the ecotourism evolution and development in Medina, 2005). As socially responsible individuals, the tourists are demanding companies and organizations to become more socially responsible.

Sustainability is a growing concern for businesses and communities alike. Tourism is a fast-growing industry and should be managed sustainably to ensure maximum benefits and minimum negative impacts on local communities, their economies and the environment. By bringing corporate social responsibility (CSR) to the forefront of business strategies, a number of tour-operators are proactively addressing this need. For tour operators like Kuoni, Thomas Cook, TUI AG and Transat, increased dedication to CRS is of vital importance, and they are setting ground for the development of a greener, more competitive and sustainable tourism industry.

Since 2000, the tour operators' initiative for sustainable development (TOI) has been promoting sustainable tourism by encouraging tour operators to design and conduct environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable tours that are critical to improve the quality of the tourism experience at the local level and safeguard destinations (<http://www.unwto.org/tourism&mdgsezine/>).

TUI promotes the sustainability of destinations by optimizing tour operators' capacity to implement environment management strategies in destinations; encourage responsible travel choices and behaviors to consumers and provide a long-term vision for the competitiveness and attractiveness of destinations.

The present paper represents a novelty element for the research field and it focuses on the question "Are Romanian travel agencies aware and engaged in corporate social responsibility?" Using a direct marketing research approach we try to answer to this question by evaluating if the Romanian travel agencies are involved in social responsibility campaigns and if the travel agencies have any rules and procedures regarding equal opportunities in employment of the women or people with disabilities. We also investigate which are the main actions of social responsibility supported by the Romanian travel agencies and how the employees define social responsibility.

2. Material and Method(s)

The research was made at the International Tourism Fair in Romania, the XXVII edition, held at Romexpo, in Bucharest, in March, 15-18 2012, on a questionnaire with 20 closed questions, the sample included travel agencies employees that came as exhibitors with their firm at the fair. The sample of the survey was made appealing to an aleatory method of sampling – simple aleatory sampling method, whose implementation led to a number of 120 questionnaires.

Limits and constrains in realizing of the research were relied to a determined period in which were applied (4 days), thus the questionnaires that had lacks or contained errors were being declared nulls. Additional, there appeared some organizational restrictions and, thus, there were eliminated the compromised questionnaires because of different considerations such as big number of no-responses, or the suspicions about the way them were fulfilled. In spite of all his, it can be stated that the level of the representatively is high although in possible to be founded some insignificant errors.

The respondents profile was as follows: from the total of 120 respondents, 45.84% were male and 54.16% female; regarding age, between 18-24 years were 10% of the total 120 respondents; those aged 25-34 years represented 30% of the total 120 respondents; between 35 and 44 years were 43% of the total; and between 45-54 years 17% of the total 120 respondents; in respect of the personal income most respondents have a monthly income more then 2500 lei (70% of the total) and 30% of the respondents have more then 3000 lei monthly income working in travel agency. As graduated studies more than 80% of the total respondents' have a master degree.

3. Results and Discussions

The first question of our research was “Is your travel agency involved in social responsibility campaigns?” The question was built to make us realize if employees of the travel agencies are informed whether the company they work for is or is not involved in social responsibility campaigns.

The data we processed after interviewing 120 employees of the travel agencies in Romania showed that 39 people do not know if the agency they work for is or is not involved in such campaigns. It is possible that some of them don't know what social responsibility means and that is why they chose this answer to our question.

33 employees answered negatively, which means that almost a third of the people we interviewed are not interested in such campaigns. With these data we can see the involvement and the interest paid by travel agencies in such projects.

48 people responded affirmatively which shows us that we have several agencies concerned with social responsibility and get involved in these campaigns.

The study continued with the questions “What is the main social action supported by the travel agency that you work for?”. The results are illustrated in table no. 1.

Table no. 1.

The main social actions supported by the Romanians' travel agencies

	Number of respondents
Environment concern	7
Humanitarian actions	6
The stimulation of the civic behavior	5
Training activities	35
Analysis of the customers satisfaction	67

Source: authors research results

As we can see, the travel agencies are mainly involved in training activities for their employees and in analysis regarding the customers' satisfaction. A lower number of travel agencies are implicated in humanitarian campaigns and problems of environmental concern.

The communication between the manager and the employees of the travel agency was another concern of our research study. In regarding of this particular matter, the responses are indicated in the table no. 2.

Table no. 2

The degree of communication between the manager and the employees of the travel agency

	No. of respondents	%
Satisfactory	78	65
Neutral	10	8.33
Unsatisfactory	32	26.67
Total	120	100

Source: authors research results

Analyzing the data from this table the situation is clear: those who believed that the degree of communication between the manager and the employees of the travel agency is satisfactory were an overwhelming number of 78 respondents out of a total of 120, while those who chose the variants "neutral" or "unsatisfactory" were 10 and 32. In this light, 65% of the travel agencies employees are satisfied by the communication with their manager.

This shows that the managers achieved to realize that a very important component in achieving business development and obtaining performances is a good communication with the employees. Today, more than ever, developing effective communication ability has become a critical priority. This is a positive fact because it proves the discovery of effective communication subtleties. Only in this way it is created among the employees the desire of working with pleasure, seeing that the manager takes care of the work that they submitted and is eager to hear their opinions.

It seems that managers achieved to reach such an intensity of communication that a large number of employees, if not all to be involved in discussions. Many of those with whom we had the opportunity to talk to complete the questionnaire stated that managers encourage them to express their views in debates because the purpose intended is an open exchange of views, in which each participant seeks to help resolve the problems identifying with business concerns. In this way the debates

have an open and informal feature, allowing - through their effects assessed as extraordinary - gathering information needed to clarify the views of the staff.

Communication is essential in establishing appropriate relationships between the manager and the employees. Managerial verbal communication is the most important way to motivate and develop the employees. There is not an available style of communication for all managers or all situations, but it is clear that for a good communication it is necessary for the manager to have time for dialogue, to ensure an adequate communication environment, to be objective, to avoid direct contradictions and strife, to give clear and concise answers to avoid misunderstandings, to communicate changes to employees and take account of their views, to avoid monopolizing the discussion.

It seems that the managers of the travel agencies that were considered for research have the reserve to take into account the views of the employees and accepting them if they are good; also, they create opportunities for feedback and listen to the opinions of the employees.

Perhaps in those travel agencies where the degree of communication between the manager and the employees is unsatisfactory, the managers have listening problems, they are not concerned with obtaining feedback from their employees or receive false feedback, rose from the fear of the employees to manifest their true feelings.

Another objective of the research paper was to investigate if in Romanian travel agencies women have the same chances as men to get hired. Women should be treated in the same way men are, and employment chances should be evaluated from the point of view of the qualification and not the gender of the person.

Table no. 3

Does the travel agency has any rules and procedures regarding equal opportunities in employment for women?

	No. of respondents	%
Yes	86	71.7
No	9	7.5
I don't know	25	20.8
Total	120	100

Source: authors research results

According to the data from the table no. 3, it can be seen that most of the respondents, that is 86, asserted that in the agency women have equal chances in employment. 25 of the respondents answered they do not know anything about this and only 9 respondents answered negatively regarding chances in employment granted for women.

Different studies and reports showed over the years that the labor market is affected by sexual discrimination (thus, there are major differences between women and men in employment, remuneration, preferment and formation). The structures in the area of equal opportunities and the formation of staff with responsibilities for implementing the policies related to equal chances must be consolidated. Tourism is an economic sector that not only provides an important number of jobs for women, but also offers extraordinary occasions for promoting them. Approximately 20.8% answered that they do not know anything related to this decision in the travel agency and only a percent of 7.5 answered negatively. In conclusion, most of the travel agencies give equal opportunities in employment for women and men, tourism being a field that assures a very large number of jobs for women.

The survey continued with the question "Does the Romanian travel agencies have any rules and procedures regarding equal opportunities in employment for people with disabilities?". The results showed that 49.2% of the total respondents affirmed that they do not know of the existence of equal chances in employment for people with disabilities, 31.7% answered affirmatively and only 19.2% answered negatively.

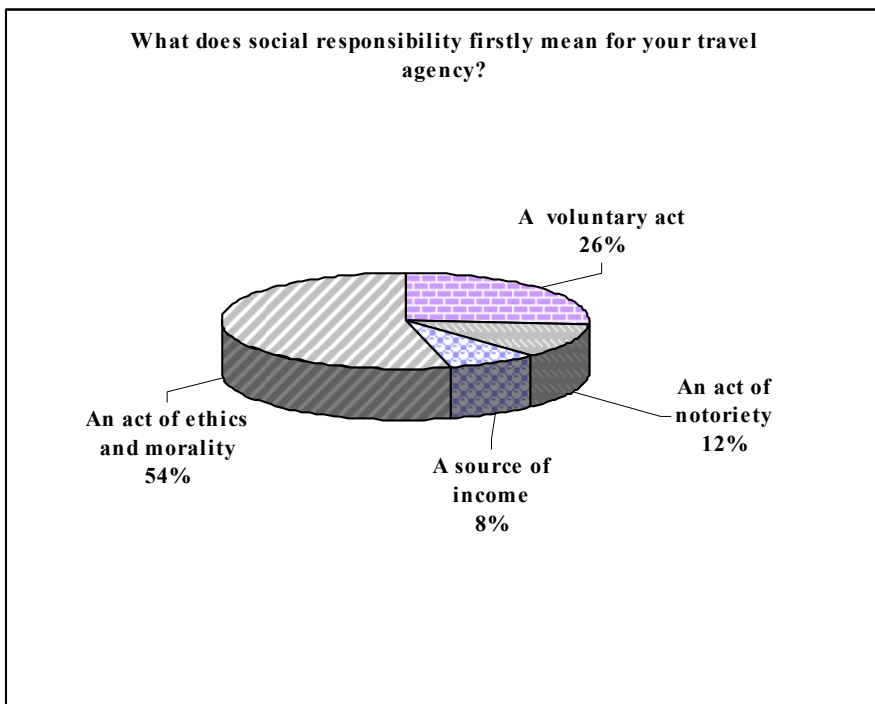
According to the statistics, in 2009, only 3% of the Romanian people with disabilities had a job. Many employers are being reluctant to hire such persons and are not aware of the advantages could have if they would do that. The employers who offer jobs to people with disabilities have the possibility to recover from unemployment insurance fund the expenses for preparation, formation and professional orientation for them. As well, they benefit from deduction from calculating taxable income of the amounts afferent to protected places of work and purchasing the equipments used by the disabled person.

The employers who hire on an indefinite period of time graduates among disabled people receive monthly for every graduate the provided amount for a period of 18 months. In 2007, the government started a national campaign for employment people with disabilities. The campaign was

consisted, among other things, on a presentation of some clips in which, for example, a mute person is an auto mechanic or a person with Down syndrome manages very well as a waiter. Likewise, deaf people are sometimes even preferred to work in the garment field.

Most of the respondents answered neutrally in our research because the management of the companies does not inform the employees about the rules that the firm must follow or because the management team wants to protect the disabled people among them, and in this way to prevent discrimination.

The research also tried to find out the perception of the Romanian travel agencies employees regarding the concept of social responsibility implemented in the agency they work for. For this particularly matter we asked them “What does social responsibility firstly mean for your travel agency?”



Graph no. 1. Social responsibility in the eyes of the travel agencies employees

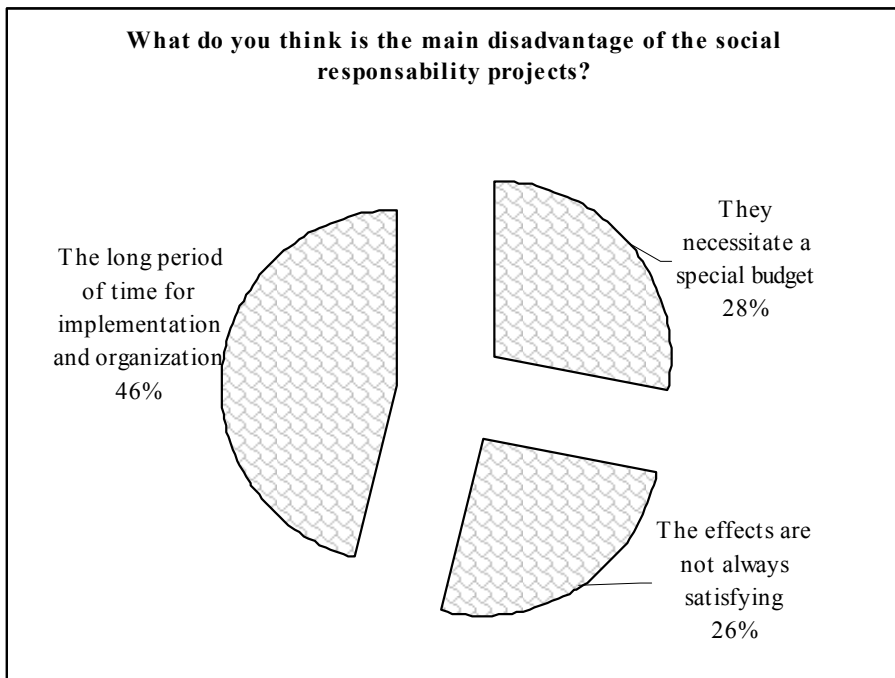
Source: authors research results

From graph no. 1 we find that for 54% of the total respondents social responsibility is an ethical and moral act, 26% said that social responsibility is a voluntary act, 12% find it an act of notoriety, while only 8% said that social responsibility is an act of income.

According to percentages in descending order obtained, we can say that indeed social responsibility is first and foremost a moral and ethical act that the companies make in the sense of volunteering, but also to gain market awareness and ultimately revenue.

In the last stage, social responsibility seen as a source of income means the actions of a company that acts responsibly in order to make money.

Finally, the paper investigated what is the main disadvantage of implementing social responsibility projects within a travel agency. The employees' responses are illustrated in graph no. 2.



Graph no. 2. The barriers in implementing social responsibility projects within travel agencies from the employees perspectives

Source: authors research results

The research results showed us some possible disadvantages of the social responsibility projects and how they affect travel agencies. Thus, 46% of respondents think that the long period of time necessary for the implementation and organization of these projects is the main disadvantage. On the other hand, 26% believe that the disadvantage is that the effects of the social responsibility projects are not always satisfying. Last but not least, 28% of those surveyed believe that the need for a special budget is the biggest impediment in realizing social responsibility projects.

4. Conclusions

CSR as a topic in tourism is receiving increasing attention as companies respond to growing pressure from all the people involved in tourism activities (tourists, tourism organizations, government authorities, hotels, travel agencies, transporters).

Tourism actors need to behave in a more sustainable way as it has been suggested that industries with a higher pollution propensity more likely affect company performance.

The study has provided evidence that the Romanian travel agencies are mainly involved in training activities for their employees and in analysis regarding the customers' satisfaction. A lower number of travel agencies are implicated in humanitarian campaigns and problems of environmental concern.

Another important insight from the study showed that for 54% of the total respondents social responsibility is an ethical and moral act, 26% said that social responsibility is a voluntary act, 12% find it an act of notoriety, while only 8% said that social responsibility is an act of income.

According to the research data, most of the respondents, that is 86, asserted that in the travel agencies women have equal chances in employment. 25 of the respondents answered they do not know anything about this and only 9 respondents answered negatively regarding chances in employment granted for women. Also, the results showed that 49.2% of the total respondents affirmed that they do not know of the existence of equal chances in employment for people with disabilities, 31.7% answered affirmatively and only 19.2% answered negatively.

More work needs to be undertaken on travel agency involvement in corporate social responsibility campaigns and new way of motivating their employees need to be undertaken in order to stimulate them to be more social responsible.

This research provides both scholars and practitioners with valuable insights. Scholars can use and develop the CSR research findings for the travel agencies. Practitioners should standardize CSR reporting in order to provide stakeholders with relevant comparisons among organizations.

Ultimately, the findings of the study should give a new perspective for advancing CSR in tourism and stimulate change by promoting corporate citizenship and stronger partnerships.

The current research entails several limitations. First, despite the wide use of extant CSR literature there is little information in tourism that assesses the state of CSR reporting although there appears to be growing interest in this area. Second, the research has also some limits and constraints that have been connected to the fixed period of the event evolution (4 days), because of this, the questionnaires which were wrong and incomplete could not be recovered, some organizational restrictions appeared, questionnaires compromised because of different reasons had to be eliminated, reasons like the ample number of non-answers, suspicions about the way the information was filled in, rejection of the respondent at the verification stage, but despite all of these, we think that we have obtained a very good representation, although some errors may be possible.

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