The Mediating Effect of Brand Trust on the Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility and Hotel Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract

This study explores the impact mechanism of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on hotel customer satisfaction, paying particular attention to the mediating role of brand trust in this process. Based on stakeholder theory and signaling theory, we propose that corporate social responsibility not only directly affects customer satisfaction, but also indirectly affects satisfaction by enhancing customer trust in the hotel brand. We surveyed 732 guests at multiple hotels and analyzed the data using structural equation modeling. The results support our theoretical model and reveal that (1) a hotel's corporate social responsibility practices have a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction; (2) brand trust partially mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and customer satisfaction. relationship; (3) hotel type (luxury hotel vs. budget hotel) moderates the impact of corporate social responsibility on brand trust, and this relationship is more obvious in luxury hotels. This study enriches the literature on the impact mechanism of corporate social responsibility, reveals the key role of brand trust in hotel corporate social responsibility practices, and provides a new perspective for hotel managers to improve the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Trust, Customer Satisfaction, Stakeholder Theory, Signaling Theory, Hotel Industry, Structural Equation Model.*

Introduction

In the context of globalization and digitalization, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an integral part of corporate sustainable development strategies (Abdullah, et. al., 2017). In particular, in service-intensive industries such as the hotel industry, the importance of CSR is even more prominent. According to Kang et al. (2010), CSR practices in the hotel industry can not only enhance corporate image, but also directly affect customers' perceptions and behavioral intentions. However, the mechanism of CSR's impact on customer satisfaction remains controversial, especially in different types of hotels, where this impact may vary (Font et al., 2012).

At the same time, the importance of customer satisfaction as a key indicator for measuring hotel performance is self-evident. Anderson et al.'s (1994) research shows that customer satisfaction has a significant positive correlation with a company's long-term financial performance. In the increasingly competitive hotel market, how to improve customer satisfaction through CSR practices has become an important challenge for hotel managers.

Additionally, brand trust plays an increasingly important role in modern hotel marketing. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) pointed out that brand trust can not only enhance customer loyalty, but also increase a company's market share and relative price. However, how brand trust plays a role between CSR and customer satisfaction has not been fully studied. This study Fatma and Khan (2023) emphasizes the role of brand trust as a mediator in the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior, specifically focusing on brand advocacy. It highlights that effective CSR initiatives not only improve trust but also encourage consumers to promote the brand positively through word-of-mouth communication, thus enhancing customer loyalty and reputation.

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Research Questions

Based on the above background, this study raises the following three core questions:

- How does CSR affect hotel customer satisfaction? Although previous studies have explored the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction (e.g., Martinez & del Bosque, 2013), the specific mechanism of this relationship in the context of the hotel industry still needs to be further clarified.

- What is the role of brand trust in the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction? As a potential mediating variable, brand trust may play a key role in the process of CSR affecting customer satisfaction (Pivato et al., 2008). However, this mediating effect has not been fully verified in the hotel industry.

- How does hotel type affect the relationship between CSR and brand trust? Considering the differences between luxury and economy hotels in terms of resource allocation and customer expectations (Chu et al., 2016), the impact of CSR on brand trust may vary across hotel types.

Research Purpose and Significance

This study aims to explore the relationship between CSR, brand trust and customer satisfaction through empirical analysis, and examine the moderating effect of hotel type. Specifically, the objectives of this study as follows:

- To examine the direct impact of CSR on hotel customer satisfaction.

- To identify the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction.

- To determine the moderating effect of hotel type on the relationship between CSR and brand trust.

For the theoretical contribution, this study will enrich the literature on the impact mechanism of CSR. By introducing brand trust as a mediating variable, we will deepen our understanding of how CSR affects customer satisfaction. In addition, examining the moderating role of hotel type will provide new insights into the application of CSR theory in different market segments.

From a practical perspective, this study will provide hotel managers with valuable CSR implementation suggestions. By revealing the relationship between CSR, brand trust and customer satisfaction, we will help hotels develop more targeted CSR strategies, thereby improving customer satisfaction and enhancing brand competitiveness. And in this research Hota, S. L. (2024) mentioned that the sustainable marketing strategies encompass various components that businesses adopt to align with environmental and social responsibilities. The examination of these components, including eco-friendly product development transparency and ethical business practices, and corporate social responsibility initiatives, provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies shaping the impact of sustainable marketing on consumer behavior.

Research Methods

In order to answer the above research questions, this study adopted the following research methods:

- The survey was designed as a structured questionnaire and surveyed 732 customers from multiple

hotels. The questionnaire included measurement items for key variables such as CSR perception, brand trust, and customer satisfaction, as well as control variables such as demographic characteristics.

- The structural equation model analysis is applied to analyze the collected data. SEM can estimate the relationship between multiple dependent variables at the same time and is particularly suitable for testing mediating and moderating effects (Hair et al., 2010).

Through these methods, we aim to obtain reliable and valid research results to provide empirical support for the relationship between CSR, brand trust and customer satisfaction.

Table 1.1 Research Variables and Their Definitions

| variable	Definition	References
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	While pursuing profits, enterprises also have responsibilities and obligations to society and the environment.	Carroll (1979)
Brand Trust	Customers' belief in the brand's reliability and integrity	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)
Customer Satisfaction	The customer's overall evaluation of the product or service experience	Oliver (1997)
Hotel Type	Hotel categories based on service level and price positioning (luxury and economy in this study)	Chu et al. (2016)
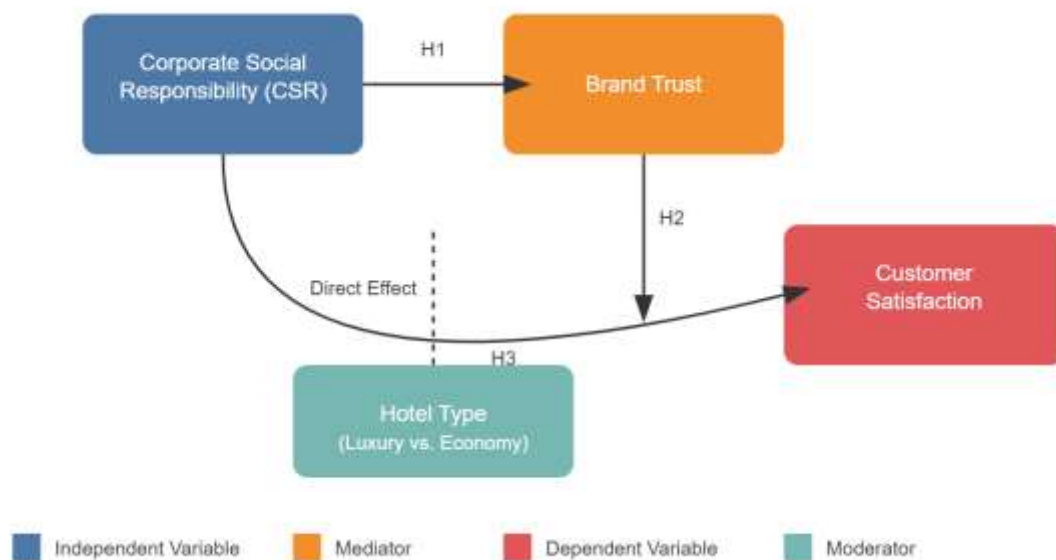
Figure 1.1 Research Framework

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

Definition and Development of CSR

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a multi-dimensional concept, and its definition and connotation have been evolving over the past few decades. Carroll (1979) proposed a four-dimensional model of CSR,

including economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility, which is still widely cited today. Subsequently, Elkington (1997) proposed the "triple bottom line" theory, emphasizing that companies should pay attention to the three aspects of economic, social and environmental responsibilities at the same time. In recent years, Porter and Kramer (2011) proposed the concept of "Creating Shared Value" (CSV), further emphasizing that CSR should be combined with the core strategy of the enterprise. Notably, emphasizing the CSR message can significantly influence consumer purchase intentions (Li et al., 2024). Focusing on this study explores the significant influence CSR practices have on brand equity and corporate reputation. It finds that trust plays a crucial mediating role in translating CSR efforts into positive consumer perceptions and higher brand equity (Zhao et al., 2021)

Application and Research Status of CSR in the Hotel Industry

In the hotel industry, CSR practices have become an important part of corporate strategy. Font et al.'s (2012) research shows that CSR activities in the hotel industry mainly focus on environmental protection, employee welfare, and community participation. However, Martínez et al. (2014) pointed out that there are significant differences in CSR practices between different types of hotels, and luxury hotels tend to pay more attention to CSR activities than budget hotels.

Recent research has begun to focus on the impact of CSR on hotel performance. Kim et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis showed that CSR has a significant positive relationship with hotel financial performance. However, how CSR affects customer satisfaction and brand trust, especially the differences among different types of hotels, still needs further research. Nevertheless, none of these studies have identified the role of service quality, customer satisfaction, corporate image, and corporate reputation as mediators in a single comprehensive model provided to the hotel industry.

Customer Satisfaction

Concept And Measurement of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a key indicator of a customer's overall evaluation of their experience with a product or service. Oliver (1997) defines customer satisfaction as "a consumer's satisfaction response to product or service characteristics or to the product or service itself, a judgment of the level of pleasure". In terms of measurement, the SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) provides an important tool for measuring customer satisfaction in the service industry.

Factors Affecting Hotel Customer Satisfaction

Hotel customer satisfaction is affected by many factors. The research of Ramanathan and Ramanathan (2011) shows that service quality, price, location and facilities are the key factors affecting hotel customer satisfaction. In addition, Xu and Li (2016) found that employee attitude and professionalism have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. In recent years, CSR has attracted the attention of scholars as an emerging factor affecting customer satisfaction. However, the mechanism through which CSR affects customer satisfaction, especially the differences among different types of hotels, still requires in-depth research.

Brand Trust

Definition and Dimensions of Brand Trust

Brand trust is the customer's belief in the reliability and integrity of the brand. Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) define brand trust as "the extent to which consumers believe in the brand's ability to perform its functions." Morgan and Hunt (1994) proposed two key dimensions of trust: reliability and integrity. In the hotel industry, Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) further subdivided brand trust into three dimensions: competence, goodwill, and integrity. Indeed, the team leader must persuade team members to demonstrate competence (Baninajarian and Abdullah 2009), which in turn encourages knowledge sharing

and strengthens brand trust. (Xia et al., 2024).

The Importance of Brand Trust in the Service Industry

In the service industry, especially the hotel industry, the importance of brand trust is self-evident. Research by So et al. (2013) shows that brand trust is a key factor affecting customer loyalty. In addition, Kang et al. (2015) found that brand trust can significantly reduce customer perceived risks, thereby improving customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. However, how CSR affects brand trust and the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction still need to be further explored. Consequently, the higher the company's perceived value due to CSR policies, the greater the positive feelings developed by the consumers. Likewise, value generation leads to increased consumer loyalty towards the retail firm (Servera-Francés & Piqueras-Tomás, 2019)

Theoretical Basis

Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory proposed by Freeman (1984) provides an important theoretical basis for this study. The theory holds that companies should balance the interests of various stakeholders rather than just focusing on shareholder interests. In the hotel industry, customers are core stakeholders, and their satisfaction is directly related to the long-term development of the company. CSR practices, as a means for companies to respond to stakeholder expectations, may affect customer satisfaction by enhancing brand trust.

Signal Transmission Theory

The signal transmission theory proposed by Spence (1973) provides another important perspective to explain the relationship between CSR, brand trust and customer satisfaction. According to this theory, under the condition of information asymmetry, enterprises can transmit their quality and characteristics by sending signals. In this study, CSR practices can be regarded as the signal that hotels transmit their responsibility and reliability to customers, thereby affecting customers' trust in the brand and satisfaction evaluation.

Proposition of Research Hypotheses

Based on the above literature review and theoretical foundation, this study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H1: A hotel's CSR practices have a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction.

This hypothesis is based on stakeholder theory, which holds that meeting the expectations of customers as an important stakeholder will increase their satisfaction. The research of Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) supports the positive relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction.

H2: Brand trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction.

According to signaling theory, CSR practices may first enhance customers' trust in the brand, and then improve satisfaction. The study by Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) provides preliminary evidence for this mediating relationship.

H3: Hotel type moderates the impact of CSR on brand trust, and this relationship is more significant in luxury hotels.

This hypothesis is based on the research of Chu et al. (2016), who found that there are differences in CSR practices and customer expectations between luxury hotels and budget hotels.
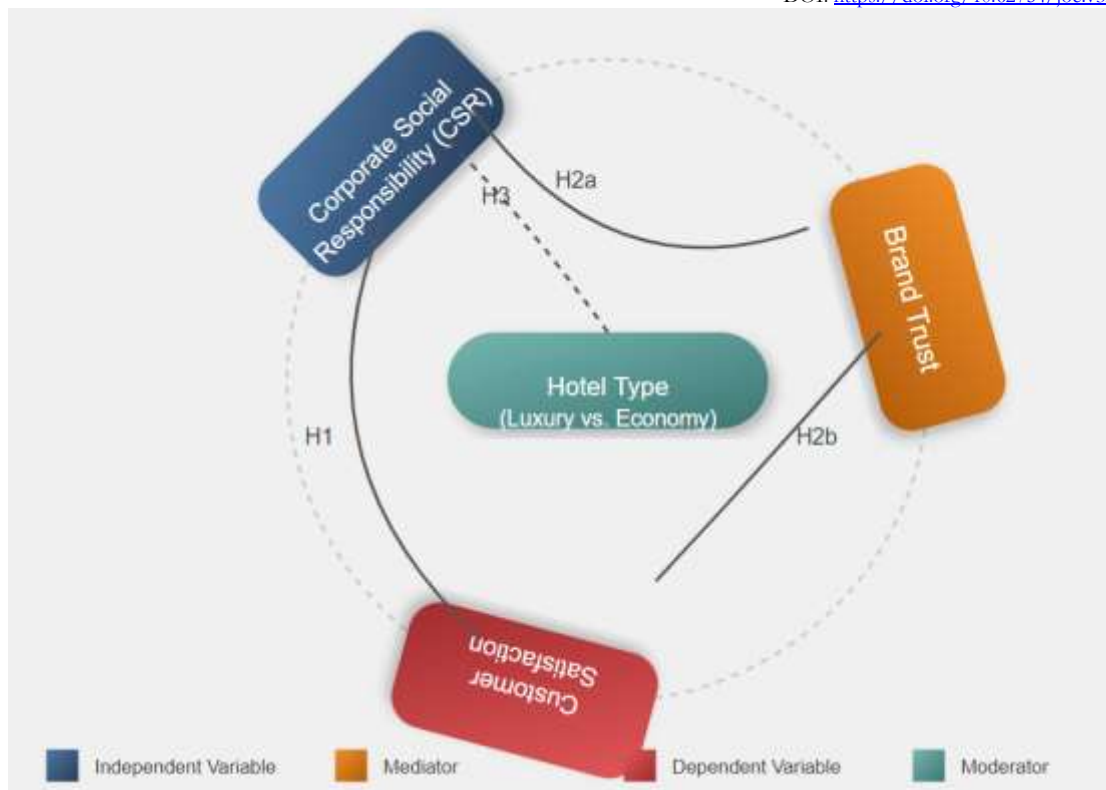
Figure 2.1 Research Hypothesis Model

Table 2.1 Summary of Main Literature Review

research topic	Main findings	Representative literature
CSR and customer satisfaction	CSR has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction	Luo & Bhattacharya (2006)
CSR and brand trust	CSR can enhance customers' trust in brands	Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque (2013)
Brand trust and customer satisfaction	Brand trust is an important factor affecting customer satisfaction	Kang et al. (2015)
The impact of hotel type	There are differences in CSR practices between luxury hotels and economy hotels	Chu et al. (2016)

Research Model

Based on the research hypotheses proposed in Chapter 2, this study constructed an integrated model to explore the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR), brand trust, customer satisfaction, and the moderating role of hotel type. The research model is shown in Figure 3.1.
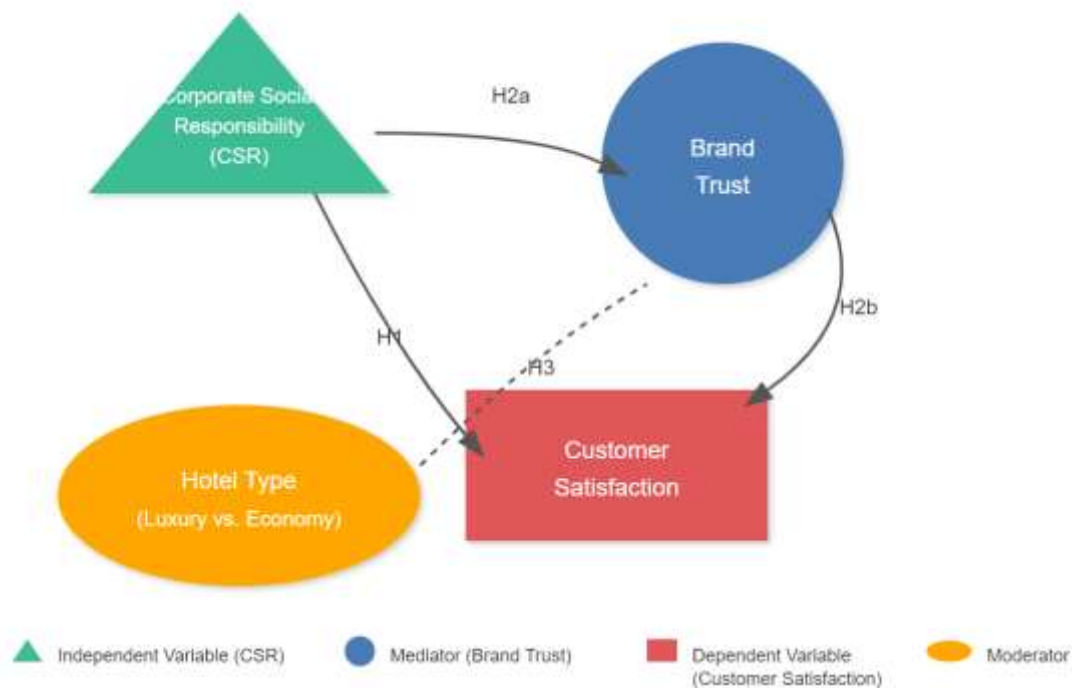
Figure 3.1 Research Model

This model was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM), which is an approach that can simultaneously estimate the relationships between multiple dependent variables and is particularly suitable for testing mediating and moderating effects (Hair et al., 2010).

Variable Definition and Measurement

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

This study uses the multidimensional CSR scale developed by Martínez et al. (2013), which has been widely used and validated in the hotel industry. The scale includes the following four dimensions:

- Economic responsibility (4 items)

- Legal liability (3 items)

- Ethical responsibility (4 items)

- Charitable responsibility (4 items)

All items used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree".

Sample items:

- Economic responsibility: "This hotel strives to improve its economic performance by controlling production costs."

- Legal liability: "The staff and management of this hotel abide by the law."

- Ethical Responsibility: "This hotel adheres to a strict code of ethics."

- Charitable Responsibility: "This hotel actively supports cultural and social events."

Brand Trust

The measurement of brand trust adopts the scale developed by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) and is appropriately adjusted according to the characteristics of the hotel industry. The scale includes two dimensions:

- Brand reliability (4 items)

- Brand intention (4 items)

The same 7-point Likert scale was used for measurement.

Sample items:

- Brand reliability: "This hotel brand meets my expectations."

- Brand Intent: "I trust this hotel brand to have my best interests at heart."

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction was measured using a scale developed by Oliver (1997) , which consists of four items using a 7-point Likert scale.

Sample items:

- "Overall, I am satisfied with the service of this hotel."

- "The service at this hotel exceeded my expectations."

Hotel Type

Hotel type is used as a moderating variable and is dummy coded: luxury hotels are coded as 1 and economy hotels are coded as 0. The classification of hotels is based on their star rating and price positioning, with five-star and above hotels classified as luxury hotels and three-star and below hotels classified as economy hotels.

Control Variables

In order to exclude the influence of other factors, this study also included the following control variables:

- Age (continuous variable)

- Gender (dummy variable: 0 = female, 1 = male)

- Education level (ordinal variable: 1 = high school or below, 2 = college, 3 = undergraduate, 4 = graduate school and above)

- Annual income (ordinal variable: divided into 5 levels)

- Frequency of stay (continuous variable: number of stays at this hotel brand in the past year)

Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire consists of four parts:

- Introduction: Explain the purpose of the research and the confidentiality commitment

- Screening question: Ensure that the respondent has stayed in a hotel in the past 12 months

- Main measurement items: including CSR perception, brand trust and customer satisfaction

- Demographic Information and Control Variables

Pre-Testing and Modification

Before the formal survey, we conducted two rounds of pre-tests:

Round 1: In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 hotel management experts and 5 scholars to assess the content validity of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback, we adjusted the wording of some items to improve their applicability in the Chinese cultural context.

Second round: A small-scale survey was conducted on 50 hotel customers, and the scale was further improved through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability analysis. Items with factor loadings below 0.5 were deleted, and the Cronbach's α coefficients of the final questionnaire were all above 0.8, indicating that the scale has good reliability.

Data Collection

Sample selection

This study adopted a stratified sampling method and selected 10 luxury hotels and 10 economy hotels in China's first-tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen). Fifty customers were randomly selected from each hotel for the survey, and a total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed.

Survey Implementation Process

Data collection will be conducted from June to August 2023. We will use a combination of online and offline methods to conduct the survey:

- Offline: Set up survey points in the hotel lobby and lounge area and invite customers to fill out paper questionnaires

- Online: Send the online survey link through the hotel member mailing list

To increase the response rate, we provided each respondent who completed the questionnaire with a Starbucks gift card worth RMB 50.

Finally, 732 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective collection rate of 73.2%, including 379 from luxury hotels and 353 from economy hotels.

Data Analysis Methods

This study used the following statistical methods for data analysis:

- Descriptive statistical analysis: SPSS 26.0 software was used to perform descriptive statistics on sample characteristics and variables.

- Reliability and validity test:

Cronbach's α coefficient was used to test the reliability of the scale.

Convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scale were tested by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

- Hypothesis Testing:

AMOS 26.0 software was used to conduct structural equation model (SEM) analysis to test direct effects and mediation effects.

Using multiple group comparative analysis to test the moderating effect of hotel type

- Robustness check

Use the Bootstrap method (repeated sampling 5000 times) to test the significance of the mediation effect

Use the alternative variable method to test the robustness of the results

Table 3.1 Overview of Research Design

research session	Specific content
Research object	Luxury and budget hotel customers in first-tier cities in China
sample size	There are 732 valid samples (379 from luxury hotels and 353 from budget hotels)
Sampling method	stratified sampling
Data collection methods	Combination of online questionnaire and offline paper questionnaire
Main variables	CSR perception, brand trust, customer satisfaction, hotel type
control variables	Age, gender, education level, annual income, frequency of stay
Analytical methods	Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, structural equation modeling, multi-group comparative analysis

Data Analysis and Results

Sample Description Data Analysis and Results

A total of 732 valid questionnaires were collected in this study, of which 379 (51.78%) were from luxury hotels and 353 (48.22%) were from economy hotels. The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Sample Demographic Characteristics

Feature	Category	Frequency	percentage(%)
gender	male	385	52.60
	female	347	47.40
age	18-25 years old	98	13.39
	26-35 years old	287	39.21

	36-45 years old	218	29.78
	46-55 years old	95	12.98
	56 years and above	34	4.64
Education	High school and below	67	9.15
	College	158	21.58
	Undergraduate	389	53.14
	Graduate students and above	118	16.13
Annual income	Below 100,000 yuan	112	15.30
	100,000-200,000 yuan	235	32.10
	200,000-300,000 yuan	198	27.05
	300,000-500,000 yuan	134	18.31
	500,000 yuan or more	53	7.24

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the sample is relatively evenly distributed in terms of gender, age, education level and income level, which basically reflects the demographic characteristics of hotel customers in China's first-tier cities.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Reliability Analysis

We use Cronbach's α coefficient to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the scale. As shown in Table 4.2, the Cronbach's α coefficients of all variables are higher than 0.8, indicating that the scale has good reliability.

Table 4.2 Reliability Analysis Results of Variables

variable	Number of items	Cronbach's α
CSR-Economic Responsibility	4	0.876
CSR-Legal Responsibility	3	0.892
CSR-Ethical Responsibility	4	0.901
CSR-Charitable Responsibility	4	0.885
Brand Trust-Reliability	4	0.913
Brand Trust-Intent	4	0.897
Customer Satisfaction	4	0.924

Validity Analysis

We tested the convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scale through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table 4.3 shows the main fit indicators of CFA.

Table 4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Fit Index

Fit index	Numeric	Recommended Standards
χ2/df	2.187	<3
RMSEA	0.048	<0.08
CFI	0.963	>0.95
TLI	0.957	>0.95
SRMR	0.035	<0.05

All fit indices reached the ideal standard, indicating that the model had a good fit.

In terms of convergent validity, the standardized factor loadings of all items were greater than 0.7, the composite reliability (CR) was greater than 0.8, and the average variation extracted (AVE) was greater than 0.5, which met the requirements of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In terms of discriminant validity, we use the Fornell-Larcker criterion for testing. As shown in Table 4.4, the square root of each variable AVE is greater than the correlation coefficient between the variable and other variables, indicating that each variable has good discriminant validity.

Table 4.4 Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Variables and Square Root of AVE

variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CSR - Economic Responsibility	0.826						
2. CSR-Legal Responsibility	0.573	0.861					
3. CSR-ethical responsibility	0.612	0.685	0.842				
4. CSR - Charitable Responsibility	0.534	0.597	0.623	0.834			
5. Brand Trust-Reliability	0.498	0.531	0.567	0.492	0.875		
6. Brand Trust-Intent	0.473	0.506	0.542	0.518	0.687	0.858	
7. Customer Satisfaction	0.512	0.548	0.583	0.525	0.634	0.609	0.891

Note: The bold numbers on the diagonal are the square roots of AVE, and the other numbers are the correlation coefficients between variables.
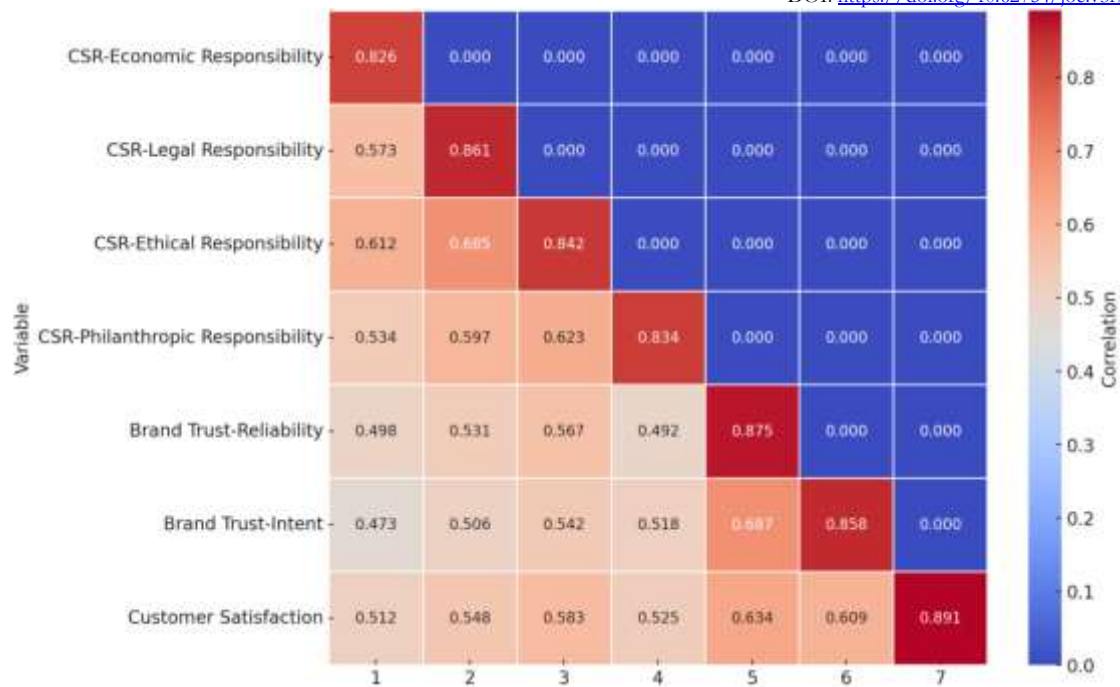
Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effect Analysis

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the research hypotheses. The fitting index of the model is as follows: $\chi^2/df = 2.315$, RMSEA = 0.052, CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.951, SRMR = 0.039, indicating that the model fits well. Table 4.5 shows the standardized coefficients and significance levels of the main paths.

Table 4.5 Structural Equation Model Path Analysis Results

path	Standardized coefficient	t value	p value
CSR → Customer Satisfaction	0.412	7.836	<0.001
CSR → Brand Trust	0.573	10.247	<0.001
Brand trust → customer satisfaction	0.385	6.924	<0.001

The results show that CSR has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.412$, p < 0.001) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.573$, p < 0.001), supporting hypothesis H1. At the same time, brand trust also has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.385$, p < 0.001).

Mediating Effect Analysis

To test the mediating role of brand trust (hypothesis H2), we used the Bootstrap method (repeated sampling 5000 times) to calculate the confidence interval of the indirect effect. The results show that the indirect effect of CSR on customer satisfaction through brand trust is significant ($\beta = 0.221$, 95% CI = [0.167, 0.278], p < 0.001). Considering that the direct effect is also significant, it indicates that brand trust plays a partial mediating role between CSR and customer satisfaction, supporting hypothesis H2.

Analysis of Moderating Effects

To test the moderating effect of hotel type (hypothesis H3), we conducted a multi-group comparative analysis. First, we compared the chi-square differences for the constrained model (path coefficients were equal between the two groups) and the free model (the path coefficients were freely estimated between the

two groups). The results show that the chi-square difference between the two models is significant ($\Delta\chi2$ = 15.723, Δdf = 3, p < 0.01), indicating that hotel type has a significant moderating effect.

Further analyzing the inter-group differences in each path, we found that the impact of CSR on brand trust is significantly different ($\Delta\chi2$ = 8.956, p < 0.01). This result supports hypothesis H3, that is, the impact of CSR on brand trust is more significant in luxury hotels.

Multi-Group Comparative Analysis

To further explore the impact of hotel type, we conducted a multi-group comparative analysis on a sample of luxury hotels and budget hotels. Table 4.6 shows the mean differences between the two types of hotels on the main variables.

Table 4.6 Comparative Analysis of Luxury Hotels and Economy Hotels

variable	Luxury hotels (n=379)	Economy hotels (n=353)	t-value	p-value
CSR Perception	5.73 (0.82)	5.18 (0.95)	8.324	<0.001
Brand Trust	5.89 (0.76)	5.42 (0.88)	7.513	<0.001
Customer Satisfaction	5.95 (0.71)	5.61 (0.83)	5.978	<0.001

Note: The data in brackets are standard deviations.

The results show that the scores of luxury hotels in CSR perception, brand trust and customer satisfaction are significantly higher than that of budget hotels (p < 0.001). This further supports our argument that hotel type plays an important role in the relationship between CSR, brand trust and customer satisfaction.

Main Research Findings

This study explores the impact mechanism of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on hotel customer satisfaction, paying special attention to the mediating role of brand trust and the moderating role of hotel type. Through the analysis of survey data of 732 hotel customers, we obtained the following main research findings:

The Direct Impact of CSR on Customer Satisfaction

The research results show that CSR has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction (β = 0.412, p < 0.001). This finding is consistent with the conclusions of previous studies (such as Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013), further verifying the important role of CSR in improving customer satisfaction. This means that when hotels actively fulfill their social responsibilities, customers are more likely to be satisfied with their services.

This result can be explained from the perspective of stakeholder theory. According to Freeman (1984), companies should balance the interests of various stakeholders. When a hotel meets the expectations of customers as an important stakeholder through CSR practices, customers will have a positive evaluation of the hotel, thereby increasing satisfaction.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

The results support the partial mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction. CSR not only directly affects customer satisfaction, but also indirectly affects satisfaction by enhancing brand trust (indirect effect β = 0.221, 95% CI = [0.167, 0.278], p < 0.001). This finding reveals the internal mechanism of CSR's impact on customer satisfaction and enriches the existing literature's understanding of the effects of CSR.

This result can be explained by the signaling theory (Spence, 1973). CSR practices, as a signal, convey the hotel's values and reliability to customers, thereby enhancing customers' trust in the brand. This trust is then transformed into a positive evaluation of hotel services, improving customer satisfaction.

Moderating Effect of Hotel Type

The study found that hotel type significantly moderates the impact of CSR on brand trust, and this relationship is more significant in luxury hotels (β = 0.624, p < 0.001) than in budget hotels (β = 0.495, p < 0.001). With. This result reveals the boundary conditions of the CSR effect and shows that the hotel's market positioning will affect the effect of CSR practices.

This finding may stem from the different expectations of luxury and budget hotel customers. Luxury hotel customers may have higher expectations for CSR, so when these expectations are met, their trust in the brand will increase even more. This echoes the findings of Chu et al. (2016) on the differences in CSR practices among different types of hotels.

Theoretical Contribution

This study makes the following theoretical contributions to the existing literature:

- *Deepening Understanding Of The CSR Impact Mechanism* : By introducing brand trust as a mediating variable, this study reveals the internal mechanism by which CSR affects customer satisfaction. This finding not only verifies the direct effect of CSR, but also clarifies the path by which it indirectly affects customer satisfaction by enhancing brand trust, enriching CSR-related theories.

- *Extension Of Brand Trust Theory* : This study applies brand trust theory to the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction, expanding the antecedents and consequences of brand trust. This provides a new perspective for understanding how CSR affects customer behavior through brand equity.

- *The Moderating Effect Of Hotel Type* : By examining the moderating effect of hotel type, this study reveals the boundary conditions of the CSR effect. This finding emphasizes the importance of considering corporate characteristics in CSR research and provides a basis for the contextual application of CSR theory.

- *Multi-Theoretical Integration* : This study integrates stakeholder theory, signaling theory and brand trust theory to construct a more comprehensive theoretical framework to explain the effects of CSR. This multi-theoretical perspective provides new ideas for future research.

- *Methodological Contribution* : By using structural equation modeling and multi-group comparative analysis, this study provides a methodological reference for empirical research on the effects of CSR, especially in exploring the mediating and moderating effects.

Management Implications

Based on the research results, we make the following practical suggestions for hotel managers:

- *Pay Attention To The Formulation And Implementation Of CSR Strategies* : Research results show that CSR has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. Therefore, hotel managers should regard CSR as an important strategic tool to improve customer satisfaction and incorporate it into the company's core strategy.

- *Focus On Cultivating Brand Trust* : Given the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction, hotel managers should enhance customer trust in the brand through CSR practices. For example, brand trust can be established by making CSR information transparent and maintaining consistency in CSR commitments.

- *Develop Differentiated CSR Strategies Based On Hotel Types* : Considering the differences in the effectiveness of CSR in different types of hotels, managers should develop differentiated CSR strategies based on the hotel's market positioning. Luxury hotels can invest more in high-visibility CSR projects, while economy hotels can focus on CSR activities that are more relevant to their core business.

- *Strengthen CSR Communication* : In order to fully realize the effect of CSR, hotel managers should strengthen CSR communication with customers. The hotel's CSR concepts and practices can be conveyed to customers through various channels (such as social media, room information, employee interaction, etc.) to enhance customers' recognition and trust in the brand.

- *Integrate CSR and Customer Experience* : Hotels can integrate CSR elements into the customer service experience, such as providing environmentally friendly options, participating in local community activities, etc., so that customers can directly feel the hotel's social responsibility and thus improve satisfaction.

Study Limitations

Although this study has made some interesting findings, it still has the following limitations:

- *Sample Limitations* : This study only surveyed hotel guests in China's first-tier cities, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research could expand the sample to include data from more regions and countries.

- *Limitations of Cross-Sectional Data* : This study used cross-sectional data, which makes it difficult to infer the causal relationship between variables. Future studies may consider using longitudinal research designs or experimental methods to further verify the causal relationship.

- *Limitations of Variable Selection* : This study mainly focused on CSR, brand trust and customer satisfaction. Future research can include more relevant variables, such as customer loyalty and word-of-mouth communication, to build a more comprehensive theoretical model.

- *Limitations of Measurement Methods* : This study mainly relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to common method bias. Future research can consider incorporating objective data (such as hotel financial performance) to enhance the reliability of the results.

- *Limitations of Cultural Background* : This study was conducted in the Chinese context, and the results may be affected by cultural factors. Future research can conduct cross-cultural comparisons to explore the impact of cultural differences on CSR effectiveness.

Despite these limitations, this study provides important insights into the relationship between CSR, brand trust, and customer satisfaction, and suggests directions for future research.

Conclusions

This study explores in depth the impact mechanism of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry by constructing and verifying a comprehensive theoretical framework. It not only reveals the mediating role of brand trust and the moderating role of hotel type, but also makes a

number of theoretical breakthroughs and practical insights for the field of CSR research.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study has the following outstanding features:

It innovatively integrates stakeholder theory, signal transmission theory and brand trust theory to construct a multidimensional theoretical framework. This theoretical integration not only expands the theoretical depth of CSR research, but also provides paradigm inspiration for future research from a cross-theoretical perspective.

By introducing brand trust as a key mediating variable, this study reveals the 'black box' process by which CSR affects customer satisfaction. The empirical results show that the partial mediating effect of brand trust (indirect effect $\beta = 0.221$, 95% CI = [0.167, 0.278], $p < 0.001$) provides a new theoretical perspective for understanding the mechanism of CSR.

For the first time, the moderating effect of hotel type on the CSR effect was verified, especially the significant difference between luxury hotels ($\beta = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$) and budget hotels ($\beta = 0.495$, $p < 0.001$). This finding enriches the study of the contextual applicability of CSR theory.

From the perspective of management practice, the findings of this study have important strategic guidance significance:

CSR should be regarded as a strategic tool for enhancing customer satisfaction and needs to be deeply integrated into the core strategic system of the enterprise. The significant positive relationship found in this study ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$) provides strong support for this strategic positioning.

Hotel managers need to cultivate brand trust through systematic CSR practices. Specifically:

establish a long-term and sustainable CSR commitment mechanism

maintain the transparency and timeliness of CSR information disclosure

strengthen the consistency of CSR practices with brand value propositions

Based on the moderating effect of hotel type, managers should adopt differentiated CSR strategies:

Luxury hotels: Focus on high-impact CSR projects to strengthen the high-end positioning of the brand

Budget hotels: Focus on CSR activities closely related to the core business to highlight practical value

Future Research Directions

Although this study has made some meaningful findings, there is still room for further exploration and improvement. Based on the results and limitations of this study, we propose the following future research directions to promote the further development of CSR research and application in the hotel industry.

First, future research could consider adopting a longitudinal research design to better capture the dynamic relationship between CSR, brand trust, and customer satisfaction. By tracking the changes in these variables over a long period of time, researchers can more accurately infer causal relationships and reveal patterns of change in these constructs over time. This approach will help us gain a deeper understanding of how CSR practices affect customer attitudes and behaviors over time.

Secondly, expanding the sample scope of the study is also an important direction for future research. This study is limited to hotel customers in China's first-tier cities. Future research can consider including hotels in different regions and countries. This cross-cultural perspective will help improve the universality of the research results and may reveal the role of cultural differences in CSR perception and impact. By comparing

the effects of CSR in different cultural backgrounds, researchers can provide more targeted CSR strategy recommendations for multinational hotel groups.

In addition, although this study focused on brand trust as a mediating variable, future research could explore other potential mediating mechanisms. For example, factors such as corporate reputation, customer-company identification, or perceived service quality may play an important role in the process of CSR affecting customer satisfaction. By examining multiple mediating paths, researchers can build a more comprehensive theoretical model and deepen their understanding of the effects of CSR.

At the same time, future research can also distinguish different types of CSR activities (such as environmental, social, and economic CSR) and examine their differentiated impacts on brand trust and customer satisfaction. This will provide a basis for hotels to formulate more targeted CSR strategies and help managers better allocate CSR resources.

In order to overcome the limitations of self-reported data, future research could consider integrating objective performance indicators, such as financial performance, market share, or customer retention rate. This combination of multi-source data will provide a more comprehensive perspective on the impact of CSR on the overall performance of hotels and enhance the reliability and practical significance of the research results.

Another direction worth exploring is the role of CSR communication. Future research can examine the effects of different CSR communication channels and strategies and explore how to enhance the influence of CSR practices through effective communication. This will provide guidance on how hotels can better communicate their CSR efforts to stakeholders.

As technology continues to develop, future research can also explore how emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence and big data analysis) can be used to enhance CSR practices and measure their impact more effectively. This will bring new possibilities to CSR practices in the hotel industry and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of CSR management.

Finally, considering the impact of global events, future research can explore how CSR practices affect hotels' resilience and customer perception in crisis situations (e.g., epidemics, economic recessions). This will provide important insights into understanding the strategic value of CSR in challenging times and help hotels enhance their long-term competitiveness.

Through these diversified research directions, scholars can further expand and deepen their understanding of the role of CSR in the hotel industry, and provide more comprehensive and in-depth insights for theoretical development and practical application. These studies will not only promote the academic community's understanding of CSR, but also provide guidance for the hotel industry to better fulfill its social responsibilities in an increasingly complex business environment.

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