



Research Article

ISO2600 CSR Practices in the Casual Dining Industry: A Comparative Case Study in Lebanon

Mira THOUMY, Jennifer ABOU HAMAD, Omar SAKR and Christelle KHALIFE

Notre-Dame University, Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon

Correspondence should be addressed to: Mira THOUMY; mira.thoumy@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper illustrated the different Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices in the casual dining industry. Six case studies were conducted in different casual dining restaurants located in rural, urban and secondary settings in Lebanon to have an in depth understanding of CSR practices and how they differ between regions. Based on the interviews, it was found that CSR is practised in this industry without a clear framework and that practices differ from a geographic setting to another.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, casual dining, Lebanon, rural areas, urban areas, secondary areas.

Introduction

A casual dining restaurant is a type of restaurant which falls between fast food and fine-dining restaurants that serves reasonably priced food in a casual ambience. In this industry, organisations are becoming more and more aware of the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its potential impact on customer satisfaction (Rudež, 2010).

The aim of this study is to compare the CSR practices in casual diners across three classified areas. This paper uses three main

geographic setting classifications to divide the Lebanese territory into urban, secondary, and rural areas. The urban area includes all the casual diners in Beirut city. Secondary areas consist of all diners in a major city and an urban setting but not in the capital Beirut. The third classification is the casual diners in the rural areas.

We will start by exploring the literature review on CSR definitions, the benefits, the ISO26000 framework, the practices in the casual dining industry, as well as the context of the study. We will describe afterwards the methods used, followed by the

comparative case studies findings. We will end the paper with discussions and recommendations.

Literature Review

The CSR concept has been a significant subject debated by academic professionals and practitioners in order to shed light on the role of businesses when it comes to their responsibilities to give back to the societies in which they are operating (Carroll, 1999).

Several authors defined the concept of CSR in a context of three dimensional aspects; the economic, environmental/ecological and social aspect (Uddin & Hassan, 2008).

The economic characteristic of CSR can be explained by how the firm's operations are impacting directly and indirectly the shareholders' wealth regarding many quantitative measures like return on investment and profit, while the social characteristic of CSR is explained in the framework of stakeholders while working for the society's interest, and the environmental/ecological characteristic considers the resources' usage while paying attention to the environmental impact of the firm's operations activities (Uddin & Hassan, 2008).

Major findings in CSR have framed it as a long-term and continuous process regarding environmental and social decisions and plans that companies should implement and integrate into their organisational operations (Isa, 2012).

CSR is considered as a tool which ensures sustainable development as a goal when firms are willing to comprise environmental and social concerns into their economic activities; which means when organizations acknowledge the significance of the three pillars of people, profit and the planet (Isa, 2012).

CSR is being defined as the voluntary integration of environmental and social aspects to organizational activities and relations with all stakeholders when considering the trade-off profit-social issues that might happen for the general interest (Witkowska, 2016).

Some authors believe that CSR practices may lead to both intangible and tangible benefits (Wei Nurn & Tan, 2010).

An intangible benefit of CSR is that companies can gain a sustainable competitive advantage over others. Moreover, companies can benefit from a strong reputation and a good word of mouth, elevating the employee's commitment (Wei Nurn & Tan, 2010). Firms can establish brand awareness and reputation, creating a customer commitment to the brand that gives back to the environment since many people nowadays are very much concerned and involved with the environment (Creel, 2012).

As for the tangible advantages of CSR practices and involvement, the firm could attract better quality of employees due to a better reputation. Hence, decreasing the rate of employee turnover because of high levels of commitment (Wei Nurn & Tan, 2010).

CSR practices is an essential element for gaining a good reputation for a company regardless of its size or type of activities. Engaging and investing in socially responsible behaviours will result in attracting as well as retaining qualified employees. This benefit, being an intangible one, could be linked to a tangible advantage which is accessing highly qualified employees. This is because the latter will be attracted to a firm having a good reputation. Individuals will feel more safe and will be attracted to companies who are socially responsible, rather than firms who have done little towards the society and the environment in which they are operating (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2015; Wei Nurn & Tan, 2010).

Many literatures shed light on several advantages of CSR. It can be mentioned that firms' objectives to reduce their overall operating costs and CSR practices were one of the solutions to this objective. Several small steps in CSR practices and initiatives towards the environment, employees and other stakeholders, can lead to cost saving to a casual dining restaurant.

As a conclusion, CSR has numerous advantages that could range from consumer loyalty, enhancing financial figures, retaining people and more accountability. These aspects will have a positive impact on the relationship between a firm and its stakeholders to ensure the value creation due to the synergy effect of their visions and aims. Firms will follow their profitability goals and stakeholders will do so in accordance to the firm's strategies and plans (Ramachandran, 2015; Wei Nurn & Tan, 2010).

CSR has been explained to include the common understanding of the social requirements within firms. The ISO 26000 framework explained its mission to aid the organization in contributing to their communities and to ensure sustainability within their context of operations. In this field, ISO 26000 was spotted as a major milestone concerning social responsibility in companies (Ward, 2011; Zinenko et al., 2015).

The ISO 26000 framework's main objective was to manage the responsibilities of companies towards their societies in different areas mainly in labour practices, human rights, fair operating practices, environment, involvement and development, organisational governance and consumer issues (Bowens, 2011; Zinenko et al., 2015).

The main topics in the ISO 26000 framework should be assessed through actions and practices in order to guarantee sustainability within firms. Labour practices are explained by giving employees safe and decent working conditions, and respecting human rights and minorities. Fair operating practices have to do with respecting laws and ensuring fairness within the companies which plan to motivate the staff and increase their level of involvement. On top of the previously mentioned subjects, respecting the environment and consumers is an essential factor for ISO 26000 standardisation requirements (Bowens, 2011; Kliment, 2016).

Adding to the standardisation processes and requirements for social responsibility within firms, the ISO 26000 could create and add value to the firm and its stakeholders while inclining or declining its financial human capital.

Yet, CSR practices should become one of the restaurants' priorities because firms in this sector will be easily out of their businesses if their customers do not trust their operations regarding food safety and transparency in their processes that could impact their reputation in the industry (Ross, 2004; McCool & McCool, 2010).

Some main CSR plans and practices towards sustainability and being social responsible are recycling and composting, energy and water efficiency treatment, serving eco-friendly packaging and menu sustainability. Restaurants should realize that food and beverage customers' awareness about this concept is increasing with time. This is why casual dining restaurants are concerned with these practices more than any other industry (Jeong & Jang, 2010).

Restaurants could recycle glass, metal, cardboards and aluminium. As for energy saving, LED lights are being used by firms instead of regular lights and a control system can be applied to regulate energy consumption. Also, using biodegradable packaging can also decrease harmful effects due to the high usage of containers for food and beverages. The idea of menu sustainability can be applied by including organic food to the menu and highlighting any harmful effects of the ingredients to clients (Jeong & Jang, 2010). The main research question of this study is: How CSR practices in Lebanese casual diners differ across urban, secondary, and rural areas?

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this paper is to explore the CSR practices in the casual dining industry and the impact of different characteristics on them. The following conceptual framework summarises the model.

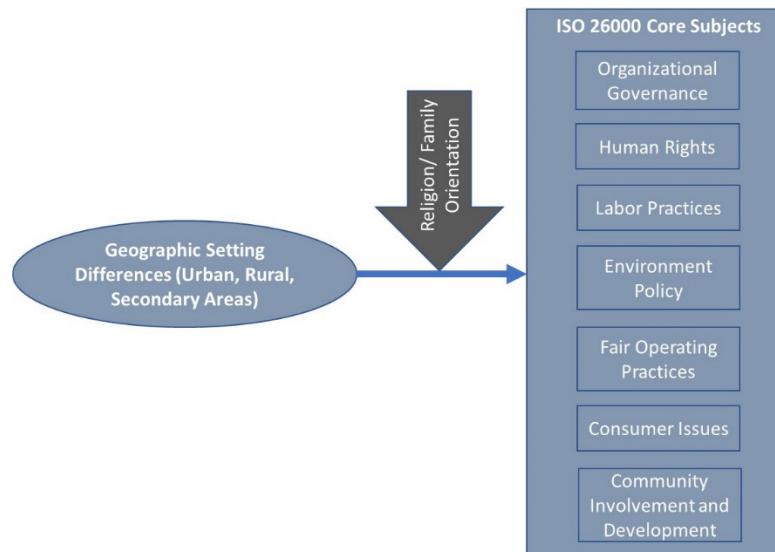


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

We will study how the geographic setting of restaurants impacts the CSR practices adopted in them and we will explore the moderating effect that the religion integration in the workplace and the family orientation of the company can have on that relationship in the context of Lebanon. In the next section, we will exhibit the contextual framework where the study took place.

Contextual Framework

Lebanon is strategically located in the Middle East region and has a long history of encouraging private enterprises (Dana & Dana, 2005). It is set on the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Its strategic location made it attractive to many invaders during different phases of its history. Persia, Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt and Greece all battled to control it. For four hundred years, the Ottoman Empire controlled Lebanon before it became a French colony during the early 20th century.

Under the French influence, Lebanon has witnessed a period of rapid industrialization. Unlike the neighbouring states, where the governments have played a major role in the economic development of their countries, it was the private sector which took the lead in developing

Lebanon's economy. France's influence on Lebanon was key in shaping its culture and dining was not an exception in this regard. "The nation came to be known as the Switzerland of the Middle East. Its capital, Beirut – with the largest gold market between Tangiers and Bombay- was nicknamed the Paris of the Middle East" (Dana, 2000).

At the end of the Lebanese civil war (early 1990's), a focus was made on two sectors that have always been important to the national identity of Lebanon: food and tourism (Blomfield & Short, 2006). In fact, the Lebanese people have noticed the international interest in their culinary traditions and accordingly they started emphasizing growth in this market. Food and wine are considered now as a main attraction to foreign tourists (Fabricant, 2010).

The economy of the country is mainly based on services, which drove many entrepreneurs to invest in the food service industry in rural and urban settings. According to research, a worldwide accepted way of classifying rural and urban areas does not exist. The classification could be done based on economic dimensions, geographic dimensions and demographics. It must be noted that relying only on the

population density is not enough to distinguish urban, secondary and rural areas (Pizzoli & Gong, 2007).

Previous research revealed that areas with high density of population, in other terms urban areas, are more likely to score higher on sustainability practices since literacy rate is higher and more activities and communications are done towards a sustainable society. In addition, people in urban and encountering areas can use more efficiently their resources considering this context (Khaleel & Ngah, 2013).

Nevertheless, rural areas are becoming more aware of the role of sustainability and CSR but unfortunately not being able yet to integrate imperatives in social responsibility when planning and executing their goals (Khaleel & Ngah, 2013).

Lebanon, known for its dynamic food, lifestyle, music, and culture, is now facing one of the worst economic and financial crises. Lebanon's economic situation is difficult because of compounded crises. The nation's economy stays in deep recession hit by currency crisis, Covid19 pandemic crisis, and intensive political and social instability for more than a year now (Koffman, 2020). As per The World Bank (2020), on October 2019, the Lebanese economy embarked into a worsening financial crisis caused by an abrupt stop in capital inflows. This precipitated banking debt, including sovereign default, and a dire exchange rate crisis. After a series of protests aimed to fight the corruption in the country, Lebanon found itself with no government, and heading towards a never ending financial and economic crisis (Yee & Saad, 2019). On top of the already existing crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, imposing a lockdown that further deteriorated the already agonizing economy. One might think that political, financial, economic, and health crises are enough. But, for Lebanon it did not end here. On August 4, 2020, a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut destroyed the majority of the port, damaging residential and commercial areas within a two-mile radius, killing hundreds of people, and leaving thousands with no home (Turak, 2020).

Koffman (2020) shed light on the fact that as Lebanon's economic turmoil continues, individuals having Lebanese Lira are rushing to purchase dollars, hence elevating the black market exchange rate to 10,000 LBP per one dollar, as its official rate is still pegged to 1,507 LBP. This elevation in the LBP rate resulted in a currency devaluation as high as 85%. For that reason, the exchange market pressures will remain to stifle trade and corporate finance in such an economy that highly depends on the dollar currency and relies massively on the import of most of the commodities needed by the consumers (Francis & Knecht, 2020).

In times of crises and downturns, such as those being faced by Lebanon now, it is essential to know whether CSR practices become an extra option or a vital pillar for a business' strategy (Ellis & Bastin, 2010). Lagace (2009) argued that financial crisis, economic downturn, or any turmoil that a certain country or sector might face, is not a reason to scale back on implementing CSR practices. Under this umbrella, CSR practices should become a part of a company's discipline and identity. Sahinidis, Daskalaki, Mantzari and Mantzaris (2014) did a study to investigate the effect of economic turndown in Greece on a business' CSR budget and practices. The study was done on 12 companies between 2008 and 2014 to examine these companies' CSR patterns. The findings reveal that in most companies, CSR activities declined as a result of the economic crisis in 2009 that started in USA and hit many countries worldwide. Moreover, it is important to mention that the vast majority of the companies prioritized their CSR practices. The practices related to the society doubled, whereas those CSR activities related to the firms' personnel reduced considerably. Another study done by Giannarakis and Theotokas (2011) revealed that financial turmoil drove companies to deviate away from CSR behaviour since it is an additive cost to the firm. So, when a financial crisis occurs, companies tend to ask questions such as whether CSR budgets and costs are a threat to the continuity of their business. Yelkikalan and Kose (2012) also emphasized the benefits of CSR practices for a business, yet these practices require extra

financial resources which might become a burden on the company in an already existing crisis. Some might assume that implementing CSR practices during crisis has no great importance, yet, it was argued by others that CSR practices should be a solid base of a company's strategy especially during hardships (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

Methodology

This paper investigates the differences in practising CSR in different geographical settings in the Lebanese casual dining industry. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the inductive reasoning was adopted. This type of methodology allows for openness to the emergence of unexpected findings from gathered data (Dana & Dana, 2005; Dana & Dumez, 2015; Patton, 1982). It also requires a flexible design which is in constant evolution. We will be starting with a "loose evolving framework" (Patton, 1987), the ISO 26000 one, but would remain flexible to formulating new questions along the way (Dana & Dana, 2005; Dana & Dumez, 2015).

A qualitative approach in research is used to assess the attitudes, behaviours and opinions of the participants for yielding new theories. Using open ended questions through semi-structured interviews is an appropriate technique in this case, to gather the needed information from participants (Creswell, 2014; Dana & Dumez, 2015). Interviews are opportunities to get insights from respondents in "an interactive and personal context" (Groenland & Dana, 2019, 227). The analysis, thus, includes thick description (Geertz, 1973), and direct quotations from people about their perceptions and experiences around the topic (Dana & Dana, 2005; Groenland & Dana, 2019).

To answer this question, data were gathered qualitatively from six restaurants within the Lebanese casual dining industry being in the three classified areas.

As explained previously, there is no single way to classify rural and urban areas. The classification could be done based on economic dimensions, geographic

dimensions and demographics. In this paper, the urban area is defined as the capital, Beirut, the secondary areas are the major cities excluding Beirut (such as Zahle, Saida, Tripoli), whereas the rural areas are all other towns all over Lebanon.

Interviews were used to gather information from concerned parties within six restaurants, each two representing one area. CEOs, marketing managers, human resources managers, or any other individual who is responsible for CSR planning and practices, were interviewed. A purposive sampling technique was selected, more specifically the judgment sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2018), where the six interviewees were selected for their expertise and capability to provide the needed information.

This comparative approach as a sampling technique is deemed appropriate in the context of the study as it will provide an in-depth analysis and could allow a better exploration of the topic (Dana & Dana, 2005; Dana & Dumez, 2015).

Deploying more than one approach when analysing data can increase the confidence when generating findings. This concept is called triangulation in research (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

At the basis of triangulation, this report mainly focused on the interviews' inputs and qualitative analysis complemented with basic descriptive analysis that we have conducted using survey-based questionnaires from the casual dining restaurants in Lebanon to have a more holistic vision of CSR practices from different employees' perspectives in several regions (Denzin, 1978). This method enriches the research since it offers several methods for the purpose of a balanced explanation. Averages and other statistical measures were used in this descriptive analysis to back up the qualitative findings of the study. The triangulation method was used in this research to make sure that the fundamental biases which arise from using a single method are overcome.

The convenience sampling technique was used for the questionnaire, where the fourteen subjects were chosen. They all work in the selected six restaurants. The sample is composed of eight males and six females. Four out of the fourteen are restaurant managers, four work in the HR department, two in the finance department, two in the marketing department, one in the project management department, and one in the operation department.

The coding done includes first the geographic setting of the firm, whether it is located in urban (U), rural (R) or Secondary area (S) coupled after it with the referring industry which is the same throughout this report since all targeted firms were selected from the casual dining industry (CD). The last item in the coding was the number of the firm based on the timing order of interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to be filled by the employees in the companies while the interviews were being done. It is essential to mention that the data collection was accomplished before the financial, economic and pandemic crises.

Findings

CSR and company mission

The mission of companies in the rural areas mostly focuses on the food quality. As for the companies that are existent in secondary cities, their focus is not only the food quality, but also on providing customers with a friendly and unforgettable experience. Missions of those companies in the cities are close to the missions of the secondary cities. They focus on the quality and the customer service and on defining their main goal in their mission statement. Concerning the vision of organisations located in the rural areas, they intend on expanding through giving franchises or opening other outlets in other cities. Some companies located in the secondary areas focus on expanding in other sectors, while others want their employees and customers to live the attitude, ambience, and experience of the organisation. As we move to the companies in the city, the organisations want to grow locally and most importantly maintain and be the leader of their category.

The core values in organisations in all regions are to value food safety, honesty, and quality. However, companies in secondary areas and cities also add to the previously mentioned values, the importance of transparency, teamwork and empowerment of employees, and being environmentally friendly.

CSR and company strategy

Therefore, we can realise that in rural casual diners, the CSR strategy is not significantly integrated in the company's strategy (average rank 6.33). The two companies do not mention any of the CSR practices in their mission, vision, and even values. Both focus mainly on the quality of the food in their mission, on expanding in their vision, and hygiene in their values. In urban areas, CSR practices are considered integrated in the firm's strategy (average rank 7.2). One out of two companies mentioned CSR as one of the company's values. CSR practices are noticeably integrated in the company's strategy in secondary areas with an average rank of 9. One out of two companies have CSR concepts in their mission statement. Their mission clearly says, "We are dedicated to serve our guests in a friendly environment with high value and quality". In addition, both companies include having code of conduct as well as being environmentally friendly in their values.

CSR and Governance

The concept of CSR for those in the rural regions is simply entering sponsorships, providing charities food from time to time, and giving back to nature through small acts such as reducing wastes and trying to pollute less. The top management in rural casual diners is moderately aware about the importance of CSR with an average rank of 6.78. One out of two companies linked the CSR activities with the main budget of the firm. That company is more focused on staying within the budget rather than implementing CSR activities.

As for those in the secondary regions, they take CSR more seriously. They usually have the marketing or HR department responsible for their CSR activities. Casual

diners in urban and secondary areas are considered aware of the significance of CSR in the top management with an average rank of 8.6 and 9.5 respectively. The top management is involved in those CSR activities. They put efforts on not to reject any proposal related to CSR. Several departments, such as HR and marketing, initiate and commit to ideas and plans related to CSR. One out of four companies even have their owner initiating CSR practices such as the idea of taking physically challenged people to places they can't go to under the title of "Happy Companions".

Secondary areas understand CSR as giving back to the environment and being responsible towards the employees (internally) and towards customers (externally). Responsible towards employees through providing them with good working conditions, insurance, training, and others. As for being responsible towards customers, it is done through providing them with promised quality, telling the truth, providing them a safe, respectful, and decent service. However, the organisations located in the cities take CSR more seriously and they even have a yearly budget for it. They do so by helping several NGOs in multiple ways, such as providing them with direct donations, dedicating a small part of every check for them, and others.

CSR and family business in Lebanon

Across Lebanon, casual diners are mostly family businesses. Thus, we can realise that CSR activities are positively affected because they are family businesses. Casual diners in the rural areas spend much less resources than those in the secondary regions and cities. In rural areas, owners are usually the ones who decide and initiate CSR activities. One of the owners there said, "CSR activities are strictly limited to the main budget" (R.CD.1). However, the other company highlighted the fact that they are a family business has a high effect on their CSR activities.

On the contrary, as we move away from rural regions, we can realise that in casual diners, not only owners are involved, but also the marketing or the HR department are involved. One of the interviewees said: "our team members not only initiate CSR practices, but they are also committed to them." (S.CD.2). However, none of them has a CSR department or a person only dedicated to those activities.

Core subjects according to ISO 26000

This qualitative research was designed based on the ISO 26000 standard; accordingly, the following seven core subjects cover the CSR practices of the six concerned companies in rural, secondary and urban areas of Lebanon.

Human Rights Practices

In all regions, men and women have equal opportunities when it comes to recruitments and promotions whether in the middle or top management positions. However, in some casual diners we can spot more men than women and that is due to reasons such as no women applied, time inconvenience for women, and other reasons not related to quotas or discrimination. One of the interviewees in the city mentioned that: "We tried to hire women as drivers, but the conditions of the work do not match" (C.CD.2). This indicates that the reasons are not correlated to gender discrimination or preferences. In the meantime, we can also spot some companies having more women than men. In addition, the reasons are not related to gender biases.

All areas have an average rank of around 8.83 concerning the latter issue. All six firms clearly say that both genders have equal opportunities when it comes to promotions at the middle and top management levels. Yet four out of six companies have a higher percentage of men in the managerial and top management positions than women. The reason that we can spot more men than women is due to the previously mentioned reasons such as no women applied, time inconvenience for women, and other reasons not related to quotas or discrimination.

Casual diners, across all regions, do not employ children. However, the majority employ children, 16 years old and above, as part-timers during summertime only. In rural areas, they used terminologies such as "to keep the kids busy during summertime" (R.CD.2).

In rural areas, the companies do not mind hiring physically challenged people; however, they do not currently have such employees. Hence, although the casual diners were positive concerning the idea of hiring physically challenged people, however the average rank is poor (2). One out of two companies mentioned that they currently do not have physically challenged people because their architecture is not

adequate. The reasons for the absence of physically challenged people in their firms vary. The interviewee clearly said: "We do not mind however the place's architecture is not ready". While the other company said that, no one seemed to apply, etc. These reasons could somehow justify the low average rank.

As we move towards secondary areas, these companies hire and currently have physically challenged employees. They also do not mind having 3%, as per the quota, of physically challenged people employed. Some of them are even working with NGOs in order to find and recruit these people. Physically challenged employees are hired in call centres usually in such regions. One of the interviewees said: "We do not mind however the place's architecture is not ready" (R.CD.2). These companies encourage the idea of hiring physically challenged employees. This is also reflected in the average rank of the questionnaires (7.8).

As for companies in the cities, one out of two companies hire physically challenged people in positions such as call centres, central kitchen, etc. However, the other company did not agree with the other and said, "We do not hire challenged people. We have people who had accidents at work and we helped them from A to Z. They are still with us working" (C.CD.2). Having those two companies that think oppositely regarding this idea is reflected in the average rank (5).

Regarding discrimination when it comes to hiring new staff, companies in rural regions are moderately biased when it comes to the race of the employee being recruited. They always prefer hiring locals. We can also spot salary differences for the same position between a local and a foreigner. One of the owners said: "Our Lebanese chef has a higher salary than the foreigner chef knowing that they have the same duties" (R.CD.1). Usually, housekeeping employees are nonlocals. Moreover, some casual diners are also biased towards religion, where they prefer to hire employees that have a certain religion. Concerning political affiliations, weight, and age, we can spot no discrimination. So, these firms are

moderately biased when it comes to hiring and dealing with employees. Both companies do not differentiate when it comes to the employee's weight, age, and political affiliation. Nevertheless, both are biased towards hiring locals. However, one out of two companies mentioned that they are also biased towards the religion of the applicant. This company prefers to employ people that have a certain religion. This issue is reflected in the 6.22 average rank.

As for the secondary and urban regions, the companies are also biased a bit towards hiring locals, but they have opportunities for non-Lebanese. However, managerial positions are for Lebanese employees. Casual diners in both areas do not discriminate when it comes to religion, weight, age, and political affiliations having an average rank of 9.6 and 9.4 respectively. However, sometimes they might have restrictions on hiring nonlocals due to legality. All four firms do not discriminate when it comes to race, but three out of the four companies stressed the fact that they try their best to recruit Lebanese people before any other foreigners.

Labour Practices

In rural areas, some casual diners do not have proper structure and architecture to provide employees with decent and safe working conditions. However, they are considering these issues in any new outlet they consider opening. Employees are insured. They are safe when it comes to social securities and health insurances if something happened to them during work time. Although the average was ranked 9.22, in rural areas one out of two casual diners do not have proper structure and architecture to provide employees with safe working conditions. Both companies are considered safe when it comes to social securities and health insurances if something happened to them during work. In secondary areas, one of the companies did a study on where most accidents happen. The manager mentioned that: "Most of the accidents happen in the kitchen and with drivers. We are following up with injured employees and are trying to take precautions" (S.CD.1). Those measures

indicate that the firms are trying to manage the outcomes and are striving to find practical solutions to solve these issues. So, in secondary areas (9.1), casual diners provide a significant level of decent and safe working conditions.

Training in rural areas happens within the department each employee works at; it is more like a handover from previous employees rather than formal and professional training. As for social dialogue that allows employees to speak out their concerns, it usually follows an open-door policy. Secondary areas provide safe and decent working conditions through giving employees flexible schedules, insurances, social securities, helping them in their private concerns, and others. As for continuous training, casual dinings in these areas tend to provide employees with in-house training in sales, food safety, customer care, leadership, HR, management, etc. They even go beyond the workplace and help employees enhance their skills and expertise such like:

- Attending seminars
- Getting them offers to learn languages such as English or French
- Providing them with discounts and offers to get their graduate degrees from some universities

Despite having an average rank of 8.67 companies providing continuous training and development to the staff, we can see some significant differences between rural and urban/secondary areas. Training in rural casual diners occurs within the department that each employee works at which explains the 8.11 rank. The continuous training in urban and secondary areas (8.8 and 9.1 respectively) is more formal. They tend to provide employees with in-house training, as well as outsourced training, to further enhance their skills and expertise. Employee's social dialogue is done through an open communication system.

Casual diners in cities provide their employees with safe conditions through offering them a fresh, young, and positive

atmosphere. They also make them feel safe through rules and regulations, social securities, fire alarm systems, etc. In these regions, training and development are necessary. Training is done in customer service, food preparation, food safety, leadership programmes, and others. In urban areas (8.6), casual diners deliver decent working conditions in the workplace. Both companies insure their employees and work on renovations of the office to enhance employee's wellbeing. One of the two companies work on a more formal level. They have regular audits on safety aspects such as checking fire extinguisher back and front hose.

As for employee dialogue concerns, in cities this issue is more formal. At first, the employee reports to the line manager, and if the issue cannot be solved through the line manager, then it is shifted to the HR.

Casual diners in all diners noticeably encourage social dialogues with an average rank of 8.75. Two out of six companies mentioned that they have an open door/communication policy. Two out of six companies follow a formal hierarchy of reporting and communicating. Employees will report primarily to their line manager and after that if the matter cannot be solved through the line manager, then it is shifted to the HR.

Environment

In rural areas companies take minor measures concerning their impact on the environment. Regarding energy, companies use led lights and some even have their own generators. As for water, only few diners have dishwashers and sensors in toilets and kitchens. Finally, in liquid and solid wastes, some recycle cartons and plastics only while others do not take any acts at all.

In secondary areas, regarding energy, companies have their own generators, led lights, filtration system. They turn off lights when not used, and they even manage a schedule to reduce energy consumption. Concerning water, one of the companies do not have practices to save water, but they mentioned the following: "Although we do

not work on saving water but we have our own awareness campaign" (S.CD.2). Other companies have sensors to save water (in their new outlets). Hence, we can see there is no major acts regarding saving water. As for the wastes, casual diners tend to recycle cartons and plastic (in collaboration with NGOs), send organic food to pork farms, reduce the number of napkins on each table, and adopt an eco-friendlier marketing. One of the organisations stated: "We are aiming of becoming 0 waste company" (S.CD.2).

In the city, led lights are used to save energy. No initiatives are taken concerning water consumption and reduction. Regarding liquid and solid waste, casual dining, have either too little or too much waste, therefore, they are not able to work with NGOs when it comes to recycling. Some companies are trying to implement a "no straw" campaign, but they are facing lots of resistance.

Moving into further descriptive details, it can be noticed that practice regarding environmental matter differs among the three areas. In rural areas, companies are taking some steps to minimise the environmental negative impact of its business activity in terms of waste with an average rank of 7.67. One out of two companies separates and recycles cartons and plastic. In urban areas, both companies do not recycle their wastes because they have many wastes and no place to store them until other specialised companies could come and take them for recycling. Therefore, urban casual diners scored a low average on that issue (4.6). As for secondary areas, they scored a very high average on this subject (9). Both companies recycle plastics and cartons. One out of two companies is implementing an eco-friendlier marketing. They even ask customers if they want "cutleries" in order to reduce plastic consumption.

Casual diners in rural areas take moderate steps to minimise the environmental negative impact of their business activities in terms of energy (average rank of 7.11). Both companies have led lights. One out of the two companies has their own generators. In urban areas, the average rank

for this concern is low (4.6). This might be because none of the companies has any initiative to minimise the consumption of energy except for using led lights in their new outlets. As for casual dining in secondary areas, they have a strong average rank of 9. Both companies have led lights in all their outlets. One out of two companies has two generators to save energy consumption. They even have a management schedule to reduce their energy consumption (like turning off the closed departments, turning off the second generator when not in use, etc.).

Casual diners in rural areas take moderate steps to minimise water consumption. One out of two companies does nothing regarding saving water consumption. However, the other company has sensors in kitchens and toilets in all outlets. This might explain the average rank of 7. In urban areas, casual diners score low on average rank (4.6) on this matter. One of the companies said: "we don't have information about water consumption reduction, but we have machines that only measures the consumption". Secondary areas score a high average rank of 7.9 on that subject. Both companies have sensors to decrease the water consumption in their outlets. One out of two companies has awareness campaigns on reducing water consumption.

Fair Operating Practices

We can realise that most casual diners whether in rural, secondary areas, or cities respect the fair operating practices in terms of pricing. They do not fix or change their prices through unethical collaboration with their competitors. They put their prices based on their quality and brand image. However, some diners in the city might alter their prices based on recurrent customers' requests. The manager interviewed said: "We might modify our offers according to the customers' feedback" (C.CD.1).

In addition, most of the companies wherever they are located do not promote sustainable management principles. Almost all of them pick their suppliers based on the location of the supplier, as well as the product's quality and prices.

In rural areas, the diners usually fight corruption through camera inspection and investigations. If they have proof that an employee is stealing, it always ends up by firing them.

In secondary regions, diners also use cameras for their investigation. Some companies have a code of conduct and written systems. At first, the company gives the employee verbal warnings, then written warnings, then salary deduction, and finally termination from the job.

In cities, codes of conduct are used. Disciplinary actions are taken, warnings (verbal and paper warning). Each case is taken solely and is investigated via HR. One of the companies said: "we have disciplinary warnings (verbal and written). We also have a code of conduct. Therefore, each case is taken separately". (C.CD.1)

Consumer issues

In terms of the food on the menu, all casual diners do not Photoshop the items on the menu, and are transparent; hence, they deliver what they promise to customers. Moreover, casual diners in cities have mystery shoppers to make sure that all employees are working as they are asked to.

All six of the casual diners in all regions agree on the fact that their company delivers what it communicates and promises to its customers. This is highly revealed in the average rank, which is approximately 9.46.

Casual diners in rural areas consider children for example through placing a kids' section on the menu. However, they do not market their products by taking advantage of their vulnerability. In secondary areas and cities, the diners intend on not placing for example pictures in the kids' menu in order not to market their products to children since they are vulnerable groups.

In rural areas, customer service is done through contacting the owners. Hence, no formal procedures are followed. According to each case, the owner chooses how to

compensate for the customer. In secondary regions, customer service is more formal. They tend to have customer care unit where all complaints are reported even if they are solved. This is done in order to track errors and take precautions. As for diners in cities, customer service is handled in a very professional way. Most of the companies track negative feedback from comment cards, "Zomato", and even on social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.). After tracking these feedbacks, the company tends to reply within 48hr in order to solve the issue. They do so by getting their contact number, apologising to them, and offering them some sort of compensation (free meal, free dessert, etc.). What is also interesting is that even employees may take initiatives to give free food in case of customer complaint.

Hence, all casual diners in rural, urban, and secondary areas have a solid customer care system in place. We can see that this is strongly reflected in the surveys where the average rank on this question was 9.21.

As for informing customers about the risks of a specific product, there are no measures taken in diners located in rural areas. They believe that their menus are "all for all". This is highly spotted in the low average rank (3.33). In secondary regions and in cities, diners inform their customers about any possible risk. They inform the customer about the existence of pork or alcohol in the product. They also inform customers in a certain diet about the number of calories, amount of fat, sugar, etc. However, this information is only available in the light section and not the whole menu. We can realise that only few diners in the city include information concerning allergies and vegetarians. One of the companies in the secondary area took the precaution issue to a completely new level. They said the following: "During our festivals we inform customers about the alcohol offered, we do not serve beer to under aged customers, we have free cabs to give our customers, who consumed lots of alcohol, a ride home, and we sometimes stop serving alcohol if we realised that things started getting out of control" (S.CD.2). This is reflected in the average rank filled out in the

surveys of urban and secondary areas (8.2 and 9.1 respectively).

Community involvement

In rural areas, the companies prioritise social investment through donating food to charity and sponsoring event specially those happening in their region. If their employees would want to volunteer, they would encourage them but not at the expense of the company. That is why we can see an average rank of 7.67. It indicates that the companies are open to the idea, but in the meantime, they do not compensate for the benefit of the company. One out of two companies said: "I don't mind, in fact I encourage my employees to volunteer but never on Saturdays and Sundays". On the other hand, diners in secondary regions and cities invest in both. They help charities and NGOs through providing them with vouchers or simply donating food. These diners also sponsor many events during the year with a specific budget dedicated for that part. In addition, they tend to encourage their employees to volunteer. They encourage them to donate blood and to volunteer in events by visiting NGOs on holidays.

Across all Lebanese regions, the casual diners strongly contribute to the local community with an average rank of 8.04. One out of six companies mentioned that they contribute to local community representatives because they consider it a win-win situation and they do it for marketing purposes only.

Reporting CSR Activities

As for reporting CSR activities, casual diners in rural and secondary areas do not promote their CSR activities. They mentioned that, "They do not like to brag about it". One out of six casual diners reports few of its CSR activities, especially those related to activities done with NGOs.

Religion/Family and CSR

In rural areas, the companies feel that since the diners are family businesses, this highly affects CSR activities. They believe that their own family morals and values are reflected and practised in the workplace. As for religion, the majority agreed that it does not affect CSR practices in anyway although they have linked indirectly their family values to their religious roots. Most of the diners are hiring people from different religions and nationalities therefore they are relying more on individual values and attitudes when it comes to the workplace than focusing only on the religion origin of employees. Five out of Six interviewed companies have mentioned clearly when asked about religion that no discrimination is applied when it comes to hiring people. In other words, those companies are mentioning that no bias practices are taking place within their workplaces concerning religion but indirectly linking their values and expectations to morals and beliefs inspired in a way or another from everyone's background.

All six casual diners do not have a priority towards their immediate and extended family members over nonrelatives when selecting employees. This was common among all interviewees. However, we can recognise that this question was ranked 6 on average in rural areas. Therefore, the surveys show that in rural areas they moderately agree that owners have a priority towards their relatives over nonrelatives. On the other hand, both companies in rural areas have a small percentage of employees as relatives.

Discussion and Recommendation

What was obvious throughout this research was that almost all the targeted firms within the Lebanese casual dining industry were practising some aspects of CSR without their awareness or with no official classification under a well-defined CSR framework. Some of the restaurants have already mentioned that they have moved to led lights instead of regular lighting systems to reduce the energy consumption to back up the literature part in this concern while

other firms are relying on their own generators to monitor energy use for efficiency purposes. Concerning recycling, practices differed in terms of geographic setting; in the urban area, they had difficulties in finding places to put their waste, a reason why recycling was a difficult process; while in the secondary areas, they were recycling plastics and cardboards in collaboration with some NGOs. No actions were taken in terms of menu sustainability as mentioned previously throughout the literature due to lack of knowledge in this concern. The notifying issue is that the awareness concerning water treatment and usage was common in some restaurants where they do measure their water usage but with no effective actions accordingly due to lack of resources or facilitations.

It would be optimal for those firms to consider at a first stage a framework to classify their planning and actions regarding CSR whether in their recruitment strategies, environmental concerns or any other decision that might affect the social welfare. Once defended, awareness of CSR will be more spread within firms and an official consideration of the social responsibility concept will be taken into consideration to set standards and try to meet targets in this context. At a later stage, being involved in writing annual CSR reports following international standards might be also an efficient step towards improvements in this field.

Theoretical Implications

While this study has shown the various levels of CSR commitment of the six concerned food and beverage companies in urban, secondary and rural areas, it has also revealed many CSR practices which need to be further explored and examined in future studies.

This research covered all the corporate CSR practices which fall under the ISO 26000 standard which are governance, human rights, labour practices, environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues and community involvement. Future research work is needed to further uncover the CSR benefits mentioned in the literature review such as the impact of CSR practices on the

reputation and brand awareness of the concerned food and beverage companies, the staff turnover, the attraction of high-quality employees and new customers and the financial results. Another topic seemed to be important in this research and which requires further investigation is the reason why certain companies recruit their employees based on religious affiliation.

This paper has also revealed the fragility of the CSR practices of the concerned Food and Beverage companies since they were mostly not implemented as part of a business strategy but were applied and introduced in a fragmented way across different departments.

In addition, seasonality has a tremendous impact on tourism in Lebanon especially in rural areas. It will benefit the future researchers in this field to measure the impact of seasonality on the CSR practices in Food and Beverage companies operating in rural areas.

Although the data collection was performed before the compounded crises that the country is facing recently, but this situation could have an effect on the findings and results of the study. According to an article published by the ESCWA (2021), the Lebanese economic situation is facing a free fall which accelerated by the end of 2019. Moreover, the article sheds the light on the deteriorating situation which became even worse with the invasion of the pandemic as well as the Beirut Port Explosion. An article published by the UNESCWA (2020) mentioned that the Lebanese private sector sales, including that of the hospitality sector, diminished in 2020 by almost 45% when compared to the previous year. All of the previously mentioned events could have an impact on the importance and priority of CSR practices in a company's strategy.

Managerial Implications

Although this paper has uncovered the immature CSR culture and practices in rural areas compared to the secondary and major cities in Lebanon, it has also shown the similarities between the three geographical areas.

The lack of sustainable purchasing policy among the six concerned companies shows a major weakness in considering the importance of working with responsible suppliers and other stakeholders in the value chain. The management of the Food and Beverage institutions needs to integrate such a policy in their future business and CSR strategies.

Reporting the CSR practices is still not common due to various reasons. This practice comes as a result of a certain maturity in CSR and is a culmination of the implementation of a solid CSR strategy. As long as these Food and Beverage companies do not deal with CSR as a major strategic choice within their strategy, reporting won't be given its strategic importance in communicating to the companies' stakeholders their CSR practices.

Happy external customers are a result of happy internal ones. The proper training and working conditions are 2 pre-requisites for the staff to generate outstanding work. This research has shown that the 2 Food and Beverage companies operating in rural areas need to improve both their training and the working conditions of their staff if they want to secure better business results.

While the six companies operating in rural, secondary and urban areas, do manage their environmental practices differently, they all need to carefully design water, waste and energy management systems to meet with the international standards and generate the positive impacts on the environment, the finance, employees, brand reputation and customers' retention.

The findings in all three areas across Lebanon are impacted in a way or another due to the economic, financial and pandemic catastrophes facing the country. CSR and governance could be impacted since the companies dedicate a certain budget in order to give back to the community they live in. Yet, being in the midst of many crises, the company will diverge from additive costs and move towards cutting costs. Also, findings regarding labour practices may be affected since providing an employee with a decent and safe environment requires additional costs. The current circumstances have an effect on the business'

implementation of CSR practices (Sahinidis et al., 2014).

Conclusion and Limitations

The main limitation of this research is the small sample size that makes it difficult to generalise based on it. This was mainly because access to data in this research was not an easy process given the dynamic environment of this industry and the busy schedules of people working in the casual dining sector. However, the survey-based data were only used in this report as a mean to triangulate the qualitative analysis obtained from the interviews without any modelling or variation analysis. In this study, we were able to understand in depth the practices in the casual dining industry.

In conclusion, CSR planning and practices do differ from one geographic area to another as it was shown throughout this research; rural areas do differ in terms of practising CSR from secondary and rural areas. It was obvious that since most of the firms interviewed were family businesses, the individuals' values were affecting the perception of CSR and how it is practised within business. Some of the firms were morally involved in CSR activities and events and others were engaged in specific activities and action plans based on specific interests or concerns.

Although some of the companies have their marketing or human resource managers dealing with CSR issues, none of the companies operating in the three geographical areas has neither a CSR manager nor a CSR strategy which reveals a weakness in the Top Management approach towards the importance of this subject. Further research is needed to identify the reasons why CSR is still not a priority for the top management members.

Recruiting physically challenged people is not implemented equally between the rural areas on one side and the secondary and urban areas on the other side. While companies of the rural areas still do not hire physically challenged people, companies of secondary and urban areas are already including them within their labour force. This research couldn't reveal the reasons why such practice is not similar between the

different areas and needs further investigation in future studies.

It was interesting to understand the different ways of recruitment among the various regions. While companies in rural areas prefer to hire local people and pay them higher incomes compared to foreigners performing the same job, they also tend to recruit people of a certain religion. However, companies in secondary and urban areas differ when it comes to religion and prefer to promote Lebanese people into managerial positions. Further studies are recommended to understand the socio-cultural contexts of the various geographical areas leading to different approaches in staff recruitment and promotion.

The community involvement of the six companies is perceived very similar since they focus on volunteering and philanthropic actions. Further research is needed to identify other strategic areas of intervention with the local communities.

Financial collapse and economic recessions tend to alter a business' interest in CSR as well as the stakeholders' anticipations concerning CSR practices (Ghitulescu & Neves, 2012). Furthermore, in their study, they revealed that the economic situation surrounding the company has an effect on its attitudes regarding the budget and implementation of CSR practices. For that reason, governance, labour practices, community involvement and environmental findings may be impacted since these CSR practices incur additional costs and additive financial burden on a company, especially in such circumstances. Hence, the economic and financial uncertainty, political instability and pandemic crisis, followed by the Port explosion in Beirut, have reduced CSR practices as well as budgets in the companies in Lebanon, including those in the hospitality sector.

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