Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
Original Research Article

The coevolutionary process of restaurant CSR in the time of mega disruption

Juanjuan Ou a,b,1, IpKin Anthony Wong c, GuoQiong Ivanka Huang c,*

a International College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, No 2, North Baiyun Road, Baiyun District, Guangzhou, China
b Lancaster University, United Kingdom
c School of Tourism Management, Sun Yat-Sen University, Tangzhou Rd. 1, Zhuhai, China

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Crisis management Corporate social responsibility Restaurant Corpus linguistics Coevolution

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how US foodservice conglomerates have embarked on corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures to circumvent dire situations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the evolution of CSR practices from restaurant enterprises to rescue and salvage their stakeholders. By analyzing press releases from ten restaurant chains in three different crisis phases (incubation, acceleration, and climax) through corpus linguistics, we identify a CSR progression mechanism that coevolves with the aftermath of the crisis among their stakeholders. This study improvises the CSR-as-process view to highlight the time-variant dynamic nature of CSR development over the course of major disruption.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has become a severe global hazard bringing unprecedented impacts to consumers, employees, suppliers, the society, and the economy. The foodservice industry has been hit particularly hard due to social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and public health concerns. While McKinsey and Company (2020) estimated the industry would suffer around a 20% decline in market capital, a recent report from Statista (2020b) indicates the volume of dine-in customers worldwide had dropped 70% by mid-June, albeit improving from the April and May slump, which was close to 100%. Sales were slashed as dining rooms were shuttered. Casual-dining brands in the US that rely heavily on empathic employee services and oasis-like physical environments witnessed an off-the-cliff sales decline when governments restricted social gathering and other city lockdown measures since the end of March (Liddle, 2020).

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to bring fear and affliction to the world, there are signs of hope as restaurant conglomerates have been embarking on corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures to assist their stakeholders to cope with adversity while facing major distributions to their businesses (McDonald’s Newsroom, 2020; Starbucks Stories and News, 2020; The Jakarta Post, 2020). There is a plethora of research on CSR, most of which conceptualize it as an event or a cause/consequence (Rhou and Singal, 2020; Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). This line of inquiry primarily focuses on dimensions of CSR and its stakeholders (Farrington et al., 2017; Kim and Kim, 2014), CSR reporting, and the nomological network of CSR such as its impacts on employees (Tsai et al., 2012; Wong and Gao, 2014), consumers (Jeon et al., 2020; Sung et al., 2020), and organizations (De Grosbois, 2012; Holcomb et al., 2007). This traditional static view of social responsibility is necessary as it builds the core foundation for future inquiries. Yet, as we will further delve into empirical from presented from this research, CSR is a rather dynamic, time-variant, and highly contextualized organizational strategic response to environmental jolts.

This study aims to address the aforementioned research gap by investigating the evolution of CSR along with progression of the outbreak in the foodservice industry, and to accentuate a process view of CSR. It seeks to answer the question of how firms adjust their CSR practices among different stages of a disaster to aid stakeholders to cope with adversity. This study employed corpus linguistics (Pollach, 2012) as the analytical approach to assess a large volume of textual data collected from US-based restaurant corporations listed in Fortune 1000. The contribution of this research lies not only in its ability to articulate how restaurant chains galvanize efforts to mitigate weakening and disturbances from negative events, but also to explore the crisis-fostering environment and how organizations respond to the different phases of

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: 201510084@oamail.gdufs.edu.cn (J. Ou), wongipk@mail.sysu.edu.cn (I.A. Wong), huanggq26@mail.sysu.edu.cn (G.I. Huang).

1 Visiting Scholar.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102684
Received 28 June 2020; Received in revised form 20 August 2020; Accepted 7 September 2020
Available online 8 October 2020
0278-4319/ © 2020 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
a crisis. More importantly, as we unravel the coherence between the impacts of the pandemic and corporate social responses that work in tandem to alleviate stakeholders’ plight, we improvise a new model that highlights the coevolution of CSR in light of extenuating circumstances stakeholders face. As restaurant conglomerates’ socially responsible endeavors progress to ameliorate different parties over time, this study underscores a new line of inquiry – CSR-as-process – that is pertinent to the process view of crisis (Williams et al., 2017).

This article is organized as follows. Literature pertaining to crisis management, CSR, and corporate communication are presented as the theoretical background and underpin the present study. It is followed by the research method along with the data collection and analysis. Findings are then presented with a focus on the CSR coevolution process in light of the crisis. This paper concludes with discussion about a new CSR evolution framework along with theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Crisis management and communication

Crisis management has been on the center stage across different disciplines including management (James et al., 2011) and tourism–hospitality (Aliperti et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2018) fields of study. There are two streams of literature theorizing about crisis in organization research. The first adopts a static view to see crisis as an event, and defines it as a low-likelihood, high-severity situation which threatens the viability and existence of an organization (Pearson and Clair, 1998). This event-centered perspective focuses primarily on understanding the aftermath of a crisis (Williams et al., 2017). Complementary to this perspective, the second stream takes a fluid view to conceptualize crisis as a process. In this processual approach, a “crisis is perceived as a long incubation process that suddenly manifests itself under the influence of a ‘precipitating’ event” (Roux-Dufort, 2007, p. 109). This paper follows the later tradition by conceptualizing a crisis as process (i.e., crisis-as-process) to focus on its progression and the evolutionary course of actions undertaken by hospitality organizations. In line with the perspective, crisis management is considered as “managing attention to weak signals” of crises-in-process, in-event organizing, and post-event actions to protect a system and (when necessary) bring it back into alignment” (Williams et al., 2017, p. 737).

Two properties are key factors that influence how a crisis is managed in this perspective. Firstly, as a crisis consists of multiple phases, understanding an organizational system and how it is impacted by adversity (and hence, how a firm copes with adversity and gains resilience) could help the understanding of the complexities in managing crisis within the organizational domain (Pearson and Clair, 1998). Secondly, various stakeholders are interlinked, which has a serious and intricate effect on handling crisis (Blackman and Ritchie, 2008; Jin et al., 2019). Organizations must continuously adjust and realign their business models and practices to gain resilience through various resource endowments to improve their capabilities for crisis enactment (Williams et al., 2017).

Among a multitude of crisis responses, corporate communication is one of the most important aspects of managing crisis (Avraham, 2015). How to respond to ongoing environmental jolts at different stages of a disaster is a critical avenue to demonstrate organizational resilience in the eyes of the public (Coombs and Lauter, 2018). Hence, an organization’s response to adversity could be framed strategically to improve its reputational assets. There are a wide array of benefits that organizations enjoy in framing their responses to a crisis, which include how the management carefully identifies causes and weakening situations, endorses remedies, instills confidence and gains trust, and establishes legitimacy (Shintman, 2006; Massey, 2001). Hence, crisis communication is a rhetorical device for an organization to attain intended images through the media and other communication channels (e.g., press release). It renders as a strategic approach for a corporation’s management to make a favorable impression.

Coombs (2007) is among the first to identify the role of crisis communication as an organizational bolstering strategy, whose success is dependent on a crisis situation. This logic is embedded within his proposed situational crisis communication theory, which casts a boundary condition on a firm’s tactical actions in handling a crisis situation based upon public attribution of responsibility during the crisis (Coombs, 2007, 2018). Much of this stream of work focuses on rebuilding reputation as an organizational response to threats and harms. Yet, one of the common communication approaches to crisis involves the illumination of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Kucukusta et al., 2019; Schultz et al., 2013). The CSR-based crisis response message, however, is “a communicative event as well as a symbolic resource that enables [stakeholders] to perceive the organization’s genuine responsibility for a particular crisis and thereby formulate their responses to it” (Ham and Kim, 2019, p. 335). As we shall delve further into the CSR literature below, it will become clear how CSR can represent a scaffold from which to construct mutually beneficial exchanges between a firm and its stakeholders.

2.2. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR encompasses many concepts that require firms to fulfill responsibilities from the lens of stockholders. Serra-Cantallop et al. (2018) state that stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, clients, and local communities need to be satisfied with their modus operandi, which should focus on benefitting their business and answering the needs of the society. Nevertheless, CSR research has frequently revealed that there are disparities in management literature as to CSR’s full meaning. According to Lindgreen and Swaan (2010) and Farrington et al. (2017), this disparity impedes the scope of CSR’s conceptual development. Incongruities abound in its practical applications. They range from the anomaly of budget airlines utilizing carbon offsetting, to massive construction of new tourism products amid dire warnings from the Maldivian government that the island would be submerged below sea level (Kundur, 2012).

From a risk management perspective, CSR acts as a form of insurance security that has a spillover effect, which can become an instrument encouraging firms to vie with competitors, to attain continued growth, and to surmount possible difficulties encountered in time (Kim and Kim, 2014; Rhou and Singal, 2020; Youn et al., 2015). CSR can elicit favorable reactions from consumers by mitigating negative effects caused by organizational hazards (e.g., scandal and product recall), which would subsequently lead to post-recovery contentment (Siu et al., 2014). CSR also plays a key role in employees attaining job satisfaction (Raub and Blunschi, 2014), organizational allegiance (Wong and Gao, 2014), and work engagement (Raub and Blunschi, 2014), which ultimately results in better employee retention and job performance (Lee et al., 2012). Serra-Cantallop et al. (2018) refer to this phenomenon as a virtuous circle, whereby all the facets together lead to better customer satisfaction and an enhancement of the corporate image (Vong and Wong, 2013).

However, conflicts may arise from CSR in bridging stakeholders while balancing business interests. A fragile and inconsistent balance among parties is a transforming and evolving process in which stakeholders continue to ameliorate different parties over time, this study underscores a new line of inquiry – CSR-as-process – that is pertinent to the process view of crisis (Williams et al., 2017). Yet, the literature also posits that strong CSR presence would ultimately improve worker performance and customer satisfaction (Liu et al., 2014; Wong and Gao, 2014). However, there could also be indirect benefits from social marketing that aims to build customer preferences
and loyalty, a basis that could enhance organizational profitability in the long run (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018).

Farrington et al. (2017) consider CSR as a convoluted development where inconsistencies can be derived from context-specific definitions. Noland and Phillips (2010) and Lee (2008) acknowledge that there is a significant movement away from macro-level analytics that focus on ethical issues, toward organizational performance empirics. There has also been a significant shift in CSR moving from a stockholder-centric to a stakeholder-oriented approach since the 1980s (Freeman, 1984). Likewise, more attention has been devoted to the micro-CSR perspective, in which the central focus rests on the role of CSR in the individual’s cognitive process of values such as well-being, satisfaction, job performance, and commitment (Wang et al., 2016).

In a similar vein, Jones (1995) observes that financial results are better achieved by investing in stakeholders such as employees, clients, and suppliers, along with society initiatives. Murphy and Schlegelmilch (2013) and Acquier et al. (2011) view this as a move away from considering social requirements, with a definite intention to utilize CSR as a tool to achieve commercial superiority over competitors. In essence, CSR improves firms with a multitude of benefits; these are further summarized in Vishwanathan et al. (2020) meta analysis to articulate four overarching mechanisms of strategic CSR that can help organizations to sustain superior financial performance: reputation enhancement, stakeholder reciprocation, risk reduction, and innovation capability improvement.

2.3. CSR and corporate communication

The media is a crucial communication channel that affords organizations opportunity to propagate their agendas and goals (e.g., improved corporate image and enhanced customer-employee relationships) through CSR (Ham and Kim, 2019). Yet, CSR raises the question of how favorable media coverage would develop in the hospitality industry given that many sectors (e.g., airline, restaurant, and casinos) are subjected to stringent regulations. Rhou and Singal (2020) highlight this issue to advocate that future studies should focus on acceptable norms in generating favorable media coverage. De Grosbois (2012) notes that even though a large number of hospitality enterprises have published their CSR goals, only a few of them have specified how well they are achieved.

To improve the effectiveness of CSR, stakeholders should be aware of the value embedded in a firm’s social practices (Kim and Kim, 2014). Serra-Cantallops et al. (2018) state that promulgation of socially responsible information of a company can give them a clear advantage over companies that fail to do so. Take the foodservice business as an example. Empirics from Lee et al. (2016) demonstrate that restaurant franchisers’ CSR initiatives not only improve their corporate image, they also help instill trust and improve satisfaction for their franchisees. In other words, “effective communication is critical for shaping franchisees’ trust in the franchisor and that trust affects franchisees’ overall satisfaction with the franchisor” (Lee et al., 2016, p. 52). Sung et al. (2020) investigated diners’ perception of CSR messages in the restaurant setting and revealed a salient role of such messages on consumer evaluations of the restaurant’s trust, expertise, and brand equity.

Yet, CSR information available from publicly listed corporations is often poorly articulated, as it tends to be spread randomly throughout their websites and archives. This may explain why consumers seldom pay attention to such information in detail. Li et al. (2017) observe, however, that ceasing to publish CSR results creates a significantly higher negative impact than if they were never promulgated in the first place. Rhou and Singal (2020) opine that there is a need to properly distribute CSR messages, in addition to their implementation. In summary, better avenues to communicate CSR is a priority to firms; and clarity, frequency, and timeliness of reliable and factual social reporting are essential to firms’ public relation campaigns (The Global Initiative Reporting, 2013). There is a need to go beyond the current CSR research that is generally pertinent to industrial classification, size, quality standards, profitability, quality of discourse, and firm performance, as critics argue (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Despite prior research largely having acknowledged its importance in the tourism-hospitality literature (Lee et al., 2016; Rhou and Singal, 2020), CSR communication inquiry is still in its infancy, as most scholars neglect the communication part of it (e.g., Farrington et al., 2017; Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Proper organizational communication is particularly important in the face of crisis, as CSR and its intended message render a critical conduit that could offset the negative impact of major disruptions to organizations and their stakeholders (Coombs, 2018).

Importantly, CSR-based crisis response should be carefully designed and implemented depending on various circumstances. In other words, different CSR communication protocols should be crafted based upon the various nature of the crisis (e.g., to cope with, to mitigate, to confront, to instill confidence, etc.) (Ham and Kim, 2019). Such an approach may require careful scrutiny of the development of a crisis, along with mindful examination of changes to CSR strategies. Although such an inquiry is largely absent from the literature, the present study aims to showcase such a coevolutionary process between a crisis and CSR communication, as follows.

3. Methods

The objective of this study is to investigate the evolution of CSR along with progression of the outbreak in the foodservice industry and to answer the question of how restaurant chains adjust their CSR practices during different stages of a disaster to aid stakeholders to cope with extenuating circumstances. Corpus linguistics is a computer-assisted data analytical approach in modern linguistics that integrates linguistic theory and computational techniques (Pollach, 2012). An important feature that differentiates corpus linguistics from other forms of the examination of texts is its focus on natural language processing based on real-life language usages (McEnery and Wilson, 2001). The term corpus, from Latin, is used to reflect a large “body” (McEnery and Wilson, 2001). Therefore, a corpus is a large computerized body or collection of naturally occurring text (Berger et al., 2020). Corpus linguistics as a method that has been used for interdisciplinary research to explore different conventionalized metonymies as a way to understand organizations (Cornellissen, 2008).

Two types of analyses are regarded as central and classic in corpus-based approaches: *keyword analysis* and *concordance analysis* (also called keywords in context). Both are classic analytical techniques for corpus linguistics. A keyword is a word which “appears in a corpus statistically significantly and more frequently than would be expected by chance when compared to a corpus which is larger or of equal size” (Baker et al., 2006, p. 97). A keyword list indicates the collective “aboutness” of the one corpus relative to another. A keyword could be used as a search term in a corpus. Concordance lines of a keyword could also be obtained: these are “a list of all of the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context in which they occur – usually a few words to the left and right of the search term” (Baker et al., 2006, p. 43).

In this study, large restaurant chains listed in the 2019 Fortune 1000 list were chosen for data collection. Ten conglomerates were obtained from the list including Starbucks, McDonald’s, Yum China Holdings, Darden Restaurants, Yum Brands, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Bloomin’ Brands, Domino’s Pizza, Brinker International, and Cracker Barrel Old Country Store. All of them are US-based companies with headquarters in the country, and they had a fairly good coverage of the population of the restaurant business, with stores widely spread across the US landscape. Press releases of these companies published during the period of February to May 2020 were collected. This period represents a rapid progression of the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in the US starting from March as the incubation of the pandemic to May as the peak of the crisis. The February corpus was included only for comparative purposes.
as it marks the pre-crisis phase right before the pandemic hit the country. In total, the dataset consists of 143 press releases which account for 81,441 words. These press releases were then built into four corpora: February Press Release Corpus (20 press releases; 10,809 words), March Press Release Corpus (47 press releases; 28,898 words); April Press Release Corpus (52 press releases; 28,352 words) and May Press Release Corpus (24 press releases; 13,382 words). Keyword analysis and concordance analysis were conducted using corpus tools: Wmatrix (Rayson, 2008) and LancoBox (Brezina et al., 2018), respectively.

It is important to note that we used a log-likelihood (LL) with a threshold value of 15.13 (p< .001) to identify discrepancy of keywords between two corpora at the .001 level of significance. In other words, keyword frequency of a reference corpus (e.g., February) was contrasted with that of the other corpus (e.g., March), while only statistical higher (vs. lower) frequency of certain keywords is specified in the tables listed below. Also, stop words and company names were excluded from analysis to reduce bias from the data.

4. Findings

4.1. Keyword analysis

Underused and overused keywords of the March corpus relative to the February corpus are presented in Appendices 1 and 2. The keyword analysis here is used only to show comparison between the two. In particular, two themes – product and business – dominate the underused keywords in corporate communication, with keywords including “shamrock,” “shake,” “transaction,” “competition,” and “statement.” February reflected the pre-crisis period, when foodservice corporations were merely focusing on their taken-for-granted business practices without even paying attention to the coronavirus.

Underused keywords of the April corpus relative to the March corpus were obtained and summarized in Table 1. The underused keywords characterize the overall tone of the March corpus. A strong product and business orientation was featured through the significantly overused product-related keywords (e.g. “pineapple,” “matcha,” “honey,” “ginger,” “coconutmilk,” “cup,” “foam,” and “brew”) and business-related keywords (e.g. “partner,” “long-term,” “business,” “companies,” “fy20,” and “celebration”). March marked the beginning of the outbreak of the coronavirus in the United States. Therefore, four health-related keywords also appear in the March corpus, including “mental health,” “mental health care,” “health,” and “outbreak.”

Different from the March corpus, the April corpus tended to be less business-focused. Table 2 summarizes the significantly overused keywords in April relative to March. Only four keywords are significantly overused in April. Aside from the keyword “food” which appears once in March, the other three overused keywords only occur in April. In early-to-mid-March, the foodservice business was not seriously impacted by the pandemic in the US, as relatively few infection cases were reported. The March corpus shows a diverse content as shown in Table 1, with most of its keywords centering around its products along with business plans and visions. In April the coronavirus evolved to a much more serious phase amid city lockdowns that were prevalent throughout the nation. The April corpus mirrors this trend of the gradual evolution of the worsening situation due to a widespread of the coronavirus. As such, keywords that center on business as usual with product-related attributes largely vanished.

When comparing the May corpus with the April corpus, results reveal a gradual shift from business-centric to CSR-centric crisis responses. The underused keywords of May relative to April obtained in Table 3 feature these two divergent corporate enactment approaches. Based on log-likelihood values (LL = 15.13, p< .001), the top four keywords obtained in Table 3 are business-oriented, including “fiscal,” “quarter,” “restaurant,” and “sales.” Only a few keywords related to social responsibility appear in April, including “fund,” “times,” “meal(s),” and “healthcare,” while the US government claimed that April recorded an acute spur of COVID-19 infections. Thus, efforts to battle the virus become the dominant themes. Health or health-related issues received unprecedented attention and media coverage on a daily basis across different industries in the US. The April corpus echoes this drastically shifted attention in the wider community, with keywords related to social responsibilities directed towards healthcare workers and monetary efforts to mitigate the crisis.

Table 4 shows the overused keywords in May relative to the April corpus. The most significantly used keyword was “farmers” in May. A few keywords that show semantic relevance to this keyword include “land,” “farmland,” and “farming.” The second most frequently used keyword cluster was “sustainability,” which is semantically relevant to the keyword “sustainable.” The third most frequently used keyword was “young,” which is related to “future” and “next generation.” A reading of the concordance lines of these keywords via Wmatrix show that these keywords collectively presented the efforts of the restaurant industry in social responsibility for a wider community, as detailed below.

---

**Table 1** Underuse keywords of April relative to March.

| Keywords          | O1 (Apr.) | 1%  | O2 (Mar.) | 2%  | LL                  |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|---------------------|
| stores            | 31        | 0.12| 34        | 0.77| 50.99               |
| iced              | 0         | 0   | 10        | 0.23| 38.6                |
| cold              | 0         | 0   | 10        | 0.23| 38.6                |
| fy20              | 1         | 0.3 | 11        | 0.25| 35.89               |
| partners          | 78        | 0.3 | 43        | 0.98| 32.98               |
| mental_health     | 2         | 0.01| 11        | 0.25| 31.91               |
| pineapple         | 0         | 0   | 8         | 0.18| 30.88               |
| matcha            | 0         | 0   | 7         | 0.16| 27.02               |
| said              | 32        | 0.12| 23        | 0.52| 24.05               |
| mental_health_care| 0         | 0   | 6         | 0.14| 23.16               |
| long_term         | 0         | 0   | 6         | 0.14| 23.16               |
| honey             | 0         | 0   | 6         | 0.14| 23.16               |
| ginger            | 0         | 0   | 6         | 0.14| 23.16               |
| roasting          | 2         | 0.01| 8         | 0.18| 21.5                |
| health            | 30        | 0.12| 21        | 0.48| 21.37               |
| flavors           | 1         | 0   | 7         | 0.16| 21.41               |
| new               | 45        | 0.17| 26        | 0.59| 21.2                |
| business          | 49        | 0.19| 27        | 0.61| 20.69               |
| outbreak          | 6         | 0.02| 10        | 0.23| 19.3                |
| salted            | 0         | 0   | 5         | 0.11| 19.3                |
| drink             | 0         | 0   | 5         | 0.11| 19.3                |
| coconutmilk       | 0         | 0   | 5         | 0.11| 19.3                |
| companies         | 5         | 0.02| 9         | 0.18| 18.06               |
| he                | 4         | 0.02| 8         | 0.18| 16.86               |
| meeting           | 6         | 0.02| 9         | 0.2  |16.43               |
| cup               | 6         | 0.02| 9         | 0.2  |16.43               |
| was               | 21        | 0.08| 15        | 0.34| 15.59               |
| really            | 0         | 0   | 4         | 0.09| 15.44               |
| new_year          | 0         | 0   | 4         | 0.09| 15.44               |
| foam              | 0         | 0   | 4         | 0.09| 15.44               |
| celebration       | 0         | 0   | 4         | 0.09| 15.44               |
| brew              | 0         | 0   | 4         | 0.09| 15.44               |
| 2022              | 0         | 0   | 4         | 0.09| 15.44               |

Note: O1 and O2 are the observed frequency in April and March corpora, respectively. The %1 and %2 values show relative frequencies in the texts. The table is sorted at log-likelihood (LL) value = 15.13 or above.

**Table 2** Overuse keywords of April relative to March.

| Keywords          | O1 (Apr.) | 1%  | O2 (Mar.) | 2%  | LL                  |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|---------------------|
| restaurant        | 97        | 0.37| 0         | 0.0 | 30.42               |
| food              | 103       | 0.4 | 1         | 0.02| 24.89               |
| restaurants       | 67        | 0.26| 0         | 0.0 | 21.01               |
| meals             | 50        | 0.19| 0         | 0.0 | 15.68               |

Note: O1 and O2 are the observed frequency in April and March corpora, respectively. The %1 and %2 values show relative frequencies in the texts. The table is sorted at log-likelihood (LL) value = 15.13 or above.
Note: O1 and O2 are the observed frequency in May and April corpora, respectively. The %1 and %2 values show relative frequencies in the texts. The table is sorted at log-likelihood (LL) value = 15.13 or above.

| Keywords         | O1 (May) | 1%  | O2 (Apr.) | 2%  | LL    |
|------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|-------|
| fiscal           | 0        | 0   | 57        | 0.22| 43.88 |
| quarter          | 3        | 0.02| 79        | 0.3 | 41.93 |
| restaurant       | 7        | 0.06| 97        | 0.37| 39.36 |
| sales            | 9        | 0.07| 102       | 0.39| 36.6  |
| primarily        | 0        | 0   | 27        | 0.1 | 20.79 |
| meal             | 0        | 0   | 27        | 0.1 | 20.79 |
| times            | 0        | 0   | 25        | 0.1 | 19.25 |
| meals            | 4        | 0.03| 50        | 0.19| 19.1  |
| first            | 6        | 0.05| 59        | 0.23| 19.1  |
| fund             | 1        | 0.01| 33        | 0.13| 18.67 |
| expenses         | 1        | 0.01| 32        | 0.12| 17.96 |
| delivery         | 12       | 0.1 | 79        | 0.3 | 17.24 |
| comparable       | 3        | 0.02| 42        | 0.16| 17.14 |
| coffee           | 0        | 0   | 22        | 0.08| 16.94 |
| healthcare       | 4        | 0.03| 44        | 0.17| 15.47 |
| Cracker          | 0        | 0   | 20        | 0.08| 15.4  |

Note: O1 and O2 are the observed frequency in May and April corpora, respectively. The %1 and %2 values show relative frequencies in the texts. The table is sorted at log-likelihood (LL) value = 15.13 or above.

| Keywords         | O1 (May) | 1%  | O2 (Apr.) | 2%  | LL    |
|------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|-------|
| farmers          | 29       | 0.24| 0         | 0   | 66.18 |
| sustainability   | 20       | 0.16| 3         | 0.01| 30.14 |
| young            | 14       | 0.11| 1         | 0   | 25.37 |
| ventures         | 11       | 0.09| 0         | 0   | 25.1  |
| me               | 11       | 0.09| 0         | 0   | 25.1  |
| trust            | 9        | 0.07| 0         | 0   | 20.54 |
| lgbtq+           | 9        | 0.07| 0         | 0   | 20.54 |
| cultivate        | 9        | 0.07| 0         | 0   | 20.54 |
| future           | 18       | 0.15| 6         | 0.02| 18.7  |
| next_generation  | 8        | 0.07| 0         | 0   | 18.26 |
| sustainable      | 10       | 0.08| 1         | 0   | 16.89 |
| students         | 10       | 0.08| 1         | 0   | 16.89 |
| reopening        | 7        | 0.06| 0         | 0   | 15.97 |
| prom             | 7        | 0.06| 0         | 0   | 15.97 |
| land             | 7        | 0.06| 0         | 0   | 15.97 |
| farmland         | 7        | 0.06| 0         | 0   | 15.97 |
| farming          | 7        | 0.06| 0         | 0   | 15.97 |

As the coronavirus pandemic continued to spread through the nation, costing tens of thousands of lives while sending millions into hospitals, coupled with stay-at-home orders, restaurants have finally realized how catastrophic the outbreak has been to the foodservice industry and its supply chain. Some companies are on the brink of bankruptcy. For example, practitioner journals commonly reported that farmers were forced to pour milk down the drain in April after demand plummeted amid the crisis (Andrews, 2020). Therefore, in May, helping the wider communities to survive and to sustain their viability since the outbreak has become a dominant theme in media coverage. The May corpus reflects this change of attention by showing engagement in a wide range of social responsibility efforts to offer help to farmers, young people, students, and entrepreneurs.

### 4.2. Concordance analysis

After obtaining the keywords for the three corpora, a qualitative approach was employed. First, two researchers read through the associated concordances from all keywords listed in Tables 1–4 from the actual data source (i.e., press releases). Themes that emerged for the four corpora were validated through a data triangulation process in which external sources, such as information from news and social media (The Jakarta Post, 2020; Yaffe-Bellany and Corkery, 2020), as well as the extant literature (e.g., Farrington et al., 2017; Rhou and Singal, 2020; Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018), were acquired to justify the coding of these themes. This process helped the researchers to improve the validity of data interpretations and to “shed additional light on the textual content” (Decrop, 1999, p. 159). It is important to note that themes that emerged from these four corpora also reflect a timeline of the progression of the coronavirus pandemic (see Table 5).

Stage 0: The pre-dawn stage of the crisis. This period reflected the time right before the pandemic hit the US. As such, restaurant chains were following the taken-for-granted corporate communication protocols to promulgate business performance and success in 2019, while longing for business engagement in 2020 and beyond. For example, McDonald’s announced that “Until then, you can still enjoy a hot and delicious juicy 100% fresh beef Quarter Pounder at your local McDonald’s.” Domino’s Pizza disclosed that “DPG to sell its 71% interest in Domino’s Norway to the Minority Shareholders for consideration comprised of a combination of the payment of a nominal amount in cash.”

Stage 1: The incubation stage (dawn) of the crisis. This period marked the beginning of the outbreak in the US, with reported cumulative cases ranging from 62 (Mar. 1) to 140,640 (Mar. 31); most of these cases originated from New York, the first epicenter in the nation (Statista, 2020a). In early March, when COVID-19 had just hit the US, restaurants only realized minor impacts to their business operations, as manifested through the themes of product, business, and social responsibility (internal stakeholder-related, such as physical and mental health issues). Among them, the product theme was the most dominant, while the social responsibility theme was the least. At the dawn of the prolonged pandemic, most restaurants were doing “business as usual” with organizational practices pertinent to better serving the clientele. However, as the outbreak gained its momentum towards the end of March, different states were beginning to take their own measures by issuing stay-at-home orders until the end of April or beyond, as well as to enact partial/full city lockdown in order to contain the spread of the virus (Wu et al., 2020). As a result, CSR initiatives reflected organizational strategy to preserve good physical and mental health conditions for staff members (i.e., internal stakeholders), while the goal was to maintain the status quo and to operate businesses as usual to the extent possible. For example, Starbucks put a strong emphasis on “providing innovative, industry-leading benefits for employees with new mental health care benefit in partnership with Lyra Health” (see Table 6).

Stage 2: The acceleration of crisis. This period represented a rapid acceleration of the outbreak, with reported cases ranging from 163,199 (Apr. 1) to 1,003,970 (Apr. 30); COVID-19 was spreading across the nation, while New York remained the most severe epicenter (Statista, 2020b).
Table 6
| corpora  | Themes                        | Concordance lines |
|---------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Product |                               |                   |
| February | Business                      |                   |
|         | Social responsibility         |                   |
|         |                               |                   |
| March   |                               |                   |
| Social  |                               |                   |
|        |                               |                   |
| April   |                               |                   |
| Business|                               |                   |

**Table 6 (continued)**

| corpora  | Themes                        | Concordance lines |
|---------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Product |                               |                   |
|         |                               |                   |
| May     |                               |                   |
| Social  |                               |                   |

2020a). As the coronavirus continued to spread widely across the landscape, restaurants were forced to shut down in accordance with city lockdown policy. The product theme was dismissed in the April corpus, while the business operation and social responsibility themes remained. However, the CSR focus of the foodservice business greatly shifted to emphasize charity and philanthropy for the general public, with the offering of free meals and food to healthcare workers and residents with urgent needs, as well as providing funding to local community and the World Health Organization to fight against the coronavirus. For example, McDonald’s donated “nearly 4 million Thank You Meals to healthcare workers and first responders in the first six days” (see Table 6). Interestingly, the keyword “healthcare” was used in the context of CSR engagements as well.

Stage 3: The peak of the crisis. This period reflected the climax of the pandemic in the US with reported cases ranging from 1,035,353 (May 1) to 1,734,040 (May 31), while the virus had widely spread across all 50 states (Statista, 2020a). As infection and death tolls continued to climb, coupled with acute job-loss claims, many industries were facing
unprecedented adversity from two fronts. On one hand, demands were sharply curtailed and many services (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and schools) were forced to shut down temporarily. On the other hand, supply chains where largely disrupted with a lack of manpower to deliver goods. This phenomenon has been particularly devastating to the restaurant industry and its suppliers (i.e., farmers). As the New York Times reported, farmers were forced to destroy products such as vegetables, eggs, and milk because many of their industry partners were closed (Yaffe-Bellany and Corkery, 2020). This situation began in mid-April and it worsened in May, putting farmers in a severe plight. As closed (Yaffe-Bellany and Corkery, 2020). This situation began in mid-April and it worsened in May, putting farmers in a severe plight. As

deliver goods. This phenomenon has been particularly devastating to the

darmers face to maintain a sustainable farm

tainability in the agricultural industry. For example, Chipotle put much

emphasis on “empowering the next generation of farmers by offering education, scholarships, grants and three year contract to young farmers” (see Table 6). These initiatives were generally aimed at “understanding the barriers farmers face to maintain a sustainable farm aligned with the company’s Food with integrity standards” (see Table 6 for more details of exemplary statements).

5. Discussion

To summarize our findings, we integrated a framework that depicts the coevolutionary course of CSR development through three different stages of the development of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath (see Fig. 1). It takes on the process tradition of crisis management (Williams et al., 2017), while putting CSR at the center stage of crisis response from restaurant enterprises to their stakeholders. The figure illustrates three phases of crisis development in the US to depict the evolution of the outbreak that subsequently impacted various stakeholders of the foodservice business. In Stage 1, the crisis weakened organizational models and practices, leading to reduced work performance. Therefore, corporate social initiatives were mainly focusing on internal stakeholders such as the employees. As the crisis gained its momentum in Stage 2, it brought devastation beyond individual organizations to the entire society (i.e., societal adversity) and hence, greatly reduced consumer demand for dine-in restaurant services. CSR efforts thus centered primarily on salvage to the local community (i.e., to mitigate severity of the crisis). These initiatives went beyond focusing merely on employees, and were devoted mainly to the general public through donation of food and money to the poor, healthcare workers, and those in desperate need. During the climax of the crisis in Stage 3, the entire economy was virtually at a standstill, putting tremendous pressure on the very existence of small businesses, especially the agriculture industry. This stall challenged the entire existing supply chain, while exposing acute vulnerabilities of the food and beverage (F&B) ecosystem. Hence, the role of CSR was primarily a means to expedite rescue to farmers, as they are so vital to the supply chain of the food-service business. In essence, the figure underscores a timely process in which restaurant chains exercised their organizational dexterity to salvage different stakeholders at various phases of the crisis. Together, they culminated to mitigate seismic changes caused by severe environmental turbulence, while fostering hope and resilience for the sustainability of the hospitality industry.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The primary contributions of the present inquiry to the literature are threefold. For CSR research, this study disentangles social responsibility into three distinct practices (i.e., CSR-to-internal stakeholders, CSR-to-community, and CSR-to-supply chain) that are geared toward different stakeholders at various stages of a crisis. In other words, this study advances the current knowledge of CSR (Farrington et al., 2017; Rhou and Singal, 2020; e.g., Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018) by taking a process view to assess the evolving course of actions undertaken to address the weakening of stakeholders at different time periods. That is, rather than taking the conventional static view of CSR that is based on cross-sectional design (e.g., Kim and Kim, 2014; Sung et al., 2020; Wong and Gao, 2014; Youn et al., 2015), this research takes a longitudinal approach to juxtapose changes of CSR focus along with the urgent needs of major stakeholders. This dynamic view of CSR adds new nuances to the existing literature by showcasing the time-dependent nature of CSR in delivering its best efforts to expedite resources to areas that are needed the most. These CSR endeavors also render different intended consequences: to maintain the firm’s business model and status quo, to mitigate the severity of crisis in the local community, and to sustain a viable future for the local economy and the industry. CSR therefore does not stand alone in isolation. Rather, the process view of CSR conceptualizes a firm’s initiatives toward societal and economic deeds that are highly coherent with the magnitude and impact of the disturbance caused by a crisis. CSR as a process hence improvises a new avenue that helps scholars to better understand the dynamism and complexity of corporate societal endeavors.

For crisis management, this study draws on the crisis-as-process perspective (Williams et al., 2017) to better realize how hospitality firms can respond to adversity. In particular, we focused on crisis communication as a means for organizations to build favorable corporate images through positive frames. Thus, CSR represents an impression management mechanism (Hooghiemstra, 2000) that evolves over the course of crisis development. To this end, the present inquiry enriches situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007; Ham and Kim, 2019). Rather than utilizing corporate communication to mitigate reputational threat during the pandemic, this research presents evidence suggesting that restaurant enterprises such as Chipotle, Domino’s Pizza, and Darden have capitalized on the crisis as an opportunity to negotiate favorable brand images through intensified CSR endeavors. These responses to major disturbances are germane to both cognitive (e.g., instilling physical and mental health of employees) and behavioral (e.g., charity and meal donations as well as supporting local farmers) actions, as the literature suggests (James et al., 2011), which continue to evolve over time. Such strategic responses are not only situational (i.e., based on the intensity of the crisis), but they are also focused with an objective to enact organizational goals (e.g., to maintain, to mitigate, and to sustain, as discussed above) to the corresponding stakeholders.

Taken together, advancement of CSR and crisis management research also helps us to better understand the highly variegated and complex system of crisis response. As Fig. 1 illustrates, three evolutions co-occurred: crisis evolution, CSR evolution, and stakeholder-focus evolution. This symbiotic view of evolution among multiple events and organizations points to a nascent phenomenon – coevolution of CSR in crisis response – as organizational societal practices coevolved along with the global crisis and its subsequent impact on the stakeholders. In biology, coevolution refers to a process where species with different development influence one another. In organizational research, the term largely reflects a process in which evolution of an organization resonates with changes in the socio-economic environment due to factors such as technological innovations (Grodal et al., 2015). The present study highlights such a situation where severe environmental jolts caused adversity to organizations, local community, and the entire supply chain. CSR was hence developed as a means to aid these stakeholders to build resilience. In other words, mega disruption from exterminating

February is excluded from the framework because the evolution of CSR development began in March.
circumstances has exerted selective pressures to drive changes of organizational crisis response through various phases of social practices. This coevolutionary interaction thus opens new areas of academic inquiry and industry practice on how a crisis and CSR co-influence organizational stakeholders and render contrary forces that affect the survival of these actors.

5.2. Managerial implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept through the global landscape, shattering lives and causing mega disruptions to businesses as never before. Overall, our findings showcase that keywords and concordances germane to restaurant conglomerates’ crisis response evolved with gradual progression from product-focused to CSR-focused keywords along with the progression of the environmental jolts from outbreak and adversities stakeholders faced. Such evolution highly reflects the socioeconomic situation in the US with the outbreak beginning to develop in March (Stage 1: incubation of crisis), worsening in April (Stage 2: acceleration of crisis), and reaching a climax in May (Stage 3: peak of crisis). The corpora mirror the timeline of the evolution of the crisis by reflecting a change in CSR-based crisis communication practices intended to bolster a positive corporate image amid severe organizational duress and adversity.

As restaurant traffic dropped precipitously, many small vendors were forced to partially close their establishments, while others suffered permanent closure. Whereas the entire hospitality industry is in turmoil, sustainability of this supply chain is critical to the success of the food industry and its supply chain. As the pandemic continued to develop its momentum and to accelerate from product-focused to CSR-focused keywords, the corpora reflect the timeline of the evolution of the crisis by reflecting a change in CSR-based crisis communication practices intended to bolster a positive corporate image amid severe organizational duress and adversity.

Empirics available from our findings thus demonstrate heroic stories of how supply chain partners came to rescue and salvage local producers and suppliers as well as to assist them to endure their plight with great fortitude. The current study articulates such a phenomenon in which CSR development of restaurant enterprises such as McDonald’s, Starbucks, Yum Brands, Darden Restaurants, and more were concerned about these external actors and not just their own stakes (e.g., business realignment and profit) (see examples from Table 6). We believe that these initiatives will pay out in the long run as good deeds to the society and humanity, commensurate with a broader sense of social responsibility. They have been demonstrated as effective means to build goodwill, engagement, preference, and loyalty (e.g., Jeon et al., 2020; Kucukusta et al., 2019; Sung et al., 2020). Despite restaurants continuing to face uncertainty, with curtailed consumer spending especially in the face of a resurgence of the virus in June and July – which may reinitiate city lockdown and stay-at-home orders – those who invest in CSR to keep the industry afloat and the society sustainable will be in consumers’ daily conversation and hence, will eventually prevail.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Despite this research undertaking a longitudinal approach with data collected from large foodservice firms in the US, there remain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, only three months of data were included in this investigation, which primarily focused on US restaurant chains. As the pandemic continued to develop its momentum and to plunder the country in June, future research is encouraged to acquire additional data to better explore the full trajectory of the crisis and hence, CSR responses. Second, there might exist cultural differences in other countries regarding CSR practices. This is especially true in the time of a crisis, as the literature has showcased cultural variations in crisis management across the globe (Goombs, 2018; Dhanesh and Srinamesh, 2018). We encourage future studies to compare and contrast these cultural differences through methods such as corpus linguistics, as it affords statistical analyses on lexical terms.

6. Conclusions

The objective of the present investigation is to explore the dynamics of CSR as an organizational crisis response mechanism in the hospitality context. We utilized corpus linguistics as a methodological approach to assess lexical items and their semantics through keyword analysis by contrasting underused and overused words from four different stages of the crisis: pre-dawn, incubation, acceleration, and peak periods. Concordance analysis further assisted us to understand the connotative meaning of major keywords and themes within the context in which they were presented. By drawing on data collected from press releases amongst ten Fortune 1000 foodservice enterprises, findings provide a
rather comprehensive picture about US restaurant corporations’ endeavors to cope with the pandemic along with efforts to alleviate the pain endured by their stakeholders. Importantly, this research investigates the coherence between the impacts of the pandemic and crisis responses that work in tandem to alleviate stakeholders’ plight. It further improves the coevolution of CSR (i.e., CSR-as-process) as a new line of inquiry in the hospitality literature.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 72074230, 72004239), Guangdong Provincial Department of Education (No. 2019GJJK052), and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies Research Grant for Young Researchers (No. 18QN27).

References

Acquier, A., Gond, J.-P., Pasquero, J., 2011. Rediscovering Howard R. Bowen’s legacy: the unachieved agenda and continuing relevance of social responsibilities of the businessman. Bus. Soc. 50 (4), 607–646.

Alpert, G., Sandholz, S., Hagenh Koch, M., Rizzi, F., Frey, M., Garschagen, M., 2019. Tourism, crisis: an interdisciplinary approach. Ann. Tour. Res. 79, 102808.

Andrews, L., 2020. Farmers Are Forced to Pour A MILLION Litres of Milk Down the Drain in April After Demand From Factories Plummeted Amid Coronavirus Crisis As Dairy Industry Faces £1bn This Month. DailyMail.Reviewed 13/06, 2020 from https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8277451/Farmers-forced-pour-MILLION-litres-milk-drain-April.html.

Avraham, E., 2015. Destination image repair during crisis: attracting tourism during the Arab Spring uprisings. Tour. Manag. 47, 224–232.

Baker, P., Hardie, A., McEnery, T., 2006. A Glossary of Corpus Linguistics. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Berger, J., Humphreys, A., Ludwig, S., Moe, W.W., Netzer, O., Schweidel, D.A., 2020. Uniting the tribe: using text for marketing insight. J. Mark. 84 (1), 1–25.

Blackman, D., Ritchie, B.W., 2008. Tourism crisis management and organizational learning. J. Travel Tour. Mark. 23 (2–4), 45–57.

Breznin, V., Timperley, M., McEnery, T., 2018. #LancsBox: Lancaster University Corpus of Texts. Retrieved April 25, 2020, from http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: toward the moral imperatives why companies engage in corporate social reporting. J. Bus. Ethics 27 (4), 319–327.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: Reviewed, rated, revised. Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manage. 29 (5), 437–454.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: the case of Hong Kong. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 31 (4), 1143–1156.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: the case of Hong Kong. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 31 (4), 1143–1156.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: the case of Hong Kong. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 31 (4), 1143–1156.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: the case of Hong Kong. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 31 (4), 1143–1156.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: the case of Hong Kong. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 31 (4), 1143–1156.

Carroll, A.B., 1991. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: the case of Hong Kong. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 31 (4), 1143–1156.
Vong, F., Wong, I.A., 2013. Corporate and social performance links in the gaming industry. J. Bus. Res. 66 (9), 1674–1681.
Wong, H., Tong, J., Takeuchi, R., George, G., 2016. Corporate social responsibility: an overview and new research directions. Acad. Manag. J. 59 (2), 534-544.
Williams, T.A., Gruber, D.A., Sutcliffe, K.M., Shepherd, D.A., Zhao, E.Y., 2017. Organizational response to adversity: fusing crisis management and resilience research streams. Acad. Manag. Ann. 11 (2), 733-769.
Wong, I., Gao, J.H., 2014. Exploring the direct and indirect effects of CSR on organizational commitment: the mediating role of corporate culture. Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manage. 26 (4), 500-525.

Wu, J., Smith, S., Khurana, M., Siemiatzko, C., DeJesus-Banos, B., 2020. Stay-at-home Orders Across the Country. Retrieved June 20, 2020, from https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/here-are-stay-home-orders-across-country-n1168736.
Yaffe-Bellany, D., Corkery, M., 2020. Dumped Milk, Smashed Eggs, Plowed Vegetables: Food Waste of the Pandemic. Retrieved June 20, 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/.
Youn, H., Hua, N., Lee, S., 2015. Does size matter? Corporate social responsibility and firm performance in the restaurant industry. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 51, 127-134.