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Community social responsibility and the performance of small tourism enterprises: Moderating effects of entrepreneurs' demographics

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Abstract

This study investigated the two main dimensions of small tourism enterprises' (STEs') community social responsibility and their impact on firms' objective and subjective performance. It also explored the moderating effects of STE owners' demographics on the relationships between the two community social responsibility dimensions and firm performance. By the survey data from STEs in the historical towns in southwestern China, the empirical findings suggested that engaging in socially responsible behavior at the community level contributes to STEs' subjective performance; and the influence of community engagement on STEs' performance is moderated by the owners' demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and birthplace.

KEYWORDS

China, community social responsibility, lifestyle business, small tourism enterprises, upper echelons theory

1 | INTRODUCTION

In most countries, small businesses take center stage in the tourism industry (Font, Garay, & Jones, 2016; Hallak, Assaker, & O'Connor, 2014) and play a key role in the sustainable development of tourist destinations—economically, socially, and environmentally. However, small tourism enterprises (STEs) often face great challenges to their performance or sustained success and incur a fairly high risk of business failure (Ateljevic, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various factors influencing STEs' performance.

One such factor is STEs' community social responsibility (CSR). Firms' social responsibility has been defined as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society." Enterprises should build close cooperative relationships with their stakeholders by factoring social, environmental, and other concerns into their business decisions (European Commission, 2011). The exercise of social responsibility at the community level involves cooperating with and supporting the community by offering charitable donations, establishing educational initiatives, supporting volunteer programs, and other activities (Inoue & Lee, 2011). Social responsibility is one of the most important dimensions of

business (Hallak, Brown, & Lindsay, 2013; Peake, Cooper, Fitzgerald, & Muske, 2015), especially for small enterprises, due to their close connections with local communities (Peake et al., 2015).

Another important factor influencing the behaviors of small businesses is the characteristics of their owners. Upper echelons theory (UET) has been used widely to demonstrate the influence of top executives' (including owners') values and cognitive bases on their firms' strategies and performance, and executives' values are reflected in their demographic characteristics (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). UET may also explain the influence of owners' values and cognitive bases on the relationship between their social responsibility at the community level and their firms' performance. Whether UET can be effectively applied in a small business, context has yet to be investigated. However, some authors have argued that both small businesses' CSR and their performance depend on their owners' values and cognitive bases (Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2004; Pansiri, 2007).

The first aim of this study is to provide empirical evidence of the influence of STEs' CSR activities on their performance. The study extends the previous literature by dividing CSR into two dimensions and comparing their influence on STEs' performance; the performance

of STEs is also categorized into objective and subjective dimensions to capture the possible divergence of small businesses' motivations in the tourism industry. Second, the study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the moderating effects of STE owners' demographic characteristics on the association between their enterprises' CSR and performance. Following Hambrick's (2007) recommendation that future researchers investigate the effects of executives' values and cognitive bases under different national systems, unique demographic characteristics such as owners' birthplace and ethnicity are included in the Chinese STE context. Testing for the indirect moderating effects of owners is also expected to contribute to the literature on UET in the strategic management field.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | CSR and the performance of small businesses

To fulfill their social responsibility, firms should cooperate with their stakeholders by factoring social, environmental, and other concerns into their business decisions (European Commission, 2011). This ensures that firms' relationships with their primary stakeholders are tailored to stakeholder needs and that they exercise their social responsibility in diverse dimensions (Clarkson, 1995). Of these dimensions, the level of CSR is critical to small businesses due to their intricate relationships with the communities in which they operate (Niehm, Swinney, & Miller, 2008; Peake et al., 2015). Small tourism businesses in historical towns communicate with the community not only by providing support through charitable giving, educational initiatives, and other volunteer programs, such as large companies (Inoue & Lee, 2011), but also through their daily business cooperation in areas such as supplying materials and coconstructing community environments (Besser & Miller, 2001; Garay & Font, 2013). However, few insights have been gained into CSR, especially its influence on the performance of small tourism businesses (Niehm et al., 2008).

In the literature, almost all CSR issues have been addressed in the context of small enterprises, especially family businesses. Certain factors have been found to influence CSR. For example, Peake et al. (2015) proved that the duration of the owner's family in the community leads a firm to take more social responsibility at the community level. Besser and Miller (2001, 2004) also found that the personal beliefs of owners and managers influenced CSR. Through cluster analysis, Besser and Miller (2001) divided 675 small business operators in 10 Iowa cities into four groups, "civic leaders, alienated business operators, followers in high collective action communities, and followers in low collective action communities," on the basis of CSR. They found that the differences between these clusters were associated with the operators' demographics and belief in the usefulness of community support strategies for business success. Business network membership has also been shown to be connected to businesses' CSR. Using a random sample of 460 nonmetro small business operators in the USA, Besser, Miller, and Perkins (2006) showed that networked businesses engaged more actively in socially responsible behaviors than nonnetworked businesses.

The impact of CSR on firms' performance has also been emphasized in the literature. Besser and Miller (2001) reported that high levels of community support made small businesses more successful. A similar result was obtained by Niehm et al. (2008) for family-centered businesses. Using principal component analysis, they divided CSR into three dimensions: commitment to the community, community support, and sense of community (explaining 43% of the total variance). They also found that although these different dimensions had different effects on firms' performance, socially responsible behaviors at the community level generally increased the sustainability of family businesses in small rural communities. In research on small tourism businesses, community-level social responsibility has been taken only as a dimension of corporate social responsibility, in which capacity it has been shown to positively affect firms' performance (Wang, Bai, & Xu, 2015). No attention has been paid specifically to firms' social responsibility exercised at the community level. Similarly, Garay and Font (2012) noted that firms reported above-average satisfaction with their financial performance as a result of activities such as "promoting consumption of local products" or "choosing local suppliers." To the best of our knowledge, however, only Hallak et al. (2013) have looked at small and medium-sized tourism enterprises' support for local communities, which they found to have positive consequences for firms' performance.

The above research in the small business context indicates that some of the personal characteristics of owners influence their firms' community-level socially responsible behaviors and the economic consequences of these behaviors. However, two significant gaps in the literature should be noted. First, most studies have taken small businesses' CSR as a whole, without exploring its diverse dimensions. Second, STEs' performance should be gauged not only by their competitiveness in the market but also relative to the noneconomic targets of their owners. An STE's objective performance can be measured by financial items reflecting the firm's survival relative to other firms in the same industry, and its subjective performance can be measured by nonfinancial items such as its owner's satisfaction or the firm's fulfillment of expectations, especially for firms with lifestyle-oriented motivations (Kropp, Lindsay, & Schoham, 2006). Both objective and subjective dimensions should be considered when measuring the performance of STEs.

This study attempts to fill these gaps in the literature by exploring STEs' CSR in depth and analyzing its various effects on firms' performance, both subjective and financial, with particular attention paid to the firm owners' characteristics.

2.2 | UET and owner characteristics

UET was initially proposed by Hambrick and Mason (1984), based on bounded rationality. It generally emphasizes the influence of senior managers' characteristics on firms' strategic decisions and performance. The theory has three main tenets (Carpenter et al., 2004). First, a firm's strategic decisions reflect its top executives' values and cognitive bases; second, executives' values and cognitive bases are a function of their observable demographic characteristics, such as age, educational experience, and functional background; and third, executives' observable characteristics determine organizational

decisions and outcomes (Hambrick, 2007). The use of executives' demographic characteristics as proxies for their cognitive bases and values has been shown to be valid and reliable in several research fields, although findings in this area may be incomplete (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). UET thus provides a practical method of empirical testing that circumvents the great difficulty of obtaining conventional psychometric data on top executives.

UET has been shown in many studies to explain various business strategies and the performance of large companies (Cheng, Chan, & Leung, 2010). A few studies have concentrated on the application of the theory in the tourism industry, and the demographics of chief executive officers/top management teams have been shown to impact their risk-taking decisions (Lee & Moon, 2016), overall franchising decisions (Moon, 2015), and alliance decisions (Pansiri, 2007). Using this theory, Park, Kim, and McCleary (2014) also investigated the influence of top managers' environmental attitudes on their hotels' environmental management activities. In these studies, demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and education were used extensively.

Generally, the owner of an STE is the only investor or one of the main investors in the business. The owner not only decides on the firm's daily operations (Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011) but also shapes the firm's operational targets. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether and how owners' personal cognitive biases and values influence the relationship between their firms' community-wide socially responsible behaviors and business performance. UET supplies a useful theoretical basis for this study. Demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and education have been used in previous research as accurate indicators of small business owners' personal values and characteristics.

Owners' characteristics are particularly important to STEs. STEs with a lifestyle-oriented motivation have become predominant in the tourism industry (Thomas et al., 2011). The owners of these lifestyle businesses are attracted by the beautiful natural environments and relaxing atmospheres of remote rural tourist destinations, such as China's historical towns (Thomas et al., 2011). Their firms' operations are not necessarily conducted solely for profit; they may be directed towards multiple goals, such as achieving a work–life balance. Firms' different motivations may result in different socially responsible behaviors (Alcantara & Kshetri, 2013) and have different effects on their business performance. These enterprises tend to have multiple goals in their business operation, financial and nonfinancial, which are very much determined by their own subjective evaluation.

2.3 | Hypotheses regarding the moderating effects of owners' demographics

In addition to the generally positive results of such activities reported in the previous literature (Besser & Miller, 2001; Hallak et al., 2013), taking social responsibility for a community has been shown to bring extra benefits for STEs. First, it helps to cushion the negative influence of management incompetence and other external shocks. For STEs, these weaknesses are generally related to high turnover and employee scarcity (Ateljevic, 2007; Manyara & Jones, 2007), over-competitive business environments (Hallak et al., 2014), and external disturbances

to firms' operations. By engaging in socially responsible activities at the community level and thereby improving their communication with the community, STEs build friendship, trust, cooperation, a sense of shared vision, and their own social capital (Besser & Miller, 2001; Niehm et al., 2008). This not only creates an atmosphere conducive to healthy competition but also helps to strengthen management competence and reduce external disturbances. Second, taking social responsibility for the community can bring emotional support for the owners of STEs. This is especially significant for lifestyle STE owners who wish to enjoy a friendly and relaxing community atmosphere. The core principle of social capital theory is that the more connections individuals make, the better off they are emotionally, socially, physically, and financially (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008). As communication increases when STEs engage in socially responsible activities, these activities can build closer relationships between STE owners and the community.

Cushioning the effects of negative incidents and/or gaining emotional support can help STE owners to overcome operational difficulties and increase their sense of achievement and satisfaction (Peake et al., 2015). But as STEs are limited by their weaknesses relative to larger scale firms (Ateljevic, 2007) and the motivations of STEs in tourism destinations tend to be lifestyle oriented (Thomas et al., 2011), the influence of STEs' socially responsible activities at the community level on their objective performance may be relatively weak. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H1** Engaging in socially responsible activities at the community level significantly improves STEs' subjective performance but has a nonsignificant influence on objective performance.

The operation of STEs is determined largely by their owners (Thomas et al., 2011). To gauge the influence of owners' personal values on their firms' operational decisions and performance, the moderating effects of owners' demographic characteristics on the associations between their firms' socially responsible behaviors on behalf of the community and their firms' performance are discussed here one by one. Relevant demographic characteristics include not only gender, age, and education, as used in the previous literature, but also birthplace and ethnicity, based on the STE characteristics observed in the initial fieldwork.

Peake et al. (2015) found gender to indirectly influence firms' participation in community-oriented social responsibility activities. Generally, people of different genders have different motivations and behaviors, according to the theory of self-construal from social psychology (Peake et al., 2015). For example, female owners tend to be more socially oriented and sensitive to ethical issues than their male counterparts (Cheng et al., 2010). They are more sensitive to others' needs and better at listening, reducing intragroup conflict and making a good impression on their firms' stakeholders (Burgess & Tharenou, 2002). These interdependent self-construal and socially oriented merits encourage women to become involved in the community and actively pursue their social support goals. Female entrepreneurs are more likely than male entrepreneurs to start small businesses to balance their work and family lives (Hazudin, Kader, Tarmuji, Ishak, & Ali, 2015) or to become independent and gain recognition from the

community (Chu, Kara, Zhu, & Gok, 2011). Men are more concerned with achieving wealth and improving their firms' financial performance (Chen & Elston, 2013). Therefore, compared with male entrepreneurs, women obtain more satisfaction and fulfillment by engaging with the community through socially responsible activities. But their relative lack of enthusiasm for controlling business operations limits the effect of their socially responsible behaviors on their objective performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H2a** : The association between CSR and STEs' subjective performance is moderated by owners' gender: it is stronger if a firm's owner is female.

The age of the owner of a firm is expected to impact the firm's strategic decisions. The characteristics of older executives, such as a tendency to engage in more conservative behavior, greater risk aversion, and a greater likelihood to obey rules and routines, are thought to be consistent with the targets of CSR (Jiang, 2010). Older owners are better able to coordinate the complicated relationships within their communities by performing socially responsible activities (Legoherel, Callo, Gallopel, & Peters, 2004). Through empirical testing, Besser (1999) showed that older operators provided more community support than younger operators. However, Niehm et al. (2008) found that the influence of owners' age on firms' socially responsible behaviors at community level was nonsignificant.

Many STE owners, especially middle-aged ones, are lifestyle-oriented (Xu & Ma, 2014). They usually already have good financial reserves and seek a high quality of life and the benefits of the local environment over financial performance (Morrison, Carlsen, & Weber, 2010; Thomas et al., 2011; Xu & Ma, 2014). They tend to enjoy a friendly local atmosphere, especially if they engage in socially responsible activities towards the community. Meanwhile, age is perceived as an indicator of valuable experience and knowledge in Chinese culture (Cheng et al., 2010). Older owners are thus significantly more likely to use their close relationships with the community to promote their businesses and increase their firms' financial performance. In contrast, engaging in socially responsible activities may be extremely costly for young STE owners, who have to fight to make a profit during the early stages of their businesses. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H2b** : The consequences of CSR for STEs' performance are stronger when firms' owners are older.

Chinese people tend to be strongly attached to their hometowns, and their "guanxi" relationships are also very much linked to their places of origin (An, 2015). This sense of attachment is deepened by the differences in language and culture between regions. Depending on their birthplace, STE owners are characterized as locals or outsiders. Compared with STE owners from other regions or provinces, local owners generally have more experience of living in the community and share the language, habits, and customs of local residents, helping them to develop a greater attachment to their communities. As Hallak et al. (2013) suggested, owners' place attachment strongly supports their family businesses' participation in community development activities, and thus, local owners are more likely to receive emotional rewards and satisfaction when they forge connections with the community through active engagement at the community level. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H2c** : The association between STEs' social responsibility at the community level and their subjective performance is moderated by owners' birthplace: the association is stronger if a firm's owner is from the local area.

China's population is ethnically diverse, but the majority belongs to the Han ethnic group. For historical reasons, Han Chinese adapt to new environments faster and more easily than other minority groups (He, Zhang, & Li, 2004). In addition, Han business people have a longer tradition of working hard for profit than many of their minority counterparts (Gao, Dang, & Wan, 2013). It is thus logical to hypothesize that Han owners differ from minority owners in their business operations. Based on the literature, it is postulated that relative to owners of other ethnicities, Han owners can make greater improvements to their financial performance by engaging with the community. However, no studies have addressed the differences in operational satisfaction between Han owners and minority owners. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H2d** : The association between STEs' social responsibility at the community level and their objective performance is moderated by owner ethnicity: the association is stronger if a firm's owner is Han.

Generally, a high education level reflects open-mindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, a high capacity for information processing, and risk-taking tendencies (Hambrick, 2007). A few studies have indicated that education is positively related to small business owners' community leadership (Besser, 1999; Besser & Miller, 2001) or to their firms' outcomes (Fairlie & Robb, 2005); however, Niehm et al. (2008) found that owners' education level was not significantly associated with small family businesses' CSR engagement. In Chinese Confucianist culture, gaining a high level of education is critical to an individual's success (Pearce, 2006). STE owners in China are thus very eager to increase their businesses' financial and nonfinancial performance to demonstrate their success. Due to these high expectations, education may have a nonsignificant or marginally significant effect on firms' performance even if better-educated STE owners more actively engage in CSR activities. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H2e** : The association between STEs' CSR and performance is not moderated by the educational level of STE owners.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This study was based on a quantitative research design. A questionnaire survey was used as the main research instrument to analyze the effect of CSR on STEs' performance and explore the moderating effects of owners' demographic characteristics.

3.1 | Identification of the business sector and field area

The empirical findings were drawn from a sample of small guesthouses in China. With their beautiful scenery and profound cultural traditions, historical towns attract not only tourists but also many STEs (Xu & Ma, 2014). Our fieldwork took place in southwestern China, in the two famous towns of Dali and Yangshuo. The research team had been working in these areas for the previous several years and had thus accumulated good knowledge of local small businesses. These towns are best known for their pioneering role in hosting international travelers in China. They were among the earliest to develop a tourism industry in the 1980s, when China "opened its door to the outside world." Due to their open business environment and leisurely atmosphere, these areas have a flourishing tourism industry, attracting not only domestic tourists, especially backpackers, but also a large number of STEs (Xu & Ma, 2014). Guesthouses make up a large proportion of the STEs in these areas (Wang et al., 2015). As they provide tourists with a full range of services, such as lodging, food, beverages, and other amenities, these guesthouses tend to have closer connections with the local community than other business entities (Wang et al., 2015). For all of these reasons, Dali and Yangshuo offered typical cases for our study.

3.2 | Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed based on our review of the literature and previous work in Dali and then tested and revised. It comprised four parts, as follows (with questionnaire items and sources shown in Table 1).

Both objective financial and subjective nonfinancial indexes were used to evaluate the performance of the sampled STEs (see Table 1). The subjective indexes were drawn mainly from Walker and Brown (2004), who developed the items with an emphasis on satisfaction to measure respondents' attitudes towards their businesses. With input from our fieldwork on STEs, two items were chosen to gauge the subjective dimension of STEs' performance, namely, the extent to which the businesses met expectations and owners' degree of satisfaction

with their jobs. The responses to these subjective items were measured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not satisfactory at all* and 7 = *very satisfactory*). The objective performance scale was based on items proposed by Kropp et al. (2006), namely, before-tax profits, return on investment, and market share. As the market share index is not suitable for use with small businesses, the percentage of repeat business was used instead to reflect the STEs' market situation. The pilot test revealed that the companies had lots of repeat tourists, especially residents of nearby areas who were attracted by the specific atmosphere of the historical towns. Based on the findings of the pilot test, we used the following scales to measure these items. For before-tax profits, 1 = *less than USD8,200* (calculated using the RMB–USD exchange rate of 6.0969, as measured on January 1, 2014) and 5 = *over USD32,800*. For return on investment, 1 = *less than 5%* and 7 = *over 30%*. For repeat business, 1 = *less than 30%* and 7 = *over 80%*. After responses had been provided, the items were standardized to facilitate analysis (Besser & Miller, 2001).

The items for "social responsibility at the community level" were chosen based on both the previous literature and our fieldwork. Four survey items were adopted from Besser and Miller (2001), Garay and Font (2013), and Jenkins (2006), with changes to their expression to suit the field circumstances (see Table 1). These items were as follows: purchasing materials or goods from local areas even if they were more expensive than the same or similar goods elsewhere; supporting and attending local festival events; promoting community development (through donations or support for community policies); and hiring local people. Two further items were added based on our observations of the practices of STEs in the communities under study: cooperating with the community to maintain public safety and complying with business ethics (e.g., avoiding cut-throat competition and maintaining business integrity). The responses to these items were measured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*very much disagree*) to 7 (*very much agree*).

To test the hypotheses, general information on gender, age, and education was requested in the questionnaire. Age was divided into six 10-year ranges from "equal or younger than 20" to "older than 60," and education was divided into four levels from "junior school or lower" to "Bachelor's degree or above." In addition, a question on

TABLE 1 Questionnaire items

Categories and items	Source
Sustainable operation	
Realizing business expectations Degree of satisfaction for current job Tendency to operate the business for a long time	Walker and Brown's (2004) and revised or reworded according to field work.
Before-tax profits Return on investment	Kropp et al. (2006)
Percent of repeat business	Modified from Kropp et al. (2006)
Social responsibility towards community	
Trying to buy materials or goods locally, even if they cost more Supporting and attending important local social or festival events Promoting community development (e.g., donating or executing community proposals)	Besser and Miller (2001); Garay and Font (2013)
Hiring employees from the community	Jenkins (2006)
Cooperating with the community to keep public security Complying with business ethics (avoiding cut-throat competition and operating with business integrity)	Fieldwork

birthplace was asked to differentiate the owners' levels of attachment to their local communities (possible responses: local area, out of town but in the same province, and outside the province). Last, to differentiate the STE owners by ethnic background (i.e., Han or minority), a question on ethnicity was included in the questionnaire.

In addition, following many previous studies (Garay and Font, 2012; Peake et al., 2015), a question on firm size was included in the questionnaire. Two indicators were used to measure size: the number of employees and the number of beds. As initial investment may also have an important influence on STEs' operational performance, a question on this was added to the questionnaire. Initial investment was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*less than about USD16,400*) to 5 (*over about USD65,607*).

3.3 | Data collection and analysis methods

The survey was conducted with the owners of the STEs due to their significant roles in the firms' operations (Font et al., 2016). A pilot test with 10 STEs in Dali was carried out first. The STE owners were asked to fill out the survey and provide feedback on item wording and the overall design of the survey instrument. Based on the respondents' feedback and other comments, the research team made further revisions to the questionnaire, with an emphasis on rewording some of the items derived from previous research. The formal fieldwork was carried out in Dali from July 25 to August 15, 2013 and in Yangshuo from January 9 to February 10, 2014. The sample totaled 154 responses (47 from Dali and 107 from Yangshuo).

Regression analysis was used to gauge the extent to which STEs' social responsibility at the community level influenced their business performance. Model 1 was proposed as a baseline model:

$$Perf = \alpha + \beta ResLC + \sum_i \theta_i control_i + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where *Perf* refers to STE performance in *objective* and *subjective* dimensions; *ResLC* refers to CSR; and the control variables (*control$_i$*) comprise *LnEmpl* and *LnBed*, the natural logarithms of the STEs' number of employees and number of beds respectively, and *lnInvest*, the value of the STEs' initial investment. In Model 1, α is a constant, β and θ_i are the regression coefficients, and ε is the error term. To avoid endogeneity, effective empirical methods and survey data analysis tools were chosen and verified (Zhou, 2005).

As discussed in the literature review, owners' demographic characteristics are likely to affect STEs' performance, and demographic characteristics may also moderate the effect on performance of STEs' CSR engagement. To capture these direct and interactive effects, a set of demographic variables (*DC$_i$*) and interactive terms (*ResLC × DC$_i$*) were introduced in Model 2:

$$Perf = \alpha + \beta ResLC + \sum_i \delta_i DC_i + \sum_i \eta_i ResLC \times DC_i + \sum_i \theta_i control_i + \varepsilon, \quad (2)$$

where the *DC$_i$* variables comprise gender, age, education, ethnicity, and birthplace.

Before running the regression analysis, the measurement items for CSR were subjected to exploratory factor analysis to detect the dimensionality of the construct, and the factor scores derived were used as the independent variable *ResLC* in the regression models.

Once multiple dimensions of CSR had been identified, they were entered into the models as separate independent variables to enable us to capture and compare the effects of different CSR dimensions on performance.

However, using factor scores estimated by regression as dependent variables may generate biased slope coefficients (Skrondal & Laake, 2001). As a solution, plausible values (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010) were produced for the objective and subjective dimensions of performance. This approach treats a latent variable as an observed variable with missing values. A multiple imputation method (Rubin, 1987) was used to impute the missing values *m* times, which resulted in *m* completed sets of the latent variable. Each of these *m* sets was then regressed separately. Finally, the results of the *m* regressions were pooled to give one result. As a larger number of imputations may produce more powerful significance tests (Enders, 2010), *m* was set at 100.

4 | EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 | Demographics of respondents

Most of the STE owners were between 20 and 60 years old; 21–30 was the largest age group (44.81%), followed by 31–40 (33.77%). Fewer than half of the STE owners were locals (42.48%), with nonlocals comprising a majority (57.52%). Of the nonlocals, 69.32% (equivalent to 39.87% of the whole sample) were from outside nearby provinces. The STE owners were generally well educated, with 31.33% holding Bachelor's degrees or higher and another 25.33% with college-level education. In terms of ethnicity, most of the STE owners were Han (70.78%). The gender distribution was almost equal. A summary of the demographics of the STE owners is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Demographics of small tourism enterprise owners

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age (years)	≤20	5	3.25
	21–30	69	44.81
	31–40	52	33.77
	41–50	24	15.58
	51–60	3	1.95
	≥60	1	0.64
Birthplace	Local area	65	42.48
	Out of town but in the same province	27	17.65
	Out of the province	61	39.87
Education	Junior school or lower	19	12.67
	High school	46	30.67
	College degree	38	25.33
	Bachelor's degree or higher	47	31.33
Ethnicity	Han	109	70.78
	Minority	35	29.22
Gender	Male	76	49
	Female	73	51

Note. "Local area" means that the owner comes from the historical town in which the small tourism enterprise is located. In China, a college degree requires 3 years and a university degree requires 4 years. The sample sizes for different variables are different because of missing data.

4.2 | Dimensions of CSR

Factor analysis was run to examine the dimensionality of the STEs' CSR engagement. The result of Bartlett's sphericity test was significant at the 0.05 level, and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was 0.70, greater than the acceptance threshold of 0.5. Therefore, factor analysis was suitable for the study. Next, as the initial eigenvalues were greater than 1, two factors/dimensions were extracted using the principal component method of factor analysis. These two dimensions represented two ways in which the STEs fulfilled their responsibility for the community: by engaging in important community events, that is, *community engagement*; and through daily activities, that is, *operational support* (see Table 3). Unlike the methods used in previous literature (Besser & Miller, 2001; Niehm et al., 2008), our factor analysis yielded dimensions based on the possible frequency of CSR activities. Our first dimension, *community engagement* (CSR_{ce}), represented STEs' demonstration of social responsibility by participating in important events such as festivals or making donations to support community development. The STEs engaged less frequently in these socially responsible behaviors, first, due to their resource constraints (Hallak et al., 2013) and, second, due to the voluntary nature of the activities. Unlike the first dimension, the second dimension, *operational support* (CSR_{os}), included daily operational activities likely to provide support for community development. Our fieldwork revealed that these activities were executed most frequently by most of the STEs because they had few employees and required special resources from the community (such as architectural ornaments and local food).

4.3 | CSR and STEs' performance

Before assessing the impact of CSR on STEs' *subjective* and *objective* performance, descriptive statistical analysis was executed. Both a *t* test and analysis of variance were used to compare the relationship between firms' CSR and their performance as categorized by the moderating variables (DC_i) of the STE owners' demographics. Overall, significant differences were found for three of the five demographic variables shown in Table 4. First, subjective performance was found to differ between male and female owners ($t = 2.089$). Second, CSR behavior at the community level was found to vary significantly between groups divided by owner's birthplace or educational level. For example, the overall difference between the groups categorized by birthplace was significant ($F = 4.409$, $p < .05$), as shown in Part B of

Table 4. Part A of Table 4 also shows that the mean value of CSR_{ce} for firms with local owners was significantly higher than that for firms with owners from other places. These differential effects of demographic characteristics support the use of UET in a Chinese context. The moderating effects of the demographic variables hypothesized in this study were further tested in the regression models.

Next, the correlations between the explanatory variables were analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 5. Strong correlations were found between the two age variables, Age_{low30} and Age_{31-40} ($r = -.687$, $p < .01$), and between the two birthplace variables, BP_{local} and $BP_{outprov}$ ($r = -.692$, $p < .01$). We thus assessed the variance inflation factors for each empirical model and found all to be lower than 3, well below the commonly adopted rule of thumb of 10. Multicollinearity was thus not a serious concern in our study.

Lastly, based on the results of the factor analysis, two dimensions of CSR, CSR_{ce} and CSR_{os}, were included as the main independent variables in Models 1 and 2. Table 5 shows the pooled results of the regressions. The *F* statistics of all of the models except Model 1 were significant at the 0.05 level. Models 1 and 6 were the benchmark models, containing only control variables. In Models 2 and 7, we included the main effects of the two social responsibility variables. For Model 2, with *subjective performance* as the dependent variable, the coefficient of CSR_{ce} was 0.296, significant at the 0.01 level, and that of CSR_{os} was nonsignificant; but for Model 7, with *objective performance* as the dependent variable, the coefficients of both CSR_{ce} and CSR_{os} were nonsignificant. These results showed that STEs' engagement with the community through participation in community events was likely to improve their subjective performance in dimensions such as fulfilling owners' expectations or delivering job satisfaction but that such CSR activities did not necessarily improve the STEs' objective financial performance. Therefore, H1 was supported.

4.4 | The moderating effects of STE owners' demographics

The moderating effects of the STE owners' demographic characteristics were tested in Models 3–5 and 8–10. Table 6 lists only the significant moderators of the relationship between the STE owners' community responsibility and their firms' performance. In line with Aiken and West (1991), interaction plots describing the moderating roles of the variables are provided in Figure 1a–f.

TABLE 3 Exploratory factor analysis of social responsibility towards community

Factor: Scale items and scale reliability	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Eigenvalue
Factor 1 Community engagement: Demonstrating responsibility by important activities (α = 0.732); percent of variance explained = 39.103%.				2.346
Supporting and attending important local social festival events	5.623	1.210	0.861	
Promoting community development (donating or executing community proposals)	5.591	1.302	0.848	
Factor 2 Operational support: Demonstrating responsibility by daily activities (α = 0.545); percent of variance explained = 16.986%.				1.091
Trying to buy material or goods locally even though this will cost more	3.506	1.614	0.556	
Hiring employees from the community	5.403	1.350	0.686	
Cooperating with the community to keep public security	6.240	0.984	0.574	
Complying with business ethics (avoiding cut-throat competition and operating with business integrity)	6.545	0.908	0.662	

Note. The extraction method is principal component analysis. The rotation method is Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

TABLE 4 Differences for STEs community social responsibility and performance with different owner demographics

Part A: *T* test		Value = 1		Value = 0		Mean difference	
Variables	Category	Mean (1)	STD	Mean (2)	STD	(1 − 2)	*T* value
Sub-*perf*	Gender	0.183	1.205	−0.282	1.238	0.465	2.089**
CSR_{ce}	BP_{local}	0.272	0.828	−0.199	1.070	0.471	3.079***
	$BP_{outprov}$	−0.176	1.137	0.115	0.887	−0.291	1.782*
CSR_{ce}	$Edu_{lowcoll}$	−0.181	1.051	0.176	0.936	−0.357	−2.193**
	Edu_{bach}	0.299	0.923	−0.131	1.008	0.430	2.587**
Part B: ANOVA test-post hoc							
Variables	Groups	Comparing (I-J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Sig.	F		Sig.
CSR_{ce}	1. GBP_{local}	1 and 2	0.521*	0.051	4.409**		0.014
	2. GBP_{inprov}	1 and 3	0.448**	0.030			
	3. $GBP_{outprov}$	2 and 3	−0.073	0.943			
CSR_{ce}	1. $GEdu_{lowcoll}$	1 and 2	−0.132	0.789	3.319**		0.039
	2. $GEdu_{coll}$	1 and 3	−.479*	0.032			
	3. $GEdu_{bach}$	2 and 3	−0.348	0.239			

Note. This table lists only the significant results for community social responsibility (CSR) and performance categorized by different demographics. In Part A, *Gender* is a dummy variable coded 1 for male and 0 for female; Edu_{bach} is an education dummy variable coded 1 for bachelor's degree or higher and 0 otherwise; $Edu_{lowcoll}$ is another dummy variable for education, coded 1 for education lower than the college level, that is, high school and lower; BP_{local} is a dummy variable for small tourism enterprise (STE) owners' birthplace, coded 1 for local historical town and 0 otherwise; $BP_{outprov}$ is coded 1 if the owner is from another province. These dummy variables are used for the regression tests. In Part B, GBP_{local}, GBP_{inprov}, and $GBP_{outprov}$ represent STE owners' groups from the local town, the local province but not the local town, or other provinces, respectively; $GEdu_{lowcoll}$, $GEdu_{coll}$, and $GEdu_{bach}$ represent STEs owners with only high school or a low education degree, college, or bachelor's degree, respectively. Only the results from the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference method are listed in Part B. These results are consistent with ones tested by other methods. ANOVA = analysis of variance.

*represents significant results at the 0.10 confidence level.

**represents significant results at the 0.05 confidence level.

***represents significant results at the 0.01 confidence level.

Models 3, 4, and 5 predicted subjective performance, and Models 8, 9 and 10 included objective performance as the dependent variable. The coefficient of $CSR_{ce} \times Gender$ for Model 3 was −0.525, significant at the 0.05 level. The nonsignificant difference between male and female STE owners' CSR activities (see Table 4) indicates that female owners are more likely to realize targets such as balancing their work and family lives and gaining greater recognition from local society (Hazudin et al., 2015; Chu et al., 2011) and that they receive more satisfaction by exercising their social responsibility at the community level (see Figure 1a). This empirically supported Hypothesis 2a, which predicted that gender would have a significant moderating effect, with a positive influence exerted by female owners. In addition, as shown in Table 6, the positive influence of gender on firms' objective and subjective performance indicates that male owners are more likely to achieve their financial targets without considering their firms' CSR (Chen & Elston, 2013).

The findings for the two main age groups, 31–40 (Age_{31-40}) and ≤ 30 (Age_{low30}), are listed for Models 4, 9, and 10. In Model 4, the coefficient of $CSR_{ce} \times Age_{31-40}$ was found to be significant (0.570, $p < .05$). This indicates that compared with those from other age groups, STE owners aged between 31 and 40 are able to obtain greater job satisfaction by engaging with the community (see Figure 1b). The negative moderating effect of Age_{low30} was evidenced by the coefficient of $CSR_{ce} \times Age_{low30}$ (−0.208, $p < .05$) in Model 9. The coefficient of $CSR_{ce} \times Age_{31-40}$ was 0.213, significant at the 0.1 level, in Model 10. Compared with STE owners aged under 30, those aged between 31 and 40 gained bigger improvements to their financial performance by engaging with the community (see Figure 1e,f). Overall, these findings are consistent and may be due to the nature of older

STE owners' operational targets and their richer experience, as discussed in Hypothesis 2b. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

A significant result was also obtained for $BP_{outprov}$ in Model 5. The interaction of $CSR_{ce} \times BP_{outprov}$ was −0.555, significant at the 0.05 level, showing that owners' being from another province decreased the effect of firms' community engagement activities on their subjective performance. Combined with the slope of the line observed in Figure 1c, this finding supported Hypothesis 2c. In addition, BP_{local} and $BP_{outprov}$ in Model 5 were both significantly negative, implying that although owners' stronger local identity may help to increase the positive influence of community engagement on their STEs' subjective performance (Table 4), local owners may also have a higher expectation of business success, which is more difficult to satisfy. In addition, the coefficient BP_{local} in Model 8 was positive. This implies that compared with owners from other provinces, local owners achieve better objective financial performance due to their local knowledge and networks.

In Model 8, with objective performance as the dependent variable, the coefficient of the interaction $CSR_{ce} \times Ethnicity$ was 0.339 ($p < .05$). Accompanying the negative main effect of CSR_{ce} (−0.276, $p < .1$), this implies that compared with owners belonging to ethnic minority groups, Han owners of STEs enjoy larger increments in financial performance as a result of community engagement (Figure 1d). This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 2d.

Hypothesis 2e was also supported, because education was not empirically found to have a significant moderating influence. The control variable *Lnemploy* had a significantly positive influence on STEs' financial performance in Models 8 to 10. According to Raju and Lonial (2002), having a greater number of employees helps to increase firms'

TABLE 5 Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	CSR_{ce}	CSR_{os}	Lnemploy	Lnbed	Invest	Gender	Ethnicity	Age_{low30}	Age_{31-40}	$Edu_{lowcoll}$	Edu_{bach}	BP_{local}	BP_{outpro}
CSR_{ce}	0	1	1.000												
CSR_{os}	0	1	0.000	1.000											
Lnemploy	1.296	0.561	0.044	−0.022	1.000										
Lnbed	3.243	0.723	−0.001	−0.067	0.527***	1.000									
Invest	0.550	0.499	0.144*	0.031	0.256***	0.132	1.000								
Gender	0.510	0.502	−0.004	0.079	−0.114	0.044	−0.016	1.000							
Ethnicity	0.770	0.420	−0.006	−0.108	0.017	0.105	0.004	−0.038	1.000						
Age_{low30}	0.480	0.501	−0.046	−0.107	0.139*	0.033	0.091	0.021	−0.068	1.000					
Age_{31-40}	0.340	0.474	0.078	0.068	−0.085	−0.026	−0.029	−0.198**	0.060	−0.687***	1.000				
$Edu_{lowcoll}$	0.450	0.499	−0.160**	0.007	−0.104	−0.010	−0.156*	0.063	−0.135*	−0.213***	−0.008	1.000			
Edu_{bach}	0.310	0.462	0.199**	−0.001	0.051	−0.087	0.281***	−0.013	0.191**	0.181**	−0.026	−0.597***	1.000		
BP_{local}	0.420	0.496	0.233***	0.071	0.003	0.097	−0.139*	−0.031	−0.227***	−0.059	0.001	0.367***	−0.338***	1.000	
BP_{outpro}	0.400	0.491	−0.143*	−0.097	−0.030	−0.186**	0.028	0.011	0.249***	0.045	−0.017	−0.383***	0.328***	−0.692***	1.000

Note. Ethnicity is a dummy variable, coded 1 for *Han* ethnicity and 0 for other minorities; Age_{low30} is an age dummy variable coded 1 if the age is equal or low than 30 and 0 otherwise; Age_{31-40} is another dummy variable for age, coded 1 for the range 31–40 and 0 otherwise. The other variables are consistent with the ones introduced in Table 4.

*represents significant results at the 0.10 confidence level.

**represents significant results at the 0.05 confidence level.

***represents significant results at the 0.01 confidence level.

TABLE 6 Pooled results of regressions

Variables	Subjective performance					Objective performance				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Intercept	0.724 (1.228)	0.820 (1.412)	1.183 (1.436)	1.086 (1.319)	1.465* (1.769)	−0.281 (−1.050)	−0.226 (−0.842)	−0.330 (−0.868)	−0.398 (−1.041)	−0.354 (−0.928)
$Lnemploy$	−0.144 (−0.576)	−0.143 (−0.581)	−0.070 (−0.273)	−0.075 (−0.293)	−0.080 (−0.315)	0.168 (1.508)	0.175 (1.585)	0.234** (2.044)	0.215* (1.869)	0.211* (1.838)
$Lnbed$	−0.265 (−1.402)	−0.263 (−1.411)	−0.351* (−1.800)	−0.334* (−1.712)	−0.366* (−1.881)	−0.055 (−0.647)	−0.070 (−0.829)	−0.115 (−1.307)	−0.100 (−1.133)	−0.101 (−1.142)
$Lninvest$	0.329 (1.397)	0.235 (1.004)	0.148 (0.605)	0.134 (0.548)	0.090 (0.366)	0.218** (2.048)	0.208* (1.945)	0.230* (2.090)	0.263** (2.384)	0.244** (2.218)
CSR_{ce}		0.296*** (2.583)	0.566*** (3.215)	0.086 (0.577)	0.570*** (3.288)		0.059 (1.125)	−0.276* (−1.763)	0.115 (1.602)	−0.051 (−0.727)
CSR_{os}		0.038 (0.359)	0.007 (0.062)	0.028 (0.262)	0.021 (0.196)		−0.065 (−1.355)	−0.075 (−1.551)	−0.075 (−1.537)	−0.074 (−1.531)
$Gender$			0.606*** (2.665)	0.590*** (2.600)	0.515** (2.244)			0.275*** (2.607)	0.276*** (2.641)	0.242** (2.334)
$Ethnicity$			−0.197 (−0.680)	−0.087 (−0.300)	−0.262 (−0.899)			−0.068 (−0.523)	−0.032 (−0.241)	−0.032 (−0.247)
$Edu_{lowcoll}$			0.372 (1.157)	0.218 (0.697)	0.248 (0.794)			0.078 (0.572)	0.070 (0.509)	0.088 (0.638)
Edu_{bach}			0.525 (1.623)	0.371 (1.162)	0.391 (1.226)			0.148 (1.017)	0.093 (0.642)	0.098 (0.675)
Age_{low30}			−0.298 (−0.988)	−0.316 (−1.049)	−0.220 (−0.732)			−0.214 (−1.499)	−0.210 (−1.465)	−0.227 (−1.582)
Age_{31-40}			−0.236 (−0.726)	−0.229 (−0.707)	−0.111 (−0.337)			−0.132 (−0.896)	−0.113 (−0.767)	−0.108 (−0.735)
BP_{local}			−0.440 (−1.399)	−0.371 (−1.183)	−0.551* (−1.729)			0.245* (1.737)	0.228 (1.619)	0.229 (1.622)
$BP_{outprov}$			−0.552* (−1.661)	−0.429 (−1.296)	−0.588* (−1.763)			0.045 (0.289)	0.026 (0.167)	0.008 (0.048)
$CSR_{ce} \times Gender$			−0.525** (−2.240)							
$CSR_{ce} \times Ethnicity$								0.339* (2.057)		
$CSR_{ce} \times Age_{low30}$									−0.208** (−1.977)	
$CSR_{ce} \times Age_{31-40}$				0.570** (2.348)						0.213* (1.907)
$CSR_{ce} \times BP_{outprov}$					−0.555** (−2.335)					
Observations	115	115	109	109	109	115	115	109	109	109
R^2	.048	.104	.228	.231	.231	.109	.145	.325	.320	.320
Adjusted R^2	.022	.063	.113	.117	.116	.084	.104	.224	.218	.218
F statistic	1.870	2.537**	1.974**	2.018**	2.012**	2.922**	2.461**	1.958**	2.051**	2.041**

Note. Only the results with significant moderating effects are listed. The variations of observation numbers are due to the missing data with different variables (performance, demographic, and control variables) included different the regression models. Variance inflation factor measures were used to confirm that there is no sign of multicollinearity. Following Aiken and West (1991), mean-centered treatment was applied on CSR_{ce} to avoid multicollinearity between $Ethnicity$ and CSR_{ce} variables. *T* values are listed in parentheses.

*represents significant results at the 0.10 confidence level.

**represents significant results at the 0.05 confidence level.

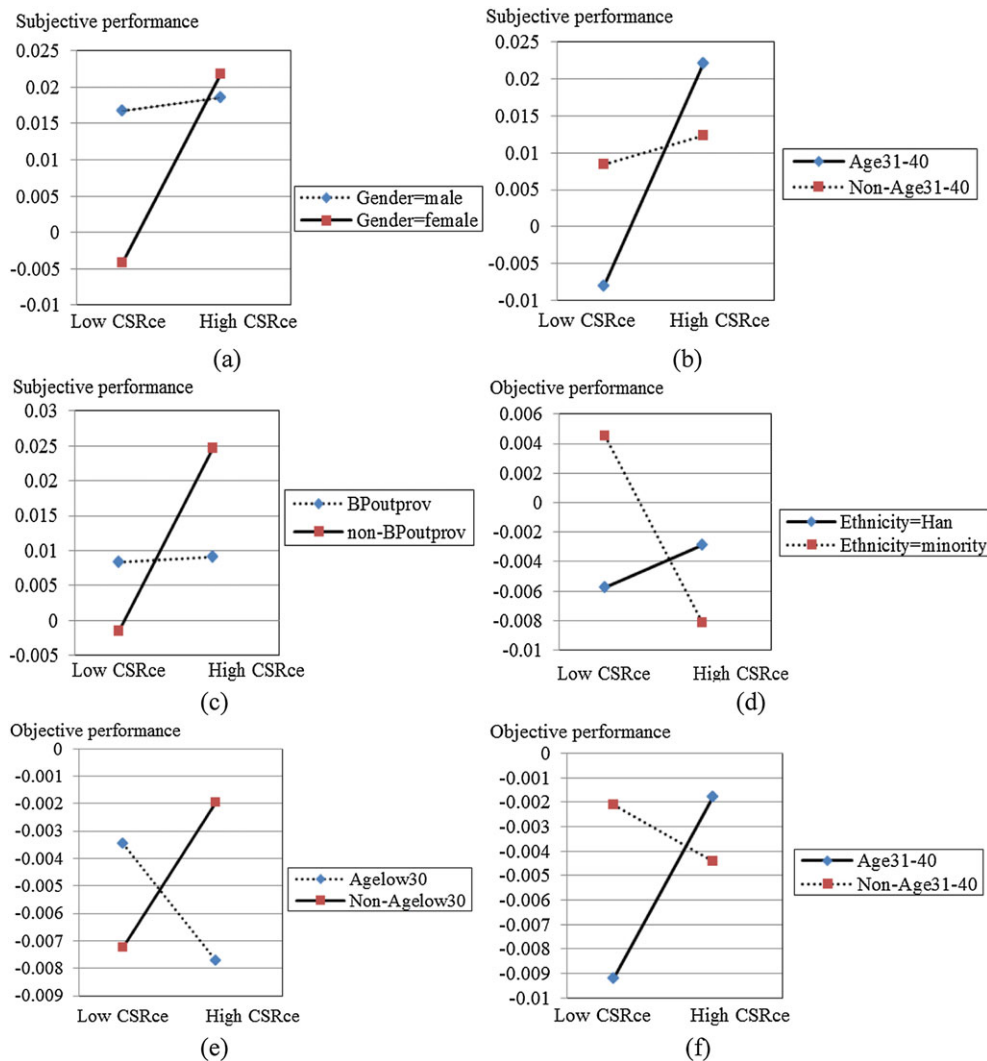***represents significant results at the 0.01 confidence level.

FIGURE 1 Moderating effects of small tourism enterprise owners' demographics. CSR = community social responsibility [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

revenue. *Ininvest* was also found to have a positive influence in most of the models. A larger initial investment indicates a better financial ability, helping to reduce STEs' financial pressure and improve their performance.

5 | CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 | Discussion and conclusion

In the context of small tourism businesses, this study investigated the association between CSR and firms' performance in depth and explored the moderating effects of business owners' demographics on this association based on UET. Using data obtained from fieldwork on small tourism guesthouses in historical towns in southwestern China, social responsibility at the community level was first divided into two dimensions, community engagement (through participation in community events) and daily operational support. Similarly, firms' performance was measured in two dimensions: objective and subjective.

The study obtained several interesting findings. First, the descriptive statistics revealed significant differences in firms' community engagement and subjective performance between groups categorized by STE owners' demographic characteristics, such as educational level, birthplace, and gender. Second, the results of the regression analysis show that the exercise of social responsibility through community engagement can improve STEs' subjective performance but that daily operational support for the community has no significant influence on either firms' subjective performance or their objective performance. Last, and most importantly, demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, and birthplace were found to have moderating effects but only on the influence of community engagement on STEs' performance. The moderating effect of education was proved to be nonsignificant in the context of STEs in China.

The different findings for the two dimensions of CSR may be related to the characteristics of STEs in historical towns. In practice, due to the limited labor market and to support the local community, most STEs tend to hire locals as employees. Meanwhile, STE owners readily become familiar with each other in such small tourist towns

(Besser, 2012). Thus, STE owners who engage in unethical business practices will not only experience financial losses but also gain a poor reputation within the community. This threat encourages them to pursue ethical business practices in their daily operations. In addition, STEs often try to provide services reflecting the specific features and traditions of the local areas (Qiu & Bao, 2005). In the historical towns surveyed in this study, such services emphasized the local architectural style and/or food. The STEs also sought to buy materials in the local area where possible. All of these factors made support for the community necessary for STEs, not simply dependent on their owners' characteristics. In contrast, community engagement through donations or attendance at social festivals was found to be flexible, resting primarily on the STE owners' personal values (Hambrick, 2007). The differences between STE owners moderated the influence of community engagement on their firms' subjective performance.

5.2 | Contribution and limitations

Only limited research has been conducted on the use of UET to explain tourism-related decisions (Lee & Moon, 2016; Park et al., 2014), and this theory has never been linked with CSR decisions in a small business context. This study contributes to the strategic management literature by applying UET in the unique context of small tourism businesses, offering the following fresh evidence in support of UET. First, the differences in CSR and performance between groups with different demographics provide further evidence of the effectiveness of this theory. Second, the study promotes the development of UET by revealing the specific indirect moderating effects of owners' demographic characteristics. Third, the findings for ethnicity and birthplace enlarge the range of relevant executive background characteristics discussed in the previous literature on applications of UET. Hambrick (2007) emphasized the need to explore the various effects of executive background under different national systems, and the current study provides new evidence of the relevance not only of traditional demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and education, but also the unique features of Chinese STE owners.

As well as promoting the use of UET, this study contributes to the CSR and small business literature. First, the division of CSR into two dimensions enhances understanding of the multidimensional nature of this concept and the different effects of these dimensions on firms' performance. Community engagement and operational support have different effects on the performance of small tourism businesses in historical towns. Meanwhile, due to fierce competition, the financial margins of microenterprises are small, making it more important for owners to build sustainable businesses than to increase their financial gains. The findings on the moderating effects of STE owners' demographic characteristics also enrich the community-oriented social responsibility literature on both tourism and small businesses in general.

In terms of its practical implications, this study proposes an effective way for small tourism businesses to increase their success: engaging in socially responsible behaviors within their local communities. To build more stable social connections between STEs and their communities, public policies should be formulated to encourage small tourism business owners to participate in local community activities. To facilitate this process, some of the background characteristics of STE owners should be kept in mind due to their influence on owners' tendency to engage in socially responsible activities. All of these initiatives are expected not only to help STEs improve their performance or become successful but also to contribute to the economic revitalization and sustainable development of destinations.

The fieldwork for this study took place in two similar historical towns selected to ensure a good degree of sample homogeneity. In the future, comparative research using samples from different types of destinations will provide a more comprehensive understanding of STEs' CSR behavior in relation to their performance. In addition, this study focused only on small guesthouses; further research should be conducted in other service sectors to obtain more generalizable findings.

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