



The great wall against burnout: CSR's influence in China's hospitality services sector

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ABSTRACT

In the dynamic arena of China's hospitality industry, understanding employee well-being has emerged as a paramount concern. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the intricate dynamics between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the pervasive issue of employee burnout, particularly within Beijing and Shanghai, the country's hospitality nerve centers. Hypothesizing that CSR can act as a protective shield against burnout, we further postulate that employee happiness and intrinsic motivation play intermediary roles in this relationship. Data collection spanned Beijing and Shanghai's diverse hospitality organizations, using a rigorous three-wave approach that culminated in insights from 385 valid responses. Through advanced structural equation modeling, the findings robustly validate our hypotheses, revealing the profound influence of CSR on burnout, mediated by happiness and motivation. This research not only elevates the academic discourse on workplace well-being and CSR in the Chinese context but also bears significant practical implications, emphasizing the strategic importance of employee-centric CSR initiatives for sustained organizational success in the hospitality sector.

1. Introduction

The modern workplace, defined by technological advancements and global interconnectedness, is also marked by an increasingly pressing issue: employee burnout. This phenomenon is not just an individual's plight; its implications stretch into the health of organizations and even the broader economic framework (Chen et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). At the core of every successful organization are its employees, whose well-being and productivity are paramount (Fu et al., 2023; Lewandowska et al., 2023). However, when burnout creeps in, it does not merely impact an individual; the entire organization feels the ripple (Liu et al., 2023). There is a noticeable drop in efficiency, increased absenteeism, and a decline in the quality of work. Picture a Shanghai hotel receptionist during the peak holiday season, tasked to balance fatigue while handling a spate of demanding customer requests—a situation that most employees in the hospitality industry deal with daily. Burnout is not an issue just for this person, it's a systemic issue that affects the way an organization performs and the economy (Meirun et al., 2022). Businesses, especially in high pressure sectors like hospitality, have no choice but to address this pervasive problem, not only is it an ethical

imperative, it's a strategic necessity.

Furthermore, businesses globally confront the associated consequences, such as surging healthcare costs, lost workdays, and elevated turnover rates (Ahmad, Ullah, Ryu, et al., 2023). Businesses globally confront significant consequences of burnout, such as surging healthcare costs, estimated at \$125 to \$190 billion annually in the U.S. alone, increased absenteeism, and elevated turnover rates (Gitnux, 2023). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as a “syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” (World Health Organization, 2019). Beyond economic costs, burnout fuels organizational disruptions. It diminishes energy, curtails innovation, and dents commitment. Disengagement sets in, trust wanes, and conflicts rise, often culminating in a toxic work environment and a detachment from organizational objectives. As we navigate the challenges of the modern workplace, it becomes evident that understanding, addressing, and curbing burnout is not merely a gesture of goodwill towards employees; it is a strategic necessity for organizational success and economic stability (De Simone et al., 2021).

Burnout is a pervasive issue affecting industries worldwide, from healthcare to finance, but it is particularly pronounced in the hospitality

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sector. Characterized by long hours, high emotional labor, and unpredictable customer interactions, hospitality employees face unique stressors that make them especially vulnerable to burnout. In this context, addressing burnout is not just an ethical concern but a strategic necessity for sustaining service quality and organizational success (Wallace & Coughlan, 2023). In this respect, several factors contribute to the rising epidemic of burnout within the hospitality sector. The industry, by its very nature, demands long and often unsociable hours, with employees constantly in the line of fire during peak seasons or rush hours. There is also the emotional labor required, as hospitality workers must maintain a friendly and accommodating demeanor, regardless of their personal state or the behavior of customers (Haldorai et al., 2019). Furthermore, various roles in this sector involve routine tasks, minimal decision-making freedom, and occasionally, constrained prospects for advancement. This, combined with the volatile nature of customer interactions and their varying expectations, sets the stage for considerable emotional, psychological, and physical fatigue.

Within the hospitality and broader services sector, the role of employees is paramount (Ahmad, Han, & Kim, 2024; Liu et al., 2024). Unlike manufacturing, where machinery and technology play a dominant role in product output, the service industry, especially hospitality, relies heavily on human interaction. Employees are not just workers, they are ambassadors of the organization, the face that interacts with customers, and the hands that craft experiences (Ahmad, Samad, & Han, 2024; Köseoglu et al., 2020). In essence, they are the product. Therefore, when burnout takes root, it does not just reduce efficiency, it directly compromises the quality of service offered. A burned-out employee in the hospitality industry can lead to countless problems. For instance, a receptionist at a hotel who is too drained to greet guests with enthusiasm, a waiter too stressed to cater to diner needs attentively, or a resort staff member too exhausted to ensure all amenities are up to standard. The immediate consequence is unsatisfied customers, who in today's digital age, can swiftly voice their displeasure on various platforms, damaging an organization's reputation. Over time, consistent subpar services due to employee burnout can lead to a decline in returning customers, bad reviews, and ultimately, organizational disruption (Leal & Ferreira, 2020). To put it succinctly, while machinery can be fine-tuned, updated, or replaced in industries like manufacturing, the human component in the services sector, especially hospitality, is irreplaceable. Employees are the heartbeat of service industries. Burnout, thus, is not merely an individual issue in this context, it is a direct threat to organizational health, viability, and success. Addressing employee well-being in the hospitality sector is not just a matter of ethics, it is, indeed, a business imperative.

While employee burnout poses a significant challenge across industries (Yuxiang et al., 2024), particularly in sectors like hospitality, it is essential to recognize that organizational milieu can play a pivotal role in mitigating this epidemic. Several organizational factors can act as buffers against the strain of burnout. Leadership, for instance, stands at the forefront. Effective leadership can cultivate an environment of trust, open communication, and support, which can significantly alleviate workplace stresses (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022). Additionally, continuous training programs, flexible work arrangements, and regular feedback mechanisms can further empower employees, fostering resilience against burnout.

Burnout not only affects individual well-being but also disrupts organizational dynamics, reducing efficiency and increasing costs. Amid these challenges, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerges as a strategic approach that not only addresses societal obligations (Ahmad, Ullah, Aldhaen, & Siddique, 2023) but also fosters workplace environments that mitigate the risk of burnout. Indeed, CSR offers a promising avenue to address this pressing issue. By fostering positive organizational climates and aligning company values with societal well-being, CSR initiatives can enhance employee morale, happiness, and intrinsic motivation (Ahmad, Samad, & Han, 2024), key resources that buffer against the depletion associated with burnout. Understanding the

interplay between burnout and CSR is essential, particularly in high-stress industries like hospitality, where employee well-being directly impacts service quality and organizational success.

In the past, CSR has been taken seriously as a marketing tool (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Siddique, 2024) or moral compass, but in recent years, CSR has come to be regarded as a basic component of the dynamics and outcomes of an organization. The underlying rationale is simple: Employees' psychological connection with their organization is heavily influenced when they perceive their organization as being socially responsible, ethically grounded, and committed to broader societal wellbeing (Guan et al., 2023). CSR initiatives like environmental conservation, community outreach, or social cause affinity constellation often align in favor of increased employee morale, improved sense of purpose & higher corporate loyalty (Ahmad, Ullah, et al., 2021). For example, employees working for organizations with robust environmental policies consistently have greater pride, a stronger connection to the company, and are more motivated to lead the organization's success.

However, most of the existing CSR literature on employee impact only focuses on how CSR impacts positive attitudinal and behavioral intentions (Ahmad, Ullah, Aldhaen, Han, & Scholz, 2022; Guo et al., 2021; Kong et al., 2021). This focus, albeit essential, might overlook a critical facet: The potential of CSR to reduce negative work outcomes. For example, active CSR engagement in an organization can decrease one's feeling of dissonance or moral conflict, and hence lower job dissatisfaction or the intent to leave. Furthermore, CSR serves as a point of pride and motivation that might actually compensate for some of the feelings of cynicism or detachment that tend to accompany burnout. Basically, although a positive correlation between CSR and employees' attitudes and behaviors has been demonstrated, a gap exists in our knowledge of CSR as a powerful mitigator of burnout. The current discussion on CSR needs to extend beyond the improvement of positive employee outcomes to the improvement of negative ones, especially burnout. In doing so, CSR could play a role in this context, and identifying and researching CSR's role here could provide organizations with a holistic approach to supporting employee wellbeing, and in turn sustainable organizational success.

To understand the sophistication of CSR's impact on employee psychology, Glavas and Aguinis's scholarly work rises to the top. By doing this, they have highlighted the role of many psychological factors as mediators between CSR initiatives and the actual impacts on employee attitudes and behaviors (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Glavas, 2016). The premise underlying this is that these psychological factors share insights with the mechanics of CSR in the workforce psyche. A gamut of these factors has been emphasized by scholars, from organizational pride, to identity affirmation, to a sense of purpose and belonging. However, while these factors undoubtedly play a crucial role, we posit that the CSR-employee burnout relationship might be significantly enriched by examining two underexplored yet pivotal psychological constructs: But this, although it may create some employee happiness and intrinsic motivation, is not what we are after. This is not theoretical: these factors directly relate to their ability to reduce burnout (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2019; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2011).

Employee happiness at work is not absence of unhappiness, it is actual state of happiness, positivity, and satisfaction (Benuyenah & Pandya, 2020). Employees who are happy tend to be more able to bounce back from stressful workplace issues and adapt to change. Additionally, when an organizations CSR efforts are in line with an employee values, it can help create a sense of meaning and contribution that makes them happier in general (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021). In this uplift state, it serves as a buffer, taking in the strains that usually feed into burnout. Additionally, while external rewards (for example, pay and benefits) are needed, intrinsic motivation is important as drive to perform a task can come naturally and be self-rewarding, e.g. personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment which can act as a deterrent to burnout (Rawolle et al., 2016). Intrinsic motivation can be sparked by CSR activities, in particular, when the employee experiences that CSR is

more than merely doing something outside work routine, it is a part of some bigger, noble cause (Hur et al., 2018). The second reason is that work that makes a difference to society can light a fire greater than the everyday challenges or tedium of doing the work, which can even prevent burnout from setting in (Chen & Liu, 2023). In short, although the current discourse regarding CSR's psychological mediators is insightful, there remains an urgent need to extend this framework when, at the very least, the problem of employee burnout is increasingly becoming a pressing issue. By interlacing constructs like employee happiness and intrinsic motivation, we not only enhance our comprehension of how CSR influences employee wellbeing, but also provide organizations with comprehensive, efficient solutions to address the burnout epidemic.

As we explore the potential of employee happiness and intrinsic motivation as mediators in the relationship between CSR and burnout, our focus narrows to a specific demographic: Such a large and growing segment of the Chinese hospitality sector. There are many reasons why this sector was chosen to hone in on. In recent decades, China's hospitality industry has grown at an unprecedented rate due to rising domestic tourism and its growing popularity as a global travel destination (Wang et al., 2020). Although lucrative, the rapid expansion has also placed tremendous pressure on its workforce (Yan et al., 2021) and burnout deserves a closer look. In addition, given the contours of Chinese work culture, including the long hours, dedication, and sometimes hierarchical work dynamics (Yousaf et al., 2020), these are distinct stressors that could exacerbate burnout. Given that the course of CSR in China is moving from mere compliance to more strategic employee-centric initiatives, it is important to understand how it may impact employee wellbeing in the context of these culturally specific challenges. With China's economic clout and the hospitality sector representing such a large part of its GDP, it's not just about individual welfare. Effective CSR can then be addressed to curb burnout and enhance productivity, reducing turnover and, by association, further boosting the economic contribution of the sector. As such, our study serves as a case study of the Chinese hospitality landscape in which we attempt to shed nuanced, culturally informed insights into how CSR can function as a bulwark against burnout and, by extension, a source of inspiration for other hospitality businesses, not only in China but also globally.

The purpose of this study is to explore the intricate relationship between CSR and employee burnout in China's hospitality sector. While existing literature extensively discusses CSR's positive impact on employee attitudes and behaviors, this research uniquely examines its role in mitigating burnout, a critical yet underexplored aspect. By integrating psychological constructs such as employee happiness and intrinsic motivation as mediators, the study provides novel insights into the mechanisms through which CSR can enhance employee well-being, offering a more holistic understanding of its impact within high-stress industries like hospitality. In recent years, there has been a growing body of research that examines how culturally embedded factors in China influence the relationship between CSR and employee well-being. For example, studies conducted in major Chinese cities have demonstrated that CSR initiatives, when aligned with local cultural values and the unique dynamics of the Chinese labor market, can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and mitigate burnout (Ma et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2019). These region-specific findings suggest that the effectiveness of CSR in reducing burnout is not merely a function of global best practices but is also critically shaped by localized socio-economic conditions, work ethics, and cultural expectations prevalent in urban centers like Beijing and Shanghai. Building on this emerging evidence, our study integrates these contemporary insights to offer a nuanced understanding of CSR's role within China's hospitality sector. By situating our investigation within the context of recent regional studies, we aim to bridge global theoretical frameworks, such as the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, with empirical observations that capture the distinctive challenges and opportunities of the Chinese market. This approach not only reinforces the strategic importance of employee-centric CSR initiatives in combating burnout but also

highlights the need for culturally tailored practices that resonate with the local workforce. In doing so, our research contributes to a more robust and contextually grounded discourse on organizational well-being in emerging economies.

The extensive body of research on employee burnout and its intricacies reveals several gaps that our study intends to address:

Historical interpretations of employee burnout overwhelmingly constructed it as a problem of individual health, the individual's lack of resilience and personal resources to cope (van der Wal et al., 2016). But in 2019, the WHO turned a corner and astutely classified burnout as a result of long term, unmanaged work related stress. Nevertheless, very little research has used this organization centric lens to guide substantial research endeavors, leaving a major gap in our understanding. This oversight is complemented by the marked geographical bias in burnout research. However, the lion's share of studies conducted in the developed countries (Chirico, 2016; Van Dick et al., 2021) may fail to capture the specific socio-economic complexity and working environment features specific to the developing countries (Wu et al., 2022). Consequently, the narrative tilts even further when CSR is examined. Currently, the leading academic discourse praises CSR for its ability to enhance positive employee outcomes, for instance, increased job satisfaction. A singularly optimistic lens for CSR could potentially obscure CSR's multifaceted impact, particularly with regard to negative impacts such as burnout. Besides, the way we discuss employee happiness also needs reframing. In existing literature, happiness is usually measured using a medley of emotional variables, including wellbeing and life satisfaction (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Hoxsey, 2010; Moccia, 2016). Although they are undoubtedly intertwined, these variables do not reflect the entire range of what it means to be happy as an employee. Happiness, as a workplace construct, is a sophisticated construct and worthy of its own, discrete assessment, we agree with Thompson and Bruk-Lee (2021). In doing so, our endeavor attempts to knit the disparate threads together in an effort to tell a comprehensive story about CSR and burnout.

2. Literature review

The conservation of resources (COR) theory is central to our exploration of employee burnout and mitigators. Hobfoll (1989) originally propounded COR theory, which specifies that people attempt to obtain, retain, and protect valued resources. They are tangible, like monetary assets, or intangible, like personal esteem and job security. The loss or potential loss of these resources can trigger stress and their acquisition can protect from stress. Central to the COR theory is that the evidence of resource loss is not only more salient but also has a disproportionately greater impact than the evidence of resource gain. The COR theory is a cogent framework in the milieu of employee burnout. Burnout can be understood as severe and chronic resource depletion in which employees who are called on continuously to respond to demands and stressors experience depletion of their personal and professional resources with little or no opportunity to replenish (Hobfoll, 1989). The emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished professional efficacy associated with burnout are the result of the continuing threat or actual loss of resources without concurrent gains.

The COR theory can be applied to the sphere of CSR and brings new possibilities to light. The CSR initiatives of organizations usually provide employees with additional resources either directly or indirectly (Mao et al., 2021). Such as a better workplace environment, better organizational reputation, increased sense of purpose or direct skill enhancement, etc. (Liu et al., 2022). If these gains are perceived by employees, they may not only be additive to their resource reservoirs but perhaps even serve as a buffer against chronic depletions that inevitably lead to burnout. Furthermore, the introduction of employee happiness and intrinsic motivation as mediating factors is congruent with the COR framework. When organizations prioritize CSR, they inadvertently foster environments where employees derive intrinsic joy and motivation

from their roles. These are instrumental resources in themselves. Intrinsic motivation and employee happiness can act as potent resource reservoirs, mitigating resource losses and, by extension, the onset of burnout. In brief, the COR theory offers a robust theoretical scaffold upon which our hypotheses are constructed. While the existing literature extensively explores CSR's positive impact on employee attitudes and behaviors, its potential to mitigate negative outcomes such as burnout remains underexplored. Existing studies predominantly focus on mediators like organizational pride and job satisfaction, yet constructs such as employee happiness and intrinsic motivation have received limited attention. By investigating these underexplored mediators, this study bridges a critical gap, particularly within the unique cultural and operational context of China's hospitality sector. By contextualizing employee burnout, CSR, and the proposed mediating factors within this framework, we seek to forge a deeper, more integrated understanding of the dynamics at play.

2.1. Hypotheses

As an influential paradigm, CSR occupies the position at the nexus of employee well-being and organizational commitment (Schwepker et al., 2021). As organizations recognize their role beyond generating profit more and more, those who are passionate about CSR and implement it often become employee satisfaction and retention leaders (Macassa et al., 2021). By consciously putting money into environmental, social, and governance areas, they create an environment where people don't just work, but actually live and find value in what they do. There is an aura of positivity about organizations that are doing impactful CSR work. For instance, when employees know that their company is trying to do something socially, they will report job satisfaction, organizational pride, sense of belonging (Hayat & Afshari, 2022). This is more than a passing lift of spirit, but is the basis of an engaged, motivated, and loyal workforce. This positive organizational perception has ripple effects on daily interactions, teamwork, and even personal wellbeing which helps employees develop resistance to the perpetual grind that sometimes occurs in today's workspaces (Svergun & Fairlie, 2020).

Existing research highlights the critical role of CSR in influencing employee outcomes across industries, yet studies specifically examining its impact on burnout within the hospitality sector remain limited. The hospitality industry presents unique challenges, including long hours, emotional labor, and high customer interaction, which amplify the risk of burnout. While some studies emphasize the importance of CSR in enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover in this sector, its role in addressing burnout through mechanisms like employee happiness and intrinsic motivation remains underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how CSR initiatives tailored to the hospitality sector can mitigate burnout and foster employee well-being.

In addition, CSR does not provide benefits only in a vague sense. The CSR actions that are taken are often translated into direct benefits for the workforce. These tangible efforts in the provision of comprehensive health benefits, opportunities for skill development and continuous learning, and in policies favoring natural environment, sustainability, mental well-being and work-life harmony, epitomize an organization's commitment to community, stakeholders and the environment (Kim & Kim, 2021). In nurturing environments, employees don't see themselves as cogs in a machine; they see themselves as part of something bigger. The sense of being cared for and this recognition are powerful deterrents to burnout (Chen & Liu, 2023) brought by fatigue, disillusionment and emotional exhaustion (Jia et al., 2022).

However, understanding the magnitude of this relationship between CSR and employee burnout necessitates the COR theory's principles. Based on resource preservation and growth theory, this theory suggests that people will always try to avoid the depletion of resources, a well-known precursor to stress. On the contrary, resource acquisition serves as a bulwark that protects the individual from possible stressors. From this perspective, the psychological and emotional gains derived from

positive CSR perceptions can rightly be termed "resources" (Yan et al., 2023). As employees accumulate these intangible resources, they are, in essence, fortifying themselves, constructing a resilient barrier against the stressors that often culminate in burnout.

Hypothesis H1. Engaging in CSR initiatives is inversely related to the prevalence of employee burnout within an organization.

In the modern organizational lexicon, the symbiosis between CSR and employee happiness is becoming increasingly evident (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021). Employee happiness, in the context of this study, refers to a state of contentment, optimism, and fulfillment derived from meaningful work and a positive organizational climate. It goes beyond the mere absence of dissatisfaction, encompassing a holistic sense of well-being and alignment with personal and organizational values. In fact, CSR is not only about corporate philanthropy but a sustainable and inclusive organizational ecosystem. Organizations align to the core values and aspirations of their employees who expect more purpose and meaning in their work (Nazir & Islam, 2020a). It often feels good when employees see their organization getting actively involved in activities that lead to societal and environmental improvement. Such actions are consistent with the values of many employees and help create a feeling of belonging and being with the purpose of the organization. This alignment can be an alignment that brings you an elevated level of job satisfaction, contentment, and happiness. Of course, being a part of an organization, that is similar in its work and beliefs to one's own values, can help other people find happiness and fulfillment (Bibi et al., 2022).

Moreover, CSR initiatives like mental health support, community engagement opportunities, continuing learning opportunities for employees, and so on, directly affect the welfare and happiness of employees (Gorovei, 2020). You make them feel valued, and supported, and give them ways to grow on a personal and professional level. In substance, the proactivity of an organization in its CSR endeavors may be a major determinant of the happiness quotient of its employees. A happy working environment is created by a harmonious blend of personal and organizational values with tangible support structures (Maham et al., 2020).

When observed through the lens of the COR theory, the relationship between CSR and employee happiness turns out to be a sophisticated one (Luu, 2021). CSR, at its core, goes beyond traditional corporate philanthropy to create an integrated, harmonious, sustainable, and inclusive organizational environment (Xue et al., 2022). Investing in societal and environmental initiatives helps organizations connect with the ethical values and the deeper aspirations of most of their employees, and in turn, strengthens their purpose-driven workplace. As CSR values run high in the organization, employees embedded within them tend to receive an abundance of resources such as pride, job satisfaction, and a feeling of belonging (Al-Ghazali et al., 2021). The tangible efforts they observe and participate in in order to make the world and society a better place reinforce their alignment with the company's mission. The resultant alignment, grounded in shared values, is not only deeply imbued with a powerful sense of purpose, but provides these with the resources required for psychological well-being. These resources are important within the context of the COR theory. They act as safeguards to buffer employees from job related stressors and burnout.

Hypothesis H2. CSR initiatives of an organization are positively associated with employee happiness.

The juxtaposition of employee happiness against burnout presents an intriguing dynamic. As employees grapple with the relentless pace of modern work culture, their psychological reservoirs are often put to the test. In this setting, employee happiness stands as a robust shield against burnout's draining onslaught (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2019). Happiness, as explored in organizational studies, is multi-faceted, encompassing positive emotions, job satisfaction, and a deep-rooted sense of purpose and belonging (Fisher, 2010). Encountering such affirming states often rejuvenates individuals, bolstering resilience and amplifying

engagement. As the COR theory stresses, these uplifting assets are crucial in warding off stress and its subsequent effects. When imbued with profound workplace joy, employees develop better coping strategies. This equips them to skillfully traverse professional challenges, striking a harmony between job demands and personal wellness (Akgunduz et al., 2023). Burnout, growing cynicism, and a dwindling sense of achievement, struggles to flourish in atmospheres permeated by such joy (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017).

Given happiness's restorative nature and its power to bolster mental reserves, its instrumental role in curbing burnout becomes evident. A workspace filled with optimism, positivity, and a deep sense of mission serves as a sanctuary, insulating its members from burnout's detrimental effects. From the perspective of COR's fundamental tenet: individuals strive to obtain, maintain, and protect their valued resources. When these resources are threatened or depleted, the potential for stress and burnout escalates; conversely, when resources are abundant, resilience against burnout is fortified (Barthauer et al., 2020).

Employee happiness, in the organizational landscape, can be thought of as a rich repository of psychological resources (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2022). This encompasses positive emotions, a sense of purpose, job satisfaction, and feelings of belonging. An environment where happiness flourishes, therefore, equips employees with a wealth of resources, both tangible and intangible. Drawing upon the COR theory, these resources serve as vital buffers, shielding individuals from the detrimental impacts of job-related stressors that could potentially culminate in burnout (Surachartkumtonkun et al., 2023). In the presence of happiness, the continuous drain on an employee's psychological reservoir is counteracted. The restoration and conservation of resources, a cornerstone of the COR theory, becomes feasible in a workspace where happiness is not just an occasional byproduct but a sustained experience. Therefore,

Hypothesis H3. Employee happiness is inversely related to burnout, suggesting that as levels of employee happiness increase, the prevalence of burnout decreases.

Employee happiness is a mediator that can help explain the inner mechanism of CSR and burnout better. Organizations that engage in CSR activity that is robust would often sow the seeds of positivity, purpose, and alignment with societal and environmental values. Such endeavors, witnessed by employees, usually result in an increase in the morale and thus happiness of employees. In turn, this heightened state of happiness is a buffer against professional burnout (Ahmad, Ullah, Ryu, et al., 2023). However, when organizations integrate CSR initiatives, embracing CSR is not just a kind expression of corporate goodwill to the stakeholders but it also indicates in a subtle sense that the organization is ethical and socially conscious (Zhao et al., 2019). It aligns with wider societal goals and creates a sense of pride, purpose, and satisfaction for employees which in turn increases levels of happiness (Boğan & Dedeoğlu, 2020). Such a state of happiness then serves as a replenishing reservoir to the emotional, physical, and cognitive drains that often precede burnout.

In fact, we can see this process even more clearly through the lens of the COR theory. While CSR initiatives add to the resource pool in the form of happiness (Liu et al., 2022) for employees, it becomes a powerful counterforce to burnout. The theory states that people who have a lot of resources are more resistant to resource depletion and the negative consequences that accompany it, such as burnout. From a CSR perspective, employee happiness is a key resource, capable of conservation and accumulation of other necessary psychological and emotional resources (Semedo et al., 2017). Considering the complexity of this layered interplay, it is easily seen that employee happiness mediates the association between CSR and burnout. CSR functions as the catalyst and employee happiness as the mediator of the detrimental pathway to burnout.

Hypothesis H4. Employee happiness mediates the relationship between CSR and burnout, such that CSR initiatives increase levels of

employee happiness, which in turn reduces the likelihood of burnout.

CSR has transcended its traditional boundaries to influence various facets of employee psychology (Mahmood et al., 2021; Murtaza et al., 2021), and intrinsic motivation stands prominent among them (Oh et al., 2021). Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is defined as the internal drive to perform tasks for their inherent satisfaction rather than external rewards. This motivation is fueled by the perception of work as meaningful and aligned with broader ethical and societal goals. These constructs are integral to understanding how CSR initiatives can enhance employee well-being and mitigate burnout (Ryan & Deci, 2000). CSR initiatives, by their very nature, aim to benefit society and the environment, aligning organizational objectives with broader societal goals. When organizations implement genuine and impactful CSR initiatives, employees often perceive these actions as reflective of the company's ethical stance and genuine commitment to the greater good (Oh et al., 2021). This alignment with an organization's ethical and social responsibilities can align deeply with employees, fostering a sense of purpose. As they recognize their contribution to a company that prioritizes values beyond profit, employees often feel an intrinsic drive to perform their roles not just for monetary rewards or promotions but for the inherent satisfaction of being part of a purpose-driven organization (Hameed et al., 2019).

Such an alignment between personal values and organizational endeavors can ignite the spark of intrinsic motivation. When employees believe they are contributing to a larger societal cause, their work becomes more than just a routine as it transforms into a mission (Loor-Zambrano et al., 2022). They no longer work merely for paychecks or promotions, they work because they believe in what they are doing, and they derive genuine pleasure and fulfillment from it. Boil down, CSR becomes a conduit that links the broader societal good with individual purpose, amplifying levels of intrinsic motivation among employees (Asante Boadi et al., 2020). An innate drive, rooted in a deep sense of purpose and ethical resonance, emerges as a priceless resource for companies, frequently resulting in enhanced commitment, creativity, and efficacy (Nazir & Islam, 2020b).

At the heart of the COR theory lies the idea that people are driven to safeguard, maintain, and obtain cherished resources, whether they are tangible or not. These resources serve as vital shields against stress and potential setbacks, influencing a range of behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (Shin et al., 2019). Within this context, CSR stands out, offering key psychological sustenance for staff (Zhang et al., 2021). Specifically, when firms participate in sincere and influential CSR actions, they not only improve their public perception but also instill their workforce with a deep-rooted sense of purpose and connection to wider societal and environmental principles (Hur et al., 2018). This alignment can be understood as a resource in itself in the form of a cognitive and emotional framework that empowers employees to see their work as inherently valuable and meaningful. As employees recognize their role in an organization that prioritizes broader societal benefits, they accumulate a valuable psychological resource: intrinsic motivation (Hao et al., 2018). This drive to act not because of external rewards, but because of the inherent satisfaction and alignment with personal and organizational values, is enriched by the resources provided by CSR. In the context of the COR theory, intrinsic motivation can be understood as a resource that, when present, conserves and amplifies other positive psychological states, shielding employees from potential stressors and burnout (Chen & Liu, 2023). Thus,

Hypothesis H5. CSR initiatives positively influence employee intrinsic motivation, such that robust CSR activities enhance the inherent drive and satisfaction employees derive from their roles.

The phenomenon of burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and increased detachment, has become an area of deep concern in organizational literature. As the existing body of literature goes deeper into the intricacies of employee

well-being, intrinsic motivation has emerged as a pivotal factor in understanding and potentially mitigating burnout (Rawolle et al., 2016; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2011). Intrinsic motivation propels individuals to engage in activities for the sheer joy and inherent satisfaction they provide, which stands in stark contrast to the draining elements of burnout (Kim, 2018). Employees who are intrinsically motivated often perceive their tasks as meaningful, engaging, and aligned with their personal values and interests. Such a perspective promotes a sense of purpose and resilience, allowing them to navigate challenges with more vigor and less susceptibility to exhaustion (Rubino et al., 2009).

Studies have suggested that intrinsically motivated individuals, by virtue of their internal drive and passion for their work, tend to exhibit better-coping mechanisms in the face of work-related stressors (Isoard-Gautheur et al., 2019). Instead of feeling overwhelmed, they draw upon their internal reservoir of motivation, which acts as a buffer against burnout's insidious onset. Their deep-rooted connection with their tasks and roles fosters a sense of competence and autonomy, key elements that shield them from feelings of inefficacy and detachment, both hallmarks of burnout.

Moreover, when framed through the COR theory, intrinsic motivation can be understood as a crucial psychological resource (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Employees with high levels of intrinsic motivation possess an inner level of energy that conserves and potentially amplifies other essential resources. In the constant battle against resource depletion this intrinsic drive acts as a replenishing mechanism, ensuring sustained engagement and reduced emotional and cognitive fatigue (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2016). In light of this academic discussion, the association between intrinsic motivation and reduced levels of burnout becomes evident. With intrinsic motivation acting as a potent shield and resource, it offers a promising avenue to counteract the debilitating effects of burnout in the workplace. Therefore, it can be stated;

Hypothesis H6. It is proposed that intrinsic motivation serves as a negative predictor of employee burnout. Employees with higher levels of intrinsic motivation are less likely to experience the adverse symptoms associated with burnout.

CSR initiatives can yield a rich array of psychological resources for employees, among which intrinsic motivation stands prominent (Nazir & Islam, 2020b). Further, as elucidated earlier, intrinsic motivation acts as a shield against the onset of burnout. Thus, it becomes imperative to understand how intrinsic motivation might mediate the relationship between CSR initiatives and employee burnout. To this end, CSR initiatives that genuinely reflect a company's commitment to ethical and societal responsibilities align deeply with employees. When an organization's actions align with broader societal values, it provides employees with a profound sense of purpose and meaning. This alignment is more than just an emotional response as it becomes a source of intrinsic motivation. Employees feel compelled to engage with their roles not just for extrinsic rewards, but also from a deep-seated belief in the value of their contributions and the larger purpose served by the organization. Once this intrinsic motivation is ignited by CSR, it becomes a powerful psychological resource, as emphasized by the COR theory (Chen & Liu, 2023). Employees who are intrinsically motivated view challenges differently. Instead of perceiving them as overwhelming stressors leading to burnout, they view them as opportunities for growth and learning, buffered by their innate drive and passion for their work. Consequently, the pathway from CSR to reduced burnout can be understood through the mediating lens of intrinsic motivation (Xu, Jie, et al., 2022). As organizations invest in meaningful CSR, they inadvertently cultivate intrinsic motivation among their employees. This motivation, in turn, acts as a protective barrier against the debilitating effects of burnout. Through the principles of the COR theory, intrinsic motivation stands as a resource that mitigates resource depletion, a primary antecedent of burnout.

Hypothesis H7. Intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship

between CSR and employee burnout. Specifically, CSR initiatives enhance intrinsic motivation in employees, which subsequently reduces the likelihood of burnout.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study context and demographics

This research spotlights China's hospitality sector, an ever-evolving industry playing a pivotal role in the nation's economic narrative. The sector, rich in diversity, mirrors China's expansive cultural heritage and supports its flourishing tourism endeavors. Specifically, we identified Beijing and Shanghai as primary cities of interest. Selected for their economic vitality and tourism significance, these cities form the backbone of China's hospitality sphere, housing a range of hotels, eateries, and related amenities for both local and international tourists. Beijing, the nation's historical and cultural epicenter, serves as a beacon of tourism, drawing millions with its blend of antiquity and modernity. On the other hand, Shanghai, often dubbed the 'Paris of the East', merges its business gravitas with a robust tourism backbone, characterized by its fusion of Eastern and Western cultural imprints. Together, these cities offer an expansive view of China's multifaceted hospitality scene.

Participants were selected from various departments, including front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, and marketing, to ensure a comprehensive representation of roles within the hospitality sector. Organizations were identified based on their visible engagement in CSR activities, verified through official digital platforms and on-site assessments. Following this, we collaborated with organizational leadership to identify suitable times and methods for participant engagement, ensuring minimal disruption to regular workflows. Invitations were extended to employees across different levels within these departments, prioritizing voluntary participation to capture diverse perspectives and experiences.

From the various hospitality organizations contacted, eight reciprocated positively leading to subsequent deliberations with the leadership of these receptive organizations allowed us to delineate the most opportune moments to engage with their workforce. This partnership was pivotal in facilitating a smooth and minimally invasive data-gathering phase, respecting the regular workflow of the employees. To ensure a panoramic view, we sought participation from different hotel departments, including the front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, and marketing.

3.2. Ethical protocols and data collection

Our research framework prioritized ethical integrity. Ethical protocols included anonymizing responses with unique codes and securely storing data in password-protected systems accessible only to the research team. These measures ensured data confidentiality during analysis and storage, adhering to institutional guidelines (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Siddique, 2023; Ahmad, Ullah, Aldhaen, Han, & Scholz, 2022; Chen et al., 2022).

Participants were apprised of the research's purview and their prerogative to withdraw sans any consequence. The data collection itself was segmented into three waves, each two weeks apart, to allow for both depth and breadth in our insights (Peng et al., 2022; Xu, Mohammad, et al., 2022). The initial wave scrutinized CSR activities and employee perceptions, offering a ground-up view of the CSR fabric of these organizations. The subsequent wave pivoted towards employees' intrinsic motivation and happiness. The final wave, and perhaps the most critical, ventured into the context of employee burnout. The three-wave data collection method was chosen to reduce common method variance (CMV) and clarify causal relationships by temporally separating the measurement of variables. Spacing the surveys over two-week intervals minimized recall and social desirability biases, enhancing the validity and reliability of the results (Ahmad, Ullah, Aldhaen, Han, Ariza-

Montes, & Vega-Muñoz, 2022). This approach aligns with best practices in survey research. This sequential approach not only minimized biases such as recall and social desirability but also strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings.

3.3. Addressing common method variance and social desirability bias

As we seek scholarly rigor in collecting data, it is important to realize that our results can be undermined if we do not guard against known pitfalls. A particular concern is CMV, which occurs when measurement error is introduced through similarity in measurement context and method (Ahmad, Ahmad, Lewandowska, & Han, 2024; Li et al., 2024). Since our data collection follows a sequential approach, we have an inherent risk that respondents will give consistent answers either because they are familiar or recent with the previous waves. To reduce CMV we used procedural remedies including anonymous feedback, emphasizing that there are no “right” and “wrong” answers, and varying the sequence of questions within each wave. Additionally, we empirically validate the existence or nonexistence of CMV using Harman's single-factor test (Ahmad, Samad, & Mahmood, 2024). The analysis showed that no one factor accounted for the majority of the variance in our data and that CMV was not a dominant issue.

Social desirability bias (SDB) is another potential bias causing our research to be perturbed. Since the study is on CSR initiatives and employee sentiments, it is expected for the participants to respond in a way that is considered socially acceptable or favorable to them, instead of what is their real opinions and feeling. We repeated our emphasis on candor in our interactions, and participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential (Ahmad, Samad, & Han, 2023; Ahmad, Ullah, Aldhaen, & Siddique, 2023). Furthermore, with indirect questioning techniques, we managed to derive honest information without questioning potentially sensitive topics frontally.

3.4. Sample size estimation

For our study, the importance of a precise and representative sample cannot be ignored. To achieve the highest degree of accuracy in our sample size estimation, we utilized the Raosoft sample size calculator, an esteemed tool recognized for its diligence in survey research methodology. Using the calculator, and considering a population size of approximately 10,000 employees from the hospitality sector of Beijing and Shanghai, coupled with a 5 % margin of error and a 95 % confidence level, it was determined that our sample size should be around 370 participants. However, anticipating the variability in responses and potential non-responses, we distributed 600 questionnaires across various departments.

At the culmination of our three waves of data collection, we received a total of 420 responses. Following the data cleaning process, where we screened for incomplete responses, and inconsistencies, we identified 385 responses as valid leading to a final response rate close to 64 %. These were included in our final dataset, ensuring a rich, reliable, and representative foundation for our subsequent analyses.

3.5. Instrument and measures

In our research, we employed a structured self-administered questionnaire formulated on a five-point Likert scale to gauge respondents' perceptions and sentiments (Ahmad, Ullah, et al., 2021). The questionnaire was validated through a rigorous process involving field experts in hospitality management and organizational psychology. Experts reviewed the questionnaire for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. Each item was assessed against criteria such as comprehensibility, cultural appropriateness, and ability to accurately measure the intended construct (Ahmad, Ullah, Aldhaen, Han, Araya-Castillo, & Ariza-Montes, 2022). Based on their feedback, minor modifications were made to improve phrasing and ensure that the questions

were contextually suitable for the hospitality sector. This validation process ensured the reliability and face validity of the instrument before distribution (Adnan et al., 2021). The questionnaire was strategically bifurcated into two predominant sections. The initial segment gathered general socio-demographic information, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of the respondents. The latter segment focused on extracting employees' sentiments concerning the variables of the study.

For the measurement of CSR perceptions among employees, we utilized the widely acknowledged [Turker \(2009\)](#) CSR scale, which includes six pivotal items. An illustrative item from this scale reads, “My hotel engages in activities that strive to protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment.” When it came to gauging employee happiness (HAPP), we turned to the succinct five-item happiness scale crafted by [García del Junco et al. \(2013\)](#). An illustrative item from this scale reads, “The organizational climate of my hotel is good.”

Intrinsic motivation (INMO), another cardinal variable in our research, was measured using a five-item scale extracted from [Tierney et al. \(1999\)](#). One such statement encapsulating INMO is, “I enjoy finding solutions to complex problems.” Lastly, to encapsulate burnout (BUOT), we drew from [Kristensen et al. \(2005\)](#). Their Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) presented an in-depth perspective on Burnout, and for our purposes, we incorporated seven pertinent items from this inventory. A representative item stresses the emotional weight of burnout with, “I feel my work is emotionally exhausting.”

3.6. Employee socio-demographic

The socio-demographic profile of the 385 respondents provides valuable context for our findings in China's hospitality sector. Males comprised 56 % and females 44 %, aligning with industry norms. Most respondents were aged 25–40, highlighting a youthful workforce. Industry experience was divided into four groups, with the majority having 3–7 years of experience, reflecting a mix of familiarity with industry dynamics and growth potential.

4. Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was chosen for its ability to simultaneously assess complex relationships between multiple variables, including direct and indirect effects ([Deng et al., 2022](#); [Fu et al., 2022](#)). This technique is particularly suitable for testing the hypothesized mediation effects of employee happiness and intrinsic motivation on the CSR-burnout relationship, providing a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics ([Ahmad, Scholz, et al., 2021](#); [Guo et al., 2021](#)). To further ensure the robustness of our findings, we conducted a series of additional analyses. First, we applied bootstrapping techniques with 5000 replications to validate the stability of the estimated coefficients. The bootstrapped confidence intervals consistently confirmed the significance of the relationships among CSR, employee happiness, intrinsic motivation, and burnout. Second, alternative model specifications were tested, including sub-sample analyses based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and industry experience. These tests revealed that our results remain stable across various groups and model configurations. Moreover, confirmatory factor analysis and subsequent reliability checks (e.g., Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE measures) further reinforced the soundness of our measurement model and minimized concerns regarding common method variance ([Jiang et al., 2025](#)). Collectively, these robustness checks provide compelling evidence that the core findings of our study are both reliable and resilient, thereby reinforcing the validity of our conclusions regarding the mitigating role of CSR in employee burnout. Examining our preliminary results, we turned our attention to the outcomes of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) presented in [Table 1](#). Regarding BUOT, all items demonstrated significant loadings with T-statistics ranging from 5.181 for BUOT1 to a high of 7.137 for BUOT4, affirming their pertinence in

Table 1
The output of CFA.

	Factor loadings	Standard deviation	T statistics
BUOT1 \leftarrow BUOT	0.814	0.157	5.181
BUOT2 \leftarrow BUOT	0.799	0.15	5.34
BUOT3 \leftarrow BUOT	0.821	0.121	6.773
BUOT4 \leftarrow BUOT	0.85	0.119	7.137
BUOT5 \leftarrow BUOT	0.819	0.126	6.505
BUOT6 \leftarrow BUOT	0.789	0.145	5.436
BUOT7 \leftarrow BUOT	0.85	0.134	6.327
CSR1 \leftarrow CSR	0.823	0.018	46.185
CSR2 \leftarrow CSR	0.748	0.042	17.705
CSR3 \leftarrow CSR	0.735	0.048	15.171
CSR4 \leftarrow CSR	0.876	0.014	63.723
CSR5 \leftarrow CSR	0.864	0.015	57.617
CSR6 \leftarrow CSR	0.787	0.055	14.417
HAPP1 \leftarrow HAPP	0.842	0.032	26.484
HAPP2 \leftarrow HAPP	0.873	0.022	39.623
HAPP3 \leftarrow HAPP	0.706	0.042	16.906
HAPP4 \leftarrow HAPP	0.747	0.043	17.483
HAPP5 \leftarrow HAPP	0.798	0.025	31.883
INMO1 \leftarrow INMO	0.779	0.027	28.462
INMO2 \leftarrow INMO	0.846	0.019	44.544
INMO3 \leftarrow INMO	0.871	0.017	50.066
INMO4 \leftarrow INMO	0.800	0.029	27.601
INMO5 \leftarrow INMO	0.822	0.023	35.559

measuring burnout. Notably, CSR items manifested even more striking results. CSR1, for instance, presented an impressive T-statistic value of 46.185, while CSR4 peaked at 63.723. These values underscore the robustness of the construct within our model. Turning to HAPP, items HAPP1 and HAPP2 stood out with substantial T-statistics of 26.484 and 39.623, respectively. This suggests that these items are critical

indicators of happiness among the workforce. Lastly, INMO showed consistency across its items. Particularly, INMO3 registered a T-statistic of 50.066, emphasizing its pivotal role in gauging INMO. These results, offer a foundational assurance of the validity and relevance of our measures, reinforcing the strength and precision of our data collection instrument. This paves the way for subsequent analyses and interpretations, rooted in the confidence of our initial findings. The measurement model is given in Fig. 1.

Following our initial examination of the CFA, we further evaluated the reliability and validity of our constructs based on the metrics provided in Table 2. For BUOT, Cronbach's alpha value of 0.92 and rho_A of 0.938 demonstrate excellent internal consistency. These values, coupled with a composite reliability (CR) of 0.935, affirm that BUOT's items cohesively measure the intended construct. Its average variance extracted (AVE) score of 0.673 surpasses the benchmark of 0.5, confirming the construct's convergent validity. Similarly, CSR showed commendable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.893 and a CR of 0.918. Its AVE, standing at 0.651, further bolsters its validity within our model. Turning our focus to HAPP, while its Cronbach's alpha and rho_A values, 0.854 and 0.867 respectively, are slightly lower compared to

Table 2
Reliability and validity measures of constructs.

	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
BUOT	0.920	0.938	0.935	0.673
CSR	0.893	0.909	0.918	0.651
HAPP	0.854	0.867	0.896	0.633
INMO	0.884	0.916	0.914	0.679

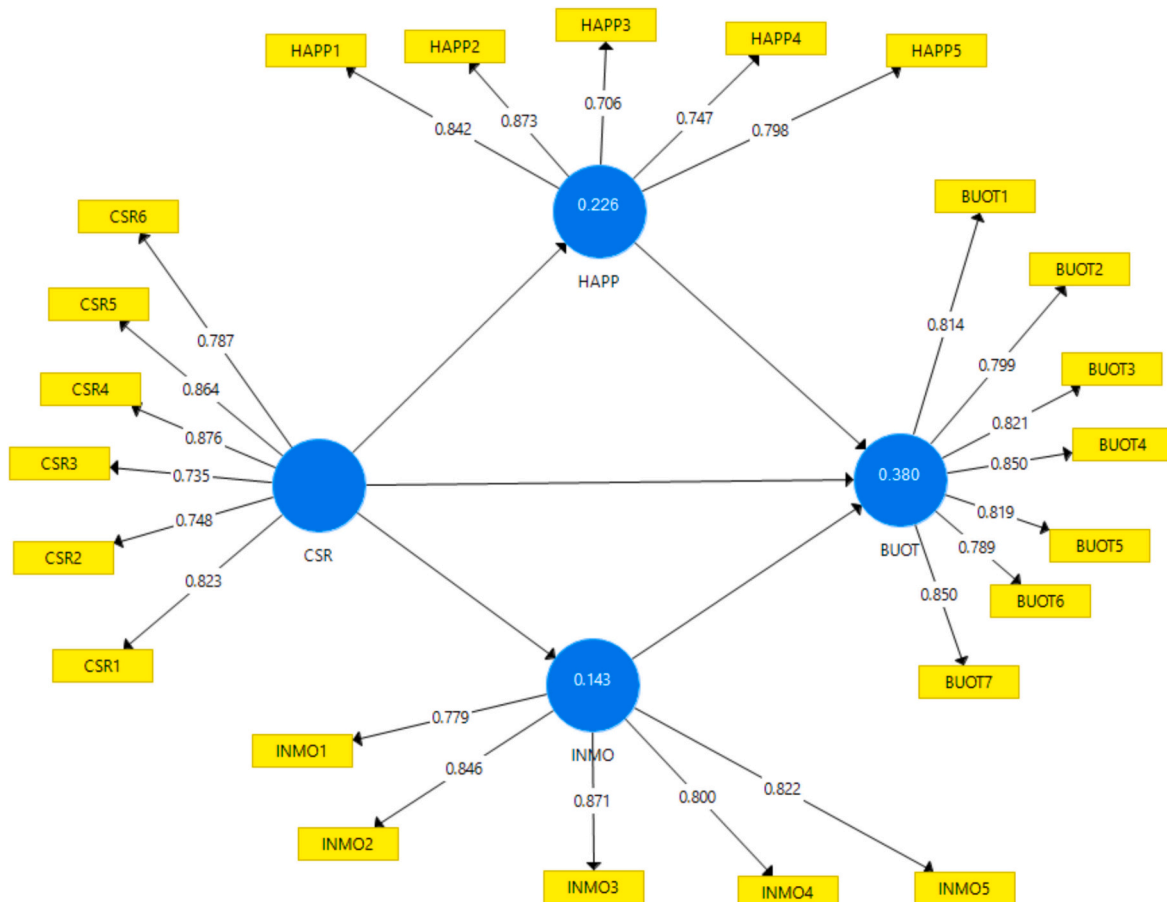


Fig. 1. The measurement model of this study.

other constructs, they still signify good reliability. The CR value of 0.896 and an AVE of 0.633 echo its efficacy in gauging happiness among respondents. Lastly, the INMO construct exhibited strong reliability, reflected in its Cronbach's alpha of 0.884 and a CR of 0.914. With an AVE of 0.679, INMO's items effectively capture the essence of intrinsic motivation.

Our exploration into the constructs' relationships deepens with Table 3. This matrix shows the divergent validity, indicated by the diagonal values, contrasting sharply with off-diagonal inter-construct correlations (Ahmad, Scholz, et al., 2021; Guan et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023). For BUOT, the square root of its AVE is 0.821, which surpasses its correlations with other constructs, affirming its divergent validity. In particular, BUOT's strongest negative correlation is observed with CSR at -0.298 , implying that as perceptions of CSR increase, burnout sentiments may diminish. CSR, displaying a square root of AVE at 0.807, demonstrates the robustness of its divergent validity. Furthermore, its positive relationships with HAPP and INMO stand at 0.284 and 0.378, respectively, suggesting that employees' positive perceptions of organizational CSR practices can enhance both happiness and motivation.

HAPP's value on the diagonal is 0.796, confirming its divergent validity. Beyond its relationship with CSR, HAPP shares a considerable positive correlation with INMO at 0.387, pointing to the idea that happiness and intrinsic motivation are intricately linked within the hospitality sector. INMO, with a diagonal value of 0.824, once again reiterates its distinctness from other constructs. Besides its aforementioned positive ties with CSR and HAPP, a slight negative correlation with BUOT at -0.116 is observed. While not as pronounced as CSR's influence, it does indicate that intrinsic motivation might play a role in offsetting burnout to some extent.

Shifting our attention to Table 4, we further validated the discriminant validity of our variables with the help of HTMT ratios. This measure, in essence, assists in distinguishing how much of a trait shared by two variables is unique to them individually. For BUOT and CSR, the HTMT value stands at 0.311, indicating a rather minimal overlap, thus providing evidence for the discriminant validity between BUOT and CSR. Similarly, the BUOT's relationship with HAPP and Intrinsic Motivation INMO shows HTMT values of 0.172 and 0.165, respectively. These values reaffirm the discriminant validity, suggesting that BUOT shares a limited common trait with HAPP and INMO. Continuing our journey across the matrix, the connection between CSR and HAPP results in an HTMT value of 0.308, while the CSR-INMO pairing shows a ratio of 0.391. Though still evidencing discriminant validity, these values are relatively higher, highlighting a slightly more pronounced shared trait between CSR and the latter two constructs.

Lastly, HAPP and INMO, two constructs intimately related to the employee experience, hold an HTMT ratio of 0.437. This, the highest among the analyzed pairings, hints at a more significant shared trait between employee happiness and their intrinsic motivation, yet still substantiating their distinctiveness.

Examining our results the hypotheses and their associated statistical findings as presented in Table 5, we extract and elucidate upon the directional relationships between our core constructs.

The first hypothesis, which posited a relationship between CSR and BUOT, yielded a statistically significant negative coefficient of -0.253 . This is further affirmed by the T-statistic of -5.750 and a p-value of 0.000, well below the common threshold of 0.05. This suggests that increased perceptions of CSR initiatives are associated with reduced

Table 4
HTMT ratios.

	BUOT	CSR	HAPP	INMO
BUOT				
CSR	0.311			
HAPP	0.172	0.308		
INMO	0.165	0.391	0.437	

Table 5
The structural analysis results.

	Beta	SD	t value	p-Value	CI	
					2.50 %	97.50 %
CSR → BUOT	-0.253	0.044	-5.750	0.000	-0.278	-0.211
CSR → HAPP	0.284	0.048	5.936	0.000	0.187	0.380
CSR → INMO	0.378	0.061	6.169	0.000	0.267	0.503
HAPP → BUOT	-0.133	0.033	4.030	0.019	-0.169	-0.107
INMO → BUOT	-0.109	0.029	3.759	0.022	-0.153	-0.098
CSR → HAPP → BUOT	-0.038	0.017	2.235	0.004	-0.052	-0.027
CSR → INMO → BUOT	-0.041	0.019	2.158	0.011	-0.078	-0.061

employee burnout. Thus, this hypothesis is empirically approved. Similarly, CSR's influence on HAPP was also under scrutiny. The analysis indicates a positive relationship with a coefficient of 0.284, backed by a T-statistic of 5.936 and a p-value of 0.000. This further cements the notion that employees' perceptions of their employers' CSR endeavors positively influence their happiness levels. Hence, this hypothesis is statistically supported.

In the context of INMO, CSR again manifests a significant positive influence, with a coefficient value of 0.378 and a corresponding T-statistic of 6.169. The p-value of 0.000 ensures that this hypothesis, advocating for a positive relation between CSR perceptions and intrinsic motivation, is substantiated. Analyzing the relationship between HAPP and BUOT, we uncover a negative coefficient of -0.133 , highlighting that increased happiness can result in decreased employee burnout. With a T-statistic of 4.030 and a p-value of 0.019, this hypothesis stands approved. The intrinsic motivation's effect on burnout (INMO → BUOT) is also discerned to be negative, with a coefficient of -0.109 . This relationship's statistical strength is validated by a T-statistic of 3.759 and a p-value of 0.022, thereby ratifying the hypothesis.

Investigating mediated relationships, the indirect path from CSR through HAPP to BUOT is negative, as shown by a coefficient of -0.038 . This relationship's significance is emphasized by a p-value of 0.004, lending empirical support to the hypothesis that happiness partially mediates the relationship between CSR and burnout. Finally, the mediated pathway from CSR through INMO to BUOT is represented with a coefficient of -0.041 and a significant p-value of 0.011. This suggests that intrinsic motivation acts as another mediator between CSR perceptions and employee burnout, providing further approval for this hypothesized relationship. We present the structural model in Fig. 2.

5. Discussion

Our research builds upon prior studies, providing a deeper understanding of the inner mechanism between CSR and employee burnout. Our findings are in line with those of Hayat and Afshari (2022) and Macassa et al. (2021), who emphasized the positive impact of CSR on employee well-being and motivation, noting increased job satisfaction and organizational pride. Using the COR theory as a foundation, we understand that employees derive instrumental psychological and emotional resources from CSR practices. This viewpoint complements Hobfoll and Freedy (2017) assertion that burnout arises from acute resource depletion. Tangible CSR actions, as highlighted by (Kim & Kim,

Table 3
Divergent validity matrix of constructs.

	BUOT	CSR	HAPP	INMO
BUOT	0.821			
CSR	-0.298	0.807		
HAPP	-0.158	0.284	0.796	
INMO	-0.116	0.378	0.387	0.824

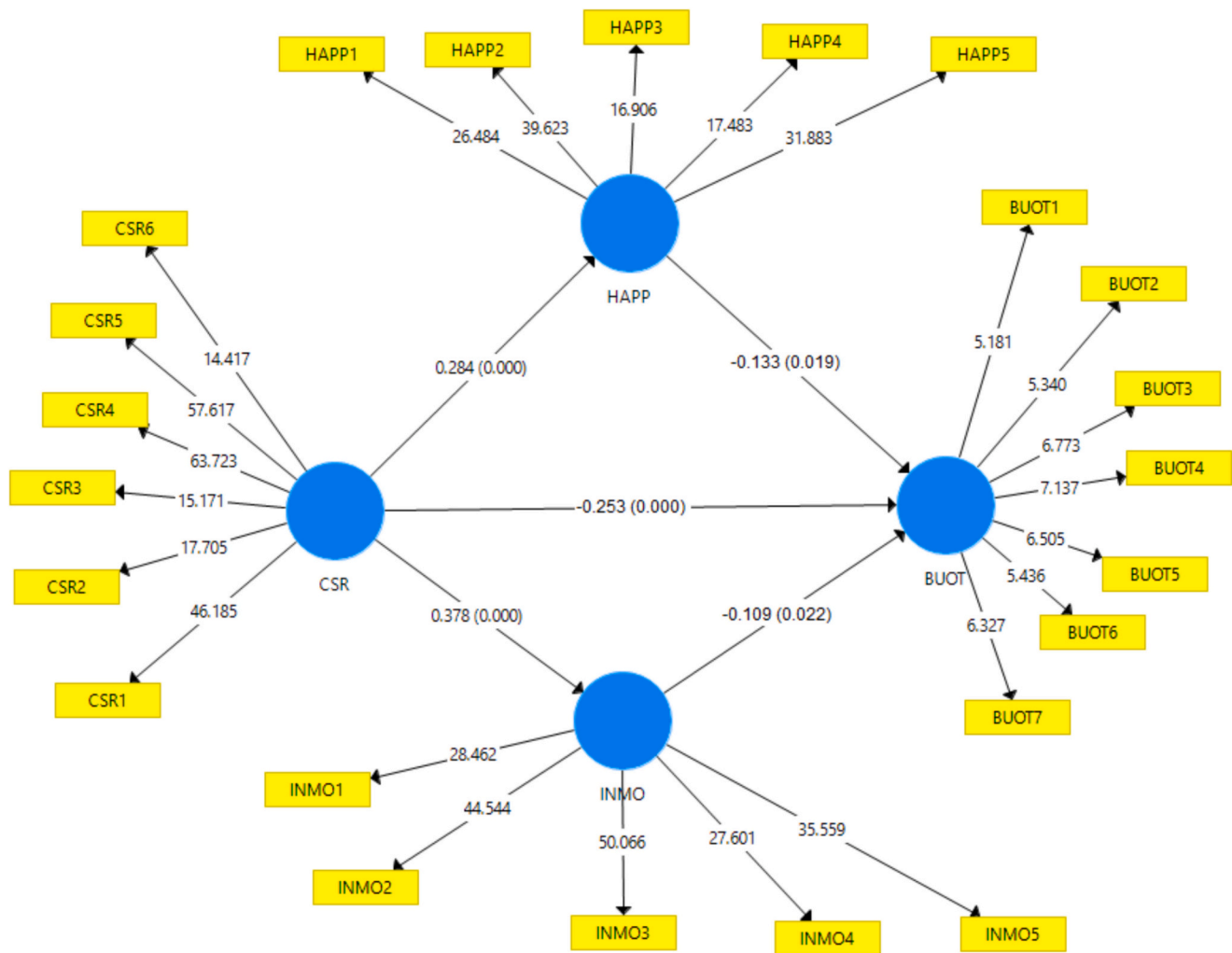


Fig. 2. The structural model of the current study showing various hypothesized relationships.

2021), directly benefit employees, signifying a commitment to preserving their resources, thus preventing burnout.

In parallel, Yan et al. (2023) and Svergun and Fairlie (2020) elucidated the pivotal role of “resources” accrued from positive organizational actions, like CSR, in influencing employee outcomes. Additionally, Nazir and Islam (2020a) further noted that modern employees search for the purpose of their work. More congruent with organizations that reflect their intrinsic values, particularly those that promote societal well-being. It's consistent with our finding that such alignment can boost employee happiness, as noted by Bibi et al. (2022). The amount of insight you can glean navigating the complicated relationship between employee happiness and burnout is fascinating. This is what Hypothesis H3 stresses, namely, that burnout is inversely related to heightened happiness. According to Santhanam and Srinivas (2019), under the present day high-pressure work environment, happiness plays a major bolster role. According to Fisher (2010), workplace happiness is a combination of positive emotions, satisfaction with work and a profound sense of purpose. Professional experience becomes holistic happiness, and resilience to challenges is strengthened.

This is in line with Akgunduz et al. (2023) proposition that workplace presence of deep-seated happiness provides employees with effective coping mechanisms. These mechanisms function as powerful tools to achieve harmony between very rigorous job requirements and personal well-being. Anthony-McMann et al. (2017) note that the debilitating triad of burnout has a hard time taking root in environments ruled by genuine happiness. As described, such environments are

bulwarks against the all-pervasive threat of burnout. This relationship is important to further dissect using COR theory. Barthauer et al. (2020) encapsulated the COR theory essence by asserting that people are very fervent in their efforts to acquire, preserve, and protect their most valuable resources. Stress and burnout follow on those situations where these resources are under threat or depleted. When resources are plentiful, though, the defenses against burnout are really well built. Aboramadan and Kundi (2022) define employee happiness well as a bountiful cache of psychological assets. Happiness provides employees with resources from positive emotions to a profound sense of belonging. This integration with the insights from Surachartkumtonkun et al. (2023) suggests that the happiness-derived resources are critical in mitigating the negative effects of job stressors that could otherwise lead to burnout.

As far as H4, CSR, and burnout are linked via employee happiness. Substantive CSR is more than merely a company's societal commitment in today's era. Such initiatives are in line with the employees and increase their happiness, as Zhao et al. (2019) stated. Similarly, Ahmad, Ullah, Ryu, et al. (2023) pointed out, that this fortified happiness is the wall that prevents burnout from starting. Similarly, CSR plays a significant role in promoting positive emotions. CSR-driven organizations get more of both pride and satisfaction. Psychological enrichment like this recharges employees and shields them from burnout. Liu et al. (2022) argue under the lens of the COR theory that CSR not only replenishes employees' resources but creates profound happiness. Happiness and purpose are a defense against the depletions that lead to burnout. CSR has carved a niche that is revolutionizing employee psychology. CSR

initiatives are more than ethically charged actions as they are rooted in CSR's commitment to societal and environmental betterment, providing employees with deeper meanings and purposes of their professional spaces. Perhaps most evident is the metamorphic relationship between CSR and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation, as defined by the seminal work of [Ryan and Deci \(2000\)](#) is fueled by an inner passion and fulfillment rather than external rewards. In this context, potent CSR actions build an ethos for employees where professional responsibilities are not limited to a mere task but are part of the ethos of the larger ethical standpoints of the organization. This leads to such alignment with purpose driven entities being a wellspring of intrinsic motivation. So CSR is not only about bridging the business-society divide, but it ignites the fire of passion and purpose in people.

From this angle, intrinsic motivation has a greater role and, as a protective coat, it protects from the danger of burnout. Studies such as [Kim \(2018\)](#) and [Rubino et al. \(2009\)](#) paint a picture of literature that is replete with insights showing that when employees experience real joy and satisfaction in their roles, they naturally build resilience against the telltale symptoms of burnout. It's not just a fleeting balm, it's actually a reservoir of strength. As suggested in the COR theory, this intrinsic drive is a cornerstone of the intrinsic drive, to shield employees from potential resource drains and to rejuvenate the employees in the presence of adversities. By bringing these threads together, we can see a very deep interaction between CSR, happiness, intrinsic motivation, and burnout. As noted, ethical CSR initiatives generate a deep sense of purpose in employees. Employees experience an increased intrinsic motivation at their organization when they see their organization's proactive commitment to societal values. Consistent wellbeing is then preserved and bolstered by the principles of this heightened state, a formidable barrier to burnout, underpinned by the COR theory.

The findings of this study align with prior research emphasizing CSR's positive impact on employee well-being but reveal nuanced sector-specific insights. In the hospitality sector, where emotional labor and customer-facing roles amplify stress, CSR's role as a buffer against burnout is particularly pronounced. Additionally, the study highlights cultural nuances within the Chinese context, where collectivist values may enhance the resonance of CSR initiatives compared to more individualistic cultures. Unlike studies conducted in Western contexts, where CSR often fosters individual pride, our results suggest a stronger link between CSR and collective well-being, driven by employees' alignment with organizational values and societal contributions. These distinctions underscore the importance of tailoring CSR strategies to specific cultural and industry contexts.

5.1. Critical theoretical contributions

Our research advances the existing debate on CSR, and employee management literature in the following ways. First, while much of the research lauds CSR for its positive influence on employee attitudes, it is essential to recognize CSR as a polygonal tool with the capacity to mitigate employee burnout. Second, the geographic bias in burnout research, with most studies concentrating on developed countries, risks an incomplete understanding of CSR. The global nature of modern business means that CSR initiatives often span continents, cultures, and varied workforce dynamics. The Chinese hospitality sector's deep dive brings to light that CSR's impact may be shaped differently based on regional factors like societal values, work culture, and industry specifics. Third, the emphasis on intrinsic motivation as a mediator between CSR and burnout is noteworthy. However, what serves as intrinsic motivation might differ based on cultural contexts. For instance, in collectivist societies like China, the greater good of the community or societal welfare may rank higher than personal fulfillment. This suggests that CSR initiatives tailored to cater to regional sensibilities might hold greater potential in mitigating burnout. Similarly, existing research tends to conflate or oversimplify emotional variables under the umbrella of 'happiness.' Differentiating between transient positive emotions and a

stable state of contentment is critical. Moreover, the factors contributing to employee happiness might evolve, not just across industries, but also across hierarchical roles within an organization. For instance, for a frontline employee, alignment of personal values with CSR efforts might lead to happiness. In contrast, for a mid-level manager, it might be the ability to participate or have a say in CSR initiatives. Four, WHO's reclassification of burnout signals a shift in responsibility from the individual to the organization. In this new paradigm, companies cannot merely provide resources for individual coping, but they must actively restructure work environments and cultures to prevent burnout from arising. CSR, in this light, is not an optional benevolent activity but could be a strategic imperative to ensure employee well-being.

5.2. Practical implications

Hospitality industry practitioners should implement several specific measures based on our research findings to reduce employee burnout through effective strategic CSR programs. Organizations need to create CSR programs that specifically address the special stress factors affecting hospitality staff. Local mental health organizations partnered with the industry can provide immediate stress management services for their frontline employees who work long hours and feel burnout. Organizations need to form specific CSR committees which must consist of staff members from different operational levels. Company committees work together to design sustainable operations and community outreach events which focus CSR programs towards employee requirements and community needs. Organizations must integrate CSR outcomes into employee retention metrics and customer satisfaction scores and absenteeism rates as this will help them quantify their CSR initiative benefits and guide their strategy development.

Our study shows to policy officials that it is crucial to develop industry-based CSR motivational structures. The proposed strategy suggests that hospitality businesses should receive tax benefits or subsidies when they establish extensive employee-oriented CSR programs. Public-private partnerships should be supported by policymakers to create standardized wellness programs and resource-sharing platforms which help small and medium-sized enterprises follow best practices in CSR. An annual conference or industry report forum dedicated to best practice sharing allows organizations to distribute successful CSR strategies across the industry which leads to sustained enhancement of labor regulations and workplace well-being initiatives. We present these specific practical recommendations that assist hospitality professionals in lowering workplace burnout and improving staff welfare conditions while guiding policy makers to develop a sustainable hospitality industry framework.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

The present research, while extensive, acknowledges certain limitations. To begin with, our geographical focus was confined to Beijing and Shanghai. Although these cities are quintessential to the Chinese hospitality industry, the exclusion of other potential cities may mean that our findings might not fully capture the entirety of China's diverse hospitality context. Next, our reliance on digital platforms and a limited number of on-site visits to gauge CSR initiatives might leave out perspectives that could be gathered from more in-depth interviews or ethnographic observations. Similarly, despite our attempts to address CMV and SDB, the latent existence of these biases cannot be entirely ruled out. In terms of socio-demographics, the study had a slightly higher representation of males. Although it mirrored the industry dynamics, it might influence certain perceptions or sentiments tied to gender.

Future research should expand its geographical scope, incorporating other cities to offer a more holistic understanding of the sector. Future endeavors might also explore other potential variables that intersect with CSR, such as organizational commitment or job satisfaction.

Diversifying the data collection methods or incorporating mixed methods might also provide a more layered understanding. Moreover, a comparative study between Chinese hospitality and that of other nations could offer cross-cultural insights, highlighting both universal patterns and cultural idiosyncrasies. Finally, this study is limited by its focus on hospitality organizations in Beijing and Shanghai, which may restrict generalizability to other regions or industries. Additionally, cultural factors unique to the Chinese context, such as collectivism, may limit applicability to individualistic cultures. Expanding the geographical scope and exploring cross-cultural comparisons in future research could address these limitations. Future research could explore cross-cultural differences in CSR's impact on burnout and conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of CSR initiatives on employee well-being and organizational outcomes.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The critical role CSR plays in preventing employee burnout, especially for high-stress hospital-type industries, has been underlined by this study. These findings can be used by organizational leaders to embed CSR initiatives within their strategic frameworks and to concentrate on activities that are consistent with employees' values, including sustainability and community engagement. Giving employees some training to understand where CSR goes beyond an action in the local office and how it could be acted upon by them makes them feel they are part of its implementation. Aside from this, acknowledging and rewarding employees' participation in CSR initiatives will improve employees' morale and reduce the level of burnout. These results have relevance for policymakers who should seek to use CSR as a means to improve workforce well-being. Incentives or regulations can encourage industries to adopt CSR frameworks to bring sweeping improvements in employee mental health and organizational performance. Governments can assist organizations in creating supportive environments for the workplace where employees are able to thrive, allowing both societal and economic benefits.

The role of CSR in shaping employee well-being, particularly in the context of China's hospitality sector, cannot be underestimated. As the landscape of this industry continues to evolve in tandem with rapid urbanization and globalization, organizations must prioritize the welfare of their workforce. Burnout is not just an individual concern but a systemic issue that requires holistic strategies. Our exploration emphasizes the profound influence of CSR not just as an instrument for fostering positive organizational dynamics but also as a potent tool for mitigating negative outcomes like burnout. Drawing from our findings, we recommend the following:

First, hospitality organizations should align their CSR activities with the values and interests of their employees. This alignment can boost intrinsic motivation by providing employees with a sense of personal and professional purpose, subsequently enhancing happiness and mitigating burnout. Second, encourage employee involvement in designing and executing CSR activities. Direct participation can augment feelings of ownership and pride, fostering happiness and amplifying intrinsic motivation. Third, regularly communicate the outcomes and impacts of CSR initiatives to employees. Being aware of the tangible differences made by the company can bolster pride, enhance happiness, and fuel intrinsic motivation. Fourth, create programs that allow employees to learn new skills and expand their horizons. When these programs tie back to CSR (e.g., sustainability training), they can enhance intrinsic motivation while combatting feelings of monotony and burnout. Fifth, recognize and celebrate individual efforts in CSR initiatives. Such acknowledgments can elevate happiness levels and strengthen intrinsic motivation, acting as a deterrent to burnout. Sixth, offer short-term opportunities for employees to work on CSR projects of their choice. These sabbaticals can rejuvenate the spirit, offer a break from routine tasks, and rekindle intrinsic motivation, all while contributing to societal well-being. Seven, establish mechanisms for employees to provide feedback

on CSR initiatives. Understanding what resonates with the workforce can lead to more impactful CSR strategies that enhance happiness and intrinsic motivation. Last but not least, beyond external initiatives, infuse well-being and mental health programs into the CSR agenda. Addressing employee happiness and burnout prevention as a part of corporate responsibility can lead to more holistic outcomes.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Yu Wang: Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Li Yan:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Investigation. **Mohammad Said Ibrahim Alshuaibi:** Visualization, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis.

Ethical approval

This study complied with ethical standards set by the Zunyi Medical University Ethics Committee (Approval No. ZMU-EC-2023-1225). Informed consent, confidentiality, and participant rights were strictly upheld.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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