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# Measuring and Examining the Relevance of Discretionary Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism: Some Preliminary Evidence from the U.K. Conference Sector

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## Abstract

This article investigates the implementation of environmentally focused discretionary corporate social responsibility (CSR) within the U.K. conference sector. A new framework is proposed that organizes and communicates information detailing business performance regarding 10 environmental policy initiatives (expressed by the acronym GREENER) using a CSR response scale (expressed by the acronym VENUE). This GREENER VENUE framework fills a void in the CSR literature by focusing on discretionary practices, by exhibiting psychometric and conceptual properties enabling its application within a multitude of contexts. Grounded in theory, the framework is simple to implement, practical, easily understandable, and highly relatable. Applying the GREENER VENUE framework to data collected via a self-administered Internet questionnaire of the U.K. conference sector reveals the majority of conference venues are classified as Eager. The study also examines the efficacy of the proposed framework toward influencing U.K. venues' performance on a range of environmentally friendly best practices relative to environmental accreditation.

## Keywords

discretionary corporate social responsibility, U.K. conference sector, environmental sustainability, conceptual framework

The application of corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks is not new. History suggests that an increasingly complex set of social and institutional initiatives (including government legislation) is being applied to markets. However, academic debate regarding the concepts and theories of CSR is undoubtedly a product of the 20th century (Carroll 1999). Bowen's (1953) seminal contribution is widely acknowledged as the literary birth of CSR. It is underpinned by businesses being responsible for both the creation of goods and services designed specifically for trade and profit motives as well as the production of social goods (Wood 2010). Conceptualization, definition, and redefinition of CSR continued throughout subsequent decades.

A paradigm shift was evident in the 1980s, when efforts to redefine and reconceptualize CSR gave way to greater emphasis on researching this domain (Carroll and Shabana 2010; Frederick 2008). This decade also witnessed intense media coverage of unrelated, globally significant environmental disasters that stimulated the conscience of a generation. The Union Carbide gas leak at Bhopal in 1984, the Russian nuclear power plant explosion at Chernobyl in 1986, and the Exxon Valdez oil tanker spillage in 1989 all contributed to place corporate activity at the forefront of societal

concerns. Concepts, principles, and practices were transferred from the literary page to society's conscience, which stimulated much greater scrutiny of corporate environmental performance. Financial institutions faced concerns over ethical investments (Harvey 1995), food retailers were questioned over immoral sourcing (Maloni and Brown 2006), and corporate activities (Sperling 2010), while fuel suppliers' explorations were meticulously inspected (Amaeshi and Amao 2009).

The tourism sector did not escape attention and has been scrutinized regarding its CSR performance. Initially focusing on mass vacationing, the pervasive nature of CSR has widened this focus to an ever-increasing range of tourism subdomains. Indeed, the conference venue subdomain is not excluded from CSR criticism. It is recognized that conference tourism has a significant and negative impact on the wider environment (Mair and Jago 2010). This is typified by

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externalities associated with overnight accommodation, the production of paper-based materials, transported food and beverage ingredients, the operation of conference facilities, and delegate transportation. Conventional conferences are a resource-demanding process with considerable environmental impacts (Hischier and Hilty 2002).

This increasing recognition of the environmental impacts of conference venues coincided with demands to adopt CSR principles (Mohindra 2008). This brings corporate behavior up to a level where it is congruent with prevailing social norms, values, and performance expectations (Sethi 1975). This generates the need for a clearly defined framework to guide conference venue's CSR performance. The business case for CSR is far-reaching. Venues who elevate to and sustain a longer-term corporate behavior standard that is in line with prevailing social norms, values, and expectations will reap the rewards of improved financial performance and profitability, a reduction in operating costs, increased staff commitment, and repeat visitation (Jones, Comfort, and Hillier 2006; J. Lee, Breiter, and Choi 2011; Nicolau 2008) by delegates, event organizers, and site selection planners.

To undertake a conference venue selection based on corporate environmental performance, delegates, event organizers, and site selection planners require reliable and easily understandable information of environmental performance. There has been a growth in the demand for a conceptual framework that provides such information and thus permits comparisons of CSR across conference venues (Marquez and Fombrun 2005); this article fills that gap in the literature. It presents the theoretical development of CSR within the tourism domain before detailing the development of a new conceptual, comparative framework. The framework is applicable to all venues in any of the four mutually exclusive venue classifications that together form the U.K. conference sector and venues of any size. The theoretical justification of venue size and classification is drawn from Whitfield (2005, 2010). Whitfield (2010) identified that the U.K. conference sector is not homogeneous in terms of venue classification, identifying that purpose-built venues were established first within the sector during the early 1950s. Hotels followed later that decade. Educational establishments and finally visitor attractions established conference facilities in the 1970s. Whitfield (2005) also identified that venue size was not homogeneous. Venue capacities range from a less than 100 m<sup>2</sup> for hotels to a maximum of over 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> for purpose-built venues. This research therefore accepts this nonhomogeneity of the U.K. conference sector in terms of both size and venue classification. In addition, the proposed framework may also be utilized by managers within wider tourism domains and nontourism domains.

## Literature Review

### *Corporate Social Responsibility*

We do not intend to offer a further temporal examination of the fundamental concepts of CSR. This is achieved by Sethi

(1979), Carroll (1999), Wood (2010), and Carroll and Shabana (2010). With regard to a definition of CSR, Carroll (1979, p. 500), argues, "The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time." However, Dahlsrud (2008) identifies that the definition of the Commission of the European Communities (2001) had the greatest frequency count when undertaking a Google Internet trawl. This definition states that CSR is "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis."

Whichever subdomain and/or definition is assumed, the underlying rationale for businesses to adopt CSR is their responsibilities, over and above their commercial responsibilities, to "give due regard to the well being of society which extends to a healthy physical environment" (Henderson 2007, p. 229). The incorporation of such principles voluntarily by business has occurred over the past four decades (Pfau et al. 2008). However, the extent to which an organization adopts CSR will depend on its view of the social, economic, political, and ethical role it plays in society and on its relationships with stakeholders (Argandoña and von Weltzien Hoivik 2009). This relationship with stakeholders, in the form of dialogue, places expectations on an organization. These expectations, and with it where precisely CSR should be applied, have expanded and contracted throughout the post-1980 period. As Painter-Morland (2006, p. 94) states, "The actions and responses of individuals and organizations cannot adequately be appreciated or evaluated without considering the specific business episode and context within which it is situated and of which it is a part. Accountability, from this perspective, is all about being responsive towards ever-changing stakeholder interests. It entails responding to these interests in terms of an evolving sense of moral appropriateness that has to be nurtured within everyday business practice."

Despite this continual debate as to the precise boundaries of expectations, CSR has grown and evolved in both practitioner and academic spheres globally (Carroll and Shabana 2010). Academically, research has ranged from the wider business ethics of corporate citizenship (Joyner and Payne 2002), which ultimately embeds "social" concerns into everyday business activity, to the narrower focus of CSR on financial performance (Mohr, Webb, and Harris 2001). This narrowing of focus can also be seen in the application of CSR to the tourism domain.

### *Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism*

Although society's demands for greater corporate ethics grew through the 1980s, little focus was placed on the tourism sector until the early 1990s (Lea 1993). It was during this decade that academic research concerning ethical tourism began to appear (Fennell and Malloy 1999). At the same time, concern was being expressed over tourism's

environmentally destructive effects, as “pressure group politics” emerged (Tourism Concern 2010). By 1998, a body of literature existed regarding greening the organization. This encompassed domains such as the adoption of greener technology and industrial sector analysis as well as the impact CSR has on organization’s economic and financial performance (Fuchs and Mazmanian 1998). Fennell and Malloy’s (1999) research was typical of these early academic efforts. They examined tour operators within the mass vacation domain, identifying that nonhomogeneity existed in terms of CSR adoption levels. Those describing themselves as “ecotourism operators” had a heightened sense of ethical necessity compared to other tourism sectors. However, as the new millennium approached, Fennell and Malloy (1999, p. 254) stated, “Fundamentally, there is a very weak foundation of research into tourism ethics studies to date.”

Post millennium, there was an expansion in the depth of application of CSR, but within the more traditional domains. Bohdanowicz (2005) examined hotel managers’ perception of environmental management, while Lynes and Andrachuk (2008) examined the motivations for CSR adoption within airlines. As this “body of knowledge” grew, it also became accepted that tourism generates income and jobs and results in much needed infrastructure, which cumulatively boost the destinations’ economy while raising living standards (Henderson 2007). This is true for one subsector of the tourism domain, that of conference tourism.

The conference sector forms one tenet in the overarching domain of business tourism, which includes meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions. Business tourism makes an enormous contribution to the U.K. economy (Mair and Jago 2010). In 2008, business tourism generated £9.1 billion (£4.6 billion international, £4.5 billion domestic) for the U.K. economy, attracting in excess of 20 million visitors in the same year (VisitEngland 2008; Office for National Statistics 2009). Thus, from the production of paper-based materials to food and beverage services, the utilization of overnight accommodation, the operation of conference facilities, and the transportation of delegates, conference venues’ social responsiveness is increasingly being scrutinized (Hischier and Hilty 2002; Mohindra 2008; Mair and Jago 2010).

In their study of an international conference, Hischier and Hilty (2002) identified that delegates’ travel accounted for 96.3% of the environmental impact of the conference, with printed material accounting for 2.9%. By subdividing travel, they identified that 96% of travel impacts stem from flights (58% long haul, 19% middle distance, 17% short haul). In a further study of public health conferences, Mohindra (2008, p. 269) identified that such conferences tend to utilize the “three Rs: reduce, reuse and recycle,” including electronic promotion, in their endeavors to negate the conference’s environmental impact.

Studies in the tourism and hospitality industries have identified a positive impact on financial performance based on company CSR activities (Aragón-Correa et al. 2008; Bird et al. 2007; Orlitzky, Schmidt, and Rynes 2003). Such studies

suggest organizations will increase the reach of their decision making and activities beyond shareholders to stakeholders, such as customers, employees, suppliers, and communities. Therefore, CSR activities can improve an organization’s financial value by (1) immediately saving costs, (2) enhancing an organization’s reputation, and (3) discouraging regulatory action that may result in significant costs for the organization (Bird et al. 2007).

In their study, García and Armas (2007) identified a positive relationship between hotel company CSR actions and return on assets. Nicolau (2008) examined abnormal returns of two Spanish hotels that made 26 CSR-related declarations between 1996 and 2006. Positive abnormal returns were identified, and the study concluded that CSR can be deemed a value added to hotels. S. Lee and Park (2009) calculated the impact of CSR actions for both hotels and casinos, in terms of profitability (firm value). They identified that for hotels there was a positive relationship between CSR activities and profitability, while for casinos there was no relationship. Kirk (1995) studied U.K. hotel environmental policies and activities, concluding that hotels reacted to environmental issues only for direct financial rewards (e.g., energy and waste management) and legislation. However, Kirk studied the environmental issue and did not relate hotels’ tangible environmental actions to financial performances. In addition, research has linked CSR and competitive advantages (Porter and Kramer 2006) and have confirmed that CSR actions positively affect an organization’s reputation (Brammer and Millington 2005) and consumer satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006). As CSR’s prevalence, particularly within the environmental domain, has grown, a means to measure such environmental performance is increasingly demanded (Kildišas and Levišauskas 2005).

### *Environmental Performance Indicators and Environmental Performance Evaluation*

The demand for CSR ratings is increasing (Jackson and Apostolakou 2010); however, the need for multiple metrics to achieve any rating makes measurement and assessment of CSR problematic. In response to this increasing demand, environmental performance indicators (EPIs) have been developed. EPIs are the quantification of interactions between economic activity and the environment (Karavanas, Chaloulakou, and Spyrellisa 2009), which provides information on environmental impacts, business processes, legislative compliance, and stakeholder interactions (Ilinitch, Soderstrom, and Thomas 1998). They can take the form of environmental management or environmental condition indicators (Jasch 2000). The former examines the actions undertaken (such as the number of environmental audits) to minimize the business’s negative environmental impact. While the latter measures the business’s impact on the environment, such as air quality. Regardless of whether they are management or condition environmental indicators, EPIs should be comparable, target orientated, and balanced, offer

continuity, possess frequency, and be comprehensible (Jasch 2000).

EPIs can be used to make temporal comparisons between businesses regarding their environmental performances. In addition, they can be utilized to set internal goals, highlight potential areas where optimization may occur, and be used as an internal or external communications tool (Thoresen 1999). EPIs form a part of an environmental performance evaluation (EPE), which is an internal process and management tool designed to provide management with reliable and verifiable information (International Standard Organisation 1998). It is essential that EPIs and EPE are organized into a framework that permits clear observation on the achievement (or otherwise) of key environmental objectives (Ramos et al. 2007).

### Conceptualization of CSR Frameworks

There are two distinct “schools of development” for CSR frameworks, the first being the conceptualization of the CSR theory, the second the development of measurement frameworks. Although Bowen’s (1953) work was progressive, it did not forward a framework by which his theory could be developed further. It was not until the 1970s that conceptual frameworks appeared (Wood 2010). Such frameworks organize concepts systematically and often form the conceptual foundation for subsequent theories (Mosby 2008). Frameworks forwarded by Sethi (1975) and Carroll (1979) are cornerstones of the conceptual framework literature; extensively critiqued, they remain two seminal articles (Carroll and Shabana 2010; Wartick and Cochran 1985; Wood 1991, 2010). Sethi (1975) classified corporate response as social obligation, social responsibility, or social responsiveness. This typology served as a conceptual framework without regard to corporate intentions or outcomes. Some element of cultural and temporal specificity must be present in an effective evaluation metric of corporate performance, where at the extreme the same activity could be considered socially responsible in one circumstance and socially irresponsible in another (Sethi 1979). There should also be stability in the categorization of corporate activities. Indeed, Sethi (1975) forwarded the view that any such conceptual framework must possess both stable categories and fixed class definitions.

Carroll (1979) improved Sethi’s framework through transforming it into a three-dimensional model. The first dimension represents the areas of obligation that businesses have to society and encompass economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary issues. Economic responsibilities are regarding consumers and investors. Legal responsibilities are to remain compliant with legislation. Ethical responsibilities are the unwritten values derived from society. Discretionary responsibilities go beyond economic and legal but are not expected of a business in an ethical sense; hence, if a business does not

undertake discretionary responsibilities it is not considered unethical (Ruf, Muralidhar, and Paul 1998). These four categories are not intended as a continuum and should not be considered as mutually exclusive. The second dimension covers issues of concern to society and may relate to the environment, consumerism, shareholders, discrimination, occupational safety, and product safety. Carroll’s most important contribution was his third dimension, often referred to as “social responsiveness,” which includes strategies that businesses adopt in response to social issues. Responsiveness runs on two continuums from reactionary to defense and from accommodation to proactive.

These frameworks brought focus to the CSR debate and heavily contributed to the conceptual origin for subsequent theories. Although conceptualizations of CSR decreased in the 1980s, they did not cease (see, e.g., Wartick and Cochran 1985). Instead, theoretical and empirical research concerning the development of measurement frameworks focused on devising a “process” framework that businesses can follow to measure where they are in terms of the process of adopting CSR (Mair and Jago 2010; Maon, Lindgreen, and Swaen 2009).

Theoretical and empirical research concerning the development of measurement frameworks has been largely focused on formulating a classification model (Petulla 1987) and on devising a “process” framework that organizations can follow to measure where they are in terms of the process of adopting CSR (Maon, Lindgreen, and Swaen 2009; Mair and Jago 2010). In terms of frameworks that provide a comparative rating or score, significant growth has been experienced in the number of financial organizations that offer CSR ratings because of the rise in social investment funds and the increase in social regulation (Marquez and Fombrum 2005). However, the use of CSR rating for investment decisions is outside the scope of this article. One framework that incorporates not only financial variables but also environmental and social parameters is that of the triple bottom line (TBL) approach. This composite approach combines ethical and discretionary variables into a single social parameter, combining it with economics parameters and environmental parameters. TBL does not contain any legal parameters, as this approach is grounded in the assumption that CSR is adopted voluntarily rather than directed by legal structures (McGehee et al. 2009). TBL is an attempt to apply an accounting paradigm (the bottom line) to social and environmental domains (Price n.d.). Underpinning this approach is the belief that an organization’s obligation to its stakeholders can be “measured, calculated, audited and reported” (Norman and MacDonald 2004, p. 243) in the same way as profit and loss. Practitioners’ concerns are firmly embedded in finding pragmatic measurements for both environmental and social parameters, remembering that “social” is composed of ethical and discretionary variables. Thus, TBL valuations would benefit from measurement against relevant criteria in established metrics (Kimmel and Boyd 2004). The TBL approach

has also found support within the wider tourism domain (Dwyer 2005; Dwyer et al. 2007; Faux 2005), although research within the hospitality domain has not adopted TBL extensively (McGehee et al. 2009).

There has been a dearth of academic conceptual frameworks that score an organization's performance. Spiller (2000) developed an Ethical Performance Scorecard, focusing on the organizations' practices with reference to six principle stakeholders and 60 best practices. Numeric ratings were assigned to each of the 60 best practices by managers of 22 organizations, whereby 2 = major strength, 1 = strength, 0 = no strength/concern, -1 = concern, and -2 = major concern. Organizations could therefore be scored between 120 and -120. It should be noted that there is considerable diversity in environmental indicator frameworks, (Ramos, Caeiro, and Melo 2004), which has created difficulties in undertaking comparisons across organizations, domains, and nations (Ramos et al. 2007).

There appears no obvious attempt to standardize EPI within EPE, with existing ratings and measures being somewhat arbitrary (Xie and Hayase 2007), along with concerns over data sources and collection methods (Bennett and James 1999) as well as a lack of consensus on what, how, and where to measure (Kolk and Mauser 2002). However, the acceptance and adoption of a singular environmental policy should not be considered as a true indication of environmental commitment by an organization. A better indication of the commitment to improving an organization's environmental performance can be ascertained if the *contents* of the environmental policy are examined. Indeed, Elkington and Burke (1989) proposed a set of 10 policy steps that may be adopted by an organization in a bid to achieve environmental excellence:

1. Develop and publish an environmental policy
2. Prepare an action plan
3. Arrange the organization and staffing of the company
4. Allocate adequate resources
5. Invest in environmental science and technology
6. Educate and train
7. Monitor, audit, and report
8. Monitor the evolution of the green agenda
9. Contribute to environmental programs
10. Help to build bridges between the various interest groups

Although there is no singular move toward identifying common dimensions of CSR in a formalized theoretical or systematic empirical way (Ilinitch, Soderstrom, and Thomas 1998), through the use of conceptual framework that draws on Carroll (1979), Sethi (1975), and the 10 steps to excellence (Elkington and Burke 1989), we now construct a conceptual framework for comparative purposes within the U.K. conference sector and further afield.

## Method

### *Conceptual Framework for Discretionary CSR*

The conceptual framework proposed for this research focuses on Carroll's (1979) fourth area of obligation, that of discretionary. This is applied to the environment, which is one of Carroll's six issues of concern to society. Discretionary obligation was chosen because the research project from which this article's findings are drawn has a working assumption that U.K. conference venues are compliant with applicable legislation in the long run. If not, they will be forced to cease trading. Thus, the practices examined in this study are discretionary in nature and are undertaken voluntarily. The venue therefore decides whether or not to adopt them; they are not imposed on the venue via legislation. Indeed, Stainer and Stainer (1993) state that the lowest denominator of acceptable behavior by organizations is legal compliance. This article therefore differentiates between discretionary and mandatory CSR.

The framework itself forms along two axes. Along the x-axis are the environmental factors under study, and the y-axis forms the organization's responses to each factor. In terms of the latter, this framework draws on Carroll's (1979) 4-point scale (Carroll's third dimension), which measures responsiveness (reactive, defense, accommodating, proactive), for its own classifications. However, we view the single category of "reaction" as too restrictive as it also encompasses "denial." The category of reaction is therefore separated into Unmotivated and Eternal denial for our framework. Therefore, we employ a five-category response scale, this being Venerated, Eager, Nonchalant, Unmotivated, Eternal denial (VENUE). Our framework satisfies Sethi's (1975) fundamental requirements of a conceptual framework, that of stable categories and fixed class definitions, with the definitions shown in Table 1.

Adapting Elkington and Burke's (1989) 10 steps to establish a continuum of action, this framework proposes 10 EPIs that may be contained within a conference venue's environmental policy. The following have been selected for inclusion within the framework.

1. **Greening the boardroom room**
2. **Register of applicable environmental legislation**
3. **Environmental disclosure by organization—annual reports**
4. **Educating staff with regard to environmental impact**
5. **Need to adopt (i) environmental review**
6. **(ii) environmental statement**
7. **(iii) environmental management system**
8. **(iv) environmental audit**
9. **Establish an environmental affairs department**
10. **Recycling, recovering, and reusing**

**Table 1.** Conceptual Framework Classifications and Definitions

Classification	Definition
Venerated	Those organizations achieving the highest standards
Eager	Organizations act in a proactive manner toward environmental issues
Nonchalant	Acknowledging the corporate–environment interaction, the organization changes internal attitudes/behavior achieving the minimum to maintain a good image
Unmotivated	Acknowledging the corporate–environment interaction, but internally organization is unwilling/unable to change, unless acted on by external force
Eternal denial	Company denies the need for policy, with no plans to introduce environmentally friendly processes

**Table 2.** Sample Questions with Associated Responses, Framework Classification, and Score Assigned

Has the venue undertaken an environmental review whereby its impacts upon the environment in relation to hosting a conference are established?	Does the venue have a separate department responsible for environmental issues?	Framework classification	Score assigned
Carried out across whole venue	Full-time department in place	Venerated	3
Carried out across part of venue, but not all	Environmental committee set up	Eager	2
Need recognized, limited action taking place	Responsibilities given to management	Nonchalant	1
Review not established, but plans to do so	No assigning of responsibilities, plans to do so	Unmotivated	0
Review not established, no plans to do so	No assigning of responsibilities, no plans to do so	Eternal denial	–1

These EPIs are referred to by the acronym GREENER. These EPIs also satisfy Jasch's (2000) conditions that they should be comparable, target orientated, and balanced, offer continuity, possess frequency, and be understandable. Thus, the 5-point responsiveness scale of VENUE will be used to gauge the discretionary indicators highlighted above, GREENER, creating the GREENER VENUE conceptual comparative framework. The EPIs selected not only are applicable to the conference sector but also are purposely generic in order that they apply to the wider tourism domain and nontourism domains. As such, the 10 EPIs were not reviewed by conference venue managers prior to the study.

### Questionnaire and Data Collection

A question relevant to each of the chosen organizational discretionary environmental indicators was included in the questionnaire. For each question five possible responses were offered. Examples of two questions with their associated questionnaire response options, responsive criteria, and scores assigned are shown in Table 2; however, the framework classifications (Venerated, Eager, Nonchalant, Unmotivated, Eternal denial) were not disclosed on the questionnaire, for fear that terms such as *Unmotivated* and/or *Eternal denial* may bias respondents toward more favorable responses. Additional questions concerning the year of implementation for each of the indicators, reasons for nonimplementation, accreditation, environmental practices employed, the venues' conference style (purpose built, hotel, educational establishment, or visitor attractions), and the extent of the venues' conference space were also asked of respondents.

Two principal methods of venue identification were utilized. Email addresses were obtained from the Venuefinder.com website (<http://www.venuefinder.com/>), and further Internet-based trawls were undertaken. The 1,726 email addresses identified formed a sample of the overall U.K. conference venue population. A pilot survey was initiated emailing out the survey hyperlink to 20 randomly selected venues. Pilot respondents were asked not only to complete the survey but also to email back any comments on structure, phraseology, and/or presentation. Once pilot responses were reviewed, the questionnaire, a self-administered Internet-based survey (Google docs), was emailed to the remaining 1,706 U.K. conference venues identified across the four venue classifications in May and June 2010.

The email respondents were based on the email addresses obtained, and hence in the vast majority of instances no specific individual was targeted, but rather the questionnaire hyperlink was emailed to a generic booking, reservation, or information mailbox for onward distribution to the appropriate individual within the venue. During the survey period several reminders were emailed, each with a link to the questionnaire; at the end of the data collection period a total of 191 responses were obtained, giving a response rate of 11.1%. No attempt was made to assess nonresponse bias.

### Scoring Venues on the GREENER VENUE Framework

For each response given to the 10 environmental variables (GREENER), a score was assigned. Table 2 identifies that for the most environmentally comprehensive response,

**Table 3.** Responsive Classification of the U.K. Conference Sector

Responsive category	Responsive score
Venerated	30
Venerated (minus)	25 to 29
Eager (plus)	21 to 24
Eager	20
Eager (minus)	15 to 19
Nonchalant (plus)	11 to 14
Nonchalant	10
Nonchalant (minus)	5 to 9
Unmotivated (plus)	1 to 4
Unmotivated	0
Unmotivated (minus)	-5 to -1
Eternal denial (plus)	-9 to -6
Eternal denial	-10

which equates to Venerated, a score of 3 is assigned; this decreases by 1 for each response until the most environmentally inert response, that equating to Eternal denial, is assigned a value of -1. The fact that being in Denial equates to a deduction of 1 point and that being Unmotivated does not add nor deduct any value results in unbalanced scoring. Thus, if all responses are negative the CSR score is -10, with the most environmentally responsive organizations scoring 30. In between these extremes, a score of 0 equates to Unmotivated, 10 to Nonchalant, and 20 to Eager. These five classifications can be subdivided. As the venue improves its environmental performance, so the responsive score increases, so the suffix “plus” can be added to the classification until the score reaches the midpoint between the initial and subsequent classification. Any score above this midpoint is approaching the next division, and thus a suffix of “minus” can be added. This subdivision is shown in Table 3.

In addition to advancing a proposed conceptual framework for discretionary CSR, this study sought to provide a supplementary empirical assessment of the convergent and discriminant validity (Trochim 2006; Garson 2009) of the proposed discretionary CSR construct. Garson (2009) advises that a construct shows evidence of criterion validity if the “proposed measures for a given concept exhibit generally the same direction and magnitude of correlation with other variables as do measures of that concept already accepted within the social science community.” On the other hand, Churchill (1979), as well as others (Campbell and Fiske 1959, p. 70), also advocated that new measures exhibit discriminant validity, the “extent to which the measure is indeed novel and not simply a reflection of some other variable.”

### Design

Toward this end, four analyses were conducted from the corpus of survey data. The first determined the extent to which the summated measure of discretionary CSR of

various U.K. venues explains performance on a range of widely accepted environmentally friendly best practices. An inventory of 18 widely accepted environmental best practices (Mohindra 2008; J. Lee, Breiter, and Choi 2011) was included in the survey to which respondents indicated the extent to which their venues employed the practices. A second analysis examined how possession of accreditation, certification, or awards for at least one type of sustainable or environmental management system also explains venues’ performance on the 18 environmentally friendly practices. Obtaining accreditation toward sustainable energy conservation or environmental systems management is universally recognized as helping improve—though not guarantee—firms’ environmental performance (Buckley 2002; Font 2002; Rivera 2002). Accreditation can therefore be considered a proxy measure for an organization’s environmental performance. The purpose of the first and second analyses is to determine and compare the influence of discretionary CSR and accreditation toward independently influencing environmental best practices by U.K. conference venues. Methodologically, this establishes whether both discretionary CSR and accreditation, though conceptualized as distinct constructs, relate to the same criterion (performance across the 18 best practices) and are convergent to some degree. A third analysis was undertaken in which both discretionary CSR and environmental accreditation were simultaneously modeled to predict performance on the 18 best practices, the aim of which was to see whether one or another measure proved more robust in explaining performance on the 18 environmental best practices. If the venues’ summated score for discretionary CSR showed significance toward explaining performance on best practices but not accreditation, this would enhance its discriminant validity. Finally, a fourth analysis was done to test whether venues with at least one form of environmental or sustainable accreditation, certification, or award would score higher in discretionary CSR than venues with no certification.

### Measures

The summated discretionary CSR score for each U.K. venue was computed by adding self-report scores obtained for each component of the GREENER framework. Possession of environmental accreditation was measured in the survey via a multiple response question asking whether the venue is currently accredited or awarded any of the following: BS8901 (Sustainability Management Systems for Events), BS16001 (Energy Management Systems), ISO14001 (Environmental Management Systems), and Green Tourism Business Awards (Gold, Silver, or Bronze). An option for venues not currently accredited or only working toward accreditation was also included. A venue was classified as being accredited (1) if at least one of the accreditation schemes above was ticked and not accredited (0) otherwise. The dependent variable in all analyses was venues’ self-reported performance on each of the 18 environmental best practices (EBPs),



evaluated using a 5-point response scale: 5 = *practice is fully employed and effective in limiting/reducing emissions and/or creating waste*, 1 = *practice not employed, no plans to introduce it*.

### Analytical Approach

For analyses 1, 2, and 3, separate models based on multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were examined. In all three analyses conducted, venues' performance scores for each of the 18 EBPs were entered as dependent variables. In analysis 1, venues' discretionary CSR score was entered as a covariate variable, while in analysis 2 possession of at least one form of accreditation was entered as a factor variable. In analysis 3, both discretionary CSR score and possession of accreditation were simultaneously entered as covariate and factor variables, respectively, to determine which independent variable (venues' discretionary CSR score or possession of accreditation) most highly differentiates performance on the 18 EBPs. For analysis 4, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted in which venues' discretionary CSR score was entered as the dependent variable and possession of accreditation as a factor independent variable.

## Findings

### Sample Characteristics

Results showed that respondents completing the survey on behalf of U.K. venues they represent were in the areas of responsibility predominantly in conferences (94 responses, or 49.2%), management (36 responses, or 18.8%) and marketing (20 responses, or 10.5%). The majority of the venues represented in the survey were small, with 51.8% of the sample representing venues with sizes of 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> or less, though medium (27.2%) as well as large venues (20.9%) were fairly represented. Most of the venues surveyed were hotels with conference facilities (47.6%). Of the 191 venues surveyed, 63.4% reported not having at least one type of environmental certification or accreditation. The discretionary CSR scores for all 191 venues in the survey sample ranged from -8 to 30, with an overall mean of 10.66 ( $SD = 10.19$ ). Sample characteristics and baseline data for venues' performance on the 18 EBPs are reported in Table 4.

### Distribution of Venues' Scores on the GREENER VENUE Framework

Overall, the classification with the largest proportion of venues was that of Eager (including Eager, minus; Eager; and Eager, plus) with 68 venues (35.6%), whereby "Organizations act in a proactive/progressive manner toward environmental issues." Nonchalant (including Nonchalant, minus; Nonchalant; and Nonchalant, plus) has the second largest

proportion of venues, accounting for 58 venues (30.4%). These venues were "Acknowledging the corporate/environment interaction, the organization changes internal attitudes/behavior achieving the minimum to maintain a good image." Fewer than 7% of venues were approaching or are at Venerated, while over twice as many venues (31 responses, or 16.2%) were viewed as having an Unmotivated approach, and 21 venues (11%) consider themselves to be in Eternal denial. As such over a quarter (52 venues, or 27.2%) of responding U.K. conference venues still have not implemented some form of discretionary environmental policies and practices or will not change their behavior toward implementing discretionary policies unless acted on by an external force.

### Supplementary Analyses

Results of supplementary (MANOVA) analyses showed that, for analysis 1, accreditation had a significant multivariate main effect on the 18 EBPs, Wilks's  $\lambda = .598$ ,  $F(18, 90) = 3.361$ ,  $p < .000$ . Results for analysis 2, which considered venues' discretionary CSR score as a predictor variable, also showed a significant multivariate effect on the 18 EBPs, Wilks's  $\lambda = .286$ ,  $F(18, 90) = 12.476$ ,  $p < .000$ . Results of analyses 1 and 2 thus indicate that although accreditation and discretionary CSR are distinct constructs, both exhibit independent yet significant effects toward venues' performance of EBPs, thereby suggesting a certain degree of convergence between the two constructs. Results of analysis 3, in which both possession of accreditation and discretionary CSR were inputted into the MANOVA as factor and covariate variables, showed only discretionary CSR to be significant toward influencing venues' performance on the 18 EBPs, Wilks's  $\lambda = .399$ ,  $F(18, 89) = 7.435$ ,  $p < .000$ . It seems therefore that when considered simultaneously with discretionary CSR, possession of some sort of environmental accreditation proved immaterial in influencing performance in a range of EBPs for U.K. venues. Table 5 shows results for analyses 1, 2 and 3. Results of analysis 4, which directly examines the extent of relationship between possession of accreditation (1 = *yes*, 0 = *none*) and venues' summated discretionary CSR score, reveals a significant relationship,  $F(1, 189) = 91.820$ ,  $p < .000$ , indicative of the convergent relationship between the two constructs.

Table 6 summarizes the univariate effects of the two independent variables (possession of accreditation and discretionary CSR) considered separately (analyses 1 and 2) and simultaneously (analysis 3) toward predicting each of the 18 EBPs, with only significant effects at  $p < .000$  shown. Although MANOVA results in analysis 1 showed an overall effect for accreditation toward all 18 EBPs, univariate tests revealed that accreditation was significant only in 3 out of the 18 EBPs. On the other hand, venues' discretionary CSR score revealed it to be significant in 14 out of the 18 EBPs

**Table 4.** Characteristics of Survey Respondents and Venues They Represent

		<i>n</i>	%
Respondent representing venue's area of responsibility	Conferences	94	49.2
	Management	36	18.8
	Marketing	20	10.5
	Others	74	21.5
Size of venue	Small (1,000 m <sup>2</sup> or less)	99	51.8
	Medium (1,001–4,000 m <sup>2</sup> )	52	27.2
	Large (4,001 m <sup>2</sup> or more)	40	20.9
Type of venue	Hotel with conference facilities	91	47.6
	Visitor attraction with conference facilities	40	20.9
	Educational establishment with conference facilities	35	18.3
	Purpose-built conference facilities	25	13.1
Possession of at least one type of environmental accreditation	No	121	63.4
	Yes	70	36.6
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Discretionary corporate social responsibility score (scale from –10 to +30), <i>N</i> = 191		10.66	10.19
Environmental Best Practices Inventory (scale from 1 to 5), <i>N</i> = 191	1. Provide recycling containers (for paper, glass)?	4.54	0.85
	2. Use china plates/cups?	4.52	1.09
	3. Do you use energy saving light bulbs?	4.49	0.87
	4. Use recyclable paper?	4.30	1.17
	5. Source local seasonal food?	4.06	1.23
	6. Offer fairtrade food/beverages?	4.01	1.36
	7. Use recyclable signs?	3.91	1.56
	8. Electronic dissemination of conference documentation?	3.88	1.43
	9. Reuse plastic name tags?	3.78	1.56
	10. Do you use air conditioning within the venue?	3.67	1.53
	11. Assess the amount of waste generated?	3.26	1.53
	12. Avoid individual packages for condiments (e.g., sugar)?	3.25	1.57
	13. Arrange food-composting options?	2.73	1.54
	14. Evaluate attendees' view of greening options?	2.66	1.50
	15. Heat recovery technology?	2.10	1.43
	16. Heat reuse technology?	2.07	1.39
	17. Offset CO <sub>2</sub> emissions arising from conferences	2.06	1.40
	18. Does your venue use solar panels?	1.72	1.08

(analysis 2). Independently considered, discretionary CSR seemed to be more effective in influencing more EBPs compared to possession of accreditation. Testing the simultaneous influence of accreditation and discretionary CSR (analysis 3) revealed discretionary CSR to be significantly related to 11 out of the 18 EBPs, whereas accreditation did not emerge to be significant at all. This outcome suggests that when considered together, discretionary CSR seems to be of more consequence in affecting EBPs, regardless of whether venues were in possession of at least one form of environmental management accreditation, certification, or award. Neither discretionary CSR nor accreditation, either independently or jointly, exhibited any significant influence toward 4 EBPs: reusing plastic name tags, sourcing of local seasonal food,

avoiding the use of individual packages for condiments, and arranging food-composting options.

## Discussion and Contribution

The rationale for businesses to adopt CSR is their responsibilities, over and above their commercial responsibilities, to “give due regard to the well being of society which extends to a healthy physical environment” (Henderson 2007, p. 229). Although society's demands for greater corporate ethics grew through the 1980s, little focus was placed on the tourism sector until the early 1990s (Lea 1993). Since then, demands for CSR have extended throughout many subdomains of tourism, including conference tourism. It is recognized

**Table 5.** Results of Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Three Analyses Conducted

	Effect	Wilks's lambda ( $\lambda$ )	F	df <sub>1</sub>	df <sub>2</sub>	Sig.
Analysis (1) Model: Intercept + accreditation	Accreditation	.598	3.361	18	90	.000
Analysis (2) Model: Intercept + discretionary CSR score	CSR score	.286	12.476	18	90	.000
Analysis (3) Model: Intercept + discretionary CSR score + accreditation	Accreditation	.835	0.978	18	89	ns
	CSR Score	.399	7.435	18	89	.000

CSR = corporate social responsibility. Dependent variable consists of the 18 environmental best practices.

**Table 6.** Univariate Tests Conducted Post MANOVA Analysis Showing Effect of Accreditation (Analysis 1), Discretionary Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Score (Analysis 2), and Both Accreditation and Discretionary CSR (Analysis 3) on a Range of Widely Accepted Environmentally Friendly Practices for (significant effects shown at  $p \leq .001$ )

Dependent variables: 18 environmental best practices <sup>a</sup>	Analysis 1: Effect of accreditation only				Analysis 2: Effect of discretionary CSR score only				Analysis 3: Combined accreditation and discretionary CSR score							
									Effect of discretionary CSR score				Effect of accreditation			
	df <sub>2</sub>	df <sub>1</sub>	MS	F	df <sub>2</sub>	df <sub>1</sub>	MS	F	df <sub>2</sub>	df <sub>1</sub>	MS	F	df <sub>2</sub>	df <sub>1</sub>	MS	F
1. Do you use air conditioning within the venue?	107	1	29.43	14.42	107	1	28.70	14.02								
2. Evaluate attendees' view of greening options?	107	1	60.43	34.44	107	1	123.93	106.72	106	1	65.25	56.47				
3. Assess the amount of waste generated?	107	1	34.66	16.77	107	1	115.41	87.90	106	1	81.30	61.59				
4. Offset CO <sub>2</sub> emissions arising from conferences					107	1	43.94	30.13	106	1	30.52	20.75				
5. Use recyclable paper?					107	1	32.13	24.52	106	1	23.28	17.63				
6. Offer fairtrade food/beverages?					107	1	47.29	26.97	106	1	40.63	23.22				
7. Use china plates/cups?					107	1	21.83	19.25	106	1	17.95	15.77				(ns)
8. Provide recycling containers (for paper, glass)?					107	1	9.73	15.43	106	1	7.54	11.88				
9. Heat reuse technology?					107	1	22.93	13.48	106	1	19.62	11.49				
10. Heat recovery technology?					107	1	32.21	18.67	106	1	32.10	18.80				
11. Use recyclable signs?					107	1	38.75	16.45	106	1	38.27	16.37				
12. Does your venue use solar panels?					107	1	17.36	14.41	106	1	19.65	16.59				
13. Do you use energy saving light bulbs?					107	1	9.27	17.98								
14. Electronic dissemination of conference documentation?					107	1	23.68	12.48								

Results for 4 of the 18 environmental practices exhibited nonsignificant dependence with any of the effects in all the three models above. These are (1) reusing of plastic name tags, (2) sourcing of local seasonal food, (3) avoiding use of individual packages for condiments (e.g., sugar), and (4) arranging food composting options.

a. Evaluated using a 5-point response scale as stated.

that conference tourism has a significant and negative impact on the wider environment (Mair and Jago 2010). Conventional conferences are very resource demanding, with considerable environmental impacts (Hischier and Hilty 2002).

Such impacts generate the need for a clearly defined framework to guide individual conference venues' CSR performance. To manage a conference venue selection based on corporate environmental performance, delegates, event organizers, and site selection planners require reliable and easily understandable information of environmental performance. There has been a rapid growth in the demand for a conceptual framework that provides such information and thus

permits comparisons of CSR across conference venues (Marquez and Fombrun 2005); this article fills that gap in the literature.

Based on the GREENER VENUE framework proposed herein, this study reveals that the greatest proportion (35.6%) of U.K. conference venues exhibit an Eager response toward discretionary CSR activities, with slightly more than a quarter (27.2%) exhibiting an Unmotivated or Eternal denial position. Venues that are Nonchalant compose the second largest proportion, at 30.4% of the sample, while only 6.8% of venues are deemed as Venerated. We consider these figures to be primary baseline estimates of U.K. conference

venues' discretionary CSR. While the body of literature covering CSR generally points toward firms becoming more CSR oriented over time across many different contexts, the record has been uncertain in terms of discretionary forms of CSR, an area that this study seeks to shed more light on. Considering that Carroll's (1979) conceptualization of discretionary CSR does not deem firms failing in discretionary CSR responsibilities to be unethical, our baseline findings cast U.K. conference venues in somewhat favorable terms, though certainly not completely satisfying. As discretionary CSR performance is socially responsive (Sethi 1975), anticipatory (Carroll 1999), and beyond what is economically or legally obliged of firms, these baseline results—while illuminating—must be considered in relation to other factors, foremost of which is whether these results are grounded on or independent of firms' favorable performance on the other fundamental dimensions as hypothesized by Carroll (1979), though this is outside the scope of this particular study. Another is whether the discretionary CSR profile of U.K. conference venues emerging from this study is typical of the age and circumstances in which the study was undertaken, coming after the recent financial crises brought about by financial institutions and highly publicized environmental disasters.

This study also provided supplementary analysis comparing the relative influence of U.K. venues' discretionary CSR performance vis-à-vis their possessing an environmental accreditation, certification, or award in respect of independently or simultaneously influencing venues' performance across a range of 18 widely accepted environmental friendly best practices. Results indicated both constructs to be independently relevant in influencing these best practices, although discretionary CSR exhibited greater relative influence over a wider range of environmentally friendly best practices when both factors were considered together. Thus, although both constructs are related, discretionary CSR showed more efficacy in discriminating firms that perform environmentally friendly best practices and not accreditation per se.

While this study is only exploratory, it suggests discretionary CSR to be more effective in promoting environmentally sound practices than formal accreditation or eco-label schemes. Perhaps accreditation tends to focus more on systems and processes rather than results and actual performance or that eco-labels are valued more for the recognition and acceptance it confers (Font 2002), yielding marketing and promotional advantages in the form of price premiums and marketable differentiation for green consumers (Rivera 2002). Despite the recent proliferation of many environmental certification and eco-label schemes in tourism, it remains to be ascertained whether organizations' environmental performance are actually improved (Buckley 2002).

Overall, the outcome of this study provides a grounded contribution to conceptual, methodological, and practical issues in the field of CSR, as applied to the U.K. conference

sector. First, it demonstrates the need for a comprehensive, integrative, and accurate measurement framework for *discretionary* CSR, along the lines advocated by Sethi (1975) and Carroll (1979) for *general* measures of CSR. We believe the GREENER VENUE framework satisfies conditions posed by Sethi (1975) requiring stable classification categories and fixed definitions of response classes, in the context of discretionary CSR and even beyond by incorporating Elkington and Burke's (1989) EPI measures.

Second, the study underscores that measuring discretionary CSR need not be only an evaluation or assessment exercise. It may actually drive other organizational factors and variables that ultimately influence an organization's overall CSR.

Finally, the GREENER VENUE framework contributes immensely in two areas heretofore overlooked by the literature on CSR: The first area is that it fills a gap by advocating a framework developed with emphasis toward discretionary practices and with specific reference to the sizeable (and rapidly growing) U.K. conference industry. In the second area, though developed here initially within the context of the conference industry, the GREENER VENUE framework exhibits conceptual and psychometric properties that enable its application to much broader and diverse contexts. It is theoretically grounded but at the same time practical, easy to implement, easily understandable, and highly relatable to organizational managers, frontline employees, and other key stakeholders of any industry. It has the potential for influencing not only the operational, managerial, and planning decisions of organizations but also individual consumer decision making and choice.

This research has focused on the adoption of *environmental* performance indicators to indicate conference venue level of CSR adoption. EPIs are not the only component of CSR, there are many others, including social, economic, and ethical. Further research may wish to expand our framework from a unidimensional environmental framework to a multidimensional framework, through the inclusion of some or all of these CSR components. Our framework also utilizes venue size and classification as independent variables. There are a variety of other independent variables that may be considered important or influential toward environmental CSR. Such variables include location (urban vs. suburban vs. rural) or target market for the venue (association or business delegates). Further research may wish to explore these independent variables further. Overall, our framework offers a baseline for U.K. conference venues' discretionary CSR and further research.

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