

## Article

# The Relationship of CSR and Employee Creativity in the Hotel Sector: The Mediating Role of Job Autonomy

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**Citation:** Guo, M.; Ahmad, N.; Adnan, M.; Scholz, M.; Awan, K.; Naveed, R.T. The Relationship of CSR and Employee Creativity in the Hotel Sector of Pakistan: The Mediating Role of Job Autonomy. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 32. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810032>

Academic Editors: Lóránt Dénes Dávid, Peter Szende and Martin Balázs Zsarnóczy

Received: 19 July 2021

Accepted: 1 September 2021

Published: 7 September 2021

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**Abstract:** Despite the growing surge in the literature about employee creativity, the mainstream literature largely views it from an organizational perspective, and ignores the underlying mechanism that motivates employees to be engaged in different creative tasks. Against this backdrop, the current work was carried out to explore the relationship of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee creativity with the mediating effect of autonomy to explain the motivational pull for employee creativity. The data were collected from the employees of the hotel sector of Pakistan through a self-administered questionnaire ( $n = 511$ ) and were analyzed by employing the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. The results revealed that CSR, through the mediating effect of job autonomy, influences employees' creativity significantly. The findings of the current analysis will help both academia and professionals from the hotel sector to understand the importance of CSR as a booster for employee creativity. Furthermore, the potential role of job autonomy as a mediator in explaining this relationship will also help policymakers to understand the importance of freedom at the workplace to engage the workforce in different extra-roles, including creativity.

**Keywords:** CSR; job autonomy; employee creativity; extra-role; tourism; hospitality

## 1. Introduction

The competitive global environment has forced enterprises to take different steps to be alive and to remain competitive. Therefore, companies that desire to be leaders in their field or want to maintain their competitive position should develop strategies with a special focus on creativity and innovation [1]. Organizations in the current age must respond appropriately to the dynamic business environment, otherwise, their existence will be jeopardized, and even if they do survive, growth will not be expected. Therefore, to be competitive, organizations must have a well-differentiated organizational management strategy to survive and prosper, regardless of their form.

Contemporary organizations are looking for creative individuals who work innovatively and proactively in order to create exceptional results. Individuals who can creatively solve problems and work proactively are required by every sector. From an organizational perspective, to cope with an uncertain environment and achieve sustainable growth, employees are expected not only to perform their formal roles, but also to engage themselves in different informal roles, like their creative performance [2]. The current surge in the organizational literature is evident of the fact that the importance of creative employees is being recognized by various contemporary scholars [3–5].

However, an exploration of the existing literature unveils that most of the prior studies have considered employee creativity to foster organizational performance [6,7] or to spur competitive advantage [8,9]. There is no denial in recognizing the importance of investigating the impact of employee creativity on the above-stated organizational outcomes; however, we argue that it is also important to explore the factors that motivate employees in different extra-roles, like creativity. Nevertheless, this perspective is still under-explored, and no universal consensus has been reached until now to answer the question of what exact set of factors may explain employees' engagement in different extra-role behaviors. To this end, we propose that employees' corporate social responsibility (CSR) perception about their organization is an important factor to engage employees in creative tasks. Therefore, the first objective of the present analysis is to explore the relationship between CSR and employee creativity.

Many organizational factors influence employee performance, especially their creative performance. In this regard, job autonomy has emerged as an important imperative to enhance employee performance [10]. Job autonomy not only spurs employee performance but also helps to boost employees' creative potential [11]. Moreover, job autonomy helps employees to make free decisions on how to perform their work creatively. The componential theory of creativity [12] also views autonomy at the workplace as an important factor to boost the creative potential of employees. When a firm provides employees with adequate freedom at work, it leads to a relaxed state of mind that is a necessary condition for employee creativity. Thus, another objective here is to investigate 'job autonomy' as a potential mediator between CSR and employee creativity.

The proposed framework of the present analysis is to be tested in the hotel sector of Pakistan. Specifically, we considered this sector relevant for the present analysis for a number of reasons. Firstly, the hotel sector is a service sector that has standard operating procedures that can easily be mimicked. In other words, redesigning decorations or adapting to new technology are some factors that can easily be imitated by competitors [13]. On the other hand, however, the innovation in this sector that is brought by the employees as a result of their creativity is not easily imitated by rivals. The reason for this argument lies in the logic that this type of innovation is idiosyncratic in details, making it challenging for rival firms to imitate. This line of reasoning is also evident in the work of Dedeoğlu, et al. [14]. Secondly, the hotel industry in Pakistan has been expanding in recent years; however, a significant number of new entrants in this sector fail due to their inability to innovate their business to remain alive in the industry, which further highlights the importance of employee creativity for this sector. A hotel that encourages its employees to foster their creative skills is likely to raise the barriers to imitation and is able to keep its business portfolio well ahead of competitors. This view is also supported by Xuhua, et al. [15].

The present analysis adds to the existing literature significantly. Firstly, the present study is a limited study which attempts to discuss CSR as a reason for employees to be engaged in different extra-roles. In this respect, most of the available literature has associated CSR with organizational performance. Moreover, the mainstream literature in the domain of employee extra-roles mostly considered the relationship between CSR and employees' pro-environmental behavior [16,17], while neglecting its potential link with another extra-role behavior of employees: employee creativity. Secondly, the present

analysis considers job autonomy as the mediating variable to explain the relationship between CSR and employee creativity. In this context, the mediating role of job autonomy to explain employee creativity is already established in the literature [11,18]. However, its potential effect from the viewpoint of CSR has not been given due consideration.

The remainder of the present analysis is divided into different parts for the convenience of the reader. For instance, the coming section deals with the underlying theory and related literature to propose different hypotheses, followed by the methodology section in which we discussed the sampling process, population, and instrument-related discussion. Next, we covered the results and analysis section, in which the major results to test the hypotheses and to validate the measurement were performed. Finally, the last part of the analysis deals with the discussion and implication of the results.

## 2. Literature and Hypotheses

Over the last three decades, different studies of creativity have been published in top-tier journals at an ever-increasing rate, and have provided valuable information for researchers and professionals [19]. Perhaps the most widely used theory to explain employee creativity is the componential theory of creativity by Amabile [20], which posits that an individual's state of intrinsic motivation is a major source to undergirding the association between different factors (personal and contextual) and employee's engagement into different creative tasks at the workplace. In contrast to domain-specific skills, which can also facilitate a person's creativity, intrinsic motivation is more diverse and depends largely on the work environment [12]. Therefore, the context of the work environment is a critical factor for employee creativity, implying that even a creative employee would not be able to perform creative tasks efficiently if he worked in an inappropriate work environment. This argument can also be seen in the work of Shalley, et al. [21]. Drawing upon this theory, we argue that a socially responsible organization is expected to provide its employees with a kind of work environment which is flexible, transparent, and keeps the employees at ease, implying that employees working in a socially responsible organization are expected to be engaged in different creative activities.

### 2.1. CSR and Employee Creativity

CSR has emerged as one of the most significant realities in the world of business. In fact, the concept of CSR is so broad in its scope that it is still evolving even in 2021. The concept was originally defined by the founding father Carroll [22], who asserted that "CSR is the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations of a society from a business". Over time, the concept of CSR has transformed itself from a charity-based concept to a phenomenon that provides a solid basis to contemporary businesses for competitive advantage [23]. There are different perspectives in which contemporary scholars have explored the effectiveness of CSR for different organizational outcomes. For instance, the most dominant perspective is that CSR positively influences a firm's performance, especially in terms of financial performance [24–26]. In fact, this perspective still dominates the field, as it serves the prime objective of every business: economic efficiency. Another dominant perspective of CSR studies is evident in the field of reputational studies, in which organizations use their CSR strategy to earn a better organizational reputation [27–29]. Yet another perspective is to influence employees' formal behavior through CSR [30–32].

There is another perspective that recently joined the lexicon of CSR studies, emphasized here also, which is to shape employee extra-role behavior. Extra-role behavior can be understood as any behavior that is not formally required by an organization [33], but is considered critical to foster overall organizational performance. Studies under this domain of CSR are quite a recent addition in the literature. In the current context, we argue that the CSR commitment of an organization is an extra-role that is performed by the organization in the larger interest of society and the environment.

This commitment of an organization is well observed by the employees serving in a socially responsible organization, as acknowledged by several preceding scholars [34,35]. The employees, in response, feel a higher level of intrinsic motivation to support their organization, not only through performing their formal job obligations but also by engaging themselves in different extra-roles, one of which is employee creativity. Employee creativity is referred to as “the process that involves employees to generate ideas that are novel and valuable for an organization” [36]. Different scholars have established a positive link between employees’ CSR perception of their organization and creativity. As an example, Hur, et al. [37] noted a positive link between CSR and employee creativity in the hospitality sector of Korea. Moreover, Abdelmotaleb, et al. [38] concluded the same finding in the context of the Egyptian Telecom sector. In like manner, Kim, et al. [39] noted that a socially responsible organization provides an atmosphere at the workplace in which employees feel a sense of safety and confidence, which encourages them to demonstrate their creative capability. The same kind of arguments can be seen in various other studies [40,41].

To sum, the CSR engagement of an organization provides its employees with a justified reason to be engaged in different creative tasks in order to enhance the overall performance of an organization. Further, as CSR engagement is an extra-engagement of an organization for the betterment of all stakeholders, and employees themselves are, of course, stakeholders, employees acknowledge this extra-commitment of their organization, and thus are expected to return to their organization positively by engaging themselves in different creative tasks which may be valuable for the organization. From another standpoint, following componential theory, as a socially responsible organization provides its employees a workplace environment that is flexible, encouraging, and above all, takes care of the employees—therefore in line with componential theory—a link between CSR and employee creativity is fostered. Hence, the following hypothesis is framed.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *There exists a positive relationship between a hotel’s CSR activities and employee creativity in Pakistan.*

## 2.2. Job Autonomy and Employee Creativity

Job autonomy can be defined as freedom, independence, and the degree to which an individual exercises discretion in determining time schedules and job procedures at work [42]. The importance of job autonomy was first acknowledged in the work of Hackman and Oldham’s theory of job fulfillment. The theory of job fulfillment asserts that job-related characteristics change the psychological state of employees and affect their motivation, attitude, and task performance significantly. In order to give meaning to their jobs and to set and pursue their own goals, employees should be given autonomy to perform their jobs [43]. Job autonomy is a critical variable that positively affects the motivation and attitude of employees [44]. Moreover, job autonomy is a job characteristic that is related to creativity. Past studies have reported that job autonomy has a positive effect on employee creativity and innovation behavior [45,46]. For instance, in their seminal work, Zhou [47] indicated that when a firm facilitates its employees with a higher level of task autonomy, it positively influences their capability to think in new and novel ways. Likewise, in one study, Pattnaik and Sahoo [48] noted that employees performing jobs with a high level of autonomy had higher levels of creativity in the Indian software sector. The seminal work of Amabile [20] also confirmed that creativity is high when employees have a choice in task performance. We argue here that when employees are endowed with autonomy, they are likely to be more intrinsically motivated and more creative than when they are under direction and control. This view is also supported by Jin and Kim [49]. Furthermore, other scholars have also proposed a positive association between job autonomy and employee creativity [11,50,51]. Thus, the following hypothesis is framed.

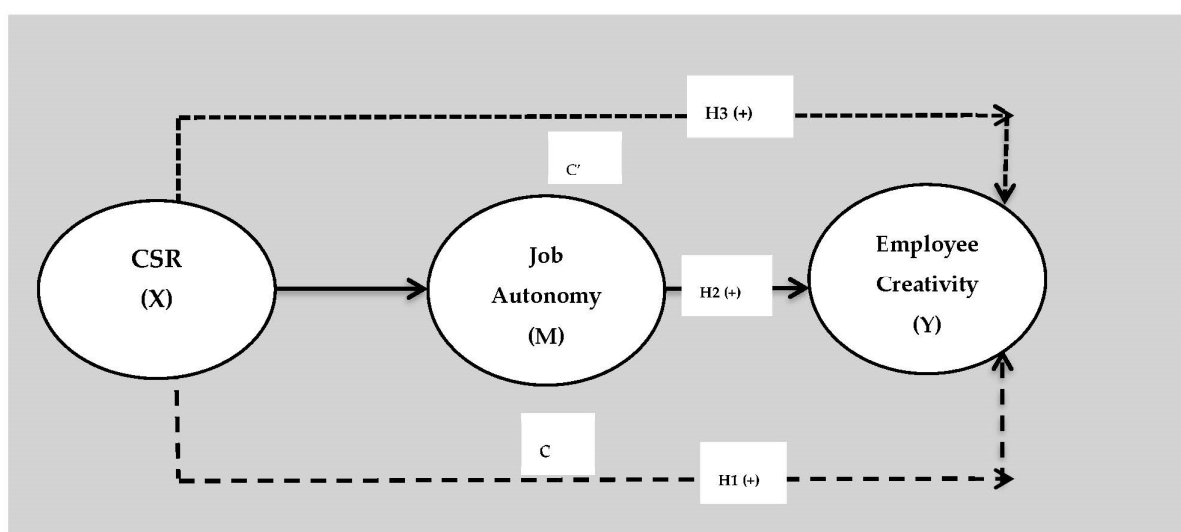
**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *There exists a positive relationship between job autonomy and employee creativity in the hotel sector of Pakistan.*

### 2.3. Job Autonomy as a Mediator

Additionally, following componential theory, it is argued that when an organization allows its employees to control their work the way they want to (task freedom or autonomy), it creates a supportive environment for employee creativity. Employees serving in an organization that empowers employees by providing job autonomy develop a sense of self-leadership [50], which motivates them to perform extra-roles, like fostering their creative capabilities. On a further note, the CSR orientation of an organization also helps the workers to develop the sense that they are serving in an organization that is caring and committed to protecting the rights of every stakeholder, including the employees [51]. From another point of view, this sense of caring also confirms to the employees that they are working in a secure environment, and thus they are expected to dedicate their whole selves to their work [52]. As a result, employees will be willfully involved in creativity, which is of the utmost value for the organization. On a final note, when supported by an autonomous work environment, the relationship between CSR and employee creativity is better explained, as job autonomy inculcates a sense of self-leadership among employees, and CSR creates a value congruence [53] on the part of employees that they are in a safe and caring environment. All these factors are helpful to spur employee creativity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is framed.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *The relationship between a hotel's CSR activities and employee creativity is mediated by job autonomy.*

The proposed theoretical model is exhibited in Figure 1. As per Figure 1, there are three constructs: CSR, job autonomy, and employee creativity. The construct of CSR is the main predictor (X), the construct of employee creativity is the criterion (Y), and job autonomy is acting as a mediating construct (M). Additionally, one needs to observe the arrowhead directions in Figure 1. As a case, the solid arrowhead from M to Y indicates that M predicts Y. Similarly, the dotted arrow  $c'$  indicates the indirect effect of CSR on employee creativity, with the intervention of job autonomy as a mediator.



**Figure 1.** Research model of the current analysis: CSR (X) = the input variable; employee creativity (Y) = the outcome variable; job autonomy (M) = the intervening variable; C = the effect of X on Y in the absence of M; and  $C'$  = the effect of X on Y in the presence of M.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Population, Sample, and the Data Collection

The target sector to test the proposed relationships of the present analysis (Figure 1) is the hotel sector of Pakistan, which has been operative in the country since its independence in 1947. The sector's progress has been slow during the initial decades of independence; however, over time the sector has shown great improvement. A fundamental difference between the hotel sector and other service sectors lies in the fact that in sectors like banking and legal services, the service provider is mainly concerned with the need fulfillment of the clients; however, the hotel sector is different in the sense that customers here come for leisure in their free time [54]. Therefore, this sector is required not only to satisfy their customers but also to build an emotional connection. Moreover, as individuals mostly come to the hotels to have enjoyment along with their meal, the need for creativity is high for this sector as compared to the others. The hotel sector in Pakistan has recently registered itself as an important sector for investment after a long period of time and after facing some critical macro-level challenges, among which was terrorism, which undoubtedly restricted this sectors' growth. However, during recent years, as the overall law and order situation in the country has improved, the hotel sector has witnessed a rising curve. This rising curve clearly shows a growing level of competition among different players in this sector. According to a recent report of the Pakistan Hotels Association, this sector is expected to be on the rise in the future too, implying that some more players will be entering this industry [55]. Thus, differentiating itself from the rest of the crowd is of paramount importance for a hotel, which raises the importance of employee creativity for this sector.

At present, the hotel sector is a significant player in the service sector, providing reasonable support to the country's economy, as the tourism and hotel sector has contributed over 7% to the GDP of the country during the year 2019. The sector employs 3,850,000 individuals in different capacities, implying that the sector contributes 6.3% of the total employment of the country [56]. The sector is assumed to continue its growth pattern in the future too, due to the special focus of the current government on tourism. Currently, the hotel industry is comprised of both national and international players. Some examples of international players in this sector are Avari, Marriot, Carlton, Regent, Hotel Mövenpick Karachi, Pearl Continental, and Ramada Plaza. In Pakistan, metro cities like Lahore and Karachi are hubs for different industrial activities. Perhaps this is the reason that both of these cities constitute the largest hotel enterprises, along with Islamabad [57], which is the capital city of the country. To be noted, Islamabad is not an industrial city; however, different businesses have established their head offices in the capital city.

The hotel industry and the business community are in congruence with each other because businesses often arrange seminars, training, and official meetings within the premises of these hotels. Owing to this congruence, a huge investment in the hotel sector within these three cities is evident. We, therefore, considered these cities as our target cities to collect the data. To take things to a further level, we considered the upscale hotels in the targeted cities to be included in our sample. The underlying reason to consider these hotels to constitute our sample lies in the fact that all of the upscale hotels in the country were actively engaged in different CSR activities. To start with the data collection process, we formally contacted the concerned offices of the selected hotels with the request to cooperate in the data collection process by providing us with access to their pool of employees. After seeking formal approval, we arranged a detailed schedule for the data collection with the coordination of the spokesperson of the sampled hotels. The data were collected from December 2019 to January 2020. The current study is an explanatory study that used primary data through a questionnaire from the representative sample of employees between the ages of 18 years to over 40 years, who were serving in different hotels in the selected cities. It is important to mention here that Pakistan is the second

youngest nation in south Asia. Specifically, the majority of the country's population (two-thirds) is under the age of 30 [58]. More specifically, according to a recent report, the median age in the country is 22.8 [59]. Given that, it is evident from Table 1 that the age group between the ages of 26 to 35 shares the largest percentage of the sample.

**Table 1.** Demographic detail.

Demographic	Frequency ( <i>n</i> = 511)	%
Gender		
Male	322	63.02
Female	189	36.98
Age-group (Year)		
18–25	69	13.50
26–30	127	24.85
31–35	153	29.94
36–40	89	17.42
Above 40	73	14.28
Experience (Years)		
1–3	82	16.05
4–6	164	32.09
7–9	189	36.99
10 and above	76	14.87
Category		
Manager/supervisor	192	37.57
Non-Manager	319	62.43
Total	511	100

Following the guidelines of López-Sanz, et al. [60], prior to finalizing the instrument and making it publically available to the respondents, the items were evaluated by experts in the field (professors and qualified managers from the hotel sector). After they assessed items for suitability and appropriateness to serve the purpose of the current research, the final version of the questionnaire was made available to the respondents. The final version contained three constructs, including CSR (12-items), job autonomy (9-items), and employee creativity (5-items).

After settling the above-noted issues, we were finally able to have our presence in the selected hotels to collect the data from the employees. To assure the representativeness of our sample, we included both managerial and non-managerial staff of a hotel. We approached particular employees at random. In this regard, we surveyed employees from different departments, including kitchen staff, serving staff, and general maintenance staff of a hotel. First of all, we sought formal permission from each informant to participate in the survey willingly. For this reason, each informant was served with a separate form with the title “informed consent” to seek the formal consent of the informant to participate in the survey. This “informed consent” form was attached with every questionnaire. All of the informants were given equal rights to quit the survey at any stage and were not required to share their reason for quitting if they did not feel comfortable doing so. Moreover, we observed the Helsinki Declaration protocols in order to strictly observe the ethical standards. A total of 800 surveys were initially distributed among the staff of the selected hotel, and we received 511 valid responses, implying that the response rate for the present analysis remained close to 68%.

### 3.2. Instrument

There were three constructs in the current study: CSR, job engagement, and employee creativity. Among these three constructs, the construct of employee creativity was treated as the output construct, the construct of CSR was taken as the input construct, and the construct of job autonomy was taken as the intervening construct. We employed the existing scales to operationalize all of the constructs of this analysis. On this point, we were in agreement with other scholars that the pre-existing scales are wise to use because they have already established validity and reliability [61]. Therefore, we used the CSR scale Turker [62]. This is a well-known scale to operationalize employees' CSR perceptions. In different instances, various researchers have used this scale in different contexts and cultures, for instance, Raza, et al. [63] recently used the scale to tape employees' CSR perceptions in the hospitality sector of Pakistan. In like manner, the same was used by Tian and Robertson [16] in the casino industry of China. The reliability value of this scale was  $\alpha = 0.89$ . One sample item for this scale is "My hotel participates in activities, which aim to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment". There were a total of twelve-items in this scale, which were rated on a seven-point Likert scale.

Likewise, we used the scale of Coelho and Augusto [64] to measure the construct of employee creativity. This scale is also a well-known scale that is used by different researchers. For instance, Hur, et al. [37], in their recent study, used this scale in the hotel sector of Korea. The scale was comprised of five-items. A sample item is "I try to be as creative as I can in my job". A seven-point Likert scale was employed for the ratings of this construct. The reliability was  $\alpha = 0.90$ , which showed a high level of reliability for this construct.

Lastly, the scale of job autonomy was adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey [65], which is one of the most famous scales to tape the construct of job autonomy. The original scale was comprised of nine-items. One sample item is "My job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work". A seven-point Likert scale was employed to record the ratings from informants. The full list of items is provided in Appendix A (Table A1).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Common Method Variance

In the present analysis, all of the information of the variables under observation was taken from the same informants at a given point in time. Thus, the issue of common method variance (CMV.) may be present in the data set, which may halt the overall health of the data. Further, the potential issue of CMV. may also lead an analyst towards a wrongly established internal consistency. This could also be the case in a situation where all of the constructs (both predictors and criterions) are perceptually measured [66]. Recognizing the importance of all of the above-stated issues, we took several theoretical measures along with the mathematical calculations. For instance, theoretically, we explained to all of the informants about the importance of their genuine and unbiased input for the appropriateness of the results. Further, all of the informants were also assured that the information shared by them would not be disclosed to anyone and would be used to serve the objectives of the present survey. Furthermore, the informants were also cleared that their anonymity would be highly maintained. On a final note, the question items for all three constructs were randomly distributed in the questionnaire so that the informants were not in a position to establish any early perceptions about a construct. Theoretically, these measures are supposed to help minimize CMV.; however, we did not rely only on the theoretical perspective and performed the famous single factor analysis as proposed by Harman [67]. To this end, we allowed all of the items to be loaded on a single factor to verify the emergence of any single dominant factor, which explains 50% or more of the total variance. Fortunately, the results did not confirm the presence of

any such dominant factors, as the most dominant factor explained less than 30% of the total variance, implying that the issue of CMV. does not require any correcting measures on the part of the analysts. Moreover, a single confirmatory factor analysis (CFA.) was also employed to further cement the observation that the issue of CMV. is not a potential threat in the current case. The outcomes revealed a poor model fit, as indicated by different model fit indices (MFI.), establishing that there is a poor fit between theory and the data for this type of CFA. ( $\chi^2 = 2119.68$ ,  $df = 182$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 11.64$ , RMSEA = 0.144, CFI = 0.381, NFI = 0.427).

#### 4.2. Construct Evaluation

We then moved to the further steps of the data analysis after confirming the absence of CMV. At this stage, we performed different construct evaluation tests, including the establishment of convergent validity (CV) through the values of the average variance extracted (AVE), which was calculated by using the following formula for each construct:

$$A.V.E = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i^2}{\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i^2 + \sum_{i=1}^k var(\epsilon_i)}$$

We followed the guidelines of Fornell and Larcker [68] and Gefen, et al. [69] in establishing CV for each construct through the AVE values. Following their recommendation, CV for a construct is maintained if the AVE value is greater than 0.5, or at least 50%. We have reported all values of AVEs in Table 2 for the convenience of the reader. It should be noted that all of the values were above the minimum level of 0.5, implying that the CV for each case was established.

Similarly, we also performed factor analysis during the process of the construct evaluation in order to detect if there was a case of any weak item loading, which can harm the results of composite reliability (CR). In this respect, no such weak loading was evident during factor analysis. Thus, we proceeded further in the data analysis to evaluate CR for each construct by using the following formula:

$$C.R = \frac{(\sum \lambda_i)^2}{\sum (\lambda_i)^2 + \sum var(\epsilon_i)}$$

The results of CR for a specific construct can be seen in Table 2, which reveals that there is no CR value that is less than 0.7, confirming that the CR in every case is well maintained.

**Table 2.** Factor loadings, convergent validity, and composite reliability.

Item	Source	$\lambda$	$\lambda^2$	E-Variance	$\sum \lambda^2$	Items	AVE	CR
CSR1	Turker [62]	0.79	0.62	0.38	8.22	12	0.68	0.963
CSR2		0.8	0.64	0.36				
CSR3		0.73	0.53	0.47				
CSR4		0.92	0.85	0.15				
CSR5		0.88	0.77	0.23				
CSR6		0.74	0.55	0.45				
CSR7		0.73	0.53	0.47				
CSR8		0.93	0.86	0.13				
CSR9		0.78	0.61	0.39				
CSR10		0.92	0.85	0.15				
CSR11		0.79	0.62	0.38				
CSR12		0.88	0.77	0.23				
JA1	Morgeson and Humphrey [65]	0.81	0.66	0.34				
JA2		0.72	0.52	0.48				

JA3		0.83	0.69	0.31				
JA4		0.76	0.58	0.42				
JA5		0.76	0.58	0.42				
JA6		0.86	0.74	0.26				
JA7		0.83	0.69	0.31				
JA8		0.89	0.79	0.21	5.98	9	0.66	0.943
JA9		0.78	0.61	0.39				
EC1	Coelho and Augusto [64]	0.81	0.66	0.34				
EC2		0.84	0.71	0.29				
EC3		0.89	0.79	0.21				
EC4		0.86	0.74	0.26				
EC5		0.74	0.55	0.45	3.44	5	0.69	0.892

Notes:  $\lambda$  = item loadings; CR = composite reliability;  $\sum \lambda^2$  = sum of square of item loadings; E-Variance = error variance; JA = job autonomy; and EC = employee creativity.

#### 4.3. Correlations and Discriminant Validity

We also calculated the inter-correlation between the constructs. The results of the intercorrelations revealed that all of the constructs were positively and significantly related to each other. For example, the correlation between CSR and employee creativity (EC) was  $r = 0.42^{**}$  (Table 3), implying that CSR and EC are positively associated with each other, which is in line with the statement of H1. In all other cases, the same can be revealed that all constructs have positive intercorrelations. Next, we also calculated discriminant validity (DV) for each construct in order to validate that the items of one construct are dissimilar from the items of the other construct. In this regard, we used the values of maximum-shared-variance (MSV) and average-shared-variance (ASV) and compared these values with AVE for a construct. To explain further, the MSV and ASV values for JA are 0.24 and 0.20, respectively, which are well below the AVE value for JA (0.66), confirming a strong case for the establishment of DV [70]. Finally, we checked the appropriateness of our measurement model. To achieve this, we checked different MFI values of our measured model and found that these values were appropriate enough to state that there is a reasonable fit between theory and the data ( $\chi^2 = 1863.282$ ,  $df = 992$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.87$ , RMSEA = 0.041, CFI = 0.961, NFI = 0.955). To elaborate further,  $\chi^2/df$  was below the cut-off level of 0.2, and both CFI and NFI values were well above the minimum range of 0.9. Similarly, the value of RMSEA was also below the threshold level of 0.06.

**Table 3.** Correlation, discriminant validity analysis.

Construct	CSR	JA	EC
CSR	<b>0.87</b>	0.39 **	0.42 **
JA		<b>0.94</b>	0.49 **
EC			<b>0.92</b>
Mean	6.34	6.42	6.11
SD	0.44	0.51	0.57
MSV	0.18	0.24	0.24
ASV	0.16	0.20	0.21

Notes: S.D = standard deviation; \*\* = significant values of correlation; bold values = Cronbach alpha; maximum shared variance = MSV; and average shared variance = ASV.

#### 4.4. Hypotheses Validation

The final step in the stage of data analysis was to validate the hypotheses of this analysis. To do this, we employed structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS. The structural model was developed twice to validate the hypothesis. For instance, in the first place, the structural model was developed to test the first two hypotheses of this analysis (H1 and H2). At this point, we did not consider any of the mediation effects of JA, as we established only the direct effect in our structural model. The results of the structural model revealed that both H1 and H2 are supported and have explained the criterion variable (EC) positively ( $\beta_1 = 0.293$ ,  $\beta_2 = 0.316$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), as indicated by their respective beta values and  $p$ -values. Moreover, the upper limit confidence interval (ULCI) and lower limit confidence (LLCI) interval did not include a zero value; thus, H1 and H2 of the current study were statistically supported. The values of MFIs were also appropriate in this regard ( $\chi^2 = 1261.038$ ,  $df = 762$ ,  $p < 0.01$   $\chi^2/df = 1.65$ , RMSEA = 0.033, CFI = 0.968, NFI = 0.963). Table 4 includes the results of hypotheses testing for H1 and H2.

**Table 4.** The results for hypotheses testing (H1, H2).

Path	Estimates	S.E	CR	R <sup>2</sup>	p-Value	ULCI	LLCI	Decision
CSR → EC ( $\beta_1$ )	0.342 **	0.0592	5.777	0.318	***	0.387	0.285	Accepted
JA → EC ( $\beta_2$ )	0.384 **	0.0628	6.115	0.332	***	0.431	0.316	Accepted

Notes: ULCI = upper-limit confidence interval; LLCI = lower-limit confidence interval; \*\*, \*\*\* = significant values.

Secondly, we drew the structural model again to include JA as a mediator between CSR and EC. Moreover, bootstrapping was also employed to assess the candidature of the mediator. In this respect, a larger bootstrapping sample of 2000 was used in AMOS. The results of this structural model are shown in Table 5. The outcomes of the mediated structural model proved that JA is a valid mediator between the relationship of CSR and EC ( $\beta_3 = 0.142$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Further, the mediation effect produced more than 44% of the total variation in EC. This effect of mediation was calculated by the following formula:

$$\text{Proportion of mediation} = \frac{\text{Indirect effect}}{\text{Total effect}}$$

Based of the above results, it is established that H3 is accepted. Furthermore, MFIs for this mediated model produced more convincing values as compared to the direct effect model ( $\chi^2 = 1092.496$ ,  $df = 784$ ,  $p < 0.01$   $\chi^2/df = 1.39$ , RMSEA = 0.031, CFI = 0.973, NFI = 0.971).

**Table 5.** Mediation results for H3.

Path	Estimates	S.E	Z-Score	p-Value	ULCI	LLCI	Decision
CSR → JA → EC ( $\beta_3$ )	0.142 **	0.026	5.46	***	0.291	0.218	Accepted
Total effect	0.445						
Indirect effect	0.152						
Direct effect	0.293						
Proportion of mediation	0.445						

Notes: ULCI = upper-limit confidence interval; LLCI = lower-limit confidence interval; \*\*, \*\*\* = significant values; S.E = standard error.

## 5. Discussion

The present analysis was carried out to serve two research objectives. The first objective was to test the relationship between CSR and employee creativity in the hotel sector of Pakistan. To this end, the finding of this analysis confirmed that there exists a positive relationship between CSR and employee creativity. The CSR engagement of a hotel helps employees to build the narrative that they are working for a socially

responsible organization that takes care of the interests of all stakeholders, including the employees. Further, they are also self-convinced that, being the member of a socially responsible enterprise, they have a flexible, unbiased, and secured work environment, which spurs their creative capability. Similarly, the CSR perceptions of an organization are well observed by its employees, and in return, they want to support their organization not only by performing their formal job tasks but also by performing some extra-roles, like employee creativity [37,71]. Evans, et al. [53] referred to this as a value congruence between employees and socially responsible organizations that motivates employees to perform certain extra-roles.

Creativity is one of the main factors affecting the competitiveness of hotel businesses. The strategic importance of employee creativity cannot be disputed. Regardless of the type of sector, it is one of the most important tools for organizations in the current age. In this respect, a plethora of previous studies has also realized the importance of CSR to spur employee creativity [38,72,73]. Lastly, the established relationship between CSR and employee creativity can also be explained in light of the componential theory of creativity, which specifies an appropriate work environment as a necessary pre-condition for employees to gauge themselves in different creative tasks. From this perspective, undoubtedly, the CSR orientation of an organization provides a work environment in which employees are at ease to be engaged in different creative tasks. Hence, the first objective of the present analysis was well achieved in light of the literary discussion supported by empirical findings.

The other objective of this analysis was to test the mediating effect of job autonomy between CSR and employee creativity. The empirical results of the present analysis established that CSR not only directly predicts employee creativity, but also indirectly predicts it through the mediating support of job autonomy. When employees are given the freedom to work or solve problems on their own, they are more likely to come up with creative solutions that involve their creative thinking process. Furthermore, the more the availability of creative solutions, the better will be the future of an organization. Differing views lead to such assumptions only if organizational support (CSR-orientation in the current case) is available for the employees. The direct and mediating role of job autonomy in fostering employee creativity is also established in past studies [11,43,44,50]. In fact, Kalyar [50] asserts that job autonomy converts the employees into self-leaders who are self-governed and self-responsible, and thus willfully act for the betterment of their organization. Further, a socially responsible organization characterized by job autonomy paves the way for employees to be involved in different creativity-related tasks. Creativity and innovation are undoubtedly receiving increasing attention from scholars to induce the performance of an enterprise. Among some of the factors that consistently induce creativity, job autonomy is a critical factor [20]. On this point, the results of the current study established that when job autonomy is included in the relationship between CSR and employee creativity as a mediator, it produces a significant effect (almost 45%) in explaining employee creativity. Thus, the second objective of the current analysis was also well served.

### *5.1. Theoretical Implications*

The present analysis offers some important implications for theory and practice. First of all, we would like to discuss some of the theoretical implications of the current analysis. Firstly, the present study enriches the available literature in the field of CSR from the viewpoint of employee extra-role behavior, specifically in employee creativity, which is an underexplored domain of the field. Most of the prior studies in the domain of CSR were conducted by assuming CSR as a construct that belongs to an organizational level, for instance, in a recent study, Golrida, et al. [74] investigated the relationship between CSR and financial performance. Likewise, researchers like Mahmood and Bashir [75] proposed CSR as a key factor to spur brand equity. However, the perspective of CSR at the individual level is recently entering into the lexicon of CSR. In this regard, one can see the

seminal work of Gutiérrez Rodríguez, et al. [76]. Secondly, the inclusion of job autonomy as a mediating variable between the relationship of CSR and employee creativity also adds significantly to the prior literature. The mediation effect of job autonomy in fostering employee creativity is evident in the available literature of organizational management [46,50,51]; however, the mediation effect of job autonomy has mostly been linked in the context of leadership studies. The current study, in this context, is one of the sparse studies which considered the mediation effect of job autonomy from the perspective of CSR to spur employee creativity. Lastly, the current study considered the hotel sector of a developing country, whereas most of the available studies were conducted in the context of developed countries or developing countries that are close to being announced as developed nations [77–79].

### 5.2. Managerial Implications

Next, we would like to mention some critical implications of the current analysis for practice. Firstly, the current study brings to the surface the importance of employee creativity for the hotel sector of Pakistan. We all know that Gmail is a creative invention that was introduced by an employee working at Google. To this end, the current study established a positive link between CSR and employee creativity. Thus, this study improves the understanding of CSR for policymakers from the hotel sector and clarifies how it can be helpful in fostering employee creativity.

Similarly, gaining new customers and converting them into loyal customers is of the utmost importance for every sector. To this end, it has been reported that there is a direct link between CSR and customer loyalty [80]. In the current context, if the visitors of a socially responsible hotel are served in a creative manner by the hotel employees, it is likely that this may lead them to a higher level of loyalty.

Notably, the current state of CSR in most hotels in Pakistan is still rooted in the philosophy of a philanthropic orientation. Although there is nothing wrong with the philanthropic approach of CSR, we think it is quite relevant here to mention that CSR, if planned well, can do wonders for this sector. The real essence of CSR is not only limited to the extent of a philanthropic orientation; in fact, the concept covers a broader horizon that can bring multiple results for a hotel, ranging from financial performance to shaping employee's extra-role behavior, or, more specifically, the creative capability of the employees. Thus, limiting CSR to the extent of a philanthropic orientation is just an attempt of *"bailing out the Titanic with a teaspoon"*.

Secondly, the current study also highlights the importance of freedom at work, which leads to a spur of employee creativity. It is not surprising that, in the current age in which organizations are characterized by a multigenerational workforce, job autonomy has emerged as a key business imperative for all sectors, including the hotel industry. Realizing the importance of freedom at the workplace, the leading organizations of the world, like Google and Facebook, allow their employees to perform their tasks the way they want to perform them. This freedom at the workplace enables such organizations to spur a positive environment in which each employee feels happy and valued. From the perspective of the hotel sector, policymakers must understand the importance of freedom at work, and should give their employees a feeling of autonomy to perform certain tasks. For example, the hotel management may allow a barman to prepare a drink that is not listed on the menu but can be a good addition to the future list. Likewise, a housekeeper should be allowed to perform his job tasks the way he feels will bring superior results. Moreover, the tourism and hospitality sector is very important for economic growth; however, appropriate and flexible policies are required to achieve sustainable growth in this sector [62].

Another important takeaway from the perspective of practical implications is that the hotel sector is a service sector in which most of the value-creating activities are performed by the employees. In other words, the dependence of the service sector on employees is critical, as compared to the manufacturing sector, in which this dependency is not as

critical. Because of the intangible nature of services, the simultaneity of production and consumption, and the role of human factors in service delivery, the success of the innovation process in the hotel business mostly derives from the attitudes and behaviors of the employees. Therefore, the management should develop workplace strategies with a special focus on the factors that can motivate employees to show their creative potential at the workplace. Last but not least, as the overall situation of law and order has improved in Pakistan, international tourists are again visiting the country. In this respect, Pakistan as a Muslim country may be a lucrative tourist place for Muslim tourists, as this segment is an emerging tourism sector around the globe, especially the segment of younger Muslim tourists [81]. Therefore, if the law and order situation of the country improves further, increased numbers of international tourists are expected to enter the country, and a creative, socially responsible hotel will be the desired place for these visitors to have leisure time. Likewise, as highlighted in the study of Henche, et al. [82] tourists are in search of new places to have unique experiences, and hotels with creative services are more likely to surpass their rivals.

### *5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions*

The current analysis also encounters some limitations, which we think open a window for upcoming researchers in the same field to carry out their future research projects in the current domain. The first potential limitation of the current study is its attempt to explain employee behavior, especially their extra-role behavior from the perspective of job autonomy and their CSR perception. To this end, we would like to mention that although the proposed relationships of the current survey produced significant results, there is still room for further variables to be included in the current model for a better explanation, as human behavior is a complex phenomenon, and explaining it with the help of two factors (CSR, job autonomy) may have consequences, which need to be interpreted carefully. Another important limitation of the current survey is the nature of cross-sectional data, which poses a considerable threat to the causal relationship. In this context, a better strategy for future studies may be to incorporate a longitudinal data design to establish a better causality. Yet another limitation of the current study is the cultural context. As the construct of CSR is contextual in its nature, and as the individuals are also expected to behave dissimilarly in different cultures and workplace environments, the results of the current study may be different. Hence, our results need to be interpreted carefully, especially in countries with different cultures (USA, Europe, etc.). However, in countries like Bangladesh and India, where there are many similarities among the ranks and files, our study is expected to produce the same results. Likewise, in future studies, controlling for age, gender, and education may generate more specified results; for example, it may be found that either men or women are more motivated to show their creative potential as a result of CSR and freedom at the workplace. Lastly, the current study considered only three cities of Pakistan for data collection, and though these three cities constitute the largest share of the hotel industry, it is suggested to include more cities in future studies to have better generalizability.

### *5.4. Conclusions*

Altogether, the current study unveiled the importance of employee creativity for the hotel sector of Pakistan. Given that the basic outlay of this sector is easy to imitate by rivals, the innovation generated as the result of employee creativity is of paramount importance for this sector, as this sort of innovation is challenging to be imitated by rivals. In this regard, the hotel sector of Pakistan needs to realize that employees' CSR perception of a hotel is a key point that provides employees a justified reason to engage themselves in different creative tasks. Thus, an important takeaway of the current study for this sector is to regard CSR from the perspective of employee creativity. Moreover, it is also important for this sector to realize that in order to cultivate a culture of creativity in a hotel, it is required that the employees must be given the freedom to make a decision and

to perform their job in their own way. To this end, a flexible work environment characterized by freedom at the workplace is central to spur employee creativity. Therefore, the hotel enterprises of Pakistan are suggested to reconsider their CSR policies along with their perspective of job autonomy, both of which can effectively predict, at least in part, employee creativity.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, N.A. and M.G.; methodology, N.A.; software, M.G.; validation, K.-u.-R., M.S. and R.T.N.; formal analysis, N.A.; investigation, M.A.; resources, M.S.; writing—original draft preparation, N.A.; writing—review and editing, M.G.; supervision, R.T.N.; project administration, M.S.; funding acquisition, M.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** This research was conducted as per the ethical guidelines given in the Helsinki Declaration. The authors obtained approval from the ethical committee of Lahore Leads University (LLU/ERC/Res/27/11).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from the respondents of the survey.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data will be made available on request from the corresponding author.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Questionnaire items.

No.	Corporate Social Responsibility adapted from Turker [64]
1	This hotel participates in activities that aim to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment
2	This hotel makes investments to create a better life for future generations
3	This hotel implements special programs to minimize its negative impact on the natural environment
4	This hotel targets sustainable growth which considers future generations
5	This hotel supports non-governmental organizations working in problematic areas
6	This hotel contributes to the campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of society
7	This hotel encourages its employees to participate in voluntary activities
8	This hotel's policies encourage the employees to develop their skills and careers
9	The management of this hotel is primarily concerned with employees' needs and wants
10	This hotel implements flexible policies to provide good work and life balance for its employees
11	The managerial decisions related to the employees are usually fair
12	This hotel supports employees who want to acquire additional education
Employee Creativity adapted from Coelho and Augusto [65]	
1	I try to be as creative as I can in my job
2	I experiment with new approaches in performing my job
3	When new trends develop, I am usually the first to get on board
4	My boss feels that I am creative in performing my job
5	On the job, I am inventive in overcoming barriers
Job Autonomy adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey [66]	
1	The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work
2	The job allows me to decide on the order in which things are done on the job
3	The job allows me to plan how I do my work
4	The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work
5	The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own
6	The job provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions
7	The job allows me to make decisions about what methods I use to complete my work
8	The job gives me a considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work
9	The job allows me to decide on my own how to go about doing my work

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