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Navigating the Post-Pandemic Era: The Mediating Role of Relationship Quality and Perceived Value on Cruise Passengers' E-WOM in Taiwan

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Abstract: Prompted by the severe effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Taiwan's cruise industry, this research aims to explore the potential role of corporate social responsibility (CSR), relationship quality (RQ), and perceived value (PV) in reviving cruise tourism. The central research question focuses on how these constructs motivate Taiwanese passengers' engagement in cruise tourism and shape their electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) behavior in the post-pandemic era. Therefore, a comprehensive theoretical model was proposed to evaluate cruise operators' relationship-building strategies. The research method involved a convenience sampling approach to gather a robust dataset of 566 valid responses from a questionnaire survey. The data were rigorously analyzed using statistical software, SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0, via the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. The findings reveal that CSR and RQ substantially impact customers' E-WOM and identified PV and RQ as salient mediators between CSR and E-WOM. In conclusion, this research enriches our understanding of the recovering cruise industry's operation model in the post-pandemic phase. It provides academically grounded insights into how enhanced relationship building, CSR, and PV generation can enable cruise operators to influence E-WOM behavior positively.

Keywords: post-pandemic era; cruise market in Taiwan; relationship-building strategies; corporate social responsibility (CSR); electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)



Citation: Zhang, X.; Chang, M.-Y.; Rong, M.; Chen, H.-S. Navigating the Post-Pandemic Era: The Mediating Role of Relationship Quality and Perceived Value on Cruise Passengers' E-WOM in Taiwan. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 14416. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151914416>

Academic Editor: Colin Michael Hall

Received: 23 August 2023

Revised: 29 September 2023

Accepted: 29 September 2023

Published: 1 October 2023



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1. Introduction

The expansion of the global cruise market, with a significant surge in Asia and particularly Taiwan, established the importance of the cruise sector [1,2]. Yet, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic led to a standstill, impacting the major industry players [3]. To navigate this new normal, this research introduces a theoretical model to analyze the effectiveness of the cruise industry's relationship-marketing strategies, emphasizing corporate social responsibility (CSR), relationship quality (RQ), customer perceived value (PV), and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM).

Ecologically sound management practices are increasingly vital, given global concerns over pollution and climate change [4,5]. This movement toward greener operations, coupled with efforts to enhance CSR, improves both corporation image and the fulfillment of sustainability goals, demonstrating reciprocity between corporations and their stakeholders [6–13].

At the same time, establishing quality relationships is fundamental to long-term business growth, which is based on research showcasing the positive effects of trust, commitment, and satisfaction [14–18]. Additionally, business engagement in CSR can build these trusting relationships [19] and foster commitment and loyalty [20,21].

The PV, especially in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, plays a critical role in shaping customer behavior [22]. The Taiwan Central Epidemic Command Center's swift response to the pandemic emphasized the importance of professionalism and trust in the industry [23,24]. This research thus argues that effective strategies to strengthen cruise travel relationships and enhance consumers' PV can promote trust among consumers in the post-pandemic era, leading to a potential rise in cruise travel preferences.

In the wake of social media proliferation, companies are leveraging these platforms for marketing, advocacy of their CSR initiatives, and obtaining customer support [25,26]. Despite existing analysis of the influence of word-of-mouth and social media marketing on consumer purchasing behaviors [27–29], the explicit impact of customer-driven social media activities toward CSR remains uncertain [30,31]. This study, therefore, focuses on the behavior of cruise passengers on social media regarding CSR and its subsequent effect on their purchasing decisions.

Earlier research on CSR establishes a mediating role between CSR and post-purchase behavior across several industries, including cruise lines [32,33]. However, a comprehensive insight regarding the implementation of CSR in the cruise industry and its influence on customer decision-making and loyalty is still lacking [27,34,35]. This study thus aims to investigate the interplay between CSR, RQ, and E-WOM in the context of the cruise industry.

Furthermore, it attempts to understand how the cruise industry can impact customers' decision-making processes and their loyalty through CSR, mediated by PV and RQ. This research not only addresses the research gap related to the interplay of CSR, PV, RQ, and the customer's role in the cruise industry but also conjectures the impact of social media on consumer behavior toward CSR. Hence, it provides pragmatic guidance for cruise operators on CSR and customer relationship strategies, while advancing academic knowledge in this field.

Ultimately, this project aims to elucidate the potential impacts of CSR practices on the PV and RQ between customers and the cruise industry, focusing particularly on how these practices may affect the evaluation of cruise companies' reputations. By augmenting our comprehension of the interplay between CSR, PV, RQ, and E-WOM, this study will provide practical guidance for cruise operators, contributing theoretically and practically to the industry and the academic community.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Stakeholder Theory

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has increasingly been recognized as a core component of successful business strategies. This comprehensive approach extends beyond profit generation by considering the welfare of a variety of stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, distributors, and shareholders [36–38].

The expansion of a company's mission, as outlined in stakeholder theory articulated by Freeman in 1984, pivots organizations from sole accountability to shareholders and moves toward recognizing all stakeholder interests [39]. This mindful approach influences an organization's decision-making process and actions, encompassing a broad sphere of interests including investors, creditors, employees, and consumers. This shift has led management teams to consider the connection between corporate social responsibility and financial performance.

Drawing on this, Carroll [40] argues that corporate activities should directly consider stakeholder interests while also aiming to enhance societal welfare. Aguinis and Glavas [41] expand on this by interpreting corporate social responsibility as an integration of stakeholder needs with the pursuit of triple bottom-line benefits—economic, social, and environmental. However, seemingly incongruous consumer perceptions of CSR have led to difficulties in recognizing a company's efforts in this arena [42–44]. Thus, this study defines “corporate social responsibility” as consumer perceptions of the company's efforts for societal welfare.

Within the stakeholder theory framework, balanced yet proactive CSR efforts should be considered to positively affect the spectrum of stakeholder interests. This is particularly applicable in the cruise industry, which faces increased demands for sustainable development from a broad range of stakeholders inclusive of passengers, local communities, employees, transportation companies, and policymakers [45]. This industry must align operational efficiency with environmental, social, and economic sustainability, underpinning the necessary challenges.

CSR in the cruise industry also necessitates a focus on both social and non-social stakeholders. While not adequately addressed in many industry-specific studies, economic and employee considerations are vital alongside the prevalent environmental and social issues [46]. This balanced approach is further supported by the observation that customers favor companies that invest in responsible corporate social and environmental policies [47].

To bring these dimensions together, Turker [48] proposed a holistic stakeholder-oriented CSR framework comprising societal, environmental, employee, customer, and regulatory responsibilities. Waldman et al. [49] further emphasize the importance of social, employee, and customer dimensions within CSR due to their significance in the negotiation of competing stakeholder expectations. Farooq et al. [50] delve into the impact of CSR on employees, highlighting an unmet need for research on CSR reputation and customer behavior interrelation within the cruise industry.

CSR has shown a varying breadth in terms of definitions and measurements [51]. Carroll's pyramid model of CSR [40] advocates for a multifaceted approach, taking into account economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic elements. However, the increasingly expansive nature of CSR activities warrants a broad stakeholder-driven perception of societal engagement [52].

To fill the existing research gap, our study will utilize Turker's [48] determinant model, centered around stakeholder theory, to investigate the connection between CSR initiatives and their effects on employee well-being and customer behavior in the cruise industry. This investigation will provide a macro perspective on CSR dynamics within the cruise industry and underline its role as a creator of multi-stakeholder value.

2.2. Perceived Value

Perceived value (PV), a multi-dimensional construct, offers a balance between what consumers receive (quality, benefits, and service) and their investment (be it time, money, or effort) [53]. A more granular perspective presents this concept as constituted by functional, emotional, social, and knowledge values [54].

Functional value encompasses the practical advantages offered by a product or service, including tangible benefits and efficiencies. Emotional value, as defined by Spinelli and Canavos [55], refers to pleasurable emotions generated through consumption, thus adding to consumers' experiences. Social value, on the other hand, is underpinned by the social implications of product or service usage, such as affirming one's social status [54]. Finally, knowledge value pertains to the enriching experiences, learning potential, and substantial information offered through product or service usage [51].

The connection between CSR initiatives and PV has found recognition in scholarship, concurrently affecting consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviors. Several studies have pointed toward a positive correlation between effective CSR activities and heightened PV, thereby fostering consumer trust, loyalty, and advocating behaviour [56,57].

Applying this framework to the cruise industry implies that CSR initiatives high on functional, emotional, social, and knowledge values have the potential to positively influence PV. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in this context is:

Hypothesis (H1). *CSR will have a positive and significant influence on PV.*

2.3. Relationship Quality

Relationship quality (RQ) is an essential multi-aspect construct in the framework of social psychology and interpersonal interactions, involving three significant components: commitment, trust, and satisfaction [58,59]. Commitment is the customer's intention to maintain a long-term relationship with a service provider, which is anchored in the assurance of future engagements' cumulative benefits, outweighing the costs or risks of changing providers [60]. Trust, another pillar of RQ, is dictated by a customer's readiness to depend on the perceived integrity and reliability of a service provider [60]. Satisfaction, the third component, arises from past experiences and the disparity between initial expectations and actual service performance [61]. While associated with momentary consumption experiences, this element is considered critical as it directs customer assessments and influences repeat patronage [62].

However, merging these three separate domains into a single framework may present concerns pertaining to discriminant validity. This factor ascertains that constructs that should be unrelated are indeed uncorrelated. The components of RQ, if found to exhibit substantial correlation, may be intertwined, thereby hindering efforts to differentiate them. This highlights the necessity of meticulous measurement and validation during survey preparation and data analysis [63].

Despite such concerns, scholars have advocated integrating these three facets into the singular construct of RQ, arguing that these elements are interconnected and jointly contribute to the overall perception of RQ. This holistic approach opens up an avenue for a more comprehensive understanding of customer relationships [62,64].

In supporting this consolidated approach, Morgan and Hunt's [60] commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing argues that commitment and trust form the core elements of successful relationship marketing. Concurrently, Palmatier et al. [64] have presented empirical evidence that supports the idea that an amalgamation of commitment and trust can provide a more profound understanding of RQ. In this context, customer satisfaction, viewed as the result of positive assessments of organizational performance, directly influences relationship-persisting decisions and, therefore, is also a critical RQ element [58,65]. While addressing discriminant validity, Smith [66] showed that though trust, commitment, and satisfaction are interconnected, they still possess statistical distinctiveness, thereby indicating that these aspects could be effectively combined into a single, comprehensive RQ construct without forgoing discriminant validity.

Numerous studies have confirmed that CSR has a positive correlation with each of the components of RQ [67,68]. CSR is observed to significantly affect customers' commitment to an organization [69,70] and amplify customer satisfaction by fulfilling their societal expectations [71,72].

Hence, combining these elements into the broader construct of RQ enhances our understanding of customer relations, promoting a more comprehensive overview of the relationship quality from multiple perspectives. This could provide nuanced insights into customer experiences. RQ is a critical component of service industries. It gains significance within the sustainability-focused cruise industry wherein compliance with societal obligations, emphasis on employee well-being, conducive working conditions, and effective CSR policy execution can bolster customer trust. These actions yield benefits beyond mere competitive advantage and improved corporate reputation by contributing positively to societal interests. On these theoretical grounds, the subsequent hypotheses have been formulated to probe anticipated positive relationships between CSR and RQ:

Hypothesis (H2). *CSR will have a positive and significant impact on RQ.*

Hypothesis (H2-1). *CSR will have a positive and significant impact on RQ's commitment.*

Hypothesis (H2-2). *CSR will have a positive and significant impact on RQ's trust.*

Hypothesis (H2-3). *CSR will have a positive and significant impact on RQ's satisfaction.*

PV influences customer satisfaction and trust, which are critical for fostering customer intentions, especially in a service industry setting [73]. Applying PV effectively can maximize customer satisfaction and trust scores [74]. PV is determined by perceived benefits, acknowledged sacrifices, and consumer behavioral intentions [75]. The attributed value of a service emanates from customers' comprehensive experiences [76,77]. Thus, we suggest:

Hypothesis (H3). *Customer PV will have a positive and significant influence on RQ.*

Hypothesis (H3-1). *Customer PV will have a positive and significant impact on RQ's commitment.*

Hypothesis (H3-2). *Customer PV will have a positive and significant impact on RQ's trust.*

Hypothesis (H3-3). *Customer PV will have a positive and significant impact on RQ's satisfaction.*

2.4. Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)

Recent advancements in new media technologies, particularly the Internet, have significantly enhanced consumer discussions about organizations, brands, services, and products within their social networks [78,79]. This phenomenon, referred to as "E-WOM" (electronic word-of-mouth), entails consumers using digital platforms to share product-related information, experiences, and reviews for the advantage of prospective customers [80–83].

E-WOM is distinguishable by its potent, rapid, and expansive distribution of online information. Studies, such as Tanimoto and Fujii's [84], underline the ability to quickly duplicate and disseminate online information, thus expanding the reach of E-WOM. Another key characteristic of E-WOM is anonymity, enabling honest opinion sharing without group pressure [85,86]. Evidence suggests that E-WOM influences consumers' expectations, attitudes, and ultimately, their purchasing decisions [82].

The literature also indicates that E-WOM can amplify the discourse surrounding a company's social responsibility [87]. The engagement metrics on social media—likes, comments, and shares—can enhance support for a company's socially responsible efforts, positively sway brand and product attitudes, and influence consumer behavior [88]. This impact culminates in an overall upliftment of the company's image [89]. Consequently, we propose:

Hypothesis (H4). *CSR will have a positive and significant influence on E-WOM.*

In the current era of pervasive social media, E-WOM has become an indispensable tool that consumers use to share their experiences and demand product or service details [90]. Its implications extend to shaping potential customers' opinions and shifting market trends. The role theory underscores the consumers' influence on service outcomes [91]. Herein, the PV derived from a product or service has a fundamental role in shaping consumer attitudes and actions. PV shows a significant positive association with E-WOM, as various studies indicate [92,93]. Customers demonstrating a higher PV are more prone to instigate favorable E-WOM platforms.

This study delves into scrutinizing the mediating role of PV, aiming to decipher the methods by which CSR strategies can mold both RQ and E-WOM inside the cruise industry circuit. The resultant insights should assist in consolidating our understanding of PV's impact on customers' decision-making and behavioral patterns. A higher PV perception could potentially fortify the association with the service provider and magnify the propensity to participate in E-WOM, constructing a network of loyal proponents for the service provider [94]. Further research reaffirms this claim, proposing that the customer evaluations, strongly molded by a service's PV, directly guide their E-WOM activities [95]. This discussion lends credibility to the consequent hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H5). *Customer PV will have a positive and significant influence on E-WOM.*

Following this line of thought, the presented hypothesis holds that an increase in perceived value will mirror a rise in E-WOM activities, thereby emphasizing the vital role of PV in shaping and bolstering effective E-WOM.

Prominently, RQ, encompassing customers' trust in sales personnel and their satisfaction with the ensuing relationship, plays a vital role. When customers perceive trust and satisfaction in their engagements with the company, they are predisposed to foster loyalty [96] and actively disseminate their positive experiences and beliefs [97]. Moreover, RQ's influence transcends traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) interactions and exerts effects within the E-WOM sphere. Trust forms the bedrock on which loyal customer bases are built and the proliferation of E-WOM facilitated. This suggests that customers exhibiting high levels of trust and satisfaction in their association with a company are inclined toward loyalty and are more prone to share their positive experiences and viewpoints on online platforms and social media. Building on these notions, this study formulates the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis (H6). *RQ will have a positive and significant influence on E-WOM.*

Hypothesis (H6-1). *RQ's commitment will have a positive and significant influence on E-WOM.*

Hypothesis (H6-2). *RQ's trust will have a positive and significant influence on E-WOM.*

Hypothesis (H6-3). *RQ's satisfaction will have a positive and significant influence on E-WOM.*

This hypothesis, by investigating the mediating role of RQ, promises to illuminate the mechanisms through which CSR initiatives can affect E-WOM. It posits that the positive influence of CSR on E-WOM is in part mediated by the quality of relationships established between a company and its customers. This hypothesis not only builds on existing literature but expands our comprehension of the manner in which CSR initiatives can stimulate positive E-WOM outcomes by nurturing durable, trustworthy relationships.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Framework

Drawing inspiration from pertinent empirical studies, this research aims to establish a comprehensive model to assess the impact of CSR on E-WOM systematically. Additionally, the framework incorporates the mediating effect of PV and RQ. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the research framework.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

This study employs a questionnaire survey methodology to gather data. The questionnaire consists of five sections: scenario design, CSR, RQ, PV, E-WOM, and basic respondent information. The use of scenario design aims to address biases, rationalization, and consistency issues that may arise from memory discrepancies [98]. Given the limited understanding of CSR among cruise customers, presenting a scenario before completing the questionnaire facilitates easier responses. The scenario design is based on Li et al.'s [99] research on CSR and incorporates the three-dimensional activities of CSR in the cruise industry to evaluate customers' perceptions.

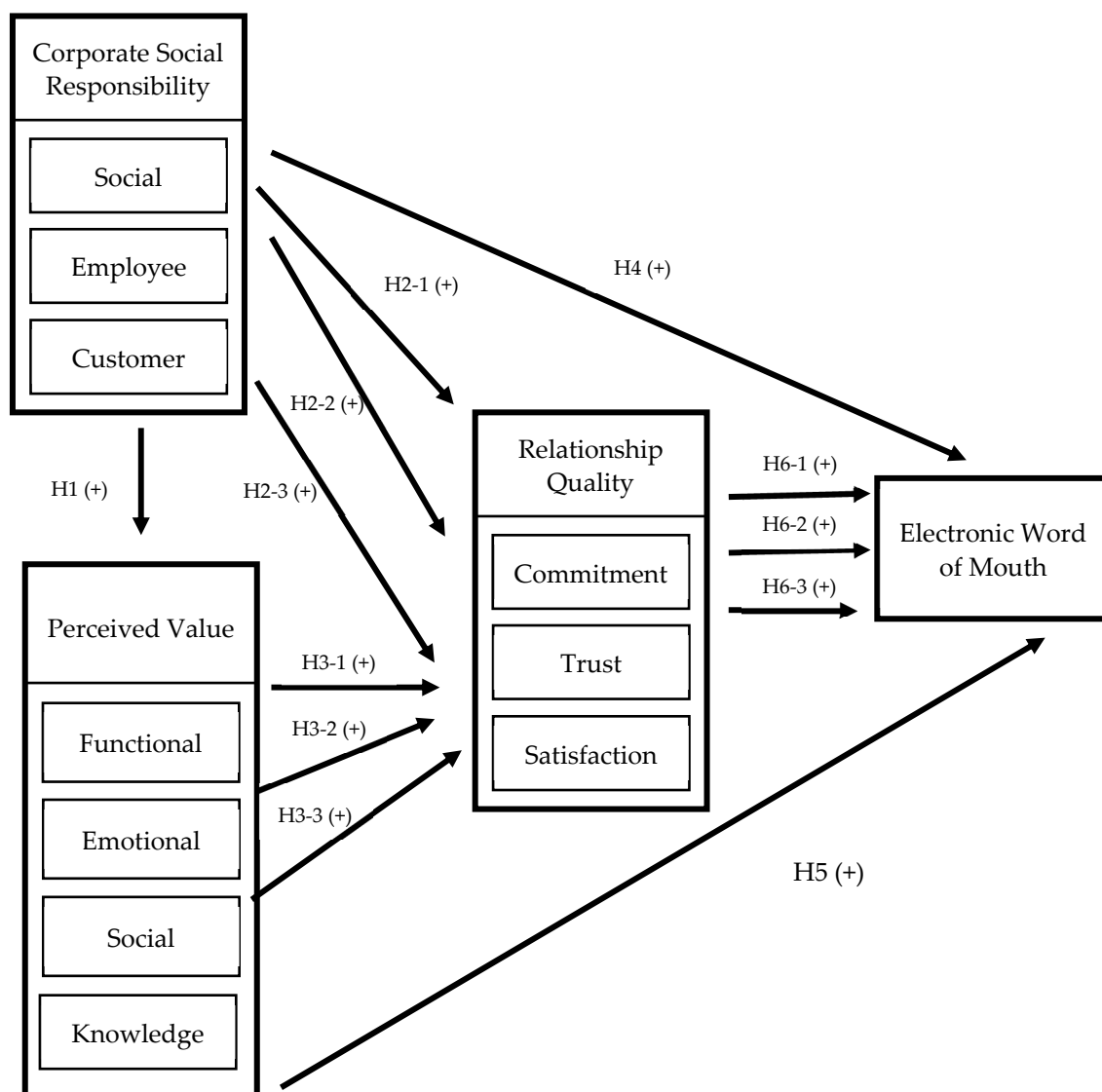


Figure 1. Conceptual framework and hypotheses of this study.

To assess customers' perception of CSR, this study utilizes Turker's [48] CSR scale, encompassing its social, employee, and customer dimensions, comprising 12 items. The measurement of RQ includes 10 items informed by the literature of Athanasopoulou [17], Samudro et al. [100], and Qian et al. [18]. The evaluation of PV draws on the established scale by Williams and Soutar [54], comprising 12 items. For E-WOM, relevant studies by Hennig-Thurau et al. [80], Chu and Kim [81], and Jalilvand and Samiei [83] contribute to the inclusion of 10 items. Respondents' demographic information such as gender, age, marital status, education level, and personal average monthly income is collected. All scales are assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree."

To ensure the clarity of the questionnaire and the accuracy of descriptions, an expert validity review was conducted. Seven experts and scholars with over 10 years of professional experience in fields such as tourism, hospitality, and the cruise industry were invited. The questionnaire was carefully examined and revised by the experts, focusing on the correctness, appropriateness, and accuracy of the wording in each item. Based on the insights provided by the experts, adjustments and augmentations were made to the wording and content of the questionnaire, resulting in the development of a suitable pilot questionnaire.

3.3. Sample and Data Collection

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental well-being of the Taiwanese population and explore strategies to restore consumers' PV of cruise tourism. The Taiwan Central Epidemic Command Center implemented a ban on international cruise ships from 6 February 2020 to 13 October 2022, which has had a significant effect on the tourism industry. To address this, operators need to develop diverse strategies to rebuild consumer trust in health protection measures. By establishing and cultivating relationships with consumers through improved quality, health measures, communication, and safety, cruise operators can enhance consumer understanding and alleviate the negative impact of the pandemic.

Given the advancements in technology and widespread internet access, researchers in the social sciences have increasingly used online platforms and social media for data collection. Online questionnaires provide advantages such as lower cost, broader reach, and faster data collection compared to traditional random sampling surveys [101]. However, online surveys have certain limitations, including biases arising from non-representative sample selection, lack of researcher guidance, dependence on internet users, and the possibility of duplicate responses [102,103]. Privacy concerns and the visibility of online interactions also affect individuals' willingness to disclose information or respond to sensitive questions. To ensure effective and representative data, researchers must acknowledge and address these influential aspects.

For this study, a pretest was conducted to enhance the reliability of the questionnaire scale. The pretest questionnaire yielded 93 valid samples, and measures of reliability were used to assess the stability and consistency of the research concepts. Structural equation modeling was employed for statistical analysis, aligning with the study's objectives and hypotheses. Based on recommendations by Wu [104], the optimal sample size for structural equation modeling should ideally range between a 10:1 and 15:1 ratio relative to the number of questions in the questionnaire. With 42 items in the questionnaire, a target sample size of 420 to 630 participants was sought.

To collect data, an online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and distributed conveniently through various online social media platforms, including Line, Instagram, and Facebook. The participation invitation included a link to the questionnaire. Data collection was conducted in May and June 2023, resulting in a total of 647 responses. After excluding 81 invalid questionnaire responses, 566 responses were considered for analysis. Demographic analysis of the valid participants (Table 1) revealed a relatively higher proportion of males (52.7%), individuals aged 31–40 (35.9%), those with a university/college education (64.5%), an average monthly income of NTD 45,001–60,000 (26.1%), singles (48.4%), and individuals without prior cruise experience (57.3%). These descriptive statistics reflect the higher rate of singledom among Taiwan's educated population of marriage age and provide insights into the current social landscape (as indicated by a 45% unmarried rate among 30–39-year-olds in Taiwan in 2020).

3.4. Methods of Data Analysis

This study employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the causal relationships between latent variables. The statistical software packages used for analyzing, testing, and refining the theoretical model were SPSS Statistics 22.0 and IBM SPSS Amos 22.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA). PLS-SEM was chosen for its various advantages. Firstly, it can handle multiple dependent and independent variables. Secondly, it effectively addresses the issue of multicollinearity. Thirdly, it robustly handles missing values and outliers. Furthermore, PLS-SEM demonstrates strong predictive power for latent variables as response variables. It also possesses the capability to simultaneously handle reflective and formative indicators. Additionally, PLS-SEM is well-suited for small sample sizes and is not constrained by data distribution assumptions [105,106]. Given the aforementioned benefits, PLS-SEM has been chosen as the principal analytical instrument for this study.

Table 1. Demographic analysis.

Variable	Description	Frequency (<i>n</i> = 566)	Percentage
Gender	Male	298	52.7%
	Female	268	47.3%
Age	21–30	155	27.4%
	31–40	203	35.9%
	41–50	147	25.9%
	51 or above	61	10.8%
Education Level	Junior high school or below	80	14.1%
	university/college	365	64.5%
	Master’s degree (inclusive) and above	121	21.4%
Personal Monthly Income (NTD)	Less than NTD 30,000	52	9.2%
	NTD 30,001–45,000	121	21.4%
	NTD 45,001–60,000	148	26.1%
	NTD 60,001–75,000	143	25.3%
	NTD 75,001–100,000	62	10.9%
	Above NTD 100,001	40	7.1%
Family Status	Single	274	48.4%
	Married (no children)	71	12.5%
	Married (with children)	221	39.1%
Cruise Experience	Never taken	324	57.3%
	Taken once	162	28.6%
	Taken two or more times (inclusive)	80	14.1%

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Inspection Results of Measurement Model Evaluation

The analysis and interpretation of the measurement model can be divided into two main steps. Firstly, the reliability and validity of the measurement model are examined. Secondly, the significance and predictive capability of the model’s path coefficients are tested. To assess the relationships between observed variables and underlying factors, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is performed, which is commonly used to evaluate the validity and reliability of unobserved latent factors. In this study, CFA is applied to evaluate the appropriateness of the measurement tool for the target population, following the approach of Hair et al. [106].

Reliability and validity analysis for the constructs is presented in Table 2. The item loadings within each construct range from 0.727 to 0.925, exceeding the standard of 0.5 suggested in previous studies [106]. Furthermore, Cronbach’s α values for each construct exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7 by Hair et al. [106], indicating strong internal consistency of the research model. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for each construct range from 0.725 to 0.883, surpassing the suggested value of 0.5 [106] and demonstrating solid convergent validity for each construct.

Table 2. Summary of the CFA for each variable scale.

Variables		Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Source
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Social CSR	1. Does the cruise company support local community economic development and employment opportunities?	0.815 ***	0.916	0.758	0.917	Turker [48]
		2. Does the cruise company actively engage in community service activities or donate to charitable organizations?	0.824 ***				
		3. Is the cruise company committed to environmental protection, including implementing measures to reduce emissions, conserve energy, or recycle?	0.801 ***				
		4. Does the cruise company prioritize the protection of marine ecosystems during the shipping process?	0.872 ***				
	Employee CSR	5. Does the cruise company provide fair and competitive wages and benefits to its employees?	0.882 ***	0.803	0.859	0.883	
		6. Does the cruise company value employee training and development, providing opportunities for further education or promotion?	0.794 ***				
		7. Does the cruise company establish a safe and healthy work environment?	0.918 ***				
		8. Does the cruise company value cultural diversity, gender equality, and workplace diversity?	0.849 ***				
	Customer CSR	9. Does the cruise company provide excellent customer service and travel experience?	0.866 ***	0.876	0.725	0.869	
		10. Does the cruise company give importance to customer opinions, needs, and feedback, and make appropriate improvements?	0.912 ***				
		11. Does the cruise company offer fair pricing and reasonable return and exchange policies?	0.857 ***				
		12. Does the cruise company respect customer privacy rights and data protection?	0.878 ***				

Table 2. Cont.

Variables	Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Source
Relationship Quality (RQ)	Commitment	1. Does the cruise company's service meet your expectations during the journey?	0.841 ***	0.872	0.806	0.917
		2. Has the cruise company fulfilled its commitments regarding itinerary arrangements, comfort, safety measures, etc.?	0.925 ***			
		3. Did the cruise company respond promptly and resolve your needs and issues?	0.858 ***			
	Trust	4. Do you find the information and promotions provided by the cruise company reliable?	0.896 ***	0.860	0.792	0.891
		5. Do you have confidence in the professionalism and service quality of the cruise company?	0.872 ***			
		6. Do you believe the cruise company would handle potential crises and emergency situations properly?	0.885 ***			
	Satisfaction	7. Are you satisfied with the cabin facilities and cleanliness provided by the cruise company?	0.890 ***	0.853	0.781	0.874
		8. Are you satisfied with the dining quality and variety offered by the cruise company?	0.916 ***			
		9. Do the activities and entertainment programs provided by the cruise company meet your needs and preferences?	0.805 ***			
		10. Are you satisfied with the service attitude and attentiveness of the cruise company?	0.876 ***			

Athanasopoulou [17];
Samudro et al. [100];
Qian et al. [18]).

Table 2. Cont.

Variables	Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Source	
Perceived Value (PV)	1. Cruises provide high-quality accommodations, dining, and leisure facilities.	0.858 ***	0.847	0.805	0.864	Williams and Soutar [54]	
	2. Cruises have modern facilities and technology that offer convenience and comfort to guests.	0.855 ***					
	3. Cruise travel offers a variety of activities and entertainment options, allowing guests to enjoy a rich leisure time.	0.887 ***					
	Emotional Value	4. Cruise travel provides me with a feeling of joy, stress relief, and relaxation.	0.869 ***	0.915	0.883		0.906
		5. The time spent on a cruise makes me feel happy and allows me to enjoy life.	0.835 ***				
		6. Cruises provide a unique and beautiful environment that brings me joy and surprise.	0.884 ***				
	Social Value	7. Cruise travel offers opportunities to establish close connections with family and friends.	0.863 ***	0.939	0.872		0.913
		8. Meeting new people and getting to know individuals from different cultural backgrounds on a cruise.	0.871 ***				
		9. Cruise travel gives me the opportunity to participate in social activities.	0.839 ***				
	Knowledge Value	10. Cruise travel provides an opportunity to learn about different histories and cultures from around the world.	0.842 ***	0.793	0.797		0.802
		11. A cruise is a place to learn and experience new things.	0.865 ***				
		12. The staff on a cruise provide professional knowledge about the destination and the cruise itself.	0.852 ***				

Table 2. Cont.

Variables	Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Source
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM)	1. Have you discovered positive customer reviews about cruises when using an internet search engine?	0.838 ***	0.779	0.753	0.865	Hennig-Thurau et al. [80]; Chu and Kim [81]; Jalilvand and Samiei [83]
	2. Have you seen others sharing their positive experiences on cruises on social media?	0.884 ***				
	3. Have you read positive reviews from other travelers on travel review websites?	0.923 ***				
	4. Have friends or family recommended cruise travel to you as a positive choice?	0.881 ***				
	5. Have you seen positive reviews about cruises from other travelers in online forums or dedicated cruise communities?	0.872 ***				
	6. Do you follow or track official social media accounts of cruise companies to get positive information about their cruise products and services?	0.796 ***				
	7. Have you found recommendations or testimonials about cruises from other travelers on online travel platforms?	0.782 ***				
	8. Have you come across reports or articles praising the products and services of cruise companies online?	0.877 ***				
	9. Have you found positive customer reviews written by other customers on websites?	0.727 ***				
	10. Have you read positive reviews or recommendations provided by cruise travel experts?	0.879 ***				

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

In conclusion, the results of the reliability and validity analysis, as presented in Table 2, show that the measurement model meets the requirements for convergent validity and composite reliability (CR). Thus, it can be concluded that the internal quality of the questionnaire constructs in this study is excellent.

Table 3 provides the correlation coefficients and square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for the measurement model. In accordance with the guidelines presented by Hair et al. [106], an evaluation of discriminant validity was conducted. It is important for the square root of AVE to exceed the correlation coefficients between variables in order to establish strong discriminant validity. The results displayed in Table 3 indicate that all correlation coefficients among variables are below the corresponding square root of the AVE, thereby satisfying the established criteria outlined by Hair et al. [106]. This finding confirms that the variables under investigation possess satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients for each dimension.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Social CSR	Employee CSR	Customer CSR	RQ	PV	E-WOM
Social CSR	5.452	0.736	0.874					
Employee CSR	5.751	1.125	0.229 **	0.934				
Customer CSR	5.438	1.127	0.726 **	0.217 **	0.856			
RQ	5.365	0.883	0.436 **	0.135 **	0.423 **	0.890		
PV	5.274	1.382	0.325 **	0.372 **	0.352 **	0.418 **	0.915	
E-WOM	4.937	0.741	0.547 **	0.244 **	0.535 **	0.686 **	0.482 **	0.885

Note 1: The diagonal line is the root of the AVE of each dimension, and the non-diagonal line is the correlation coefficient between each dimension. Note 2: ** $p < 0.05$.

Furthermore, the indicators that were tested within the measurement model clearly fulfill the strict requirements for reliable and valid quantification of data. Consequently, this study is now well-prepared to proceed with the analysis of the structural model and the subsequent testing of the hypotheses.

4.2. Structural Model Evaluation

The initial step in analyzing a structural model involves examining collinearity and assessing the overall goodness of fit. Collinearity among the variables within the structural model is initially assessed by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF). In this study, the VIF values ranged from 1.736 to 4.452 for all variables, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 5.0. These results suggest the absence of multicollinearity in the structural model.

Furthermore, several goodness-of-fit indices were evaluated to assess the overall fit of the research model. The χ^2/df ratio was found to be 2.513, indicating an acceptable fit. Additionally, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was 0.072, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.069, and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and comparative fit index (CFI) were determined to be 0.905, 0.922, 0.917, and 0.913, respectively. These findings demonstrate the goodness-of-fit indices for the research model.

Table 4 provides the outcomes of the hypothesis testing and the path coefficients for the research model. These coefficients for CSR, PV, RQ, and E-WOM were assessed using the bootstrapping algorithm in the SmartPLS statistical software (PLS-SEM), and their corresponding results are reported in the same table.

Analysis indicates that CSR positively and considerably impacts PV, thus supporting H1 (CSR \rightarrow PV: $=0.865$, t -value = 32.275). Further analysis suggests that CSR plays a significant role in affecting RQ, giving support to H2-1 (CSR \rightarrow RQ's commitment: $=0.685$, t -value = 14.128), H2-2 (CSR \rightarrow RQ's trust: $=0.702$, t -value = 11.446), and H2-3 (CSR \rightarrow RQ's satisfaction: $=0.751$, t -value = 9.853). Moreover, PV has a significant and positive effect on

RQ, validating H3-1 (PV \rightarrow RQ's commitment: $\beta=0.672$, t -value = 10.784), H3-2 (PV \rightarrow RQ's trust: $\beta=0.718$, t -value = 12.185), and H3-3 (PV \rightarrow RQ's satisfaction: $\beta=0.682$, t -value = 10.352).

Furthermore, CSR significantly influences E-WOM, which implies that the H4 hypothesis is validated (CSR \rightarrow E-WOM: $\beta=0.563$, t -value = 8.287). There is also a strong and positive relationship between PV and E-WOM, supporting H5 (PV \rightarrow E-WOM: $\beta=0.594$, t -value = 7.962). Furthermore, RQ substantially and positively influences E-WOM, thus corroborating H6-1 (RQ's commitment \rightarrow E-WOM: $\beta=0.572$, t -value = 9.892), H6-2 (RQ's trust \rightarrow E-WOM: $\beta=0.655$, t -value = 11.362), and H6-3 (RQ's satisfaction \rightarrow E-WOM: $\beta=0.725$, t -value = 9.826).

These findings imply that higher levels of CSR within cruise companies correspond to increased levels of PV, RQ, and E-WOM. Therefore, hypotheses H1 to H6 are affirmed.

Table 4. Path coefficients for each variable.

	Path	Standardized Coefficient	t -Value	Result
H1	CSR \rightarrow PV	0.865	32.275 ***	Supported
H2-1	CSR \rightarrow RQ's commitment	0.685	14.128 ***	Supported
H2-2	CSR \rightarrow RQ's trust	0.702	11.446 ***	Supported
H2-2	CSR \rightarrow RQ's satisfaction	0.751	9.853 ***	Supported
H3-1	PV \rightarrow RQ's commitment	0.672	10.784 ***	Supported
H3-2	PV \rightarrow RQ's trust	0.718	12.185 ***	Supported
H3-3	PV \rightarrow RQ's satisfaction	0.682	10.352 ***	Supported
H4	CSR \rightarrow E-WOM	0.563	8.287 ***	Supported
H5	PV \rightarrow E-WOM	0.594	7.962 ***	Supported
H6-1	RQ's commitment \rightarrow E-WOM	0.572	9.892 ***	Supported
H6-2	RQ's trust \rightarrow E-WOM	0.655	11.362 ***	Supported
H6-3	RQ's satisfaction \rightarrow E-WOM	0.725	9.826 ***	Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

4.3. Mediation Effects Testing

This study involved a validation test for the mediating effect, using path analysis as the reference standard. The Sobel test was the chosen method, serving to measure the indirect influence and significance of variable x on variable y [107]. Table 5, derived from the Sobel test, demonstrates that the z -value and p -value are crucial in identifying any indirect impact of these variables. A z -value exceeding 1.96 on the mediator variable signifies its significance. In conclusion, our findings confirm the existence of mediating effects between the subjects of our study—CSR, PV, RQ, and E-WOM. The offered empirical evidence supports the suggested hypotheses, emphasizing the importance of these mediating relationships.

Table 5. Mediation effects testing.

Constructs	Relationship Between Constructs	Path Coefficient t -Value	Sobel Test z -Value
CSR \rightarrow PV \rightarrow RQ's commitment	CSR \rightarrow PV	4.358	4.045 ***
	PV \rightarrow RQ's commitment	18.682	
CSR \rightarrow PV \rightarrow RQ's trust	CSR \rightarrow PV	4.358	3.822 ***
	PV \rightarrow RQ's trust	12.971	
CSR \rightarrow PV \rightarrow RQ's satisfaction	CSR \rightarrow PV	4.358	3.185 ***
	PV \rightarrow RQ's satisfaction	16.765	
CSR \rightarrow RQ's commitment \rightarrow E-WOM	CSR \rightarrow RQ's commitment	3.286	3.164 **
	RQ's commitment \rightarrow E-WOM	5.658	
CSR \rightarrow RQ's trust \rightarrow E-WOM	CSR \rightarrow RQ's trust	2.977	2.925 **
	RQ's trust \rightarrow E-WOM	4.903	

Table 5. Cont.

Constructs	Relationship Between Constructs	Path Coefficient <i>t</i> -Value	Sobel Test <i>z</i> -Value
CSR → RQ's satisfaction → E-WOM	CSR → RQ's satisfaction RQ's satisfaction → E-WOM	3.052 5.021	3.981 **
PV → RQ's commitment → E-WOM	PV → RQ's commitment RQ's commitment → E-WOM	18.682 5.658	2.877 **
PV → RQ's trust → E-WOM	PV → RQ's trust RQ's trust → E-WOM	12.971 4.903	2.903 **
PV → RQ's satisfaction → E-WOM	PV → RQ's satisfaction RQ's satisfaction → E-WOM	16.765 5.021	3.175 **
CSR → PV → E-WOM	CSR → PV PV → E-WOM	4.358 7.988	3.502 ***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion

This research study uncovers the considerable impact of CSR on PV, RQ, and E-WOM. It suggests that the recommendations from service providers exert a persuasive effect on consumers, leading to the establishment of trust, which is a crucial factor in this context. Consequently, the early implementation of relationship quality management strategies among cruise customers can effectively influence their E-WOM, thereby enhancing the overall competitive advantage of cruise companies. Given the current circumstances, with the impending lifting of the COVID-19 lockdown measures and the potential for future pandemic-related disruptions, it becomes crucial for cruise companies to establish robust customer relationships on online interactive platforms such as Facebook, LINE@, and Instagram. Leveraging these platforms to provide cruise customers with relevant events and up-to-date information can facilitate the development of effective operational strategic models for the post-pandemic period.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This research affirms that CSR can enhance customer trust, commitment, and satisfaction toward cruise companies, and is consistent with the findings of Ko et al. [108] and Lacey and Kennett-Hensel [52]. Therefore, by fulfilling CSR, the cruise industry can not only improve its reputation and image but also strengthen the intensity and depth of relationships with consumers, consequently promoting customer loyalty. Practitioners should possess a clear understanding of the consumer decision-making process and utilize these findings for strategic planning, enhancing cruise passenger loyalty through initiatives, such as increasing philanthropic activities.

Furthermore, within the research framework, RQ plays a significant mediating role between CSR and E-WOM. This aligns with the RQ model initially proposed by Crosby et al. [58] and validates the important “mediating variable” role of RQ between service providers and customers. This study also confirms the positive impact of RQ on E-WOM, which is consistent with the findings of Singh and Sirdeshmukh [96] and Ranaweera and Prabhu [97].

Another key finding of this study is the significant mediating role of PV within the research framework, which is in line with the conclusions drawn by Chong and Verma [92] and Wang and Sarkis [93]. PV not only enhances a company's social standing and customer trust but also exerts a profound influence on RQ and the impact of E-WOM. For Taiwanese consumers, the perception of value associated with cruising primarily stems from the delivery of high-quality cruise services and cost-effectiveness by operators. Therefore, it is crucial for operators to incorporate meticulous planning, cleanliness, and hygiene within their quality management strategy to ensure utmost satisfaction across various service areas such as entertainment, leisure, dining, and accommodation. Additionally,

comprehensive professional training should be provided to all service personnel involved in various aspects of business operations, ground services, and onboard services. By orchestrating captivating and immersive experiences through a diverse range of onboard facilities and activities, operators can incentivize passengers to revisit and recommend their services. To further enhance customer appeal, cruise operators may consider offering group, off-peak, or early bird discounts for itinerary reservations, as well as including complimentary lottery experiences, exclusive luxury activities, and value-added land tours in destination port cities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited in-person service experiences, but despite this, support for CSR, enhancement of company brand and product attitudes, consumer behavior intentions, and improvement of the company's positive image can be achieved through social media engagement such as likes, comments, and shares. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Gavilan et al. [109] on consumer attitudes toward online food delivery during the pandemic, suggesting that consumers significantly influence their repurchase intentions based on the experiential value derived from online food delivery services on relevant social platforms. Moreover, these findings are consistent with previous studies, demonstrating the positive mediating effect of experiential value on consumer repurchase intentions [110,111].

To sum up, this research study highlights the significant influence of CSR on RQ and E-WOM and underscores the mediating role of RQ and PV. These findings provide valuable insights for the cruise industry in developing effective strategies to strengthen customer relationships, enhance customer loyalty, and navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and potential future disruptions.

5.2. Management Implications

The research findings highlight the significance of PV in shaping the preferences of Taiwanese consumers toward cruise travel services in the post-COVID-19 period. To capitalize on this, the Ministry of Transportation and Tourism Bureau can propose promotional policies and initiatives that encourage operators to offer enticing measures and strategies to potential cruise travelers. These measures should focus on enhancing the value derived from leisure, creating memorable experiences, providing VIP treatment, and encouraging the sharing of cruise-related content on social media platforms. By offering such incentives, operators can outweigh the temporal and monetary costs associated with cruise travel.

Furthermore, as international travel gradually resumes and entry and quarantine procedures at airports and ports are relaxed worldwide, there is an opportunity for governmental collaboration with cruise operators. This collaboration can involve the joint sponsorship of complimentary cruise travel for healthcare personnel who have been recommended by medical institutions for their outstanding contributions in combating the pandemic. Such an initiative not only fulfills CSR but also generates social value within the cruise travel industry through the implementation of social welfare marketing strategies.

6. Conclusions

While this research offers pivotal insights and guidelines to both scholarly exploration and pragmatic applications, it is critical to acknowledge its constraints. A key limitation pertains to the reliance on digital questionnaires interconnected within mobile network-led social media platforms, forming the main method for data generation. Such exclusive dependency might lead to a skewed representation toward usage patterns of these specific platforms, potentially leading to the underrepresentation of respondents aged 50 and above. To rectify this bias in subsequent studies, it would be advisable for researchers to diversify their pool of participants by including those who do not frequently use mobile social media platforms and collect data via alternative means. This could manifest in the form of paper questionnaires disseminated through travel agencies or relevant professionals, thus ensuring a more democratically inclusive representation across assorted age groups and both networked and non-networked communities.

The research's proposed analytical framework, scrutinizing the impact of CSR, PV, and RQ on E-WOM, provides significant guidance for future research. To bolster the robustness of such empirical results, a more diverse range of methodological strategies is encouraged. This could involve qualitative research techniques or a mixed-method research design integrating both qualitative and quantitative procedures.

Moreover, subsequent research initiatives should delve into the impacts of various national cultures, with a specific focus on differences between Asian and Western countries. Comprehending any deviations in the results of the outlined model in diverse national and cultural contexts is critical. For instance, in South Korea, where a collectivist culture emphasizing interdependence and harmony prevails, it is evident that a substantial proportion of Korean consumers surmise that upholding social responsibility and efforts to ameliorate the social environment is incumbent upon companies [112]. Therefore, understanding the variances of CSR within different cultural contexts demonstrates significant relevance for the advancement of future research.

Author Contributions: The four coauthors together contributed to the completion of this article. X.Z. was the first author, who analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript; M.-Y.C. contributed to reviewing the manuscript and revising the results and conclusion; M.R. contributed to reviewing and revising the literature, results, and conclusion; and H.-S.C. acted as the corresponding author on their behalf throughout the revision and submission process. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, H.-S.C., upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments: We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all the experts who have taken the time to review this article and provide valuable comments.

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

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