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A REVIEW OF FAST FOOD COMPANIES' APPROACHES TO ANIMAL WELFARE

'Hospitality must aim higher on animal welfare' (Footprint 2019)

ABSTRACT

Purpose

This review paper extends the literature on animal welfare in the hospitality industry by exploring how some of the major fast food companies have publicly addressed this issue.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The paper reviews, and reflects on, the animal welfare statements and policies posted on the Internet by five major fast food companies namely, Yum! Brands, Restaurant Brands International, McDonald's, Domino's Pizza Group, and Subway.

Findings

The findings reveal that four interlinked themes, namely strategic corporate commitment, a focus on supply chains, policies on specific categories of animals and food products, and auditing, illustrated the selected companies approach to animal welfare. The authors also raise a number of issues about the selected companies' approaches to animal welfare including the aspirational nature of their commitments, the emphasis on regular audits, the role of external assurance in the reporting process, the role of animal welfare pressure groups and campaigns, and the impact of COVID-19.

Research limitations and Implications

The paper's empirical material is drawn from the corporate websites of five fast food companies, but the paper has theoretical and practical implications and provides a platform for future research.

Originality/ Value

The paper offers a simple review of the way five major fast food companies have addressed the issue of animal welfare.

KEYWORDS

Animal welfare; animal welfare statements; corporate social responsibility; fast food companies; auditing

Introduction

The hospitality industry has a wide range of environmental, social, and economic impacts, and many companies have developed corporate social responsibility policies to address these impacts. More specifically, these policies have focused on a wide range of issues including global warming and greenhouse gas emissions, health and well-being, human rights and labour standards, the communities in which companies operate, supply chain relationships, business ethics, packaging, food waste, working relationships, and animal welfare. The hospitality industry's approach to corporate social responsibility has received considerable attention within the literature (e. g. Jones *et al.* 2016; Rhou and

Singal 2019; Iyer and Jarvis, 2019; Franco *et al.* 2020), but despite public concern about animal welfare (e.g. Rioja-Lang *et al.* 2020), the issue has attracted limited attention within the hospitality literature. The focus of the published work in this field has focused on animal attractions and tourism (e.g. Fennel 2015; Font *et al.* 2019; Dou and Day, 2020), rather than more widely within the hospitality industry.

Domestic pets aside, most people's closest, if indirect, contact with the welfare of animals is through their food, though in many ways, animal welfare is effectively separated from the social practice of eating animal products. Buller and Roe (2018, p. 9), for example, argued that the consumption of animal products had become '*so distinct – geographically, morally, aesthetically – from livestock, that the animal disappears.*' The hospitality industry is bound up with animal welfare in that a food offer is either an important element in, or the *raison d'être* for, many hospitality experiences, and thus it is surprising that the issue of animal welfare has attracted limited attention from hospitality scholars. This exploratory paper looks to address this current research gap within the hospitality literature, by reviewing how five of the major fast food companies, namely Yum! Brands, Restaurant Brands International, McDonald's, Domino's Pizza Group, and Subway, seen to be high profile and dynamic players within the hospitality industry, have publicly addressed animal welfare.

While Thiemann and Alcalá (2019) argued that there was no accepted definition of fast food, there is general agreement that fast food companies provide food and drink, which is consumed on their premises, taken away or ordered over the telephone or the Internet for home delivery. The paper outlines the basic characteristics of animal welfare, offers a short literature review of corporate social responsibility and animal welfare, an examination of the selected five fast food companies' approaches to animal welfare, a series of reflections on these approaches, and a number of conclusions which outline the implications raised by the review, and makes some suggestions for future research agendas.

Animal Welfare

In simple terms, the concept of animal welfare includes the physical and emotional condition and the behaviour of animals. More authoritatively, the American Veterinary Medical Association (2020, webpage) suggested that an animal is seen to be in '*a good state of welfare if it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress.*' The Five Domains Model, developed in the 1990's, which embraces the nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state of animals, is also often used to provide a framework for assessing and managing animal welfare (Mellor 2017).

In many ways, animal welfare revolves around the belief that animals are sentient beings, namely that they feel or perceive things, and that consideration should be given to their physical, emotional, and behavioural wellbeing. As such, animal welfare concerns arise over a variety of issues, including care for domestic pets and animals, the exploitation of animals for commercial entertainment, animal experimentation in science and medical laboratories, and the ways animals are treated in modern intensive agricultural production systems. In addressing modern agricultural practices, for example, although Cornish *et al.* (2016) argued that there was substantial evidence that the majority of people had a poor understanding of how animals were treated in the food production process, Clark *et al.* (2016)

identified some of the damaging impacts of increased productivity on the welfare of farm animals and highlighted public concerns about such impacts.

Literature Review

A variety of research has been published on the fast food industry's approach to corporate social responsibility. Schroder and MacEachern (2005), for example, explored how young consumers responded to the corporate social responsibility initiatives pursued by two of the UK's fast food companies. Their work suggested that while there was scepticism regarding the companies' promotion of corporate social responsibility, consumers had high expectations that the companies would behave in a socially responsible manner. Gheribi (2017) reported that McDonalds had begun to adopt a more proactive strategy on corporate social responsibility, and that it was participating in animal welfare initiatives. In exploring factors influencing millennial fast food consumers' buying behaviour, Harun *et al.* (2018) suggested that corporate social responsibility initiatives alone, would not influence purchasing intentions, and they argued that that fast food companies would be well advised to adopt a stronger and more visible stance towards altruistic and social welfare goals, to influence buying behaviour.

Tong and Wong's (2014) research on enhancing corporate reputation and brand in Hong Kong's fast food industry, suggested that a focus on corporate social responsibility had a positive effect on word of mouth communication about buying behaviours and customers' perceptions of food quality. Further, the authors' findings revealed that corporate social responsibility provided a competitive advantage to fast food businesses, as it played a huge role in inducing positive word of mouth communications about perceived food quality and encouraged repeat purchases. Schrempf (2012) examined the connections between fast-food chains and obesity and outlined what kind of responsibilities such a social connection implied, before going on to explore the implications of such responsibilities.

Outside the corporate social responsibility literature per se, work has been published on approaches to animal welfare in the fast food sector, but in what is a rapidly evolving public arena, some of this work seems a little dated. Over a decade ago, Adams (2008), for example, suggested that fast food companies were well positioned to effect changes in animal welfare within food supply chains. However, at that time, he suggested and that while many of these companies had responded to pressure from animal rights organizations, there were few signs that the fast food companies were working collaboratively to improve animal welfare. Even earlier, in a case study of slaughter plants supplying a major fast food company, Grandin (2000) simply suggested that animal welfare audits may motivate the meat industry to improve handling and slaughter practices.

On the conceptual side, Rhou and Singal (2020, webpage) argued that '*hospitality studies are largely a-theoretical*' and suggested there was a need for greater engagement with theory, and for more theory testing, within the hospitality industry literature. Rhou and Singal (2020) also suggested that the hospitality industry's geographical, institutional, and national diversity, and its varied ownership and management models, provided a rich theoretical laboratory for hospitality scholars. Garriga and Mele (2014) suggested that a wide variety of theoretical approaches had been employed in studying corporate social responsibility.

A range of theoretical approaches have certainly been employed in studying consumer behaviour in the hospitality industry. Harun *et al.* (2018), for example, drew on social identity theory, the theory of reasoned action and expectation disconfirmation theory, in exploring the factors influencing fast food buying behaviours. Shen (2017) employed the theory of planned behaviour and altruism in exploring consumers' intentions to dine at green restaurants. Kwon and Ahn (2020) drew on attitude-behaviour-content theory to explain how customers' scepticism towards corporate social responsibility programmes influenced their response towards hotel brands. However, in the current paper the focus is on the corporate, rather than the consumer, level, and two sets of theoretical approaches to corporate social responsibility, seem particularly relevant in shining some light on the fast food companies' approaches to animal welfare. Namely, stakeholder theory, which holds that a company should create value for all its stakeholders, not just its shareholders, and more critical approaches, which look to locate corporate social responsibility within wider economic, political, and social structures.

Firstly, Rhou and Singal (2020, webpage), for example, used '*a stakeholder lens*' to explore research on the impact of corporate social responsibility on '*the environment, employees, customers, community and investors in the hospitality industry.*' Raub and Martin-Rios (2019) suggested that major companies within the hospitality industry should form partnerships with their stakeholders to address corporate social responsibility. Secondly, Roth *et al.* (2020, p.411) looked to demonstrate how and why corporate social responsibility '*was both shaped by, and supportive of capitalism*', while Kazmi *et al.* (2015, p. 742) argued that '*corporate social responsibility exhibits the core characteristics that together exemplify the spirit of capitalism.*'

Method of Enquiry

In looking to undertake an exploratory review of approaches to animal welfare within the fast food industry, the authors chose a simple method of enquiry, which they believe to be fit for purpose. A preliminary Internet survey of major companies within the hospital industry had revealed that the animal welfare statements and policies of five fast food companies, namely Yum! Brands, Restaurant Brands International, McDonald's, Subway, and Domino's Pizza Group, were readily accessible on the Internet. The authors believe this is an appropriate approach in a paper designed to review how some of the major fast food companies were addressing animal welfare, rather than to provide either a comprehensive or a comparative analysis across the fast food industry, or to test hypotheses about corporate behaviour towards animal welfare.

Internet searches were conducted using the name of the selected five fast food companies, and animal welfare, as the key phrases. This search generated the animal welfare statements and policies which provide the empirical material reviewed in this paper. As this material is available on the selected fast food companies' corporate websites, and the authors were of the view that it was not necessary for them to approach the companies to seek permission to use their animal welfare statements. Some authors (e.g. de Grosbois 2016) have used content analysis to systematically identify themes and issues on corporate websites. Given the exploratory nature of this paper, and that the animal welfare statements and policies on the selected fast food companies' websites were clearly signposted, the authors decided that quantitative methods of content analysis were not

appropriate. Rather, the authors undertook an informed reading of the relevant documents, to draw out the important issues and themes.

The paper draws on specific statements taken from the selected fast food companies' corporate websites. Here the aim was to explore how the selected fast food companies publicly expressed and evidenced their approaches to animal welfare and the authors were minded that this was perhaps best captured in the fast food companies' own words, not least in that quotations could convey corporate authenticity, and offer greater depth of understanding (Corden and Sainsbury 2006). At the same time, the authors were satisfied that the two conditions, outlined by Saunders *et al.* (2009) concerning the validity and reliability of material drawn for Internet sources, namely the authority and reputation of the source and the citation of a contact on the website, had been met.

Approaches to Animal Welfare

All five of the fast food companies posted animal welfare statements and policies, which effectively captured their approach to animal welfare, on their corporate websites. However, rather than describing their individual approaches, the aim here is to identify, and draw out, the general themes that illustrate the companies' approaches to animal welfare. More specifically, the author's informed reading of the selected fast food companies' animal welfare statements and policies enabled them to identify four, general, though not universal, themes, namely strategic corporate commitment, a focus on supply chains, policies on specific categories of animals and food products, and audit processes.

Firstly, strategic corporate commitment, was expressed in a variety of ways. Yum! Brands (2018, webpage), for example, claimed '*we view animal welfare in a holistic manner as a key element in providing food to our customers*', and stressed its commitment to the continuous improvement of animal welfare through all stages of its supply chain. In addressing its corporate commitment to animal welfare, Domino's Pizza Group (2019, webpage) emphasised that it was '*committed to ensuring high standards of animal welfare throughout its supply chain.*' Restaurant Brands International (2019, webpage) stressed vital importance of animal welfare and more specifically the company's '*ongoing commitment is to monitor and require strong animal welfare practices throughout our global supply chain.*'

The '*Vision*' underpinning Subway's (2019, webpage) '*Animal Welfare Policy*' is focused on their belief that healthy farm animals, whose breeding, raising, transport and slaughter all contributed to high animal welfare standards, and underpinned its commitment to providing its customers '*with safe and quality food.*' Subway suggested that its guests and stakeholders expected the company's sourcing policies to reflect high quality welfare and safety standards and that such standards contributed to not only to its customers' health and wellbeing, but also to the quality of the natural environment.

Secondly, the selected five fast food companies explicitly acknowledged the importance of their supply chains in addressing animal welfare. Restaurant Brands International (2019, webpage), for example, reported that it sought '*strong commitments with our suppliers to ensure that farm animal welfare is upheld in our supply chain.*' In a similar vein, McDonald's (2019, webpage) acknowledged it was not directly involved in either raising livestock, or in slaughtering operations, but claimed to '*understand our*

responsibility to improve the health and welfare of those animals in our supply chain throughout their lives’.

Domino’s Pizza Group (2019) reported its expectation that all its suppliers will adopt the highest practical, and commercially viable, animal welfare standards. Domino’s Pizza Group (2019, webpage) also emphasised that *‘suppliers must demonstrate continuous improvement and work together to improve animal welfare standards across our sector’*, and that *‘we require suppliers to have formal animal welfare policies in place to cover all areas of our policies.’* Yum! Brands (2018) reported working with its suppliers to reduce stress levels, to address improvements in mortality rates, health, mobility, and behaviour, and to minimise painful procedures, in order to ensure that the company’s designated animal welfare standards remained a critical component in selecting suppliers.

Thirdly, some of the selected fast food companies provided details on specific animals and animal products. Subway (2019), for example, outlined its policies on eggs, pork, beef and dairy cattle, and poultry. In addressing eggs, for example, Subway claimed that every stage of the production process embraced all aspects of animal welfare, including selection of breeds, housing and confinement of hens, and feeding regimes, as well as routine mutilations and the culling of male chicks. In a similar vein, Subway’s aspirations are that its pork supply chain is sensitive to a number of welfare concerns, including gestation, confinement systems, mutilation practices, farrowing crates and other systems of confinement, and, where feasible, access to outdoor environments.

Domino’s Pizza Group (2019) outlined a number of general principles expected of its suppliers’ production systems. These principles included that *‘all animals should be identifiable throughout the production and livestock marketing supply chain’*; *‘all livestock must be reared according to good husbandry, welfare and hygiene practices’*; *‘all animals must be provided with an adequate supply of fresh clean drinking water and access to feed every day’*; and that *‘suppliers must be aware of the source of all animal feed’* (Domino’s Pizza Group 2019, webpage). More specifically, in addressing *‘beef cattle’*, Domino’s Pizza Group (2019, webpage) emphasised *‘all stock must be reared according to good husbandry, welfare and hygiene practices, complying with local legislation as a minimum’*, and *‘we are committed to eliminating the use of close confinement production systems from our supply chain.’* Domino’s Pizza Group (2019, webpage) also reported *‘we will work with suppliers to ensure access to pastures or outdoor areas are made available to beef cattle during the grass growing season.’*

Fourthly, there were commitments to auditing designed to ensure animal welfare. Restaurant Brands International (2019), for example, require all beef and poultry suppliers to its Burger King and Tim Horton brands, to submit mandatory annual third-party audits covering animal welfare standards. McDonalds (2019) emphasised its commitment to audit as part of its overall approach to animal health and welfare. Under the banner *‘Welfare at Slaughter’*, the company (McDonalds 2019, webpage) stressed that it expected the slaughter of all animals in its global supply chain to be monitored by audit processes. All the abattoirs on McDonald’s list of suppliers are independently audited annually to ensure that they meet the company’s required standards.

Domino’s Pizza Group’s (2019, webpage) *‘Animal Welfare Policy’* includes a number of references to the company’s audit requirements. Under this policy, the use of antibiotics,

hormones or growth promoting antibiotics is prohibited and any antibiotic use for animal health reasons is strictly monitored, and subject to ad-hoc audit by Domino's Pizza Group. This policy also specifies that all new suppliers must complete an animal welfare questionnaire, and suppliers are subject to a compliance audit. More generally, in reviewing suppliers' compliance with its animal welfare policy, *'higher risk companies'*, are audited *'at least every two years'*, while all other suppliers *'receive an audit at least every four years'* (Domino's Pizza Group 2019, webpage). Subway (2019) reported giving preference to suppliers that conducted regular independent animal welfare audit programmes, and that the company also implemented third party audits at all of its suppliers.

Reflections

All the selected fast food companies publicly outlined and looked to evidence their approach to animal welfare, but four issues merit wider reflection. Some of the fast food companies commitments were explicitly aspirational and expectational. Such corporate aspirations and expectations can be seen to reflect public concerns about animal welfare. However, given that the fast food companies have global reach and source animal products across extensive geographical areas, where there may be different cultural attitudes to animal welfare, fulfilling such aspirations may present complex challenges. There may, for example, be a fundamental challenge to the fast food companies' traditional business models which rely, in part at least, on the large scale supply of competitively priced animal products. Here, in a comprehensive global report on animal welfare management in the food industry, Amos and Sullivan (2019) suggested that the willingness of customers to pay higher prices was a barrier to the adoption of higher animal welfare standards. Economic issues aside, different cultural attitudes to, and interpretations of, animal welfare, within suppliers and amongst their employees, may, at times, also undermine commitments to the welfare of animals within the fast food companies' supply chains.

At the same time, the selected fast food companies' commitments to animal welfare are at least one step removed from their own operations, and this massively reduces their control of animal welfare measures. Here, an important element in the selected fast food companies' approach to animal welfare is the regular independent audit of meat and poultry suppliers. However, some doubts have been cast on the efficacy of the audit process within the food industry. Haggarty (2009, p. 767), for example, argued that audit-based governance, is shaped by the food industry's major players, who have effectively converted perceived *'consumer preferences into checklists of acceptable farming practices.'* In focusing specifically on animal welfare, Escobar and Demeritt (2016, p. 171) suggested that there was *'tendency for audit processes to become decoupled from the qualities they are meant to assure.'*

Many major hospitality companies have used their corporate social responsibility and reporting processes to outline their commitments to animal welfare, and to report on their achievements in looking to meet these commitments. More specifically, if fast food companies are to build confidence and stakeholder trust in their approaches to animal welfare, and to avoid accusations of greenwashing, or perhaps more accurately of welfare washing, this effectively demands independent assurance of the reporting process. Here, Jones *et al.* (2014) suggested that in the past, the scale of independent external assurance of the corporate responsibility reports published by some of the leading companies within the hospitality industry had, at best, been limited. While commissioning comprehensive

independent external assurance, within large, diverse, and geographically widespread, supply chains can be an expensive and a complex process, it is one which fast food companies may well need to address to establish the integrity and credibility of their commitments to animal welfare.

More generally, fast food companies are facing increasingly strident criticisms of their approach to animal welfare. World Animal Protection (2018, p.6), for example, launched its *'Change for Chickens Campaign'* in 2016, which looked to draw attention to what it saw as the fast food companies failure to address the welfare of chickens within their supply chains. Two years later (World Animal Protection 2018, p. 1). published a damning report *'The Pecking Order'*, which argued that the major fast food companies were *'failing the chickens their businesses depend on.'* Further, the report claimed that the majority of the *'600 billion chickens farmed annually worldwide endure acute and severe suffering'*, and that they are subjected to *'cruel confinement in crowded, featureless and unnaturally lit sheds'* (World Animal Protection 2018, p. 3).

Perhaps even more damningly, the report found that none of the leading fast food companies had *'effectively implemented strategic commitments to chicken welfare'* (World Animal Protection 2018, p.3). In updating the initial report two years later, World Animal Protection (2020) reported that 29 major financial institutions had joined the Global Investor Collaboration on Farm Animal Welfare (Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare 2020), that looks to encourage major food companies to improve their management of critical animal welfare issues.

SubwayEatCruelty (2020, webpage), an alliance of animal protection groups, claimed that while Subway promises its customers that its food is are of a high quality and it is produced sustainably and to high ethical standards, *'the exact opposite is the case'* and *'the chickens that end up in Subway's sandwiches and salads have lived, and died, under excruciating conditions.'* In 2018 several animal protection groups, including Animal Equality, Compassion in World Farming and Mercy for Animals, worked together to put pressure on McDonalds to raise its animal standards. At a time when social media is becoming an increasingly important force in energising public opinion, it remains to be seen how well the major fast food companies will be able to assuage animal rights concerns

At the time of writing, it is impossible to consider animal welfare issues in the fast food industry without some reference to COVID-19, not least because the pandemic has affected *'virtually all parts of the hospitality value chain'* (Gossling *et al.* 2020, webpage) and a number of factors have contributed to growing public concern. Such concerns have been fuelled by press and media reports (e.g. Financial Times, 8 June, 2020) that many abattoirs and meat packing and processing plants were COVID-19 hotspots and had been closed, albeit temporarily, and that restrictions on international trade in meat and poultry products, had disrupted many traditional supply chains.

At the same time public fears about the COVID-19 pandemic, about the claimed tracing of its origins to a wholesale food market in China, and about the reported incidences of high levels of the virus amongst people working in food processing and packing plants in a number of countries, have all served to heighten consumer awareness about the safety of animal products within food supply chains. Given that all sectors of the hospitality industry have been badly hit by COVID-19, It remains to be seen if, the major players within the fast

food industry will continue to commit the financial resources required to address animal welfare concerns, or if they will concentrate their resources and energies on looking to rebuild their businesses. That said, the fast food industry will surely ignore the impact of COVID-19 at its peril.

The COVID-19 pandemic may provide important opportunities for fast food companies to combine more comprehensive approaches to both animal welfare and food safety, as part of revised corporate responsibility strategies. Looking to alternative futures, Plant Based News (2020, webpage), a media outlet producing content about veganism and plant based living, suggested that given public concerns about food safety in the wake of COVID-19, and estimates that up to 75% of new diseases in humans have animal origins, *'it's about time that food companies ramped up their efforts to prevent the spread of such diseases.'* Further Plant Based News (2020, webpage) claimed that *'the immune systems of animals raised on lower welfare factory farms are far weaker than any other; couple this with the immense overcrowding seen on these intensive farms - where some 90 percent of farmed animals are raised - and the risk of contracting and spreading dangerous diseases is worryingly high.'*

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the ways in which five major fast food companies, namely Yum Brands, Restaurant Brands International, McDonalds, Domino's Pizza Group and Subway, have publicly addressed their commitments to animal welfare. Four interlinked themes illustrate the selected companies' approach to animal welfare namely, strategic corporate commitment, a focus on supply chains, policies on specific categories of animals and animal foodstuffs, and auditing. At the same time, some of the fast food companies' commitments to animal welfare are aspirational, and at least one step removed from production, and there are specific concerns about auditing, and the external assurance of their achievements in meeting commitments, and more general public concerns for the welfare of animals in the companies' supply chains. More generally, the paper extends the current literature on animal welfare within the hospitality industry.

2. Theoretical Implications.

Three sets of theoretical implications can be identified. Firstly, the paper provides an opportunity to pursue Rhou and Singal's (2020) call for the exploration of theories within the hospitality industry, not least in that the selected fast food companies operate across a varied range of geographical areas, cultural environments and legislative jurisdictions, and with both company owned and franchise business models. In some sectors of the hospitality industry companies may look to modify their operational practices and policies to accommodate regional and local practices and cultures, which might, in turn, offer the opportunity to revise theoretical models. However, the fast food companies effectively look to pursue the same approaches to animal welfare across their international theatres of operation.

Secondly, and more specifically, the selected fast food companies might be seen to offer further illustration of the importance of partnerships with stakeholders, particularly with the public and with suppliers. On the one hand, growing public concerns about the

welfare of animals might be seen to be clearly reflected in the fast food companies' increasing public commitment to animal welfare policies. However, Amos and Sullivan's (2019) assertion that the customers' willingness to pay higher prices presents a problem for the adoption of improved animal welfare, suggests that public's general support for higher standards may be tempered by economic considerations. This might be seen to be generating mixed stakeholder messages for the fast food companies. On the other hand, the locus of power in the relationships between the fast food companies and their suppliers, lies very much with the fast food companies, that look to regulate, and in many ways control, their suppliers' business operations. As such, this calls into question the extent to which suppliers, as stakeholders within the fast food industry, can genuinely be seen to influence the fast food companies' approaches to animal welfare.

Thirdly, questions about the locus of power within fast food supply chains opens a window on a third set of theoretical issues, in that it informs the more critical theoretical approaches to corporate social responsibility. Here the selected fast food companies' public commitments to animal welfare can be seen to reflect Kazim *et al.*'s (2015, p. 742) more general argument that corporate social responsibility is *'merely a smokescreen, concealing the exploitative nature of corporate capitalism.'* This argument was originally developed in the context of workers' security and reward systems, but it may be seen to have equal force in explaining the fast food companies approach to animal welfare. Hanlon and Fleming's (2009, p. 938), argument that corporate social responsibility is an *'ideological smoke screen designed to either soften the image of firms engrossed in the rampant pursuit of profit, or as a way to deflect attention away from an unsavoury core business model'*, is perhaps now a little dated, but it certainly still resonates.

3. Corporate and Practical Implications

The paper also has managerial and practical implications. At the corporate level, for example, the paper suggests that companies within the fast food industry would be advised to enhance the regularity of their animal welfare audits and to introduce greater independence and transparency into the auditing process and to the public reporting of this process. At the same time, the major fast food companies should look to commission comprehensive independent external assurance of the reporting of animal welfare measures for their corporate social responsibility reports. Both these changes would, in turn, enable the fast food companies to promote their approach to animal welfare with increased visibility and confidence, and to respond more effectively to public criticism from animal welfare pressure groups. Larger issues about the future of fast food companies' current business models are beyond the scope of this paper, but they may come to pose a major corporate challenge.

There are also implications at a practical and operational level. If the fast food companies introduce more comprehensive and transparent approaches to animal welfare, then managers of individual company outlets may look to communicate messages about welfare measures regularly to all employees. This, in turn, might help to infuse animal welfare into their company's operational culture and to encourage employees to pass on animal welfare messages to customers within the course of everyday commercial transactions. If internal such communications are combined with the introduction of a changing variety of marketing messages and appropriate images about the company's

approach to animal welfare at the point of sale, and in advertising flyers delivered to homes within their catchment areas, this could be mutually reinforcing.

4. Limitations and Future Research

The paper has its limitations, not least that its empirical material is drawn solely from the corporate websites of just five fast food companies and does not include any face to face interviews, or focus group sessions, with representatives from those companies. At the same time, the authors did not include the fast food companies' suppliers in their research enquiries. However, the authors believe that their simple method of enquiry is fit for purpose for a review paper, that it has some theoretical and practical implications, and that it offers a valuable platform for future research.

More specifically, animal welfare certainly offers a wide variety of research agendas for hospitality scholars. At a conceptual level, for example, animal welfare provides opportunities to test, develop, and refine stakeholder theory by exploring how the positions of different groups of stakeholders within the hospitality industry are incorporated into corporate decision making about approaches to animal welfare. At the same time, analysis of both changing perceptions of the importance of animal welfare considerations, as well as how such changes might be balanced against other corporate goals, will contribute to stakeholder theory. In a more radical vein, a focus on animal welfare within the fast food industry might also help to further illuminate and develop critical theories that look both to locate the hospitality industry politically, economically and socially, as well as to understand the industry's business operations and strategies under capitalism.

A wide range of empirical research opportunities can also be identified. At the corporate level for example, research may help to increase understanding not only of why, and how, fast food companies develop their policies on animal welfare and how they look to elicit stakeholders' opinions, but also of how fast food companies look to take account of wider pressure group campaigns in formulating such policies. Research on how animal welfare concerns inform the relationships between fast food companies and companies in their supply chains, and on the location of power within these relationships, also merits attention. At the same time, research on if, and how, the introduction of more explicit and verifiable animal welfare policies affects profit margins, stock market performance and reputation, may help to inform understanding of the workings of possible new business models within the fast food industry.

At the operational and consumer level, many research questions arise, but two provide an illustration of possible research agendas. Does greater consumer awareness of a fast food company's approach to animal welfare influence buying behavior and patronage? How do fast food companies incorporate animal welfare policies into their general marketing messages, as well as into marketing messages at the point of sale? Finally, although the current paper has explored animal welfare commitments in some of the leading fast food companies, an examination of smaller and more local companies' policies on animal welfare, would broaden the scope of this genre of work within the hospitality industry.

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