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The mediating role of corporate image on the retailer's corporate social responsibility practices and corporate reputation of a fast-food chain company

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the study is to examine the mediating role of corporate image on the influence of retailers' corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of a fast-food chain brand and its corporate reputation. The study utilized the dimensions of the retailer's CSR dimension. This study focused on the external stakeholders (customers) of X fast food brand in Klang Valley. Social exchange theory was employed to guide the study. Quantitative (survey) methods have been used in this study, whereby 150 valid online questionnaires were gathered among the customers in the Petaling Jaya and analyzed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (Smart-PLS 4.0). The findings showed that Philanthropic activities, Respect for the Environment, and Respect for Consumers have positive and significant relationships with corporate image, and corporate image also has a positive and significant relationship with corporate reputation. Furthermore, there is a significant mediating effect of corporate image on the relationship between CSR practices (Respect for Consumers, Respect for the Environment, Philanthropic Activities) and corporate reputation. The conclusion, implications, and suggestions for future studies were also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained interest in the field of corporate and strategic communication (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021; Argenti, 2022; Chua & Chan, 2022; Cornelissen, 2023), and it has become a global trend, however, pertinent issues around CSR such as environmental preservation and protection and the marketplace which focused on the consumers are found to be relatively low (Luger et al., 2022). Hence, organizations must prioritize their social responsibility initiatives rather than as a form of greenwashing strategy as it will reflect their company values and bring a competitive advantage. The food and beverages (F&B) in the Malaysian market is projected to reach up to US\$17.89bn in 2024 (Statista, n.d.), indicating that F&B is a prominent industry that contributes to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moreover, CSR has been enacted by various parties (e.g., governments, trade unions), and peer pressure by the consumer, which makes retailers look into the sustainability impacts of their activities (Wirba, 2023). This has further supported the notion of Mansouri et al. (2022), where the customer's buying behavior is not necessarily based on the price of the product and service quality, but it is also based on how ethically the company follows rules and regulations in manufacturing the products and services. Based on the discussion, the consumers' expectations of CSR are high in the food industries (He et al., 2022), given that companies in the F&B industry face numerous issues such as obesity (Muhammad Zamri et al., 2023), and food/product safety (Telukdarie et

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al., 2020; Tempels et al., 2020). Although the practices of CSR have been increasing, past research mainly focused on the CSR's disclosure, but not on how the stakeholders perceived the practices.

Even so, literature has been carried out on the consumer's perceptions of CSR activities and various outcomes in the telecommunication industry (Zhang, et al., 2020), hospitality industry (Kaur et al., 2022), gambling industry (Tetreova, 2023), banking sector (Al-Mubarak et al., 2019), fast-fashion apparel (Chan et al., 2023; Mickelsson et al., 2023), coffee retailing industry (Chan & Saad, 2019), beer industry (Hasan et al., 2022), and the education industry (Chan & Huam, 2019). In addition, there are studies of CSR in the F&B industry that were conducted in developing countries (see Handayati et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020). However, there is still a dearth of research on the impact of CSR initiatives on the image and reputation from the consumer's perspective.

Besides, there was a study conducted in South Korea by Kang et al. (2017) to measure the influence of CSR on young consumers (adolescents), but the study only focused on young consumers and was based on the perceptions of high school students. Gheribi (2017) examined whether McDonald's employees, customers, supply partners, and the community understood the CSR activities implemented by the fast-food chain, but it was conducted in a Western cultural context. However, there is still a lack of research done on a more mature audience such as looking into university students as young consumers (Jha et al., 2022) and beyond from the Eastern cultural context.

In addition, most of the studies in the literature focused on using Carroll's (1979) model, however, research that offers a more holistic approach to consumers' perceptions of CSR in the retail industry, namely philanthropic activities, respect for the environment, and respect for the consumers (Maignan, 2001; Brunk, 2010; Öberseder et al., 2014), needs further investigation.

Besides, numerous scholars such as (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019, 2020; Irfan et al., 2020; Jang et al., 2019) argued that there is confusion in the image and reputation literature, as some scholars argued that these two constructs are similar, and others claim it otherwise which made it difficult to distinguish them. This has further support the notion of Szwajca (2018), where these two constructs are different and need to be examined differently, as the image is the perception, while reputation is based on the aggregate of the images of the corporations' previous activities and behaviors which is more stable (Fombrun et al., 2008). Thus, numerous past research indicated that the image and reputation are distinctive (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010; Podnar & Golob, 2017), and additional research is needed. Based on the above highlighted gaps, therefore, our study intended to investigate the role of corporate image as a mediator on the impact of a retailer's CSR activities and the corporate reputation from the consumer's perspective, particularly in the fast-food chain.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a better theoretical ground regarding the relationship between CSR practices, corporate image, and reputation. Theoretically, SET refers to the social behaviors in terms of an exchanging procedure (Blau, 1964), where one party voluntarily provides a benefit to another, and the other party will be obliged to provide benefits in return (reciprocal relationship) (Gergen, 1969). The rule of reciprocal relationships can be applied to customer-based CSR initiatives because it implies voluntary actions by the firms to support the welfare of the stakeholders, including the customers. The firms provide benefits to their customers beyond profit maximization (voluntary), and this will instill the customers to pay back these voluntary actions in terms of forming a positive image. This aligns with the notion of (Khuong et al., 2021; Singh & Misra, 2021) who believe social responsibility not only shapes a positive and favorable stakeholder's attitude about the company but also builds a favorable corporate/brand image that can strengthen the stakeholder-company relationships.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR is a business social responsibility toward society, which highlights the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has on organizations (Carroll, 1979; Carroll, 2016). However, there is no single unifying universal definition that can be considered as different stakeholders will have different perceptions on how they perceive CSR (Frerichs & Teichert, 2023). Generally, it refers to saving the environment, communities, and society which goes beyond what is required by a firm (Newman et al., 2020; Wirba, 2023). Research in this field examines the consumers' perceptions of CSR in the retailing industry based on the dimensions of philanthropic activities, respect for the environment, and respect for the consumers which are highlighted in the literature (Maignan, 2001; Brunk, 2010; Öberseder et al., 2014). One primary motive for companies to engage in CSR initiatives is to attract consumers. Many organizations use CSR as a tool to differentiate themselves from their rivals.

2.3 Corporate Image and Reputation

Corporate image is "the net result of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge people have about a company (Worcester, 2009; p. 573)". Corporate image is the different perceptions that internal and external stakeholders have about the organization or institution (Triatmanto et al., 2021). According to Ponzi et al., (2011), reputation is an emotion-

based measurement that focuses on the esteem, good feeling, trust, and admiration that customers feel towards the institution or company.

2.4 The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Image & Corporate Reputation

CSR and corporate image are significantly related. When an organization engages in highly socially responsible activities, corporate image and reputation are favorably formed in the consumer's mind (Emmanuel & Priscilla, 2022). Therefore, CSR is a fundamental activity in today's business world and it is often incorporated into marketing and business strategies. For instance, in Bahrian, Al-Mubarak et al., (2019) investigated CSR's influence on the corporate image of banking companies. Four (4) main components of CSR; economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic were utilized. The results indicated a positive significant impact between CSR practices and the corporate image of the banking industry in the Middle East.

In addition, Kim et al. (2020) examined the impact of CSR on the corporate image to foster customers' long-term relationship orientation. The findings found the positive effect of CSR (economic, legal, ethical, philanthropy) and corporate image. This aligns with the notion of Chen et al., (2021) which indicated that CSR plays a pivotal role in company profits, and corporate image, shaping consumer attitudes and it is a vital marketing strategy for sustaining corporate development in a business environment.

The above discussion has supported Pang's et al. (2018) notion that CSR is useful for building the corporate image of a company in Asian countries. This implies that proactive two-way communication with stakeholders is needed to increase the prominence of CSR's work by maximizing the potential of company websites and establishing employees as primary enactors of CSR. Cheng et al. (2018) aimed to examine the impact of CSR and food health and the corporate image of the fast-food industry. The results provide strong evidence to support a positive impact between CSR and food health & safety and corporate image. Furthermore, the path between food health & safety and the corporate image was also found to be positive and significantly related.

In Jordan, Alrubaiee et al. (2017) aimed to test CSR and marketing performance and to observe the impact of customer value and corporate image. Their study highlighted that there is a link between customer value and corporate image. The findings appeared to show positive results between CSR and corporate image. In other words, customer value and corporate image played the role of partial mediators in marketing performance and the path between CSR and corporate image were also established. Specifically testing fast food-related CSR programs, a study by Kim and Ramos (2018) examined how stakeholders perceive the motives of public health-related CSR and generic social-issue-related CSR initiatives. Surprisingly, the results revealed that companies tend to pay attention to generic social-issue-related CSR rather than to public health-related CSR initiatives (profit generation and philanthropic activities) which makes the findings differ from most of the other literature. This is congruent with the findings of Widayat et al. (2022), who found a positive impact between CSR and corporate image. Hence, CSR activities done by the company help to satisfy the consumers which helps in developing a solid corporate image (Chen et al., 2021). In addition, in Poland, Szwajca (2018) examined the corporate image and corporate reputation in the banking industry. The results indicated that image and reputation are two distinctive assets for competitive advantage and a perceived favorable corporate image in the consumers' minds will positively influence the reputation of the companies. This is congruent with the notion of (Abdullah & Ali, 2018; Chan et al., 2023; Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2020), where a good image will help to build the corporate reputation of institutions with other determinants like satisfaction, loyalty, and legitimacy in an educational setting. Furthermore, Almeida and Coelho (2017) investigated the corporate reputation of a dairy company, and the findings established a positive linkage between reputation and image.

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, this study postulated that:

H₁: *Respect for consumers will have a positive impact on corporate image.*

H₂: *Respect for the environment will have a positive impact on corporate image.*

H₃: *Philanthropic activities will have a positive impact on corporate image.*

H₄: *Corporate image positively impacts the corporate reputation.*

2.5 Corporate Image as Mediator

Aldehayyat (2021) intended to test the CSR initiatives and hotel performance, through the mediating effect of hotel image and error management culture as the moderators in the Jordan tourism industry. The results revealed a positive link between CSR and the hotel image and performance. In addition, it also indicated hotel image is a mediator between CSR and the hotels' performance. Kim et al. (2020) investigated the CSR and consumer long-term relationship orientation (LRO), mediated by the corporate image and customer's citizenship behavior (CCB) in the food service industry in Korea. The study utilized the 4 dimensions of Carroll's CSR pyramid model and the findings showed that 4 CSR dimensions have significant positive

impacts on corporate image and CCB. In addition, the study confirmed the impacts of CCB and LRO. This is also congruent with Karabetyan's (2020) study which examined the linkages between the dimensions of CSR practices, corporate image, and reputation. The results indicate that the three variables are statistically significant, and corporate image act as a partial mediator in these relationships among healthcare employees, where the applicable of the corporate image as a mediator was supported by numerous literature (see Şeşena & Gündoğdub, 2023; Wang, 2020). In addition, Kim et al. (2017) examined the CSR initiatives' perception and customers' revisit intentions through the corporate image as a mediator in a Korean gaming company. The findings found that ethical CSR had the strongest effect on corporate image. However, only philanthropic CSR had a significant and direct effect on revisit intentions. Furthermore, the corporate image was found to mediate between the four CSR practices and revisit intentions. Furthermore, Widyastuti Said et al. (2019) highlighted the trend of an environmentally conscious company to increase its corporate image and reputation. The results demonstrated there is a favorable impact between green marketing strategies and customers' trust, wherein this has supported the notion of de Leaniz et al. (2019) that consumers are keener to trust environmentally certified hotels, whereby hotel's environmental CSR image has a direct effect on their behavioral intentions. This also aligned with the study of Fosu et al. (2024), on examining the environmental CSR practices on corporate social performance (CSP), through green innovation and corporate image as mediators. The results found that green innovation and corporate image were the mediators in enhancing the CSP.

This has further supported the study of Al-Karim and Fayez (2020), who found that brand image mediates the relationship between economic CSR and social CSR on the brand equity of Unilever brand in Bangladesh. It shows that adopting CSR initiatives that are communicated to the stakeholders would enhance a company's reputation, ergo, and earn consumers' trust. Based on the above discussion, for firms to compete with their rivals, companies must develop greener practices to develop a positive reputation and gain public support.

Based on the discussion, therefore, the study posits that:

H_{5a}: *Corporate image mediates the impact between respect for consumers and corporate reputation.*

H_{5b}: *Corporate image mediates the impact between respect for the environment and corporate reputation.*

H_{5c}: *Corporate image mediates the impact between philanthropic activities and corporate reputation.*

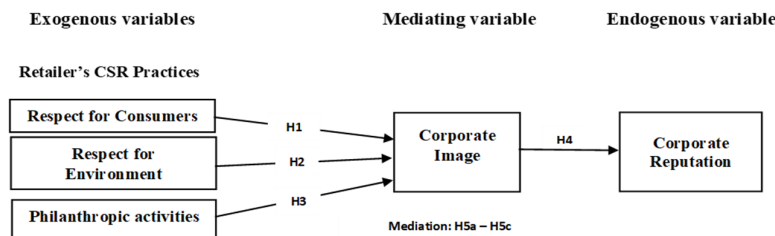


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researchers used a quantitative (survey) design, specifically online surveys that were distributed to the customers. Deductive research intends to explain the linkages between the variables. In this study, survey design was an appropriate method to apply, where the researcher can effectively find out the opinions of respondents (Babbie, 2020).

3.2 Sampling Techniques

This study utilized non-probability sampling, namely purposive sampling. The objective of purposive sampling is to target the respondents who exhibit characteristics/ attributes (Campbell et al., 2020). As the target respondents are the customers of X fast-food brand, however, the sampling frame (exact population of the customers) was not granted. Hence, the researchers had determined beforehand that the particular respondent must be a consumer of X brand and have prior experiences in visiting the store before giving out the questionnaire. Thus, researchers applied the a-priori sample size technique via the G-Power analysis to identify the sample size (Hair et al., 2022; Memon et al., 2020). The sample size via the G*Power 3.1.9.2 software indicated that the minimum sample size is 119 (effect size: 0.15; power: 0.95; number of predictors: 3). Hence, the study yielded 150 useful responses and it was sufficient for statistical analysis. This has supported Bougie and Sekaran's (2019) notion that a sample size ranging from 30 and 500 is valid for social sciences research.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire is made up of four (4) sections. Section A was the respondents' demographic profile (e.g. gender, age, race, number of visits to the X fast-food brand and a screening question "Do you purchase/ visit X fast-food before?" to filter the

valid responses. Section B comprised the three dimensions of retailer's CSR practices, namely philanthropic activities, respect for the environment, and respect for consumers which adapted from (Lombart et al., 2019; Maignan, et al., 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008). For Section C, this study adapted the measurements for the corporate image from Hsu (2018), and for Section D, the items for corporate reputation were adopted from (Ponzi et al., 2011). The researchers used the 5-point Likert-type scale with (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree to measure the variables for Sections B, C, and D.

3.4 Common Method Variance

The study investigated the common method variance (CMV) – a similar source bias that happened due to the self-report measures in the survey method (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Researchers applied Harman's single-factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to test the CMV, and the first extracted factor of the total variance is (38.288% < 50%). Thus, it can be claimed that no serious CMV was found in this study.

3.5 Statistical Analysis and Significance

Structural Equation Modelling via the PLS-SEM was used to test the research framework. PLS-SEM was utilized as it can handle many variables and constructs (Henseler et al., 2009). Most importantly, this study aimed to examine the research framework through the prediction perspective (Cepeda-Carrion et al, 2019; Hair et al., 2019). This aligned with Rigdon's (2016) notion, that prediction analysis is an advanced technique in social sciences research.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The researchers distributed an online questionnaire via Google Forms. The online questionnaire included a brief introduction of the intention to conduct the study, the voluntary essence of participation, anonymity, and confidentiality declarations. The online questionnaire links were sent to the respondents through WhatsApp, WeChat, and Facebook. Researchers included a screening question "Do you/ have you ever purchased X fast-food brand before?" to assist in filtering out the invalid responses and 150 valid responses were generated after the filtering process.

3.7 Ethical Concerns

For this study, researchers have included the informant consent on the cover page of the online questionnaire before respondents proceed to answer the survey. Respondents voluntarily participate in this research, where the consent form highlights the anonymity and ensures the confidentiality of the respondent's information, and data will only be used for research purposes.

4. Results

Female respondents comprised (59.3%) as compared to male customers (40.7%) out of the total 150 respondents. Furthermore, 64.0% of the respondents were from the age group of 18-22 years old, whereas respondents from the age group of 23-27 years old were 42 (28.0%). Besides that, Table 1 also shows that most respondents (74.0%) visit X fast-food brand 1 to 5 times a month.

Table 1
Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (n=150)

Variable(s)	f	%
Gender		
Male	61	40.7
Female	89	59.3
Age		
18-22	96	64.0
23-27	42	28.0
28-32	4	2.7
33-37	4	2.7
>37	4	2.7
Race		
Malay	33	22.0
Chinese	43	28.7
Indian	20	13.3
Others	54	36.0
How frequently do you visit X fast food in a month?		
1 - 5 times	112	74.7
6 – 10 times	29	19.3
11 – 15 times	6	4.0
> than 15 times	3	2.0

4.1 Measurement Model

Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess the indicator reliability, while convergent validity (AVE) and discriminant validity were used to ascertain the validity. Thus, Cronbach's alpha should be higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). As demonstrated in Table 2, Cronbach's Alpha for all variables is higher than 0.7. Based on Fornell and Larcker (1981), the item reliability of each variable (outer loadings), the composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extract (AVE) are used to determine the convergence validity. Hair et al. (2022) state that the CR and the AVE should be greater than 0.7 and 0.5, then the convergent validity is established. Table 2 shows all the items passed the threshold of 0.7, with the values of CR ranging from 0.876 to 0.915 and AVE were all greater than 0.5. Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations is used to ascertain discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Kline (2011) suggested that the HTMT values should be less than the threshold of HTMT_{.85}, thus, discriminant validity is ascertained (see Table 3). Besides, Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2006) highlighted that collinearity was examined using variance inflation factor (VIF) with a threshold value of 3.3 (see Table 4), thus, collinearity problems were not found in this study.

Table 2
Measurement model assessment

Variable(s)	Items	Item deleted	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Philanthropy activities	Phi1		0.762	0.823	0.876	0.587
	Phi2		0.766			
	Phi3		0.753			
	Phi4		0.839			
	Phi5		0.703			
Respect for the Environment	Env1		0.824	0.883	0.655	
	Env2		0.839			
	Env3		0.839			
	Env4		0.726			
Respect for the consumers	Con1	Con6	0.773	0.828	0.879	0.592
	Con2		0.732			
	Con3		0.818			
	Con4		0.806			
	Con5		0.715			
Corporate image	CI1		0.805	0.883	0.915	0.682
	CI2		0.778			
	CI3		0.866			
	CI4		0.835			
	CI5		0.843			
Corporate Reputation	CR1		0.882	0.867	0.909	0.715
	CR2		0.896			
	CR3		0.807			
	CR4		0.793			

Table 3
HTMT Ratio

	Corporate image	Corporate reputation	Consumer	Environment	Philanthropy
Corporate image					
Corporate reputation	0.846				
Consumers	0.656	0.643			
Environment	0.656	0.556	0.616		
Philanthropy	0.603	0.614	0.663	0.530	

4.2 Structural Model

When the measurement model is verified and confirmed to have validity and reliability, the structural model can be evaluated. The path coefficient, *t*-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), cross-validated redundancy (Q^2), and effect size (f^2) were all investigated in the structural model. Hair et al. (2022) suggested that bootstrapping procedures (resample of 5,000) were used to test the structural model (see Table 4). Table 4 and Fig. 1 show the results for Respect for customers ($\beta = 0.284$, $t = 3.323$, $p = 0.00$), Respect for the environment ($\beta = 0.331$, $t = 4.152$, $p = 0.000$), and philanthropy activities ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 2.838$, $p = 0.002$) were found to have a positive impact with corporate image. Besides, corporate image ($\beta = 0.751$, $t = 19.057$, $p = 0.000$) showed a significant relationship with corporate reputation. Hence, H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , and H_4 were supported. R^2 , which reflects the model's explanatory power, was then analyzed in this study (Henseler et al., 2009). According to Cohen (1988), 0.02 for R^2 is weak, 0.13 for R^2 is moderate, and 0.26 for R^2 is substantial. This study discovered that 3 dimensions of retail CSR practices explain substantial variance in the corporate image ($R^2 = 46.3\%$). Furthermore, corporate image explained the substantial variance in corporate reputation ($R^2 = 56.4\%$). Cohen (1988) divided the effect size of f^2 into small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35) respectively. Based on Table 4, respect for the consumer has a small or weak impact on the corporate image ($f^2 = 0.093$), respect for the environment has a moderate impact on the corporate image ($f^2 = 0.143$), Philanthropy activities has a weak impact on the corporate image ($f^2 = 0.057$), and corporate image has a strong impact on corporate reputation ($f^2 = 1.293$).

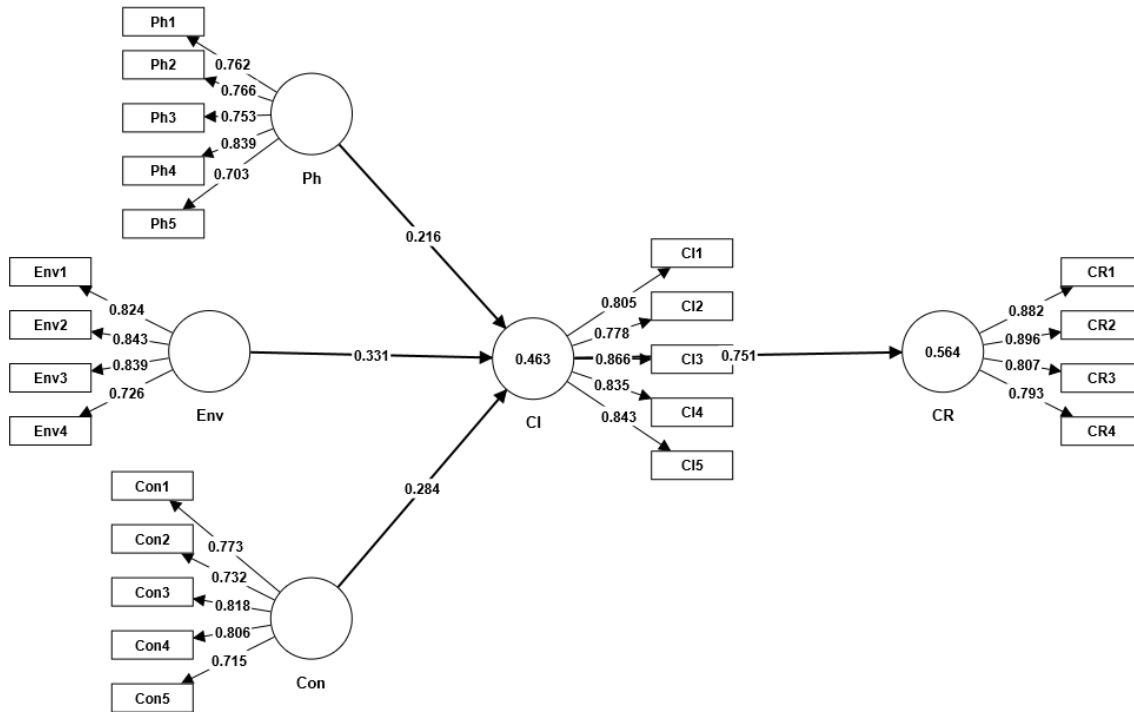


Fig. 2. Structural model assessment

Table 4 Hypothesis Testing (Direct Effects)

Path	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	P	(LLCL-ULCL)	D	R ²	Q ²	f ²	VIF
H1: Con → CI	0.284	0.085	3.323**	0.000	0.137-0.415	S	0.463	0.302	0.093	1.617
H2: Env → CI	0.331	0.080	4.152**	0.000	0.201-0.462	S			0.143	1.428
H3: Phi → CI	0.216	0.076	2.838*	0.002	0.091-0.341	S			0.057	1.517
H4: CI → CR	0.751	0.039	19.057**	0.000	0.676-0.808	S	0.564	0.391	1.293	1.000

** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05; S= Supported
 LLCL= Lower Level Confident Interval; ULCL=Upper Level Confident Interval
 1-tailed test

4.3 Mediation Analysis

Preacher and Hayes (2008) highlighted that the indirect effects were also tested using the bootstrapping method. Corporate image mediates the relationship between Respect for customers and corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.213, t = 3.223, LLCI = 0.084, ULCI = 0.340$), corporate image mediates the relationship between Respect for the environment and corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.248, t = 4.154, LLCI = 0.133, ULCI = 0.368$), corporate image mediates the relationship between Philanthropy activities and corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.162, t = 2.701, LLCI = 0.049, ULCI = 0.283$). Due to the lower and upper confidence interval not straddle a zero, it can be said that the indirect path is significant and H5a, H5b, and H5c were supported. Thus, corporate image mediates the impact between retailers’ CSR practices (respect for consumers, respect for the environment, philanthropic activities) and corporate reputation.

Table 5 Indirect Effects

Path	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p	Confidence Interval (BC)		Decision
					LL (2.5 %)	UL (97.5 %)	
H5a: Con -> CI -> CR	0.213	0.064	3.223	0.001*	0.084	0.340	Supported
H5b: Env -> CI -> CR	0.248	0.060	4.154	0.000**	0.133	0.368	Supported
H5c: Phi -> CI -> CR	0.162	0.060	2.701	0.007*	0.049	0.283	Supported

** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, BC= Bias Corrected, UL = Upper Level, LL = Lower Level
 2-tailed test

Shmueli et al., (2019) highlighted that the variables can be replaced when the study evolves in the future, and the researchers aimed to examine the out-sample prediction (Hair, 2020). Hence, Shmueli et al. (2016) introduce the PLS prediction assessment. PLSpredict was to verify the predictive relevance of the current research model. The overall predictive significance of each path model endogenous construct is determined using Q^2 (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). Since their resulting Q^2 values (0.302 and 0.391, respectively) are more than zero (see Table 4), the Q^2 values indicate that corporate image and corporate reputation have sufficient predictive relevance. Thus, it indicated that the model has high predictive power for corporate image and reputation (see Table 6).

Table 6
PLS predict assessment

Variable(s)	Items	PLS		LM	PLS-LM	Interpretation
		RMSE	Q^2 predict	RMSE	RMSE	
Corporate Image	CI1	0.823	0.276	0.884	-0.061	High
	CI2	0.768	0.252	0.820	-0.052	
	CI3	0.878	0.323	0.904	-0.026	
	CI4	0.736	0.210	0.747	-0.011	
	CI5	0.727	0.360	0.744	-0.017	
Corporate	CR1	0.789	0.301	0.858	-0.069	High
	CR2	0.818	0.329	0.856	-0.038	
	CR3	0.966	0.180	1.043	-0.077	
	CR4	0.803	0.213	0.818	-0.015	

5. Discussion

The results found that customers are likely to associate with organizations that participate in CSR practices. The current findings show that X fast-food brand is well perceived by the customers and their CSR practices influence their perception in building a good corporate image, which supported the findings of past studies which showed a significant path between CSR and corporate image (Al-Mubarak et al., 2019; Widayat et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). Therefore, CSR activities done by the company can help to satisfy the consumers' needs which helps in developing a good corporate image (Pang et al., 2018). Furthermore, the current results also supported the notion corporate image will have a positive impact on reputation which supported past findings (Chan et al., 2023; Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2020; Szwajca, 2018).

Based on the above discussion, the fast-food restaurant must pay more concerns to the customers' well-being. This study has shown that respect for consumers is one of the predicting factors that boost the corporate image. This has been demonstrated with the X fast food brand, where they provide the nutrition facts to the consumers when consumers are buying their foods, which showed the calorie consumption as a responsible action towards their consumers.

Based on the findings, X fast-food brand can embrace further by making sure its line of products uses more healthy ingredients, to ensure its safety for its consumers. Besides, the findings also found that Philanthropic activities like donation/ charity, and sponsoring community events were also perceived well by the respondents, which shows that X fast-food brand have a favorable CSR image in the eyes of their customers. Hence, they must take good care of the customers by providing healthy foods and carrying out charities to sponsor the community to shape a favorable perception. Besides that, X fast food brand can help by hiring workers from the lesser advantaged groups. In return, this practice will influence consumers to develop a good perception of the corporations, and further develop their reputation. Based on the notion, the results also reassure the mediating role of the corporate image which is congruent with numerous studies (Aldehayyat, 2021; Fosu et al., 2024; Şeşena & Gündoğdub, 2023; Widyastuti et al., 2019) that suggested CSR activities positively influence customers' mind and improve corporate image and reputation. This also aligned with the findings of Lombart et al., (2019) that philanthropic activities of a retailer's CSR initiatives have a moderate impact on corporate image, however, it was contrasted with the results of Al-Karim and Fayeze (2020), where their study found that brand image did not mediate significantly between environmental CSR and brand equity. In summary, consumers' response to CSR practices differs from industry depending on the cultural, economic, and political background where the corporations operate. Hence, corporations must use relevant CSR initiatives to drive triumph outcomes.

6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the result from this research specifically discussed the three main exogenous variables which are philanthropic activities, respect for the environment, and respect for the consumer. These three main CSR attributes indicate that CSR practices do play an important role in leading consumers' perceptions to formulate corporate image and corporate reputation in a company.

6.1 Academic Implications

The research provides prodigious contributions to the theoretical framework by enhancing the social marketing theories, through the explanation of SET, where the study found that the determinants such as CSR practices, and corporate image,

play a vital role in predicting corporate reputation. The reciprocal relationship is evident, highlighting that the initiatives of CSR practices as the inputs in the SET, and it helps to shape favorable customer perceptions about the company and lead to a positive image and reputation.

The study also contributed to extending the scholarship on marketing and corporate communication by empirically testing the two constructs namely, corporate image and reputation, where prominent scholars in the field argued that these two variables are not the same and have confusion (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010; Podnar & Golob, 2017; Szwajca, 2018).

6.2 Practical Implications

Pang et al. (2018) highlighted that CSR is used for image building of a company in Asia, they found that building relationships through proactive two-way communication with the stakeholders is encouraging, and it increases the prominence of CSR by maximizing the potential of the company websites. Hence, this study helps organizations to improve their CSR practices and helps to attract more customers.

Even though the results of the current study are significant, it can be observed that the age respondents are young adults. Hence, it might not be able to reflect whether the consumers fully understand what CSR is and whether they are aware of it. Hence, X fast food brands need to craft their community involvement and environmental CSR practices by communicating and educating their customers if they wish to further improve and build a solid corporate image and reputation.

Hence, it is recommended that X fast food management carefully select its CSR initiatives. The findings provide prodigious insight for the management of X fast food brand to create favorable CSR awareness among the customers. Thus, the X fast food chain company should prioritize its CSR initiatives sincerely, not as a form of greenwashing strategy (Balluchi et al., 2020) as it will reflect their company values and bring a competitive advantage.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

Based on the findings and prescriptions for better CSR practices that can be drawn from the present research, a few recommendations for future studies are suggested. The major shortcoming is related to the sample size, where the sample size is unable to generalize to the population of X fast-food chain company, as it was based on purposive sampling. Thus, future studies can increase more samples to better represent the population.

Besides, this research only focuses on X fast food brand as one of the fast-food chain restaurants in the F&B industry. It would be interesting to include more brands from F&B or different industries for future studies to increase the validity.

Finally, the current study was only limited to investigating CSR practices from the consumers' perspective. For future studies, the researchers would recommend looking into various stakeholders such as employees, media, and regulators.

Future studies can also include other potential constructs such as repurchase intention, CSR skepticism, *Halal* image, CSR communication (Chan et al., 2023; Naatu et al., 2022), social media usage (Martinez-Sala et al., 2023), customer satisfaction (Fong et al., 2023; Ning et al., 2023) and customer retention to test the mediating and moderating effects of this framework to add more insights into social responsibility and strategic corporate communication scholarship.

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