



## **Does CSR Image Matter to Hypermarket's Consumers in Malaysia? Perspective from Persuasion Knowledge Model**

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is commonly accepted that positive corporate social responsibility (CSR) image brings desirable outcomes, for instance, brand loyalty, improved brand image, enhanced store image, as well as increased visit intention; suggesting there are various direct outcomes of CSR image. Underpinned by the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), this paper proposes that these outcomes are presented in a sequential manner, where there is a core mechanism that relates CSR image to store image and brand awareness, and in turn associate with consumers' visit intention. A quantitative research methodology has been used where a structured questionnaire was distributed to consumers in selected states in Malaysia using the mall intercept method. Structural equation modelling was applied to examine the proposed model. The discoveries of the current study offer the observed evidence for the correlation between perceived CSR image and hypermarket visit intention, mediated by overall store image and brand awareness. The study emphasises a prominent role of CSR schemes, bringing together the overall hypermarket store image and the hypermarket brand awareness, which will enable hypermarket management to further boost visit intention from consumers.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of hypermarkets has decreased greatly and are consolidating (The Star, 2019). Malaysian consumers are no longer visiting hypermarkets as often as before because consumers prefer to shop at mini-markets that are nearer to their homes and have more competitive prices (The Star, 2019). Although hypermarkets have been capitalising on store attributes (i.e., product varieties, geographical convenience, pricing policies, marketing promotions, and store atmosphere) to engage customers (Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009), such strategies are no longer sufficient as consumers in Malaysia are increasingly becoming smart shoppers (Euromonitor International, 2017) with higher expectations from businesses.

Furthermore, the decrease in consumers' disposable incomes lately have forced consumers to shop at retailers with the lowest prices. Therefore, in order to survive, hypermarkets are now shifting their strategy by moving to smaller-sized formats, renovating their stores, and prioritising close proximity to consumers (Euromonitor International, 2019). Currently, retailers have also started to invest their resources in activities related to corporate social responsibility (CSR), with the intention of being remarked as reliable corporate citizens as an alternative to survive. Indeed, a combination of a strong store image, brand awareness, and CSR strategies have been frequently reported to result in greater consumer engagement (Drumwright, 1996; Gupta and Pirsch, 2008; Percy and Rossiter, 1992).

Several researchers have claimed that when companies perform socially responsible attempts, it can alter consumer perception and attitude towards that company (Choi and La, 2013). Recent studies have also suggested that a growing number of firms are implementing CSR programs as a corporate tactic to attain a competitive advantage as well as to foster long-term affiliation with consumers (Martinez and Bosque, 2013). However, literature has implied various direct outcomes of CSR image (e.g. Duarte et al., 2014; Gutiérrez Rodríguez et al., 2017), while other studies have found perceived CSR did not display a direct relationship with its outcomes (e.g. Glavas and Godwin, 2013). Although various studies implied presence of mediators between perceived CSR and loyalty, there was no consensus on these mediators. Some suggested functional and symbolic images of the brand (He and Lai, 2014; Eryandra et al., 2018), firm image (Plewa et al., 2015; Liu and Ji, 2010) or customer satisfaction and trust as mediators (Liu and Ji, 2010), but it is not known what mediators exist in the context of hypermarket.

Literature indeed suggests mediators to look at the processes or mechanism through which CSR is able to create hypermarket visit intention and PKM to provide the theoretical basis. The above mentioned combined, motivates this study in testing the applicability of PKM by evaluating if mediators did exist between the relationship of CSR image and consumer visit intention to the hypermarket, while capturing opinions and attitudes of consumers. PKM advocates that knowledge and experiences consumer learnt about a hypermarket (i.e. CSR image: socially responsible hypermarket), determines consumers' opinion (i.e. store image: perception on product and service quality) and consumers' attitudes (e.g. brand awareness: the support given to the hypermarket brand) about the hypermarket, and finally translate to consumers' decision (i.e. consumer visit intention to the hypermarket). Ultimately, this study aims to investigate whether consumer discernment of a hypermarket's CSR will bring a rise in consumer visits to the hypermarket when there are good overall store image and brand awareness. Uncovering the mechanism provides a more solid understanding on the inter-relationships of CSR image outcomes, which serves as the basis for selection and implementation of CSR activities, specific to creating store image and brand awareness, then consumer visit intention to the hypermarket may follow.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### **Overall Hypermarket and Consumers Trends in Malaysia**

Hypermarkets in Malaysia continue to decline in the grocery retailer's category. Many leading hypermarkets players are downscaling and reformatting due to the rise of competition that they faced from smaller retail format stores and the increasing numbers of upscale supermarkets that offer a variety of imported goods that draw affluent consumers and expatriates (Euromonitor, 2020). Mr. Tan Hai Hsin, the managing director of Retail Group Malaysia indicated that hypermarkets in Malaysia are going through a merging stage (The Star, 2019) as the current downturn of the economic situation has forced under-performing stores to close. It was reported that

hypermarkets in Malaysia dropped 3% in current value in 2019 while sales have declined to RM 14.2 billion (Euromonitor, 2020).

Similarly, Mr. Tan further stated that the hypermarket sub-sector reported depressing growth in September 2019 and it was the 8<sup>th</sup> consecutive quarter that this sub-sector reported negative growth (Marketing Magazine, 2020; The Malaysian Reserve, 2019). For instance, GCH Retail (M) Sdn Bhd which manages Giant and Cold Storage in Malaysia has closed many stores and decreased floor sizes at some locations. Besides that, Tesco Stores (M) Sdn Bhd has also gone through the same exercise where in early 2020, Tesco was sold to the CP Group of Thailand and later renamed to Lotus's Store (M) Sdn Bhd. Similarly, AEON BiG Sdn Bhd and AEON Co (M) Bhd have conjoined under one roof (The Edge, 2020; The Malaysian Reserve, 2019).

Malaysian consumers are becoming more discreet in their spending and constantly looking out for better value for money from their groceries shopping (Euromonitor, 2020). Thus, Malaysian consumers are seen to reduce shopping in hypermarkets and increase purchases in mini-markets such as the KK Mart and 99 Speedmarts, especially in consumptions of small quantities (The Star, 2019; The Malaysian Reserve, 2019; Euromonitor, 2020). Moreover, these smaller grocery stores are now providing very economical prices compared to hypermarkets.

Compared to approximately 25 years ago, when Carrefour was the first hypermarket format that was introduced to Malaysian in 1994, consumers enjoyed shopping leisurely in a large-format grocery store with wide variety of merchandises provided under one roof is now diminished due to the fact that Malaysian are exhausted spending long hours in the hypermarkets for basic necessities (The Star, 2019). Additionally, hypermarkets are turning out to be less appealing compared to shopping malls which offers a selection of arrangement that are more stimulating and varied (The Malaysian Reserve, 2019). As a result, hypermarkets are now opening new smaller grocery stores to meet the current demand of busy urban and time-pressed consumers.

Nevertheless, the Covid-19 pandemic has altered the manner people shop for groceries, which offers struggling hypermarkets a much desirable uplift. During the Movement Control Order (MCO), hypermarkets and grocery retailers that had physical stores in Malaysia experienced a surge in their sales and enjoyed double-digit growth (The Edge, 2020). This is because many restaurants were not permitted to open for business; hence, many Malaysian were compelled to patronise hypermarkets to purchase their basic groceries needs to prepare a meal at home. Besides that, those who encountered loss of income or pay cut had to look for cheaper alternative and have reduced the frequency of eating at restaurants. Consumers are also visiting the hypermarkets by taking the chance to go out of their homes (The Edge, 2020).

However, Mr. Adzman Shah Mohd Ariffin, the Bumiputera Retailers Organisation Committee Member, formal employee of Cold Storage and Carrefour Malaysia, as well as the CEO at ExaStrate Solutions Sdn Bhd, stated that hypermarkets will continue to close over the next two to three years. This is because the rising of rental costs will surpass the allowable occupancy costs, which in turn will impact profitability among the intensified competition, with fewer consumers and growing costs (The Edge, 2020). Therefore, it will be seen that hypermarkets will be consolidating outlets that are not worthwhile anymore.

As the survival of hypermarkets in Malaysia are indefinite and the competition between retailers is intensified, many retailers are now involving in CSR in the hope of attracting more consumers to visit their stores by differentiating themselves (Drumwright, 1996; Gupta and Pirsch, 2008; Percy and Rossiter, 1992). Thus, examining consumers' judgement towards a hypermarket's CSR image is pertinent and timely to gauge the increase visitation of consumers to the hypermarkets, coupled with good store image and brand awareness.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

The notion of CSR has a broad and distinct antiquity, and the number of definitions are increasing. More empirical research and complementary themes have also emerged. A detailed definition was adopted by Carroll (1991), in which CSR was separated into four components: legal, economic, philanthropic and ethical responsibility. Besides that, CSR is defined as undertaking commerce in a manner that sustains or enhances both the consumer's and community's well-being (Kotler, 1991). According to this understanding, organisations take into account the concerns of society by taking accountability for the effect of their actions or conducts on stakeholders and the environment (Rahim et al., 2011). Given the different definitions derived from previous studies, this study describes CSR as the extent to which an organisation aids and impacts the community in progressive ways. This definition is coherent with earlier studies (i.e., Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Yoon et al., 2006; Eisingerich et al., 2011).

For CSR deeds to develop value for the company, they must be perceived positively by the stakeholders (Barnett, 2007). To ensure this happens, firms are guided by the stakeholder theory, which put forward that organisations should pay attention to all stakeholders that can affect the value of the organisation, particularly when they are attempting to maximise value or value-seeking behaviour (Jensen, 2001). Stakeholders are groups of individuals who have an interest in or share in the corporation. They consist of stockholders, management, employees, suppliers, consumers, as well as the local public (Freeman, 2001). Organisations are driven to extend their objectives to keep in mind the aims of other investors through CSR, which is apart from the main goal of profit maximisation (Rahim et al., 2011). For this reason, based on the stakeholder theory, many firms participate in CSR events to stimulate socially responsible conduct and approaches in responding to stakeholders' needs (Maignan and Farrell, 2004).

Consumers are highly imperative stakeholder group as they can directly shape the success of an organisation. This is because consumers offer support to the firm in the form of profits and substitute their capital for the firm's products (Freeman, 2001). They have been the focal attention of many studies because they are an essential stakeholder group that seems to be influenced by a firm's CSR ideas (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004). For instance, a study on Chinese consumers' perceptions of CSR revealed that the mean response (five out of seven) of consumers is an indication that CSR is perceived as crucial among consumers (Ramasamy and Yeung, 2009). Similarly, a study on the link between young consumers and CSR communication shows that 84.1% of young consumers think it is vital for companies to be involved in CSR activities (Schmeltz, 2012). To conclude, past research has suggested that consumers will either directly or indirectly respond favourably (e.g., increased visit intention) to firms that engage in CSR initiatives. Therefore, it is essential to empirically test the relationship between CSR and its outcomes.

### **The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)**

The PKM, established by Friestad and Wright (1994), theorises that when consumers deduce and respond to marketing persuasion efforts, they derive their responses from their persuasion beliefs. According to the PKM, persuasive activities are transmitted from an agent to a recipient, whereby the agent seeks to influence the recipient's opinions, attitudes, decisions, and behaviours. Recipients will respond to the agent's persuasive attempts by carrying out certain persuasion coping behaviours based on their knowledge and experiences (Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2013). For instance, the PKM has been used in a CSR context to explicate the impact of consumer knowledge and scepticism on consumer interpretations of CSR activities (Anuar and Mohamad, 2012; Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009).

Similarly, each consumer assesses CSR initiatives based on their knowledge base, which includes their experiences, assumptions, and perceptions of a firm. Thus, consumers might take into account a firm's CSR performance when they evaluate its products (Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2013). Likewise, Groza et al. (2011) have applied the PKM to observe attributes that help explain how consumers act in response to a CSR programme and the observed motives that may be influenced by specific message attributes. Plewa et al. (2015) have also used the PKM to suggest how consumers who are familiar with corporate volunteering activities may be able to assess the firm's activities in a more positive way and believe that the company is socially responsible.

In other words, the PKM suggests that persuasion targets (e.g., consumers) infer the fundamental reasons and hidden implications of persuasion agents' (e.g., marketers; retailers; advertisers) persuasion attempts (e.g., advertising messages; sales offer); these targets may not purely believe or agree with the endeavours, and their interpretations are known as persuasion knowledge. The persuasion target's combined past experiences, information and persuasion knowledge of the persuasion agent is referred to as agent knowledge (e.g., the firm's current management, history, reputation, current social media and marketing activities). Persuasion knowledge has a vital role in shaping variations in attitudes in persuasion targets, and agent knowledge plays a role in intensifying consumers' capability to deduce how and why a firm behaves the way it does (Ham and Kim, 2019; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000; Laferty and Goldsmith, 1999).

To apply the PKM in the context of this study as the theoretical basis, the persuasion agent is the retailer management team or marketers, while the persuasion attempts are the retailer's CSR activities – a positive message sent to the persuasion target – and the persuasion target is the consumer. Persuasion knowledge in this perspective states that consumer insights of a retailer's behaviour when engaging in CSR initiatives intended to impact consumer beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Meanwhile, agent knowledge refers to individual consumers' knowledge about retailers' current and past CSR initiatives.

In other words, in this study, PKM supports that knowledge and experiences consumers learnt about a hypermarket (i.e. perceived CSR image: the hypermarkets' social responsibility activities) ascertains consumers' opinion (i.e. store image: perception on product quality, price, ambience) and consumers' attitudes (i.e. brand awareness: favourable hypermarket brand and its existence in consumers' mind) regarding the hypermarket, and finally explains consumers' decision (i.e. hypermarket visit intention).

By disclosing the process of CSR image to visit intention, it offers more robust comprehension on the inter-relations of CSR image aftermaths, it also provides the foundation for selection and implementation of CSR activities, explicit to forming store image and brand awareness, and in turn may improve consumers hypermarket visit intention. In sum, the present study proposes that individual consumers will deduce and decipher a hypermarket's CSR initiatives via persuasion and agent knowledge, then respond in terms of visitation intention to the hypermarket.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Hypermarket Visit Intention**

Fostering good public relations, developing a better corporate image, forming positive brand evaluations, enhancing consumer loyalty, and increasing sales (Lii and Lee, 2012; Zhu et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017) are some of the positive outcomes when engaged in CSR activities. Galbreath (2010) has asserted that if CSR activities demonstrate a company's fairness, it may diminish employee turnover. Furthermore, by achieving the integrity needs of consumers, CSR could strengthen customer satisfaction. Finally, CSR initiatives are able to improve overall firm reputation as they send out obvious signals that lead stakeholders to deduce positive characteristics (Galbreath, 2010).

Hence, CSR allows companies to protect themselves from interrogation as the companies have eminent amounts of goodwill among consumers along with other stakeholders (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Furthermore, it can stimulate positive behaviours in stakeholders such as purchasing intention, employment seeking, stronger stakeholder-company affiliations, and improved stakeholder support actions (Du et al., 2010). Therefore, CSR is able to help companies better realise their organisation's objectives (i.e., increase consumer visitation, patronisation, and purchasing behaviour).

Perceived CSR image refers to consumer beliefs concerning an organisation's CSR activities and whether genuine concern for the CSR initiatives are being demonstrated by the company (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Deng and Xu (2017) have found that an upright CSR image may initiate positive effects on consumers' loyalty, purchase intention, recommend intention. Furthermore, a study has illustrated that a company's use of CSR has influenced the purchasing behaviour of Malaysian consumers (Rahim et al., 2011). Also, a study on consumer responses to CSR has shown that consumers' buying intentions of a firm's product is affected by a firm's CSR endeavours (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

According to the PKM, companies intend to convince consumers of their desire to be good corporate citizens by undertaking various CSR activities. Consumers may appraise a firm's CSR image centred on their experiences, perceptions, and assumptions about that company. Thus, if a hypermarket is perceived to have a good CSR image, consumers may be more likely to show positive responses towards it in terms of visitation intention. Hence, the following hypothesis is presented:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between the perceived CSR image of a hypermarket and consumers' hypermarket visit intention.*

### **The Mediating Effect of Overall Store Image**

Image is shaped in a variety of ways by different units or attributes such as organisations, stores, and brands (Lemmink et al., 2003), and image building is an essential strategy in drawing and keeping consumers (Bloemer and De Ruyter, 1998; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Gupta and Pirsch, 2008). Furthermore, store image is recognised to be the leading determinant in predicting consumers' re-patronage intention and consumer store preference (Koo and Kang, 2004; Yun and Good, 2007; Erdem et al., 1999). It is also perceived by consumers to be vital in relation to purchasing decisions as it displays the images of the retailers, which will affect the perceived quality of their products as well as the purchase intention of consumers (Jaafar et al., 2012).

Image of a store can be expressed as the state wherein the store is perceived by consumers (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006). Wu et al. (2011) defines store image as the inclusive attitude of consumers that stems from store characteristics. Thus, store image is recognised as the consumers' evaluations of a retail store, which is

personally connected to consumers' impressions of that store (Kan et al., 2014). Studies in the Netherlands have attained that store image had a positive direct impact on consumers' attitude towards a store brand (Semeijn et al., 2004, Van Riel et al., 2012). There is also empirical evidence that CSR image influences consumers' perceived image of a company or store (e.g., Plewa et al., 2015; Liu and Ji, 2010; Gupta and Prisch, 2008; Loussaïef et al., 2014).

Following the PKM logic, a hypermarket sends CSR knowledge to the consumer via CSR activities, initiatives or communications through advertising, and the perceived CSR then creates a general impression of the hypermarket (overall store image) in the consumer's mind, leading to hypermarket visit intention. CSR, as persuasion knowledge, is used to infer the overall evaluation of the hypermarket image (overall store image) and this leads to behavioural intention (visit intention). Chien et al. (2014) discovered that the image of the store has an indirect and direct impact on intention to purchase. Store image has also been found to play the role of a mediator among advertising spending and brand loyalty (Hameed, 2013). In addition, Nessel et al. (2011) have found that store image serves as a vital mediator involving consumers' loyalty and satisfaction in the retail setting. Therefore, it is proposed that store image could indirectly affect hypermarket visit intention, leading to the following hypothesis:

*H2: The overall store image of the hypermarket mediates the relationship between the perceived CSR image of the hypermarket and consumers' hypermarket visit intention.*

### **The Mediating Effect of Brand Awareness**

Companies with a large market share are those that have the highest brand awareness level among consumers (Osman and Subhani, 2010). Organisations with high brand awareness have products and services with a decent standing in the market and are greatly accepted by the market (Gustafson and Chabot, 2007). Percy and Donovan (1991) asserted that before the consumers purchase a brand, it is necessary for them to foremost be conscious of that brand. It is only when there is brand awareness that brand attitudes can be formed and behavioural intentions occur. Consequently, awareness to a brand is an imperative stage in consumers' willingness to generate brand preferences and process nearer to the purchasing goal (Ross and Harradine, 2004; Chi et al., 2009).

Aaker (1996) characterised brand awareness as the intensity of a brand's existence in the consumer's mind. In the same vein, Woodward (2000) asserted that awareness of a brand was related to brand familiarity, where consumers' awareness towards a brand would increase as their exposure to the brand increased. In the same way, Osman and Subhani (2010) stated that brand awareness plays an important role in consumer decision making, perceived value, and loyalty. When consumers are considering a product category, it is essential that the brand appears in the minds of the consumers first. Consumers have a ruling to only purchase recognisable and eminent brands (Keller, 1993). This finding is in line with Nedungadi and Hutchinson (1985) and Chinomona and Maziriri (2017)'s study, in which they found that top-of-mind awareness was strongly correlated with brand choice and brand loyalty. Brand awareness is an advantage resource that is permanent and sustainable, and once a brand reaches a dominant awareness level, it is difficult to remove the brand in the mind of the consumers.

The formation and maintenance of brand awareness is the main reason for advertising and marketing, so that the brand may be noticeable to the consumers in the purchase condition (Yuan and Jang, 2008). Moreover, Radder and Huang (2008) have asserted that brand awareness can significantly affect product purchasing of a consumer and the loyalty of the consumer towards the specific brand (Saleem et al., 2015). Studies have also ascertained that CSR can lead to brand awareness (Servaes and Tamayo, 2013; Tian et al., 2011; Grover, 2014; Martínez and Nishiyama, 2019). For instance, Lai et al. (2009) have revealed that the socially responsible behaviour's perception stimulates optimistic brand awareness among consumers.

It is apparent from the literature that CSR would increase brand awareness which in turn would create a positive outcome. Hence, it is implied that brand awareness would mediate the link between CSR and hypermarket visit intention. Some studies have uncovered that brand awareness acts as an indirect role in affecting future purchase intentions (Shahin Sharifi, 2014; Shabbir et al., 2010). The signalling theory (Spence 1973; 2002) suggests that brand awareness creation can be implied as a signalling process in which the hypermarket's activities (i.e. CSR programs) transmit signals to stakeholders (i.e. consumers), and sequentially, stakeholders will apply these signals to develop impressions or associations of the hypermarket (Galbreath, 2010). In other words, when hypermarkets become involved in CSR and advertise their CSR programme (i.e.

signals), stakeholders (i.e. consumers) may become excited and this may reinforce consumers' brand awareness of the hypermarket brand. This might then increase visit intention to the hypermarket.

Besides that, according to the PKM reasoning, a hypermarket conveys CSR knowledge (persuasion knowledge) to consumers through CSR events, programs or messages through advertising, and then the perceived CSR develops an overall consumers' attitude towards the hypermarket (overall brand awareness) in the consumer's mind, leading to assured brand existence mentality, which in turn will affect consumers' hypermarket visit intention (behavioural intention). Even though the final goal of a marketing strategy is purchase intention and behaviour, this must often be conditioned by establishing awareness of the brand in the midst of consumers (Percy and Rossiter, 1992). Hence, the following hypothesis was developed:

*H3: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between the perceived CSR image of the hypermarket and consumers' hypermarket visit intention.*

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Collection and Sampling

This study has employed a quantitative technique where self-administered questionnaires were made use of. Working adults were surveyed in this study because they are the ones with decisive power and are responsible for purchasing household groceries. Thus, they are more familiar with the hypermarket environment and able to provide meaningful insights. Questionnaires were distributed to consumers in the three states (i.e., Johor, Wilayah Persekutuan, and Putrajaya, Selangor) with the highest number of hypermarket outlets, using a mall-intercept technique. Hence, the samples can better represent the population of Malaysia. Respondents were asked to rank their most preferred hypermarkets (or most frequently visited) from 1 to 5 (e.g., Giant, Tesco, AeonBig, Mydin, and NSK) before filling in the questionnaire. Subsequently, the respondents were asked to rate the constructs (i.e., CSR image, store image, brand awareness, and visit intention) grounded on the hypermarket that they ranked most preferred.

### Measurements

The study used a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") to gauge the constructs. Table 1 illustrates the list of measurement items and their references, where items were adapted from. Perceived CSR image was measured with 5 items, adopted from Folse et al. (2010), a sample item was, "I think this hypermarket has a legitimate interest in this cause". Next, Store image (3 items) was adopted from Nettet et al. (2011), a sample item was "This hypermarket gives satisfactory store image to the general public". Furthermore, brand awareness was measured with 4 items, adopted from Yoo et al. (2000), a sample item was "I know what the store brand looks like". Finally, Hypermarket Visit Intention (4 items) was adopted from Hsu et al. (2010), a sample item was "I would recommend this hypermarket to someone who seeks my advice". All measurements have a Cronbach's alpha value ranging between 0.8 to 0.94, which demonstrates good reliability (Pallant, 2010).

Table 1 Measurement Items

Constructs	Items	Authors
Perceived CSR Image	CSR1: I think this hypermarket has a legitimate interest in this cause.	Folse et al. (2010)
	CSR2: This is a socially responsible hypermarket.	
	CSR3: This hypermarket is a good corporate citizen.	
	CSR4: Helping others appears important to this hypermarket.	
	CSR5: This promotion benefits research more than it benefits this hypermarket.	
Store Image	SI1: This hypermarket gives satisfactory store image to the general public.	Nettet et al. (2011)
	SI2: This hypermarket gives satisfactory store image to my acquaintances or friends.	
	SI3: This hypermarket gives satisfactory store image to me.	
Brand Awareness	BA1: I know what the store brand looks like.	Yoo et. al (2000)
	BA2: I can recognise the store brand from among other competing brands.	
	BA3: I am aware of the store brand products.	
	BA4: I can quickly recall the store brand.	
Hypermarket Visit Intention	HVI1: I would recommend this hypermarket to someone who seeks my advice.	Hsu et al. (2010)
	HVI2: I would say positive things about this hypermarket to other people.	
	HVI3: I would encourage friends and relatives to shop at this hypermarket.	
	HVI4: I will continue to shop at this hypermarket in the future.	

## RESULTS

### Respondent Demographics

The final sample consisted of 460 consumers, 58.4% were females. Most of the respondents were Malays (47%), followed by Chinese (33%), and Indians (18.5%). Most of the respondents were aged between 31–40 (32.4%). Nearly half had attained a bachelor's degree (47.8%), and most had a monthly income of RM2000 to RM4000 (32.4%).

### Measurement Model Validation

This study applied the two-stage analytical method (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) comprising a measurement model (validity and reliability of the measures) and structural model (hypothesised relationship testing) examination (Hair et al., 2014) employing the SMARTPLS Software (Ringle et al., 2015). SMARTPLS Structural Equation Model (SEM) was employed in this study to confirm and test existing theories rather than exploring new theories. It is to determine whether a particular model is valid rather than looking for a suitable model (Gopinath, 2014). Hence, the use of SMARTPLS is appropriate as the aim for this study is to investigate how the variables correlate with each other and their effects on consumers' hypermarket visit intention.

Table 2 shows the measurement model, which assesses the convergent validity of the constructs (i.e., loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted). It was discovered that the indicators' outer loadings for all items surpassed the suggested value of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2010). The composite reliability values had a range of 0.820–0.944, which exceeded the threshold level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). This indicates that all constructs have internal consistency. Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) had a range of 0.686–0.820, which was above the threshold value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). This denotes that the items loaded in the corresponding constructs account for greater than 50% of the constructs' variance.

Table 2 Measurement model: loadings, construct reliability, and convergent validity

Construct/Indicator	Loading	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
<i>Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility</i>		0.916	0.686
CSR1	0.812		
CSR2	0.865		
CSR3	0.879		
CSR4	0.850		
CSR5	0.726		
<i>Store Image</i>		0.820	0.820
SI1	0.908		
SI2	0.905		
SI3	0.904		
<i>Brand Awareness</i>		0.923	0.749
BA1	0.857		
BA2	0.884		
BA3	0.869		
BA4	0.851		
<i>Hypermarket Visit Intention</i>		0.944	0.809
HVI1	0.901		
HVI2	0.902		
HVI3	0.913		
HVI4	0.881		

Table 3 shows the discriminant validity. The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio method was followed to determine if there was high multicollinearity and to ascertain discriminant validity. The HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2015) shows that all constructs are significantly different at HTMT0.90 (Gold et al., 2001) and HTMT.85 (Kline, 2011). This implies that discriminant validity has been established. In this study, both convergent and discriminant validity were established.

Table 3 Discriminant validity of the measurement model: Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion (2015)

	BA	HVI	SI	CSR
BA				
HVI	0.396			
SI	0.494	0.518		
CSR	0.254	0.462	0.463	

Note: HTMT < 0.85 (Kline, 2011), HTMT < 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001); BA = Brand Awareness, HVI = Hypermarket Visit Intention, SI = Store Image, CSR = Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility.

Collinearity assessment is essential to ensure that variables or factors do not assess the same constructs. Table 4 presents the values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each of the constructs. All VIF values were below the limit value of 3.3 (Diamantopoulous and Siguaw, 2006), indicating that these constructs are distinct, that there are no lateral collinearity issues, and that the partial least squares path model is not a concern.

Table 4 Collinearity Assessment

	Hypermarket Visit Intention	Brand Awareness	Overall Store Image
Brand Awareness	1.249		
Overall Store Image	1.430		
Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility	1.215	1.000	1.000

### Structural Model Assessment

After each and every construct in the measurement model were justified, the structural model was tested. The structural model was adopted to evaluate the path coefficient ( $\beta$ ), the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). The bootstrapping procedure was implemented with a re-sample of 1,000 to acquire the standard path coefficients, standard errors, and t-value to evaluate the significance of individual hypothesised relationship (Hair et al., 2016). In addition, the mediation analysis was ascertained following the Hayes and Preacher's (2014) notion that signify the indirect impact of perceived CSR on hypermarket visit intention. The path coefficient clarifies this effect for every path in the mediation chain.

Figure 1 and Table 5 show that the direct path coefficient for perceived CSR shows a positive significant relationship with hypermarket visit intention ( $\beta = 0.265$ ,  $t$ -value  $> 1.645$ ), thereby supporting H1. The bootstrapping examination also shows that the two indirect effects,  $\beta = 0.118$  and  $\beta = 0.040$ , are significant, with  $t$ -values of 3.961 and 2.611. The indirect effects 95% Boot CI Bias Corrected: [LL=0.065, UL=0.178] and [LL=0.015, UL=0.074], do not straddle a 0, demonstrating a mediation influence (Preacher and Hayes, 2004, 2008). That is, both the mediation influences are statistically significant, so H2 and H3 are supported; indicating mediation effects (store image and brand awareness) exist between perceived CSR and hypermarket visit intention.

The coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) were 0.307 for hypermarket visit intention, 0.174 for overall store image, and 0.054 for brand awareness. Cohen (1988) indicates a substantial model when the  $R^2 = 0.67$ , a moderate model when  $R^2 = 0.33$ , and a weak model when  $R^2 = 0.19$ . In this study,  $R^2$  is 0.307, suggesting a moderate model. The model indicates that perceived CSR, overall store image, and brand awareness accounted for about 31% of the variance in hypermarket visit intention. The effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) were also assessed. Cohen's (1988) guideline was applied to measure the degree of effect sizes, which are trivial ( $< 0.02$ ), small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). As pointed out in Table 5, five relationships showed substantive effects (i.e., four small effect sizes and one medium effect size). Using a blind-folding procedure, the study examined the predictive relevance of the model. Table 6 shows the three  $Q^2$  values for brand awareness ( $Q^2 = 0.038$ ), hypermarket visit intention ( $Q^2 = 0.236$ ), and overall store image ( $Q^2 = 0.136$ ). All values were above 0, which implies that the model has satisfactory predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014; Fornell and Cha, 1994).

Table 5 Results of the structural model analysis (hypothesis testing)

Hypothesis	Relationships	Standard Beta	Standard Deviation	$t$ -value	$p$ -values	Confidence Interval (BC)		Decision
						LL	UL	
H1	CSR -> HVI	0.265	0.057	4.663**	0.000	0.340	0.497	Supported
H2	CSR -> SI -> HVI	0.118	0.030	3.961**	0.000	0.065	0.178	Supported
H3	CSR -> BA -> HVI	0.040	0.015	2.611**	0.005	0.015	0.074	Supported

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , BC=Bias Corrected, UL=Upper Level, LL=Lower Level

Table 6: Determination of Coefficient ( $R^2$ ), Effect size ( $f^2$ ), and Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ )

	Determination Coefficient $R^2$	Predictive Relevance $Q^2$	Effect Size ( $f^2$ )		
			HVI	BA	SI
BA	0.054	0.038	0.035 (Small)		
HVI	0.307	0.236			
SI	0.174	0.136	0.081 (Small)		
CSR			0.083 (Small)	0.057 (Small)	0.211 (Medium)

Note:  $f^2$  score interpretation (0.35 large effect size, 0.15 medium effect size, 0.02 small effect size,  $< 0.02$  trivial effect size). BA = Brand Awareness, HVI = Hypermarket Visit Intention, SI = Store Image, CSR = Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility.

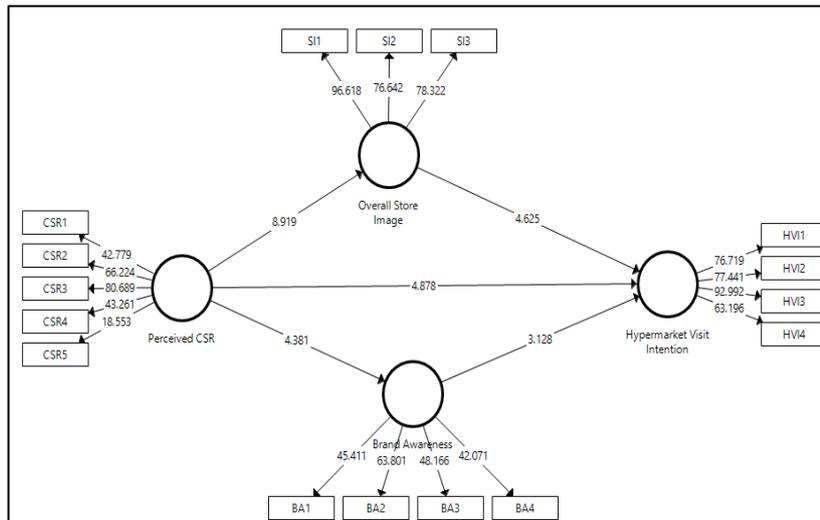


Figure 1 Structural Model

## DISCUSSION

The study investigates the influence of CSR in a retail context. The results show that a hypermarket retailer that engages in socially responsible ways may enhance the image consumers hold of its stores and their awareness of its brand. Subsequently, this image and brand awareness influence consumer intentions to visit the retailer, which means that a retailer's seeming level of commitment in CSR attempts motivates a process that drives consumers to judge the store in terms of image and brand when deciding to visit. Indeed, this study provides support for PKM, which found that overall store image and brand awareness mediate perceived CSR image and consumers' hypermarket visit intention.

This study provides a thorough model that comprises perceived CSR and other fundamental constructs like the overall store image and brand awareness to advance our understanding of how the perceived hypermarket's socially responsible methods relate to consumer behaviour effects in terms of visit intention to the hypermarket. This study also examines the mediating effect of overall store image and brand awareness in the relationship between perceived CSR and consumer hypermarket visit intention. Likewise, the intent of the study is to explore whether the perception of consumer towards the retailer's CSR will direct to an increase in consumer visits to the retailer when there are good overall store image and brand awareness.

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, earlier studies on CSR have concentrated on its effect in areas such as international expansion (Khojastehpour, 2015), corporate political activity (Horiguchi et al., 2018), developed countries' multinationals in emerging markets (Varela et al., 2015) and potential benefit gain by firms in Australia (Galbreath, 2010). Moreover, previous studies on CSR have focused on its impact in the context of other stakeholders such as managerial (Kusuma, Sholihin and Agritansia; 2018), operational (Shahabuddin et al., 2018) and corporation or institutional (Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2017; Yang et al., 2017). However, the existing literature has largely ignored the context of retailing in Malaysian consumers. In particular, this study assesses whether consumer perceptions of CSR initiatives will increase consumer visits to hypermarket retailers, thereby focusing on the extensive gap in the literature in this area.

Second, this study also contributes to the literature by delving into the mediating role of overall store image and brand awareness in establishing consumer intentions to visit the hypermarket. Third, this study applies the persuasion knowledge model (PKM) in the extent of CSR, store image, and brand awareness in the context of hypermarket retailing, and further contributes to these approaches. Findings from this study are significant for management and marketing researchers as well as retail practitioners. Addressing the research questions will shed light on the possible outcomes of demonstrating CSR across the retail context in Malaysia.

### Theoretical Implications

As businesses become more challenging and stakeholders' demands grow more complex, the call for corporate transparency and social responsibility grows ever louder. Hence, retailers have to devote more resources to a

variety of social initiatives to maintain a positive corporate reputation and business sustainability (Du et al., 2010; Saeidi et al., 2015). CSR enacts a crucial role in a firm's marketing strategy as it addresses consumers' expectations and perceptions, which eventually translate to higher favourable behaviour such as intention to purchase, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (Park et al., 2017). Former studies have surveyed the impact of perceived CSR on a range of fields, but the function of perceived CSR on consumer behavioural outcomes in the setting of hypermarket visit intention in Malaysia has caught little research interest (Hong et al., 2019). Hence, this study investigates the impact of perceived CSR image on consumers' behavioural responses – specifically, consumer hypermarket visit intention – through heightened store image and brand awareness.

The findings reveal that the discernments of consumer's CSR image have a positive influence on consumer visitation to a retailer. The results further demonstrate that favourable consumer perceptions of hypermarkets' socially responsible activities translate into improved store image and brand awareness, and subsequently lead consumers to increase their visits to the hypermarket. This study supplements prevailing research on CSR by underlining that retailers should involve themselves in CSR activities to build a favourable CSR image and stimulate a socially responsible appearance and approaches in responding to consumer's needs and expectations (Maignan and Farrell, 2004; Hajjat, 2003).

This study also delivers empirical support for the existence of a relationship between perceived CSR and consumer hypermarket visit intention in accordance with the PKM model: consumers evaluate the hypermarket's CSR image based on their prior experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of the hypermarket before portraying positive behavioural intention towards it (e.g., visit intention). Therefore, hypermarkets that present a favourable CSR image are more likely to achieve increased visits. These verdicts validate the results of prior studies that tested the relation between CSR image and positive consumer behavioural outcomes (Deng and Xu, 2015; Hong et al., 2017; Rahim et al., 2011; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

In addition, this study adds to the literature on store image and hypermarket visit intention. The findings of this study confirmed studies that have proposed a linkage between perceived CSR image and favourable attitudes towards a store (Lii and Lee, 2012; Zhu et al., 2017) and others showing a favourable overall store image will lead to positive behavioural intention from consumers (Wu et al., 2011; Bao et al., 2011). Based on the PKM, consumers assess the information they receive from a hypermarket and make inferences about the hypermarket's overall image, which then sparks consumer visit intention to the hypermarket. Such claim is constant with Nezakati et al. (2014), who discovered that store image has a positive effect on patronage behaviour in Malaysian hypermarkets.

The perceived CSR image of a retailer will not improve a consumer's visit intention to the retailer unless it enhances store image. The results of this study put forward that a hypermarket's commitment in socially responsible endeavours expedites visit intention in the event of strong overall store image as overall store image has been learned to mediate the association between perceived CSR and consumer hypermarket visit intention in this study. This finding is aligned with earlier studies that have examined the indirect effect of store image on intention (Chien et al., 2014; Hameed, 2013). In other words, if consumers perceive the hypermarket to be socially responsible, through strong overall store image, consumers' hypermarket visit intention can be established.

Moreover, this study confirms that brand awareness leads to favourable consumer behavioural intention (Shabbir et al., 2010; Yuan and Jang, 2008; Saleem et al., 2015) and that CSR improves brand awareness (Servaes and Tamayo, 2013; Tian et al., 2011; Mattered et al., 2012). According to the PKM, consumers judge the communication they receive from the hypermarket's CSR initiatives and make implications about the hypermarket's brand that may generate positive impressions or associations of the hypermarket (i.e. improved brand awareness), which then in turn will affect consumers' hypermarket visit intention. It is possible to achieve high brand awareness through strong CSR activities and thus achieve high hypermarket visit intention. This is coherent with Radder and Huang (2008) which revealed that brand awareness can significantly affect consumer purchasing decisions and loyalty to the brand.

This present study implies that a retailer's CSR engagement may accelerate intentions to visit the retailer if CSR is publicised to the consumers. This study has added to the knowledge of brand awareness, with the findings revealing that brand awareness mediates the link between perceived CSR image and consumer's hypermarket visit intention. In other words, if consumers perceive the hypermarket's CSR initiatives positively and talk about it to others, brand awareness will be enhanced, and this will lead to higher visit intention. This is

in accordance with prior studies that have observed a mediation effect of brand awareness on intention (Shahin Sharifi, 2014; Shabbir et al., 2010).

### **Managerial Implications**

There are several suggestions for retailing management teams and practitioners in Malaysia. First, as it was uncovered that perceived CSR has a positive significant relationship with hypermarket visit intention, hypermarkets should participate in CSR programmes that are genuine and visible to consumers. For instance, they could engage in more wide-ranging CSR programmes targeting various salient stakeholders, like consumers, employees, and the local community. For example, CSR for the local community could be accomplished by giving out basic necessities to homeless people, orphanages, or care homes, or by organising occasional cleaning activities at parks frequented by local residents. Furthermore, hypermarkets could improve their CSR image by communicating their CSR initiatives through the company's website or by displaying videos or photographs on how the company's CSR programmes have enriched the society.

This study also found that overall store image mediates between perceived CSR and hypermarket visit intention. Besides enhancing store image through CSR activities, other aspects of store image should also be managed carefully. A substantial number of studies have ascertained that improving elements such as quality of the product, store ambience, pricing, service and facility convenience, advertising, and more are essential for building a favourable store image (Koo and Kang, 2004; Kim and Jin, 2001; Belwal and Belwal, 2014; Al-Ali et al., 2015). Thus, these store image factors should constantly be improved by retailers. For example, retailers can benefit from offering a wider range of product categories by engaging a broader supplier base that produces high-quality products. Abdul et al. (2017) asserted that suppliers of food and beverage tend to emphasise on product aesthetics, product performance and food features when supplying their goods to hypermarkets. In addition, retailing management can ensure there are wide aisles between in-store display racks, arrange products neatly according to the colour of the packaging, and create vertical or horizontal blocks to attract attention.

Finally, the discoveries of this study have revealed that brand awareness mediates between perceived CSR and hypermarket visit intention. Besides improving brand awareness through CSR activities, brand awareness can be strengthened via sales promotions, advertising, and other marketing activities (Chi et al., 2009). For instance, hypermarkets may advertise their brands through social media or online advertising. Social media is a significant platform and if utilised properly, it can bring progressive economic impact to a brand (Hutter et al., 2013). With consumers becoming more web-savvy than ever, using videos and short stories as forms of advertising can encourage consumers to click through the hypermarket's website and inspire consumers to visit it. Moreover, hypermarkets can publicise their brands through newspaper advertisements (i.e., coupon redemption), outdoor advertisements (i.e., billboards, travelling advertisements on cabs or buses), CSR programmes such as sponsoring a marathon that raises funds for chronic diseases, and posters placed in malls, stores, and streets (i.e., about discounted items or contests).

### **Limitations and Future Research Suggestions**

This study has shortcomings that could lead to prospective research opportunities. First, this study was restricted to four constructs only. To achieve a broader understanding of hypermarket visit intention in Malaysia, future studies could include other factors or variables (e.g., perceived quality, brand image, brand loyalty; CSR themes) that might explain why people visit particular hypermarkets (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2017; Saleem et al., 2015; Chapardar and Khanlari, 2011). Second, this study merely assessed consumers' overall perceptions of store image. Other store image attributes may possibly be incorporated to enhance the model and gain more valuable interpretations of hypermarket visitation in Malaysia. Among these attributes are product variability, service quality, convenience of facility, promotion, advertising, and store atmosphere (Koo and Kang, 2004; Al-Ali et al., 2015).

Thirdly, the results of this study may present a potential halo effect as respondents may assess CSR image as a good one to remain consistent with their choice of store even though they may not have sufficient information about the CSR of the store. Hence, future study could emphasise the kind of CSR activities that the store is involved in. Finally, future research could conduct similar studies on other retail formats such as department stores, convenience stores, or speciality stores, as this study only focuses on hypermarkets, which limits the generalisability of the results to different retail formats in Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

CSR studies seem to overlook the indirect impact of CSR on improving visits to retailers through enhancing store image and brand awareness. Highlighting the direct impact of CSR on outcomes (visit intention) alone undermines CSR's overall ability to enhance visit intention. The PKM provides a theoretical grounding for CSR's direct and indirect impact on hypermarket visit. When CSR is implemented by a retailer, it may excite the relevant stakeholders, who may spread or share the CSR news via social media. This can reinforce brand awareness and make the retail brand a top choice to visit. The PKM explains how CSR activities are captured as persuasion knowledge, which is then used by consumers to structure an overall store image of the retailer. That is, if CSR activities are perceived favourably, the overall store image will be enhanced, and this increases visits to the retailer. Ultimately, CSR does matter to retailers in attracting patrons to the store.

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