

THE SALIENCE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO SYMBOLIC
CONSUMER VALUE AND BRAND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

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♪*Tangerine trees and marmalade skies*♪ – I wish I could say it was all that. But alas that was not to be. In which case I must thank Almighty Allah for granting me the best of wives – Nisha Hussain. This work would not have materialised if not for her fortitude. Naturally then, I dedicate this to her. For it is as much hers, as it is mine.

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ABSTRACT

Firms engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and go to great lengths to showcase it to their consumers. Some firms even leverage on their CSR as a key facet of their business strategy. Although consumers have been reported to articulate positive preferences for CSR, CSR related consumer outcomes in the market remain poor in general. The primary reason for it is reported to be consumers' perceived lack of value from CSR. In view of that problem, this study set out to examine consumers' perception of value from CSR. To that end, a mixed methods embedded research design was adopted. Drawing from the Self-theory, this study proposed a conceptual model that operationalised the perception of symbolic value from CSR to consumers and subsequently the outcomes therefrom. To validate the measurements and to assess the structural fit of the model, this study adopted the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) statistical technique. In addition, this study sought to further understand the meaning of the symbolic value that consumers experienced from CSR by conducting in-depth interviews. The findings validate this study's proposed operationalisation of symbolic value from CSR to consumers. It was found that symbolic value perception was bifurcated on two levels of abstraction, which were the product and the firm, that lead to strong and enduring relationships between consumers and brands. This study also found that the meaning from the symbolic value that consumers experienced from CSR is profound, as it relates to an individual's innate need for enhancement of his/her self-concept. The consumers were found to experience such meaning under six conditions related to CSR implementation. Namely when it is promoted, strategic, consistent, tangible, transparent, and innovative. Together, these findings contribute theoretically to the research on the dynamics of consumer value creation from CSR. In addition, it enables researchers to understand the meaning that consumers ascribe to the symbolic value that they perceive from CSR. These findings are also expected to assist firms in reformulating their marketing and consumer value delivery strategies towards generating better CSR related consumer outcomes in the market.

ABSTRAK

Firma-firma melaksanakan tanggungjawab sosial korporat (CSR) dan bersungguh-sungguh untuk menarik perhatian para pengguna mereka terhadapnya. Sebilangan firma-firma juga menjadikan CSR sebagai komponen penting dalam strategi perniagaan mereka. Walaupun para pengguna menyuarakan pendapat yang positif terhadap CSR, namun reaksi sebenar mereka terhadapnya di pasaran adalah kurang menggalakkan. Sebab utama yang dilaporkan adalah kekurangan persepsi nilai daripada CSR pada kaca mata para pengguna. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini mengkaji persepsi nilai pengguna daripada CSR, dengan menggunakan kaedah kajiselidik campuran. Berdasarkan *Self-theory*, kajian ini mencadangkan sebuah model yang mengoperasikan persepsi nilai simbolik daripada CSR kepada para pengguna dan mengusulkan hasil daripadanya. Kaedah statistik *Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling* (PLS-SEM) telah digunakan untuk mengukur dan mengesahkan model tersebut. Selain daripada itu, kajian ini cuba untuk memahami maksud nilai simbolik yang dialami dengan menggunakan kaedah temubual yang mendalam. Hasil penemuan kajian ini telah mengesahkan pengoperasian nilai simbolik daripada CSR kepada para pengguna sepertimana yang diusulkan. Adalah didapati bahawa persepsi nilai simbolik daripada CSR terbahagi kepada dua peringkat penelitian, iaitu pada peringkat produk dan firma, yang mana menjurus kepada hubungan yang kukuh dan lebih bertahan di antara para pengguna dan jenama-jenama. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa maksud nilai simbolik yang diterima oleh para pengguna daripada CSR adalah berkaitan keperluan semulajadi mereka untuk menambahbaik sahsiah diri. Para pengguna didapati mengalami maksud tersebut di bawah enam keadaan yang bersangkutan dengan CSR. Iaitu, apabila ianya dipromosikan, strategik, konsisten, nyata, telus, dan berinovatif. Secara keseluruhannya, penemuan kajian ini menyumbang secara teori kepada kajian berkenaan dinamik persepsi nilai pengguna daripada CSR. Di samping itu, ianya membolehkan para pengkaji untuk lebih memahami maksud tersirat di sebalik nilai simbolik yang diterima oleh para pengguna daripada CSR. Penemuan-penemuan kajian ini juga mampu membantu firma-firma untuk meformulasikan strategi pemasaran serta penyampaian nilai mereka ke arah mencapai sambutan pengguna yang lebih baik di pasaran.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	xiv
	LIST OF FIGURES	xvii
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xix
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xx
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Background of the Study	1
	1.2.1 Overview	1
	1.2.2 CSR's Implications on Firm's Economic Performance	2
	1.2.3 CSR and Stakeholder Outcomes	3

1.2.4	CSR and Consumers	4
1.2.5	Addressing the Gap in the Literature	6
1.3	Significance of Malaysia as Locale of Study	7
1.3.1	Vision 2020	8
1.3.2	Regulatory Compliance	9
1.3.3	CSR Research in Malaysia	9
1.4	Problem Statement	10
1.5	Purpose of Study	12
1.6	Significance of this Study	12
1.7	Organisation of the Thesis	14
1.8	Definition of Key Operational Terms	16
1.9	Scope and Delimitations of Study	17
1.10	Summary	18
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	19
2.1	Introduction	19
2.2	Corporate Social Responsibility	19
2.2.1	Historical Overview	20
2.2.2	CSR in Malaysia	21
2.2.3	Concept and Definition	25
2.2.4	CSR Theories	30
2.2.5	Consumers' Perception of CSR	34
2.3	Consumer Value	36
2.3.1	Concept of Consumer Value	37
2.3.2	Definition of Consumer Value	37

2.3.3	Consumer Value Typology	41
2.3.4	Type of Consumer Value from CSR	43
2.4	Self-Concept and Symbolic Value	46
2.4.1	Historical Overview	46
2.4.2	The Consumer ‘Self-Theory’	47
2.4.3	Self-concept	48
2.4.4	Symbolism in the Marketplace	50
2.4.5	Symbolism and Consumer Behaviour	52
2.4.6	Research on Symbolic Value	53
2.4.7	Consumer Culture Theory	55
2.5	CSR Consumer Interaction	57
2.5.1	Self-image Congruity	59
2.5.2	Consumer-company Identification	60
2.6	Consumer-brand Relationships	62
2.6.1	Definition of a Brand	62
2.6.2	Brand Relationship Theory	63
2.6.3	Symbolism in Brands	66
2.7	Literature Map	67
2.8	Conceptual Model	70
2.9	Hypotheses Development	75
2.10	Summary	82
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	83
3.1	Introduction	83
3.2	Research Method	83

3.2.1	Definition of Mixed Methods Research	83
3.2.2	Justifications for Mixed Methods Research	86
3.2.3	Advantages of Mixed Methods Research	87
3.3	Mixed Methods Research Paradigm	89
3.4	Mixed Methods Research Design	90
3.4.1	Factors in Selecting Research Design	90
3.4.2	Mixed Methods Embedded Research Design	92
3.5	Operational Framework	94
3.6	Sampling	96
3.6.1	Sampling Method	97
3.6.2	Sample Size	97
	3.6.2.1 Sample Size for Quantitative Analysis	98
	3.6.2.2 Sample Size for Qualitative Analysis	99
3.7	Research Instrumentation	100
3.7.1	Research Instrumentation for Quantitative Data	100
	3.7.1.1 Advantages of Vignette-based Questionnaire	100
	3.7.1.2 Survey Questionnaire	102
3.7.2	Research Instrumentation for Qualitative Data	108
	3.7.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews	109
3.8	Pre-testing	113
3.8.1	Pre-testing of Quantitative Instrument	113

3.8.2	Pre-testing of Qualitative Instrument	115
3.9	Data Analysis Procedures	116
3.9.1	Quantitative Data Analysis	116
3.9.1.1	Structural Equation Modelling	116
3.9.1.2	PLS-SEM Construct Identification	121
3.9.1.3	Evaluating PLS-SEM path model	124
3.9.2	Qualitative Data Analysis	129
3.10	Assumptions and Ethical Issues	136
3.11	Summary	137
4	QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	138
4.1	Introduction	138
4.2	Descriptive Statistics	138
4.3	Construct Verification	141
4.3.1	Item Generation	142
4.3.2	Content Validity Ratio	145
4.3.3	Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)	146
4.4	Analysis of Proposed Conceptual Model	150
4.4.1	Assessment of Measurement Model	150
4.4.1.1	Internal Consistency Reliability	150
4.4.1.2	Indicator Reliability	152
4.4.1.3	Convergent Validity	152
4.4.1.4	Discriminant Validity	153
4.4.2	Assessment of Structural Model	154

4.4.2.1	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	154
4.4.2.2	Effect size (F^2)	156
4.4.2.3	Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	158
4.4.2.4	Path Coefficients	158
4.5	Hypotheses Testing	159
4.5.1	Mediation Analysis	160
4.6	Discussion of the Quantitative Findings	163
4.7	Summary	172
5	QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	173
5.1	Introduction	173
5.2	Sample Frame	173
5.3	Reliability and Validity	175
5.4	The Qualitative Analysis	179
5.4.1	Preliminary	179
5.4.2	Coding	180
5.5	Qualitative Data Display and Findings	181
5.5.1	Within-case Reports	182
5.5.2	Cross-case Analysis and Findings	182
5.5.2.1	Overview	183
5.5.2.2	Corporate Social Responsibility	184
5.5.2.3	The Basis for Meaning from CSR	188
5.6	Research Question No. 12	192
5.7	Research Question No. 13	205

5.8	Summary	240
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	242
6.1	Introduction	242
6.2	Summary of Study	242
6.3	Summary of Analysis and Findings	244
6.3.1	Summary of Quantitative Analysis and Findings	245
6.3.2	Summary of Revised Analysis and Findings	247
6.4	Discussion of Research Questions	257
6.5	Discussion of Mixed Findings	265
6.6	Theoretical Implications	271
6.7	Practical Insights	273
6.8	Limitations	275
6.9	Future Research	276
	REFERENCES	279
	Appendices A-F	316 - 373

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Consumer-related outcomes to CSR	5
2.1	CSR timeline in Malaysia	22
2.2	Broad categories of CSR	29
2.3	Normative class CSR theories	31
2.4	Instrumental class CSR theories	32
2.5	Multi-dimensional definitions of consumer value	40
2.6	Consumer value typology	42
2.7	Value aspects of symbolic value in consumer behaviour research	55
2.8	Identity related outcomes from products	57
2.9	The facets of Brand Relationship Quality	65
2.10	Research Questions, Objectives and Hypotheses	72
3.1	The core characteristics of a mixed methods research	85
3.2	Justifications for Mixed Methods Research	88
3.3	Major Mixed Methods Design Types	93
3.4	Advantages of Vignette-based studies	101
3.5	Research Constructs, Construct Dimensions And Question Statements	104
3.6	Interview Guide	111

3.7	Checklist to determine respondents' comprehension	114
3.8	Four most frequent reasons for using PLS-SEM	118
3.9	Guidelines for preparing PLS Path Model	120
3.10	Identification of constructs in proposed Conceptual Model	123
4.1	Gender of respondents	139
4.2	Age of respondents	139
4.3	Ethnicity of respondents	140
4.4	Academic qualification of respondents	140
4.5	Respondents' occupation	140
4.6	Respondents' monthly household income	141
4.7	Residential location of respondents	141
4.8	Items generated as per SCV Value Aspects	144
4.9	KMO and Bartlett's test results	147
4.10	Principal Component Analysis	148
4.11	Results of the Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation	149
4.12	Internal Consistency Reliability	152
4.13	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	153
4.14	Discriminant Validity	153
4.15	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	156
4.16	R2 values with exogenous constructs omitted	157
4.17	Effect size of R^2 (F^2)	157
4.18	Stone-Geiger's Q^2 values	158
4.19	Path Coefficients	159
4.20	Mediation results	162

4.21	Type of mediation (VAF)	162
4.22	Summary of findings	166
5.1	Profile of participants to qualitative study	174
5.2	Verification strategies in qualitative research	177
5.3	Theme PERSONAL LIMITATIONS	191
5.4	Themes for Research Question No.12	193
5.5	Theme RESPONSIBILITY	197
5.6	Theme CONTRIBUTION	199
5.7	Theme CONTENTMENT	201
5.8	Theme ATONEMENT	202
5.9	Theme SELF-ACTUALISATION	204
5.10	Themes for Research Question No.13	213
5.10	Theme PROMOTIONS	220
5.11	Theme STRATEGIC	227
5.12	Theme CONSISTENCY	231
5.13	Theme TANGIBLE OUTCOMES	235
5.14	Theme TRANSPARENCY	236
5.15	Theme INNOVATION	240
6.1	Summary of quantitative results	246
6.2	Path Coefficients for Revised Model	249
6.3	Mediation Results for Revised Model	251
6.4	Type of Mediation for Revised Model	251
6.5	Summary of results for Revised Model	254

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Organisation of this thesis	15
2.1	Consumers' perceptions of CSR (CP-CSR)	36
2.2	Literature Map	67
3.1	Typology of mixed methods research	91
3.2	Operational framework	95
3.3	Sample size recommendation for PLS-SEM	99
3.4	Structural model assessment procedure	126
3.5	Mediation analysis procedures in PLS-SEM	128
3.6	Components of qualitative data analysis	130
4.1	Value aspects of Symbolic Consumer Value	143
4.2	PERVAL value typology and representative items	144
4.3	The standardised estimates and standardised loadings of the measurement model	151
4.4	Path analysis of the structural model	155
4.5	R ² values on the structural model	156
4.6	Mediation test (standardised estimates)	163
4.7	Beta for indirect effect	164
5.1	Causal network of meanings from CSR	194

5.2	Legitimacy framework	212
6.1	Revised Conceptual Model	247
6.2	Revised Mediation Test (Standardised Estimates)	252
6.3	Revised Beta for Indirect Effect	253
6.4	Summary of Qualitative Results	256
6.5	Visualisation of Mixed Findings	269

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BRQ	-	Brand relationship quality
CCI	-	Consumer-company identification
CCT	-	Consumer Culture Theory
CP-CSR	-	Consumers' perceptions of CSR
CrM	-	Cause-related Marketing
CSR	-	Corporate Social Responsibility
GLC	-	Government-linked company
NGO	-	Non-governmental organisation
PLC	-	Public-listed company
SCV	-	Symbolic consumer value
SEM	-	Structural Equation Modelling
SIC	-	Self-image congruity
WBCSD	-	World Business Council for Sustainable Development

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Survey questionnaire	316
B	Interview instrument	325
C	Sample of transcribed interview	326
D	Analytical Memo for Participant #6	357
E	Subject matter rating document	359
F	Content Validity Ratio (CVR) report	367
G	Indicator Reliability	370
H	Within-case Report	373

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of this study, introduces the research domain and outlines the path of the study to its conclusion. It begins with a brief discussion on the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and a firm's economic performance. Particularly in relation to the influence of consumer value in generating positive market outcomes. The focus of the research and the problem statement are discussed. Followed by the proposed conceptual model, research questions and hypotheses. The significance of this study, in the Malaysian context and elsewhere, is highlighted as well. This chapter closes with the general outline of this study, definition of key terms and finally, scope and delimitations of this study.

1.2 Background of the Study

1.2.1 Overview

Initially derided as a socialist movement (Friedman 1970), CSR is now common practice in developed as well as developing nations (Carroll and Shabana 2010). Several reasons have been attributed for its growth. Some scholars point to CSR as a means for corporate redemption, following the various scandals in the west (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006; Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009). Others believe it

coincides with the advent of globalisation that has extended the impact of firms beyond economic to social and environmental concerns as well (Logsdon and Wood, 2002; Matten, Crane and Chapple, 2003). Critics of CSR on the other hand, blame it on the fall of communism and the rise of social advocacy groups (Wolf, 2004; Jensen, 2010). Meanwhile in developing countries such as Malaysia, it has been mostly the case of mimicking the west (Banerjee, 2008; Amran et al., 2013). In any case, as firms increasingly invest financial as well as non-financial resources into their CSR, the strategic nature of CSR turns ever more significant. A key aspect of that is the consumer value that is created from their CSR programmes (Woodruff, 1997). In view of that, this study sets out to examine and understand how CSR creates value for consumers.

1.2.2 CSR's Implications on Firm's Economic Performance

Understandably, this burgeoning interest in CSR has spurred a great deal of scholarly research pertaining to its implications. In particular, the extent to which firms can 'do well by doing good' (Falck and Heblich, 2007). To 'do well', from a firm's perspective, would imply gaining economic advantage. After all, a firm is an enterprise set up for making profit (Schmitz and Schrader, 2013). So while it may appear admirable, noble even, that a firm should engage in social and environmental causes, the primary objective of a firm remains economic. Nonetheless there is no denying that a firm is accountable for its negative externalities (McWilliams and Siegel, 2011). Regardless whether it impacts a firm's social or environmental milieu, or both. Not least because these externalities have the potential to be charged back to the firm; eventually resulting in negative economic outcomes (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz, 2001). Issues such as pollution and poor working conditions for instance, have been known to result in fines, consumer boycotts and bad publicity for a firm. CSR therefore provides the avenue for a firm to manage and minimise the undesired consequences of its operations (Okoye, 2009). But in so being, it must be guided by economic considerations; just as its other strategic initiatives and programmes (Porter and Kramer, 2006; Lev, 2011). This principle represents the

underlying basis of this study throughout, the justifications of which are discussed in Chapter 2.

CSR can take a heavy toll on a firm's financial resources (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). Take for instance Khazanah Nasional Berhad – Malaysia's sovereign fund company. It is reported to have spent over Ringgit Malaysia 300 million on CSR, in a period of six years (The Edge, 2014). That is a huge sum of money by any measure. Which perhaps, as some might suggest, could have been put to better use by investing in other initiatives that are proven strategic (Friedman, 1970; Wolf, 2004). As despite all the rhetoric about CSR, evidence of its business case from a financial perspective remains equivocal (Porter and Kramer, 2006). Results from scholarly literature too appear to be mixed, and as such have not been helpful in resolving this matter. For example, several studies found a positive link between CSR and the financial performance of a firm (Tsoutsoura, 2004; Eccles, Ioannou and Serafeim 2011), while others could not (Griffin and Mahon, 1997; Margolis and Walsh, 2003). Similarly in Malaysia, a study by Ramasamy, Hung and Yeung (2007) to determine if firms with high CSR engagement outperformed firms with low CSR engagement, found the results to be inconclusive as well.

1.2.3 CSR and Stakeholder Outcomes

Since evidence from a strictly financial perspective remains elusive, there have been suggestions that CSR's business case can be established in an oblique manner instead (Kurucz, Colbert and Wheeler, 2008; Medarevic, 2012). That is, by seeking out non-financial positive outcomes from CSR, that in turn contribute to a firm's economic value. Outcomes such as increased market share, increased brand equity and brand loyalty for example, that have been empirically proven in the past to positively influence the economic value of a firm (Perinni et al., 2009). Or alternatively, outcomes that reduce firm risk and/or operational costs, or minimise turnover, and by that increase a firm's economic value as well (Tsoutsoura, 2004). Either way, these outcomes do not materialise on their own. Rather, they are the result of CSR's impact on the various stakeholders of a firm; namely shareholders and investors, consumers, employees, suppliers, and in some cases, the environment

and the community. Each group has the potential to affect the economic value of a firm distinctly (Peñaloza and Mish, 2011). Thus, Pelozo and Papania (2008) suggest that a firm's economic performance is expected to improve by way of stakeholder engagement. That is, when a firm responds to issues of concern among its salient stakeholders. In this regard, CSR has been identified as one such avenue (Greenwood, 2007; Dawkins and Lewis, 2003; Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun, 2012;)

In general, stakeholders have been found to respond favourably to CSR. Scholarly studies report various outcomes that include, creating positive impressions on prospective employees (Turban and Greening 1997); improving supplier relations (Anselmsson and Johansson, 2007); increasing interpersonal cooperation between employees (Bartel 2001); creating environmental protection (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001); improving community relations (Marin and Ruiz, 2007) and attracting potential investors (Bhattacharya and Luo, 2009). Even in Malaysia, CSR is reported to raise the corporate reputation of a firm amongst its stakeholders (Abdullah and Abdul Aziz, 2013). These reported outcomes lend credence to CSR's potential in boosting a firm's economic performance by way of stakeholder engagement (Medarevic, 2012; Freeman and Moutchnik, 2013).

1.2.4 CSR and Consumers

Of the many stakeholders, the influence of consumers on a firm cannot be overstated (Khalifa, 2004). As "the lifeblood of the firm" (Freeman, 2001: p.43), consumers have the potential to affect the competitive positioning of a firm, not to mention, its economic performance (Naumann, 1995; Woodruff, 1997; Woodall, 2003). For some time now, consumers have been increasingly demanding that firms demonstrate strong commitments to social and environmental causes. In a recent worldwide market survey for instance, 83% of the respondents insisted that firms must engage in CSR (MSLGroup, 2014). Consumers have even singled out CSR as one of the key determinants for global brand preference (Holt, Quelch and Taylor, 2004). Not surprisingly, consumers are reported to have expressed positive

outcomes to CSR, in various ways. Several of these outcomes are presented in Table 1.1 below.

With such positive outcomes being reported, one would not be wrong to casually surmise that consumers are flocking to buy products from firms that engage in CSR. And that as a result, firms with high CSR engagement are reaping the financial returns thereof. But that has not been the case.

Table 1.1: Consumer-related outcomes to CSR

<i>Expressed outcomes</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Improved product evaluations	Brown and Dacin (1997)
Influence purchase intentions	Sen and Bhattacharya (2001)
Improve consumer choices	Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor (2000)
Increase consumer-company identification	Bhattacharya and Sen (2003); Ahearne, Bhattacharya, Gruen (2005)
Improve consumer satisfaction	Luo and Bhattacharya (2006)
Improve consumer attitudes and beliefs	Becker-Olsen and Hill (2005); Jones III, Cole and Cox (2012)
Improve consumer-employee relations	Korschun, Bhattacharya and Swain (2011)

Source: Pelozo and Shang, 2011

For in spite of all the reported outcomes from consumers, evidence from the real world market points to the contrary. Overall, the actual response from consumers has remained poor and firms with high CSR engagement have not experienced a

surge in their sales (Devinney, 2009; Claudy, Peterson and O'Driscoll, 2012; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch and Gruber, 2011). This gap, between consumers' expressed outcomes to CSR and their actual response in the marketplace, has baffled scholars for some time now. Various studies have been carried out to get to the bottom of it, following which several reasons were identified. These include poor access to such products and consumers' lack of awareness (Young et al., 2010; Servaes and Tamayo, 2013). However, across industries and product categories, a recurring reason is reported to be consumers' inability to perceive value from CSR (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010; Devinney, 2009; Eckhardt, Belk, and Devinney, 2010; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch and Gruber, 2011). A leading market survey on consumers points to the same reason as well (Cone Communications, 2013).

Nevertheless, CSR is not without its success stories. There are real world examples where firms have distinguished themselves from their competition by way of CSR engagement (Porter and Kramer, 2006). The Body Shop, Ben & Jerry's and Patagonia are three such examples. These firms rely extensively on CSR and CSR-related initiatives to draw their consumers' attention, and consequently, enjoy a loyal consumer following in the market (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004). Likewise, the environment-friendly hybrid engine vehicles, have proven to be a hit with consumers as well. Just in the year 2013 alone, their sales had increased over 230% from the previous year (Shahan, 2014). Although these examples may be exceptions to the general situation concerning CSR and consumers, they underscore an elementary point in this study. That consumers not being able to *perceive* value from CSR, is not by any means indicative that CSR is of no value to consumers.

1.2.5 Addressing the Gap in the Literature

Given the situation above, Pelozo and Shang have called for researchers to examine how CSR creates value for consumers (2011: p.130). This study attempts to take up their call. First however, the type of value must be determined. For consumers may perceive value in several forms (Kainth and Verma, 2011). Therefore

in advancing the type of consumer value from CSR, this study is mindful in adopting consumers' perspective of what constitutes value. Since it is consumers' inability to perceive value from CSR that serves as the foundation to this study. This is critical, as consumers and firms do not always perceive value in the same manner (Priem, 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). A firm for example, may value CSR for reputation management, operational efficiency and risk management (Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun, 2011). From the perspective of consumers on the other hand, CSR is said to be a psychosocial construct (D'Aprile and Talò, 2013; Bhattacharya, Korschun and Sen, 2009). In so being, the value that a consumer perceives from CSR relates to the preservation and enhancement of his or her self-concept (Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschun, 2006; Peñaloza and Mish, 2011; Loureiro, Sardinha and Reijnders, 2012). This form of consumer value is classified as symbolic (Smith and Colgate, 2007).

To that end, this study advances the Consumer Identity Enhancement (CIE) model as its quantitative research model. Essentially, CIE is predicated on the premise that consumers leverage on the symbolic value from their consumption to enhance their self-concepts, which results in a more robust market behaviour on their part (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Sirgy, 1980; Solomon, 1983; Belk, 1988; Santos et al., 2009; Malär et al., 2011). The concept is drawn from inter-disciplinary fields of research; representing insights from marketing, consumer behaviour, behavioural psychology and strategic management. Its theoretical basis is discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this study. Essentially, CIE articulates the process by which consumers perceive symbolic value from CSR, and its influence on consumers in forging a strong bond with brands, that leads to their sustained market patronage. The dynamics of CIE are presented and explained later in Chapter 2.

1.3 Significance of Malaysia as Locale of Study

Addressing consumer value creation from CSR is equally important in Malaysia. For although it is a relatively new here (Sharma, 2013), CSR has been identified as being instrumental to the nation's progress and wellbeing. There are two reasons for that. The first is in view of Malaysia's Vision 2020 initiative (Amran and

Devi, 2007). While the second, which is related to the first, is by reason of regulatory compliance. These reasons, combined with a sustained effort from policy makers to encourage CSR, has spurred it on in Malaysia in this past decade (Ahmad and Saad, 2013).

1.3.1 Vision 2020

Introduced in 1991, Vision 2020 has since served as the nation's blueprint for development. It comprises a set of guidelines formulated to transform Malaysia into a developed nation by the year 2020. Essentially, Vision 2020 aims for the creation of a prosperous Malaysian society; one that is economically robust, as well as caring and equitable (Economic Planning Unit, 2014). Among its key initiatives is to create an export-oriented economy (Mohamad, 1991). Just as well, since the Malaysian domestic market with its 29.9 million population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013), is relatively small. Naturally, an export oriented economy would require Malaysian firms to expand their markets abroad. That would mean that Malaysian will face competition from multi-national firms and their established brands. To make a positive impact, their business strategies must reflect current trends in consumer markets. CSR is definitely one of them. As both scholarly studies and market based surveys report that consumers expect high CSR engagement from firms (Bonini, McKillop and Mendonca, 2007; Holt, Quelch and Taylor, 2004; Nielsen, 2012; Cone Communications, 2013).

Moreover, an export-oriented economy also requires Malaysian firms to source for funds for expansion and growth. Again CSR features prominently; this time in the form of Socially Responsible Investments (SRI). SRI has grown much in investing circles over the years, to the point that it is now considered mainstream (Sparkes and Cowton, 2004). It is closely associated with CSR, as it is based on how firms respond to social and environmental causes, alongside its economic objectives. Sparkes and Cowton (2004) further opined that SRI has become "an investment philosophy adopted by a growing proportion of large investment institutions". That – bearing in mind – was written over ten years ago. Today, it is reported that every US\$1 out of US\$9 invested is in the form of SRI and growing (Chamberlain, 2013).

Not surprisingly, Bursa Malaysia is looking to launch a SRI index of its own, to attract investments from all over the world (ABN, 2013).

1.3.2 Regulatory Compliance

In any case, CSR is now inevitable, either by reason of government policy or regulations. This applies to Government-linked companies (GLCs) as well as public listed firms in Malaysia. GLCs are firms in which the Malaysian government has a controlling stake (Putrajaya Committee on GLC High Performance, 2005). There are over a hundred such firms. As a group, GLCs have a substantial influence on Malaysia's overall economy, considering their combined value accounts for almost half of the market capitalisation of Bursa Malaysia (Esa and Ghazali, 2012). Besides, a number of GLCs, such as Petronas Berhad, Sime Darby Berhad and Gamuda Berhad, have extensive business operations all over the world.

In 2005, the Malaysian government launched a series of initiatives to accelerate the economic performance of GLCs. One such initiative was the 'Silver Book': a set of guidelines concerning CSR implementation for GLCs (Sharma, 2013). Basically, the Silver Book serves to institutionalise and embed CSR programmes and practices in GLCs' businesses, practically making CSR no longer just optional. The objective is to leverage on CSR as a strategic initiative that adds economic value to the firm, while enhancing the social and environmental landscape of the nation in the process. Viewed from a broader perspective, this initiative is actually a continuum of Vision 2020's overall objectives, which calls for an equitable form of development. Meanwhile since 2007, Bursa Malaysia requires all public-listed firms to report on their CSR activities, in accordance with its prescribed framework (Yam, 2012). This requirement indirectly makes CSR compulsory for public-listed firms, as without any CSR initiatives, there will be nothing for them to report.

1.3.3 CSR Research in Malaysia

With CSR no longer being an option for many firms, CSR practice in Malaysia has intensified. As a result, today, Malaysia is said to be one of the leading ASEAN nations in terms of CSR implementation (Ahmad and Saad, 2013). A handful of firms even rely extensively on CSR to draw consumers' attention. 'Faiza' for instance, is one such brand. Not coincidentally, this has generated a growing number of scholarly studies on CSR in the Malaysian context (Esa and Ghazali, 2012). With regards to CSR's influence on consumer behaviour, the findings are generally positive; and not unlike those reported from the international context. For example, CSR is reported to positively influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Nareeman and Hassan, 2013); and, increase consumers' perceptions of corporate reputation (Abdullah and Abdul Aziz, 2013). However, research on CSR and consumer value creation from a Malaysian perspective remains largely unexhausted.

In view of that, Malaysia serves as a good and potent locale to conduct this study. It is apparent from the above discussion that the nation's policy makers look to Malaysian firms as drivers of economic growth. To that end, CSR has been identified as a key strategic initiative to enhance firms' competitive advantage – evidenced by the various policies and regulations promoting it. In this regard, consumer value is critical, as it is a key source of competitive advantage (Naumann, 1995). More so, if Malaysian firms seek to create a compelling value proposition for their offerings to consumers in other, more developed markets. This study therefore is timely and apt, for its findings may assist Malaysian firms to reassess their CSR strategies, towards creating consumer value and improving market outcomes. In so doing, this study will also contribute to the nascent research area of CSR from a Malaysian context.

1.4 Problem Statement

CSR has a long history of scholarship, dating back to the 1930s (Carroll, 1999). During that time and since, CSR has been researched and reported to produce various positive stakeholder outcomes, in diverse fields of study. From a strategic management perspective, CSR is reported to confer increased levels of competitive

advantage to a firm (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; 2011; Kurucz, Colbert and Wheeler, 2008; Becchetti et al., 2012). Considering that consumer value is reported to be a major source of competitive advantage, understanding the dynamics of consumer value from CSR therefore, is of great consequence (Woodruff, 1997). Yet, and in spite of the extensive research in CSR, it still remains unclear how CSR creates value for consumers (Peloza and Shang, 2011). That is the theoretical gap that will be addressed by this study.

Thus far, scholars have suggested that in the case of CSR, the benefit to consumers is primarily psychological in nature. Accordingly, it is said that CSR provides consumers with the means for self-affirmation and expression of their values, beliefs and attitudes (Bhattacharya, Korschun, and Sen 2009; D'Aprile and Talò 2013; Marin and Ruiz 2007). In marketing and consumer behaviour literature, psychological benefit from consumption as is suggested by scholars in relation to CSR, is categorised as 'symbolic consumer value' (Hirschman 1981; Epp and Price 2008; Bhat and Reddy 1998; Aggarwal 2004). Smith and Colgate (2007, p.10) define symbolic consumer value as "the extent to which consumers attach or associate psychological meaning to a product". Therefore, in view of the theoretical gap, this study sets out to examine and understand how symbolic value from CSR is created for consumers.

The theoretical gap in turn, leads this study to examine and understand the practical gap in symbolic consumer value from CSR. For over a hundred years now, symbolic value has been identified to have a positive influence in consumer behaviour (Trigg 2001; Levy 1959; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Solomon 1983; Mick 1986; Ravasi et al., 2012). That however, has not been the case with CSR. Consumers' actual market response has been disproportionately poor compared to their expressed outcomes (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010; Claudy, Peterson and O'Driscoll, 2012; Jones III, Cole and Cox, 2012). The prominent reason is reported to be consumers' inability to perceive value from CSR (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010; Devinney, 2009; Eckhardt, Belk, and Devinney, 2010; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch and Gruber, 2011). Therefore, this study also sets out to examine and understand how consumers perceive value from CSR.

Finally, it concerns the research context of this study – specifically, Malaysia. Although there have been previous research reported concerning CSR in Malaysia, there is still very little understanding of how consumers in Malaysia perceive value from CSR. Let alone, how their perception of value from CSR influences their market response to CSR related initiatives. Understanding this aspect is equally important, since in the past decade, a number of regulations have been introduced by the Malaysian authorities with regard to CSR implementation. That leaves Malaysian firms little choice but to engage in CSR, which in consequence, calls for firms to have a better understanding of their consumers, in relation to CSR.

1.5 Purpose of Study

In light of the problem statement, the purpose of this study is to understand the dynamics of consumer value from CSR and its influence on consumers' market behaviour. Since a mixed method is applied in the course of the research and analyses to this study, this purpose is operationalised in a two-fold manner. In its quantitative research, this study empirically examines the relationships between the various constructs represented in the proposed CIE model. And in so doing, tests if the CIE model offers a valid framework in understanding consumer value from CSR and its influence on consumers' market behaviour. While in its qualitative research, the purpose is to identify what meaning consumers experience from CSR and subsequently understand how consumers experience that meaning.

1.6 Significance of This Study

The findings of this study will support and enrich theoretical applications of both CSR as well as symbolic consumer value. As was highlighted by Pelozo and Shang (2011), the link between CSR and consumer value needs further examination. All the more since the concept of consumer value itself, has evolved in recent times, to reflect the changes in market conditions. This study takes cognisance of that, as

consumer value from CSR is viewed from its symbolic properties, in tandem with the nature of CSR as a psychosocial construct. And by that, augment theoretical applications of the concept of consumer value as well. To that end, this study proposes and tests a model which explains the dynamics of symbolic consumer value from CSR. By way of the model, creation of symbolic consumer value is further shown to be bifurcated on two levels of abstraction. First at the product-consumer level, and secondly at the firm-consumer level. In so doing, the study demonstrates that both the product and the firm, contribute to the creation of symbolic consumer value from CSR and provides a more holistic conceptualisation of consumer value from CSR. The theoretical gap in relation to symbolic consumer value from CSR is further addressed by an in-depth inquiry into ‘what’ and ‘how’ consumers experience the value. This in turn provides a rich account of the symbolic consumer value that consumers perceive from CSR.

The findings will also have practical implications towards improving a firm’s overall value proposition. As was mentioned, currently consumers’ actual market response to CSR is relatively poor. This leaves firms not being able to benefit from their CSR investment. The findings of this study, in relation to symbolic consumer value from CSR, will assist managers to plan and execute their CSR programmes towards improving the delivery of consumer value. In so doing, firms will be able to address the current problem of consumers not being able to perceive value from CSR in the marketplace. Firms could also benefit from the findings herein in configuring both product-level interactions and firm-level interactions with their consumers in relation to CSR. In the end, an improved understanding of symbolic consumer value, will improve the strategic potential of CSR as one of the firm’s drivers of economic growth.

Lastly, this study will provide insights for CSR in the Malaysian business landscape. Being in its infancy, the study of the concept of CSR in Malaysia is far from being exhausted. Existing studies, have for the most part, focused on the reporting and corporate governance aspects of CSR. Notwithstanding, the importance of CSR in Malaysia is burgeoning. Various initiatives and measures from the authorities and government bodies make it almost impossible for firms to neglect, much less ignore. Therefore, the findings of this study, within the context of

Malaysia, will aid in the enrichment of empirical knowledge pertaining to CSR. This will also assist local firms in their efforts to explore foreign markets – especially developed nations – where CSR has been established as key aspect of a firm's operations that consumers and other stakeholders look out for.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters as shown in Figure 1.1. Chapter 1, inasmuch as it serves as the executive summary to this study, brings the study into context. The background to this study, the gap identified from the literature and the problem statement are discussed. Followed by the discussion on the conceptual model, research method, purpose and limitations of this study and the definitions of key terms used throughout this study. Moving on, Chapter 2 presents and synthesises the literature pertaining to the concepts and theories of this study. Especially that which are relating to CSR, consumer value and brand relationship. Discussions on these concepts explore the various perspectives that have been employed by scholars prior. This chapter also discusses the concept of consumer value, in relation to the influence that it has on consumers self-concepts. Chapter 3 presents the mechanics of the back-end of this study – that which is related to the research components. In so doing, the research design and method, sampling and data collection, and research procedures are presented. It highlights the nature of the mixed methods research design undertaken by this study.

Following that, Chapter 4 presents the analysis and findings of the quantitative data in this study. While Chapter 5 provides the analysis and findings of the qualitative data that were based on in-depth interviews. This study ends with Chapter 6, that presents the integration the quantitative and qualitative findings in this study. It goes on the discuss the findings in view of the objectives of this study, before closing with recommendations and implications for future research.

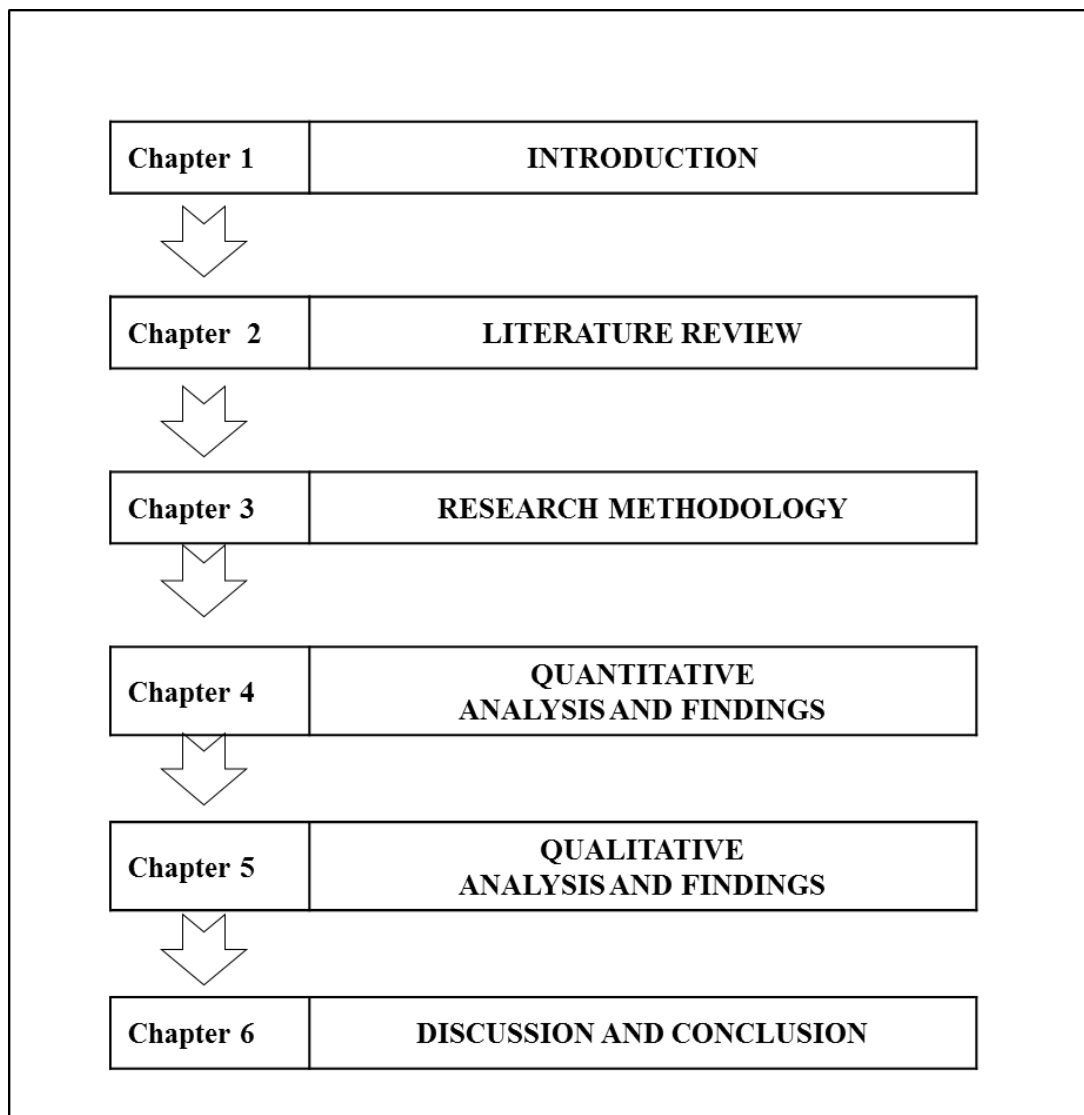


Figure 1.1 Organisation of This Thesis

1.8 Definition of Key Operational Terms

The following are the key operational terms of this study and their respective definitions.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
i. Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ)	Consumer based measure of the strength and depth of consumer–brand relationships comprising six different sub-dimensions: love/passion, self-concept connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy, and brand partner quality (Fournier, 1998; Breivik and Thorbjørnsen, 2008).
ii. CSR	A comprehensive set of policies, practices and programs that are integrated into business operations, supply chains and decision-making processes throughout the firm and usually include issues related to business ethics, community investment, environmental concerns, governance, human rights, the marketplace as well as the workplace (Tsoutsoura, 2004). In this study, the construct CSR refers to consumers' perceptions thereof.
iii. Consumer-Company Identification (CCI)	The level of self-categorisation between the consumer and the firm encompassing solidarity and support for the firm, the sharing of characteristics with the firm and with other consumers of the firm (Hildebrand et al., 2010)
iv. Consumption	The cycle of acquisition, use, possession and disposal of products by consumers (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

v.	Consumer	In this study, the term ‘consumer’ refers to end-use consumers only.
vi.	Firm	In this study the term ‘firm’ is used to denote any form or structure of business or commercial entity that has the primary goal of making profit for its investors or shareholders.
vii.	Product	“Anything that can be offered to satisfy a need or want” (Kotler and Keller, 2005, p. 372). It may be in the form of physical goods, services or ideas.
viii.	Self-image congruity (SIC)	A consumer’s level of comparison between his or her self-image and the perceived image of a consumer of a particular product (Sirgy et al., 1997).
ix.	Symbolic Consumer Value (SCV)	Symbolic consumer value is a form of consumer value that refers to the extent to which consumers attach or associate psychological meaning to a product (Smith and Colgate, 2007).

1.9 Scope and Delimitations of Study

In terms of scope, this study is limited twofold. Firstly, as the research question is to examine the salience between CSR and symbolic consumer value, it is limited to the value of CSR in relation to consumers only. As such, value from a firm’s CSR initiatives in relation to other stakeholders of a firm, such as shareholders, employees, suppliers and special interest groups will not be examined. Secondly, the scope of this study is limited to the CSR initiatives of firms that operate in a business-to-consumer mode, and not business-to-business mode.

Therefore, the perspective of firms, that function as consumers to other firms – in the downstream levels business will not be examined.

Whereas, as regards delimitations, this study only examines the research question in light of the chosen constructs. Namely, consumers' perceptions of CSR, self-image congruity, consumer-company identification, symbolic consumer value and brand-relationship quality. That is not to say that other constructs excluded from the study are not relevant. Only that these were chosen to fit the overall objectives of this study, namely the study of symbolic consumer value from CSR. Moreover geographically, the research of this study was largely concentrated in urban centres of the nation. The respondents therefore were for the most part, urbanites. It is possible that the findings may vary, should the research have been conducted in less urban locales, given that the psychographics of the respondents may be different.

1.10 Summary

This chapter began by discussing the background issues to CSR and consumer value. Particularly in view of the changed market landscape that now lays emphasis on meaning to consumers, from a socio-cultural aspect. Following that, the gap in the literature was identified and discussed. Namely, in relation to consumer value from a firm's CSR initiatives. This was then placed in the context of Malaysia, where CSR plays a key role in realising the nation's aspirations to achieve the status of a developed nation. In addition, this chapter presented the research question and the corresponding proposed conceptual framework in the form of PCM, as well as the research objectives and hypotheses of this study's research. In Chapter Two that follows, the theoretical foundations to this study will be reviewed and discussed in depth.

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