

# Do corporate social responsibility and safety of food affect reputation? A study of fast-food restaurants industry in Hong Kong

## Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been seen increasingly used as to gain competitive advantages. It has become especially significant in retailing industry where CSR practices in health, safety and environmental issues are concerned. This research was undertaken to study the customers' perception of the impact of CSR in fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong. Empirical data was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire survey of randomly selected customers leaving randomly selected fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong. 350 completed questionnaires were collected and statistically analyzed by verifying the relationships between the three constructs in this study, they are corporate social responsibility, food health and safety and corporate reputation by using structural equation modeling. The results found that corporate social responsibility has a positive correlation with food health and safety, and both corporate social responsibility and food health and safety are positively related to corporate reputation. The study adds to the relevant body of knowledge both theoretically and practically. It also adds new erudition with regards to food health and safety and its role in the relationships between corporate social responsibility and corporate reputation.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, food health and safety, corporate reputation, retailing, structural equation modeling

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gradually become an essential part of an organization. Most companies now recognise the value of CSR to corporate reputation (CR) and many of them use their CSR certifications as business leverage (Xu, 2014). In today's highly competitive business environment, business sustainability is essential for driving success (Hutchinson, Singh, and Walker, 2012). Even though the notion of CSR in business was put forward as early as the 1950s, it is only relatively recently that retailers have realized the long-term benefits of practicing it (Wagner et al., 2008; Silberhorn and Warren, 2007).

Hong Kong is one of the fastest growing economies in the world with its retail sector contributing significantly to the growth (Euromonitor, 2017a; Euromonitor, 2017b). With its fast-growing economy and the influence of globalization, fast food has become a part of the new lifestyle in Hong Kong (Euromonitor, 2017a; Euromonitor, 2017b). Therefore, fast-food restaurants are evolving and adapting to 21<sup>st</sup> century customers' changing needs and preferences, such as catering to customer expectations that retailers should practice CSR (Ye et al., 2015; Min and Min, 2013).

Mounting competition amongst service retail industries such as banks and food has led to stiffer competitive strategies (Min and Min, 2013). Fast-food retailers are no strangers to CSR, though sustainability in this industry is paradoxical and complicated. As with other industries, fast-food restaurants embark on CSR initiatives that are relevant to them to build trust, and enhance CR. Studies reveal that stakeholders have high expectations for fast-food restaurants to engage in more quality CSR initiatives (Hur, Kim, and Woo, 2014).

In addition to being in a very competitive industry, fast-food restaurants around the world constantly face various hurdles such as shortage of food, increasing cost of production, and scandals. The recent supply of tainted beef and poultry from Brazil to Hong Kong fast-food retailers is just one such scandal (Boadle, 2017). This is when customers of fast-food restaurants tend to point fingers at the retailer with whom they regularly come face to face, which tarnishes that restaurant's CR (Lauritsen and Perks, 2015). With consumers being extremely concerned about the reliability and standards of a restaurant's food source and its impact on their health, it may be difficult to regain a good CR once it is lost (Xu, 2014). Although customers of restaurants in Hong Kong have increased over the years due to lifestyle changes, many customers are still trying to eat healthily outside their homes (Xu, 2014). Therefore, health and food-related authorities need to collaborate to create new standards, disclose nutritional values, and ensure quality ingredients.

Despite the inconsistency in definition and what is practiced by various industries in different countries, CSR has gained increasing attention (Santos, 2014; Hur et al., 2014). Major industry players have embraced the need to practice CSR to retain customers and yield success (Ye et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2010). The past decade has witnessed companies, small and big, creating a niche CSR activity that is relevant and suitable for their business (Ye et al., 2015). Thus, this research aims to understand the relationships between CSR activities and CR of fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong.

In examining FHS's role in the relationships between CSR and CR, this research addresses a gap in CSR knowledge. The study verifies that FHS is an initiative taken by a restaurant to ethically conduct business, which shows that it is taking its responsibilities seriously. Recent years have witnessed various changes in the business world in terms of technology and ecological degradation, which have seen CSR increasingly used as a competitive tool. This study adds theoretical knowledge to the role of FHS as a part of CSR to gain a competitive advantage in the food and beverage retail industry. However, as suggested by previous studies, sustainable opportunities are more likely to be gained by businesses that are not only perceived to be operating ethically but can be seen as doing so (Plewa, Conduit, Quester, and Johnson, 2015). FHS has the ability to be visible to stakeholders such as customers, whereas CSR activities such as charity giving, though important, may not have the same long lasting positive impact on stakeholders.

Adding new erudition with regards to FHS and its role in the relationships between CSR and CR is a contribution to the CSR theoretical body of knowledge. The correlation between CSR and FHS shown in addressing hypothesis one concurs with the findings from previous research. However, since all the direct hypotheses are supported in this research, the study further elucidates that though CSR adds overall value to a business, relevant CSR activities matter more for enhancing CR.

With regards to the study's practical contribution, the finding that there are positive relationships between CSR, FHS, and CR corroborates the findings from previous CSR related studies that highlights the significance of CSR to a sustainable business (Mahan, Heithoff and House, 2012). In order to be sustainable in the competitive food and beverage retail industry, it is no longer sufficient to have a great chef or delicious recipes; compliance with FHS rules and regulations and conducting business in an ethical manner is now crucial to success in the industry. In light of the findings from this study, managers who are tasked with implementing CSR activities might consider introducing visible and innovate compliances

with FHS that would be appreciated by customers and that will ultimately enhance CR.

In summary, Hong Kong fast-food retailers face new challenges to remain competitive as its market grows rapidly with consumers looking for more than just quality. Thus, it is essential to establish a reputation that will attract and increase positive word of mouth and repeat purchase customers.

This research offers a literature review of relevant studies and the development of the three hypothesis. Then the methodology will be explained in terms of the sample, data collection method, measurement items and the approaches of data analysis approaches. After then are the findings of analytical analysis, discussion, finally, the recommendations and conclusion. The completed questionnaires of this research is shown in Appendix 1.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

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

CSR is now accepted and is being adopted by organizations to fulfill a myriad of organizational objectives (Hur et al., 2014). However, it is still unclear which CSR practices influence public opinion more and what the influences are. Moreover, organizations are unsure of the value of CSR practices, namely the moral act of their business (Chan, McBey, and Scott-Ladd, 2011).

Businesses ought to be legal in order to provide services and products to the public and in return receive money based on the value of those products and services. Some critical issues such as religion, culture and education form the normative system in an organization's decision making (Santos, 2014). Thus, moral obligation of an organization is dependent on these issues, as such adding complication to decision making with regards to moral obligations.

#### **2.1.1 Ethics as a CSR Dimension**

With increased public information and social media, there is a growing interest in CSR. This has arisen primarily due to some organizations' philanthropic acts and arguments that a portion of any business expenditure should be for charitable purposes (Peloza, Loock, Cerruti, and Muyot, 2012). However, there is no requirement for businesses to act in this way in order to be considered ethical. Some businesses are considered ethical as they provide disclosure and are transparent in their business dealings, whilst others are considered ethical due to their fair employment. Unfortunately, though, scandals such as the tainted beef products from Brazil (Boadle, 2017), workplace sexual harassment, and faulty products such as Samsung Galaxy Note 7 have affected millions of people around the world and raised serious doubts over the ethical behaviour of organizations. Although the need for ethical business practices has been largely consistent and constant since 1985 when the thinning of the ozone layer was attributed to human activity (Wagner et al., 2008), business ethics have improved in some areas and got worse in others.

Another closely related CSR term that has emerged is the triple-bottom-line that suggests organizations work on a profit-planet-people basis, ensuring the organization makes sufficient profits, contributes to saving the planet, and is responsible to the people. This closely relates to Carroll's (1979) derivation of CSR and the foundation for the Global Reporting Initiative (Wagner et al., 2008). Triple-bottom-line is more suitable for large conglomerates that are listed on the stock market, while small and medium size businesses, whose economic

contribution is the largest in the world, have no reason to report their CSR activities. However, in the face of fierce competition, these organizations value their reputation just as much as large organizations and often support efforts to improve the environment and community while continuing to remain profitable (Lai et al., 2010). Moreover, small and medium size organizations are often forced to practice CSR since large CSR practicing organizations will only buy their supplies from small and medium size organizations that also practice CSR (Bourdeau et al., 2013). This chain of purchasing and supplying helps to build the CI and CR of an organization (Silberhorn and Warren, 2007).

### **2.1.2 CSR in the Fast-food Industry**

Moreover, customers expect organizations to practice more CSR; in particular, corporations exporting branded products have to ensure their sources practice CSR and maintain a healthy image (Tsoi, 2010). Hence, customers have the power to dictate what is required from the organization. Studies indicate that Asian organizations are extremely careful about their product quality and CSR activities when they are exporting their products to Europeans, as these buyers expect their supplier to practice CSR (Tsoi, 2010).

### **2.2 Corporate Reputation (CR)**

Corporate reputation is developed over a period of time with consistent performance and effective communication (Hur et al., 2014). The reputation of an organization is closely linked to its products and service. However, employee care, environmental protection and social responsibility initiatives have also become pertinent in assessing reputation (Edwards and Rees, 2017). Though this has become an acceptable yardstick, the weight age in terms of how much each contributes to reputation varies and is primarily dependent on individual circumstances (Hur et al., 2014; Lewis, 2003). Reputation has further become a social identity where several aspects such as loyalty and repeat purchase are contributing factors (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012; Bartikowski and Walsh, 2011).

Theory of cognitive dissonance suggests reputation rides high when one's experience surpasses expectation (Skallerud, 2011). This further indicates that organizations with a good reputation are trusted, whereby organizational mistakes and crisis are easily forgiven and forgotten (Skallerud, 2011). Therefore, corporate reputation is driven by a multi-dimensional effort taken by the organization as a competitive tool that allows it a better chance to be recognised in a crowded industry (Lai et al., 2010). As reputation emerges from various disciplines such as marketing, management and sociology, it also affects future employee's choice of company to work in, choice of investment, whom people want to affiliate with, and where customers want to purchase from (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, and Whetten, 2006).

### **2.3 Challenges in Building Corporate Reputation**

Besides these unique characteristics, service is also known to be different from product in terms of its delivery and receipt. The inseparability characteristic describes service as one that is produced and received at one point of time (Lovelock et al, 2005). Hence there is no storage of service, giving the service provider no chance to alter, correct and enhance the service before delivery; the reputation of the service provider is highly dependent on the service consultant or service employee who confronts the customer at the point of delivery (Clemes, Gan, and Zhang, 2010). A well-trained, concerned and empathetic service consultant is able to enhance the organization's reputation by delivering what the customer appreciates (Bartikowski and Walsh, 2011). Alternatively, one bad moment the customer faces with customer services will damage marketing efforts to strengthen the organization's reputation.

## **2.4 Effect of CSR on Corporate Reputation**

It is therefore important to develop a strong corporate reputation to build positive customer perceptions (Lai et al., 2010). CSR initiatives such as charity giving, water or energy saving, fair employment, and using environmental friendly products in daily business practices, contribute to a holistic business that positively affect CR (Kotler et al., 2015). Retailers are expanding and embarking on CSR to create an iconic name and gain customer trust that would consequently retain and gain customers (Martin and Hetrick, 2006). These CSR activities add social and humanity values in the products and services to encourage customers' belief and trust in the product (Blazevic et al., 2014). Specifically, in branding retail, CSR is an effective tool that prolifically increases iconic brand name recognition, as such the brand gets selected when need arises (Martin and Hetrick, 2006). Although CSR instills customers' belief and trust in a brand, the CSR activities must be relevant in order to trigger positive thoughts amongst customers (Tong et al., 2013).

## **2.5 Effect of Food Health and Safety on Customer Perception**

Retailers embarking on CSR seem to develop competitive strategies more passively than pro-actively (Souza-Monteiro and Hooker, 2017). With increasing concern over various CSR programmes initiated from a range of interests, environmental and health and safety concerns rank highest, while animal and community welfare and renewable energy capture the interest of a small group of people (McWilliams, 2015). Meanwhile, customers' least concern is over fair trade, fair employment and legal purchases (Rim, Yang, and Lee, 2016). Hence, it is salient for retailers to embark on CSR initiatives that are relevant, recognised, and are of keen personal interest to relevant stakeholders (Souza-Monteiro and Hooker, 2017; Tong and Wong, 2014; Tong, Wong, and Leung, 2013). However, for fast-food retailers where service is as essential as the final product, identifying an appropriate, relevant, yet significant CSR activity can be difficult. Fast-food customers envisage an array of CSR activities, including product knowledge and ethical sourcing, ethical preparation of food, and disclosure of information such as nutritional facts, country of origin and ingredients (Souza-Monteiro and Hooker, 2017; Xu, 2014).

In recent years there has been an increasing demand from consumers for healthy and safe food (Ursin et al., 2016), and some recent food related studies have included health and safety as a relevant dimension of CSR (Forsman-Hugg et al., 2013). More specifically, fast-food retailers' FHS includes nutritional facts, hygienic environment, the safety of food, employee welfare, animal welfare, and food supplier's product quality handling (Forsman-Hugg et al., 2013). Its work ensures continuously improving food safety practices and minimises the risk of future safety issues from ingredients. Some big food retailers even implement effective food safety and quality management systems to successfully manage risks and improve quality. Hence CSR tenets link these dimensions to sustainable CSR, whereby fast-food retailers can benefit from increasing purchase intention that is influenced by positive word of mouth and reputation.

With an increasing number of competitors within the fast-food industry, FHS is becoming more important in influencing consumer perception of food outlets, which steers customers' choice (Santos, 2014). Though some fast-food retailers are already involved in various CSR initiatives such as charities, environmental friendly packaging, and treating their employees fairly, information on ethical sourcing of supplies had not hitherto been considered information pertinent to customer decision making (Xu, 2014). However, evaluation and

disclosure of internal food selection processes is now considered almost essential for customers to form a perception.

## **2.6 Hypotheses Development**

Even in very competitive fast-food industry in Hong Kong, CSR is useful in building a company's corporate reputation (Tsoi, 2010; Lam and Zhang, 2003). It is still quite hard to comprehend the outcomes of implementing CSR initiatives although corporate reputation is recognized as a critical success factor for organization's success (Worcester, 2009). So hypotheses are proposed in this research from the perspective of fast-food restaurants' customers in Hong Kong to evaluate whether there are contributions of CSR to CR. In addition the relations between FHS and CSR, and CR respectively were studied. The literature review above has shown that there are contradicting notions of what customers perceived FHS to be about although the studies by Yeung and Yee (2012) and Yeung and Morris (2001) in FHS commented that FHS is a critical component of sustainable development and contributes to increasing food security and environmental protection. So, in light of the recent FHS scandals in Hong Kong's fast-food industry, consumers now have a greater awareness and knowledge of FHS (Wongprawmas and Canavari, 2017).

As FHS is theoretically a CSR initiative embarked upon by the food industry, the first hypothesis, H1 below suggests the direct relationship between CSR activities and customers' perception of FHS in Hong Kong fast-food restaurants.

H1: There is a significant and positive correlation between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and food health and safety (FHS) in Hong Kong's fast-food industry.

Many studies (Ye et al., 2015) suggest CSR activities enhance CR whilst some studies have revealed the positive influence of CSR on CR (Kim, 2017), other studies contend that CSR activities should be relevant to the business and of interest to customers for CSR to have a positive effect on CR (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). These studies help this research to suggest the following hypothesis H2.

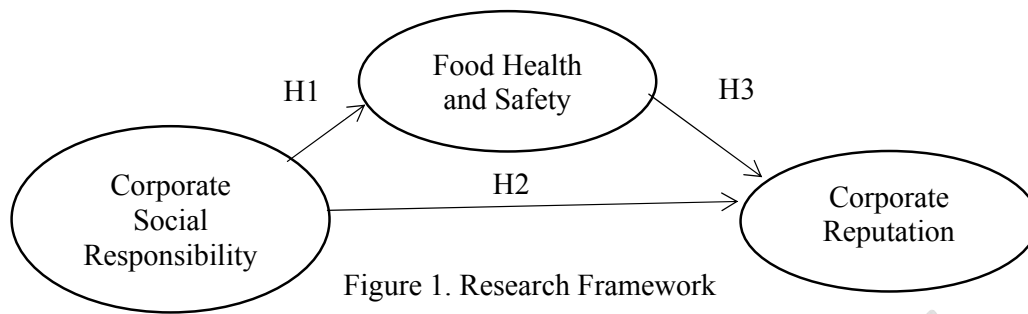
H2: There is a significant and positive relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate reputation (CR) in Hong Kong's fast-food industry.

As mentioned above, FHS has become more essential in the fast-food industry as there is wide spread interest in eating right and healthy (Souza-Monteiro and Hooker, 2017). The literature review also further comments on the importance of transparency to exude positive customer behaviour (Tong et al., 2013). Customers require important details about the products and services they bought and companies should allow customers to make more informed decisions. And it is important to verify if FHS is perceived relevant and critical for customers and consequently influence CR of fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong. These arguments suggest the following third hypothesis H3 in this research.

H3: There is a significant and positive relationship between food health and safety (FHS) and corporate reputation (CR) in Hong Kong's fast-food industry.

## **2.7 Research Framework**

Figure 1 shows the research framework of this study of the three constructs: corporate social responsibility (CSR), food health and safety (FHS) and corporate reputation (CR).



### 3. Methodology

A summary of methodology is shown below.

#### 3.1 Sampling and Data Collection Method

The sample of this research is the customers of the fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong with age greater than 18 years old. A sample size around 150 to 500 as suggested by Malhotra (2014) in social studies and past research on customers in related to CSR have sample size 300 and 400 (Tong and Wong 2014; Tong et al. 2013), so a sample size between 300 and 400 is proposed in this research. The sampling approach was generated from a database of fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong obtained from a public domain in which the major fast-food restaurants are listed. Researcher of this study approached potential respondents outside the selected fast-food restaurants based on their walk toward or away from that restaurant by convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire designed for this research was distributed personally to fast-food restaurant customers outside predetermined restaurants which were from the 18 districts in Hong Kong. Questionnaires were distributed between February 2018 and April 2018. Researchers distributed the questionnaires to respondents who filled in the questionnaires by themselves and then placed the filled form into a box hold by the researchers. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a higher response rate (Sekaran and Bougie 2016).

#### 3.2 Measurement Items

This study adapted a 7-point measurement scale as it has the ability to measure marketing constructs in the service industry (Sekaran and Bougie 2016; Malhotra 2014; Burns and Bush 2010). The questions borrowed from well-established research articles with high level of reliability and validity in their studies. The construct corporate social responsibility used the studies by Ramasamy and Yeung (2009) and Lacey, Close, and Finney (2010) with totally six items. Five items were used in measuring food health and safety by using the questions by Knight, Worosz, and Todd (2007) and Yeung and Morris (2001). Five questions were used by the studies by Bartikowski and Walsh (2011) and Chomvilailuk and Butch (2010) in measuring corporate reputation. The completed questionnaires are shown in Appendix 1.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

This research applied exploratory factor analysis for validity test and Cronbach's Alpha for reliability test. The research model and the hypotheses are tested by using Structural Equation Modelling.

### 4. Results and Analysis

#### 4.1 Sample Characteristics

A total of 350 responses were collected and the characteristics of the sample of the responses are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Data**

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	167	47.70
Female	183	52.30
<b>Age</b>		
21<	117	33.40
21-40	81	23.10
41-60	109	31.10
>60	43	12.40
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	187	53.40
Married	163	46.60
<b>Education Level</b>		
Primary	20	5.70
Secondary	118	33.70
Tertiary	182	52.00
Post Graduate	30	8.60
<b>Salary Status</b>		
\$10,000 and below	167	47.70
\$10,001 - \$20,000	71	20.30
\$20,001 - \$40,000	74	21.10
Above \$40,000	38	10.90
<b>Total:</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.2 Validity Test Using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Table 2 below shows the results of using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for testing the factor loading of each item in each construct. The results show that  $X^2 = 2629.645$ ,  $df = 120$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.0001$ . As  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$  is the standard rule to reject the null hypothesis, the identity matrix is considered not to exist.

**Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Tests**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.907
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2629.645
	Df	120
	Sig.	0.000

H0: identity matrix exists

H1: identity matrix does not exist

**Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix in EFA**



Construct and Questions	Component		
	CSR	FHS	CR
Corporate Social Responsibility			
CSR3: This fast-food restaurant is very involved with the local community.	0.596		
CSR4: This fast-food restaurant commits to using a substantial portion of its profits to help communities where it does its business.	0.892		
CSR5: This fast-food restaurant includes charity work in its business activities.	0.886		
CSR6: This fast-food restaurant shows concern over environmental degradation.	0.635		
Food Health and Safety			
FHS1: The food from this fast-food restaurant is better than its competitors.		0.732	
FHS2: The food from this fast-food restaurant is more consistent and reliable in comparison with its competitors.		0.924	
FHS3: The food quality of this fast-food restaurant is higher than its competitors.		0.718	
FHS4: This fast-food restaurant makes sure that the food that customers eat is safe.		0.634	
Corporate Reputation			
CR1: This fast-food restaurant has a good reputation.			0.661
CR2: This fast-food restaurant treats its employees well.			0.605
CR3: This fast-food restaurant is reputable for its socially responsible behaviour.			0.783
CR4: This fast-food restaurant offers high-quality food.			0.602
CR5: This fast-food restaurant is highly rated by many customers.			0.765

The output in Table 3 shows a factor loading that is above 0.5, iterating 13 items. Four items of corporate social responsibility loaded highly as component 1 with loading factors between 0.892 and 0.596 but the two items “CSR1 - This fast-food restaurant provides a safe and relaxed dining environment for customers”; “CSR2 - This fast-food restaurant offers good working conditions for its employees” were withdrawn from CSR because they did not load as highly into component factors where the loading factors are below 0.5. Four items of FHS loaded highly as component 1 with factor loadings between 0.924 and 0.634 but the item “FHS5 - This fast-food restaurant provides enough healthy foods choices for you to choose from” was withdrawn from the construct FHS with low factor loading value whilst in corporate reputation, all five items loaded highly and clearly as a component with factor loadings between 0.783 and 0.602.

**Table 4. Percentage of Variances Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings
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	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Food Health and Safety	6.516	40.724	40.724	6.516	40.724	40.724
Corporate Reputation	2.144	13.400	54.124	2.144	13.400	54.124
Corporate Social Responsibility	1.051	6.570	60.694	1.051	6.570	60.694

Table 4 above shows the percentage of variances explained by the constructs in this research. This output indicated a total of 60.69% of the variances in the remaining 13 items in the study. FHS explained 40.72% of the variation, CR explained 13.4%, the remaining item CSR revealed 6.57% variation. As the total variances explained is relatively high (60.69%), the study items satisfy the requirement set by Nunnally (1978) for further significance analysis. This shows that there are 39.31% of variances that went unexplained, which could be other constructs that are closely related to the above three constructs.

#### 4.3 Reliability Analysis

The reliability test used Cronbach's alpha as suggested by Cronbach (1951). Table 5 below indicates that CSR's Cronbach's alpha = 0.796 with four items, mean = 16.48, and standard deviation of 3.815. The four items in FHS recorded a Cronbach's alpha = 0.814, mean = 18.59, and standard deviation of 3.881. Finally, CR with five items recorded a Cronbach's alpha score of above 0.823, mean of 21.80, and standard deviation of 4.367. All three Cronbach's Alpha shows a score above 0.7, indicating satisfactory reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 5. Reliability Analysis Output**

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
CSR	0.796	4	16.48	3.815
FHS	0.814	4	18.59	3.881
CR	0.823	5	21.8	4.367

#### 4.4 Significance Testing using Structural Model in SEM

This study examined the relationships between CSR, FHS and CR. The three latent variables were expressed by items tested for their validity and reliability and were used to draw a SEM for testing the direct relationships H1, H2 and H3. Before the trial, the normality of the data was an assumption that needed to be confirmed (Kline, 2011). To run the Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) test for model fit, normality is a necessity as it deflates the value of  $X^2$ , which would otherwise increase the statistic for non-model fitting declaration (Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen, 2008).

SEM began with a measurement model consisting of the three constructs and 13 items that represented them. Table 6 below shows statistical results of the measurement model consisting of the three constructs and 13 items that represented them. In which the CMIN = 218.478, df = 84, p-value = 0.0001, Cmin/df = 2.601, indicating a significance of the measurement model that to be a satisfactory model as p-value of this  $X^2$  test is less than 0.05. Also, GFI = 0.921, CFI = 0.965, AGFI = 0.86 and RMSEA = 0.0068 satisfy the rule for a satisfactory model. As the four satisfying statistics are sufficient to declare the model fit (Kline, 2011).

**Table 6. Measurement Model Statistics**

Model	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	GFI	PGFI	CFI	RESEA
Default model	218.478	84	0.000	2.601	0.921	0.644	0.965	0.068
Saturated model	0.000	0			1.000		1.000	
Independence model	2370.644	105	0.000	22.578	0.337	0.295	0.000	0.249

Table 7 below lists the standardized direct effects showing that the loading of CSR, CR and FHS items are distinctive, supporting the results in SEM above.

**Table 7. Standardized Direct Effects (Group number 1 – Default Model)**

	CI	FHS	CSR	CR
CR5	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.596
CR4	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.751
CR1	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.635
CR2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.711
CR3	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.682
FHS1	0.000	0.812	0.000	0.000
FHS2	0.000	0.759	0.000	0.000
FHS3	0.000	0.808	0.000	0.000
FHS4	0.000	0.575	0.000	0.000
CSR3	0.000	0.000	0.710	0.000
CSR4	0.000	0.000	0.624	0.000
CSR5	0.000	0.000	0.617	0.000
CSE6	0.000	0.000	0.710	0.000

Table 8 below shows regression weights with C.R. value  $> 1.96$  and p-value  $< 0.05$  for all items that show significance (Kline, 2005), thus the relationships between the latent constructs are settled.

**Table 8. Regression Weights (Group number 1 – Default Model)**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CSR6	<---	CSR	1.046	0.105	10.005	***
CSR5	<---	CSR	0.901	0.100	9.022	***
CSR4	<---	CSR	0.821	0.090	9.110	***
CSR3	<---	CSR	1.000			
FHS4	<---	FHS	0.737	0.077	9.587	***
FHS3	<---	FHS	1.019	0.064	15.937	***
FHS2	<---	FHS	0.849	0.057	14.844	***
FHS1	<---	FHS	1.000			

CR3	<---	CR	1.281	0.122	10.512	***
CR2	<---	CR	1.175	0.108	10.855	***
CR1	<---	CR	1.000			
CR4	<---	CR	1.431	0.127	11.268	***
CR5	<---	CR	1.009	0.108	9.344	***

**Note:** \*\*\* = p-value < 0.05

Table 9 below shows the correlation estimates and covariance estimates for the latent constructs for this study, where all correlations are above 0.346 showing moderate to significant relationships between the variables. Consistent with this finding, the covariance C.R. value > 1.96 with their respective p-value < 0.05 indicates that the covariance is equally significant.

**Table 9. Correlation and Covariance (Group number 1 – Default Model)**

Relationships			Covariance				Correlation
			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Estimate
CSR	<-->	FHS	0.291	0.062	4.737	***	0.346
CR	<-->	CSR	0.336	0.051	6.531	***	0.605
CR	<-->	FHS	0.495	0.061	8.056	***	0.768

Table 10 below shows the results of the normality test with which the X<sup>2</sup> value and its corresponding p-value were recognized. Unlike most distributions, X<sup>2</sup> distribution statistics decreases in value when p-value increases. As such, when the significance value of p-value is > 0.05, X<sup>2</sup> statistics drop and H0 is not rejected (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2005).

**Table 10. Assessment of Normality (Group Number 1 – Default Model)**

Variable	Min	Max	Skew	C.R.	Kurtosis	C.R.
CR5	2	7	-0.226	-1.726	-0.269	-1.026
CR4	1	7	-0.26	-1.983	-0.255	-0.973
CR1	1	7	-0.411	-3.141	0.154	0.589
CR2	1	7	0.107	0.817	0.478	1.826
CR3	1	7	0.008	0.063	-0.088	-0.337
FHS1	1	7	-0.376	-2.873	-0.209	-0.796
FHS2	1	7	-0.575	-4.393	0.606	2.314
FHS3	1	7	-0.111	-0.846	-0.251	-0.957
FHS4	1	7	-0.439	-3.352	-0.314	-1.2

CSR3	1	7	-0.022	-0.169	0.052	0.197
CSR4	1	7	-0.135	-1.032	0.241	0.919
CSR5	1	7	-0.151	-1.157	0.283	1.081
CSR6	1	6	-0.152	-1.162	-0.343	-1.31
Multivariate					63.0895	24.5895

The multivariate kurtosis and kurtosis's C.R. values given in Table 10 immediately above were considered based on Mardia's criteria (Kline, 2011). Multivariate kurtosis = 63.09, being > 1.96 as the rule of thumb, and Kurtosis's C.R. = 24.59 otherwise >  $\pm 5$ , the normality of the data is disrupted (Kline, 2005). These studies show that SEM is a robust tool, which could use a non-normality data set to test the significance of the relationships assumed earlier. The bigger the sample size, the more capable is SEM of running these tests (Hair et al., 2010; Hooper et al., 2008; Kline, 2005). This study is based on a sample size of 350, which is sufficient for SEM to run without meeting the normality assumption (Hair et al., 2010).

## 5. Discussion

For the hypothesis H1 where there is a significant and positive correlation between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and food health and safety (FHS) in Hong Kong's fast-food industry, this positive correlation found in this research shows that the CSR activities can generate positive about FHS in the restaurant retailing industry in Hong Kong. As FHS becomes a critical issue in food industry, customers' expectation has increased about the health and safety of foods they took in these restaurants, especially in retailing. Past studies (Yeung and Yee, 2012) treat FHS and CSR as the same meaning FHS is also related to ethical issues whether the retailers sell healthy and safe food to customers. Hence, the finding of positive relation between CSR and FHS further supports these previous results.

Hypothesis H2 that is about there is a significant and positive relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate reputation (CR) in Hong Kong's fast-food industry, is supported, which concurs with the findings of previous studies (Ye et al., 2015). Besides, the food industry is generally sensitive to all levels of scandals. CSR seems to be a tool that can be used to placate these scandals. These scandals can be overlooked by customers and eventually forgotten due to the trust customers have in the restaurants based on the CSR activities they are involved in. However, with stiff competition in the industry, the consequence of a ruined reputation may lead to irreversible damage (Skallerud, 2011; Worcester, 2009; Martin and Hetrick, 2006). Generation Z and Y are knowledgeable about CSR and see its activities in an organization as a competitive tool used to build up CR. Since more than half the respondents who completed the questionnaires for this research are from these two generations, it can be concluded that current and future fast-food consumers will not be easily pleased with simply good food and a decent restaurant atmosphere.

The last but not the least hypothesis H3 that there is a significant and positive relationship between food health and safety (FHS) and corporate reputation (CR) in Hong Kong's fast-food industry is supported as well. Previous studies indicate that there is a strong relationship between FHS and corporate reputation (Lu, Tong and Wong, 2017; Tong, Wong and Lu, 2017; Ursin et al., 2016). This is also revealed to be the case among Hong Kong fast-food customers, who perceive FHS as significantly related to the reputation of a fast-food operator. And reputation is sculpted with a conscious effort to instil a positive perception of an

organization in society's mind. As there is a constant change in stakeholders and the environment, organizations' efforts are becoming more challenging and the call for consistency is now persistent and frequent (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012; Skallerud, 2011). Food establishments are not spared from this incessant call, thus cannot take FHS for granted. The impact of a lack of FHS in an establishment can be drastic and long term. Enhanced technology in the shape of social media is capable of spreading both positive and negative news far wide and wide. Although FHS has always been important in a food establishment and is perceived essential by customers, the new environment has changed the impact trifold. As such, food establishments are forced to ensure that the news spread about it is all positive.

Fast-food restaurant customers who participated in the study are primarily from generation Y and Z with different attitudes and values. These are also the generations that do not consider the consequences of what they post on social media (Priporas et al., 2017). The impact of their negative reviews on FHS of a restaurant can be highly damaging to the restaurant. Moreover, customers generally are developing an interest in what food they consume and where they consume it. This, may be due to an increasing general knowledge, concerns over health and safety, the increase in food and travel related reality television programmes, and food bloggers. Whatever the reasons, fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong are reminded to be consistent and mindful of what they offer in order to be sustainable and reap the long-term benefits of having a good reputation (Lai et al., 2010).

A new stream of research and knowledge has opened up in the area of CSR, which is becoming more prolific as businesses begin to take it seriously. However, CSR is yet to have a specific grounded theoretical definition. In the current fast-moving lifestyle, with a growing emphasis on service and retailing, the findings from this study will contribute both theoretically and practically. Besides verifying pre-existing knowledge in CSR and CR, the findings augment the body of knowledge with the revelation of the role played by FHS in a fast-food operator's effort to build and sustain their CR.

This research verifies the significant findings to practitioners. The three hypotheses tested confirms the existence their relationships which may prove to be useful knowledge for marketers who may be able to reap benefits by being more stringent in their quality control, which will help reduce non-compliance and possible returns. This research especially got the special findings that marketers in the food retail industry face more issues, as this industry is as much a service industry as it is a product industry in Hong Kong. The identification of the importance of CSR and FHS in this research would be helpful to managers to achieve higher competitive of their business in terms of better control of product's ingredients and source of supplies. Innovative ways of convincing customers about their food production is critical in promoting the health and safety of their foods provided to customers.

Managers implement CSR initiatives that are driven by business strategies and relevant laws and regulations is ethically conducting their business. Customers in different parts of the food industry will view FHS differently. Thus this study suggests managers form customer oriented CSR and ethical initiatives.

As it is essential for food retailers to develop brand reputation, food related CSR might be useful CSR initiatives. Though CSR is currently a business buzzword, food retailers may need to separate CSR activities from compliance with food ethics. This is more crucial now in view of the public's great interest in CSR (Hur et al., 2014; Santos, 2014; Xu, 2014). It is therefore

important to differentiate normal CSR activity from the food related ethical conduct of food retailers. Compliance with laws set by authorised bodies is insufficient to impress customers as these would be thought of as basic requirements. However, ethical acts above and beyond those required by food related laws and regulations might help to increase respect and trust. Customers' trust in a food retailer leads to various positive marketing related impacts such as positive word of mouth, increase in purchase intention, and credibility (Wattanakamolchai et al., 2016). These benefit retailers in the long run and are pertinent for their sustainability.

## **6. Limitations and Recommendations**

The limitation of this research is to generalize the findings because of the convenience sampling approached used. Because of the respondents were not randomly chosen, moreover, bias might be occurred and the respondents to whom questionnaires were administered outside the fast-food restaurants. This could have caused misrepresentation and desirable response issues, since a large number of respondents were younger than 20 years old who may not have been paying even though they had made the decision what to buy. This group of fast-food customers may be buying and consuming fast food out of desperation, due to absence of home cooked meals.

They are also more likely to ignore compliance, so instead of appreciating the efforts taken by the retailer to behave ethically, they place more importance on the taste of the fast food, convenience, and brand name (Wattanakamolchai, Singal, and Murrmann, 2016). As this study was carried out in part to confirm theories from previous studies, the findings are limited to only addressing the research questions. Moreover, generalizability may have been limited due to convenience sampling and the context of the study. Furthermore, the new construct of FHS is solely related to the food and beverage industry, which has its own unique issues, hence limiting the current findings to that industry. This limitation can also be extended to the retail industry in general where the customers are end consumers. Future studies could be not conducted in various industries and pure random sample approach could be used to enhance the level of generalizability of the research findings.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study theoretically contributes to the existing body of knowledge on corporate social responsibility, food health and safety and corporate reputation. Food health and safety (FHS) is considered as a construct in this study because FHS is a dimension of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and has a clear initiative relating to the business. The study also contributes practical implementation of CSR by suggesting fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong the importance of FHS. Those practices would be beneficial to them in building up corporate reputation. The findings give further evidence to practitioners the direction and importance tasks in implementing CSR and ultimately enhancing reputation. Generalization of findings of this research could be enhanced by studying more different types of industry and using a higher level of random sampling in selecting the target respondents.

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UNDER PEER REVIEW

## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

### Background information:

This survey will help to determine the relationship among corporate social responsibility (CSR), food health and safety and corporate reputation for fast-food restaurants in Hong Kong.

### 背景資料:

這是一項關於香港快餐店企業社會責任 (CSR)，客戶對食物安全及健康和企業信譽之間關係的調查。

### Instructions for how to complete the questionnaire:

Please reply to all questions based on your personal opinion and insight. Please answer all of the questions by placing a tick (✓) next to Questions A1-D5 and providing numbers for Questions D6-D7. You should be able to complete the survey in 8 to 10 minutes. Please bear in mind that the first impression is usually your most accurate response.

### 如何填寫調查問卷:

請根據你的個人判斷回覆所有問題並以剔號 (✓) 回覆 A1 至 D5 的問題，及以數字回覆 D6 至 D7 問題。你的第一印象通常是你最準確的印象。你應該能夠以約 8-10 分鐘完成調查。

### A. Corporate Social Responsibility 企業社會責任

Please comment on this fast-food restaurant's performance in terms of its Corporate Social Responsibility.

(請就這快餐店在企業社會責任中的表現作評論)

		Strongly agree 十分同意	Agree 同意	Slightly agree 稍微同意	Neutral 中立	Slightly disagree 稍微不同意	Disagree 不同意	Strongly Disagree 十分不同意
A1	This fast-food restaurant provides a safe and relaxed dining environment for customers. 這快餐店提供安全及舒適環境給顧客。							
A2	This fast-food restaurant offers good working conditions for its employees. 這快餐店提供安全及健康工作環境給員工。							
A3	This fast-food restaurant is very involved with the local community. 該快餐店十分關注當地社區。							

A4	This fast-food restaurant commits to using a substantial portion of its profits to help communities where it does its business. 這快餐店堅持將部分盈利用來幫助本地社區。							
A5	This fast-food restaurant includes charity work in its business activities. 這快餐店已經把慈善作為業務的一部分。							
A6	This fast-food restaurant shows concern over environmental degradation. 這快餐店會關心環境惡化的事情。							

## B. Consumer Perception on Food Safety and Health

客戶對食物安全及健康的看法

Please comment on how this fast-food restaurant performs in Food Safety and Health).

(請就這快餐店在食品安全及健康的表現作評論)

		Strongly agree 十分同意	Agree 同意	Slightly agree 稍微同意	Neutral 中立	Slightly disagree 稍微不同意	Disagree 不同意	Strongly Disagree 十分不同意
B1	The food from this fast-food restaurant is better than its competitors. 這快餐店的食物比其他競爭對手更好。							
B2	The food from this fast-food restaurant is more consistent and reliable in comparison with its competitors. 這快餐店的食物與其他競爭對手相比更穩定及可靠。							
B3	The food quality of this fast-food restaurant is higher than its competitors. 這快餐店的食物質量是高於其他競爭對手。							
B4	This fast-food restaurant makes sure that the food that customers eat is safe. 這快餐店可以確保你吃的食物是安全的。							
B5	This fast-food restaurant provides enough healthy foods choices for you to choose from. 這快餐店提供足夠健康食物供客人選擇。							



## C. Corporate Reputation 企業信譽

Please comment on the Corporate Reputation of this fast-food restaurant.

(請就這快餐店的企業信譽作評論)

		Strongly agree 十分同意	Agree 同意	Slightly agree 稍微同意	Neutral 中立	Slightly disagree 稍微不同意	Disagree 不同意	Strongly Disagree 十分不同意
C1	This fast-food restaurant has a good reputation. 這快餐店有非常好的企業信譽。							
C2	This fast-food restaurant treats its employees well. 這快餐店對待員工很好。							
C3	This fast-food restaurant is reputable for its socially responsible behaviour. 這快餐店因為它的企業社會責任而聞名。							
C4	This fast-food restaurant offers high-quality food. 這快餐店提供高品質的食品。							
C5	This fast-food restaurant is highly rated by many customers. 這快餐店獲很多客戶的高度認同。							

## D. Personal information of the Participant 參與者的個人信息

D1	Gender: 性別 :	Male 男	Female 女
D2	Age: 年齡 :	< 20	21-40
		41-60	≥61
D3	Marital status: 婚姻狀況 :	Single 單身	Married 已婚
D4	Education Level: 教育程度 :	Primary 小學	Secondary 中學
		Tertiary 大專	Post-graduate 研究生

D5	Salary Range: 工資範圍：	HK\$10,000 or below 港幣\$10,000 或以下	HK\$10,001 to 20,000 港幣\$10,001 至 \$20,000
		HK\$20,001 - 40,000 港幣\$20,001 至 \$40,000	Above HK\$40,000 港幣\$40,000 以上
D6	No. of times eating in a fast-food restaurant: 於快餐店進食次數：	About (        ) times/ month 約(        ) 次/每月	
D7	No. of times eating in this fast-food restaurant: 於這快餐店進食次數：	About (        ) times/ month 約(        ) 次/每月	