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Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Managing Relationship Quality and Loyalty: An Empirical Study among Vietnamese Young Consumers in Retail Context

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of Vietnamese young consumers' perceived corporate social responsibility on their relationship quality (satisfaction and trust) and loyalty to supermarkets. In addition, the study also evaluates the mediating roles of relationship quality on the effect of perceived corporate social responsibility on loyalty. Survey method and structural equation modeling with path analysis on AMOS 22 were used to test the hypotheses among a sample of 386 young shoppers, an important and increasingly socially conscious customer segment of Vietnamese supermarkets. The results reveal that Vietnamese young consumers' perceptions of supermarkets' corporate social responsibility have direct positive effects on their loyalty, trust and satisfaction. Furthermore, this study also demonstrates the paths from perceived corporate social responsibility to customer loyalty in Vietnam retailing context through partial mediating effects of customer trust and customer satisfaction. These findings provide some practical implications in designing and implementing customer-retention programs targeting young shoppers in which the relationship quality (trust and satisfaction) and customer loyalty can be managed not exclusively from the supermarkets' offerings but also good perceived CSR, an intangible source associated closely with the concept of sustainable development.

Keywords: Retailing, corporate social responsibility, loyalty, satisfaction, trust, relationship quality

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has increasingly become a vital strategy of many companies in the world since empirical studies have affirmed its role as a key antecedent of customers' behavioral intention (Asatryan, 2002; Diallo and Checkchin, 2015; Du *et al.*, 2007). Theoretically, CSR requires companies to take into consideration all entities that may be affected by its actions as well as use its resources in ways that improves welfare of society at large while experiencing its own economic prosperity (D'Amato et al, 2009; Kok *et al.*, 2001). Since CSR programs help generate social capital that contributes positively to sustainable

development goals, the main agenda of all developing countries under the United Nation by the next decade (Bhinekawati, 2016), many governments have introduced policies aiming at institutionalize sustainable development goals into business operations. Despite the expansion of global value chains and foreign direct investment, developing countries including Vietnam still suffer from sustainable development issues such as poverty, inequality, weather changes and environmental degradation the most. Thus, CSR in those countries including Vietnam should be set priority in any public and organizational strategic policies. In which, the best way to motivate companies to include CSR in their business decisions is explaining the role of CSR on demand-side perspectives so that they realize the long-term benefits of adopting CSR.

This study focuses on the young customer segment due to the following reasons. Firstly, a research on Vietnamese consumers' awareness about CSR by Hieu (2011) indicates that the young customers are the most aware of CSR and also pay attention to a company's CSR strategies the most among other segments. The selection of young consumers for this study will, therefore, helps reduce response bias. Secondly, since Vietnam has young population with median age of only 30 years old and relatively high birth rate (CIA, 2016); young consumers represent an important segment of supermarkets with high and growing volume. Thirdly, gaining loyalty from young consumers is very beneficial since their income will grow in the future while the duration they may stay with the supermarkets is still very long.

This paper aims at investigating how young customers' perception of supermarket chains' CSR influence their loyalty to these supermarkets in Vietnam context as well as testing the mediating roles of relationship quality (customer satisfaction and trust) on the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty. The findings will provide valuable strategic implications for Vietnamese supermarkets in designing effective customer-retention programs targeting young consumers while contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals of the country.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Corporate social responsibility

The literature on CSR reveals the confusion regarding how to define and measure perceived CSR. According to McGuire (1963), CSR refers to "*The idea of social responsibility supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations, but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations*". Carroll (1979) has expanded this definition and proposed that "*The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time*". When environment pollution has become a hot issue over the world, the scope of CSR is further enlarged in which responsible business should recognize not only social but also environmental concerns in their core business practice (McIntosh and Mohan, 1999). Since globalization occurs in every aspects of social and economic life, the definition of CSR has been revised by Warhurst (2001) in which CSR is defined as "*the internalization by the company of the social and environmental effects of its operations through proactive pollution prevention and social impact assessment so that harm is anticipated and avoided and benefits optimized*". In general, CSR can be regarded as a firm's initiatives to go beyond traditional responsibilities and contribute in positive ways to its shareholders, customers, employees, the society and the environment.

2.2. Relationship quality (Customer satisfaction and trust)

Relationship quality which is the vital concern of every company is made up by customer trust and customer satisfaction (Asatryan, 2002; Cheng, *et al.*, 2008 and Roberts *et al.*, 2003).

Customer satisfaction is a common customer-oriented metrics for managers in quality control and marketing effectiveness evaluation across different types of products and services. Customer satisfaction can be defined as an effective response or estate resulting from evaluation of overall product consumption or service experience upon the comparison between the perceived product or service performance and pre-purchase expectations (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Fornell, 1992; Halstead *et al.*, 1994). Specifically, according to Berry and Parasuraman (1991), in service marketing, each consumer forms two levels of service expectations: a desired level and an adequate level. The area between two these levels is called a zone of tolerance which is a range of service performance within which customer satisfaction is achieved and if perceived service performance exceeds the desired level, customers are pleasantly surprised and their loyalty is better strengthened. The literature reveals two major ways to measure customer satisfaction including transaction specific measure which covers customers' specific satisfaction towards each transactions with the service provider (Andreassen, 2000; Boulding *et al.*, 1993) and cumulative measure of satisfaction which refers to overall customer scoring based on all brand contact and experiences overtime (Anderson *et al.*, 1994; Fornell *et al.*, 1996; Johnson *et al.*, 2001; Johnson and Fornell, 1991; Krepapa *et al.*, 2003). According to Rust and Oliver (1994), the cumulative satisfaction perspective is more fundamental and useful than transaction-specific one in anticipating consumer behaviors. Besides, the cumulative satisfaction has been adopted more popularly in many studies (Gupta and Zeithaml, 2006). In this research, we will measure customer satisfaction under the cumulative perspective.

Trust is logically and experientially one of the critical determinants to customer loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002). According to Sekhon *et al.* (2014), while trustworthiness refers to a characteristic of a brand, a product or service or an organization to be trusted; trust is the customers' willingness to depend on or cooperate with the trustee upon either cognitive base (i.e. reasoning assessment of trustworthiness) or affective base (i.e. resulted from care, concern, empathy, etc.). Trust is driven by two main components which are performance or creditability which refers to the expectancy that what the firm say or offer can be relied on and its promises will be kept (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999) and benevolence which is the extent that the firm cares and works for the customer's welfare (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002).

2.3. Customer loyalty

Due to the increasing importance of relationship marketing in recent years, there have been rich literature on customer loyalty as a key component of relationship quality and business performance (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). The literature defines customer loyalty differently. On behavioral perspective, customer loyalty is defined as biased behavioral response reflected by repeat purchasing frequency (Oliver, 1999). However, further studies have explored commitment to rebuy should be the essential feature of customer loyalty instead of simply purchasing repetition since purchasing frequency may be resulted from convenience purposes or happenstance buying while multi-brand loyal customers may be not detected due to infrequent purchasing (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). Upon behavioral and psychological components of loyalty, Solomon (1992) and Dick and Basu (1994) distinguish two levels of customer loyalty which are loyalty based on inertia resulted from habits, convenience or hesitation to switch brands and true brand loyalty resulted from conscious decision of purchasing repetition

and motivated by positive brand attitudes and highly brand commitment. Obviously, true brand loyalty is what firms want to achieve the most. Recent literature on measuring true brand loyalty reveal different measurement items but most of them can be categorized into two dimensions: behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalty (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Asuncion, Josefa and Agustín, 2002; Maxham, 2001; Morrison and Crane, 2007; Teo *et al.*, 2003). Specifically, behavioral loyalty refers to in-depth commitment to rebuy or consistently favor a particular brand, product or service in the future in spite of influences and marketing efforts that may encourage brand switching. Meanwhile, attitudinal loyalty is driven by the intention to repurchase, the willingness to pay a premium price for the brand, and the tendency to endorse the favorite brand with positive WOM.

2.4. The linkage between CSR and customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty

CSR has been found to have direct effect on both customer trust (Chun and Bang, 2016) and customer satisfaction (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Ross *et al.*, 1992). In other words, positive perceived CSR will lead to a positive evaluation of the company that, through association, has positive influence on product or service evaluation, satisfaction and trust. However, the literature on the relationship among perceived CSR, customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty has drawn different outcomes. According to García de los Salmones *et al.* (2005) and Liu *et al.* (2010), CSR has no direct effect on customer loyalty, instead, CSR indirectly influence customer loyalty through trust and satisfaction. However, according to Asatryan (2002) and Du *et al.* (2007), customers reward CSR brands with their loyalty and advocacy and the direct relationship between CSR and customer loyalty does exist. In retailing industry, Diallo and Checkchin (2015) indicated that perceived CSR has both direct and indirect impacts on customer loyalty in which trust mediates partially the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty. To date, there has no research on CSR in Vietnam retailing industry. In order to test the direct impact of perceived CSR on customer loyalty as well as the mediating effects of customer satisfaction and trust on the relationship between perceived CSR and loyalty as shown in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1), this study, upon Vietnam retailing context, will test the following hypothesis:

- H1:** Perceived CSR has direct positive effect on customer loyalty
- H2:** Perceived CSR has direct positive effect on customer satisfaction
- H3:** Perceived CSR has direct positive effect on customer trust
- H4:** Customer satisfaction mediates the effect of perceived CSR on customer loyalty in the way that the higher perceived CSR is, the more loyal customers are
- H5:** Trust mediates the effect of perceived CSR on customer loyalty in the way that the higher perceived CSR is, the more loyal customers are.

2.5. The linkage among customer trust, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty

Since loyalty is the key metrics in relationship marketing, many studies have confirmed the relationship between each of customer satisfaction and customer trust and loyalty. Specifically, trust has been affirmed as an important antecedent to customer loyalty in many research (Agustin and Singh, 2005; Bart *et al.*, 2005; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Chiou and Droge, 2006 and Chinomona, 2016; Delgado *et al.*, 2003). Besides, customer satisfaction is found to positively affect CL in several other studies (Dubrovski, 2001; Hallowell, 1996; Kaura, 2013; Lam and Burton, 2006; Saleem *et al.*, 2016). However, according to Andre

and Saraviva (2000) and Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds (2000), both satisfied and dissatisfied customers have tendency to switch their providers, especially in case of small product differentiation and low customer involvement (Price *et al.*, 1995). This study, when testing the mediating roles of satisfaction and trust on the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty in Vietnam retailing context, will also test the following hypothesis:

H6: Customer satisfaction has direct positive effect on customer loyalty

H7: Trust has direct positive effect on customer loyalty

3. RESEARCH METHOD AND MEASUREMENT SCALES

This study conducted a quantitative survey with the use of a paper-based questionnaire. At the beginning of the questionnaire, there is an instruction that the respondents should continue if they have ever shopped at a supermarket and list one online supermarket that they have recently made purchase from so that respondents can recall memory of their purchasing behavior (Wu, 2013). A pilot test was also implemented on twenty Vietnamese shoppers so as to ensure the questionnaire's good comprehension; easy-to-understand language and phraseology; ease of answering; practicality and suitable length (Hague *et.al*, 2004). The data was collected within April 2017 with the employment of convenient sampling method. The sample included undergraduate and postgraduate students in a large educational institution in Hanoi city. The questionnaires were distributed face-to-face in class with the permission and collaboration of tutors. A total of 398 questionnaires filled, however 12 were removed due to missing data. The 386 valid sampling units include 57.25 % female and 42.75% male. Although the respondents' age range is from 18 to 34, the larger age group was 22 to 30 (74.87%). Monthly spending at supermarkets mostly ranges from 2 – 5 million VND (65.80%).

The measurement instruments were developed based the comprehensive literature review in service industry. Perceived CSR was measured with five items adapted from Lai *et al.* (2010) and once used by Diallo and Checkchin (2015) for retailing context. This study measures overall satisfaction with a supermarket with both cognitive and affect-based responses (Jones and Suh, 2000) with a 3-item scale adapted from Ha (2006) and Loureiro *et al.* (2014). Trust was measured using a three-item scale as recommended by Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Loureiro and Miranda Gonza'lez (2008). Three items proposed from scales previously developed were used to measure customer loyalty (Ha, 2006; Molina *et al.*, 2009). A five-point Likert scale was used to measure each construct, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

4. RESULTS

4.1. Assessment of the measures

The measurement model was evaluated for reliability, convergent and discriminant validity as well as overall fit with the data. This study assessed validity and reliability of the measurement constructs following the guideline on the use of structural equation modeling suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on AMOS 22 was conducted to test for the convergent validity of measurement items used for each construct. CFA results as shown in Table 1 indicated that all factor loadings were statistically significant and greater than 0.5. In addition, a CFA on the four-factor model from AMOS 22 resulted a good model fit (CMIN/df = 1.968; p=.000; RMR=0.022; GFI=0.950; CFI = 0.960; AGFI= 0.927; RMSEA=0.05; PCLOSE=0.475) representing overall good fit with the data. Therefore,

all measurement items are retained for further exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on SPSS. The pool of items measuring perceived CSR, customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty were subjected to an EFA with principal factor as extraction method followed by varimax rotation. The EFA results revealed four factors in accordance with the initial measurement of each construct. We, therefore, concluded that all measurement items achieved convergent validity and the unidimensionality of the constructs. Moreover, the Cronbach alpha coefficients for each construct ranged from 0.704 (customer trust) to 0.814 (perceived CSR) all of which were higher than the cut-off point of 0.7, indicating a high reliability of the measurement scale. In addition, the AVE values were above the recommended threshold of 0.5 further support the convergent validity and reliability of the measurement items (Fornell and Larcker 1981). All measurement items as shown in Table 1, therefore, are qualified to be used for hypothesis testing.

Table 1
Confirmatory factor analysis results

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Variable items</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Perceived CSR (CSR)	CSR1	The supermarket is very concerned with environmental protection	3.15	0.68	0.713	10.677
	CSR2	The supermarket is very concerned with local community	3.30	0.64	0.734	10.867
	CSR3	The supermarket offers locally manufactured products	3.21	0.65	0.654	10.064
	CSR4	The supermarket is fair with others	3.16	0.67	0.702	10.566
	CSR5	The supermarket cares about clients' right	2.95	0.70	0.617	___
Customer satisfaction (CS)	CS1	Overall, the supermarket satisfies my needs	2.76	0.67	0.768	___
	CS2	It is one of the best supermarkets comparing with others	2.97	0.73	0.734	12.477
	CS3	Overall, the supermarket delivers an excellent service	2.76	0.75	0.771	12.740
Customer trust (CT)	CT1	I trust on service delivered by the supermarket	3.60	0.70	0.663	8.923
	CT2	I feel confidence in the quality of the products	3.28	0.71	0.613	8.630
	CT3	The promises are fulfilled	3.68	0.73	0.674	___
Customer loyalty (CL)	CL1	I intend to continue to buy with the same frequency in the supermarket	3.30	0.79	0.751	___
	CL2	I speak well about this supermarket to other people	3.31	0.81	0.803	13.080
	CL3	I will recommend the supermarket if someone ask for my advice.	3.17	0.84	0.702	12.178

Notes: Measurement model fit details: CMIN/df = 1.968; p=.000; RMR=0.022; GFI=0.950; CFI = 0.960; AGFI= 0.927; RMSEA=0.05; PCLOSE=0.475; “___” denotes loading fixed to 1

Table 2
Average Variance Extracted, inter-construct correlation and Reliability

	<i>CSR</i>	<i>CS</i>	<i>CT</i>	<i>CL</i>	<i>Reliability (C.R.)</i>
CSR	AVE=0.538				0.814
CS	0.068	AVE=0.682			0.800
CT	0.109	0.063	AVE=0.564		0.704
CL	0.110	0.134	0.145	AVE=0.639	0.794

5. FINDINGS

The hypothesized relationships have been tested upon a path analysis recommended by (Oh, 1999) using AMOSS 22. The indicators of model fit indicated that the proposed model demonstrates a reasonably good fit to the data. Table 3 shows the path coefficients in the original model and modified models (Model 2 and Model 3 as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3) in which each of customer satisfaction or trust were removed from the original model to test their mediating effects.

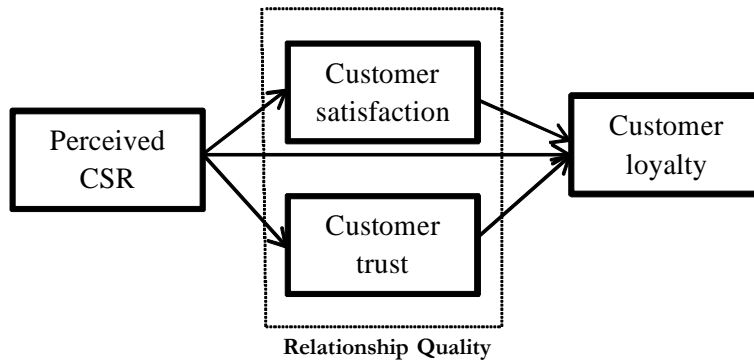


Figure 1: Proposed Model (Original Model)

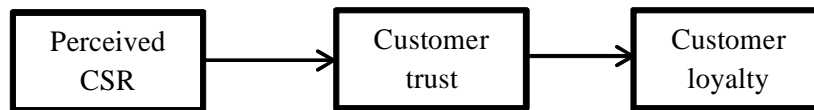


Figure 2: Model 2

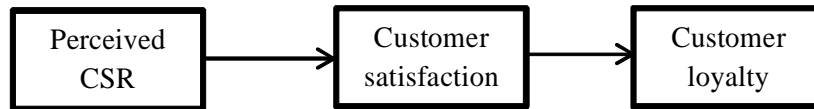


Figure 3: Model 3

According to the path analysis results for the original model, all of perceived CSR, customer trust and customer satisfaction have significant positive effect on customer loyalty (support H1, H6 and H7). In addition, the positive impacts of perceived CSR on both customer satisfaction and trust are significantly found (support H2 and H3). In order to test the mediating roles of relationship quality on the effect of perceived CSR on customer loyalty, we removed either customer satisfaction or trust resulted in Model 2 and Model 3 accordingly and run path analysis for each of these models.

The path coefficients resulted from Model 2 that excludes customer satisfaction was compared with those in Model 1 (the original model) to test the mediating role of customer satisfaction. Specifically, both perceived CSR and customer satisfaction have positive effects on customer loyalty in two models. However, the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty is higher when customer satisfaction is absent. According to the mediating conditions suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), the results indicate that customer satisfaction mediates partially the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty (support H4)

Table 3
Path coefficients

<i>Construct path</i>	<i>Model 1 (original)</i>	<i>Model 2 (without CS)</i>	<i>Model 3 (without CT)</i>
CSR to CS	0.383**		0.370**
CSR to CT	0.604**	0.595**	
CSR to CL	0.217*	0.338*	0.448**
CS to CL	0.362**		0.388**
CT to CL	0.409**	0.457**	
Fit indices			
CMIN/df	1.968	2.493	2.259
CFI	0.960	0.953	0.964
GFI	0.950	0.955	0.957
AGFI	0.927	0.927	0.931
RMR	0.022	0.022	0.021
RMSEA	0.05	0.062	0.057
PCLOSE	0.475	0.087	0.209

Notes: *p < 0.05 and **p < 0.001

Similarly, Model 3 that excludes customer trust was compared with those in Model 1 (the original model) to test the mediating role of customer trust. Results in table 3 reveal that both perceived CSR and customer trust have positive effects on customer loyalty in two models. Moreover, the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty is higher in the absence of customer trust. Therefore, it is concluded that trust mediates partially the effect of perceived CSR on loyalty (support H5) (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

6. DISCUSSION

The results of this study are in line with previous researches that support the direct positive effect of perceived CSR on customer loyalty (Asatryan, 2002; Diallo and Checkchin, 2015; Du *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, this study demonstrates the paths from perceived CSR on customer loyalty in Vietnam retailing context among young consumers in which the mediating roles of customer trust and customer satisfaction are affirmed.

The relationship between perceived CSR and customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty among young consumers can be explained that through engagement with good CSR, young customers may feel that they are supporting the society and environment, therefore, their loyalty is strengthened. On the other hand, young customers mostly associate supermarkets which have good CSR with positive evaluation of its products and services. As a result, their overall response to and experience with the supermarket become more positive that enhances customer satisfaction. In addition, supermarkets with good CSR are evaluated positively, therefore gains more trust from customers. Since both customer satisfaction and trust positively influence loyalty, by affecting such relationship quality dimensions, positive perceived CSR can encourage more loyalty.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS MARKETING PRACTICE

This study draws some practical implications for retail chains in managing customer loyalty of young Vietnamese young consumers who are increasingly socially conscious. First, they should enhance their perceptions towards CSR since customer trust, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty stem not only from supermarkets' offerings but also how customers perceive about their CSR practices. Nowadays, upon the improvement of educational system, the development of various communication media, especially the rapid growing Internet penetration among young people as well as the effect and wide spread of international and national social campaign, Vietnamese young consumers are better educated and show their increasing concerns about corporate social responsibility as well as its effects on sustainable development. Accordingly, retailers' marketing strategy in particular and business strategy in general should be changed accordingly towards more "social responsibility" as a way to win and retain young consumers.

Young consumers represent the new generation of shoppers in Vietnam. When they get older, their social consciousness and concerns about CSR are highly likely are increasing. Therefore, practicing good CSR is not only a strategy to win and retain young consumers today but should also be the long term business philosophy of every retailer in the long term from now on. Moreover, since Vietnam retailing industry has developed at a high pace with highly competitive environment, building and maintaining good relationship quality through satisfaction and trust which ultimately lead to customer loyalty are very crucial to every supermarket for their long term business growth. Among many strategies some of which may be very costly and can be imitated by competitors such as aggressive price cutting or advertising, practicing good CSR is a good choice to establish consumer trust, strengthen customer satisfaction and build long-term customer relationships while creating unique brand position in customers' minds. Specifically, supermarkets should show concerns and take initiatives in protecting environment (e.g. reducing carbon footprints across supply chain and daily business operation, using environmentally friendly or renewable materials), supporting local community (e.g. holding a charity program), selling locally manufactured products (e.g. advocating the national campaign "Vietnamese people use Vietnamese products") as well as treat customers fairly and do everything in favor of customers' rights (e.g. setting up customer policies and respect it or just keeping promises to customers). It is also important that supermarkets should communicate how good their CSR is so that young customers can perceive it by including CSR in company reports, advertisements, and public relations activities since not CSR itself but how supermarkets' CSR in young customers' perception affect their response to the supermarkets. Finally, it is emphasized that perceived CSR should be managed as a marketing variable, similarly to customer satisfaction and trust, in customer relationship marketing in which retailers should frequently measure and evaluate perceived CSR through customer survey to evaluate and control their CSR programs.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

This study faces some limitations. First, regarding sample size, we have used suitable sampling methods with adequate sample representation. However, a larger sample size with wider demographic characteristics such as occupation and income may be more helpful and effective for the path analysis and managerial implication. Third, we have used only a limited set of measurement items due to concerns about model parsimony and data collection efficiency. For example, perceived CSR can be measured separately with economic, environment, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions each of which has different measurement scales (Maignan, 2001; Salmons *et al.*, 2005).

Further studies could examine the effect of each dimension of perceived CSR on customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty and also explore these relationships in different product or market contexts where the nature of perceived CSR may be different. Besides, upon larger sample size with various demographic characteristics, future research may compare and test the effects of demographic factors on perceived CSR and the strength of the effects that perceived CSR may have on customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty.

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