

Research Paper

Corporate Social Responsibility: Exploring SME Owners' Understanding and Practices

Pei Yi Beh and Sushila Devi Rajaratnam
Taylor's University, Malaysia

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Abstract: This paper explored small and medium enterprise (SME) food retail owners' understanding on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and identified their CSR practices. Limited research has focused on CSR in SMEs despite their economic and social significance in many countries, including Malaysia. The study attempted to narrow this gap. Semi-structured interviews were held with eight SME food retail owners in the Klang Valley, an area with a high density of SME food retail businesses. Interviewees were selected using purposive and snowball sampling and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The general understanding among SME food retail owners is that CSR benefits customers, employees and the community and is synonymous with financial contributions from large organisations. However, a negative perception is that large organisations engage in CSR either to gain publicity or evade taxation. Nine CSR practices were identified and themed into six dimensions: stakeholder, economic, sociocultural, philanthropic, environmental and legal. The economic, legal, philanthropic, environmental and stakeholder dimensions are consistent with the CSR models proposed by Carroll (1979) and Dahlsrud (2008). However, the dimension classified as sociocultural does not exist in both Carroll's and Dahlsrud's models and emerged from the findings of this study. Hence, sociocultural is a new dimension. Though this study provides some significant findings, it focused on independent owner-operated food retail outlets, in one area and sought only owners' perceptions. Future studies can focus on other important stakeholders, particularly employees and customers, to obtain more balanced findings. Moreover, instead of using only a qualitative research design, future studies can employ both qualitative and quantitative research design to obtain more robust findings.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, small and medium enterprises, food retail owners, hospitality, Malaysia

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Correspondence: Peh Yi Beh, Taylor's University, Malaysia. Email: peiyibeh@gmail.com

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained prominence in many industries, including the hospitality industry. Though hotels and restaurants have implemented various environmentally friendly business practices, more studies have focused on the hotel sector than the food service sector (Kucukusta, Mak & Chan, 2013). Moreover, research attention has generally concentrated on large hospitality and tourism organisations compared to small and medium enterprises or SMEs (Tamajon & Aulet, 2013). The research focus on large organisations is evident even in the context of other industries, despite small and medium enterprises (SMEs) constituting the bulk of businesses in many countries (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013).

In Malaysia, SMEs play a dominant role in the country's economic growth as they contributed 35.9% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 65% to total employment and 17.8% to total exports in 2014 (SME Corp. Malaysia, 2016). According to the 2011 Economic Census, 90% of SMEs are in the services sector which include food and beverage services (SME Corp. Malaysia, 2016) and their contribution to GDP is expected to increase to 42% by 2020 ("SMEs are important", 2015). In tandem with their growing importance, SMEs in Malaysia have been involved in various CSR initiatives, though many of them do not identify them as CSR (Nejati & Amran, 2009). This may be due to the lack of understanding on what CSR is and the specific CSR activities in Malaysia (Lu & Castka, 2009). This paper attempts to contribute to the CSR literature by focusing on SMEs, an under-researched area. The paper explores SME food retail owners' perception of what CSR is and the specific CSR practices they undertake, in the context of Malaysia. SMEs in food and beverage services accounted for 25% of the service sector in 2010 (SME Corp. Malaysia, 2016) and play a prominent role in the country's economic development. Therefore, any social or environmental initiative that SMEs undertake makes a vital contribution to society. In view of this, investigating SME food retail owners' perceptions on CSR will enhance understanding on the concept and practices of CSR, specifically in the context of an emerging country. The two research questions that guided this study are:

- 1) What do SME food retail owners understand about the concept of CSR?
- 2) What are the CSR practices of SME food retail owners?

Conceptualisation of CSR

In spite of gaining significant popularity over the last three decades, there are many different definitions for CSR (Drebes, 2014) put forward by various scholars (Garay & Font, 2012, Taghian, D'Souza & Polonsky, 2015; Khunon & Muangasame, 2013; Ho Kang, Seoki & Huh, 2010). Nevertheless, the common stance of these definitions is that organisations should contribute back to society (and other stakeholders) voluntarily. This stance is also reflected in the CSR definition in Malaysia. Bursa

Malaysia (formerly known as Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange) defines CSR as “open and transparent business practices that are based on ethical values and respect for the community, employees, the environment, shareholders and other stakeholders. It is designed to deliver sustainable value to society at large” (Haron, Ismail & Oda, 2015, p 82). This definition provides a guide for CSR practices undertaken by Malaysian public-listed companies but does not apply to SMEs that are not publicly listed.

The different definitions of CSR have highlighted multiple dimensions of social responsibility. These dimensions underline the various CSR practices and may be equally relevant for large as well as small and medium business organisations. Carroll's CSR model, widely acknowledged as making an influential contribution to CSR knowledge (Pino, Amatulli, De Angelis, & Peluso, 2016), identified four basic dimensions, namely economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) responsibilities (Carroll, 1979). The four dimensions were presented as a pyramid with the economic dimension at the base of the pyramid since the economic responsibility is the foundation upon which the other three responsibilities are based (Carroll, 1991). According to Carroll (1991), the economic responsibility of business is to provide goods and services to consumers and make profit. Economic responsibility is the basis for the other three responsibilities. Legal responsibility mandates a business to comply with the relevant laws and regulations established by the government, while ethical responsibility involves practices related to the environment, civil rights and consumerism, that are either expected or prohibited by stakeholders (Carroll, 1991). Finally, philanthropy consists of discretionary activities to promote quality of life of the community and include contributions such as financial resources or time. In contrast to the mandatory economic, legal and ethical responsibilities, organisations that do not fulfil their philanthropic responsibility are not considered unethical (Carroll, 1991). Carroll later modified the CSR pyramid developed in 1991 to include application of CSR to global stakeholders (Carroll, 2004).

Dahlsrud's (2008) conceptualisation of CSR was based on five dimensions, developed through a content analysis of CSR definitions in the existing literature. The five dimensions are: social, voluntariness, economic, stakeholder and environmental. Dahlsrud (2008) described these dimensions broadly. The social dimension refers to the relationship between business and society and involves practices that contribute to a better society. Voluntariness implies that business organisations should perform beyond legal requirements, while the stakeholder dimension refers to how businesses interact with their stakeholders. The environmental dimension integrates environmental concerns in business operations and the economic dimension refers to achieving financial success (profitability) and economic development. The author asserts that all five dimensions are necessary to understand how CSR is defined.

Recently, the environmental dimension has gained significance due to growing awareness of environmental issues. Empirical studies have focused on environmental

CSR activities in different sectors such as hotels (Khunon & Muangasame, 2013; Azilah, 2004), SME tourism businesses (Tamajon & Aulet, 2013) and SME manufacturing businesses (Ramakrishnan, Haron & Goh, 2015). Two studies (Azilah, 2004; Ramakrishnan et al., 2015) were carried out in Malaysia. In the lodging industry, the majority of CSR practices carried out by hotels focus on environmental management practices such as improving waste management through recycling, energy and water conservation, and buying and selling in a green manner (Kucukusta et al., 2013).

With the exception of the economic dimension, Dahlsrud's five and Carroll's four dimensions are labelled differently. However, to some extent, these dimensions are similar in their content. More importantly, Carroll's and Dahlsrud's conceptualisation of CSR are based mainly on definitions used in the West, in particular, Europe and America. Therefore, these definitions may be context-specific and may not portray how CSR is understood and practiced in emerging countries such as Malaysia. Nevertheless, as Carroll's model is more established in the literature due to its applicability to various empirical contexts (Pino et al., 2016), this model was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Methodology

Based on an interpretive paradigm, this study explored SME food retail owners' understanding and practices of CSR. SME food retail owners who had between 5 and 75 full-time employees were identified for this study as this is the criteria used to define SMEs in Malaysia (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2013). Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to select interviewees. Purposeful sampling design refers to intentionally selecting individuals to understand the central phenomenon in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This sampling technique was deemed suitable as the sample for this study was limited to a specific target group - SME food retail owners who could provide the desired information. In snowball sampling, subsequent participants are referred by current respondents (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). As this technique is usually used when respondents are difficult to identify and contact (Cooper & Schindler, 2008), its use was considered appropriate for this study. The semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews allowed SME food retail owners the opportunity to express their own opinions and were therefore utilised. Altogether, eight SME food retail owners were interviewed and the duration of each interview averaged between 35 and 45 minutes. No pre-determined number of interviews was set. Rather, the interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and in this study, data saturation was achieved with eight semi-structured interviews carried out between November and December 2014. The interviews were confined to the Klang Valley which has the

highest number of food retail outlets in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to group and analyse the transcribed data according to the commonality of data, relationship between each variable and differences across the set of data (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The interview excerpts included in this paper retained the original sentences used by the interviewees so as not to alter their meaning.

Ethical procedures were followed during the data collection process. An information sheet was first provided to all interviewees before the interviews were conducted. The information sheet described the purpose of the study as well as information on how the data would be collected and treated. The researcher emphasised the importance of anonymity and that the results would only be used for the purpose of this study. To protect their identity, interviewees are referred to as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 and so on until Interviewee 8. Interviewees were then requested to sign a consent form to acknowledge their participation. These steps were crucial to establish a relationship of trust with the interviewees, as many were expressing personal opinions and feelings.

Six of the eight interviewees were male and two were female, aged between 23 and 55 years. All were Malaysians with six Chinese and two Malays. The majority had between one and two years' experience in the food retail business and only two had been in this industry for twelve years. The food retail businesses sampled included independent cafes, burger joints and small restaurants selling local food. These food outlets employed between 10 and 35 full time employees, in accordance with the criterion used to define an SME.

Findings and Discussions

Understanding on CSR

The findings on interviewees' understanding with regard to the concept of CSR are categorised into six themes:

Providing quality food and service to customers

Two interviewees believed that food retail businesses have the core responsibility of providing good quality food and service to customers. One interviewee stressed that quality should be taken care of, starting from the procurement of raw food items until their preparation as food ready to be served.

It's the quality and how we produce the product in a good way, the legitimate way... The chicken must be from a good source, the source has to be clean and then when we grill it, we must use proper utensils (Interviewee 1, male, 28).

While food quality is often prioritised in food service operations, the quality of service delivered is equally important, as highlighted by another interviewee. He ensures that the quality of food and service provided are able to fulfil customers' needs and make them happy.

Most important is to meet customer needs... the product and service provided to the customers should achieve their satisfaction... We will make sure the food we serve can make customers happy (Interviewee 2, male, 40).

Establishing close relationship with staff/ Bonding with staff

There is no doubt that customers are the main focus of a business. The food retail owners interviewed recognise that besides prioritising customers, good companies have to appreciate and establish a close relationship with their employees. They acknowledge that good service quality comes from service staff who are happy and satisfied in their workplace. Interviewee 3 shared his experience on how he builds good relationship with his employees.

We want to have a good relationship with the team so usually on Monday or sometimes after shift we will hang out or play ball games to build the relationship. We know that as long as our employees are happy, customers can be happy as well as they are the one who serve customers. (Interviewee 3, male, 27).

Interviewee 6 stated if employees praise their employer, then that employer has been successful in establishing good relationship with employees. On the other hand, she added that strict or autocratic management will adversely impact on building good management - staff relationship. This interviewee also believed that:

Human beings [staff] are the greatest asset in any company, some people don't believe humans are an asset, they believe in control and manage only (Interviewee 6, female, 55).

Enhancing wellbeing of local community/society

Financial contributions are perceived as the common way to help enhance the wellbeing of the local community. Other than financial support, one interviewee shared that his company helps the local community by bringing customers closer to a charity organisation. Another interviewee (Interviewee 4) highlighted that a company has the potential play a more significant role than an individual in

promoting awareness on CSR activities for the community, as shown in the excerpt below:

I do it with my business, it is able to raise better awareness to the people... probably I can promote orphanages which lack funds...so hopefully some big donor will come and say hey, I can support this orphanage, this will make me very happy (Interviewee 4, male, 40s).

In addition, interviewees contribute to the wellbeing of society when they support customers' self-development by hosting enlightening activities in the restaurant, as stated in the next excerpt:

It is not about [providing] food only but it involves soul and mind development...We provide space for musician and singers to showcase their talent, share life experiences and sell their CD's after [their] performance. We also hope that customers are able to learn from the life experiences of our performers (Interviewee 7, male, 33).

The findings indicate that there is a varied understanding on the concept of CSR among the SME food retail owners. The different understandings stem from the perception that CSR is targeted towards different stakeholders, and based on this study, the important stakeholders are customers, employees and the local communities in which the SMEs operate. This finding is consistent with existing literature that suggests to perform well, organisations should consider the interests of different parties or stakeholders when making business decisions, and not just shareholders (Kucukusta et al., 2013; Sen & Cowley, 2013).

Voluntary contribution

Interestingly, Interviewee 3 opined that CSR practices should be voluntary and not made mandatory. He disagreed with the word 'responsibility' as he feels it implies an obligation or compulsory involvement, as revealed in the subsequent excerpt:

I don't like the word CSR because of the word of "responsibility" because it feels like that (CSR) is something that must be done. (Interviewee 3, male, 27).

This finding echoes the voluntary stance embraced in many CSR definitions in the existing literature (Sprinkle & Maines, 2010). The voluntary aspect of CSR may have been emphasised due to the commonly held belief that CSR is synonymous with corporate philanthropy and, according to Mescon and Tilson (1987, in Gautier and Pache, 2015), it is the oldest form of social responsibility. Carroll (1991)

conceptualised corporate philanthropy as a purely voluntary CSR practice unlike economic, legal and ethical CSR practices which are considered obligatory.

Financial contribution by large organisations

Among interviewees who were familiar with the term CSR, it was regarded as synonymous with monetary contributions and sponsorships by large companies. It was perceived to benefit the donor in the long run, according to an interviewee who quoted a food and drink company, as an example.

Bigger companies likethey sponsor beverage vans for schools and benches in public parks. It gives [them] better return in the long term as well, if you are good at CSR, you will have good relations with the authorities or the government (Interviewee 4, male, 40s).

Publicity/Tax evasion

Despite most interviewees' opinions that CSR is beneficial to society, the study also unearthed a conventional opinion that CSR is used by large organisations as a publicity tool to enhance their corporate image and avoid paying corporate taxes. This is expressed in the following extract:

Big corporations like to donate money. They can donate [money] because they are big players...to evade from paying taxes and some people just do it because of the glamour and for marketing their business (Interviewee 1, male, 28).

This negative perception may limit interviewees' involvement in CSR as they may be unaware of the genuine advantages of CSR activities. Scholars acknowledge that companies engage in CSR for altruistic and strategic purposes. The strategic orientation focuses on achieving organisational profits while the altruistic orientation of CSR focuses on genuine philanthropy, irrespective of whether the organisation reaps benefits (Jamali, Zanhour, & Keshishian, 2009). Hence, organisations using CSR as a marketing or publicity tool do so in order to benefit their bottom line. This rationale for engaging in CSR has boosted the importance of CSR among organisations (Lee, Mak & Pang, 2012).

CSR Practices

For the second research question on CSR practices of SME food retail owners, the findings revealed that the interviewees were engaged in various CSR activities or practices. Their understanding on what CSR means is closely associated with their

current CSR practices. A total of nine CSR practices emerged from the findings and were themed as: providing quality food, service and conducive physical environment, motivating staff, ensuring customer happiness, sharing knowledge, encouraging flexible work culture, engaging in non-monetary initiatives, providing employment opportunities, preserving the environment and complying with legal requirements. The nine CSR practices were then categorised into six different dimensions based on their appropriateness. The six dimensions were economic, sociocultural, philanthropic, environmental, legal and stakeholder dimensions.

Economic Dimension

The practices that were identified under the economic dimension are: providing quality food, service and ensuring ...' a conducive physical environment as well as motivating staff. It is expected that engaging in these practices for their primary stakeholders would enable SME food retailers to reap financial gains and sustain business performance in the long run.

Providing quality food, service and conducive physical environment

Six of the eight interviewees asserted that providing good quality food and service as well as ensuring a conducive physical environment in the restaurant is top priority. They regarded these practices as top priority due to their direct impact on business performance and long-term sustainability. One interviewee clearly articulated this practice as revealed in the following excerpt:

I have always told my staff the three key things that we always need to ensure: q for quality, s for service and c for cleanliness [of restaurant]. So, Q - quality of the food, includes the ingredients and the way you present the food; service would be the way you serve the customers...make sure your customers are always happy... third one is cleanliness; we have to make sure the place is always clean... so our business can be sustained for the long term (Interviewee 4, male, 40s).

Clearly, providing quality food, service and ensuring cleanliness of the place (restaurant) reflect CSR practices that are unique to the food service sector of the hospitality industry; a viewpoint affirmed by Njite, Hancer, & Slevitch (2011).

Motivating staff

Interviewees view staff motivation as an important CSR practice because employees are regarded as the backbone of a company and are crucial for its survival. The food retail industry is a service-based operation which depends largely on staff to prepare

food and serve customers. To motivate staff, benefits such as free meals and incentives such as profit-sharing are established by owners. According to Interviewee 3, the profit-sharing system implemented in his outlet motivated his staff to perform more effectively, as highlighted below:

We have this unique thing called profit-sharing programme, every month we take a certain percentage of sales and divide by the number of people [staff] working and their [working] hours and give them a share of the profit to keep them motivated (Interviewee 3, male, 27).

Besides monetary rewards, it was perceived that empowering staff to do what it takes to make customers happy, would also motivate them. Interviewee 5 provides a flexible working environment to facilitate staff empowerment at her outlet, as shown in this excerpt:

...Normally I let them [my staff] do whatever they want as long as that makes sense to make customers happy. [I tell them]if you think the customer will be happy, then do it! Just do it! (Interviewee 5, female, 23).

Employees are regarded as one of the most important stakeholders (Kim & Scullion, 2013) and their contribution is necessary for the efficient functioning of an organisation (Closon, Leys & Hellemans, 2015). Indeed, prior studies prove that CSR practices motivate employees in their work (Kim & Scullion, 2013). However, contrary to Kim & Scullion (2013) who found that businesses seldom engage in CSR with the main aim of motivating staff, this study does highlight that SMEs engage in CSR practices that are aimed at motivating staff. Interestingly, interviewees recognise that both financial rewards (that is, bonuses, profit-sharing and free meals) and non-financial rewards through empowerment, are important motivators to encourage staff to perform well and provide good customer service.

Sociocultural Dimension

This study uncovered a new dimension categorised as sociocultural. This dimension does not exist in either Carroll's or Dahlsrud's CSR models. The sociocultural dimension is revealed in three CSR practices which are: ensuring customer happiness, sharing knowledge and encouraging a flexible work culture or environment.

Ensuring customer happiness

As customers are the main reason why businesses exist, ensuring customer happiness is considered an important CSR practice. Food retail owners realise that if customers

are not satisfied with the service provided, they will not repeat their patronage or alternatively, vent their dissatisfaction through social media. Interestingly, one interviewee stated that ensuring customer happiness in their outlet is a way of giving back to society, in terms of their psychological health:

If customers come here with a pissed off face and they sit, enjoy our food and service then go out with a smile on their face...you make them happy and they will come back again tomorrow (Interviewee 1, male, 28).

Literature affirms that customers positively support organisations with CSR practices. According to Gupta (2011), CSR improves purchase intent and consumers provide greater support for companies that have CSR practices. In addition, Perez and Rodriguez del Bosque (2015) found that customer-centric CSR initiatives positively influenced customer satisfaction, recommendation and repurchase behaviours in banks.

Sharing knowledge

Interviewees believe that sharing knowledge on the quality of food ingredients used in their food outlets with customers, is important. Through such information-sharing, customers would be able to appreciate the taste of, and value the food served. One interviewee explained:

We share with our customers that it is the original taste, slowly we will influence and educate them on how to appreciate the taste of original food (Interviewee 7, male, 33).

Besides customers, another interviewee (Interviewee 6) educates young volunteers involved in her CSR activities on the importance of having good values such as being thrifty and making decisions that benefit society. The interview's excerpt highlights this:

One volunteer for my event suggested that I should give him a T-shirt to remember this event. I asked him how many t-shirts he has and told him how much it will cost to print one ... might as well donate that money to a children's home. This is the thing I share with young people (Interviewee 6, female, 55).

Encouraging flexible work culture

According to the interviewees, a comfortable and flexible work culture is implemented in their food retail outlets. For instance, employees are encouraged to be innovative

in the way they perform their work without having to worry about being blamed for mistakes made. The following excerpt highlights this:

My management style is you can explore and be creative and we can take risk in a way so that we can think outside the box (Interviewee 4, male, 40s).

The sociocultural dimension emphasises SMEs' primary stakeholders and is aimed towards fostering social and cultural cohesion with customers, employees as well as the local community. Interestingly, the food retailers perceive that customers' patronage should be reciprocated not only by providing quality food and service and sharing knowledge on food ingredients but also by taking care of customers' emotional wellbeing during their dining experience. Encouraging a flexible work culture for employees gives employees a sense of responsibility and ownership and subsequently, makes them happy and motivated in their jobs. This motivation would then be translated to providing quality service to customers. The associated practices are thus seen as a mechanism for the SMEs to achieve competitive advantage. Educating young volunteers on good values reflects their commitment towards shaping a caring society.

Philanthropic Dimension

CSR practices that are categorised as philanthropy engage in non-monetary initiatives and provide employment opportunities to the community.

Engaging in non-monetary initiatives

Interestingly, while large organisations contribute in terms of financial donations or sponsorships, the SME food retail owners interviewed prefer to engage in non-monetary initiatives for the local community. An interviewee had sacrificed two days away from operating his business to sponsor and carry out an event that benefitted the local community. His interview extract is highlighted below:

A female chef from Taiwan [requested to] use our kitchen to teach 15 parents and their children within this area about cake making (Interviewee 7, male, 33).

Moreover, the same interviewee used his restaurant as a place to bring people together. As an example, he allowed his food outlet to be used by a violin player to perform for his customers. In doing so, he provided an opportunity for the performer to display his talent as well as to interact with customers.

I wish my customers are not listening to music only but able to understand their life direction... What we do is to touch people's lives with little acts by

providing them an opportunity [such as] a stage for them to exhibit their talents and allow them to share dreams [to our customers] (Interviewee 7, male, 33).

Interviewee 8 engaged in other CSR activities to help the local community. He set up a running club in his neighbourhood to encourage people to adopt a healthy lifestyle. In addition, he organised and sponsored food donations to the homeless and to members of a religious place of worship. His interview extract is shown below:

We have a proper coach for the jogging activities every Tuesday night and give out isotonic drinks after jogging. It's for people who want to maintain a healthy lifestyle. I also created a little social group so that we can extend a helping hand to the needy. Every last Wednesday of the month, we pack 400 packets of food. We go all over KL (Kuala Lumpur) to give out free food to the homeless people. We also sponsor some food to the church when there is food fair (Interviewee 8, male, 32).

Providing Employment Opportunities

Interviewee 8 also contributes to the wellbeing of society by employing talented, unemployed individuals:

My business partner will go around Petaling Street and look for buskers. The buskers have talent but no place [opportunity] for them to showcase their talent. So we employ them to perform at our place (Interviewee 8, male, 32).

Community-based CSR practices consist of participating in philanthropic activities that contribute towards improving the local community's living standards (Ismail, Alias, & Mohd Rasdi, 2015). While involvement in non-monetary corporate philanthropic activities may reflect the interviewees' personal values and ethics, it is consistent with the widely accepted view that SMEs do not engage in financial philanthropy due to limited resources. Despite philanthropy being regarded as the discretionary aspect of social responsibility (Carroll, 1991) and their limited resources, it is encouraging to note that SME food retailers' are committed towards making a positive impact on their community's wellbeing. Furthermore, by serving the needs of the community it is part of, an organisation ultimately benefits from its philanthropic activities and flourishes together with its community (Gautier & Pache, 2015). It is worth noting that a majority of the eight interviewees engaged in CSR practices for their customers and the local community. The prominence of these two groups of stakeholders indicates that the food retailers share strong social

capital ties with their customers and the local community in which they operate their business. Also, it indicates a promising trend to participate actively in the national development.

Environmental Dimension

The environmental dimension comprises of CSR practices that preserve or protect the natural environment.

Preserving/Protecting the environment

An interviewee acknowledged his responsibility to protect the environment since his company's operations impacted on the environment. Hence, he shows his commitment through reducing waste, reusing and recycling, also referred to as the 3Rs. CSR practices he has implemented include using reusable food containers, reducing waste in the preparation of food and recycling used items as decorations in his restaurant. These practices are highlighted in the following excerpt:

As a lunchbox provider for TEDx event, I have designed a wrapper with a message for the lunchbox tupperware (container). The message is to encourage the event participants to bring the food tupperware home, wash and reuse it. We also make full use of our food ingredients, for example we use all parts of the chicken rather than just use some parts such as chicken breast or thigh for cooking. Most of my restaurant decoration items are recycled ones...for example, my dad's primary school bag, sofa and antique coffee grinder. This is the uniqueness of our café (Interviewee 7, male, 33).

According to Maloni and Brown (2006), the food industry has adverse effects on the environment. They suggested that in addition to selling environmentally friendly products, food retailers should adopt environmentally responsible practices for their supply chain network. In view of this, existing literature has highlighted that SME owner-managers tend to engage in environmental practices that result in cost reduction as well as have a positive impact on the environment (Cassells & Lewis, 2011).

The finding that only one interviewee focused on environmental friendly practices in his food retail business may reflect the personal attitude of the interviewee. To a certain extent, lack of commitment to improve the environment highlights the lack of importance the natural environment receives with regard to CSR in Malaysia, and this indifference has been pointed out by Darus (2012). As environmental issues are increasingly receiving global attention, more concerted efforts should be undertaken by the local regulatory authorities to ensure that the food industry, including SMEs,

engage in environmentally responsible practices from a supply chain perspective and hence, influence their daily operational activities.

Legal Dimension

Based on the findings of this study, the legal dimension refers to the practice of complying with the government's requirements in the hiring of foreigners.

Complying with legal requirements

This compliance is important so that SME food retail owners play by the rules of the game in employee recruitment procedures. As foreigners are usually employed for frontline positions in the local food service industry, it is imperative for food service operators to comply with the relevant laws and regulations to ensure that they do not pose a health risk in their workplaces. In this context, one interviewee opined that having foreign employees with valid work permits is important. Her interview excerpt emphasises this:

For the foreign staff, I make sure all of them have work permits... (Interviewee 5, female, 23).

Complying with the regulatory requirements in the hiring of foreigners indicates the legal responsibility a business has towards the government. This CSR practice was only mentioned by one interviewee probably because this is a mandatory obligation and as such, may not be perceived as a CSR practice by the others. As the government is an important regulatory stakeholder, it is imperative that SMEs behave in a legally and socially acceptable manner so as to sustain their business operations (Taghian et al., 2015).

Stakeholder Dimension

This study uncovered a total of nine CSR practices that focused on the interviewees' internal (employees) and external stakeholders (customers, local community, government and the environment). Since the nine practices emphasise different stakeholders, another dimension referred to as stakeholder, has emerged and this is consistent with Dahlsrud (2008) who explicitly classified the stakeholder as one of the five dimensions in his conceptual model. The nine CSR practices and the six related dimensions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Study findings: Six CSR dimensions based on nine CSR practices and five stakeholder types

Stakeholder Dimension	Economic Dimension	Sociocultural	Philanthropic Dimension	Environmental Dimension	Legal Dimension
– Employees	– Providing	– Ensuring	– Engaging	– Preserving/	– Complying
– Customers	quality food,	customer	in non-	Protecting	with legal
– Local	service &	happiness	monetary	the	requirements
Community	conducive	– Sharing	initiatives	environment	
– Government	physical	knowledge	– Providing		
– Environment	environment	– Encouraging	employment		
	– Motivating	flexible work	opportunities		
	staff	culture			

Conclusion

With regard to the first research question, the study found that SME food retail owners within the Klang Valley perceived CSR to be beneficial to different stakeholders, namely customers, employees and the community. Despite the generally positive perception towards CSR, the study uncovered a negative perception that large organisations engage in CSR with an ulterior motive, specifically to gain publicity or to evade corporate tax. To answer the second research question, a total of nine CSR practices emerged which were themed into six dimensions. Five dimensions, namely economic, legal, philanthropic, environmental and stakeholder are consistent with the CSR conceptualisations or models proposed by Carroll (1979) and Dahlsrud (2008). However, the dimension classified as sociocultural does not exist in either Carroll’s or Dahlsrud’s model and emerged from the findings of this study. This new dimension implies that SME food retail owners have a caring personality that may be unique to the context of this study as all the interviewees are Malaysians. Hence, the Malaysian culture may have influenced their perceptions.

Interestingly, the findings present a different viewpoint from that of Siwar and Harizan (n.d.). They pointed out that SMEs in Malaysia are more concerned with achieving profitability to sustain their business operations rather than being concerned with how their operations affects their intimate stakeholders (employees, customers and the local community). However, the findings of this study suggest that through their engagement in various CSR practices to benefit stakeholders, SME food retail owners are concerned about how their businesses impact these stakeholders.

The findings of this preliminary study offers some awareness to policy makers that despite Malaysia not having CSR guidelines for SMEs, some SME food retailers undertake CSR practices based on their understanding. In spite of the significant findings, this study focused on a very specific segment of the hospitality industry, independent owner-operated small food retail owners, in one particular area in

Malaysia. Future studies could focus on different types of food retail outlets such as chain restaurants, franchised outlets and kiosks in other areas in Malaysia. The findings from these studies would provide a better understanding on the status of CSR among food retailers in Malaysia. In addition, this study sought the perceptions of only eight food retail owners and this may have limited the findings. Further studies can focus on a larger sample and, include other important stakeholders such as employees and customers to obtain more balanced findings. Finally, instead of using only a qualitative research design, future studies can employ both qualitative and quantitative research designs to obtain more robust findings.

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