

Hypermarkets in Malaysia: Issues of Expansion, Distribution and Corporate Social Responsibility

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***Abstract---**With the higher consideration of Corporate Social Responsibility among researchers globally, its empirical support in Malaysia is relatively limited. In fact, various factors have proven to impact CSR application that eventually leads to increase customer base and win their satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, CSR practices are key concern area for hypermarkets to ensure their business sustainability in a changing and uncertain corporate environment. Business corporations are currently seeking higher social responsibility that contributes to the environment and society. Additionally, Hypermarkets consider higher degree of CSR practices to impact the behavior of their consumers. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to discuss in details issues regarding expansion, distribution, and challenges met by Malaysian hypermarkets CSR practices.*

***Keywords---** Social Responsibility, Issues of Expansion, Distribution and Corporate.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept Corporate Social Responsibility mainly describes the connections that corporations have with the society they serve [30,17]. It is certain that practices of corporate social responsibility are important part of corporations that help them to achieve consumer loyalty and brighten their organizational images [36]. Apparently, CSR have a very big influence on corporations' image as that drives corporations to make bigger investments on CSR practices[37]. Therefore, it seems completely reasonable to consider corporate social responsibility activities in hypermarkets general strategy. This is believed based on the fact that corporations effort made on CSR are simply repaid by customers[49].

Corporation social responsibility activities are believed to force positive impacts on some variables relevant with the behavior of consumers such as their attitude to the corporation [7], corporation general evaluation [32,40], consumer-firm identification [18, 19], and eventually brand image & loyalty[15].

A. *Hypermarkets retailing in Malaysia*

A traditional sundry store was the initial phase of retail industry in Malaysia and it developed to supermarkets and eventually to hypermarkets. The term hypermarket refers to a modern retailing store that enables customers to purchase most of their basic needs. This concept of having almost all customers' needs under one roof made hypermarkets key attraction for customers shopping purposes, particularly in purchasing monthly household

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necessities[26]. In Malaysia, the concept of hypermarket retailing that is fundamentally based on self-service has witnessed considerable momentum[28]. The Malaysian culture that considers shopping as a key pastime is strongly supporting the concept of hypermarket. In a previous research, it was found that over 89% of Malaysian customers favour hypermarkets to purchase their household needs[27]. The overall physical environment that surrounds hypermarkets such as covered parking, music, air conditioning, high variety in food and beverages, and rest areas has become key attraction tool for most families not only for shopping purposes but also a place to spend quality time with family. Hence, the term hypermarket is not limited to shopping purposes, but functions as a place for realignment. Traditional retailing involves some basic components such as price driven, time saving, and service delivery [53]. Through years, traditional retailer stores have transformed to supermarkets and afterwards to hypermarkets [10,26], that have significantly changed the structure of the market in addition to regulatory policies [24]. The value added that hypermarkets have include features such as the modern display format, larger varieties and quantities, and market space [9]. Generally, the smaller the market is, the fewer the number of international retailers [43]. Malaysia hypermarkets opportunity to significantly expand is still on-going.

In Malaysia, the foreign direct investment inflow (FDI) has recently witnessed improvement. The main contributing sectors in such improvement are wholesale and retailing. Economic development in countries leads to improve various factors [33] such as purchasing power, goods and service variety, information available in the market, order management, and interacting. In fact, grocery retailing industry revolution is very impressive compared to all other industries. In some cases, it can actually be perceived as an automatic development that is out of control. The high increase in the competition of retail industry is referred to several factors such as the higher number of emergent retailers' competition among markets giant players. Market and retail corporations' efficiency has increased due to the high competition in the industry [4]. In Malaysia, giant retailers such as Tesco and AEON have made dramatic investment for the purpose of increasing their competitive networks[9]. Privatization rules that require 30% of private equity to be held by Bumiputra[34] have provided local people with the opportunity to be highly involved in the retail industry. Additionally, the opportunity is open for local Malaysian to be part of the operational expansion of the whole hypermarket industry.

II. HYPERMARKET RETAILING EXPANSION

The expansion of retailing operations could be achieved through two key ways; locally or internationally. Hypermarkets in Malaysia can increase their outlet under Malaysian land through local expansion. On the other hand, international expansion strategy refers to the opening of new outlets in other countries. Due to the increase of competition or probably scant opportunities in the local market [1, 58], internationalization has increased as well [55]. In hypermarket retailing, internationalization depends on various factors such as leadership, innovation, corporate culture, customer focus, and eventually customer awareness [2]. For the purpose of enhancing this capability, hypermarket retailers are required to adopt the most appropriate internationalization strategy between self-established subsidiary, joint venture, franchising, or direct acquisition to support their presence in the new market [35,47].

Internationalization refers to the process of expanding business activities to a new country. Corporations have different means for internationalizations based on their skills as well as expertise to tackle that new country. Apparently, expanding business activities is not an easy process, particularly in a new country. This is due to the differences between home and host country which include differences in culture, legal rules, political policies, economic system, business practices, communication tools, behaviour and eventually general business condition [19, 21]. The say “think globally, act locally” is in fact easier than actual practice and a lot of retailers have learned a hard lesson because of that say [45]. According to [38], the four main obstacles in internationalization are differences in culture and language, logistic and communication cost, regulatory controls, and the competitive environment. Therefore, the road to internationalization is full of ups and downs and that makes it hard.

In fact, many hypermarkets corporations have tried expanding their business operations to other foreign countries. However, these hypermarkets attempts are not all successful. Apparently, European and British retailers are considered as internationalization leaders. The year 1969 marked the first retailer expansion of Carrefour in the international market [8]. Kamath and Godin (2001) [31] have stated in their research that the set of restrictions that Carrefour faced domestically presented by legislation and some other forces motivated Carrefour to seek international opportunities. The internationalization and business expansion of Carrefour mainly depends on five key forces. These forces are 1) developing ideas, 2) simple and clear ideas, 3) universal ideas, 4) commitment, and 5) state of mind. The Malaysian retailer market consists of both local and international iconic hypermarket players which keep on widen their operations continuously. The existence of international retailers in Malaysia has forced the local players to enhance their services for higher competitiveness and sustainability.

Corporate Social Responsibility is the economic and social commitments that contribute the development of corporations, corporation’s stakeholders, and to the entire surrounding environment [13]. Corporations are using CSR commitments to avoid hurdles and reduce all possible harmful effects of their business activates to ensure brightening their image and sustaining their business [41]. Corporations in the earlier times used to run their business for one and only goal which is maximizing the business profits and highly increase the wealth of shareholders. However, CSR came as criteria that balance the equation between business practices and improving the society and its surrounding environment [33]. Therefore, the paper is considering eight vital dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility:

A. Corporate Website

In fact, businesses are in the era of technology using many different ways to market their brands online [11]. Chaffey et al. (2009) states that the most typical method that corporation use to market their brands online is establishing own website. This website content should include the corporation’s basic information such as history, contact information and product line [11]. Firms’ web pages provide feasible options to create, present, and eventually communicate all CSR agendas [19, 20]. Through corporations’ websites, users can easily have an access to the desired information [22]. Hwang et al, 2003 pointed out that websites function is not limited to providing information and market the brand image but also offering tools to sell products [48, 60].

The remarkable expansion of online hypermarket is importantly considered especially in highly populated and urban areas. The society in these areas is mostly busy and electronic hypermarket emerged as an excellent alternative to stay away from stressful crowding. Although online shopping and electronic hypermarkets in particular have been introduced and widely accepted by customers [28].

B. Public Relations

Public relations play significant management role in advising and educating consumers or even encouraging business executive to develop corporate social responsibility practices. PR has other identical roles such as the promotion of philanthropic actions as well as relationship-building initiatives, communicating all CSR practices, and act as a criterion for ethical standards [32]. Both CSR and PR work together to strengthen and foster corporations' public relations with all relevant groups relying on the practices of CSR and the tactics of PR [14]. For hypermarkets, PR works to encourage customers to eat fresh food and maintain healthy lifestyle.

C. Advertising

The term advertising is defined as non-personal form of presenting and promoting goods and services or even ideas that is mostly paid to specific sponsor (Dominic, 2013). An advertising of good or service includes providing sufficient information about the good or service or summary of the idea presented using media [5]. In the case of CSR, advertising is significantly effective since it draws corporations' reputation and protection line. Previous authors have made a distinction of the persuasive CSR advertising which attempts to positively influence customers to purchase products that has CSR attributes (McWilliams, Siegel and Wright, 2006). For Hypermarket retailers, advertising comes in many forms. However, the most widely adopted ones are the posters and displays within the hypermarket, TV advertisement, and newspaper and magazines advertisement. Zorita (2008) has stated in a research that advertising and promotions is the best tool used to raise corporations' sales. Based on the explanation of [16], the display of merchandise factor tends to concentrate on in-store location as well as the shopping route for the purpose of positively influencing customer's propensity to browse. As an addition, the visual presentation of products in stores has positive impacts on customers purchasing behavior.

D. Social Media

Social networking relying on online media is defined as a variety of digital resources of information that initially created and consumed by the users of internet as a tool of educating one another regarding goods, services, personalities, and issues [12]. Tools of social media allow corporations to interact directly and indirectly with customers and thus encourage customer engagement [59]. Currently, social media is the most popular channel that connects consumers with corporations [25]. According to Vivek et al., (2012) [57], with the emerging of social media; corporations are considering customer engagement tactics to build strong relationship with customers by organizing campaigns that aim to increase customer involvement and ensure lasting connections with them. In the case of Hypermarket retailers, they are depending on customer engagement strategy to mainly create emotional connection with customers [54]. Snow (2012) [52] has also claimed that the proper use of social media by corporations is a powerful tool since it adds value to customers and increases their engagement (Hollbeck, 2013).

E. Community Support

The support of CSR is identified as a key moderating considerable factor when it comes to assessing customer reaction to corporations CSR information [50]. This is because the domains of CSR practices are very diverse (Gao, 2009). It is indicated that new hypermarket outlets have achieved success due to many different contributing factors. Positioning strategy implemented by these new retailer outlets is one of the key reasons. Some of the sociological natures in the hypermarkets are low price and large assortment that is supported by shopping centers free parking. This gave customers the feeling of being equally treated regardless any social differentiation while they are given the chance to experience sense of freedom to touch and choose among different products [39].

F. Environmentally Friendly

The term green marketing refers to the effort made by corporations in designing, promoting, pricing and distributing products in a way that encourages environmental protection. Stated differently, it is all activities designed for the purpose of generating and facilitating any exchanges intended to achieve satisfaction of human needs considering minimum harm to the natural environment. The American Marketing Association has defined green marketing as the marketing of environmentally safe and friendly products.

The green retailing integrates a set of actions such as availability of green products, displaying and promoting them, sustainability in retail stores practices, and business ethical activities. This generation customers are paying attention to corporation's environmental activities. Therefore, the demand for friendly to the environment products has remarkably increases [46]. To make the least possible impact on environment, corporations have re-launched and resigned some of their products (Jones et al, 2007, Bergstrom et al, 2005) that are mainly intended for developing their positive image in the minds of conscious consumers who consider environmentally friendly products.

G. Sale of locally Produced Products

Local products refer to the products that are made or produced within the local area and have the local identity. Within supermarkets area, there are few stalls that are specialized in selling fresh food. The traditional markets were considered as supermarkets that serve fresh food and provide one step shopping for variety of fresh foods [23]. In fact, there are four key issues relevant with fresh food characteristics that can attract consumers purchasing decision. These four issues are price, quality, reliability and availability. According to Sloan et al. (1984) [51], higher goods quality upheld higher degree of freshness. Consumer decision while purchasing fresh food is greatly influenced by the freshness of the food [42,56] and vice versa. A big portion of consumers are basically willing to pay higher to purchase quality food and would certainly change their selection if the quality is not as expected. Alongside with quality, price is another influential variable that informs customers about goods value. Stock availability is another concern that consumers have when it comes to the freshness of the food. Lastly, Goldman et al. (1999) added the last concern that consumers have regarding fresh food is variety. In term of variety, Zinkhan et al. (1999) [61] indicated that most consumers who seek freshness in products consider the variety of the available products. Hypermarkets are regarded by some experts as product specialists who provide very selective products chosen from a wide range of items.

H. Treating Employees

It is indicated that higher implementation of CSR programs leads to higher level in creativity in the workplace. For employees, CSR describes their self-evaluation in addition to the personal interpretation of corporate social responsibility practices performed in their corporations [6]. In fact, this evaluation creates positive perceptions that shape employees behavioral and attitudinal reaction in their workplace [34]. Not only that, CSR encourages employees to be part of the voluntary activities that eventually lead to improvement in their skills and general career. To provide balance between employees working condition and their career development, top management of most corporations consider CSR practices that makes it easy and flexible to achieve such balance.

It is found that in-store employees play primary role in affecting consumers who shop from physical stores. Kim, 2012 suggested that store employees' problems consist of three major elements; salespersons number, employees' behavioral attribution, and employee's physical attribution. When it comes to influencing customer intention, emotion and satisfaction; salespersons in the stores play an indispensable role [3,37,29].

III. CHALLENGES FACING HYPERMARKET RETAILING EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES IN MALAYSIA

The retail industry and hypermarkets particularly in Malaysia has developed impressively. This is due to the fact that main and most sellable products in Malaysian hypermarkets are groceries and basic household needs. By the year 2013, the grocery retailers' sales outgrow the non-grocery retailers. Malaysia has very big hypermarket players such as Aeon, Giant, Econsave, Tesco, and Mydin[27]. Since Malaysia is a developing country and it has an opportunity to internationalize its hypermarkets in neighbor countries, there is still an opportunity to expand domestically as well. It has been noticed that socio-economic level in a place changes by the existence of hypermarkets. This is referred to the fact that most Malaysians prefer to shop from modern retail shops that have modern facilities. In connection with that, the hypermarkets provide an opportunity for small as well as medium enterprises to sell their produced products in big quantities to them. In the process of catering shoppers increasing demand, higher employment opportunities are produced in hypermarkets and even in the sub-retailers. As a result of these opportunities in entrepreneurship and employment, it is indicated that hypermarkets help in improving the socio-economic level in the areas it is located in Malaysia. This is achieved by a reduction of the gap of average monthly income of household and population between rural and urban areas. Thus, the expansion of hypermarkets in Malaysia is considered as a center for socio-economic development. This is very important factor for socio-economic development, especially in the rural areas in Malaysia. Figure 1: Hypermarket Retailing Expansion as a Hub for Socioeconomic Development

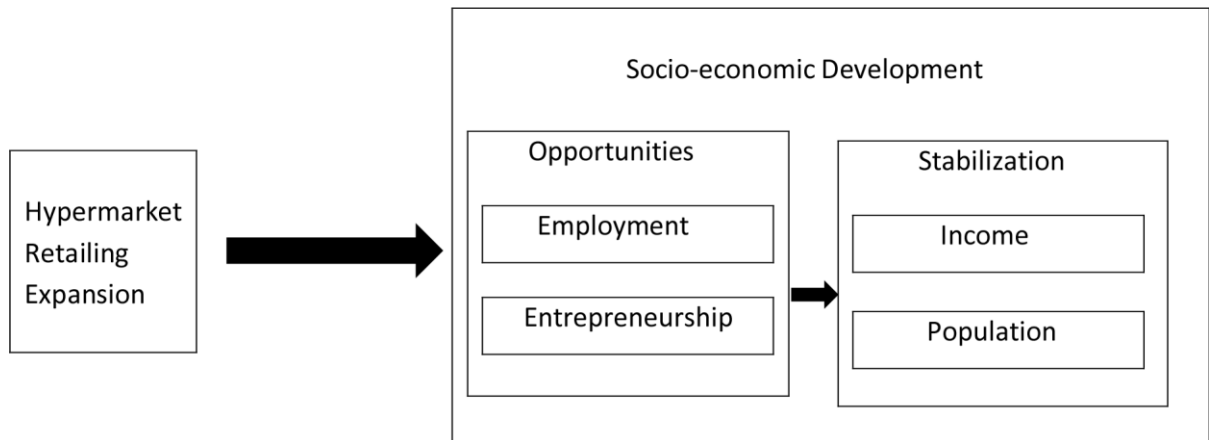


Figure 1:

(Junainah Mahdee: 2015)

IV. DISTRIBUTION OF HYPERMARKET OUTLETS AND POPULATION IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is consisting of 14 states that are clustered into five key regions. 1) The northern region consists of Perlis, Pulau Pinang, Kedah and Perak; 2) Southern Region consists of Melaka and Johor; 3) Central Region consists of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Putrajaya and Negeri Sembilan; 4) East Coast that consists of Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu; 5) East Malaysia consists of Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan. Table 1 below shows hypermarket stores distribution and the population of every region. The hypermarket stores distribution based on every region is obtained from the most recent data provided by key retail market players while the population percentage is obtained from the department of Statistic Malaysia. In Malaysia, opportunities to gain benefits from local consumers is high and hence, hypermarket retailers are recommended to rely on local expansion strategies rather than international expansion strategies. Under the current situation, more than half of the hypermarket outlets (58%) or (201 outlets) are located in the Central Region of Malaysia. This is due to the fact that the Central Region has the highest population which is approximately (28.96%) or (8,762,700 people) when it is compared to all other regions. The region that has the second highest number of hypermarket outlets is the Northern Region at 15.32% that consists of 53 hypermarket outlets while its population is at 21.23% that consists of 6,242,400 people. Thirdly, the Southern Region has 15.03% or 52 hypermarket outlets with a population of 14.52% (4,393,300 people). The East region has 23 hypermarket outlets

Table 1:

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Number of Hypermarket Outlets</i>	<i>Percentage of Hypermarket Outlet</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Percentage of Population</i>
North Region (Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang and Perak)	53	15,32%	6,424,400	21.23%

Central Region (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan)	201	58.09%	8,762,700	28.96%
Southern Region (Johor and Melaka)	52	15.03%	4,393,300	14.52%
East Region (Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang)	17	4.91%	4,415,300	14.59%
East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan)	23	6.65%	6,265,900	20.71%
Total	346	100%	30,261,600	100%

[27]

Which represents 6.65% of the total hypermarket outlets to a population of 20.71% (6,265,900 people) while East Coast region has 17 hypermarket outlets (4.91%) on an area that has a population of 4,415,300 people (14.59%). The high number of the population in the Central region is due the migration of youngsters to the region for different purposes but mainly better living standards. Therefore, population density is predicted to more stabilize if the number of hypermarkets increases in all other regions. This is due to the fact that hypermarkets have the ability to become a hub for communities to increase their living income. Besides that, the availability of hypermarkets functions as hubs for these communities to spend high portion of their income on household needs.

Generally, hypermarket retailers prefer highly populated areas to establish their business. Nonetheless, the ratio of hypermarket stores distribution to the population distribution is not fixed of constant. This indicates the ability and opportunity that hypermarket retailers have to still consider the Northern and East region of Malaysia in their expansion because their population is fairly high. It is also significantly meaningful for hypermarket retailers to expand in the Southern region and in Johor in particular due to the close border it has with Singapore as one of Singaporean shopping habits is to cross the border to Malaysia and purchase their needs from Johor. This will importantly constitute to the overall Malaysian economy and Southern Region in particular. The data on the Table below indicates that the Central Region has the highest population. Figure 2: Distribution of Hypermarket Outlets and Population in Malaysia An opening of extra hypermarket outlets outside the Central Region will certainly improve living standards and eventually discourage or at least reduce the migration to the Central Region. Not only that, those who have migrated to the Central Region might also return to their hometowns due to the development of their original place. This will indirectly reduce the destiny of the population in the Central Region and lead to stabilization in human distribution in all regions. Hypermarket retailers' effort alongside with government support can lead to develop all regions equally and consistently. Despite the negative impacts the hypermarket retailers have

on small grocery shops, the positive impact of the hypermarket retailers has always overruled the relatively small negative impact.

V. MEASURING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

According to Perez et al. (2013), since the introduction of CSR concept, measuring CSR has been the objective of many research studies. Due to the lack of consensus, they individually tried to formulate a specific measurement method. The scale of their researches is based on the theory of stakeholders, rather than the theory of sustainable development. By the consideration of literature review and exploratory research, five key stakeholders are identified to be relevant with CSR image. Each of the stakeholders is identified with one CSR item: "CSR in fact integrates corporate behavior committed to ethical practices, social projects, the environment, and information transparency in corporate relationships with all relevant stakeholders" [44]. In regard to consumers, five items are listed, "mainly concerning both clear and honest communication of corporate goods and services and management of complaints" [44]. These items cover three key issues: self-discipline, information transparency and new products development. With the consideration of these items, Pérez et al. (2013) constructed a quantitative study based on interviewer-administered questionnaire. Items related to customers were the following; creates procedures to comply requirements of customers, honest treatment with customers, having employees who offer complete and clear information regarding corporate goods and services to customers.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Malaysian consumers highly accept the idea of hypermarkets and shopping from hypermarkets for their household necessities. Generally, the opportunity of corporate social responsibility to support business to expand their business activities is always available. With the consideration of all variables, it is indicated that the Malaysian hypermarket retailing is still not saturated. Therefore, it would CSR would certainly be a big added value to hypermarkets that consider local expansion opportunity within its strategies. Placing hypermarket in an area directly contributes to socioeconomic development and eventually raises living standards. In return of that, hypermarkets will also be rewarded by the consideration of customers purchasing more in a specific outlet. Providing convenience during customers shopping journey will eventually help hypermarket retailers to maximize their total profits.

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