

# **The role of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability on Competitiveness, the mediating impact of customer loyalty: Evidences from the hotel industry in Qatar**

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## **Abstract**

Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability (CR&S) is to enable organisations so that integrate social, environmental and economic values into its core strategy and functional operations. This lead to an improvement in management and decreases possible business risks and at the same time would improve long-term community and environmental interaction. This, in turn may lead to an enhancement in organizational competitiveness. This paper investigates the role of CR&S on competitiveness through the mediating role of customer loyalty. A model is developed and examined through hotel industry in Qatar. Statistical results show that all research hypotheses can be accepted and that customer loyalty can be gained by incorporating CR&S values which would affect competitiveness in hotel and hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, Customer Loyalty, Competitiveness, Hotel industry, Qatar.

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## **Introduction**

Customers may attracted to organisations by perceiving how these organisations core values cope with social traits (Hui Tsai et al., 2015). Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability (CR&S) can refer to how organisations would incorporate its social commitments in its core strategy and operations (Pino et. al., 2015). As long as the level of CR&S affects business and community can be enormous in short- and long-term, it would be vital that level of ‘the CRS awareness’ is highlighted and recognized in different organisations (Kang et. al., 2010). As such shift recognised, organisations are to create value by incorporating CR&S into their core strategies and operational practices, ultimately contributing to society.

In accordance, an increased awareness has emerged among organisations on concepts of CR&S and how it affects performance and competitiveness (Font et al., 2016). Zappala (2003) argue that organisations; in different fields, would plan to pertain CR&S so keep chances of survival in modern environment competition. Generally speaking, dealing with environmental issues can help to improve employee safety, increase efficiency, and reduce operational costs (Hui Tsai et al., 2015) which in turn would enhance competitive advantages for organizations and, influence consumer behavior and loyalty (Kang and Lee, 2010). Therefore, companies need to institutionalize socially responsible activities in order to respond to consumer demands (Romani et al., 2013). Due to this great significance, the focus of studies on CR&S has shifted from why to how, so that CR&S is completely aligned with business strategies (Kamaei, 2015). This research aims to investigate the impact of CR&S on competitiveness mediating the role of customer loyalty with evidences from the hotel industry in Qatar. Theoretical background on CR&S is presented followed by model development and hypotheses testing.

## **Theoretical background**

### *Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability: emerging of the concept*

Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability (CR&S) can be considered as a critical element in creating and maintaining company reputation so that enhance competitive advantage of these organisations (Park et al., 2014). This is especially true in the modern world, where companies are receiving growing pressures to consider the environment (Menichini and Rosati, 2014) and have to create long-term relationships with consumers and the society. Walker (2007) argue that the first attempts to conceptualize CR&S date back to the 1960s. Recently, CR&S has been defined as the moral obligations of companies to maximize their positive impacts while minimizing their negative effects on the social environment (Hui Tsai et al., 2015). In another definition, CR&S is defined as the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities of a firm toward the society and the environment (Font et al., 2016). It is then a sense of responsibility and responsiveness toward the society and the ability to manage the relationship between a firm and the society (Herzig and Moon, 2013).

It was Davis in 1973 who presented a more comprehensive model on CR&S (Davis, 1973). Davis explained why and how organizations should act so improving and developing both themselves and the society to which they belong (Davis, 1973). In a more modern trend, Wood

(1991) proposed three levels of CR&S, making the concept more tangible. Carroll (1999) later argued that the social responsibility in any organisation would be divided into four perspectives: economic, legal, ethical, and altruistic where all of which can lead to improved citizenship quality in such organisation. Wood (2010) states that these perspectives can be considered as links that are connected by economic concerns on one hand and social concerns on the other. Economic obligations imply the fact that, as economic entities, firms are created to improve the economy. Therefore, producing goods and services for the society is considered the first and foremost objective of any firm. Legal obligations refer to the society demanding that companies comply with rules and regulation rather than being merely profitable. Ethical obligations represent activities with no economic or legal requirement that cover norms, standards, and expectations about which consumers, employees, the society are concerned. Such concerns may involve justice, equality, and protection of stakeholders (Carroll, 1999). Finally, altruistic obligations are the activities carried out by a firm in response to societal expectations for being a good citizen (Akter, 2015).

#### *CR&S and Customer loyalty*

Customers are the most important entities observing the activities of an organization (Marin et al., 2009). Consumer reactions toward any organization would include word of mouth, intention to buy and support, satisfaction, and in general *loyalty* (Kang and Hustvedt, 2013). Baber et al. (2016) argue that the notion of “word of mouth” used to describe customer recommendations to each other, which plays a major role in shaping consumer behaviours and attitudes and thus customer loyalty. A behavioral reaction by one consumer to recommend a particular brand inclines the minds of other consumers toward that brand during the processes of decision-making and evaluation (Pino et al., 2015). Romani et al. (2013) found that, in their decision to share positive word of mouth, customers tend to favour more socially responsible companies. On the same domain, Kang and Hustvedt (2013) demonstrated that how a company’s efforts to achieve social responsibility perceived by customers directly affects their attitudes and loyalty towards such company. Al-Hawari (2006) added that customer satisfaction creates a large number of behavioral outcomes such as repurchase intention and customer loyalty. In such manner, Loureiro et al. (2012) states that CRS would have a positive effect on customer loyalty. In accordance, Park et al. (2014) reported a rational relationship between consumer purchase behaviours and environmental advocacy. Furthermore, Lombart and Louis (2014) demonstrated that customer loyalty and satisfaction are directly affected by CRS. Moreover, Marin et al. (2009) investigated a significant positive relationship between

CRS and customer loyalty.

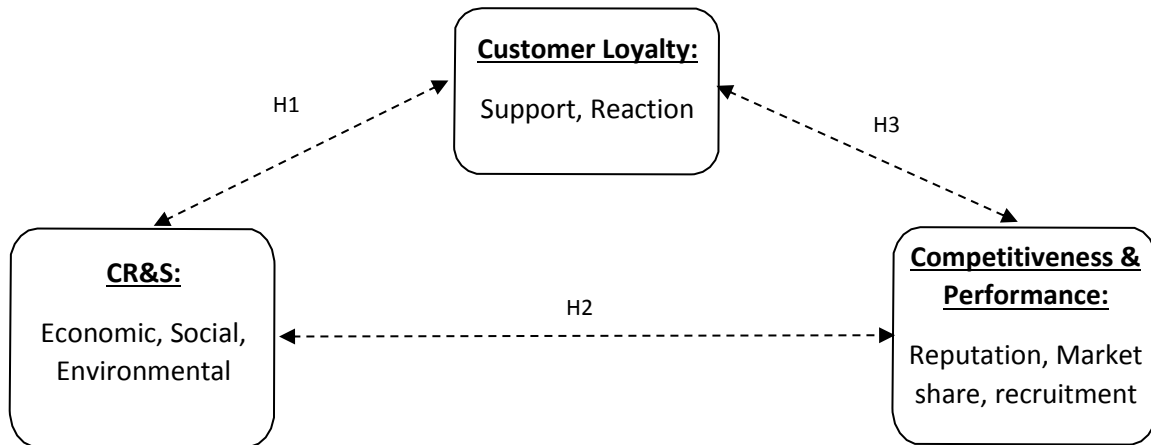
### *CR&S and Competitiveness*

A firm's commitment to its social responsibilities then can have a notable effect on its performance (Sandhu and Kapoor, 2010). Herzig and Moon (2013) argue that CRS would affect long-term success, economic growth, and increase competitiveness. Many authors highlighted the effect of CR&S on competitiveness and performance (Chen and Carey, 2009, Kaplan, 2004, Issa, 2011). Font et al. (2016) state that CRS would positively affect market share which is a common standard in advancing competitiveness. Moreover, Vázquez and Hernandez (2014) focused on exploring the role of sales capability in various aspects to enhance competitiveness and performance, which can be improved by increasing CR&S capabilities. By comparing American and Japanese organizations, Kaplan (2004) showed that sales performance, profitability, and stock returns are key factors in both compensation and changing senior management where associated with CR&S towards customers and the society. Vázquez and Hernandez (2014) Concluded that CR&S has a direct and positive effect on competitive and performance.

### *CR&S, Customer loyalty and competitiveness, model development*

CR&S then can affect competitiveness and customer loyalty. Figure 1 illustrate conceptual model developed after theoretical background. CR&S would directly affect competitiveness and customer loyalty. In addition, customer loyalty would play a mediating role in affecting competitiveness in organisations. It is reported that CR&S affects Corporate Social Performance (CSP) and some considered it as an indicator to CR&S outcomes (Hui Tsai et al., 2015). CSP was firstly proposed by Carroll in 1979 and later on, Wartick and Cochran (1985) proposed a model of three principles explaining CSP; namely social legitimacy, public responsibility, and managerial discretion (Wood, 1991).

**Figure 1: Conceptual model: CR&S, Customer loyalty and Competitiveness**



Lizarzaburu (2012) argues that companies focus on identifying and responding to public demands while aiming to enhance their social legitimacy, acceptance, and status. In addition, organizational recruitment can be an important indicator to competitiveness and performance as the capabilities of a firm are partially dependent on its attractiveness for stronger and more professional applicants. This creates a positive relationship between the company and occupational expectations of the society and can be considered as an indicator to competitiveness and higher performance (Wang et al., 2014). Reputation also can be considered as a direct outcome of CR&S. Issa (2011) argues that by building reputation, organisations are to achieve value of competitive advantage which can be reflected by mental image or superiority. In addition, reputation can enhance sales and lead to required financial performance (Issa, 2011). Also, organizational effectiveness and efficiency are improved through change, transformation, and compatibility (Chen and Carey, 2009). Farooq et al. (2014) found that social responsibilities in an organization depend on employees' observation of CR&S activities by the organization. Several ways to enhance support behaviours include training and development, performance appraisal and compensation, informal roles (Limpanitgul et al., 2013). Accordingly, research hypotheses can be as follows:

H1: There are mutual effects between CR&S and Customer loyalty.

H2: There are mutual effects between CR&S and Firm Competitiveness and Performance.

H3: There are mutual effects between Customer Loyalty and firm Competitiveness and Performance.

## Methodology

In order to test research hypotheses, a survey questionnaire was developed and distributed to managers and customers in hotels in Qatar. With more than 300 hotels, mostly four and five stars, a sample of 540 respondents participated in this study. A Structure Equation Model (SEM) is used to analyse data using AMOS. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed to reduce the number of measured components and extract factors. Furthermore, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to determine item validities as well as identify and confirm influential factors. Research variables and items of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1 as follows:

**Table 1: Research variables and dimensions:**

Variable	Dimensions	Definition	Reference
Corporate Social Responsibility	Economic	In comparison to the other companies, this company: A1: is more sensitive in production A2: has more standard products A3: has products with better qualities relative to their price A4: gives more information to their customers about their products. A5: considers the rights of the consumers as their management priorities. A6: has stable relations and cooperation with the customers and providers. A7: prefers responsible providers. A8: better trading relations with the nearby companies.	Vázquez and Hernandez (2014)
	Environmental	A9: uses raw materials for production with minimum environmental risks. A10: preserves more in the energy consumption. A11: considers and values identification of alternative energies. A12: participates more in the activities for the preservation of environment. A13: has positive viewpoints in the production, purchasing and using products compatible with the environment.	
	Social	A14: is more supportive of job seekers. A15: is more supportive of those injured at work. A16: is more aware from the quality of the personnel. A17: gives more importance to the health and security of the personnel. A18: is more committed to creating opportunities for work and education. A19: gives more importance to the education and development of human resources. A20: is better at taking employee suggestions into account in decision-making. A21: gives better opportunities to the personnel. A22: participates more in social projects.	
Consumer Loyalty	Support Behaviour	B1: We use the products to support the company. B2: We try new products to support the company. B3: It is important for us that others support the advertisements of the company. B4: We give importance to offer a useful feedback.	Romani et.al (2013)
	Customer reaction	B5: I believe I am committed to using the products of this company rather than those of others. B6: When I want to buy a product for the next time, I use the products of this company. B7: I use the products of this company for the next time. B8: I have a positive attitude towards using the products of this company.	Marin et al (2009)
Competitiveness and	Reputation and Popularity	C1: The reports of the public media about this company is positive C2: The reports of the public media indicates the advantages of working in this company C3: The public media often publish useful information about this company.	Tsai et al (2015)
	Market share	C4: This company has an improving market C5: This company has good financial advantages in comparison with the competitors. C6: The stakeholders of this company benefit more than their competitors	Vázquez and Hernandez (2014)

	Recruitment, Employment Desirability	C7: I desire to work in this company. C8: Working in this company is one of my best choices. C9: I advise others to work in this company.	Tsai et al (2015)
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## Findings and Results

Table 2 shows validity and reliability of measured model. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to confirm reliability. CR values for all constructs exceeded the cut-off point 0.60. In addition, all constructs have a minimum AVE of 0.50. Convergent validity and differentiation were employed to determine construct validity. All factor loadings are greater than 0.05, at  $p < 0.01$ ; which means that convergent validity is confirmed.

**Table 2: Validity and reliability of constructs**

Hypothesised Path	Estimated coefficient	$\lambda^2$	e	AVE	CR
SOC ---- CRS	0,51	0,26	0,74	0.47	0.63
ENV ---- CRS	0,51	0,26	0,74		
ECO ---- CRS	0,78	0,60	0,40		
SUP ---- LOY	0,57	0,33	0,67	0.51	.076
CR ---- LOY	0,79	0,62	0,38		
REP ---- COMP	0,72	0,52	0,48	.059	0.75
SHARE ---- COMP	0,78	0,60	0,40		
REC ---- COMP	0,77	0,59	0,41		

Subsequent to confirming reliability and validity, the measurement model was examined. Table 3 indicates that all fit indices have acceptable values, meaning that the model provides adequate fit for the data. Additionally, Figure 2 presents the standard measurement model, wherein all factor loadings pertaining to CR&S, Customer Loyalty, and Competitiveness exceed 0.50, which is indicative of significance.

**Table 3: Important Fitness Indices for the standard measured model**

CMIN/DF								RMSEA
3.570	.000	.049	.956	.924	.551	.935	.952	0.069

Following, the structural model is examined and the hypotheses are tested. Figure 3 shows



structural model test results with standard coefficients estimation. Moreover, according to Table 4, fit indices are greater than recommended values, implying that the model fits the data well.

**Table 4: Important Fitness Indices for the structural model**

CMIN/DF	P	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI	NFI Delta 1	CFI	RMSEA
1.092	.000	.066	.887	.891	.817	.824	.933	.046

Since there are no estimation problems and the standard estimation coefficient ( $\beta$ ) is significant for all paths with bootstrapping at  $p=5\%$ , the obtained estimates are considered satisfactory.

The final step involves confirming the validity and reliability of the structural model, which similar to the measurement model, can be carried out using convergent validity, discriminant validity, CR, and AVE. As shown in Table 5, reliability and validity are supported to a large extent.

**Table 5: Validity and reliability of the structural model**

Constructs	Estimated coefficient	AVE	CR
SOC	0.78	0.613	0.888
ENV	0.76	0.613	0.926
ECO	0.76	0.577	0.924
SUP	0.75	0.593	0.818
CR	0.72	0.533	0.818
REP	0.68	0.499	0.799
SHARE	0.75	0.511	0.754
REC	0.71	0.488	0.826

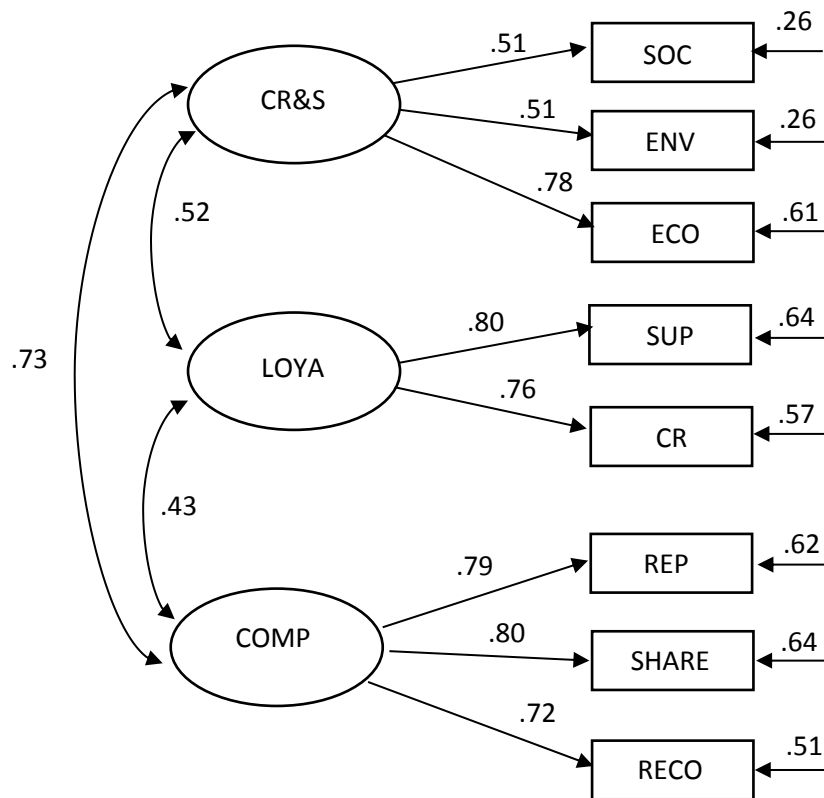
Once model fit is established, in order to test the postulated hypotheses, t-values for each path need to be examined. Regression estimates for the relationships between the studied variables, standard errors, critical ratios, and t-values are presented in Table 6 Referring to this table and the t-values, all hypothesis paths are significant, implying support for all of the hypotheses. Larger t-values signal stronger relationships. According to Table 6, CSR has the

strongest impact on consumer reactions.

**Table 6: The regression weights for the relations between the variables**

Hyothesised Path	Estimated coefficient	Standard error	Critical value	Significance
SOC ---- CRS	0.86	0.082	9.34	***
ENV ---- CRS	1.35	0.094	13.08	***
ECO ---- CRS	0.24	0.075	5.42	0.005
SUP ---- LOY	0.94	0.093	11.17	***
CR ---- LOY	0.61	0.064	7.02	***
REP ---- COMP	0.59	0.054	7.65	***
SHARE ---- COMP	0.17	0.079	3.96	0.009
REC ---- COMP	0.99	0,068	12.68	***

**Figure 2: The standard measurement model of the research**



## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Accordingly, statistical results indicate that different dimensions of CR&S, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions, significantly affect Competitiveness and performance (indicated by reputation and popularity, market share, and recruitment) through Customer Loyalty (including: Supportive behavior and Customer reaction). These results cope with others (e.g.; Baber et al. (2016), Pino et al. (2015), Tsai et al. (2015), Vasquez et al. (2014), Lombart and Louis (2014), Menichini and Rosati (2014), Vázquez and Hernandez (2014), Farooq et al. (2014), Park et al. (2014), Shabnam (2013), Romani et al. (2013), Kang and Hustvedt (2013), Loureiro et al. (2012), Lee et al. (2011), Wood (2010), Ramasamy et al. (2010), Marin et al. (2009) and Nan and Heo (2007)).

It is apparent then that competitiveness and performance can be achieved when a company turns reputable and popular in the society leading to loyalty. It can be concluded after the aforementioned results that CR&S is the most important platform for building a strong position. While any organization would adopt CR&S plateau, consumers are indirectly involved through their reactions. Customers would engage in a favourable behaviour that supports organisations directly and indirectly. Additionally, once customers turn loyal, they try to somehow reciprocate the company's efforts, which will affect competitiveness and performance of such organisation. In other words, investing in CR&S may dramatically lead to a survival of an organisation.

In such manner, managers play a precondition role since they are tasked to encourage accountability toward the society and customers. Constant attention to quality of service, complying with environmental regulations, and considering economic issues of the country as well, can guarantee success of a company in the competitive market. Knowing that costumers are not only considering products, but also how these products affect on the environment and the social responsibility of its manufacturer. Significantly, if managers are to better understand various aspects of CR&S including the effectiveness of current measures, they will be able to achieve public satisfaction and success of their plans.

Furthermore, it is recommended that plans and initiatives to be taken for implementing CR&S in companies. Since CR&S is an extremely important topic in competitiveness, it has not received sufficient attention in hotel industry in Qatar. It looks critical that managers and employees get themselves familiar with the topic. It is also important that general conscience

is adopted so that hotels and other organisations get involved in such CR&S strategic orientation. More specifically, there is a need to focus more on what employees, customers, and the society need. Furthermore, company plans, especially those related to CR&S, need to be communicated in a way that increases public awareness rather than merely inform employees. Appropriate communications and careful use of the media can help to sway and maintain the public's opinion.

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