

ASSESSING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF RELIGIOSITY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CSR ACTIVITIES OF FAST FOOD INDUSTRY AND COMBATING GLOBESITY

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Abstract

Consuming fast food has become a lifestyle for many, especially millennials. Obesity, a silent killer, continue to affect Malaysian society due to high fast food consumption. This study explores the moderating effect of religiosity on the relationship between the fast food industry's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and efforts to combat globesity. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 685 millennials in Selangor through an online survey. Findings from PROCESS analysis reveal that religiosity significantly moderates the relationship between the economic and philanthropic dimensions of CSR and combating globesity. The study highlights the importance for fast food companies to genuinely engage in responsible and ethical CSR practices, appealing to socially conscious young consumers. It aligns with Goal No. 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), promoting good health and well-being, and reflects the MADANI value of (*Ihsan*) which emphasizes equitable healthcare access for all Malaysians.

Keywords: Fast food, Millennials; Corporate Social Responsibility, Healthy Lifestyle, Well-being

1 Introduction

Many scholars have discussed how fast food consumption among the youngsters has been a prominent trend over the previous century. This is driven by convenience, price, social influences, evolving food preferences and strong marketing targeted at youngsters; especially those with a busy schedule (Parikh, 2020). People of all ages consume fast food, from children to the elderly, but those in the 18 to 30 age range enjoyed it the most. Fast food caters to various preferences by offering a variety of appetizing and tempting choices (Folkvord et al., 2020; Rajini et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2019).

Fast food frequently adds new products to their menus to cater the daring tastes of its younger patrons. Therefore, fast food is also a popular choice for youngsters when hanging out with friends. This trend has significant implications for health, lifestyle,

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and the fast food industry itself. Unluckily, fast food is often high in calories, sugars, sodium, and unhealthy fats like trans and saturated fats, which lead to overindulgence in calories, obesity, poor dietary habits, and other health issues such as cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes (Abdullah et al., 2017). This implicates that young generation taking unhealthy fast food causing a long-term negative effect on their health (Jahan et al., 2020).

Practicing a healthy dietary pattern is essential for overall health, well-being, and lifespan. Those who have practised healthy habits since young age are more likely to enjoy life with fewer health complications, lower healthcare costs and continue to live fully and actively. According to Lun et al. (2021), fast food companies occupy a unique and influential position in promoting healthy dietary patterns due to their extensive research, capacity to sway consumer decisions and strong marketing campaigns. Fast food can play a prominent role in promoting the health and well-being of the young generation through implementing socially responsible practices.

There are several socially responsible strategies can be employed by the fast food industry such as by offering healthier menu options, reducing portion sizes, reformulating recipes, supporting public health initiatives, providing accessible nutritional information, adopting sustainable business practices, and engaging in educational campaigns to promotes balanced eating habits. Fast food companies may demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility and enhance the health of the next generation by implementing these strategies. In addition to boosting public health, this may build brand recognition for the fast food companies and foster consumer loyalty.

Carroll's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) pyramid as illustrated in Figure 1 is a widely recognised paradigm that illustrates the four responsibilities that must be fulfilled by the organization which are economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Hence, when the fast food industry integrates this model to address the needs and concerns of various stakeholders including promoting healthy eating among the young generations, this enhances the overall well-being of the community. Through a combination of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities, the fast food restaurants can establish a healthier food environment, educate young consumers, and support broader public health goals (Tahir et al., 2023).



Figure 1: Carroll's CSR Pyramid

Source: (

On the other hand, religiosity refers to an individual's religious beliefs and practices. Religiosity significantly influence individuals to adopt the healthier eating habits through dietary laws, moral teachings, and ethical concerns. Despite this influence varies across different religions and cultural context, but it frequently leads to more mindful, self-disciplined, and health-conscious eating behaviours. Therefore, the purpose of conducting this study is to examine the moderating effect of religiosity on the relationship between the fast food's CSR practices and combating obesity.

1.1 Globesity among the Young Generation

Over the past century, the obesity pandemic "globesity" has become one of the most important public health challenges, especially for youngsters, due to its tremendous growth in prevalence around the world . Obesity incident is rising not only in developed country but also in developing nations due to unhealthy dietary patterns. This makes it a global public health challenge that demands coordinated efforts at local, national, and international levels. Obesity has a significant negative influence on health and has been linked with the risk of getting non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease, and cancer.

The current situation of obesity in Malaysia is concerning with serious health consequences for the population. According to , non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a major problem that accounts for up to 70% of early deaths in Malaysia each year. Figure 2 presents the findings from the recent National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023; whereby the prevalence of overweight, obesity, and abdominal obesity has surged by 10% from 44.5% in 2011 to 54.4% in 2023. The rate is predicted to become even higher. The prevalence of these conditions puts a significant strain on Malaysia's healthcare system and accentuates the urgent need for comprehensive public health interventions to promote healthier lifestyles.

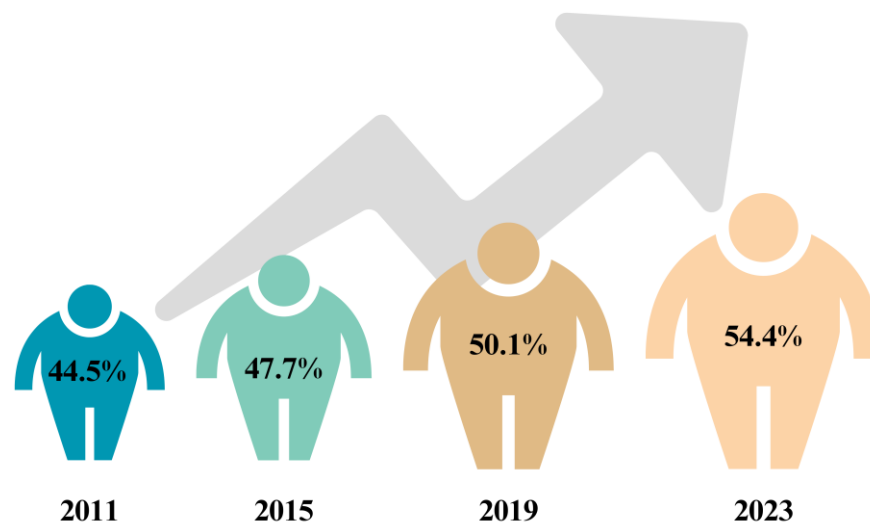


Figure 2: Trend in overweight and obesity among adults in Malaysia from 2011 to 2023

Source:

The National Plan of Action for Nutrition of Malaysia (NPANM) III, 2016 – 2025 witnesses the Malaysia's continued commitment to the Rome Declaration on Nutrition implemented by the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) in 1992 and 2014. NPANM III, 2016 – 2025 is the sequels of the NPANM I, 1996 – 2000 and NPANM II, 2006 – 2015. NPANM III, 2016 – 2025 is the comprehensive plan to attain the optimal nutritional well-being of Malaysians and address food and nutrition challenges in the country . As obesity is a major public health concern in the nation, this plan outlines various initiatives and strategies to address malnutrition, including obesity.

In view of mushrooming of fast food restaurants in Malaysia, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and fast food industry has taken the strategy to provide healthier food choices to public. The Guidelines on the Advertising and Nutrition Information Labelling of Fast Foods serve as the vehicle for putting this into practice. This policy forbids the promotion of fast food advertisements and any sponsorship during children's television programmes . In addition, the fast food companies must present the nutritional value of the products they sell. As outcomes of continuous dialogues with fast food industry, various initiatives have been made to reformulate the fast food products such as boosting the fibre amount, lowering the amount of fat, sugar, and salt.

Not only that, the Malaysia MADANI thrust of care and compassion (*Ihsan*) concept aligns with SDG which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. The government supports this goal by giving emphasis on health equity and focusing on reducing burden of NCDs. In order to ensure better coverage of strategies and activities to promote optimal nutritional well-being of Malaysians, a concerted effort through multi-stakeholder engagement including public, private sector, and civil society is vital to get better support and commitment.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Fast Food Industry's CSR Practices

2.1.1 Economic

At the base of the pyramid, economic responsibility demands the business be profitable and operate sustainably . The primary goal of economic responsibility is to be profitable while advocating for broader social and environmental concerns. Economic responsibility performed by the fast food restaurants aimed at combating obesity concentrates on aligning business practices with public health objectives while ensuring economic sustainability. The fast food industry needs to understand the consumer preferences for healthy eating and modifying product offerings accordingly (Khan, 2018). In this case, the fast food industry can utilise pricing strategies that offer value meals or discounts for healthier products could convince consumers to choose a healthier option. Hence, a wider audience may find it simpler to make healthy choices if the fast food restaurant serves a variety of nutritious menu items at a reasonable price. Fast food industry might invest in developing and advertising nutritious food that appeal to health-conscious consumers.

2.1.2 Legal

Every organisation is bound to comply with laws and regulations established by the government (Khan, 2018). Through legal CSR initiatives, fast food industry can guarantee the quality of their food by following food safety regulations, providing accurate nutritional information, managing the supply chains responsibly, providing proper training to staffs and interacting with the customers in a transparent manner. By doing so, they not only comply with legal requirements but also build trust with consumers and contribute to public health. In Malaysia, food operators are required to

abide by various food regulations including (1) Food Act 1983; (2) Food Regulations 1985; (3) Food Hygiene Regulations 2009; (4) Halal certification; and (5) Environment Health and Safety Guidelines to ensure food safety, quality, and hygiene. Adhering to strict food safety and quality control measures is able to protect consumers' health and well-being.

2.1.3 Ethical

Ethical CSR encompasses actions that are permissible or forbidden in the organisation without being legally obligated (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020). Fast food industry has a social responsibility to boost the communities they serve (Chrisjatmiko & Margareth, 2018). To implement ethical CSR, it is not only adopting practices that are legally compliant procedures but also morally sound, benefiting consumers, employees, communities, and the environment. Ethical CSR performed by the fast food restaurants to fight against obesity is vital as it helps the consumers make informed dietary choices especially when the fast food provide clear and accessible nutritional information about all menu items. The fast food restaurants should demonstrate their commitment to improve health outcomes of the young generation and addressing globesity by prioritising nutritious food options, transparent nutritional information, responsible marketing, responsible marketing, community health support and ensuring quality ingredients.

2.1.4 Philanthropic

Philanthropic CSR involves initiatives that surpass business interests to positively impact public health through education, community engagement, research and allocating resources to encourage healthier lifestyles. Fast food restaurants can sponsor or host educational programs for schools and communities to educate children and adults about nutrition, balanced meals, and the importance of practising healthy eating. In addition, the fast food industry may focus on healthy recipe development by investing in creating healthier menu items and recipes that reduce sugar, fats, and calories without compromising quality (Tahir et al., 2022). In order to promote the benefits of healthy eating and the risks associated with obesity, the fast food industry may reach a large audience by utilizing a variety of media channels. For example, since 2011, McDonald's in the United States of America (USA) has made significant changes to their Happy Meal offerings by reducing portion sizes of fries, adding healthier side options like apple slices, and offering low-fat milk as beverage options (Baertlein, 2012). This effort is commendable as it signifies the fast food industry make a positive impact on the fight against obesity, benefiting both the community and their brand image.

2.2 Religiosity

Religiosity refers to the extent of an individual's religious beliefs, practices, and involvement. It includes an individual's level of devotion, frequency of participation in religious activities, and how deeply their religious beliefs influence their daily lives and decision-making (Shahadan et al., 2022). The dietary patterns of the young generation might be impacted by their religious beliefs by several mechanisms including (1) providing dietary guidelines; (2) promoting moral and ethical values; (3) leveraging community and social influences; and (4) integrating health education in religious activities. Hence, religiosity might influence how the young generation perceives the CSR responsibilities by the fast food restaurants, particularly those aimed at addressing obesity. CSR responsibilities that encourage healthy eating and ethical practices may be

viewed more favourably by religious youth as most religious teachings nurture their adherents to choose products and services that align with moral and ethical values.

2.3 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory underpin the concept of addressing morals and values in managing an organisation. The R. Edward Freeman originally develop this theory and emphasises the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders in the decision making process (Freeman, 1984, 2010). Stakeholder encompasses of wide range of entities including (1) employees; (2) customers; (3) suppliers; (4) investors; (5) communities; and (6) government. This theory incorporates ethical consideration into business practices by contending that organisations have a moral obligation to consider the impact of their actions on all stakeholders. In the context of this study, this theory guides the fast food industry in designing CSR strategies that benefit the consumers specifically young generation to promote healthy eating.

3 Research

This paper presents the result of a quantitative approach using survey involving 685 respondents in Selangor. Employing a quantitative approach offers numerous advantages including objectivity, reliability and able to generalise conclusion to a larger population; thus, the findings of this study will be able to provide evidence-based conclusions about the outcome of implementing fast food's CSR practices to combat obesity among the young generation (Ahmad et al., 2023; Creswell, 2016). This study has received ethical approval from the UiTM Research Ethics Committee on 3rd July 2023, REC/07/2023 (PG/MR/226). The instrument utilised in this study was thoroughly developed based on the past literatures and tested for validity using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and reliability test using Reliability analysis to ensure the measurement instruments is accurate and consistent. The data collection was conducted for three months from 1st June 2023 until 31st August 2023. The respondents' data was then analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 27). To answer the research objectives, several analyses were performed including Normality analysis, Descriptive analysis, and PROCESS analysis.

4 Findings and Discussion

This study gathered data from 685 young generation staying in Selangor. Majority of the respondents (74.3%) were female while the remaining 25.7% are male. Respondents aged between 22 and 24 years old outnumbered other age group, accounting for 60.7% of the respondents in this study. 96.5 respondents who answered the survey are single. Most respondents are currently full time students as 89.6% of them declared they are unemployed. Notably, respondents who received the tertiary education from public or private universities, higher institutions, or colleges dominates the population of this study. 87.3% respondents have diploma or Bachelor degree's certificate, 6.9% pursue study in postgraduate level, 3.9% have certificate while the rest 1.9% attended secondary and primary schools. 57.5% of their monthly household income was less than RM2,500.00, followed by RM2,501.00-RM4,849.00 (17.4%). Majority of the respondents (65.1%) reported that they visit fast food restaurants one to twice times a week (Refer Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Respondents (N=685)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
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Gender	Male	176	25.7
	Female	509	74.3
Age	18-21 years old	200	29.2
	22-24 years old	416	60.7
	25-27 years old	44	6.4
	28-30 years old	25	3.6
Marital status	Single	661	96.5
	Married	24	3.5
Type of occupation	Public sector	19	2.8
	Private sector	36	5.3
	Self-employed	15	2.2
	Non-governmental organization	1	0.1
	Unemployed	614	89.6
Educational level	PT3/PMR/SPM/SPMV/SMA	13	1.9
	Matriculation/Foundation/STPM/STAM	27	3.9
	Diploma/Bachelor Degree	598	87.3
	Master/PhD	47	6.9
Monthly household income	Less than RM 2,500.00	394	57.5
	RM2,501.00-RM4,849.00	119	17.4
	RM4,849.00-RM10,959.00	110	16.1
	More than RM10,959.00	62	9.1
Frequency of eating fast food (weekly)	0 time	94	13.7
	1-2 times	446	65.1
	3-4 times	119	17.4
	5-6 times	13	1.9
	More than 6 times	13	1.9

Economic- Based on the PROCESS analysis, the findings of this study confirm that religiosity moderates the relationship between the economic responsibility and combating globesity ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.021$). Economic CSR responsibilities performed by the fast food restaurants aimed at reducing obesity through offering affordable healthy options to improve public health. When the young generation perceives that the economic CSR responsibility performed by the fast food restaurants aligns with religious teachings on health, nutrition, and ethical practices, they will prioritise spending their money on the nutritious food. Spending prudently is favoured by religiosity, which may boost the influence of economic CSR by the fast food restaurant to combat obesity. Young generation who are highly religious are often guided by their faith in making financial decisions, especially in relation to their health and well-being. Therefore, they will spend their money wisely and choose healthier food options because they may view their bodies as something to care for responsibly. In the context of this study, majority of the young generation are currently unemployed so, they might avoid excessive or impulsive spending on unhealthy foods that do not contribute to their overall well-being. This signifies as a form of responsible stewardship, reflecting a commitment to using their resources in ways that honour their faith.

Affordable healthy menu choices make it easier for the young generation to choose nutritious food without compromising their financial constraints. Fast food industry can effectively reach this demographic by highlighting economic CSR efforts that align with their values of responsible spending and health consciousness. By offering affordable healthy options, expanding availability of healthy food,

implementing health-focused rewards and improving marketing strategies, the fast food restaurants can attract and retain young consumers and contribute to the broader goal of combating obesity.

Table 2: PROCESS Analysis: Religiosity Moderates the Relationship Between Economic Responsibilities and Combating Globesity

	Coefficient	SE	T	P
Constant	2.2962	1.0446	2.1981	.0284
IV: Economic	0.0185	.2855	.0649	.9483
MV: Religiosity	-0.2636	.2564	-1.0278	.3046
Interaction: Economic X Religiosity	0.1591	.0688	2.3138	.0211

Table 3: Conditional Effect of Economic Responsibilities Moderated by Religiosity

95% CI						
Religiosity (MV)	Effect	SE	T	P	Low	High
3.1667	.5223	.0835	6.2551	.0000	.3582	.6864
4.0000	.6549	.0558	11.7271	.0000	.5451	.7646
4.8333	.7875	.0764	10.3128	.0000	.6374	.937

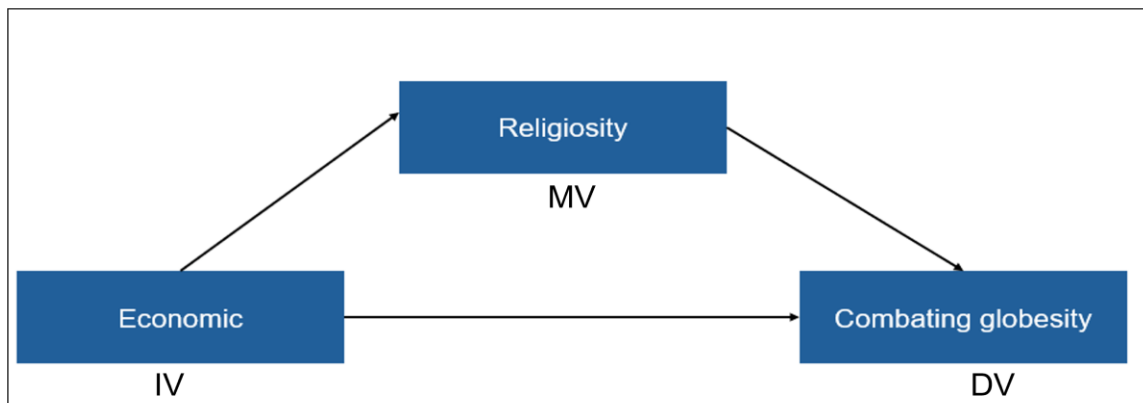


Figure 3: Religiosity Moderates the Relationship Between Economic Responsibilities and Combating Globesity

Legal- The findings of this study exhibit that religiosity does not moderate the relationship between legal responsibility and combating globesity ($p > 0.05$, $p = 0.091$). The young generation's religious beliefs and practices do not significantly shape their understanding of fast food restaurants' legal obligation to tackle obesity. Legal responsibility to combat obesity independently of religiosity by ensuring regulatory compliance and public health, complying with the food safety and quality standards, and assuring ingredient transparency. This perhaps due to the young generation perceive that legal responsibility including regulations on food labelling, food preparation standard and managing the supply chain responsibly are often consistent and apply to all groups of people. These standards are intended to guarantee a minimum compliance and do not vary based on individual. This is supported by as the researcher argue that the fast food should emphasize legal CSR obligations as it demonstrates their commitment to ethical practices and responsible business conduct. In addition, legal regulations are enforced universally without consideration of religiosity. Hence, the effectiveness of

fast food restaurants' legal responsibility is likely to be consistent regardless of religious belief.

Table 4: PROCESS Analysis: Religiosity Does Not Moderate the Relationship Between Legal Responsibilities and Combating Globesity

	Coefficient	SE	T	P
Constant	2.2559	1.1168	2.0199	.0440
IV: Legal	.0285	.2854	.1000	.9204
MV: Religiosity	-.1571	.2871	-.5471	.5846
Interaction: Legal X Religiosity	.1209	.0714	.0910	.0910

Table 5: Conditional Effect of Legal Responsibilities Moderated by Religiosity

					95% CI	
Religiosity (MV)	Effect	SE	T	P	Low	High
3.1667	.4115	.0830	4.9563	0.0000	.2483	.5746
4.0000	.5122	.0652	7.8525	0.0000	.3840	.6404
4.8333	.6130	.0933	6.5730	0.0000	.4279	.7963

Ethical- The findings of this study postulate that religiosity does not moderate the relationship between ethical responsibility and combating globesity ($p > 0.05$, $p = 0.824$). The impact of ethical responsibility performed by the fast food on addressing obesity remains consistent and does not rely on the religious beliefs or practices of consumers. This is because the ethical responsibility in CSR is driven by the moral principles and standard that enhance the well-being of consumers and public. The initiatives such as offering healthy menu options, transparent marketing practices, commitment to quality and transparent marketing practices are voluntarily performed by the fast food restaurants. By upholding the ethical standards, fast food restaurants can foster a healthier society and make a global and inclusive difference in the fight against globesity. Ethical responsibilities are grounded in universal principles of fairness, transparency, and health promotion. Regardless of one's religious views, these guidelines may help prevent obesity in a comparable way.

Table 6: PROCESS Analysis: Religiosity Does Not Moderate the Relationship Between Ethical Responsibilities and Combating Globesity

	Coefficient	SE	T	P
Constant	.4603	.8975	.5129	.6083
IV: Ethical	.5311	.2659	1.9972	.0464
MV: Religiosity	.3854	.2140	1.8006	.0724
Interaction: Ethical X Religiosity	-.0138	.0620	-.2223	.8242

Table 7: Conditional Effect of Ethical Responsibilities Moderated by Religiosity

					95% CI	
Religiosity (MV)	Effect	SE	T	P	Low	High
3.1667	.3763	.0798	4.7605	0.0000	.2756	.5831
4.0000	.4321	.0637	7.9453	0.0000	.3932	.6501

4.8333	.5018	.0817	6.7603	0.0000	.4196	.7888
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Philanthropic- The level of religiosity among young generation influences how these philanthropic efforts are perceived, supported, and, how successful they are to promote healthy eating and combating obesity. The findings of this study discover that religiosity can moderate the relationship between philanthropic responsibility and combating globesity ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.0187$). Philanthropic responsibility is when companies voluntarily engage in initiatives such as donating to health programs, supporting nutrition education, or funding community wellness projects to improve society. Religiosity can influence philanthropic responsibility by fast food restaurants and its effectiveness in combating obesity especially when the young generation have strong values regarding health, body care, and dietary practices.

The young generation with prominent levels of religiosity perceive that philanthropic efforts that align with religious values such as promoting health or encouraging self-control are relevant because religious teachings frequently advocate taking care of one's body and abstaining from excess. In contrast, the same philanthropic efforts might be less impactful if the young generation does not prioritise health in a way consistent with moral or religious obligations. This corroborates with findings of the study conducted by whereby the scholars argue that the dietary habits of the consumers can be transformed with nutrition education since the consumers will know how to choose healthier foods, especially if they are highly health conscious.

Table 8: PROCESS Analysis: Religiosity Moderates the Relationship Between Philanthropic Responsibilities and Combating Globesity

	Coefficient	SE	T	P
Constant	3.2154	1.0492	3.0647	.0023
IV: Philanthropic	-.2622	.2722	-.9630	.3360
MV: Religiosity	-.2431	.2657	-.9148	.3608
Interaction: Philanthropic X Religiosity	.1587	.0673	2.3592	.0187

Table 9: Conditional Effect of Philanthropic Responsibilities Moderated by Religiosity

					95% CI	
Religiosity (MV)	Effect	SE	T	P	Low	High
3.1667	.2403	.0778	3.0905	.0021	.0875	.3931
4.0000	.3725	.0567	6.5715	.0000	.2611	.4839
4.8333	.5048	.0816	6.1835	.0000	.3443	.6652

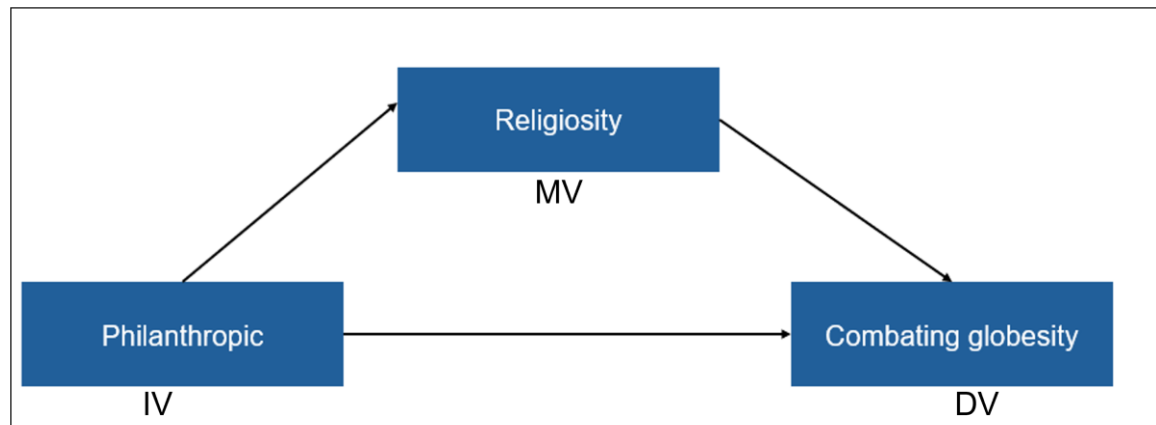


Figure 4: Religiosity Moderates the Relationship Between Philanthropic Responsibilities and Combating Globesity

5 Conclusions

This study underscores the importance of the fast food industry fulfilling these four main CSR responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic) in their efforts to combat globesity. These responsibilities align with Carroll's CSR pyramid and delineate the multifaceted approach that fast food companies can take to address the globesity. The findings of the moderating analysis demonstrate significant patterns: religiosity has influenced the relationship between the economic and philanthropic CSR activities performed by fast food towards combating globesity. This demonstrates that religiosity plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes of the young generation towards the CSR activities, especially in combating issues such as globesity. This may increase the younger generation's knowledge of how their values and beliefs determine their food choices and encourage them to seek out fast food options that align with their ethical and religious beliefs, notably those that are devoted to addressing health concerns.

In addition, the government can leverage this finding to strengthen the existing policies that encourage the fast food industry to design and implement more CSR initiatives that contributing to public health and well-being, such as mandatory CSR reporting, imposing health-related regulations, offering tax breaks and subsidies, and providing grants for health initiatives. The findings of this study also give a significant message to the fast food restaurants to genuinely committed to combating globesity through responsible and ethically driven practices, as this would attract more consumers who prioritize these values, especially the young generation. Nevertheless, given that the study was conducted only among young generation in Selangor, the specific cultural, economic, and religious characteristics of Selangor might not fully represent those of other regions in Malaysia. Future researchers should include other regions of Malaysia and possibly other countries to determine if the findings hold across different geographical settings and cultural contexts. This would enhance the generalisability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship.

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