

Store Patronage for Apparel Purchase – A Comparative Study of Two Store Formats

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Abstract

Objectives of this study were to understand the influence of salient store image dimension and overall store image on retail store patronage and also to identify the nature of relationship (congruence/ divergence) between customers' self-images and their corresponding store images. Data was collected using questionnaire from 175 respondents of specialty and departmental store types. Factor analysis was used to determine the important dimensions of store image. These dimensions were regressed on store patronage to analyze their role in predicting the same. Reasons for a shopper to patronize department store was spaciousness, merchandise arrangement, and clientele and specialty store for distinctiveness of the merchandise and value for money. Image dimension that was salient in specialty store was value for money and for a departmental store it was its clientele. Congruence between customers' self-images and their corresponding store images were a very important determinant of patronage for frequent shoppers of both the formats.

Key words: Specialty store, departmental store, patronage, store image

Introduction

Consumers in many of emerging economies like India, Vietnam, and China did most of their shopping in areas located in central or downtown areas of the city in previous two decades. But present-day consumers have a variety of retail formats to satisfy their needs and wants (Srivastava, 2008; Tuyet Mai et al., 2003). Major transformations in retailing structures are due to rapid economic development (Reardon and Berdegué, 2002). Fast changing retail environment suggests the usefulness of understanding shopping behaviors relevant to retail context. In the present environment of an evolving market for organized retailing and increasing global competition, the task of managing store patronage is an important managerial challenge. Branding and advertising build brand awareness and purchase predisposition. However, these do not always translate into sales. Many purchasing decisions are made or can be heavily influenced on the floor of the shop (Underhill, 1999). Shoppers are susceptible to the impressions and information they acquire in stores. From a theoretical point of view too, there is a strong reason for studying the drivers of (store) patronage for retail stores in different retail formats (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004; Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Reutterer and Teller 2009). Consumers have categorical knowledge structures of different retail stores that include

expectation of the store attributes, typical configuration of attributes and performance level that is expected from that category (Sujan, 1985). Store image has been identified as one of the important determinants of success in retailing (Hildebrandt, 1988).

This study defines store image in line with the extant literature that, it consists of number of dimensions, which collectively form its image. Store image makes shopping a pleasurable experience and reduces monotony associated with task oriented aspects of it. With the plethora of alternative stores of all formats available with all image dimensions, consumers demand the best shopping experience and hence the retailer is compelled to work on his store's image. Objective of this research is to find what consumers expect from different retail formats and whether store patronage aligns with the self image of the individual.

Research on store environment explores the influence of its various elements on consumer behavior. For example, it shows that the perceptions about store employees may influence customers' attitudes towards merchandise and service quality (Hu and Jasper, 2006). Similarly, convenience, quality, variety and value lead to positive attitudes towards private labels (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Vahie and Paswan, 2006) and store brands (Semeijn, van Riel, and Ambrosini, 2004). Store environment may also influence the number of items purchased, store liking, time and money spent (Sherman, Mathur and Smith, 1997), perceived quality of merchandise and patronage (Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman, 1994); sales (Milliman, 1982), product evaluation (Wheatley and Chiu, 1977), satisfaction (Bitner, 1990), and store choice (Darden, Erdem and Darden, 1983). This study aims to understand the influence of salient store image dimensions and overall store image on store patronage and also to identify the nature of relationship (congruence/ divergence) between customers' self-images and their corresponding store images.

Empirical support exists on the importance of store image dimensions across store types. It implies that dimensional analysis of image should be conducted with regard to store type. The study aims to understand the influence of store image dimensions on store patronage. If so, what are the dimensions that influence it and are those dimensions vary across formats? The research also aims at identifying image dimensions that are most important (salient) in the overall image that customers have of different types of stores and to identify the nature of the relationship (congruence/ divergence) between customers' self-images and their corresponding store images.

Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

Store Image

Different store image variables that are included for this study are layout, sales service, quality, variety, nature and display of merchandise, store atmospherics, store amenities (trial rooms, air conditioners), supporting services (after sale service, return policies, exchange, alteration etc), advertisements and overall store image. All the variables are discussed elaborately in the following sections.

Layout: Layout is highly salient to customers in self-service environment to orientate, find way and gain feeling of self control (Bitner, 1992). Proper layout reduces the

perceived stress in shopping (Baker et al., 2002) and evokes positive affect (Yoo et al., 1998). Layout makes even the utilitarian shopper to buy additionally by creating an urge in them (Sherman et al., 1997). Layout should be simple but not too simple and should also have surprise and unexpectedness (Spies et al., 1997). Poorly designed store (bad layout), reduces the shopping pleasure, initiate the incurrence of psychic costs (Baker et al., 2002) and induce negative emotion (Spies et al., 1997). It also creates a non entertaining shopping experience and causes negative affect (Jones, 1999).

Sales Service: sales service is an important dimension of store image. Number of sales people, their way of dressing and greeting influences the perception of consumer regarding sales service provided by a store (Baker et al., 1992). A retailer's task will go beyond merely training employees to follow rigid store rules or policies (Hu and Jasper, 2006). Strong merchandise skills, merchandise sense and skills to accurately read customers and win them over are required by salesmen. Employee's politeness, courtesy, engagement in friendly conversation (Mittal and Lassar, 1996), salesperson's interpretation a customer's needs and their ability to interact in a congenial manner are factors determine the shopping enjoyment in a store. As a result, customers tend to become pleased with and committed to such a relationship (Beatty et al., 1996). This creates shopping pleasure which enhances their shopping enjoyment.

At the retail outlet, affect is induced by the salesperson (Yoo et al., 1998). Even in brief and mundane encounter the employee induces positive affect (Mattila and Enz, 2002). Salesmen should not be overbearing but must be nearby and helpful when required. This will produce positive affect and the absence of this will cause negative affect (Jones, 1999). Bad service includes slow/bad service, aggressive selling, and lack of product knowledge produces negative affect.

Store Atmospherics: The term "atmospherics" refers to the managerial effort to design buying environments to produce emotional states in a buyer that enhance probability of purchase (Smith and Sherman, 1993; Kotler, 1973). Atmospherics trigger affective tendencies leading to unplanned buying behavior. Emotion strongly influences actions including impulse buying (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Hausman, 2000; Rook and Gardner, 1993; Youn and Faber, 2000). Consumers in more positive emotional states tend to have reduced decision complexity and shorter decision times (Isen, 1984). These positive feelings can be conceptualized as positive affect, which reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. It is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasant engagement. When compared to negative emotion, consumers with positive emotion exhibit greater buying because of feelings of being unconstrained, a desire to reward themselves and higher energy levels (Rook and Gardner, 1993).

Store Amenities: Amenities are services offered by the store for the convenience of shoppers. Store amenities include presence of lifts or escalators, trial rooms and air conditioning (Dickson and Alba, 1977; Levy and Weitz, 1998). The lounges, aisle spaces, benches, chairs, trial rooms and rest rooms form the customer space are also amenities present in a retail store. Customer space contributes toward the positive mood of the shopper (Berman and Evans, 2007).

Merchandise: Merchandise assortment has been consistently present as one of the dimensions that constitute store image (Mazurski and Jacoby, 1986). An assortment is the selection of merchandise a retailer carries. It includes both the breadth of product categories and the variety within each category. Retailers capture their customers' interest by the nature of their product range. It communicates to the customer what kind of retail store they are entering and therefore helps them in their individual buying process.

Large assortment is favored instead of small assortments as the latter produces positive affect. Three assortment related items are frequently identified in retail literature: price, styling and design variety (Bell, 1999; Finn and Louviere, 1996). Product assortment is an important image attribute because it represents the "core product" of a retail store (Levy and Weitz, 1998). Larger assortment implies that the store meets the needs for an individual and increases the satisfaction with its offering (Morales et al., 2005). In addition consumers evaluate larger assortment more positively (Godek et al., 2001). Larger assortment has pronounced impact on in store browsers. It has been suggested, that browsing, or shopping without specific intent, may be more significant than the actual acquisition of products and can provide a highly pleasurable "vicarious buying" experience (MacInnis and Price, 1987; Sherry, 1990). In store browsers, would be proceeding more slowly and valuing assortment of the store. They would have higher tendency to make unplanned purchases. Jarboe and McDaniel, (1987) found browsers made more unplanned purchases than non-browsers in a regional mall setting.

Merchandise quality is another important attribute of store image (Sit et al., 2003). Retailer should decide on the product quality he/she should carry in the store based on merchandising philosophy of the store. Merchandise quality is the most important image attribute because it has maximum impact in forming a positive image of the retail store in consumer's mind (Berman and Evans, 2007). Perceived quality of available merchandise will have a positive effect on the consumers' perceived product benefits from the retail store (Monroe and Krishnan, 1985). Perceived product benefits will in turn lead to the formation of a good overall impression about the retail store.

Supporting Services: Supporting services are those offered by store for the benefit of its customers. The effect of such allied services on overall service quality or satisfaction has been explored by Dabholkar et al., (1996) under the dimension "store policy". It includes all extra services that the store extends to satisfy its customers. The supporting services include acceptance of all credit or debit cards, facilities for return or exchange of merchandise, alteration facilities, child care and children entertainment facilities at the store.

Overall Store Image: This refers to the general perception of customer regarding retail store. It is closely related to the store image (Pessemier, 1980). Ghosh (1994) considers store image to be composed of the different elements of the retail marketing mix: location, merchandise, store atmosphere, customer service, price, personal selling and sales incentive programs. The perceptions may be due to past reputation of the store as well as the impression that a shopper has after visiting the store (Martineau, 1958). The impression is based on general attribute dimension of store. In many cases the reputation that store builds up over years also helps in creating a good impression about the store in shoppers mind

Customer's Self Image: Self image refers to the totality of individuals' thoughts and feelings referring to him/her as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). In an effect to identify and enhance one's self image consumers choose actions that are consistent with their image and avoid doing things that may contradict it. Purchases made by consumers are directly influenced by the image an individual has of himself. Consistency and congruency also play an important part in establishing the relationship between self-concept, individual's image, and final purchase behavior. Self concept and store image interaction has been captured (Sirgy and Danes, 1982; Stern et al., 1977) as a predictor of store loyalty (Bellenger et al., 1977).

Store Patronage: Haynes et al., (1994) define patronage as how individuals choose an outlet for shopping. Store choice and patronage patterns are based on consumer's perceptions, images, and attitudes formed from experiences, information, and need. Furthermore, patronage behaviour involves a decision process related to where consumers shop, how they shop, and what they purchase. This decision process is often initiated by patronage motives, which determine why consumers shop and make purchases at certain retail stores (Moschis, 1992). Store patronage involves the consumer's choice for a particular retail store (Shim and Kotsiopulos, 1992). Past retail and marketing studies have identified several consumer oriented store attributes (e.g., price, quality, variety, discounts, store reputation) and their relationship store patronage. Jacoby and Mazursky (1984) suggested that consumers form a set of beliefs about a store, on the basis of which they decide whether it is the type of shopping environment that appeals to them, creating store patronage intention.

Researchers have tried to understand the relationship of store image with many other constructs like 'store patronage', 'self image', 'store loyalty', etc. However, there is a lack of integrated studies of store image which links the various dimensions of store image, self image, and store patronage. This study makes an attempt to move towards an integrated model of store image as depicted in the Figure 1 below.

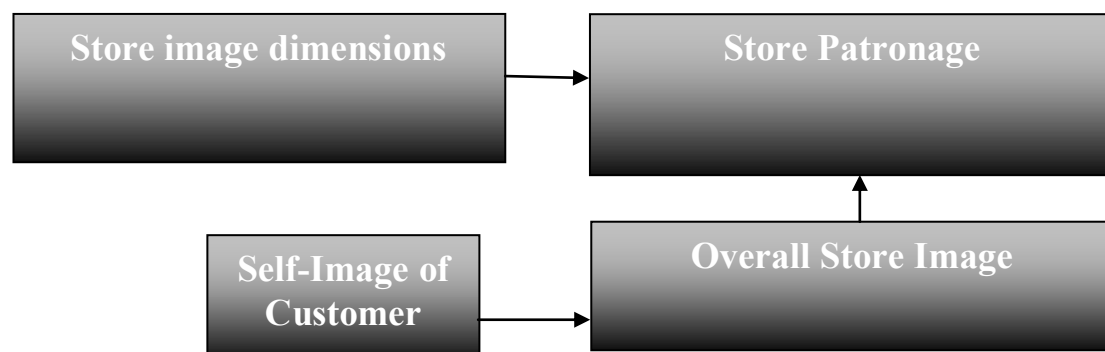


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Research Design

Data Collection

Mall intercept method was used to collect data. Data was collected from two types of stores, namely specialty store and a departmental store. Potential respondents were intercepted upon their exit from the store and solicited for their participation in the survey. The locations of the interviews, the time of the day and the days of the week were rotated in accordance with the recommendations of Bush and Hair (1985) to make the final sample as representative as that of the population. The survey was conducted in a metropolitan city of India namely Chennai. The sampling technique used for the present study is convenience sampling.

A total of 440 shoppers were approached out of which 175 agreed to participate in the study. The response rate was 39%. Respondents were told that this was a part of student project from a prestigious local university and were not compensated.

Measurement Scales Used

Items used to measure the constructs were adapted from past research studies where they were used to measure similar constructs. All the constructs were measured using multi-item scales. Customer's self-image (Stern et al., 1977); store image dimensions (May, 1974), store patronage (Dodds, Monroe and Grewal, 1991). All the scales used had good reliability and is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale Reliability

Scale	Reliability	
	Specialty Store	Departmental Store
Customer's Self image	.833	.833
Store image Dimension	.795	.876
Store Patronage	.886	.992
Overall Store Image	.865	.868

Selection of Product Category

The category chosen for the study is apparel. The rationale for this decision is based on the following factors:

Fashion retailing was selected because of the powerful links that researchers have identified between clothing choice, personality, and self concept. Choice of clothing has been described as a form of communication influenced by social norms, self-expressions and technology (Beck,1985), a personal signature that symbolically communicates the social identity that a person seeks to project (Davis, 1985; Dichter, 1985), and as a reflection of the personality of the wearer (Dichter, 1985)

Results

In this study, factor analysis was used to determine the important dimension of store image. These dimensions are regressed on store patronage to analyze the role of those in predicting it. To analyze the congruence between self-image and store image one-way ANOVA was used. Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling

adequacy were in the acceptable level making the data amenable for further data analysis as given in Table 2.

Table 2: Amenability for Factor Analysis

	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity
Specialty Store	.781	.000
Departmental store	.820	.000

As the un-rotated factor matrix does not yield effective result, varimax rotation was used which yielded a better output. Finally 8 factors for specialty store and 9 factors for departmental store were retained, which explain 58.55% and 62.66% of variance respectively. Factors are mentioned in the Table 3 and 4 given below.

Table 3: Total Variance Explained for Specialty Store

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Value for Money	4.163	12.615	12.615
Merchandise Fashionability	3.726	11.291	23.906
Sales Clerk Service	2.514	7.618	31.523
Customer Sensitivity	2.056	6.231	37.754
Merchandise Arrangement	2.033	6.161	43.916
Convenience	1.659	5.026	48.942
Merchandise Distinctiveness	1.612	4.885	53.826

Table 4: Total Variance Explained for Departmental store

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings			
	Total	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Merchandise Fashionability	8.272	5.114	15.498	15.498
Sales Clerk Service	2.734	2.732	8.278	23.776
Customer Sensitivity	1.836	2.301	6.973	30.749
Convenience	1.603	2.296	6.958	37.707
Merchandise Arrangement	1.408	1.853	5.616	43.323
Clientele	1.305	1.753	5.312	48.635
Spacious	1.218	1.620	4.910	53.544
Price & Return policy	1.197	1.571	4.760	58.304
Contemporary	1.106	1.438	4.357	62.661

These factors were then regressed on store patronage for both the store types. The model was significant ($F=9.55$, $p=0.0$) and with value for money, fashionability, sales clerk service, distinctiveness, access were the predictors of store patronage for a specialty store that explained 32.3% of the variance. And for departmental store,

the model was significant ($F=6.15$, $p=0.0$) and with fashionability, internal arrangement, clientele, spaciousness were the predictors of store patronage, explaining 23.1% of the variance.

Table 5: Regression Results for Specialty Store

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.470	.097		46.252	.000
Value for money	.515	.097	.357	5.314	.000
Merchandise fashionability	.405	.097	.280	4.173	.000
sales clerk service	.296	.097	.205	3.052	.003
Customer sensitivity	.093	.097	.065	.962	.337
Internal arrangement	.049	.097	.034	.506	.614
Convenience	.019	.097	.013	.195	.846
Distinctiveness	.397	.097	.275	4.089	.000
Accessibility	.252	.097	.174	2.596	.010

Table 6: Regression Results for Departmental Store

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.027	.100		30.418	.000
Merchandise Fashionability	.354	.100	.250	3.545	.001
Sales clerk Service	.032	.100	.022	.317	.752
Customer sensitivity	.184	.100	.130	1.842	.067
Convenience	.009	.100	.006	.088	.930
Merchandise arrangement	.308	.100	.218	3.081	.002
Clientele	.478	.100	.338	4.785	.000
Spaciousness	.251	.100	.178	2.513	.013
Price and return policy	.074	.100	.052	.742	.459
Contemporary	.008	.100	.006	.084	.933

To identify the nature of the relationship (congruence/ divergence) between customers' self images and their corresponding store images ANOVA was run with for frequent shoppers of specialty store. The F value (0.361) is not significant which implies that the self image of frequent shoppers is congruent with the store image.

And for, frequent shoppers of departmental store, F value (0.139) is not significant which implies that the self image of frequent shoppers is congruent with the store image. Self image refers to the totality of individuals' thoughts and feelings having with reference to themselves as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). Consumers can also be defined in terms of products and services that they use. So, the image of the store that the consumer patronizes should be the same as that of the shopper. If there is mismatch the consumer will not shop nor patronize that store. Consistency and congruence also play an important part in establishing the relationship between the self-concept, the individual's image, and final purchase behavior. Congruence between the images are required for patronage.

Table 7: ANOVA – Frequent Shoppers of Specialty Store

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1627.594	20	81.380	1.130	.361
Within Groups	2808.339	39	72.009		
Total	4435.933	59			

Table 8: ANOVA – Frequent Shoppers of Departmental Store

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1122.573	17	66.034	1.503	.139
Within Groups	1888.640	43	43.922		
Total	3011.213	60			

Discussion

The attribute of store that causes patronage for a specialty store is different from that of a departmental store (Chiang and Li, 2010; Huddleston et al., 2009). For the consumer to patronize a departmental store the internal arrangement of store should be clearly demarcated, each department should be spacious. This is important for a department store as it aids in product search. Consumers expect goods to be fashionable and also they are conscious of the other shoppers (clientele of the store). Clientele explains the social image that a store carries to draw patronage of shoppers. For a specialty store, consumers are patronizing for the distinctiveness in merchandise and sales service. Also, consumers want value for the money as these specialty stores are usually expensive. Despite all these they would patronize specialty store if only it is easily accessible. Congruency between self image and store image is an important determinant of store patronage for frequent shoppers of both department and specialty store. Among the store attributes in specialty store is value for money and departmental store is its clientele and image congruency between the store and the shopper.

Managerial Implication

Our findings are important considering that they come from India. Compared to western countries the store size is less and also adequate importance is not given for store environment across product categories (ranging from grocery till electronic

goods). But the scenario is changing. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most Indian retailers try and cut corners in an effort to cut costs. Many supermarkets, even those owned by big business houses, switch off the air-conditioning from time to time (despite India being a hot country), have employees that are at best indifferent, if not downright discourteous and rude and have long checkout times (radventure.blogspot, 2005). All this shows either a lack of customer focus or perhaps is an attempt to cut costs. However, we show that this cost cutting is at the cost of profitable impulse purchases (Mohan *et al.*, 2013); besides, prior research shows that this is detrimental to patronage (Baker *et al.* 2002) and loyalty (Sirgy and Samli, 1985). Hence, Indian retailers have to pay much more attention to these details.

Big FMCG companies like Hindustan Unilever (the Indian arm of Unilever) are investing in upgrading the humble “kirana” store to give shoppers a better experience and in the bargain, gaining not just the trust of these “kirana” stores, but also valuable and profitable additional sales through unplanned buying. Foreign retailers who are looking at entering the Indian retail market may also take note of this. They may be tempted to follow the strategies of some Indian retailers and cut costs by not investing enough in the antecedents of store environment. Doing so may mean loss of profitable purchases. Hence, they probably need to invest in antecedents of store environment, since the gain may likely be higher than the costs incurred in doing so.

Specialty stores managers should be working on the distinctive and fashionable merchandise as it works as differentiator. Also, those managers should concentrate on sales service. Though the consumers want distinctive and fashionable merchandise also look for value for money. Apart from merchandise attributes and sales service they also want the stores to be conveniently located. For a department store the importance is more on store attributes like the arrangement and spaciousness and also the fellow consumers who visit that store. But, irrespective of the format the consumers expect the merchandise to be fashionable. This is a significant variable that influences patronage decisions across formats especially in apparel. This highlights that the format preference is categorical as it did not influence product attributes in grocery (Geetha and Naidu 2013) and store switching that is widely prevalent (Popkowski Leszczyc and Timmermans 1997) but in apparel as this is an experiential product. Consumers also patronize stores that are congruent with their self images. So, retailers apart from analyzing the image of their store should also be analyzing the profiles of the shoppers as image congruence is an important predictor of patronage. Though, shopper profile is not the factor under the control of retailer, the store manager has to manage its influence as it controls store patronage. It is very important to create congruency between store and the shopper in the case of frequent shoppers as it leads to loyalty. An understanding of shopper retail format choice behavior will enable retailers to segment their markets (Prasad and Aryasri 2011). Hence the analysis of format choice could also prove to be segmentation tool aiding the store in their marketing strategies and penetration of the store.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to certain contingencies the store managers of both the department and specialty store could not give us information on what is their anticipated perception of the customer’s store image. This information would certainly allow us to link the congruency between customers’ store image and retailers’ anticipated image. But at

present we could limit our study only to the extent of analyzing the congruency between customers' self image and the store image of the stores which they prefer to shop at. Congruence between retailers' anticipated image and the customers' store image will help in an in depth examination of the conceptual model that can be carried out in future. Results of this study provide an encouraging start in understanding the determinants of store patronage in an emerging retail market. The socio-economic factors of the consumers were not explored in the model. This may be a crucial factor in an emerging market that could be incorporated in the model. Other variables such as mall loyalty, shopping area loyalty etc could be included. Role of age, gender, culture and socio-economic status can also be considered as moderating factors.

Conclusion

The study aims to understand the influence of store image dimension on store patronage across formats. A shopper patronizes a department store for spaciousness, merchandise arrangement, and clientele and specialty store the reasons are distinctiveness of the merchandise and value for money. Though the consumers patronize specialty store for sales service they would do so if only it is accessible. Convenience is the variable that influences the patronage of a specialty store. Shoppers prefer the apparel to be fashionable across formats and retailers have to constantly upgrade their merchandise to be in line with the current trend. Image dimensions that are salient in specialty store are value for money and departmental store is its clientele. Congruence between customers' self-images and their corresponding store images are very important determinant of patronage for frequent shoppers of both the formats and hence retailers should take adequate measures to create the image congruency.

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