

Retail Store Image and Consumer Behavior Linkages

-A review based discussion framework

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Abstract

In dynamic and competitive retail space, store image management has become an essential strategic tool for retailers to gain competitive advantage. Meanwhile, as consumer maneuver within diverse retail environments, literature too documents various consumer research studies pertaining to the complexity and dynamics of responses and behavior. Appreciating the significance of the retail store image in understanding the behavior of consumers, it shall be interesting to discover linkages of the retail store image with associated consumer behavior variables. The study endeavors to build on theory by a discussion outline after reviewing relevant literature. Further, it shall provide a useful theoretical framework that can aid retailers and marketers alike to build retail outlets with favorable images. The reviews encompass diverse studies wherein the relationship amid retail store image consumer perceptions and dependent consumer behavior constructs have been examined.

Key Words: Retail, Store image, Consumer behaviour, Store attributes, Literature review

1. Introduction

Past decade has witnessed geographic and technological shifts, changing purchase decisions has given rise to more aware, conscious and knowledgeable consumers who look for the varied store experiences with newer expectations. Thus trend in considering retailer performance as a measure of customer experience per square foot (KPMG, 2018) is prompting store retailers to change their priorities. A significant facet of this development has augmented the importance towards the perception of 'store image' to draw customers. Retailers are striving to identify the appropriate retail mix elements and contend with differentiated in-store experiences on different

dimensions in the retail space (Dutta et al., 2016).

All retail stores reflect an image to their customers; however, each can echo diverse images to a different segment of consumers. Jansson (2002) refers to a rise of reflexive accumulation in contemporary times. By reflexive accumulation, Jansson refers to a process whereby cultural and economic actions are deeply interwoven. The retail store is one such space where economic and cultural action come together. Consumers buy something not only because it serves an economic purpose, but also because it is culturally acceptable thus the image of the retail store is produced by mediatized descriptions.

Customers frequently assess and choose retailers as per

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This paper was presented during the XIV International Conference on 'Rethinking Strategies for Leadership and Governance in Emerging Global Scenario' conducted by Prestige Institute of Management and Research Indore in association with All India Council for Technical Education in January 2020.

their retail image perceptions. Thereby, it is imperative for retailers to build up, nurture and commune the appropriate store image. There are lots of parts which adds to the store image and all are weighed in a special way, in consumers' mind in diverse consumer groups (McGoldrick, 2002). In order to prosper, a retailer must present a unique, lucid, and a consistent image. Once the image is recognized in the minds of customers, a retailer is positioned in places as compared to its competitors (Berman, 2011, p. 519). This image frequently becomes the source of competitive edge, since other aspects might be restricted in the way they distinguish the retailer's brand image from their competitors' image (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000). Thus for accomplishing competitive advantage, store image management for retailers is a vital strategic tool (Delgado et al., 2014). Since store image is associated with consumers' perceptions of retailer (Morscettet al., 2005). Over a period of time, the influence of retail store image on consumer behavior has been largely recognized. Scholars suggest that store image could differ on the basis of cultural differences for the reason that of national/regional cultural influences on the consumer's behavior (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009). Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand consumer behavior as it is the study of when, why, how, and from where a consumer purchase or does not purchase a product/brand. It endeavors to comprehend the consumer decision making process, at individual and group level, including individual consumer's characteristics (demographics and behavioral) so as to understand what consumer wants.

This study seeks to present a discussion paradigm for appreciating the significance of the retail store image in understanding the behavior of the consumer and later build perspectives for enhancing the retail store image and thus reduce and bridge the gap amid the retail store image and various consumer behavior variables. It is an attempt to utilize pertinent studies to contribute to the benefit of future deliberations and valuable dimensions whilst structuring and developing retail strategies for practitioners.

2. Objectives of the Review

The current review critically examine the empirical as well as theoretical available literature on store image in marketing and retailing domain. In spite of presence of abundant studies, this meticulous review add to the body of knowledge in three most important ways. Primarily, literature study was conducted to develop better understanding of retail store image and its constitute store attributes. Secondly, the existing literature is consolidated and consumer behavior variables are identified to review the studies with respect to the store image. Further, this cataloging aids in understanding the precedent research studies on the proposed linkages with respect to the store image. The next significant contribution is development of a discussion framework model of linkages amid store image and various dependent consumer behavior variables. In view of the above objectives, further manuscript is structured as follows: Section 1 and 2 has presented Introduction and review objectives respectively. Section 3 presents the outline of consumer behavior and its importance. Section 4 while examining the available literature, reveals retail store image and its dimensions, constituent store attributes. In Section 5, a detail review of identified consumer behavior variables and their relationship with store image is presented. Section 6 concludes and discusses the implications. Section 7 and 8 illustrates the limitations of the study scope of future research respectively.

3. Consumer Behavior

The focus of Consumer Behaviour is on how the consumer decides to spend their accessible resources in terms of money, time and efforts on consumption associated items i.e. marketers offerings (Schiffman, Kanuk, and Ramesh, 2011). Though as per Kernan, (1995), the roots of Consumer behavior lies in the marketing discipline but the development and significance of consumer behavior studies began in the late 1950s. Wherein both practitioners and academia focused on consumer behavior to expand an overall knowledge from its academic perspectives (Gordon and Howell 1959; Dahl et.al., 1959). Consumer behavior is

as an interdisciplinary area stemming from majorly four disciplines including “Psychology (study of human mind and mental factors affecting behavior), Sociology (study of human society), Anthropology (study of human societies culture and development) and Communication (process of imparting/ exchanging information)” which explains consumer decision-making process (Schiffman, Kanuk and Ramesh, 2011). However, Solomon (2013) categorized the influencing disciplines of consumer behavior on the basis of the level of their focus which can be micro referring to the individual consumer or the level can be macro which focuses on the consumer as a part of group/s or society at large. Solomon defines Consumer Behaviour as “*It is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires*”. As per Blackwell et al., (2006), consumer behaviour involves “activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services”.

A paradigm shift is witnessed since the emergence of consumer behaviour, especially in context of retailing, the significance of understanding of consumer needs and wants, perceptions and attitudes and purchase intention turned out to be very essential for the strategic implementation of various retailing activities. The relevance of consumer behavior to the retailing is a fundamental one. In the current competitive retail landscape, the success of a retail store rely on having accurate knowledge of its consumers. Moreover retailers function in a dynamic setting facing numerous changes in consumer needs and wants, demographics, varied retail formats, disruptive technologies and everchanging retail ownership models across the globe. In such a scenario, the understanding of consumer behavior becomes imperative subject to dwell.

4. Retail Store Image

The seminal work by Martineau (1958) brought out that “a retail store has a personality” and retail store images can be defined as: “the way in which the store defined in the shopper's mind”. According to Lindquist (1974-1975) “store image is complex by nature and consists of a

combination of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors that a consumer perceives to be present. Functional attributes can be seen as tangible elements, such as merchandise selection, price range, and store layout, while psychological qualities determine how a store makes someone feel”. Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) defines “store image as complex function of consumer's perceptions of a store on various salient attributes”. As per Porter and Claycomb (1997, p. 374) claim that “Retail image is generally described as a combination of a store's functional qualities and the psychological attributes consumers' link to these”. Bezes C (2014) in a study tested a common tool to measure website and store image and results showed that ten image dimensions were namely, “offering, price, layout, accessibility, promotions, customer service, advice, reputation, institution and connections”. In a prevalent review of literature for the past fifty years, the study demonstrated that as the original investigations in the 60s and 70s the major store-attributes were not altered considerably. Mathur and Gangwani (2016) identified six retail store image dimensions namely “Sales Personnel & Store Association; Atmosphere; Promotion & Institutional; Service; Merchandise & Convenience”. More recently, Burlison Josh and Oe Hiroko (2018) examined 24 studies on store attributes that affect retail store image and identified eight significant factors, namely, “merchandise, service, convenience, promotion, clientele, physical facilities, atmosphere and institutions”.

The majority of the scientific society believe that store image is articulated by the way consumer assess various attributes of retail store (Devlin et al., 2003) which implies that for each of the store, a different image is formed in the mind of consumer (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998).

Store Image as conceptualized in literature highlights two different schools of thoughts. One is a store attribute approach where store image is conceptualized as a multidimensional (Shen, 2010; Marks, 1976). Other school of thought advocates store image is considered as a holistic concept where store image is conceptualized as an integrated formation of beliefs, knowledge and familiarity

with store and image perceptions (Hartman and Spiro 2005) wherein “store image is defined as perceptions of consumers on primary marketing activities of a store” (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009).

Store attributes comprises of both functional and psychological attributes/dimensions of store image. The holistic view of store image gives the overall store impression in the consumer's minds. In the study, both the conceptualizations of store image are incorporated to comprehend the linkages amid retail store image and allied consumer behavior constructs.

5. Consumer Behavior and Retail Store Image

The conception of retail space or store image has been deemed to be an integral element of the consumer decision-making process. Past research approves the influence of store environment on consumers' perceptions of purchased goods/services (Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Bender, 1964; Martineau, 1958). More so, when consumers have little or no shopping experience with a specific particular product,/ store/ environment, they might use their own perceptions about store's image in addition to product price. As shoppers seek an experience, which is additional to merchandise assortment or quality, a fusion of multi-dimensional store attributes crafts a favourable and apt retail store image. Since various retail image dimensions vary with retail area and store types, product type, and the characteristics of target market. Consequently, certain image related attributes will have larger influence as compared to others on consumer behaviour depending upon the consumer as individual and the nature of their purchase decision (Bell, 1999). Thus, the store image is considered as an imperative construct in the performance of human behaviour (Belwal and Belwal, 2017; Bagdare, 2015; Lindquist et al., 2001).

According to Campbell and Deane (2019: 238), the politics of image is connected to “the dialectic of alienation and belonging that is at the foundation of our social world.” In this sense, it is useful understand which dimensions of the image of the retail store structure a sense of belonging, and which dimensions of the image structure, a sense of

alienation to consumers. In broader terms, what is humanising and dehumanising about the retail store and its attributes?

Amidst current retail developments which affects consumer behavior, researchers need to address as to which of the store attributes of store image, the retailer need to focus, so as to build not only a favorable store image, but the image which successfully attracts its target customers to stores.

As consumer maneuvers within diverse retail environments and experience multi store attributes, literature documents, various consumer research studies pertaining to intricacy and dynamics of responses and behavior. The retail store image literature review underlines few current findings of relevant studies on associations amid retail store image, consumer perceptions and associated dependent consumer behavior aspects were also being examined. This facilitated an enhanced domain knowledge understanding of the retail store image by providing a deeper insight into their influence on various consumer behavior variables (Van Noordwyk, 2008). Consequently, select consumer behavior variables were found to be engaged as independent variables in envisaging store image and which are listed as “Attitude, Emotional State, Decision-Making, Patronage Preference, Approach/Avoidance Behavior, Patronage Behavior, Customer Satisfaction, Store Loyalty, Store Choice, and product-specific attributes”. Hereafter, findings with respect to each of the above with its linkages with store image and its attributes are discussed to craft a discussion framework.

A review is conducted from the available literature illustrating retail store image being portrayed as a construct in predicting all possible associated consumer variables. The presented literature review in the following sections of the manuscript comprises relevant research findings across past decades, to present an extensive outline of the domain area of main construct, however it does not acknowledge to be a comprehensive related literature.

5.1 Attitude

As conceptualized by Ajzen(2001), “Attitude can be as a summary evaluation of an object”. Since attitude influences consumer behavior, association amid a consumer's store perception and attitude is pertinent to store image research (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004). Though only some studies have explored the affiliation connecting the retail store image perceptions and consumer attitude towards store, preliminary outcomes appeared to show that such a relationship exist. As per planned behavior theory (Ajzen, 1985), consumer attitude determines their behavioral intention, thereby the attitude of consumer towards retail stores plays a crucial role in the selection of shopping modes. While this general attitude towards a store is willingly available, it is likely to have a direct impact on consumer's store-specific quality perception (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). In fast food restaurants retailing environment context, Ward et al. (1992) established that as the store environment relates to store image, it positively correlates with the attitude towards the retail service.

A study in Malaysia, when inspected, the influence of retail store image attributes on the consumer perception established that these are assimilations of all the indications and messages as received and in-store shopping experiences. These were added to their personal perceptions of store image dimensions (Hossein et. al, 2014). Additionally, Koo (2003) had also indicated that varied retail elements have significant and favorable influences on the attitude of consumers towards retail stores.

5.2 Emotional State

Emotional state of an individual makes an impact on their behavior. The pleasure and arousal dimensions exclusively decide either ways, a consumer may react optimistically or pessimistically to a consumption situation, including store environment (Solomon, 2013). Image is related to the desire for consumption. Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman (2017) indicate that unfettered desire is a problematic state of existence for consumers. Hope and desire have been known to fuel consumer ideology and the market system.

It is useful to focus on emancipatory imaginations of desire and discover how desires can be connected to overcoming repressions of psyche. It is also useful to situate the retail store and its image within broader structures of the economy and ask whether the retail store helps in contesting inequality or ends up amplifying inequality.

“The outcome of varied combinations of pleasure and arousal levels gives numerous dimensions of emotional states namely Arousing, exciting, pleasant, relaxing, sleepy, gloomy, unpleasant and distressing” (Solomon, 2013). Research had also supported the findings that the service element of retail store image has a favorable and optimistic influence on feelings which led to consumption (Grace and O’Cass, 2005). Several research studies have investigated the effect of retail stores on consumer's emotional state and subsequently their purchase behavior. In fact, store image deems to be a manifestation of a one's perception of reality (Bernstein, 1986) which is based on “one's beliefs, emotions and feelings” (Barich and Kotler, 1991). As the image is an assessment made partially on the basis of emotional attributes (Nevin & Houston, 1980), thus ought to be associated with emotions that an individual anticipates to feel by realizing after their aim to shop. For instance, if a consumer aim to shop at a retail store, then they will typically relate a more positive outlook with a store which they see more optimistically. Further, Hunter (2006) established that “influence of shopping center image on desire to visit arises directly and indirectly through positive likely emotions which is partly mediated by positive predictable emotions”. Thereby, suggesting that all communications to shoppers need to be focused on emotional appeal as compared to cognitive appeal. Research proposes “appeal type needs to be corresponding to whether the product is mainly affective or cognitive” (Johar and Sirgy, 1991).

Kim et al. (2009) found consumers regard fit amid the appearance of sales associate (salesperson) and the store image as a vital influencing factor on their opinion about the store image. Ballantine et al. (2010) confirmed that the

interaction amid stimuli, which constitutes store atmosphere can considerably influence shoppers' affect (emotional state) for the retail store and found that influence of several atmospheric cues on the hedonic retail experience.

5.3 Purchase Decisions

In spite of all the efforts of retailers to “pre-sell” consumers by influencing advertising, marketers started recognizing that the retail store environment strongly influence many purchases. (Solomon, 2013). For instance, in the context of women consumers, one of the main information source, while deciding to purchase clothes is store displays. According to Sen et al. (2002) consumer's judgment to enter a specific store is greatly prejudiced by window display, especially at the entrance location, although findings in addition showed that purchase decisions are robustly related with information which is more products category-specific as compared to store-specific, which is gathered from store window displays. Consumers may alter their mind by erroneous feelings before they enter the store to purchase. At the same time, they also may intend not to go into the store originally but enter and purchase for the reason that store's window display image or atmosphere was perceived good (Samli et al., 1998; Chowdhury et al., 1998). More recently, while examining the antecedents of consumer behavior towards storefront windows, Pantano (2019) demonstrated that consumers not only willingly entire the store when they witness and sense, innovative interactive technologies at storefront windows, but also share positive word-of-mouth with friends.

Though, prior research studies have shown that music played in the store influences purchase decisions (Oakes et al., 2013). In a recent study, Toldos et. al (2019) further indicated that “customers in a non-English speaking country are more likely to make purchases when music is played in English, which fits with the store's global image and in addition, this effect is mediated by time spent in the store”.

5.4 Store Preference

Research around the retail store image validated the

linkages amid store image and store preferences which is well described by a popular model such that, “Sheth's (1983) model of patronage preference had argued that personal and product determinants influence consumer's shopping motives, while market and company factors influence consumers' shopping alternatives”. Pragmatic evidence on proposed relationships between a store image dimension- 'facilities' and patronage preference was found.

Hansen and Deutscher(1977-78) established the “importance in rankings for facilities in department and grocery stores were similar”. While evaluating the retail store image dimensions Thang and Tan(2003) established the association among 'how consumers perceive store image' and their 'preference for retail outlets'. The study pointed out that the enhanced positive perception of consumers towards the store's facilities will result in high store preference. In a more recently, Jacobs et al. (2010) with a qualitative research approach found that “product-related factors such as quality, price, product range and convenient packaging” enhances consumers' store preference.

5.5 Approach or Avoidance Behaviour

The consumer response to an environment as per Mehrabian and Russell (1974) model affirms that “these reactions can be symbolized by 'approach' or 'avoidance' behavior”. In retail context, 'approach' behavior connotes, stay and remain inside the store and respond to the store environment whereas avoidance behavior connotes to leave and move out of the store.

Earlier, in a study on elderly consumers it was found that store attributes impacts approach or avoidance behavior (Moye & Giddings, 2002). As per Donovan and Rossiter (1982) “consumer's emotional states of pleasure, arousal and dominance are influences by store atmosphere”, in addition emotional state acts as mediator amid store atmosphere and approach-avoidance response. Various intensity of lighting used for displaying merchandise, as a store attribute influences approach/avoidance behavior as per Summers and Hebert (1998). Gilboa and Rafaeli (2003) reveals that customers are more apt to approach a retail store with modest visual complexity and high order

appeal. In the retail environment, Deng and Poole (2012) instituted an optimistic relationship amid “visual complexity to digital user interface” and store preference. However, more recently, Jang and Choo (2018) while investigating the similar effect in a retail fashion store found approach behavior of consumers showed “an inverted U-shape in the low-order condition, while a positive linear shape in the high-order condition was observed, and interestingly the interaction impact was significant for high-sensation seekers only”. These conclusions could possibly aid retailers in formulating appropriate visual merchandising strategies in retail stores. It becomes more useful especially when organizing a large number of wide-ranging merchandise in a complex environment.

5.6 Patronage Behaviour

Patronage behavior refers to all those actions that a consumer carries out with the intention of making a purchase from a retail store. These actions comprise of information search, purchase/post purchase behavior. Patronage behavior also includes non purchase associated actions like gathering information about many retail stores before buying required merchandise. Patronage of consumers towards a retail store sums up the extent to which they return to a store for repeat purchasing. If a store is able to sustain long term store patronage, consumer spending too was found to increase (Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006a, b; Hu and Jasper, 2006;).

Many different research studies validated the influence of retail store image perceptions on consumer patronage behavior. According to Doyle & Fenwick (1974), while targeting their customer retailers found store image to be a decisive factor and over a period of time it affects patronage behavior of customers (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986). Consequently, retail practitioners must appreciate store image perceptions of customers as they will help them in facilitating and spotting target customers who also are likely to buy (Bhat and Singh, 2017; Clement et al., 2015). Retailer is ought to maneuver the entire store image perceptions of the consumers in order to persuade

patronage behavior of consumers (Oh et al., 2008). For instance, Kumar et al. (2010) establishes “the cognitive influence of store atmospherics on customer value, store image, and patronage intentions in an emerging market conditions”. Kaul et al. (2009) concluded that “initial-trust-image of a new store influences shopper trust as well as patronage intentions, where shopper trust reduces significantly when an initial-trust-image is negative as compared to initial positive perceptions”. The study also indicated that Indian shoppers are inclined by the varied cues and among them store's front displays are the most vital ones, followed by word-of-mouth promotion and recommendations from friends and relatives plays an important role in eliciting shopper patronage. Chang H. J. et al. (2015) brought out that sales employees at retail outlets and the store atmosphere attribute of an active wear specialty store has an affirmative effect on consumer satisfaction, thus creating a straight impact on 'word of mouth' and re-patronage intention for active wear specialty stores. Jacobs et.al (2010) with a qualitative research approach among consumers of food in department store revealed that “store-related factors such as store location, appearance and hygiene, service quality, convenience of trading hours, and consistency in store layout predominantly influenced participants in their patronage of a specific store format”.

5.7 Consumer Satisfaction

According to Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998), “Consumer satisfaction is referred as the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the store) meets or exceeds expectations”. In the retail literature, Many different research studies had validated that the connection amid retail store elements/attributes and consumer satisfaction (Thang and Tan, 2003; Gail and Scott, 1995; Hackl et al., 2000; Gomez et al., 2004). Recently, Watanabe et.al (2019) confirmed that store image evaluation positively affects consumer satisfaction.

Bouzaabia et al. (2013) developed a model based on “existing research in the area of 'logistics service quality', 'service logic', 'store image', and 'customer loyalty’”. The results demonstrated that customers might gain an

extensive pie of their satisfaction during the exchanges of in-store logistic operations and which is supposed to be a vital constituent of the retail servicescape which besides directly influencing satisfaction also indirectly influences via its image. More recently, Thomas S. (2013) in a study in Indian context validates “the measurement model of customer satisfaction and while deliberating on its influence on customer loyalty stated that the store image was also seen to have a positive impact on customer loyalty through the mediating variable customer satisfaction”. In a model (tested in Spain and USA), Martı́nez-Ruiz et al. (2011) described factors which exercise maximum influences on customer satisfaction are “services, quality and are followed by convenience”. Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou (2009) found in Greece supermarket context that customers evaluate store image as statistical significance for their satisfaction levels and specific store attributes emerged as significant determinants of satisfaction including products, pricing, personnel, and in store convenience whereas atmosphere and merchandising has no significant influence on satisfaction formation.

As per, Martenson (2007) there lies a strong relationship among “Corporate Image” and “Satisfaction and when consumers find the store neat and pleasant, they believe that the store understand their needs and thus customers feel satisfied”. Noyan and Simsek (2011) demonstrated that retail store image perceptions with respect to store dimensions, “service, store atmosphere, loyalty programs and service”, vary with consumer satisfaction in Thailand's supermarkets study. Roy et al. (2011) showed that store image perceptions with store dimensions, including “physical structure, service reliability, employees' competence and courtesy” vary with consumer satisfaction. Watanabe et al. (2013) found that “the significant attributes that explained satisfaction were price, employees and product, and where price was found to be the most influencing attribute”.

5.8 Store Loyalty

Early on the premises established that the space amid consumers and a retail store, is the decisive cause of store loyalty (Thompson, 1967). Store loyalty is defined by

Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) as “the biased (i.e. non-random) behavioral response (i.e. revisit), expressed over time, by some decision making unit with respect to one store out of a set of stores, which is a function of psychological (decision making and evaluative) processes resulting in brand commitment”.

Researchers exemplified that few retail store elements play a critical part in customer store loyalty behavior (Hu and Jasper, 2006; Sherman et al., 1997; Baker et al., 2002; Sirgy et al., 2000). Burt and Carralero-Encinas (2000) deliberated on some of these concerns which were linked to retail store image management and the possible gap between the retailer's opinions and the customer's perception of store image. Earlier, in a conceptual model Osman (1993) anticipated that if retailer meets up or surpasses the customer expectations, it will result in favorable customer experiences, probably can direct to repeat purchase behavior and improved customer loyalty. Likewise, a minor alliance with the customer and the retailer images may possibly face the customer's decreased loyalty. Lee and Lee (2005) found significant relationship amid sales personnel and store loyalty. Further, Birtwistle et al. (1999) pointed out that retail store image is the insight embraced by customers and store's frontline staff. As per their findings, the store's frontline staff should uphold high esteem towards their retail store and its offerings including the environment in which they interact with store customers.

There are quite a few evidences that “store loyalty might be positively linked to store image and customer satisfaction” (Bloemer and De Ruyter, 1998; Osman, 1993), on the other hand, precise linkages amid satisfaction, store image and loyalty remains unclear in different retail settings. For case in point, Beneke et al. (2011) in the franchise setting in South Africa supermarket study rejects the argue that store image directly affects loyalty and indicated that customer satisfaction is essential for a relationship to survive, amid both store image and loyalty, and loyalty and trust. Koo (2003) in a study in Korea, established that “attributes of discount stores has a positive and significant effect on store loyalty” whereas Chang and Tu (2005) confirms the similar

influence at hypermarket consumers in Taiwan. Jha & Arora (2012) in a study of loyalty card of pantaloon stores in India found “significant relationship between the extent of customer loyalty towards a particular store and the level of customer satisfaction”.

5.9 Store Choice

In principal, Store choice is considered as a cognitive procedure (Sinha and Banerjee, 2004) and store choice decisions were conceptualized as a two stage problem situation, pertaining to processing information of store location and timings for shopping visits (Leszczyc et al., 2000). Consumers utilize retail store elements as assessment criteria in active decision making course with regards to retail store choice (Jin and Kim, 2003). Joyce & Lambert (1996) explained that “store image is a vital constituent in a consumer's choice of a retail store”, for instance, the significant role of store's window display in influencing shoppers' decision to go inside a store is vital and thereby influencing in forming their perceptions about store image.

Numerous studies identified that store choice decisions are driven by store attributes (Basu et al., 2014; Prasad & Aryasri, 2011; Mortimer, 2012; Tripathi & Sinha, 2008). For instance, Jantan and Kamaruddin (1999) found that most significant store image attributes/dimensions influencing the department store choice was “location followed by service; merchandise and promotion; and advertising” among seven examined dimensions among Malaysian shoppers. Jaravaza and Chitando (2013) further elaborated that “store location related aspects including, travelling time, locational convenience, proximity to complimentary outlets and store visibility are the influencing factors in the selection of a store”. Nevertheless, Hassan & Bakar (2010) explained “dependence of store choice on store attributes like reasonable price, merchandise assortment and personalized services offered by the retail store”.

From the perspective of consumers, assortment does play a primary role in store choice. (Kahn et al., 1986; Brieschet al., 2009). More recently, Gudonavičienė and Alijosiene (2013) revealed “merchandise to be the most

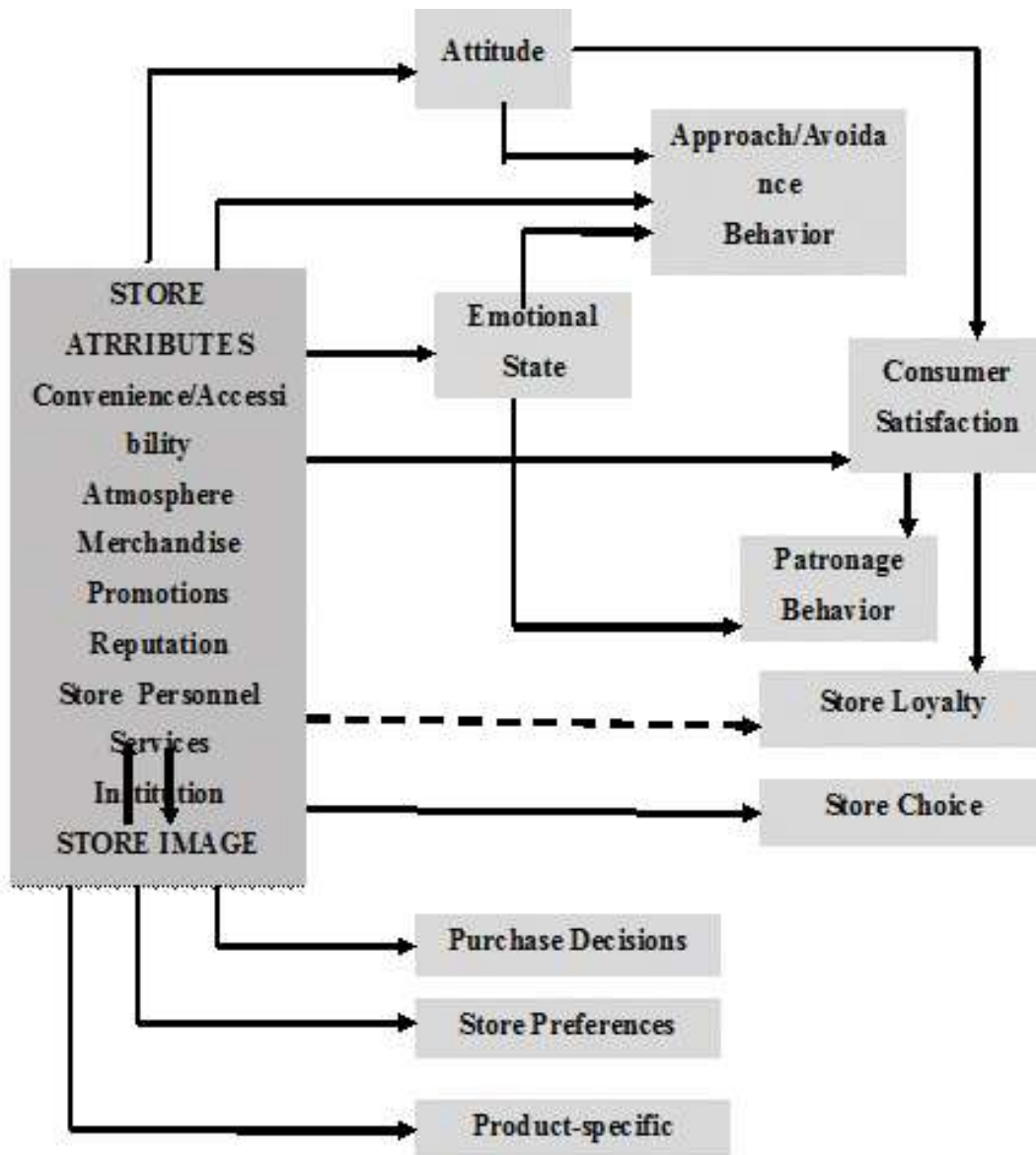
significant image attribute for selecting a store, followed by macro accessibility, entertainment, micro accessibility and atmosphere”. According to Bezes (2015) store attributes like “accessibility, the range of merchandise and Reputation” influences store choice. Similarly, Yilmaz (2004) found “while selecting shopping center, merchandise features and geographic location to be the preferred store image dimensions”. In a separate study, Dhurupet al. (2013) while discovering the influence of store image factors on store choice, found “sales assistance to be the most important and store atmospherics, the least important store image factor” for the sportswear shoppers in South African. Researchers from more than a decade have been emphasizing the need to craft beautiful store environments, and highlight store attributes which draws and influence store choices (Nair, 2018M; Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986).

5.10 Product-specific Variables

In the contemporary intricate retail setting, customers depend on the impressions of a retail store along with brand/store services in order to take buying decisions. Product/brand image and store image are interrelated variables, moreover, retailer's offerings aids in positioning it alongside its competitors within a sector (Varley, 2005). Helme Falk Miralem (2016) brought out the fact that consumers have a preference and classify sensory cues “as per a specific product in the department, the service offered by the firm and the store image”. This imply that retailers must deploy and select visual, auditory and olfactory cues according to their product offerings and retail store image so as to establish appropriate fit especially when complementary and positioning product offerings/services in a retail setting.

Baugh and Davis (1989) indicated that “apparel prestige is more favorable for clothing from a high prestige image store as compared to a low prestige image store for both designer and private label clothing”. Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003) exemplified affirmative and significant relationship among consumers' perceptions of retail store image and private label brands. Similarly, Semeijn et al. (2004) also validated that “store image perception to be an

important predictor of attitude towards a private label brand when examined consumer evaluations of private label brands”.



Note: _____ denotes confirmed linkages ; ----- denotes contradictory findings

Fig. 1: Proposed conceptual Framework of Retail Store Image and Consumer Behavior Linkages

6. Conclusion and Implications

Retail store image research highlights several empirical research findings relating to the linkages among the perceived retail store image and associated consumer behavior constructs. However, findings from research work offer few contradict results. The current study concludes the outline of literature on the linkages amid retail store image and consumer behavior constructs by integrating present research studies into a discussion framework. Fig. 1 illustrates the proposed discussion framework of relationships amid retail store image and consumer behavior constructs. The centre of the model depicts the interaction of store attributes and retail store image where formation of store image is on the basis of consumer perceptions of all the associated store attributes. The model further delineates the influences of store image on varied consumer behavior variables, where in all the confirmed relationships supported by existing research findings are depicted with a solid line. However a broken line represents contradictory findings from the literature with regard to relationship amid store image and consumer behavior construct.

Even though not many studies examined associations amid retail store image and the attitude, emotional state, and social cues, outcomes indicate evident influences of consumer's perceptions of retail store image on these variables, and few studies mentioned how the influence varies with store image dimensions. It was found that there are favorable associations of retail store image and decision-making, though decision types varied significantly in the literature. Further, a robust support is identified the existence of the relationship among both patronage reference and approach-avoidance behavior and consumer perceptions of retail store image. Likewise, support relationship of store satisfaction, patronage behavior, and store choice, was established in context of consumer perceptions of retail store image influences. However, contradicting findings were identified in literature when the relationship between perceived retail store image and store loyalty was examined. Finally, the impact of retail store image perceptions on product-specific variables was

found to be significant and supportive, though influences of specific store attributes varied significantly. The consequences of the diverse retail store image studies are broadly contradicting as various store image dimensions influence the consumer behavior variables differently. Few were standalone research findings, while others were not comparable as inconsistency was found in their research methodologies. Thus it is challenging to draw and present a definite conclusion from the research.

The study thus initiates a useful conceptual framework that can be utilized by retailers as they formulate their retailing strategies for targeting customers as well as enhancing their store image. Since customers might see the store image being ingrained in a retail outlet setting as the stimuli intend to influence their behavior. Utilizing the logical conceptual framework, retailer can analyze and improve their marketing and promotional strategies successfully.

7. Limitations

After extensive review and discussion, it was found that some of the findings contradicted the existing literature while few provided standalone conclusions thus it was difficult to state any inference from the same. The retail store image being a multi-dimensional construct was considered by different store elements/attributes thereby there was no uniformity in the scale used thus many a times it was difficult to make conclusions or comparisons. Though this study presents many realistic aspects for the retail practitioners and marketers to examine while planning retail strategies to draw customers, still this work largely covers reviews from extant literature that offers a conceptual and analytical discussion framework for advance assessment through factual data. Several practical analysis are required to provide a more robust framework in order to put up a comprehensive retail marketing strategy to facilitate retailers to augment the impact of this study.

8. Scope for Future Research

The study provides a new landscape for further research as there are several promising areas which have ample of scope for further study. This study has examined the

linkages amid store image and various consumer behavior variables. Since findings from various studies discussed in the study provide extensive contradictions, few secluded findings and conflicting research methodologies, thus presenting challenges to draw perfect conclusions from the research, emphasizing the call for further empirical support. Furthermore, varied dimensions of retail store image can be researched separately in greater detail for in-depth understanding of their role and relationships with various consumer behavior variables.

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