

Influence of Shopping Orientation and Store Image on Patronage of Furniture Store

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Abstract

Knowledge on furniture consumers' retail patronage will promote and enhance efforts to increase sales at furniture stores and could guide future research. This research therefore was proposed to develop a general model of retail patronage and to empirically test the relationships proposed in the model in the context of furniture market. The objectives of the study include 1) to review existing retail patronage models and related literature 2) to develop a general framework of retail patronage behavior and 3) to test the model in the furniture store shopping patterns. Based on a review of the literature the study proposed to adapt Darden's patronage model of consumer behavior. 115 data were collected through survey questionnaires and the underlying relationship among the variables that characterize consumers' patronage behavior towards furniture was studied. Statistically it was found that in terms of shopping orientation, the apathetic shopper and the personalizing shopper was influenced by the lifestyle of the consumer and hence influenced the customer patronage. Store image on the other hand was found to enhance the impact on consumer patronage of the furniture store and moreover acted as both the predictor and the moderator.

Keywords: Patronage, Store image, Shopping orientation

1. Introduction

Furniture plays an important role in satisfying the social needs of the family. Home is not only a physical state but also includes the net of social relations for family members, friends and neighbors. The home also indicates the identity of the person, reflecting his or her lifestyle and personal values. Furniture represents the changeable part of the home and it helps the individual to express his or her personality and feelings. Through furniture, the family can also express their social status and associated it with memories and experiences of their childhood. In general, furniture plays a very stable and essential role in our lives. Therefore this study is trying to bridge the gap in the literature of marketing by exploring the patronage of the furniture consumer and will further recommend for future research on furniture shopping formulation.

The consumer's behavior in marketing situations has been investigated in many studies. In a study by Schreiber as cited in Karki (2000), five criteria are listed that must be taken into consideration when studying consumer buying behavior: 1) price consciousness, (2) quality consciousness, (3) original, unusual decision, (4) planned decision, and (5) non conformist decision. The previous study also identified that buyer's demographic profile like education and income have influence on furniture buying decision. Buyers with higher education and better income use more sources of information when buying furniture (Karki, 2000).

The choice of furniture store in terms of price has been investigated (French et. al., 1972). Other relevant factors such as product aspects (quality, assortment), convenience of shopping (location, parking) and payment possibilities (credit, cash discounts) may also influence buying decision (French et.al., 1972). Therefore the purpose of the study is to develop the general model of retail patronage and to empirically test the relationships proposed in the model in the context of furniture market. The objectives of the study include 1) reviewing

existing retail patronage models and related literature 2) to develop a general framework of retail patronage behavior and 3) to test the model in the furniture store shopping patterns.

The decision to patronize a store usually starts with a set of characteristics or attributes that consumers consider important. Consumers use these attributes to determine which stores can cater to their needs. Patronage studies in the past have attempted to identify determinants of store choice in relation to attributes such as price, quality, variety of merchandise, credit availability, return policies and well known brands. Physical facilities or attributes have been included among other attributes in some studies but they have not been fully addressed in these related studies. According to Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1995) environmental dimensions such as air quality, lighting, layout, carpeting and aisle width and placement are physical store attributes used to project store image and influence store choice. Store retailers must be able to attract customers to shop for furniture in their store. As furniture stores are faced with stiff competition, they must understand the importance of the environment and what can be done to influence store patronage. Today's retail market is characterized as being more competitive thus, furniture store retailers must develop effective strategies to gain a competitive advantage. Therefore, furniture store retailers should find ways to attract consumers and increase patronage. Therefore, the motivation of this study is due to the above reasons.

In this study, furniture patronage behavior is defined as the extent to which consumers shop at the furniture store, the propensity to shop at the store in future and the extent of the willingness of the consumer to recommend the store to friends and relatives.

2. Literature Review

Many studies in consumer patronage have suggested that shopping orientation and store image was among the factors that influence the patronage behavior of the consumer. In relation to furniture product, consumer's life style is the antecedence of shopping orientation. As noted earlier, home indicates the identity of the person, reflecting his or her lifestyle and personal values.

2.1 Shopping orientation

Shopping orientation could be defined as a shopper's style that places particular emphasis on a shopping-specific lifestyle encompassing shopping activities, interests and opinions, and reflecting a view of shopping as a complex social, recreational and economic phenomenon (Visser and Preez, 2001). Shopping orientations are related to general predisposition toward acts of shopping. They are conceptualized as a specific dimension of lifestyle and operationalized on the basis of activities, interests and opinion statements pertaining to acts of shopping (Li et. al 1999). Shopping is not only an economic activity but also psychological and social. According to consumers, shopping orientations are various; include economic, convenience, experiential, leisure, and self-fulfillment. Tauber (1972) noted that consumers often shop out of personal motives (diversion from the routine of daily life, self-satisfaction, and sensory stimulation) and social motives (social experience outside the home, peer group attraction, and pleasure of bargaining).

This construct is important as a shopper tends to shop at the store that meet his/her perceived expectations on certain attributes perceived as important to him or her. Stone (1954) classified shoppers into four types: the economic shopper, the personalizing shopper, the ethical shopper and the apathetic shopper. According to Stone, economic shoppers are those who express a sense of responsibility for their household purchasing duties. An economic shopper will shop in stores based on their perception of price where they are likely to shop at stores that are perceived to offer goods at cheaper prices than other stores (Osman, 1996).

A shopper who does not like shopping tends to shop in stores that are close to their homes (Stone, 1954). Personalizing shoppers include those who prefer shopping at a store "where they know my name". Personal attachments formed between them and the store personnel will greatly influence their patronage of a store. Economic factors like price, quality and selection of merchandise are less important. Ethical shoppers are those who sacrifice lower price or wider selection of merchandise in order to help their small neighbourhood stores to survive against the big shopping mall. Apathetic shoppers do not discriminate between kinds of stores. They consider shopping as a necessity and thus the main criteria used is locational convenience.

Numerous other versions of shopper classification have been made (Darden and Reynolds, 1971, Schiffman et.al. 1977, Lumpkin, 1985, Suchard and Cooper, 1990). The most distinct typologies that appear consistent across studies are economic, social and apathetic shoppers (Wesbrook and Black, 1985).

Whatever the basis of shopper taxonomic approaches adopted, it should be noted that customers are taking a new shape with the adoption of new lifestyle. Past studies have found support for the influence of shopper orientation

on the perceived image of a store. (Mason, Durand and Taylor 1983, Lumpkin 1985). As such causal links between shopping orientations and store image as proposed in the model is consistent with past studies.

2.2 Store image

Martineau (1958) was the first researcher to offer the following description of store image:

“it is... the way in which the store is defined in the shopper’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes”. The more favorable the image, the more likely it is that consumer would shop and buy at the store. The store image researchers have conceptualized image to include store attributes.

Many conceptualizations of store image have been advanced in the past (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974, James et.al, 1976; Kunkel and Berry, 1968 M; Marks, 1976). The dominant attitudinal perspective that is taken in the literature treats store image as the result of a multi-attribute model (Marks, 1976; James et.al., 1976.) According to Bloemer and Ruyter (1997) store image is defined as the complex of a consumer’s perceptions of a store on different (salient) attributes.

Different authors have identified different store attributes as part of the overall image towards the store. Lindquist (1974) combined models from 19 studies and came up with nine different elements: merchandise, service, clientele, physical facilities, comfort, promotion, store atmosphere, institutional and post transaction satisfaction. Doyle and Fenwick (1974) distinguished only five elements: product, price, assortment, styling and location. Bearden (1978) came up with the following characteristics: price, quality of merchandise, assortment, atmosphere, location, parking facilities and friendly personnel. According to Bloemer and Shroeder (2002) store image is the sum of all the store’s attributes, in the way perceived by the consumer, through his or her experience with the store.

Burt and Carralero-Encinas (2000) consider the retail store as the key success factor to a retail company. The major source of competitive advantage for retailers can be found in the value added delivered to customers, through the performance of functions or activities. This value added must be based on consumer needs and values. Thus it is fundamental that store understands the importance of the store image in their positioning statement. For McGoldrick (1990) accumulated image is also an indicator of the asset value of the “retail brand”, which represents the long-term result of the marketing activities. To understand the image effects can lead to better purchase decisions for consumers and to better strategies for retail stores. As stressed by Osman (1993), customers’ patronage behaviors towards a particular store depend on their image of that particular store. The more favorable the store image, the higher the valence of the store customers.

Fox et al. (2004) examined the relationship of price to grocery shopping behavior and found that it was less important in driving consumer spending than promotion and store assortment. But Sieder and Costley (1994) found price to be a major determinant of store choice in the grocery shopping context. They also reported that consumers had accurate perceptions of market pricing related to the store that they considered in their study. According to Yavas (2003), price is an important driver in store choice among a battery of patronage motivations. Studies have also linked the pricing policies of an organization to consumer value perceptions and ultimate shopping intentions. (Biswas et al, 2002). According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), retail store image has images of their own that serves to influence the perceived quality of products that carry and the decision of consumers as to where to shop. These images stem from their design and physical environment, their pricing strategies, and product assortment.

As stressed by Alba et al (1994), a study of retail store image based on comparative pricing strategies found that consumers tend to perceive stores that offer a small discount on a large number of items (i.e frequency of price advantage) as having lower prices overall than competing stores that offer larger discounts on a smaller numbers of products (i.e; magnitude of price advantage). Thus, frequent advertising that presents larger numbers’ of price specials reinforces consumer beliefs about the competitiveness of as store’s prices. In the past, store displays were mainly used for promotional purposes. But as consumers became more sophisticated, retailers have discovered new roles for effective display: communicating product information and store image, assisting consumers in making purchase decisions, and creating an exciting shopping environment (Bell and Ternes, 2002).

For the purpose of this study, store image is defined as customers’ perception about quality, price and atmosphere of the furniture store only as the main attributes. This was assessed by the customers’ cognitive attitudes towards those attributes. Below is store image components partly adapted from Giraldi et.al. (2005)

[Table 1 is insert here]

Besides store factors such as merchandise, service, price, atmosphere, promotion and people, retail stores also have images of their own to influence the perception of the consumer. Their perceived quality of products and etc. will subsequently lead to consumer decisions to shop. This personalized self images that the store possess are strictly associated with consumer personality and lifestyle. Consumers tend to shop in stores that have images consistent with their own self images (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1997).

2.3 Lifestyle

Lifestyle refers to one's mode of living, activities and opinions regarding oneself and the environment in general. It covers issues such as how one lives, what products one buys, how one uses them and one's opinion about them. A person's lifestyle is molded by one's demographic characteristics and values (Ghosh, 1990)

Studies that have described retail patronage from a lifestyle perspective include Cort and Dominquez, 1977; Crask and Reynolds, 1978 and Bearden et.al., 1978. Cort and Dominquez (1977) which examined the cross-shopping motives of customers of a specialty store chain and reported that cross-shoppers were likely to be bargain seekers rather than only fashion seekers. Bearden et.al., 1978 found differences in lifestyle of patrons and non patrons across different types of stores. The findings provide support to the influence of lifestyle on customers' preferences for retail store attributes. Thus, customer's lifestyles do influence their perceived image of a store.

According to Lamb, Mc Daniel and Hair (2008), lifestyle is a mode of living; words, they choose products and services that meet diverse needs and interests rather than confirming to traditional stereotypes. Pertaining to furniture, consumer lifestyle can be either ethnocentrism or polycentric.

2.3.1 Ethnocentrism vs. Polycentric

Consumer who are highly ethnocentric are likely to feel that it is inappropriate or wrong to purchase foreign-made product because of the resulting economic impact on the domestic economy (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Consumer ethnocentrism specifically refers to ethnocentric views held by consumers in one country, the in-group towards products from another country and the out-group (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Consumers may believe that it is not appropriate, and possibly even immoral, to buy products from other countries. Purchasing foreign products may be viewed as improper because it costs domestic jobs and hurts the economy. The purchase of foreign products may even be seen as simply unpatriotic (Klein, 2002; Netemeyer et al., 1991; Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995; Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

Another stream of literature, however, counters this position. The work on consumer ideologies such as ethnocentrism, nationalism, and patriotism posits that precisely because of the 'shrinking globe' and the more and more interconnected world; consumers are increasingly concerned with their cultural, national and ethnic identities, which subsequently affect their consumption motivations (Burton, 2002; Quellet, 2007). For example, ethnic and national sentiment can lead to consumer preferences for domestic products/services rather than imports and result in loyalty to local producers. For this group of consumers, characterized as ethnocentric in their purchase orientation, country of origin (COO) information exerts a high diagnostic value in their search behavior (Jo et al., 2003). Conversely, consumers, who may choose to either ignore COO information in their product choices and/or exhibit preferences for imported products/services, can be characterized as polycentric in their purchase orientation.

3. Research framework and hypotheses

A conceptual framework of consumer patronage adapted from Darden's patronage model of consumer behavior was used to display relationships between variables and patronage. The study focuses on the underlying relationships among shoppers personal characteristic (the researcher focus on lifestyle), shopping orientation, store image and furniture store patronage behavior.

Lifestyles and shopping orientations are good predictors of various aspects of shopping behavior such as store loyalty and preferences for types of retail outlets (Moschis, 1976). According to Darden's (1980), shopping orientation serve as key construct in a patronage choice model. The antecedent variables to shopping orientations include personal characteristics (lifestyle, social class and family life cycle) and information sources. It is also hypothesized that shopping orientation to a large extend determined by the store image, which in turn impact on patronage behavior (Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992a, 1992b). Below is the proposed research framework

[Figure 1 is insert here]

3.1 Research Hypothesis

Based on the framework discussed above, several propositions were developed:

1. Customers' image of a furniture store is influenced by their shopping orientation
2. Customers' lifestyles influence their shopping orientation.
3. Store image enhance the impact of shopping orientation towards customer patronage.

4. Research methodology and findings

Purposive sampling was used in data collection as the nature of the study is to determine the patronage behavior of the furniture consumer. 300 questionnaires was hand delivered to the consumer and a total of 115 questionnaires were returned as useable responses, for which the profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 2:

[Table 2 is insert here]

When the variables were analyzed using the principal component analysis, the 62 items on life style and shopping orientation were factored into two dimension; store image were factored into three dimension; and patronage behavior was unidimensional. The dimension of Life Style were (1) ethnocentrism and (2) polycentric; Shopping Orientation were (1) apathetic shopper and (2) personalize shopper; Store Image as (1) price, (2) quality of product, and (3) atmosphere. For consumer patronage, it was factored unidimensionally. The Cronbach alpha reliability measure for these dimensions ranges from 0.6 to 0.79 levels and are deemed to be satisfactory.

4.1 Test of Relationships

4.1.1 Relationship between life style and shopping orientation

Life style as antecedence to shopping orientation was found to have significant and positive relationship for both shopping orientation (apathetic shopper; and personalize shopper) as the model exist and fit between both variables. However, apathetic shopper was found significant with consumer's life style (either ethnocentrism or polycentric) (refer to table 3). To the researcher's knowledge, this may be due to the fact that apathetic shopper who was define as not discriminate between kinds of stores, consider shopping as a necessity, locational convenience is the priority and having no specific personal relations with the store will choose stores that meet their interest in terms of price or product regardless of where and who own the store. Therefore their ethnocentrism or polycentrism influences their shopping orientation.

On the other hand personalize shopper who prefer shopping at a store "where they know my name" would choose specific stores that already have attachments formed between them and the store personnel. Therefore, life style will not influence their shopping orientation.

[Table 3 is insert here]

Relationship between shopping orientation, customer patronage and moderating effect of store image

All the hypotheses of this study are tested simultaneously using hierarchical regression involving three levels (noted as Model 1, 2, 3). Model 1 focuses only on the independent variable, shopping orientation and its relation to patronage while Model 2 includes moderating variable; store image. Store image as an additional independent variable before the interaction terms are introduced in Model 3. The details of the findings and the summary of the model fit are as displayed in Table 4.

Findings indicate that the shopping orientation influences patronage with regard to apathetic shopper's only. This means that a furniture store doesn't have to be personalizing to attract loyal consumers. The products, price and location they offered as well as other variables will determine the consumer patronage.

Results of Model 2 suggest that as the perception towards store image increases so is the consumer patronage indicating the role of store image as a predictor. When the interaction terms are included, only one of them is significant notably interaction between store image and shopping orientation (personalize shopper and price). Since store image plays both roles; of a predictor and a moderator, the situation is termed as quasi moderator. This means that store image has both a direct effect on patronage as well as modifying the impact of shopping orientation on consumer patronage. Notices that personalize shopping orientation was never significant independently towards patronage but was significant when interacting with store image (i.e. price). This indicates that the relationship of personalize shopping orientation is enhanced with a store image that perceives to have reasonable price. Price, as selling appeal, does not carry with it the meaning of quality and it consequently fixes in the mind of the consumer the idea that economy is the chief element to be considered in the purchase of furniture. Furniture brings a comparatively high unit price, and, therefore, the price element will doubtless always play an important role in its purchase. It is interesting to note that, while apathetic shopping

orientation is significant to patronage, personalize shopping orientation will only be significant with the inclusion of moderating effect, that is store image specifically in terms of price.

[Table 4 is insert here]

5. Discussion

From the results of the present study, we found that apathetic shoppers who do not discriminate between kinds of stores; consider shopping as a necessity and their main criteria is locational convenience does influenced by both ethnocentric and polycentric life style. This means that to attract loyal customers, furniture store must be located at a strategic and convenient location and provide variety of products either local or foreign products. Moreover, it doesn't have to be personalized. Thus, the products, price and location they offered will determine the consumer patronage. With regards to personalized shoppers, only with the influence of store image particularly price will enhance their patronage behavior. Notices that personalize shoppers were never significant independently towards patronage without interacting with store image (i.e. price). This indicates that the relationship of personalize shopping orientation is enhanced with a store image that perceives to have reasonable price. However, we found that store image plays both roles; of a predictor and a moderator. This means that store image has both a direct effect on patronage as well as modifying the impact of shopping orientation on consumer patronage.

6. Conclusion

The finding of this study conclude that, life style of the individual does influence the shopping orientation of furniture consumer mainly when their act of shopping are based on their apathetic shopping orientation. In addition, apathetic shopping orientation will affect their patronage towards the particular furniture store. Furthermore, the impact of store image has given a significant contribution towards patronage of furniture store as this research found that the better the perception of consumers towards price, product and atmosphere of the store, the greater their patronage towards the store. Personalize shopping orientation on the other hand is only significant when interacted with the perception of consumer towards price. Therefore it can be concluded that information about price contribute to the patronage regardless of consumers' life style.

A study of patronage of furniture stores is important for several reasons. First, it gives better understanding to the furniture stores on the factors influencing patronage behavior. Second, furniture stores attempting to determine why consumers shop at their store will find this research important. Empirical studies such as this will provide furniture stores with the tools necessary to attract and retain customers. Third, the framework provides information on the characteristics of their loyal consumers and the store's attributes as sought by their customers. This will allow them to identify factors that are best to stress in enhancing their retail strategies.

For further research, it is recommended that more dimension of life style, shopping orientation and store image were incorporated. The more dimension will give a better generalization towards patronage behavior of the consumer.

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Table 1. Components of Store image

Component	Details
Price	Low price Competitive price
Quality	Good or poor quality stock brand names
Atmosphere	Sufficient number of employees Well trained employees High quality décor Beautiful

Table 2. Demographic Profile

No	Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percent
1	Gender:		
	a) Male	41	35.7
	b) Female	74	64.3
	Total	115	100
2.	Age:		
	a) 21-31 years old	25	21.7
	b) 31-40 years	38	33.0
	c) 41 and above	52	45.2
	Total	115	100
3.	Race:		
	a) Malay	109	94.8
	b) Chinese	6	5.2
	Total	115	100
4.	Occupation:	5	4.3
	a) Students	50	43.5
	b) Governments	45	39.1
	c) Private	15	13.0
	d) Own business	100	100
	Total		
5.	Status:		
	a) Single	21	18.3
	b) Married	89	77.4
	c) Widow	5	4.3
	Total	100	100
6.	Income:		
	a) < RM 1000	22	19.1
	b) RM 1000-RM 3000	59	51.3
	c) RM 3001-RM 5000	25	21.7
	d) > RM 5000	9	7.8
	Total	100	100

Table 3. Relationship of life style and shopping orientation

Life Style		Shopping Orientation: Apathetic shopper			
		<i>Beta</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>R² Change</i>	<i>F Value</i>
1.	Ethnocentric	0.211**	0.156	0.000	10.328***
2.	Polycentric	0.297***			10.328***
		Shopping Orientation: Personalize shopper			
1.	Ethnocentric	0.182	0.08	0.000	4.890***
2.	Polycentric	0.187			4.890***

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression – Relationship between Shopping Orientation, Patronage and moderating effect of Store Image

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable - Patronage		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Shopping Orientation			
Apathetic shopper	0.369***	0.134*	0.420
Personalize shopper	-0.001	-0.024	-0.259
Store image			
Price		0.177**	0.431
Quality of Product		0.551***	1.063**
Atmosphere		-0.179**	-1.166**
Interaction			
Apathetic*Price			0.018
Apathetic *Product			-0.407
Apathetic *atmosphere			0.006
Personalize*price			1.309**
Personalize*Product			-0.324
Personalize*atmosphere			-0.505
F value	8.825***	18.532***	8.885***
R square	0.136	0.459	0.487
Adjusted R square	0.121	0.435	0.432
R square change	0.136	0.323	0.027
F change	8.825***	21.735***	0.917

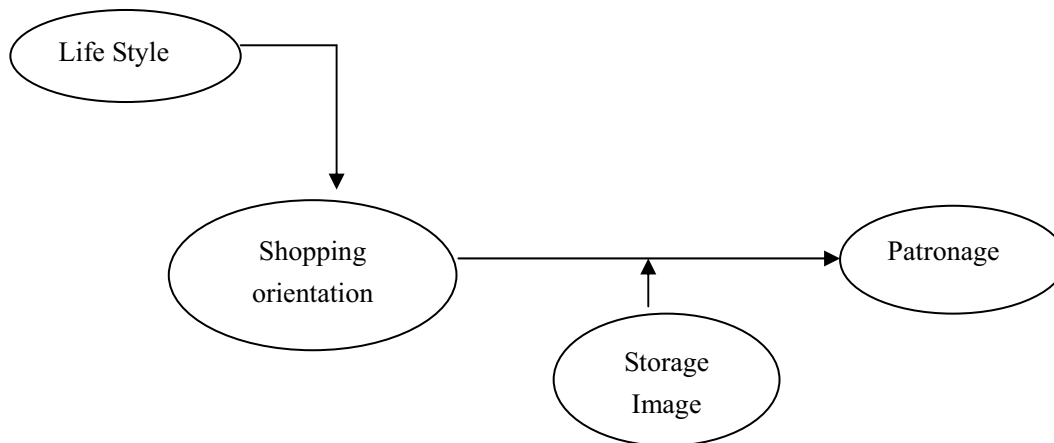


Figure 1. Research framework adapted from Darden's patronage model of consumer behavior