

ELEMENTS OF SUPER MARKET IMAGE INFLUENCING THE PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF YOUTH IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT: *In this study influence of various elements of store image are investigated with respect to purchase intention of youth in Pakistan. Store Image elements such as atmospherics, convenience, product quality, employee service and physical facilities are under consideration in this research. This study employed quantitative technique for analysis of data. A statistical evaluation is made of various store image elements affecting the purchase intention of youth in making purchases from supermarkets in multiple cities of Pakistan. The study sample comprises of 400 customers. The data was analyzed through SPSS21 software. Descriptive statistics, Regression model, bivariate correlation analysis and OLS regression were undertaken to compute the data. The findings has shown that all the observed elements of supermarket strongly influence the purchase intention of young customers and effective supermarket image building measures can help supermarkets in increasing its sales, profits and reputation.*

Keywords: atmospherics, convenience, product quality, employee service, physical facilities,
Purchase intention, youth.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporarily with changing market needs, shopping has become a rising practice and hundreds of supermarkets can be found in the big cities of Pakistan. As lives have become busy and trends are changing, people now prefer to shop all their needs under one roof to minimize the search cost along with time and effort involved. When anybody talks about a supermarket, there comes into mind a different name, a different need, and a different place to visit and purchase at. This difference is present due varying preferences of customers for products or services offered. It is seen that the trend to shop from one roof is penetrating rapidly and widely throughout the world despite the fact that although expensive, it is regarded a convenient activity. Along with convenience, supermarkets bring along a wide range of superior quality products under one name. Many international supermarkets are operating globally to delight their customers. According to [16] "shopping mall brand experience" is the response of consumer towards the activities of that certain shopping mall. These activities may include perceptual, sensory, emotional and behavioral experiences. [16] Also stated that shopping mall personality influences the satisfaction of customer.

In Pakistan, the concept of supermarkets was introduced in the early 1980s and now Pakistan has both local and international supermarket chains in abundance. During the early days of the trend of supermarkets in Pakistan, only the customers in major cities in Pakistan boasted to have the privilege and experience of shopping at and benefitting from the supermarkets. But the turn of the new century brought a dynamic change in Pakistani customers' patronage of supermarkets which made the culture penetrate down into other cities and resulted in the establishment of thousands of superstores in the country with more and more people welcoming and adopting the trend due to the interlinked convenience. This fast adoption of the trend has presented the competitors in the supermarket sector with the challenges of attracting and retaining customers to meet the business goals and gain profits. The most suitable way to meet the challenges and achieve success in business and at the same time is through building and maintaining the store or

supermarket image. Therefore, there is a need to study the elements that affect store image. The objective of this research is to identify the relationship between elements of supermarket image and purchase intention of youth in Pakistan. The elements include atmospherics, convenience, product quality, employee service & physical facilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of retail store image gained importance in 1958 when Pierre Martineau put forth the concept of 'personality of the retail store' and since that time marketing researchers have been acknowledging that customers develop thoughts and feelings about stores over time. These thoughts and feelings lead to the overall impressions about a store which have a strong influence on the customers' shopping behaviors and purchase intentions [8] [12] described store image as a fusion of psychological attributes and functional qualities comprising the retail store and defined it as "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". Taking Martineau's work on store image one step further, Lindquist developed the analysis of differences between functional qualities and psychological attributes of store image in 1974. [11], contributed his findings and referred to the store's image as a concept that is more than the sum of its components as it encompasses a number of secondary elements along with the primary ones. [11], also reflected on how various store image characteristics interact with each other and suggested that store image has another side which is based on a number of emotional contents that comprise a mix of emotional and factual elements.

Different store attributes that constitute the overall store image have been highlighted by researchers over the years. These attributes have been collectively called Retail Mix [5]. In the seminal article by [8], four key attributes were identified: (1) layout and architecture, (2) symbols and color, (3) advertising, and (4) sales personnel. Later on, [7], developed this to include 12 dimensions, each comprising between three and seven attributes. Lindquist conducted a study on store image in 1974, and combined models from 19 studies in his study and put forth 9 store image elements,

which were: service, merchandise and clientele, comfort, physical facilities, promotion, institutional and post transaction satisfaction and store atmosphere. Likewise, [2] outlined 8 attributes, including quality of the merchandise, price, assortment, location, atmosphere, promotion, friendly personnel and parking facilities. However, [5] introduced the idea of marketing mix in 1990, according to which a store image is composed of 8 different elements of the retail marketing mix which include: merchandise, location, store atmosphere, price, customer service, advertising, sales incentive programs and personal selling. In this regard, according to the retail mix model, a retail store owner or manager has to make sure that those products are being offered to their customers that they expect them to offer in the store [5].

[1], explains that store image is a multidimensional construct including five factors namely: access, in-store atmosphere and price & promotion, cross category, product-service assortment and within-category. As per [4], there are five factors that determine a store's image, these include: price, product, stock, place and physical environment. [13] put forth six main dimensions of a store's image, which are: services regarding operating personnel, possibilities of return, credit and delivery services; convenience, related to a store's location, product quality, product selection variety, product prices and a store's atmosphere. All these store image elements have been observed to influence customers' purchase intention in various studies.

Moreover, [14] refer to purchase intention as the customer's willingness to purchase a particular product or service in future. Therefore, an increased purchase intention represents an increased possibility of purchase [14]. Human behavior is influenced by the physical settings and they make their

decisions under the influence of the image they make in their mind of those physical settings [3]. Psychologists say that a person acts in response to physical environment in two differing ways: Approach and Avoidance. A person adopts the way of approach because of attractiveness of environment where as the avoidance is shown by the intention of not staying and exploring [6]. In this regard, due to the influence of supermarket image on customers, the purchase intention of buyers is a growing subject for both the companies and market researchers because they know that strong purchase intention may fetch a lot of more potential customers to a supermarket along with retaining the older ones. Therefore, all small and big companies are now paying attention to every detail in this regard [15].

This study will focus on five key factors of the store image and in this regard, current study perceives store image elements of atmospherics, convenience, product quality, employee services and physical facilities. These factors/variables represent the supermarket image elements that may influence purchase intention of youth in Pakistan. [17] Contributed in the previous research and presented perspective of superstores in Pakistan. According to the study conducted by [17], atmospherics variables like; scent, cleanliness, lighting and display layouts have positive influence on consumer's purchase intentions. [10], contend that there is a significant relationship between customer relationship management and purchase intention, through trust and perceived relationship quality which indicates relationship between purchase intension and (a) atmospherics (b) convenience, (c) product quality, (d) employee service, and (e) physical facilities which are determined by the this study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

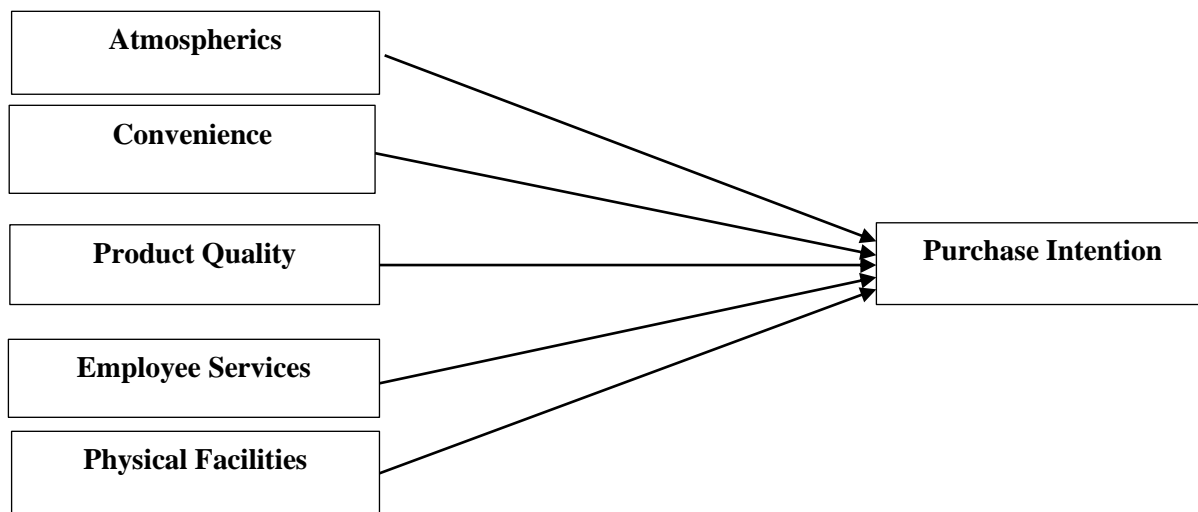


Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

Hypotheses

On the basis of literature and conceptual framework, following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between atmospherics of supermarket and purchase intention in youth.

H2: There is a positive relationship between convenience of supermarket and purchase intention in youth.

H3: There is a positive relationship between product quality of supermarket and purchase intention in youth.

H4: There is a positive relationship between employee services of supermarket and purchase intention in youth.

H5: There is a positive relationship between physical facilities of supermarket and purchase intention in youth.

METHODOLOGY

Study population and sample selection

The population of this study comprised young customers aged between 18-29 years, who shopped from multiple supermarkets in major big cities of Pakistan. The age bracket was selected considering the youth age bracket declared by the government of Pakistan. According to the Government of Pakistan [9] "various countries use different age groups for defining the population of youth. In Pakistan the population in youth age group is 15-29 years. This age group is consistent with the definition of youth taken by the Commonwealth". This study kept the minimum threshold of 18 years for population sample because in Pakistan fewer than 18 individuals are under parents/guardians care and normally not sent for purchasing groceries.

Convenience sampling technique was used to select the study population. The questionnaire was delivered personally to a total of 400 young customers on the spot in the 15 selected supermarkets. The respondents were requested to fill in the questionnaire during their shopping trip and return in at the same time as it takes maximum 15 minutes. Data collection was stopped once the threshold of 400 responses was reached. Distribution and collection of the questionnaire at the same time assured high response rate and the response rate was 100%. Sample characteristics collected through the demographic and background data have shown that the age of most of the respondents of the present study ranged between 24-29 (24-26 years 38.2% and 27-29 years 43%) years. Most of the respondents of this study were males (58%), graduates (49.5%) and married (52%). It was also seen that most of the respondents purchase their grocery from Hyperstar (49.5%) and have a monthly income ranging between PKR. 35000-45000 (37%) with an average spending ranging between PKR. 5001 to 7000 (54%) with 1-2 times frequency (81.5%) of monthly shopping. The elements of supermarket that

influence the customers' reason about purchasing from a particular supermarket include convenience (22.3%), product quality (22.2%) and employee services (22.6%).

Data collection method and technique

Survey research method was used for collecting data in this study. Data was collected through a self-administered close ended questionnaire specially developed for the current study. The questionnaire for this study was designed with the research objectives in mind and the theories that emerged during literature review, to collect data on the influence of store image elements on youth's purchase intentions in Pakistan. The questionnaire comprised three sections and a total of 50 items: Section I: collected personal information of the respondents and comprised 5 items regarding respondents' gender, marital status, education, age and income. Section II: aimed at collecting general information on the respondents' shopping behavior and had 4 items regarding the supermarket they preferred to go to; the main reason for selecting that particular supermarket for making purchases at; frequency of visiting the particular supermarket for shopping and amount of average money spent on each shopping trip. Section III: aimed at collecting information on the variables being measured in the current study. Section III consisted of 6 sub-sections. Section A aimed at collecting information on atmosphere and had 11 items; Section B was on convenience and had 7 items; Section C measured product quality and had 10 items; Section D measured employee service and comprised 4 items; Section E aimed at measuring responses on physical facilities and had 4 items and section F measured purchase intention and had 5 items. The respondents rated each of the items in sections III sub-sections A to F on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree) while completing the questionnaire. Cronobach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire items which was $\alpha = .725$ or 72.5%.

Descriptive and Statistical Analyses

Data was analyzed using SPSS21 software. Descriptive values for each variable were determined (mean, minimum, maximum and standard deviation) of the data and measures of dispersion of the data through determination of the moment of skewness of the data and moments of kurtosis. Statistical analyses of the Pearson bivariate correlation analysis and regression analysis were also undertaken to show the positive or negative impact of the variables. Alpha levels of 0.01 and 0.05 were accepted as showing statistical significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 Statistical analyses of regression analysis was undertaken to show the positive or negative impact of the variables,

Table1: Descriptive statistics of independent, moderating, mediating and dependent variables

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	St.Dev
Purchase Intention	3.00	5.00	3.9507	.63745
Atmospherics	2.20	5.00	3.8975	.60234
Convenience	3.00	5.00	4.0435	.52944
Product Quality	2.33	5.00	3.8633	.63077
Employee Services	2.33	5.00	3.9642	.82403
Physical Facilities	2.00	5.00	3.8965	.65975

Note: The data are normalized such that the mean values are zero.

Table 2 Pearson Bivariate Correlation Analysis

	Purchase Intention	Atmospherics	Convenience	Product Quality	Employee Service	Physical Facilities
Purchase Intention	1	**0.047	**0.043	**0.013	**0.024	**0.016
Atmospherics		1	**0.036	**0.049	**0.036	**0.038
Convenience			1	**0.017	**0.046	**0.016
Product Quality				1	**0.018	**0.017
Customer Service					1	*0.010
Physical Facilities						1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Findings were further confirmed through OLS regression.

The findings have been presented below.:

Table 3: OLS Regression Estimates on Factors Affecting Purchase Intention^{a,b,c,d,e}

[R² = 0.822; SEE = 0.28043; F = 362.883; ANOVA's Test Sig. = 0.000]
 Regression Equation: PI= 0.146 + 0.732 A + 0.721C + 0.016 PQ + 0.168ES+0.345PF

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.146	0.131		1.115	0.265		
A	0.732	0.039	0.707	18.937	0.000	0.579	1.726
C	0.721	0.078	0.659	9.235	0.000	0.693	1.464
PQ	0.016	0.042	0.013	0.390	0.697	0.636	1.573
ES	0.168	0.030	0.161	-5.551	0.000	0.980	1.020
PF	0.345	0.054	0.430	-6.417	0.000	0.763	1.310

^{a,b,c,d,e} Independent variables: A (Atmospherics), C (Convenience), PQ (Product quality), ES (Employee services), PF (Physical facilities), Linear Regression through the Origin, SEE = Standard Error of the Estimate *p<0.01 **p<0.05

Statistical analyses and findings

Statistical analyses of the Pearson bivariate correlation analysis and regression analysis were also undertaken to show the positive or negative impact of the variables. Alpha levels of 0.01 and 0.05 were accepted as showing statistical significance. All the variables were transformed into natural

logarithms. The following regression model was used to test the relations of supermarket image elements (atmospherics, time and convenience, product quality, employee services and physical facilities: independent variable) and purchase intentions (dependent variable) of the customers.

$$PI_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A_{i,t} + \beta_2 C_{i,t} + \beta_3 PQ_{i,t} + \beta_4 ES_{i,t} + \beta_5 PF_{i,t} + \mu_{i,t}$$

Where as

β_0 = Constant of the regression equation

β_1 = co-efficient of A (atmospherics)

β_2 = co-efficient of C (convenience)

β_3 = co-efficient of PQ (product quality)

β_4 = co-efficient of ES (employee services)

β_5 = Coefficient of PF (physical facilities)

$PI_{i,t}$ = Logarithm of purchase intention behaviour in time t

$A_{i,t}$ = Logarithm of atmospherics in time t

$C_{i,t}$ = Logarithm of convenience in time t

$PQ_{i,t}$ = Logarithm of product quality in time t

$ES_{i,t}$ = Logarithm of employee services in time t

$PF_{i,t}$ = Logarithm of physical facilities in time t

$\mu_{i,t}$ = the error term.

Table 2 provides the Pearson correlation for all the variables that were used in the regression model. The Bivariate correlation analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between supermarket elements and youths' purchase intentions in Pakistan.

The findings show that the significance between the store image elements of atmospherics and purchase intention is 0.047 ($p < 0.05$); convenience and purchase intentions is 0.043 ($p < 0.05$); product quality and purchase intention is 0.013 ($p < 0.05$); employee services and purchase intention is 0.024 ($p < 0.05$); and physical facilities and purchase intention is 0.016 ($p < 0.05$) which indicates that all the elements of store image tested in this study have a significant impact on youths' purchase intentions in Pakistan. The findings suggest that there exists a positive relationship between the elements of store image and youths' purchase intentions in Pakistan. A test for multi-collinearity was also performed. $R^2 = 0.822$ of the variance in the degree of PI can be explained by the degree of A, C, PQ, ES and PF. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was also significant at 0.000. (VIF) coefficients were found to be less than 2 which shows no collinearity issues and tolerance coefficients were greater than 0.50. The results show that all the five elements of supermarket image i.e. atmospherics, time and convenience, product quality, employee services and physical facilities influence youths' purchase intentions in Pakistan. There exists a positive relationship between the dependent variable i.e. youths' purchase intentions and the independent variables of the elements of supermarket image.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As in [17] author stated in his study that atmospheric variables have a positive influence on consumer's purchase intentions. Bitner [3], in his study described that human behavior is influenced by the physical settings. The study findings revealed that the store image elements of atmospherics, convenience, product quality, employee services and physical facilities have a positive relationship with young customers' purchase intention. It also validates the previous studies conducted to find the positive relationships between variables of store image and purchase intention. The findings also suggest that the supermarket owners and managers need to have a strong eye on the observed store image elements in order to outdo their competitors, attract more customers, retain old customers and

increase sales, profits and reputation. They should also track the strong purchase intention for their products from the perspective of these elements. There is an increase in the trend to shop at supermarkets due to changing lifestyles, education and awareness among the Pakistani public so supermarkets have to respond efficiently to highly sensitive changing trends and improve the shopping experience of the customers in order to be successful in the retail market.

Limitations & Future Recommendations

There were some limitations to the research, such as time, cost and access to target population. Moreover, other data collection techniques can be used that can provide more in-depth data to get further insights based on the perceptions of the target population and reach a larger section of diverse populations. Furthermore, only three supermarkets in major cities of Pakistan were included in the study for data collection due to time and cost constraints. Researchers investigating marketing should give special consideration to other elements of retail mix because it is critical to understand the relationship between supermarket image elements and customers' purchase intentions for recommending improvements for supermarket sector in Pakistan. New and existing supermarket owners and managers should focus on customer needs and shopping preferences to improve their stores.

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