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# Understanding the Construct of Grocery Store Image: An Extensive Review of Pertinent Literature

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## ABSTRACT

*The primary objective of this paper is to increase the existing body of knowledge of grocery store image concept by reviewing existing literature in this domain extensively. Along with supply side dimensions the consumers' side dimension are also taken into consideration for better understanding the domain of grocery store image. Conceptually, the established literature on store image is reviewed as basis to develop initial understanding of the construct. An attempt to study store image from retailers' as well as consumers' perspectives has been made. In this pursuit various dimensions determining image are extracted and then categorized in two sections: retailers' planned store image dimensions and consumers' perceived store image dimensions. It would help in minimizing the gap between retailers' planned store image and consumers' perceived store image. This can help retailers positioning their store in desired manner.*

**Keywords:** Retail store, Perception, Consumer, Shopping behavior, Image.

## INTRODUCTION

In developing countries like India organized retail market is growing by leaps and bounds. And the entry of organized retail formats has provided an extra momentum to it. Generally, the mature markets with slow growth rate are potential targets for organized grocery retailers (Uusitalo, 2001), and accordingly the strategies are formulated by the retailers. Indian context is all together a great exception to this norm as, first, it is one of the fastest growing market not a mature one; second, it has huge untapped market and; third it has large population. So quantum of opportunities is big enough to lure retail biggies. Further, the developed markets approaching saturation that forced retail giants to head their way towards India. Also, the contemporary scenario is witnessing a paradigm shift riding on rising income levels, growing urban population, more nuclear families, and changing lifestyle/shopping style. In India, low prices have been considered as decider in shopping of any kind of products. But now consumers are ready to pay premium prices for better products and improved services. They are also considering experiential dimensions of shopping. Grocery stores of different formats are set to provide numerous options to consumers that created a stiffer competition in market (Voinea & Filip, 2011). All these happenings, collectively, opened the doors of business opportunities for those involved in retail business. But along with opportunities it would also cast upon retailers a great responsibility to ensure sustainability and growth. Specifically, identifying relationship between perceptions, store image, and behavioral intentions became need of the hour (Hsu K. *et al* 2010). However, every store owner try to cash in on favorable image but who does it in a better way will be victorious. In this pursuit the various aspects that determine image are being explored by researchers. Although, the construct- store image (in general) has been area of interest for researchers, but still some more efforts are needed to understand it in context of groceries specifically. Furthermore, organized grocery stores are relatively new entrants in India and it raises a question that how these stores would adapt Indian

environment. To answer this question it becomes inevitably necessary to identify dimensions, sub-dimensions or variables that drive Indian consumers to store and eventually create a favorable image in their mind. Further, a valid and reliable instrument is also need to be developed to measure the store image.

Store image in context of groceries is the focal point of this paper. Conceptually, the established literature on store image in general is reviewed and adapted as base to develop a conceptual framework for grocery store image. Previously, some valuable work has been done in store specific environments; such as Heijden and Verhagen, (2003) in online store image and Preez et al. in apparel store image. As if one medicine can't cure every problem, similarly same instrument cannot measure a construct (store image) in different store environments. Also, the position and image of retail store/brand changes with the change in social and cultural environment (Uusitalo, 2001). So marketers should continue to develop and test instruments designed for specific marketing problems (Dickson and Albaum, 1977). These underlying arguments gave a strong base to researchers to venture into the arena of grocery store image.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The primary objective of this study is to understand the domain of store image with the help of established literature review. An attempt has also been made to investigate the dimensions and variables that build up retailers' planned store image and consumers' perceived store images. It would be helpful for further empirical researches.

### **METHODOLOGY APPLIED**

A simple and comprehensive approach adopted for this particular study. A fair number of definitions and measurement scales developed by different researchers were explored to achieve aforesaid objectives. Good research begins with good measurement (Hinkin et al., 1997) due to which development of measurement is considered as the most important part of any study (Schoenfeldt, 1984). Popular processes developed by Churchill (1979) and Hinkin (1995) are followed for developing a measurement scale of store image. The process constitutes 8 steps for developing a reliable measurement scale out of which first two steps are performed in this study which consist identifying domain and dimensions of construct. Multiple scales containing multiple items have been developed by researchers for the measurement of construct- retail store image. Similar work has been done by (Heijden & Verhagen, 2003), (Preez et al.), Hinkin et al. (1997) and (Choudhary et al., 1998) in context of online store, apparel store, hospitality sector, and grocery store environment respectively.

In inductive approach a group of respondents is asked to describe their feelings or behavior regarding any construct (Hinkin, 1995). Conversely, in deduction approach existing definition and relevant literature of construct is used for the generation of items, so an extensive review of relevant literature is needed (Schwab, 1980). So the deduction approach is applied in present study. Established literature is extensively reviewed to understand the domain- dimensions, sub-dimensions and instrument items of store image. Various research papers and reports were retrieved from different sources and shortlisted on the bases of availability of key parameter such as store image and perception etc. After going through a handful amount of literature following dimensions of planned and perceived store image and their respective items (variables) are extracted.

### **DOMAIN OF STORE IMAGE**

Store image is a multifaceted construct (Heijden & Verhagen, 2003) and complex as well (Preez et al.). Although, perception and store image have been focal points for researchers, retailers and academicians, but till now there is lack of consensus on the universal meaning and definitions of these (Preez et al.). Store image construct was firstly coined and defined by Martineau (1958), as, "a store defined in the shopper's mind partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychology attributes". Although, image and perception are different constructs but interrelated. This interrelatedness depicted in many definitions of image in terms of perception, given by researchers. Wyckham (1967) described store image as the summation of perceptions of

store attributes. Bloemer and Ruyter (1998) defined store image as “the complex of a consumer’s perceptions of a store on different (salient) attributes”. The consumers are exposed to various external stimuli in the retail store world like atmospherics, product mix, advertising and promotional tools. Consumers translate all these external stimuli into a mental creation, called as perception (Wilkie, 1986). Further, Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) defined perception as “the process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world”. In brief, perception is “a process through which consumer makes sense out of the world” (Runyon, 1977). Many commentaries explained the concept of perceptions in terms of senses, such as, “to perceive is to observe through the senses” (Young, 1961). Although, perception and sensation are two different concepts but perception begins with sensation (Foxall & Goldsmith, 1994; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). The grocery stores can be distinguished on the basis of several attributes (Brown, 1992), retail formats (e.g. organized or unorganized) is one of them (Uusitalo, 2001).

Customers seeking service quality treat modern store concept and traditional store concept differently (Anselmsson & Johansson, 2014) and perceived higher satisfaction in former when compared to latter one (Huddleston, Whipple, Nye, So & Lee, 2008). These stores provide huge number of options to consumers to choose from, that created a stiff competition (Voinea & Filip, 2011). The choices of a particular store and of a particular brand are the major ones that customers make in a routine manner (Fotheringham, 1988). These choices are outcomes of motivations and abilities of shoppers and affected by attitude, subjective norms, intention and perceived control over behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Further consumer's store choice defined as a series of tradeoffs between assortment, price, and transactional convenience of store (Messinger & Narasimhan, 1997, 6). In literature store choice behavior is recognized as cognitive process in which information is processed like any other decision making process (Sinha, Banerjee, & Uniyal, 2002; Sinha & Banerjee, 2004). These store attributes may include price, variety, assortment, quality and location (O’Conor, 1990) or may include atmospherics, advertising and store personnel (Sheth & Mittal, 2004).

## **DIMENSIONS OF STORE IMAGE**

### **1. RETAILERS’ PLANNED STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS**

Consumers perceive store on a number of dimensions, called as dimensions or components or attributes. Collectively, these dimensions make up the image of a particular store (Heijden & Verhagen, 2003). In this section researchers listed dimensions or factors or variables that directly related to store and play significant role in the formation of store image. Directly related in the sense that these factors are in control of retailers so can be changed or improved as per kind of image store strategized or planned to project in front of target audience. For example, the management might plan to project itself as a high quality store, a discount center, a convenient store or a variety store etc. It is evident that customer choice of a particular store is based on the attributes linked to it (Woodside & Trappey, 1992). Attributes like *product selection*, *price*, *personnel courtesy*, and *cleanliness* play a decisive role in store selection (Carpenter, 2006). These attributes constitute the personality of a store which is a key antecedent of consumer choice behavior (Das, 2014). Some of these dimensions are discussed as follows:

**In-store experience:** the overall experience consumers have in a store plays a significant role in their satisfaction and revisit behavior. The time a consumer enters in the store starts interacting with the different aspects of the store in the form of different senses like feel, touch, smell, sight, etc. These interactions with store formulate consumer experiences. Hence, *store atmosphere* is an important driver for a grocery store (Carpenter & Moore, 2006). Some of other aspects are: *Store layout* (Martineau, 1958; Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999; Wong & Yu, 2001; Birtwistle et al., 1996), *Architecture* (Lindquist, 1974), *Store atmosphere* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), *Décor* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010), *Display* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Hsu, Huang & Swanson 2010), *Store projection* (Lindquist, 1974), *Store Reputation* (Lindquist, 1974; Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999; Birtwistle et al., 1996), *Reliability* (Lindquist, 1974), *Clean* (Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010), *In-store movement* (Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010), *Popularity* (Wong & Yu, 2001), *Food courts* (Wong & Yu, 2001). *Cleanliness* acts as a major

differentiator between physical stores based grocery formats like supermarket and supercenter (Carpenter & Moore, 2006).

**Merchandise:** Product attributes are crucial in defining the image of a store. Nilsson, Garling, Marell and Nordvall (2014) found that *quality and availability* are most important attributes after approachability by car. Baltas and Papastathopoulou, (2003) found *merchandise variety* and product features as important attributes for grocery store choice. Available literature has shown various other aspects of merchandise which are considered by the consumers while patronizing a particular store. These aspects include *Quality* (Lindquist 1974; Kunkel & Berry 1968; Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy 1999; Hsu, Huang & Swanson 2010; Baltas & Papastathopoulou 2003; Joyce & Lambert 1996; Wong & Yu 2001; Birtwistle et al. 1996), *Assortment* (Lindquist, 1974; Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010; Wong & Yu, 2001), *Style and fashion* (Lindquist, 1974; Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy 1999; Wong & Yu, 2001; Birtwistle et al. 1996), *Guarantees* (Lindquist, 1974), *Brand names* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003), *Selection* (Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999; Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003; Birtwistle et al. 1996), *Packaging* (Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003) etc.

**Price:** previous researches have examined *price competitiveness* as most important discriminator between different store formats and that the frequent customers gave preference to price competitiveness (Carpenter & Moore, 2006; Carpenter & Balija, 2010). Further, *Price level* (Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003) and *discounts* (Joyce & Lambert, 1996) lure the customers and create a positive image of store.

**Service:** consumers consider the quality of services provided during their purchase (Hu & Jasper, 2006; Wong & Yu, 2001). Service aspect of a store has been studied from various angles i.e. *Staff Service* (Lindquist, 1974); *Ease of Return* (Lindquist 1974); *Credit* (Lindquist, 1974; Kunkel & Berry 1968); *Delivery* (Lindquist 1974; Kunkel & Berry 1968); *Restaurant facilities* (Kunkel & Berry 1968); *Escalators* (Kunkel & Berry 1968); *Baby strollers* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968); *Service quality* (Hu & Jasper 2006; Wong & Yu 2001); *Refund and company procedures* (Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999; Birtwistle et al. 1996); *Fast check out* (Hsu, Huang & Swanson 2010); *Adequacy* (Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010); *Quality* (Wong & Yu 2001).

**Sales personnel:** the available literature depicts several dimensions related to sales personnel that exert a significant impact on consumers' perspectives towards store. Some of these are: *Attitude* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968); *Knowledgeability* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968); *Number of sales personnel* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968); *Good or poor service* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968); *Professional* (Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999; Birtwistle et al., 1996); *Friendly* (Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999; Birtwistle et al. 1996); *Attractive* (Joyce & Lambert, 1996); *Courteous* (Joyce & Lambert, 1996).

**Convenience:** ease with which a consumer can complete its actions with or within the store termed as convenience. Like other dimensions convenience have also been studied and discussed from different aspects: *Access* from home, from work (Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Carpenter & Moore, 2006). Nilsson, Garling, Marell and Nordvall (2014) found in a study of grocery stores that *approachability* by car is the most important factor. The *convenience* factor is associated with grocery stores irrespective of their size. However, convenience perception is different in the sense that small size stores are near, provide speedy and easy store experience while large size stores are convenient because consumer can purchase huge quantity in a single visit and can carry in car easily (Uusitalo, 2001). *Parking facilities* emerged as a significant factor in selection of a grocery store. That is why more convenience seeking consumers are appealed towards supermarket grocery stores because of availability of parking area and ease of access (Carpenter & Moore, 2006).

**Store location and proximity** (Lindquist, 1974; Wong & Yu, 2001) plays a very important role in grocery store selection (Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003). Another dimension of convenience can be *delivery* of product that is positively related to store (Gehrt & Yan, 2004). Good or poor *location* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), *Parking* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010; Wong & Yu, 2001), *Opening hours* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), *Travel distance* (Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010), *Informative signs* (Joyce & Lambert, 1996), *late closing hours* (Wong & Yu, 2001), are some other dimensions of convenience.

**Promotion:** various promotional activities are performed by retailers for developing a distinct store image. These include: *Sales promotion* (Lindquist, 1974; Wong & Yu, 2001; Wong & Yu, 2001), *Product displays*

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(Lindquist, 1974), *Advertising* (Lindquist, 1974; Hsu, Huang & Swanson, 2010), *Symbols* (Lindquist, 1974), *Colors* (Lindquist, 1974), *Special sales* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), *Stamps* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), *Fashion shows* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), *Media used* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), and *Reliability* (Kunkel & Berry, 1968). It has been shown that store size also affects perception of consumers towards modern grocery formats i.e. small size stores are perceived as having features like higher price, nearness and accessibility, while large size stores are perceived as having attributes like huge quantity, promotional offers and more distance (Uusitalo, 2001). Merchandise, price and services are most frequently studied dimensions in past researches. But the frequency of use is nothing to do with the relative importance consumers give to these dimensions. However, due to ever changing consumer preferences and behavioral aspects the relative importance of above given dimensions and variables also kept on changing simultaneously. The relevancy of these dimensions has been intact to date.

## 2. CONSUMERS' PERCEIVED STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS

The attributes discussed in earlier section directly relates to the store. There may be an ideal situation in which everything is perfect about store i.e. high quality, fair prices, perfect placement and good reputation. Everything is up to the mark necessary to establish a planned positive image of store. Notwithstanding that, some consumers may vary in responses when asked about their feelings about that store. Their responses may vary across positive to negative, highly satisfied to highly dissatisfied so on and so forth. It is so because the image is not only what the store reflects but it is also how the consumers perceive it. Image of a store would have been similar across all consumers if it was determined by store related attributes only. But in reality every consumer or a group of similar kind of consumers possesses a unique image in mind that is different from that of other kind of consumer(s).

Beside store related attributes, there are many other factors that affect the planned store image of a particular store and alter its original meaning. In nutshell, consumer related attributes like- demography, psychology, socio-economic condition, motivation etc.- determine how a consumer would perceive aforesaid store related attributes and eventually make an image in his or her mind. It is worth noting that a good image is necessary but not sufficient to keep the customer revisiting your store and behave in an expected manner every time. Because, there are several other factors that play decisive role every time when a consumer thinks off making any purchase. These factors are christened as situational factors. Which store consumer would visit depends on - availability of time, day of shopping, distance of store, type of purchase, product category, companion of consumer and many more. Keeping these logics in mind researchers extracted the following consumer related factors from available literature. These factors affect the way a consumer would perceive store image related dimensions.

**Demographic attributes:** The demographic attributes of shoppers plays crucial role in store format selection (Jayasankarprasad, & Aryasri, 2011). It has been shown in past researches that *age* and *gender* drive the store choice (Sinha *et al.*, 2002). Further, gender has shown substantial influence on purchase intention also (Jayawardhena, Wright, & Dennis, 2007). In a study of grocery store the hypothesis was supported that women have more satisfaction in store than men (Helgesen, & Nessest, 2010) and they are more concerned about economic criteria (Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003). Relationship and convenience came out as more important factors for a woman that's why they prefer local stores (Khare, 2012). Similarly, *household size* and *income* of the family have also shown substantial impact on store choice as well as on shopping patterns of consumers (Sinha *et al.*, 2002; Peter & Harry, 1997). High-income consumers are more inclined towards specialty grocery stores and low income groups patronize conventional stores. Moreover, as the household size increases the customers are more likely to purchase from supercenter (Carpenter & Moore, 2006). Some other studies revealed the impact of age, income and *education* in their specific studies (Carpenter & Balija, 2010; Sinha *et al.*, 2002), education was found negatively related to price attributes of a grocery store because more educated person gets more salary (Baltas & Papastathopoulou, 2003). However (Gehrt & Yan, 2004) found a weak relation in choice and demographics.

**Motivation:** Every consumer wants to get something different from a shopping trip that can be called as motivation or purpose of that particular trip. Consumer might want to look for *merchandise, assurance, hassle reduction or enjoyment* (Rajashree, Rajamma, & Paswan, 2007). Motivation is something subjective that may vary across customer to customer. The researchers have put forth various segments of customers on the basis of their motives. Such as: fun shoppers, work shoppers (Sinha, 2003), hedonic shoppers, value expressive shoppers and utilitarian (Khare, Ahtani, & Khattar, 2014), active, price sensitive, convenience seeking, brand loyal and discerning (Jayawardhena *et al.*, 2007). It is worth noting that the young Indian generation possesses hedonic perspectives; they are fun loving, concerned more about meeting their friends and getting product ideas and information (Kaur & Singh, 2007). In addition to that, motives for shopping vary across gender also (Dholakia, 1999).

**Need for Interaction:** Doing interaction is an instinct part of human behavior. Consumers interact with sales persons, other consumers and friends in store. That is why interaction is also considered as major need of customers during shopping (Kim & Kincade, 2007). Personal interaction found as one of the most important determining factor of service quality in a grocery store and have a great impact on customer satisfaction (Anselmsson & Johansson, 2014). So if store based retailers want to stay away from costing disintermediation, they necessitate to process store as a generator of social interaction (Pavitt, 1997).

**Situational dimensions:** In literature, situation has put forth as a potentially important driver of consumer behavior. It comprises time and place factors which can affect the way a consumer behave (Belk, 1997). More precisely, situation represents the circumstances in which customer react to the stimuli (store) (Sydney, Sandipa & Lucette, 1996). Belk, 1974 firstly described circumstances as: *Physical Surroundings, Social Surroundings, Temporal Perspective, Task Definition, and Antecedent States*. Store location, geography, lighting, aromas and products constitute physical surroundings of store (Belk, 1974). *Availability of time and particular day* to go store included under temporal perspectives. *Delivery time* vary across retail formats (Palmer, 2006), immediate (in-store) to delayed (online store). In time pressured situation physical stores are preferred (Gehrt & Yan, 2004); further time pressure has been identified as an important stressor in grocery store (Fram & Ajami, 1994). Shopping is dependent on the specific day of week (Kahn & Schmittlein, 1989). The task in hand that affect where to shop decision, includes *product* to purchase (Peterson *et al.*, 1997), *shopping-context* (Dholakia, 1999), *product-category* (Khare, 2012). For major shopping trips consumers prefer hypermarkets and discounters, while for small store trips supermarkets are preferred (Reutterer & Teller, 2009). *Social surroundings* include other consumers present in the store. *Antecedents states* constitute moods and traits of an individual.

## DISCUSSION

It has been observed that purchasing groceries from organized retail stores is becoming a new normal in developing countries like India. Also, the diversified, modern, technologically empowered and unprecedentedly aware consumers are posing a challenge for retailers' dominance in retail environment. Gone are the days when consumers were content with whatever provided by retailers. Undoubtedly, the consumer side is all set to direct the future of organized grocery retailing. To survive and to stay relevant in this new era creation of distinct positive image should be at the top of retailers' to do list. For this, retailers' should also look into demand side dynamics and respond in a strategic manner. Anything retailers plan about store image should essentially be in congruence with the perceptions of consumers. But due to ever-changing consumer behavior what is planned is not perceived in the same way and a gap emerges between planned and perceived store image. That could devolve overall store image. The factors responsible for it are consumers' demographic attributes, their motivation, psychological factors, socio-economic factors and shopping situation that significantly bear upon consumers' perception towards store image dimensions. Eventually, it becomes imperative to study the store image in relation with the demographic, motivational, psychological, socio-economic and situational factors and consider these as determinant and supporter of store image. It could be a great contribution to the existing knowledge in this field and of immense help in forming better strategies to create a favorable store image across all type of consumer(s).

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