

Store as a Brand and its Impact on Consumer Purchasing Behavior for Consideration

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Abstract

Stores of apparel brands consider a driving force in boosting business and shaping consumer buying behaviors. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of brand store image on consumer purchasing behavior in Lahore city. This study was conducted by using a mixed-method study design. Two well-known brands of male and female apparel were selected conveniently as a sample of this study. Interviews and focus groups were used for data collection, from managements and stores' staff, which were analyzed thematically. These qualitative results were then used to generate a questionnaire for customers. For this purpose, data were collected from 216 respondents. Quantitative data were analyzed by using SPSS. Results revealed that different strategies used by brand stores for the attraction of their customers while the attributes of stores, elements of the brand, and customer-friendly policies were found important influential factors in determining the purchasing behavior of the customers in this study. The findings of this study can be a source of implications for new store brands and future researchers, by extending the scope of the tool used in this study they can contribute to the literature.

Keywords: Brand image; consumer behavior; retail industry; apparel store.

JEL Classification: M 310

1. Introduction

Consumers usually prefer uniqueness in products while visiting brand stores. Moreover, they examine some of the qualities of a product before purchasing anything (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). This perspective of the buyer about the product is usually linked with some desirable attributes which can fulfill their demands (Assael, 2004).

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So, in this regard, each retailer tries to offer something new in the products to give their consumer an exceptional shopping experience. The retail store needs to describe what is unique, different, and special about their products which makes them better than others. To accomplish this, the retail store has to combine special approaches of branding that draw the customers' attention at the time of shopping. One form of increasingly popular strategy is highlighted by Floor (2006), which is to convert the store into a brand.

Moreover, Floor (2006) indicated that customers positively get inspired when retailers make them see their stores as a brand. For this, the retailer has to do a lot of hard work on many factors comprising the diversity in quality of services and product items, store environment, exterior, attitude, quality in service of sales staff, price range, and the actions required for frequent promotion (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004).

In this regard, Gagliano and Hathcote (1994) emphasized that the atmosphere of the store is very imperative, particularly in fashion houses where customers usually like to utilize their considerable amount of time for shopping. Consequently, the importance of store environment was understood by various retailers in their store setting and numerous investigators started investigating the impact of a tangible atmosphere of the stores on customers' behavior (Turley & Milliman, 2000). This leads to the competition where retailers apply different strategies to get the attraction of customers and to look different from others such as; use of screens, lighting, visuals, videos, music, and fragrances (Marsh, 1999 & McGoldrick, 1990).

So it was explored that store environment can impact the buyer behavior and their views in addition to the general quality of the store, their service standard and distinctiveness in the product (Baker et al., 1994), purchase capacity (Milliman, 1982) and the level of price (Areni & Kim, 1993). Moreover, The importance of return policies for customers was also highlighted by Yarrow (2012). Other important factors highlighted by researchers are price and quality which consumers consider when going for brand shopping (Vranešević & Stancec, 2003). Similarly, the reputation of the retailer associated with the name of the brand is also considered critical (Agarwal & Teas, 2002). Moreover, Jobber (2001) mentioned various factors from the perspective of the customer while studying purchasing behavior such as; prices and quality, advertisements, promotions, brands, and group suggestions.

Keller (1993) stated this phenomenon as a brand image when retailers groups use different strategies to set; their brand position in the market and the perception of people about their brand. This insight usually leads to a positive or negative image of the brand, which can impact their performance. Esch et al. (2006) found that brand image directly affects the purchase decision made by customers. Likewise, Nasar et al. (2012) highlighted companies spend a large amount of their budget for the establishment of their brand image by considering its importance and developing special marketing approaches.

In Pakistan, market research is not considered important or used by various business houses for their products or services such as retail branding in apparel are emerging trends based on very limited research studies. In the past, the consumer was not used to do shopping from retail brands, but now trends are changing due to fast lifestyles and gradual growth of the sale of retail brands. An increase in credit facilities is one of the major causes other than possible causes behind this trend (Carpenter et al., 2005). This study is conducted to study the consumers' purchasing attitude towards branded apparel stores and to reveal the important aspects of apparel brand stores, which they use to capture the customers' attention. The consumer-oriented approach was used to find out the perception of users about their preferences and desires.

In present times, the competition in the market makes it harder and challenging for brands to define the exact demands and desires of consumers. In the context of Pakistan, consumers' purchase intentions and brand store depend on multiple factors, which need to be studied to promote the brand image successfully. Although this topic has been explored by many researchers in western countries (Boutsouki et al., 2008), however, the findings of those studies cannot be generalized in Asian countries. In Asian countries, particularly Pakistan, various private apparel brands are at their initial age of development with a continuous struggle of making their stores successful. In this regard, this study is an attempt to explore the factors that might affect the growth and penetration of private brand stores in Pakistan.

Further, this study can abet the retailers to concentrate on the features of the store image that are necessary for getting consumer's attraction. Additionally, this study is considered an addition to existing literature and might be a source of guidance for future researchers, they can replicate this study with other brands by widening the scope.

1.1 Research Problem and Research Questions

This study aims to explore the impact of brand stores on consumers' buying behavior in the retail apparel industry by figuring out which possible strategies might impact the consumers' behavior and decision of purchasing. The research questions are:

- What are the approaches that brands are focusing on expanding and maintaining the brand image and consumer attraction?
- Which strategies may be utilized in the future to improve the brand value and image for consumers?

In the quantitative section, this study investigates the possible differences in male and female consumer purchasing behavior.

2. Review of Literature

Retailers who call themselves a brand have the luxury to play with the customers' emotions and can develop rational relations. Rational relationships mostly can be achieved through a friendly shopping environment. A retail store can be progressed from just the distributor of products to become a brand that differentiates it from other retailers (Floor, 2006).

Over the most recent few decades, Pakistan has turned out to be the home of various fashion houses and innumerable dazzling local and global brands. The clothing business sector is continually extending, as a result of expanded requests coming from a fashion-sensitive population. The market is responding to the needs of men, women, and kids of various age ranges and offering a wide scope of lines, from easygoing to semi-formal, work, and wedding wear.

According to Jamal (2016), urbanization and changing trends in the spending behavior of consumers boosted the significant investment in the retail business in Punjab. Especially, in this province, the retail business is flourishing in even small towns. Estimates are given by the Punjab Board of Investment and Trade about retail business are approximately \$42bn with yearly sales beyond \$105bn whereas, the State Bank of Pakistan stated that retail trade escalated from \$96bn in 2011 to \$133bn in 2015. After agriculture and industry, it is considered the third largest sector of the economy, contributing about 18% to GDP, and is believed to be the second-largest jobs provider about 17% of the total workforce. With the increase in private label products in the market, whether or not this trend will continue as it is in the favor of the retailer manufacturer in Pakistan.

Researchers study various factors to investigate the customers' purchasing behavior and associated possible variables. In this regard, the term brand image is studied as the confidence placed by the consumers in the quality of products that are produced by the organizations. Pujadi (2010) defined brand image as the psychological aspects of the image or impression built on the subconscious of a consumer through the expectations and experiences associated with a particular brand. So, it creates a good impression of a brand and also develops a personal association with the brands that store in the customer's mind while purchasing products.

Blackwell et al. (2001) defined consumer behavior as a collection of conducts in which they own, utilize and motivate towards products and services. Khan et al. (2012) explained the criteria used by customers regarding their purchasing decision, for instance; prices, characteristics, quality, brand, presentation, consumer easiness and accessibility. D'Souza et al. (2006) specify that having a beneficial experience of purchasing makes the consumer share this experience with others and go again for shopping for the same product.

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Similarly, various factors regarding store environment that can influence consumers perception, regardless of the time and money they invest in the store reported as the color, music, and arrangement of the item displays (Milliman, 1982; Grewal et al., 1998). Baker et al. (2002) categorized these factors further into physical ones such as decor, lighting, design, ambiances such as music and smell, and social elements such as clientele, employees' availability, and the friendly attitude with customers. Stylish presentation of the clothes also nurtures the culture of promotion for consumers in Pakistan Richardson et al. (1996) also agreed and reported that consumers' ratings of brands' quality were higher in the conditions when they found a store aesthetically and physically more satisfying. Levy et al. (1998) recognized the significance of store environment as a tool to sustain in the market. In the beginning, only some selective community of consumers can reach the branded clothes, but nowadays clothes are accessible to the common people too (Rezvi, 2012). Especially, outlets of various brands provide the platform to the target consumers to get a variety of clothes that remain available throughout the year (Muzaffar, 2012). Similarly, several retailers have extended their services by placing online orders through the use of websites and other mediums, which made the reach of these brands approachable to many consumers (Taha, 2012; Muzaffar, 2012).

Additionally, other possible factors which might influence consumers' intention are personal motivation, attitude, values, needs, personality characteristics, socioeconomic, cultural background, age, sex, professional status, and social influence exerted by family, friends' colleagues, and society as a whole (Sivanesan, 2014). Advertisement is also studied as an important tool used by the business group to produce the positive image of their brands (Driessen, 2005) and usually, this attracts the youth more. Shoaib et al. (2012) also found the connection between the behavior of consumers, advertisement and brand image.

3. Methodology and Research Design

The mixed-method design was used to investigate the different aspects of this study.

3.1 *Population and Sample / Sampling design*

This study was conducted in Lahore, and collected data were limited to two selected apparel brand stores; Sapphire and Equator. Data was collected from only two approachable outlets of these brands due to convenience, time, and financial restrictions. Additionally, data of this study were collected from multiple sources: from the salesperson of those stores to understand their interaction with consumers and other policies, the management of that brand was also contacted to gain information about approaches used at this level for setting their brand image and getting consumers' attraction and at the end consumers were also contacted to understand their background, perceptions, and attitude towards brand and products.

Their management and staff members were also then purposively selected for focus groups and interviews. Only those respondents from sales and management staff were selected who had at least two years of working experience. For the quantitative section, a sample of 216 respondents was taken conveniently.

3.2 *Tool for Data Collection*

Focus groups, interviews were conducted with the management and sales staff of both selected brand stores, whereas self-constructed questionnaires were used for data collection from consumers.

3.3 *Procedure and Data Analysis*

The primary data was collected by conducting four focus groups with the 5-6 sales staff from two branches of Sapphire and Equator. Focus groups provided insight into staff behavior and attitude towards their brand and store in a limited time. Furthermore, four interviews with the management of these brand stores were also conducted. These focus groups and interviews were conducted after taking informed consent. Field notes were taken along with the recording.

The gained data were then transcribed for analysis. Themes and codes were generated for the construction of the item in order to study the purchasing behavior of customers. For this purpose, a five-point Likert scale comprised of 25 items was created and their scoring is from 5 to 1 ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. These 25 items covered the four factors, emerged as a result of qualitative analysis, which was strategies, attributes of stores, elements of brands and customer policies. Additionally, questions to demographics were also included in the questionnaire. Survey data were analyzed by using inferential statistics.

3.4 Variables

Consumer behavior is defined by Blackwell et al. (2001) as a set of acts in which they get, use and decide and incline towards products and services. Whereas, demographic variables include gender, age, personal status, and income.

4. Results

Table 1
Respondents' Demographics

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Female	108	50
Male	108	50
Age		
Less than 20	34	15.7
20-30	154	71.3
31-40	21	9.7
More than 40	7	3.2
Personal Income		
Less than 50,000	123	56.9
50,000-80,000	57	26.4
Above 80,000	34	15.7
Missing values	22	10.2
Personal Status		
Student	123	56.9
Professional	77	35.6
At home	15	6.9
Others	1	.5
Total	216	100

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Table 2
Descriptives of factors: Strategies used for customers' attraction, Brand elements, Store attributes, and Customer related policies:

Factors	Mean	SD	SE	Minimum	Maximum
Strategies	27.10	4.91	.334	9	40
Elements	20.22	3.12	.212	5	25
Attributes	27.50	4.89	.333	7	35
Customer policies	20.03	3.24	.220	5	25

The range of scores of factors, strategies used for customers' attraction was 9-40 against a possible range of 8-40 and the mean score is 27.10 with a standard deviation of 4.91, range of score of elements of the brand was 5-25 against a possible range of 5-25 with a mean 20.30 and standard deviation was 3.12 and the range score of store attributes was 7-35 against a possible range of 7-35 with mean 27.50 and standard deviation 4.89. Whereas, the range of score of the factor customers' policies were found 5-25 against the possible 5 -25 with a mean of 20.03 and standard deviation 3.24. The mean of all factors was taken as the base to divide the scores of respondents into three categories; less than mean score, mean score, and more than the mean score to identify the factors, which influence the purchasing attitude of the respondents.

Table 3
Score details

Factor	N	%
Strategies		
Less than Mean	91	42.13
Mean	20	9.25
More than Mean	105	48.61
Elements		
Less than Mean	72	33.33
Mean	38	17.60
More than Mean	106	49.07
Attributes		
Less than Mean	74	34.26
Mean	18	8.33
More than Mean	124	57.41
Customer Policies		
Less than Mean	87	40.27
Mean	31	14.35
More than Mean	98	45.37

The results showed that near to half, 48.61 % of the respondents scored more than a mean, on the items given as the strategies used by the brands to attract the customers. Similarly, the majority of the respondents, 49.07% scored more than a mean score in their preferences towards elements of brands. Likewise, more than half, 57.41% of the respondents scored more than a mean on the factor marked as attributes of the store mentioned by brands for their customers. In the end, 45.37% of the respondents scored high on the items made to study the customers' purchasing attitude due to policies offered by different brand stores for their attraction

Table 4

Independent sample t-test measuring the Gender Difference in Strategies, Elements, Attributes and Customer Policies

Factors		Mean	SD	t	p
Strategies	Male	28.21	4.77	-3.40	.001*
	Female	25.99	4.82		
Elements	Male	20.45	3.06	-1.06	ns
	Female	20.00	3.19		
Attributes	Male	27.88	4.85	-1.15	ns
	Female	27.12	4.92		
Customer policies	Male	20.35	3.18	-1.45	ns
	Female	19.71	3.29		

**Significant*

The analysis showed that the mean of the male respondents found greater on the factor of strategies than the female respondents living in Lahore with the significance level of 0.001 $p < 0.01$, which indicates the real difference between the two groups in their preferences towards the strategies used by brand stores for their attraction. However, significant differences did not find in factors such as elements (of brands), store attributes, and customer policies.

5. Discussion

In this study, the impact of brands' store image on consumers' buying behavior in the retail apparel industry was studied along with the factor which might influence their behavior. Demographic data about respondents were also collected to understand the characteristics of the respondents (Gender, Age, Income, and Personal Status). Data for this study were collected in two stages. For the qualitative section, staff and management of two brands (female and male) were purposively selected whereas, the stores of these brands were conveniently selected. The convenience sample was used by many previous researchers (Umbreen & Rashid, 2012; Vahdati & Mousavi, 2016), whereas simple random was used by Tariq et al. (2013). The survey data was analyzed by using t-test and descriptives, whereas previous researches used the correlation, descriptives, and regression test (Umbreen & Rashid, 2012; Tariq et al., 2013)

These brands were Sapphire and Equator. The management of these stores shared the following details about their brands: the Equator as one of the main male apparel brands has been present in the market since 2005 but working as a wholesaler/shopkeeper. Initially, it was difficult to estimate the market value of their products due to the wholesale business, so in 2015, it properly ventured into the retail business and later terminated its wholesale business operations. In the beginning, they were importing their fabrics mostly from China and Tukey but the Equator is now doing 50-60% of their manufacturing and has decreased 40-50% of their import.

It has been working on establishing its brand name and identity for the past 2-3 years but, its consumers were aware of this for the last 8 to 9 years. This brand is now working with 16 stores. Some of the Equator (3-4) stores are flagship stores with 10-22 people working in these stores whereas the regular stores have 4-6 people working in them.

Sapphire is an emerging known female clothing brand. Its first store was launched in 2011 then re-launched on 6th December 2014. They have 6 stores in Lahore with almost 400 employees. They claim themselves as competitors of Nishat and Khaadi as they are considered one of the top brands. The advantage they claim to have is in-house production from raw to finish ready to wear.

The qualitative analysis revealed four themes: strategies used for customer attraction, attributes of stores, elements of the brands, and customer policies. These themes were highlighted by staff and management of these brand stores which they consider important for influencing the purchase decision of their customers. This study explored the following strategies used by both brand stores for their customers' attraction; spending more on products' quality than marketing, decor, outdoor marketing, use of social media for promotion and facility of placing an online order, use of the technology for sending promotional messages SMS (direct marketing, responses to customer needs, print media (catalogs), and availability of many branches for their customers. As one of the staff members said during focus groups:

Sometimes our customers ask us about the décor instead of taking an interest in our product and they appreciate it..... *the majority of our regular customers visit after receiving messages about new volumes, but mostly come after getting messages about sales.*

Similarly, both brand stores also stated the following attributes which they were using in their stores for their customers; uniformity in stores themes focus on display presentation, large stores with good ambiance (sitting area, playing area and cafeteria, soft music in the background), as one of the Managers mentioned during the interview: *"We sapphire perhaps only apparel store who has a cafeteria inside Store"*.

Other mentioned attributes were; Lights direction on products, display with complete background combination, friendly environment, enough staff for the service of customers, always availability of the variety of products with active and enough sales staff in uniform with their name tags. These findings are also supported by the various previous studies (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994; Turley & Milliman, 2000; McGoldrick, 1990; Marsh, 1999). When they were asked to describe the main elements of their brand, during the interview they reply: *“Our logo works like word of mouth”*

The following elements were stated by the staff and management of both stores; logo Identity symbol, uniqueness, no comprise on the quality of product, customer service and consider their customers as, “word of mouth”. These results verified the findings of many previous pieces of research (Baker et al., 1994). Regarding customer-related policies, the following policies were emphasized by the management and staff of both stores: provision of claim and change item services with flexibility, always looking for customer feedback along with welcoming behavior of sales staff for their customers. As they mention during the interview:

“Customer is always king... our customer policy is different from others we claim on the spot and our claim time is more than other brands even after 30 days if customers want to claim, and we have that product in our stock we feel no hesitation to accept that claim”

This finding is supported by Yarrow (2012). This is the most interesting finding as little literature was found in this regard. This theme can be explored further in the future. The quantitative analysis of these factors verified that the majority of the respondents scored high in the items indicating purchasing preferences due to the strategies used by store brands for customer attraction, attributes of stores, elements of the brands, and customer policies. Additionally, it is revealed that male customers are attracted more due to the strategies used by the store brands as compared to the female customers which are supported by (Sivanesan, 2014). However, gender differences were not found in other themes. The most plausible reason could be that the majority of the respondents in this study were students. Other reasons could be individual differences and other variables which are not included in this study.

The above results show that consumers’ buying behavior is mostly based on the strategies, attributes of stores, brand elements, and customer policies used by brand stores in this study. The gender of the customer is also found as an important factor that can impact the purchase intention in this study. However, in this study, qualitative data were taken only from two brand stores, therefore that the results could not be generalized to the other brands because some other factors affecting customers’ behavior of purchasing may differ in other cases. Hence, the scope of this study can be broadened in the future by taking a large sample and adding other brand stores to increase its generalizability.

5.1 *Future Implications*

It is suggested to future researchers to apply the model that emerged in this study for other brand stores to make comparisons and to study the differences. In the light of the findings, it is suggested that other stores that are planning to launch their products, should focus more on the factors which could impact their customers' purchasing intention too as found in this study. Furthermore, the tool developed in this study can be further developed after establishing its norms, reliability, and validity as an indigenous tool for future researches and as a contribution to the literature.

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