THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFESTYLE AND STORE ATTRIBUTE
WITH CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN HYPERMARKET
INDUSTRY IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

Hypermarket industry is gaining popularity in these recent days. With variety of merchandise, services and facilities offering under-one-roof, consumers prefer to patronize in this store. Hence, understanding the consumer behavior in hypermarket is a great platform for retailers to be competitive. Lifestyle changes in Iran call for a need to further analyse consumer preferences to be aligned with the store attributes provided, which then lead to consumer satisfaction and ultimately store loyalty. However, lack of evaluation in the above matter from the perspective of Iranian resulted in unidentified focus as generalization from others may not be parallel. Additionally, many of previous study have partially examine the four important variable of lifestyle, store attributes, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty, showing its importance, conversely none have consider all four as a continuous model, which is the contribution of this study. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between three factor of lifestyle namely education oriented, socially active, credit prone with five important store attributes for the Iranian; store promotion, price, product assortment, store atmosphere and sales personnel. In addition, this study also examines to the relationship of the store attributes towards consumer satisfaction and further to store loyalty which is the aim of every retailer. The data was collected from a convenient sampling consisting sample of 385 respondents which are the consumers of 23 branches of Shahrvand Hypermarket in Iran. Returned questionnaire were analysed. The relationship between lifestyle, store attribute, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty was confirmed. It was found also that indirect link between store attribute and store royalty through consumer satisfaction (i.e. a indirect link) is stronger than direct link between store attribute and store loyalty.

ABSTRAK

Industri pasar raya besar kini menjadi semakin popular. Dengan adanya pelbagai tawaran barangan, perkhidmatan dan kemudahan di bawah satu bumbung, para pengguna lebih berkuasa dalam membuat pilihan. Maka, memahami kelakuan pengguna dalam pasar raya besar merupakan platform yang sangat baik bagi para peruncit untuk bersaing dengan lebih hebat. Oleh kerana berlakunya perubahan gaya hidup di Iran, analisa lanjut tentang keutamaan atau kecenderungan pengguna perlu dilaksanakan untuk disejajarkan dengan ciri-ciri pasar raya itu sendiri. Ini akan menghasilkan kepuasan dan kesetiaan pengguna terhadap pasar raya tersebut. Walau bagaimanapun, kekurangan penilaian daripada perspektif rakyat Iran sendiri tentang aspek ini telah menghasilkan satu fokus yang tidak dapat dikenalpasti memandangkan kesimpulan umum yang dibuat oleh orang lain mungkin tidak sejajar. Malahan, banyak kajian sebelum ini yang meneliti sebahagian daripada empat pembolehubah penting iaitu gaya hidup, ciri-ciri pasar raya, kepuasan pengguna dan kesetiaan terhadap pasar raya menunjukkan kepentingannya, sebaliknya tiada satu pun yang menganggap keempat-empat pembolehubah itu sebagai model yang berterusan, yang merupakan sumbangan kepada kajian ini. Maka, kajian ini meneliti hubungan antara tiga faktor gaya hidup iaitu berorientasikan pendidikan, aktif secara sosial, cenderung untuk berhutang dengan lima ciri penting pasar raya untuk rakyat Iran; promosi pasar raya, harga, kepelbagaian produk, suasana pasar raya dan jurujual. Tambahan lagi, kajian ini juga meneliti hubungan antara ciri-ciri pasar raya terhadap kepuasan pengguna dan seterusnya kesetiaan pengguna terhadap pasar raya yang menjadi matlamat setiap peruncit. Data telah dikumpul dari persampelan rawak mudah yang terdiri daripada 385 orang responden yang merupakan pengguna kepada 23 buah cawangan Shahrvand Hypermarket di Iran. Soal selidik tersebut dianalisa. Hubungan antara gaya hidup, ciri-ciri pasar raya, kepuasan pengguna dan kesetiaan terhadap pasar raya telah dapat disahkan. Kajian juga mendapati bahawa hubungan tidak langsung antara ciri-ciri pasar raya dengan kesetiaan terhadap pasar raya itu melalui kepuasan pengguna lebih kuat berbanding dengan hubungan langsung antara ciri-ciri pasar raya dengan kesetiaan terhadap pasar raya itu sendiri.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the background context of the subject at hand. This is followed by the problem statement and purpose of the study, as well as its significance and scope. The chapter ends with an overview of the thesis structure, which will provide the reader with a quick glance at the issues addressed in this study.

1.2   Background of the Study

This part focuses on definition of retailing and description of retailing in Iran.

1.2.1   Retailing

Retailing is the largest industry in most developed countries, with grocery retailing being the most important in terms of value and volume (Burt and Sparks, 1995). Retailing is divided into two formats: non store-based retailing and store based retailing. Non store-based retailing simply means that retailing does not take place in a physical store, and encompasses formats such as online retailing, mail

order, automatic vending machines and teleshopping. Store based retailing, meanwhile, refers to a channel where consumer can purchase tangible goods, i.e., consumers are able to see physical products in front of them at a specific store for a specific period of time. Consumers then purchase products according to their personal preferences in physical stores such as specialty stores, convenience stores, departmental stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets (Ray, 2010).

The hypermarket is an important form of store-based retailing, especially in terms of packaged products regularly purchased by consumers, due to its lower prices and one-stop shopping (Farhangmehr et al., 2000). Moreover, the hypermarket is the fastest growing sector in the retailing industry that other sectors struggle to compete with it (Dunne and Lusch, 2008). The hypermarket has also replaced thousands of small grocery stores because it is able to present a larger assortment of products with competitive prices (Seiders and Tigert, 2000). This means that although many products and goods can be found in supermarkets, special groceries, convenience stores and drug stores (Kim and Jin, 2001; Kim, et al., 2002), most consumers prefer to shop in hypermarkets due to the low level of risk and higher degree of convenience (Farhangmehr et al., 2000). To better clarify the issue, it must be noted that people are more time-conscious now than they were 10 or 20 years ago, and thus prefer to shop in hypermarkets that have a large variety of low-priced products under one roof, which also operate on a self-service basis, and offer free parking (Kamath and Godin, 2001).

Lifestyle changes also account for people being interested in products that they may not have paid attention to in the past, as well as the choice of where said products are purchased. Thus, consumers shop based on their lifestyles, e.g., low income families prefer to shop from discount stores. Consumers choose stores that most match their lifestyle needs; upon finding a suitable store, they will do the majority of their shopping there, and if they are continually satisfied, then store loyalty occurs (Hawkins, 2010). Therefore, retail managers should not be oblivious of the fact that the lifestyles of consumers play an important role in their business survival. Retail managers should thus create store attributes (store images) based on

the lifestyle of consumers to attract them, because this affects consumers' store choice. This will not only satisfy their consumers, but also ensure their loyalty.

Consumers choose specific store formats for their different attributes, such as lower prices, variety of merchandise, convenience, quality and services, which are all factors that will contribute to consumers' image formation and influence their store choice decision (Farhangmehr et al., 2000; Seiders and Tigert, 2000; Jin and Kim, 2003; Carpenter and Moore, 2006). However, although consumers sometimes change their store choice decision by shopping at a new retail format, no research conclusively proved that consumers rely on a single format for their shopping needs has been found.

To return to the hypermarket, it has been noted above that the format is very well tailored to the needs of modern consumers. However, hypermarkets cannot ignore other competitive formats, with store attributes that appeal to other aspects of consumers' lifestyles. For instance, convenience stores with long working hours (e.g., 7-Elevens that are open for 24 hours) are popular amongst consumers who want more time convenience for shopping. Discount stores that have low prices, meanwhile, are patronised by low income families. It needs to be reiterated that consumers choose to shop at a store if they become satisfied with the attributes of that particular store. Thus, it is vital for the hypermarket manager to know that consumer lifestyle is not only a determinant factor in selecting a store for their major shopping needs, but also in defining which store attributes are important, as well as how it will affect consumers' behaviour, satisfaction, and ultimately, loyalty.

1.2.2 Retailing in Iran

Retailing in Iran can be categorised into two formats: store based and non-store based retailing. The former encompasses grocery retailers, beauty specialist retailers, clothing and footwear specialists, booksellers, etc. Non-store based retailing includes internet retailing, vending and home shopping. Grocery retailers in Iran,

which have higher sales than other store based formats, can be further subcategorised into three types: traditional grocers (i.e., 'mom and pop' stores), hypermarkets and supermarkets.

Traditional grocers in Iran have seen their sales decline, and consumers are shifting towards the more modern hypermarket format (Asgharizadeh and Ghasemi, 2009). This is due to a few reasons. Firstly, the small format of the traditional grocer is not able to attract consumers with assurances of product quality and low prices. Secondly, the Iranian government encourages people to shop in hypermarkets because hypermarkets fall under its supervision, in terms of competitive prices and subsided primary products. Prices can be controlled through circumventing the role of dealers, who are seemed as the main reason for inflation in Iran. In addition, time-constrained Iranian consumers prefer to shop from hypermarkets which provide everything under one roof and have flexible opening hours. Table 1.1 demonstrates Iranian retail sales by format.

Table 1.1: Sales in Iranian Retailing by formats: % Value Growth 2007-2008 and 2008-2009

Retailing		Formats	Value Growth	
			2007-2008	2008-2009
	Store based Retailing	Grocery Retailing	61%	55% ▼
		- Hypermarket	31%	29% ▼
		-Supermarket		
		-Traditional Grocery Retailer	30%	26% ▼
		Other Retailing format	22%	22% -
	Non- Store based Retailing	- Internet Retailing	9%	15% ↑
		- Vending	2%	5% ▼
		- Home shopping	6%	3% ▼
		Total	100	100

Source: Statistics Center of Iran (2009)

The Table 1.1 shows that the hypermarket format decrease at a faster rate in two consecutive years than other formats of store based retailing, and even non-store

based retailing. However, the two percent decrease of the growth of hypermarkets should be a source of concern for hypermarket managers and the government, because it shows hypermarket performance deteriorating despite the lack of major competitors, the declining number of small grocers, as well as the high level of governmental support. Additionally, only two hypermarkets are active in Iran, namely Shahrvand and Refah, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.

According to Hofstede (2010), Iran is characterised by the highest level of uncertainty avoidance (UAI) in the Middle East. This shows the Iranian people's low tolerance of uncertainty. Hofstede notes that the level of uncertainty is reduced by way of severe regulation in terms of law and policies, which are accepted by society. This is reflected in the strict governmental control of Iranian hypermarkets.

Iran experienced an increase of over 200% in disposable income and GDP due to the rapid increase in oil prices, which reached its highest in 2008 (at more than USD 140 per barrel). However, the growth in the money supply as well as government's spending and expansionary policy led to the highest inflation rate in the region (26% in 2008) and started to limit purchasing power (Euromonitor, 2010). In addition, the economic stagnation after new sanctions against Iran by Western countries is another reason for the decline of Iranians' purchasing power, which has resulted in them seeking goods with more competitive prices (Statistics Center of Iran, 2009).

It seems that the lack of attention paid to creating store attributes based on consumer lifestyles is a cause of poor retail performance (Menati, 2003). This leads to dissatisfied consumers. These dissatisfied consumers will then select rival formats, even if these formats have also been weakened by the current economic situation. A given hypermarket that is not able to satisfy its consumers will not be able to secure their commitment to repurchase from the store. When this happens, store loyalty never occurs, and the store cannot survive. It is suggested that consumer lifestyle, and its relationship with both the consumer decision process and store attributes, is very significant, in terms of being a vital tool in the evaluation and choice of a specific store (Hawkins *et al.*, 2010). The present study therefore is designed to

determine the relationship between lifestyle and store attributes, and to investigate the relationship between store attributes and consumer satisfaction as well as store loyalty.

1.3 Problem Statement

The changing lifestyles of Iranians results in mismatch between their preferences and store attributes—the priority of the consumer which impacts upon his or her choice of where to shop—that leads to dissatisfied consumers (Soltani, 2004). These lifestyle changes beg the need for a study on the effect of changing behaviours on consumer loyalty and satisfaction (Menati, 2003). Based on Saeedi (2006), there are various lifestyles in Tehran. So, it may be necessary to find which lifestyles impact on consumer behaviour and their store selection. This is, of course, linked to reduced retailers' sales and profits, because consumers are essential for all retailing formats; this further necessitates an analysis of the relationship between these sales figures and consumer needs and requirements. It is important to note that past studies have been carried out on this topic. This study, however, focuses in the context of Iran, specifically the performance of Iranian hypermarkets. In this light, it is hoped that this study will be of use to hypermarket owners and managers operating in Iran.

Secondly, based on Iranian consumers' suggestions, there are five major internal store attributes (i.e., price, product assortment, promotion, sales personnel and store atmosphere) that affect hypermarket performance (Soltani, 2004). These internal store attributes are the first things that consumers will be confronted with upon entering a store, as well as during the process of selection or evaluation of a store. It is suggested in this study that these five internal store attributes are the source of the current weak performance of hypermarkets in Iran. The decrease in the sales of hypermarkets in 2009 (Table 1.1 above) only confirms this weakness.

Furthermore, despite more than ten years having passed since the opening of the first modern branch of hypermarkets in Iran, past studies reveals those hypermarket retailers' efforts to ensure consumer loyalty and satisfaction are inadequate (Soltani, 2004; Hamidizadeh and Ghamkhari, 2009). The two hypermarkets in Iran, namely Shahrvand and Refah, do not regularly evaluate consumer satisfaction and store loyalty. This in itself warrants further analysis, seeing as the results of this study may not only help researchers and hypermarket managers understand where and how they are falling short of suitable performance, but will also help them update their marketing strategy based on consumer tastes, and thereby increasing consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Three of Iran's hypermarkets also went bankrupt after the Iraq-Iran war (1993-2001). Shahre-Rosta, Quds and Naft closed because of weak management, unplanned marketing strategy, and a lack of consumer satisfaction (Asgharizadeh and Ghasemi, 2009). In this light, the study is expected to assist existing hypermarkets identify the major problems within the Iranian retail sector.

In addition, although there exist studies that specifically explore the relationship of lifestyle and store attributes (Lumpkin and Hite, 1988; Chowdhary, 1989; Huddleston *et al.*, 1990; Oates *et al.*, 1996; Moschis, 2003), as well as the linkages between lifestyle, consumer behaviour, and market segment (Kucukemiroglu, 1999; Chen *et al.*, 2007), there is no study exploring the links between lifestyle, store attributes, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty at the same time in a unit study. For example, Huddleston *et al.* (1990), Oates *et al.* (1996) and Moschis (2003) explore the relationship between lifestyle and store attributes, while Bloemer and Ruyter (1998), Koo (2003), Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) only explore the linkages between store attributes, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty.

According to literatures, loyalty is used as a measure of the success of marketing strategy (Koo, 2003). Not only store attribute has a critical impact on building store loyalty (Martineau, 1958; Lindquist, 1974, Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998), but also satisfaction is regarded as an antecendent of store loyalty (Bloemer

and Ruyter, 1998). Now, there is an unanswered question: whether there is a direct relationship between store attribute and store loyalty through consumer satisfaction.Finding this answer may be useful for attractinh more consumers based on findings related to this matter.

And as noted above, there is a lack of studies carried out in non-Western settings, meaning that it is difficult to generalise the findings due to cultural differences. A quick review of the studies mentioned above clearly shows that the relationship between store attribute and lifestyle has been explored by some researchers, with others examining the relationship between store attributes, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty. Undoubtedly, the four variables are important; the present study represents a new research opportunity, in terms of examining all four variables together in an Iranian context, which will not only be useful to future researchers, but also hypermarket owners and managers in the country.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the lifestyles of Iranians, store attributes, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty. In order to stay competitive in the market, it is necessary to identify which methods can remedy structural flaws in the format and attract more consumers, with the final aim to keep them loyal to the store. In addition, the changing lifestyles of Iranian have also resulted in changing consumer behaviours, meaning that store managers should amend their store attributes in alignment with consumers' preferences.

1.5   Objective of Study

The objectives of this study are:

1)   To investigate the relationship between lifestyle and store attributes in hypermarket industry.

1a)   To investigate the relationship between socially active factor and store attributes in hypermarket industry.

1b)   To investigate the relationship between Education oriented factor and store attributes in hypermarket industry.

1c)   To investigate the relationship between credit prone factor and store attributes in hypermarket industry.

2)   To investigate the relationship between store attributes and consumer satisfaction.

3)   To investigate the relationship between consumer satisfaction and store loyalty.

4)   To investigate the relationship between store attributes and store loyalty.

5)   To investigate an Indirect Relationship of Store Attribute and Store Loyalty through Consumer Satisfaction.

1.6   Research Hypotheses

H1) There is a relationship between lifestyle and store attributes of hypermarket.

H1a)   There is a relationship between socially active factor and store attributes of hypermarket.

H1b)   There is a relationship between education oriented factor and store attributes of hypermarket.

H1c)   There is a relationship between credit prone factor and store attributes of hypermarket.

H2) There is a relationship between store attributes and consumer satisfaction.

H3) There is a relationship between consumer satisfaction and store loyalty.

H4) There is a relationship between store attributes and store loyalty.

H5) There is an Indirect Relationship of Store Attribute and Store Loyalty through Consumer Satisfaction.

1.7   Significance of the Study

As noted above, there have been a significant amount of studies that examine the issues of consumer shopping behaviour and retail marketing strategies to tackle the intense competition in the hypermarket industry. However, most of these studies have been performed in the United States and Europe. In this light, the present study aims to enable hypermarket retailers in Iran to gain a better understanding of their consumers.

Due to changing lifestyles and the variety of retailing formats, consumers now have more options to evaluate and choose from. This study will be useful in providing a more insightful snapshot of the retail industry in Iran, specifically with regard to the hypermarket format.

In addition, this study emphasises the importance of consumer lifestyle, and its relationship with store attributes in the retailing environment. Many researchers have identified that store attributes play an important role in affecting consumer satisfaction and store loyalty. Thus, through the identification of store attributes as

perceived by consumer lifestyle, retailers can establish better marketing strategies for their store.

1.8   Scope of Study

This study focuses on the lifestyles of Iranian consumers (i.e., education oriented, credit prone and socially active), selected store attributes (i.e., promotion, price, product assortment, store atmosphere and sales personnel), consumer satisfaction, and store loyalty. The Shahrvand hypermarket in Iran, which has 23 branches, is used as the basis of the study. Accordingly, the consumers of this hypermarket form the target population of the study.

1.9   Definitions of Key Concepts

The following key concepts will be used throughout the study. These concepts are defined as follows: a *customer* is someone who always shops from a specific store, but the larger term *consumer* (or an individual shopper) is someone who takes part in the evaluation, acquisition and utilisation of products or services. Therefore, a consumer is not only one who shops for products and services, but also uses free services (Tyagi and Kumar, 2004). Based on this theory, the term *consumer* will be used in this study.

Consumer lifestyle, or the psychographics of consumers, are the social and psychological factors that influence shopping behaviour and the consumer decision process (Berman and Evans, 2004; Hawkins *et al*., 2010). *Consumer satisfaction*, meanwhile, refers to the overall consumer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional reaction to the difference between what consumers expect and what they receive, with regard to the fulfilment of some need, goal or desire (Kotler and Keller, 2006).

Studies use the term *store attributes* to refer to the image of the store (Martineau, 1958; Kim and Jin, 2001). Store attributes collectively constitute a determining factor for the selection of a store, and is related to consumer behaviour, such as consumer satisfaction and store loyalty (Peter and Olson, 2007), because these attributes are paid considerable attention from consumers in their selection or evaluation of a specific store (Martineau, 1958; Visser and Preez, 2006). Finally, the term *store loyalty* will also be used in this study, and refers to consumers' intent and deep commitment to repurchase a chosen product/service repeatedly in the future (Oliver, 1999; McMullan and Gilmore, 2003).

1.10   Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the introduction, and contains a review of retailing in both the global and Iranian contexts. The chapter also listed the problem statement and purpose of study, as well as its significance, scope, objectives, research question and a definition of key concepts. This chapter also identifies the Iranian retailing environment, specifically its hypermarket format, as the subject of the study. The following chapter will present an overview of the retailing industry and a review of past literature on retailing.

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