

Mediating Role of Self Congruity on Retail Patronage Decisions among Supermarket Shoppers in Kenya

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.806183>

Received: 06 June 2024; Accepted: 18 June 2024; Published: 17 July 2024

ABSTRACT

Self-congruity results when a consumer's self-image matches their image of a typical store shopper with respect to how they would look like and behave. The objective of this study was to determine the mediating effect of self-congruity on the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya. The research was based on integrated theory of patronage preference and behavior, self-determination theory and integrative model of retail environment, self-congruity and retail patronage. The positivism research philosophy and exploratory research design were deployed. Supermarkets were selected from Nairobi County as a representative of the whole country with 30% of the supermarkets participating. Every 4th random customer was chosen from the 30 supermarkets for a desired sample size of 384. Primary data was collected from 311 customers using structured questionnaire and data was analysed using path analysis. The results of the study showed that self-congruity mediate the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya. This indicated that supermarkets in Kenya should consider updating their stores to match with the consumer's self-image and image of a typical store shopper. This study concludes that self-congruity is an important predictor of retail patronage and that managers should be on the lookout for the self-concepts of their shoppers and try to provide environments that would maximize shopping experiences.

Keywords: Self Congruity, Retail Patronage, Supermarket Shoppers, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The retail industry in Kenya has been robust due to increased population, infrastructure development, advanced technology, robust economic growth, and increase in locally manufactured high-quality goods, growing middle class, and the entry of international players. The retail environment provides a variety of cues that shoppers can use to form an impression of the typical customer of the store. The environmental cues that affect retail image include place (atmospherics and location), promotion, product, and price (Sirgy et al., 2000). For example, well known and top of the line brands and in an upmarket location are likely to create an image that a store is upscale with affluent patrons. Higher prices may also be associated with high quality merchandise and affluent shoppers.

To ensure survival in the highly competitive market, retail managers need an understanding of the aspects that consumers evaluate when selecting a supermarket (Makhitha & Khumalo, 2019). The quest to understand consumer needs is challenging owing to the multifaceted nature of consumer behavior that

results from the interaction of external factors and the individual characteristics of customers (Kiboro et al., 2020). Differences in shopping orientations and expectations from a given store, as well as type and amount of purchase push customers towards specific store formats. This leads to customers choosing either an informal store like a duka, or a formal store like a supermarket or a department store. A supermarket is a large self-service retail food store offering groceries, meat, produce as well as nonfood items such as health and cosmetic products and general merchandise (Levy et al., 2018). The Kenyan shopper shops twenty-one (21) times a month with five (5) of these trips being to a supermarket for bulk purchases. Seventy percent (70%) of the money spent per shopping trip is below fifty-five (55) shillings with 18.1% of shoppers spending less than ten (10) shillings per trip. The majority of shoppers top-up their shopping from kiosks, grocery shops and vegetable vendors. Additionally, eighty eight percent (88%) of Kenyan shoppers are ready to defect with only twelve percent (12%) being firm loyalists of a retail establishment (Nielsen, 2020).

This study was anchored on integrated theory of patronage preference and behavior (Sheth, 1983) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The study also used Integrative Model of Retail Environment, Self-Congruity and Retail Patronage (Sirgy, 1982). Integrated theory of patronage preference and behavior describes and explains individual patronage behavior from selection of outlets to actual purchase behavior in a store. Self-determination theory addresses consumer behavior with regards to a consumer's motivation for purchasing products (Gilal et al., 2019). The model postulates links among retail store image, store environment, self-congruity and retail store patronage. The theory builds on the assumption that a shopper's attitude towards a product is shaped by the matching of the product user image with the shopper's self-concept. The self-congruity theory in retail matches an individual's self-concept to a retail store image. Shoppers perceive stores in terms of its typical customers (Sirgy et al., 2000). Thus, the study sought to establish the mediating effect self-congruity on the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integrated model of self-congruity posits that different components of a store including its atmosphere are linked to store image. Store attributes may be gauged in the light of a shopper's expected level of performance for a given attribute. Shoppers are said to have stereotypical images of stores with some being viewed as catering to upscale shoppers, while others to working class shoppers. Retailers therefore, develop store images to position their stores relative to the needs of their targeted shoppers. People prefer brands that they think people similar to them use (Postica & Cardoso, 2015; Abel et al., 2013). People think they forms the basis of the self-concept from which self-congruity is derived. Self-concept is the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings that one holds about oneself (Sirgy, 2018). As such, individuals are always looking to enhance and maintain their self-concept and they do that through the purchase and usage of products. Consumers evaluate brands on their self-concept and what they aspire to be and choose brands that are congruent with their self-concepts (Ha & Im, 2012; Kim & Hyun, 2013, Sirgy, 2018).

Congruence between self-concept and brand personality makes a consumer feel good about himself, leading to a willingness to develop a stronger relationship with the brand (Tomassen, 2017; Tooray & Oodith (2017). Parwati et al. (2020) recommend that stores offer products that match the personality and characteristics of their shoppers to increase self-congruity. Sirgy (2018) proposes that high levels of self-congruity have a positive effect on product preference, brand attitude, product evaluation, purchase intention, brand attachment and actual purchase behavior.

Parwati et al. (2020) in a study on self-congruity, celebrity endorsement, brand attitude and brand loyalty found self-congruity to be positively related to brand loyalty. It was also found to be positively related to brand attitude among shoppers of a clothing store in Indonesia. Specifically, brand attitude mediated the relationship between self-congruity and brand loyalty. Tomassen (2017) in a study on self-congruity and

brand attachment in hedonic product categories concluded that while both actual and ideal self-congruities led to emotional brand attachment, the branding that was based on the actual self-congruity seemed to work better compared to the ideal self. Tooray and Oodith (2017) similarly found both actual and ideal self-congruities had a positive relationship with brand preference, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Brannen and Frisby (2017) found that while both actual and ideal self-congruities were positively related to brand loyalty and product usage, ideal self-congruity was found to significantly predict brand loyalty while actual self-congruity was not. In the same vein, actual self-congruity, unlike ideal self-congruity was found to be a significant predictor of brand usage. Japutra et al. (2018) found that actual self-congruity was a better predictor of brand attachment compared to ideal self-congruity among shoppers in the United Kingdom. Abel et al. (2013) found a positive link between actual and ideal self-congruities but with actual self-congruity being a stronger predictor of patronage of health clubs. In the light of the mixed results with regards to self-congruity and retail patronage, as well as a lack of studies conducted in Kenya a gap arises with regards to store image, self-congruity and retail patronage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used an explanatory research design as a research design. Target population of the study was made all shoppers of supermarkets in Kenya. Nairobi was the representative county since it is the capital of Kenya and hosts the highest number of large supermarkets. The study only targeted shoppers of supermarkets that were registered with the Retail Trade Association of Kenya (RETRAK). A representative sample was drawn from supermarket shoppers in Nairobi to participate in the study. Godden's (2004), of infinite populations that are above 50,000 was used to calculate the sample size. This formula was appropriate since the list of supermarket shoppers in Nairobi did not exist. Supermarket shoppers were estimated to be 53% of the Kenyan population (Nielsen, 2020). The sample size was 384. Sampling was conducted using multi-stage sampling method. In stage one, supermarkets in Nairobi were clustered into two; RETRAK and non-RETRAK members. In stage two, systematic stratified sampling was used to select supermarkets that participated in the study. Store number one was randomly selected as a start with the fourth store thereafter being systematically selected. At stage three proportionate stratified sampling was used to calculate the required number of respondents per selected store that participated in the study. Due to the lack of a list of shoppers, the data was conveniently collected from randomly selected customers in the stores. Data was collected over a week, during different periods of the day to ensure a balance of respondents. The study variables were operationalized as follows: self-congruity as actual self and ideal self (Ha & Im, 2012; Kim & Hyun, 2013). Store image as merchandise, service, convenience and marketing communication (Breytenbach, 2014; Dhurup et al, 2013). Retail patronage as store choice, store loyalty and word of mouth recommendations (Ha & Im, 2012; Breytenbach, 2014). The mediating effect of self-congruity on the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya was tested using Baron and Kenny (1986) four steps method at 5 percent significance level. Inferential statistics was carried using path analysis to test the relationships between the variables of interest; self-congruity, store image and retail patronage.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study sought to determine the influence of self-congruity as a mediating variable in the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was guided by the following null hypothesis;

H₀: Self-congruity has no mediating effect on the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya.

Baron and Kenny (1986) four-step method was used to test the hypothesis using path analysis. Mediation is confirmed when the following conditions are fulfilled. The first condition; independent variable must be significantly related to dependent variable in the absence of mediating variable. The second condition; independent variable must be significantly related to the mediating variable. The third condition; mediating variable must be significantly related to the dependent variable. The fourth condition; by controlling the effect of mediating variable on the dependent variable, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be insignificant. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mediating Results

| model summary | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | | |
| 1 | .546 ^a | 0.298 | 0.295 | 0.503 | | |
| 2 | .372 ^b | 0.138 | 0.135 | 0.945 | | |
| 3 | .312 ^c | 0.097 | 0.094 | 0.574 | | |
| 4 | .558 ^d | 0.311 | 0.306 | 0.826 | | |
| analysis of variance | | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 29.825 | 1 | 29.825 | 117.988 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 70.273 | 278 | 0.253 | | |
| | Total | 100.098 | 279 | | | |
| 2 | Regression | 40.325 | 1 | 40.325 | 45.115 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 251.166 | 281 | 0.894 | | |
| | Total | 291.491 | 282 | | | |
| 3 | Regression | 10.773 | 1 | 10.773 | 32.685 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 99.867 | 303 | 0.33 | | |
| | Total | 110.64 | 304 | | | |
| 4 | Regression | 84.961 | 2 | 42.481 | 62.307 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 188.176 | 276 | 0.682 | | |
| | Total | 273.137 | 278 | | | |
| Coefficients | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.734 | 0.209 | | 8.289 | 0.000 |
| | Store Image | 0.597 | 0.055 | 0.546 | 10.862 | 0.000 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 0.269 | 0.392 | | 0.687 | 0.493 |
| | Store Image | 0.692 | 0.103 | 0.372 | 6.717 | 0.000 |
| 3 | (Constant) | 3.451 | 0.099 | | 35.015 | 0.000 |
| | SCM | 0.186 | 0.033 | 0.312 | 5.717 | 0.000 |
| 4 | (Constant) | 0.01 | 0.049 | | 0.192 | 0.848 |
| | Store Image | 0.49 | 0.293 | 0.495 | 1.672 | 0.096 |
| | Self-Congruity | 0.13 | 0.053 | 0.132 | 2.459 | 0.015 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Retail Patronage | | | | | | |

| |
|--|
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Store Image |
| c. Predictors: (Constant), Store Image |
| d. Predictors: (Constant), Self-congruity |
| e. Predictors: (Constant), Self-congruity, Store Image |

In step one; retail patronage was regressed on store image. The R squared value was 0.298, that is, 29.8 percent of variation in retail patronage was explained by changes in store image. The model was significant in overall ($F= 117.988 > 3.84$, p value of $0.000 < 0.05$). Also store image was individually significant ($\beta = .597$, $t = 10.862 > 1.96$, p-value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Hence conditions for step one of mediation were met. The analysis moved to step two.

In step two; self-congruity was regressed on store image. The R squared value was 0.138, that is, 13.8 percent of variation in self-congruity was explained by changes in store image. The model was significant in overall ($F= 45.115 > 3.84$, p value of $0.000 < 0.05$). Store image was individually significant ($\beta = 0.692$, $t = 6.717 > 1.96$, p-value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Hence conditions for step two of mediation were met. The analysis moved to step three

In step three; retail patronage was regressed on self-congruity. The R squared value was 0.097, implying that 9.7 percent of variation in retail patronage was explained by changes in self-congruity. The model was significant in overall ($F= 32.685 > 3.84$, p value of $0.000 < 0.05$). self-congruity was individually significant ($\beta = .186$, $t = 5.717 > 1.96$, p-value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Hence conditions for step three of mediation were met. The analysis moved to four.

In step four; retail patronage was regressed on store image and self-congruity. The R squared value was 0.311, implying that 31.1 percent of variation in retail patronage was explained by changes in store image and self-congruity. The model was significant in overall ($F= 62.307 > 3.84$, p value of $0.000 < 0.05$). The direct path (store image-retail patronage) was not significant ($\beta = 0.490$, $t = 1.672 < 1.96$ p-value = $0.096 > 0.05$). The indirect path through self-congruity ($\beta = 0.130$, $t = 2.459 > 1.96$, P-value = $0.015 < 0.05$) was significant. This means that by introducing self-congruity, the relationship between store image and retail patronage became insignificant. This shows that full mediation took place. Thus, null hypothesis that self-congruity has no significant mediating effect on the relationship between store image and retail patronage among supermarkets in Kenya was rejected.

The regression models resulting from mediation testing are:

Step 1: $RP = 1.734 + 0.597SI$

Step 2: $SC = 0.269 + 0.692SI$

Step 3: $RP = 3.451 + 0.186SC$

Step 4: $RP = 0.010 + 0.490SI + 0.130SC$

These findings agree with those of Postica and Cardoso (2015) and Tooray and Oodith (2017). Self-congruity leads to strong attachments to a store, satisfaction and customer loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings concluded that actual self-congruity had a stronger influence compared to ideal self-congruity. The study further concluded that there was a small difference in the influence of actual and ideal self-

congruity on patronage even though actual congruity was found to be more influential in determining patronage of stores. As a result, managers need to align their store images in a manner that would encourage self-congruity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the importance of self-congruity to brand and store attachment, due to its ability to perpetuate self-identity, self-consistency and self-esteem, retail managers ought to design retail strategies that will lead to consistencies between their store's images and those of the customers.

This would include stocking of products that match the image, setting up retail stores in areas that match their self-concepts as well as communicating using channels that would strengthen the match. It is important that retailers not only emphasize the functional value derived from the offerings in their stores but also the emotional and social value they provide.

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