STORE IMAGE: TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL MODEL
PART 1

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ABSTRACT
The lack of a universal definition and conceptual model of store image guided the aims for this research, namely to 1) delineate the underlying structure of the store image construct; 2) formulate a definition of store image; and 3) develop a model of the underlying theoretical structure of store image. An in-depth literature review was done to specify the domain and to delineate the underlying structure of this construct. The knowledge gained was incorporated into the model of apparel store image that served as point of departure for the development of a scale to measure the importance of apparel store image dimensions.

Keywords: store image, dimensions, apparel, conceptual model, multi-dimensional

This article is the first in a series of three focussing on the multi-dimensional nature of the store image and the complexity of measuring this construct. Although the literature cited is generic, apparel store image was central to the investigation. The theoretical underpinnings of store image are discussed in Part 1 followed by an overview of scale development in Part 2. Part 3 reports the empirical testing of the Apparel Store Image Scale.

What is store image? This question has been the focus of various research endeavours. Martineau (1998, p. 47), in his seminal study on store image, first defined store image as “…the way in which the store is defined in the shopper’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes”. Lindquist (1974–1975, p. 31) concluded that store image is “…complex by nature and consists of a combination of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors that a consumer perceives to be present”. According to the literature most definitions stress that store image is the consumer’s perception of a store, based on a set of salient attributes (Bloomer & De Ruyter, 1998; Faircloth, Capella & Alfond, 2003; James, Durand & Dreves, 1976; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993). However, researchers contend that the definition of store image is more than the factual description of characteristics; it also describes the interaction among characteristics (Amirani & Gates, 1993; Dichter, 1985; Oxenfeldt, 1974–1975). Zimmer and Golden (1988) as well as Keaveney and Hunt (1992) referred to the gestalt nature of the store image construct. The term gestalt is defined as “…the idea that the individual’s perception of any object incorporates innumerable bits of separate information that are combined in such a manner that the end result of the integration of inputs amounts to more than the sum of its constituent parts” (Chowdhary, Reardon & Srivastava, 1998, p. 73).

Why is store image important? The contextualisation of store image within the scope of corporate personality, corporate identity and corporate image has been reported extensively by scholars such as Kennedy (1977), Dowling (1986), Abratt (1989), Markwick and Fill (1997), Varley (2005) and Stuart (1999). The broad context of corporate branding was established by investigating the interplay between corporate strategy, culture, identity and image as reported in Visser, Du Preez and Janse van Noordwyk (2006). The relevance of store image within this context, and more specifically the context of the retail store brand, was discussed. Visser et al. (2006, p. 51) proposed an integrated model of store choice and retail marketing strategy by adapting Monroe and Guilinnan’s model of store choice (in Assael, 1992, p. 630) and combining it with Davidson, Sweeney and Stampfl’s model (in Terblanché, 1998, p. 106). This proposed model positions store image as a critical variable in apparel store choice. It also indicates the interaction between the uncontrollable and controllable consumer needs and the position of retailing in the market as well as in the integrated marketing strategy. Against this broad background the construct of store image was further investigated in order to specify the domain and to delineate the underlying structure thereof.

It is evident that a universal and generally accepted definition of store image (pertaining to specifically the dimensions of store image) is still lacking. Academic debates concerning the theoretical underpinnings of store image further complicate matters (Chowdhary et al., 1998). If researchers employ different definitions of a construct, comparison and accumulation of research findings are hampered, resulting in an inability to develop syntheses of existing knowledge and to develop scientifically sound measuring instruments. These are prerequisites for driving research and advancing theory building ( DeVellis, 2003; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006; Netemeyer, Bearden & Sharma, 2003). There is little evidence of these issues in store image research. The overall objectives of this article series focus on the definition of store image, the development of a measurement scale and the testing thereof in an apparel retail environment.

The aims of this paper are to
• specify the store image domain from existing store image literature;
• develop a conceptual model of store image and related consumer behaviour variables;
• delineate the underlying structure (dimensions and subdimensions) of the store image construct;
• formulate a definition of store image; and
• develop a model of the underlying theoretical structure of apparel store image.
STORE IMAGE DOMAIN SPECIFICATION

To specify the domain of store image, consumer behaviour variables in store image research were identified. Firstly, consumer behaviour variables employed as independent variables in store image research will be highlighted. Secondly, a summary will be given of research in which the relationship between store image perception and dependent consumer behaviour variables was investigated. This section spans empirical research of more than three decades but does not profess to be inclusive of all related literature.

Results from studies on the relationship between demographic variables (age, gender, level of education, occupation, residence, income level, marital status and number of children) and perceived store image were marked by contradicting findings (Chowdhary, 1999; Gehrt & Yan, 2004; Hyllegard, Eckman, Descals & Borja, 2005; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Oates, Shufeldt & Vaught, 1996; Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, Kasper, Kleijnen, Hoekstra & Commandeur, 2001; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003; Williams & Slama, 1995). Consequently no definitive conclusions can be drawn about the influence of demographic variables on the perceived importance of store image.

Initial support for the relationship between store image perception and lifestyle as a psychographic variable has been found, whether directly or indirectly. Shim and Kotisopulos (1992) indicated that shopping orientations act as mediator in the relationship between lifestyle and store image perception. The relationship between store image and other psychographic variables (i.e. environmental disposition and values), however, was only supported by isolated findings (Erdem, Oumlil & Tuncalp, 1999; Grossbart, Hampton, Rammohan & Lapidus, 1990).

Only a few studies investigated the influence of socio-cultural variables (family life cycle, social class, subculture and specifically culture) on store image. Two studies suggested a relationship between culture and the perceived importance of store image. Differences in ethnicity (Kim & Han, 2000) and
root culture (Van de Velde, Pelton, Turnbull Caton & Byrne, 1996) were reported. Shim and Kotsiopulos (1992) found that socio-cultural variables had an indirect relationship with store image perception mediated by shopping orientation. Contrary to Janse van Noordwyk (2002) who reported differences between subcultural groups based on population group and their perceptions of store image, Gehrt and Yan (2004) indicated that ethnicity did not influence the perceived importance of retail attributes.

The relationship between socio-psychological variables (especially self-image and body cathexis) and perceived store image was investigated. Shim, Kotsiopulos and Knoll (1990) found that men with different body types varied regarding their satisfaction with store attributes. Other researchers (Graeff 1996; Quester, Karunaratna & Goh, 2000; Hogg, Cox & Keeling, 2008; Jamal & Goode, 2001; Thompson & Chen, 1998) identified a positive relationship between self-image, brand image and brand perceptions, which can be applied to the perceptions of store image. Graeff (1996) stated that self-image and brand image congruence serves as an evaluative criterion in the attitude towards a brand. The results from these studies provide unequivocal support for the importance of self-image congruence with store image.

Studies provided initial support for a relationship between information sources and store image perception (Faircloth et al., 2001; Jin & Kim, 2003; Kliatchko, 2005; Osman, 1993; Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1992; Williams & Slama, 1995). Similarly, support was found for the relationship between situational influences (e.g. gift shopping, time pressure, urgent purchases and usage situations) and the perception of store image (Gehrt & Yan, 2004; Mattson, 1982; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Van Kenhove, De Wulf & Van Waterschoot, 1999). However, the specific situational influence variables included within each study differed significantly.

The relationship between shopping orientation and store image perception was more conclusive although the shopping orientation groups that were identified in specific studies differed (Morschett, Svoboda & Foscht, 2005; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1992; Visser & Du Preez, 2001). The results of Shim and Kotsiopulos (1992) indicated that shopping orientations predict the importance of store attributes. In contrast, Morschett et al. (2005) found that consumers’ shopping motives did not impact on their perception of store attributes. Results indicated that shopping motives had an impact on consumers’ attitudes towards retailers. Consistent support was found for the relationship between store image perception and product-specific variables (Amine & Cadenat, 2003; Porter & Claycomb, 1997; Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003) as well as store-specific variables (Joyce & Lambert, 1996; Mitchell & Kiral, 1998; Moore & Carpenter, 2006; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003; Solgaard & Hansen, 2003; Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1992). Research on product-specific variables refers to brand image and label brand quality while store-specific variables refer to store type.

Various studies reported relationships between dependent consumer behaviour variables and store image perception. Results from these studies are less contradictory. Although only a few studies investigated the relationship between store image perception and attitude (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004) and emotional state (Grace & O’Cass, 2005; Solomon, 2002), results are indicative of the influence of store image perception on these variables. Research provides evidence of the relationship between perceived store image and decision making, although the types of decision vary greatly (Faircloth, et al., 2001; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993; Ward, Bidner & Barnes, 1989). Strong support was found for the relationship between store image perception and both patronage preference (Amirani & Gates, 1993; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003; Thang & Tan, 2003) and approach/avoidance behaviour. However, research indicated that in some instances the relationship between store image perception and purchase behaviour was mediated by emotional state (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Ward et al., 1992).

Support was found for the influence of perceived store image on patronage behaviour (Baker, Parararaman, Greaves & Voss, 2002; Grace & O’Cass, 2005; Newberry, Klemz & Boshoff, 2003) as well as on store satisfaction (Bloomer & De Ruyter, 1998; Gómez, McLaughlin & Wittink, 2003; Koo, 2003; Miranda, Konja & Havrila, 2005). Research on the relationship between perceived store image and store loyalty concluded with contradicting findings. Chang and Tu (2005), Koo (2003) and Miranda et al. (2005) reported a direct positive relationship between store image perception and store loyalty. Only partial support for this relationship was found by Odekerken-Schröder et al. (2001) whereas Bloomer and De Ruyter’s (1998) study found an indirect positive relationship. Lastly, the influence of store image perception on product-specific variables was supported, although the specific attributes included in the literature varied (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003; Semeijn, Van Riel & Ambrosini, 2003; Stern, Zinkhan & Jaju, 2001; Varley, 2005).

The knowledge gained from this review of research was amalgamated into a conceptual theoretical model (see Figure 1) delineating proposed relationships between store image and related consumer behaviour variables. Central to this model is the interaction between store attributes and store image, where store image formation is based on consumers’ perceptions of all the attributes associated with a store (Faircloth et al., 2001; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993). The model further delineates the influence of consumer behaviour and related variables on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Dimension Names Included from Literature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Activity dimension; Clean and spacious atmosphere; Musical aesthetics dimension; Store atmosphere; Store atmosphere – aura; Store atmosphere – olfactory; Store atmosphere – tactile; Store atmosphere – visual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Accessibility; Congestion; Convenience; Convenience (economic); Convenience – store location and mobility; Convenient facilities; Errand shopping; Facility convenience; In-store convenience and physical environment; Leisure activities; Location; Location and convenience; Price; Promotions/convenience; Proximity and familiarity; Service convenience; Variety under one roof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>Appearance; Congestion; Convenient facilities; Facility convenience; Family shopping; Outside attractiveness; Physical facilities; Sensory/layout dimension; Servicescape; Service – store facilities; Store layout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Clientele; Institutional factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandise</td>
<td>Brand name; Fabric; Fashionability; Fashion goods; Focused shopping; Merchandise; Merchandise value; Merchandise variety; Merchandising; Popularity; Price; Price and quality aspects; Price competitiveness; Price/quality dimensions; Products; Quality/reputation; Rich mix of commodities and services; Status; Technical quality; Time/availability; Value; Value-added service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Advertising; Interest shopping; Promotion; Promotions; Promotions/convenience; Sales and incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales personnel</td>
<td>Employee service; Functional quality; Personal interaction; Professional; Preference for salespeople; Relational quality; Salesmanship; Salespeople service; Salesperson/service; Service – sales associates attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>After-sales service; Complaint handling; Core service; Credit; Credit facilities; Employee service; In-store service; Merchandise; Merchandise requests; Post-transaction service; Presence of related services; Rich mix of commodities and services; Salespeople service; Salesperson/service; Service convenience; Services; Service – sales associates attributes; Service – store amenities; Service – store facilities; Value-added service; Various store services</td>
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store image. Relationships that were supported by research findings are indicated with a solid line. Where results reported contradictory findings the relationships are presented by a broken line.

UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF STORE IMAGE: DIMENSIONS AND SUBDIMENSIONS

Store image literature yielded a significant number of researchers who presented their view of the underlying structure (dimensions and subdimensions) of store image. However, it is evident that they did not consistently employ a similar underlying structure. The lack of a clear definition of store image is, therefore, further exacerbated by the absence of consensus on a set of universal store image dimensions (Amirani & Gates, 1993; Burns, 1992). Those researchers who reported dimensions and subdimensions for store image employed various research methodologies to arrive at these structures, namely

- qualitative research (Janse van Noordwyk, 2002; Lee & Johnson, 1997; Visser et al., 2006; Zimmer & Golden, 1988);
- quantitative research with the application of exploratory factor analysis (Belanger, Robertson & Greenberg, 1977; Bellizzi, Crowley & Hasty, 1983; Chowdhary, 1999; Erdem et al., 1999; Haddleston, Ford & Mahoney, 1990; Kim & Jin, 2001; Marks, 1976; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Sullivan, Savitt, Zheng & Cui, 2002); and
- multiple discriminant analysis (Wong & Teas, 2001).

For the purposes of this study it was imperative to take cognisance of the findings of these researchers. The process of identifying store image dimensions included several distinct phases. Firstly, store image dimensions were identified from literature, and secondly, these dimensions were refined to arrive at a final set of dimensions underpinning store image. This first phase employed a systematic process with several distinct stages that enabled the researchers to integrate the literature into a final set of store image dimensions, namely

- compiling a composite list of dimensions from the literature;
- identifying emerging dimensions;
- compiling a composite list of the subdimensions included within each dimension;
- grouping isolated dimensions with the identified dimensions based on a comparison of subdimensions; and
- compiling a set of dimensions to be subjected to refinement to arrive at a final set of dimensions.

After compiling a composite list of all store image dimensions (stage 1), the list was scrutinised to identify those dimensions that were supported by different researchers. The names attributed to the dimensions in each study served as guideline for identification. Nineteen dimensions emerged, namely Age, Atmosphere, Clientele, Convenience, Credit, Environment, Facilities, Institutional, Layout, Location, Merchandise, Post-transaction, Price, Promotional, Quality, Reputation, Sales personnel, Service and Value. These dimensions were refined to

- ensure that dimensions are grouped together appropriately;
- address any overlap between dimensions;
- eliminate any redundant dimensions; and
- determine the relevancy of the dimensions within the current study.

![Proposed conceptual model of the underlying structure of store image](image-url)
This refining exercise resulted in the 19 dimensions being scaled down to eight dimensions as depicted in Table 1.

Similar to the diversity in dimensions underlying store image, the subdimensions mentioned in the literature are also much varied. A composite list of subdimensions included within each dimension was compiled from the reviewed studies. The subdimensions were grouped together on the basis of name similarity and frequency of mentions recorded. However, the need to further refine the subdimensions for inclusion in a model...
of the underlying structure of store image became evident. The possible overlap between subdimensions (within dimensions), the relevancy of each subdimension as well as the grouping of the final list of subdimensions was critically assessed. Table 2 depicts the dimensions and subdimensions identified as well as subdimensions referred to by various authors.

The multiplicity of consumer variables related to store image (refer to Figure 1), as well as the wide array of store attributes and subdimensions condensed into dimensions (refer to Table 2) are but some of the issues that should urge researchers to conduct investigations into store image with circumspection. Any endeavour to propose a definition and model of the underlying theoretical structure of store image should take cognisance of not only these issues but especially the gestalt nature of store image.

CONCLUSION: PROPOSED MODEL AND DEFINITION OF STORE IMAGE

In the proposed model, the four concentric circles represent a mutual influence on each other. Central to the model is store image. The eight dimensions underpinning the construct are represented in the first concentric circle, followed by the subdimensions underlying each dimension. The outer concentric circle of the model constitutes the specific store attributes underlying the identified subdimensions and dimensions. The perception of these store attributes is integral to store image formation. The size and components of each circle are not related to the importance of the specific dimension or subdimension. This model serves to delineate the underlying structure of the store image construct and should be implemented as a starting point when developing instruments to measure store image.

The proposed conceptual model of the underlying theoretical structure of store image was submitted for expert judging to further enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness thereof. Firstly, the model was considered at a special advisory session with two experts in the field of store image and consumer behaviour. Since the model was used as a point of departure for item generation and the subsequent development of a store image scale (refer to Part 2 of this series), it was imperative to ensure that the model represented a logical and practical framework. The review of the model was done in conjunction with a review of the initial item pool. From the feedback of this session, several adaptations were made to the model, specifically to the wording, ordering and grouping of the subdimensions within each dimension. Secondly, the model was submitted to a panel of experts from different but related fields of study, all of whom were familiar with the research problem, study objectives and scale development (three PhD holders and one advanced PhD candidate). From the feedback one change was effected, namely the grouping of Smell and Sound under the subdimension Store interior within the Atmosphere dimension.

The revised model is presented in Figure 3 (from here onwards referred to as the model of apparel store image).

Due to the nature and scope of store image, the formulation of a succinct definition is extremely difficult. The risk remains that important facets and nuances could be omitted resulting in a deficient definition. Thus, store image is defined as a complex, multidimensional construct based on the perception of tangible and intangible store attributes associated with eight dimensions, namely Atmosphere, Convenience, Facilities, Institutional, Merchandise, Promotion, Sales personnel and Service. These dimensions are further delineated into subdimensions that are underpinned by specific store attributes. Store image has a gestalt nature that is represented by the interaction
between the salient tangible and intangible store attributes. The formation of store image relies on the perception of a store, which varies by retailer, product and target market. By implication, store image is influenced by (1) the consumer's perception of a set of salient store attributes; (2) the importance the consumer places on the various store image dimensions, subdimensions and the associated store attributes; as well as (3) the retailer's manipulation of these store attributes through strategic management.

Store image is a complex construct. The investigation of existing literature reported in this article culminated in a proposed model and comprehensive definition of store image that could be refined and tested further. This definition and the proposed model of apparel store image served as the point of departure for the next phases in the scale development process that will be reported in parts 2 and 3 of this article series.

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