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BRAND AND STORE IMAGE AS DRIVERS OF REPURCHASE INTENTION: INSIGHTS FROM APPAREL FOCUSED LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Through this review-based methodology, this study identifies the relationship between brand image, store image and the intention to repurchase in the apparel industry. When consumer behavior continuously changes, and consumers are faced with many choices, it is critical maneuver for apparel brands and their customers to understand what contributes to repeat purchases. Past research indicates that brand image encompasses perceived quality, brand reputation, emotional attachment and symbolic value of the brand, and is very important in influencing consumer loyalty. On the flipside, store image including store atmosphere, store design, customer service, merchandise and the overall shopping environment can influence consumer satisfaction and the intention to return to the store. This paper organized the past research into separate themes to explore how both brand and store image pave way to personal decisions to repurchase apparel. This review also brought in sub-categories, such as culture differences sub-category, demographic sub-category, and digital store environment vs. physical store environment, in our explorations of the primary categories of brand and store image. In the end, a comprehensive and favorable image across all touchpoints may provide more favorable intention to repurchase apparel.

KEYWORDS: *Brand Image, Store Image, Repurchase Intention, Apparel Industry, Consumer Behavior*

INTRODUCTION

The literature on brand image, store image, and repurchase intention has been investigated in marketing literature and particularly relevant to the competitive apparel industry, a domain dominated by emotions where brands and retail environments influence customer behavior. Researchers mention that brand image - a function of perceived quality, trust, emotional appeal, and symbolization - results in consumers' evaluations after a purchase and consumers' post purchase evaluation culminates in repurchase intention (Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Customers are more likely to repurchase apparel from brands they are most fashionable, provide trust, and are in aligned with their self-identity. Store image results from a combination of physical attributes (e.g., store layout, cleanliness, lighting, product assortment, and staff behavior) and psychological attributes (e.g., comfort, excitement, and atmosphere) that influences consumers' satisfaction with and intention to return to a store (Baker et al., 2002; Hsieh & Chang, 2004). Existing literature illustrates that the store environment functions as an essential interface where consumers interact with the brand either physically or digitally, ultimately generating assessments with cognitive and emotional consequences toward future purchasing behavior. A positive store image enhances the customer experience, reinforces brand values, and creates relationships around emotional bonds contributing to brand loyalty. Further, various studies with models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior or Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework explain how brand/store image encourages consumer perceptions and emotions, attitude toward the store image, subsequent behavior stemming from store image and ultimately repurchase decisions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Donovan et al., 1994). As fashion retailers move to omnichannel retailing, brand/store image extends to outlining aspects of the online store experience which are shaped by website aesthetics, ease of use and navigation, personalization and responsiveness that would also affect their ability to foster customer loyalty (Kim & Lennon, 2010). Further, literature indicates that consumers assess both brand and store images holistically based on experiences, suggesting that consistent images strategies across all channels evoke even better experiences for consumers. Demographic and psychographics are moderating applied variables that impact consumer/image relationship, Younger consumers are likely to heed more importance on brand symbolism than older consumer, who likely heed more importance to customer service and ease of access (convenience). Loyalty programs, influencer collaboration, personalized marketing, and memorable experiences are several strategies that have been highlighted to reinforce brand and store image. Scholars have identified the importance of congruence of consumers' self-concept and the brand/store's perceived image to build trust and commitment that ultimately encourages consumers to revisit. This is very relevant in the apparel context where entries can be influenced by emotional expression, trend fit, and social

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validation. A strong brand and a managed store image will provide a strong competitive advantage. Emotional branding and a well-equipped store environment, whether physical or digital will ensure consumers back and associate with apparel brands. There is a theme running through the literature review where greater consumers' brand and store image are more favorable resulted in more satisfaction and higher chances of repurchase behavior respectively. This pattern is existent within the brand management construct, brand and store image are vital components to strategic brand management in retail special in apparel.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overall, while early studies laid the groundwork for the discussion on the role of brand and store image in repurchase intention, authors have recently used the previous work and expanded it include emotional engagement, customer experience, and perceived brand authenticity. For example, Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet (2011) found that brand experience and brand affect significantly influenced brand loyalty, which in turn promoted repurchase behavior, especially in the context of fashion retail where emotional engagement is viewed as crucial. Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) also argued that brand experience has a multidimensional nature, and fundamentally consists of sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral experiences which contribute to brand image and the evolution of consumer brand relationships over time. Another fruitful line of literature that has taken off in recent years, at least in the context of retailing research, is related to brand authenticity, and its influence on trust and repurchase behavior. Morhart, Malar, Guevremont, Girardin, and Grohmann (2015) found that consumers will be more likely to repurchase from apparel brands they perceive to be authentic, while these brands demonstrate consistency, credibility, and integrity. From a retail standpoint, Turley and Milliman (2000) noted a multitude of atmospheric cues, such as awareness of lighting, scent, music, and color schemes that can affect store image and ultimately influence the emotion status of consumers, leading to repeat purchasing behavior. In addition, Grewal, Levy, and Kumar (2009) showed that value-based pricing, high quality merchandise, and effective in-store marketing could positively alter store image and perceptions of value fostering loyalty. This assertion lends itself to omnichannel retail. Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman (2015) stated that an omnichannel integration of customer experience and perceptions across online and offline touchpoints affects both brand perception and repeat patronage indicating that successful omnichannel retailers effectively manage their image across touchpoints. In the age of social media, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) discovered that brand-related interactions and user-generated content raised brand image and influenced repurchase intention indirectly through electronic word-of-mouth and brand trust. Each of these contributions documents the constantly developing relationship between consumer perception and apparel retailing, highlighting the need for brand and store image to be nurtured and responsive to new technology and consumer expectations.

DISCUSSION

A synthesis of the previous literature has revealed a complex and evolving understanding of how brand and store image influence repurchase intention in the apparel industry. In both earlier and more recent work, there is agreement that brand image, based on providing emotional appeal, perceived quality, brand authenticity, and consumer-brand identification, are critical to building long-term customer relationships. While early studies focused on cognitive dimensions like awareness on elements of value (i.e. Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), only recently has the attention shifted to dimensions related to brand affect and experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias et al., 2011). This more recent work also illustrates that modern consumers tend to be more influenced by emotional appeal and brand identity, as well as experiential, creative and immersive interactions with brands. Similarly, the construct of store image has shifted from a focus on physical store layout and in-store atmospherics (Turley & Milliman, 2000) to a consideration of the digital store aesthetic, usability and omnichannel congruence (Verhoef et al., 2015).

The intersection of brand and store image leads to a composite image that has significant effects on repurchasing. Studies show that when both dimensions are cohesively perceived positively then they reinforce each other creating a synergic effect propelling trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. One example could be, when engaging brand messaging is combined with a familiar and engaging retail marketplace, whether in a physical or digital space, the perceived authenticity is increased and stimulates repurchase behavior (Morhart et al., 2015). Additionally social media and user-generated content is relevant in shaping both brand and store image, especially among younger consumers who consume and use peer influence and digital engagement to make purchasing decisions (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Moreover as consumers shift toward omnichannel and experience-based retailing, consistency across all touchpoints of branding is critical. Grewal et al. (2009), noted that successful retailers view the customer experience as a strategic management function by integrating pricing, place (in-store service) and promotion (marketing communication) within appealing brand experiences all at the same time.

The literature also recognizes moderating variables, such as demographics, culture, and personal values, that affect how consumers understand brand and store images. This shows a necessity for segments and personalization in image-building activities. For example, whether something is presented as an "authentic" brand, or a "satisfying" store experience, could differ dramatically for younger versus older consumers, or for consumers from different cultures. Further, while online environments allow scalability and convenience, it does

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not replace the sensory and emotional heft that is possible in physical stores, so all effort could be lost at digital personalization and engagement so that both channels can be impactful.

CONCLUSION

The literature emphasized the importance of brand image and store image in influencing repurchase intention in the competitive apparel sector. Brand image, developed from perceived quality, trust, emotional appeal, and self-identity representation, is critical in responsible consumers' evaluations for future purchase intentions and loyalty. Similarly, store image indicated aspects of the store's physical dimensions (i.e., layout, cleanliness, product availability) and psychological dimensions (comfort, excitement, and atmosphere) that lead to the overall satisfaction of consumers and the likelihood that they will continue to visit the store.

More recent studies have broadened this discussion by adding emotional engagement, brand authenticity, and omnichannel experiences about repurchase behavior. Studies have found that brands perceived as authentic and emotionally resonant help engage consumers, leading to trust and continuous loyalty in the long term. 'Omnichannel retailing' refers to the seamless experience customers receive across platforms (digital and physical) and helps to provide consistency in brand image and store image. Physical attributes of the retail environment can enhance customer experience and brand perceived value and include aspects such as sensory and experiential marketing (e.g., lighting, scent, music). Consumers' interactions with brands and retailers through social media enhance perceived brand image and have been found to influence customers' purchase intentions through electronic word-of-mouth and trust.

While the criteria highlighted above are applied to the practice of apparel retailing, successful apparel retailers must adapt brand image and store image with changing consumer expectations while creating loyalty in future retail consumers. Future research should consider studying the impact of advancing technologies (e.g., augmented reality shopping experiences, artificial intelligence in apparel purchasing) will have on consumer behavior, and to continuously adapt retail strategy perspectives during demanding competition in apparel retail.

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