The effects of store image components on consumers purchasing retailer brands in Korea

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Absract

Although a huge number of academic researchers have paid considerable attention to exploring both the degree to which store image influences retailer brand customers and how to develop store personality, they have overlooked the contemporary retail context in which retailers have developed many different types of retailer brands, that is, price-oriented or quality-oriented retailer brands. Rather than focusing on the latter, much literature has looked at the former. Accordingly, even though there are many articles related to store image, a few authors have shown their interest in identifying the extent to which store personality affects customers purchasing retailer brands at lower prices. As a result, their efforts have been to illustrate the relationship between store image and consumer behaviours buying retailer brands.

In that multiple retailers over the world such as E-Mart, Lotte-Mart, Tesco Korea and Tesco UK have actively introduced not only the quality-focused retailer brands that quality is better than, or equal to national brands, and prices are slightly higher than, or equal to them, but also price-focused retailer brands, academicians should make an effort to investigate how store image affects customers purchasing a quality-oriented retailer brand, comparing with previous research results. That is why the authors illustrate the extent to which store personality components influence retailer brand customers, including particularly quality-oriented retailer brand customers through an empirical research.

By adopting a questionnaire method as a research technique to illuminate the relationship between store image components and retailer brand customers, research validity increases and further, data gathered through a field survey are analysed through a few statistic analysis methods, in order to minimise statistical deviations. Compared with the prior research concentrated on price-focused retailer brands, the authors have significantly shed light on customer behaviours purchasing retailer brand products with higher quality. When it comes to store personality components, the research suggests the following five items: merchandise attributes, services, physical facilities, promotions, and institutional image, considering the subcomponents mentioned by the previous research. Proposing the conceptual research model which those elements are differently hypothesised, according to retailer brand types: PR (Price-oriented Retailer brand) and QR (Quality-oriented Retailer brand), the research is proceeded.

Through empirical research, the authors found that amongst the five items, only promotion influenced retailer brand customers in the Korean retailing marketplace, unlike other countries explored by many researchers, such as UK. Although much literature emphasises that those elements are closely related to retailer brand buying proneness, it is completely not fit to the Korean market. Also, research findings provide new insights into the degree of store image effects on retailer brand customers for academiciansand practitioners. Whether the retailer brand development program that a retailer has carried simultaneously both price-focused and quality-focused retailer brand types is practically profitable should be explored in the future.

Keywords: store image, store personality, image formation, image components, retailer brands

Introduction

Unlike other countries in which retailer brands have accounted for higher market share, such as UK, Germany, France, and so on, Korea has shown lower retailer brand market share (ACNielsen, 2005). However, since Korean retailers introduced the new development concepts avoiding poor packaging and quality into retailer brand programs, the market share growth of retailer brands have been outstanding (Cho, 2009). As evidence, the retailer brand market share of Tesco Korea increased to 26 % in 2009 from 20 % in 2007 (Cho, 2011). In the same vein, with the increasing number of hypermarket/discount stores, many authors have paid significant attention to identifying the characteristics of retailer brand customers like perceptions or attitudes, comparing with national brand customers (e.g. Frank and Boyd, 1965; Bettman, 1974; Murphy, 1978; Strang et al., 1979; Murphy and Laczniak, 1979; Cunningham et al., 1982; Szymanski and Busch, 1987; Dick et al., 1995, 1996; Omar, 1996; Prendergast and Marr, 1997; Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007; Herstein and Tifferet, 2007; Rha and Cho, 2011).

Moreover, in spite of a huge number of articles concerned about store image and store personality (e.g. Arons, 1961; Doyle and Fenwick, 1974; Lindquist, 1974; King and Ring, 1980; Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Semeijn et al., 2004; Vahie and Paswan, 2006),

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researchers have been less interested in exploring the degree to which retail store image components influence customers when buying retailer brand products. Ratherthan interest in identifying the relationship between store image and retailer brand-prone customers, authors tended for the most part to concentrate on investigating the factors affecting store image formation (e.g. Martineau, 1958; Rich and Portis, 1964; Doyle and Frenwick, 1974; Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986). Although Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003), Semeijn et al. (2004), and Vahie and Paswan (2006) studied its relationship, they overlooked the fact that retailers have developed many types of retailer brands, such as priced-oriented and quality-oriented retailer brands. In other words, they illustrated how store image is associated with retailer brand customers, on the premise that retailers developed the only one type of retailer brands, that is, a price-focused retailer brand. Considering that retailers have introduced various retailer brand types as seen in Table 1, depending on the levels of price and quality, therefore, their findings should be in doubt in recent.

It is, thus, necessary to note how much store image components have an impact on different retailer brand types. Except for M & S (Marks and Spencer) which has sold only one brand type focusing on quality, most of retailers have operated many different forms of retailer brands over the world. As an example, Tesco Korea and E-Mart have developed three types of their own brands in the grocery sector, based on price-oriented and quality-oriented strategies (Cho, 2009).

<Table 1> Retailer brand types

Types	Tesco Korea	E-Mart	Lotte Mart	Tesco UK
Price-oriented	Alttle	Save	Save L	Tesco Value
Mid-priced and better quality	Joun	E-Mart	Choice	Tesco
Quality-oriented	Premium	Best	Prime	Finest

Compared with the previous studiesthat illustrated the relationship between store image or personality elements and price-oriented retailer brand customers, the authors aim at exploring the extent to which those factors influence customers, when purchasing different types of retailer brand products in the grocery sector. In other words, the authors look at the relationship between the elements concerned about building store image and two differentiated retailer brand forms: price-oriented retailer brands and quality-oriented retailer brands.

This paper begins to review articles associated with store image and its components, proposing research hypothesises. The next section will get involved in justifying a research method, analyse the data collected through a questionnaire and then research findings will be discussed. Finally, research conclusions and implications for manufacturers and practitioners will be given, together with some limitations as well as future research directions.

Literature review and hypothesis development

The relationship between retailer brands and store loyalty or retailer brand loyalty has significantly attracted an author’s interest, even though there are contrast arguments about whether retailer brands have nothing to do with building store loyalty or not (e.g. Cunningham, 1959; Rao, 1969; Anvik and Ashton, 1979; Cagley et al., 1980; Hawes and Kiser, 1980; Granzin and Schjelderup, 1980 Bellizzi et al., 1981; Granzin, 1981 McEnally and Hawes, 1984 Martell, 1986; Nandan and Dickinson, 1994; Dick et al., 1996 Steenkamp and Dekimpe, 1997; Ailawadi et al., 2001; Baltas, 2003 Jonas and Roosen, 2005). In addition, a large number of researchers have extended their research area to how to build store image from a practitioner’s point of view. Although some researchers have paid their attention to how much store image influences retailer brand customers(e.g. Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Semeijn et al., 2004; Vahie and Paswan, 2006), it is not enough to explain the current retail context where retailers have operated a variety of retailer brands, because they researched price-focused retailer brands, without looking at quality-oriented retailer brands. Furthermore, it would be expected that customers buying retailer brands might differently respond to different retailer brand types. It is, thus, essential to investigate how store image components affect retailer brand customers, when purchasing different types of retailer brands.

Before reviewing the existing literature based on store image development and formation processes, the definitions of store image and a store personality formation process should be examined.

Store image

There are a few different definitions in the academic world, with respect to store image (e.g. Martineau, 1958; Kunkel and Berry, 1968; James et al., 1976 Engel and Blackwell, 1982), and then, without defining the term, store image in this research, readers might be confused. What is evident is that its definition has continuously evolved and further, become sophisticated. As noted by Martineau (1958) in the early stage, store image in a shopper’s mindwas regarded as being based on both functional qualities such as product assortment, price levels and store layout, characterised by visual aspects, and psychologicalattributes such as a sense of belonging, kindness, politeness, and a feeling of excitement or interest, whilst Lindquist (1974) highlighted that it is a complicated concept and result from the combination of tangible or intangible factors that the customers buying products perceive. Also, the research conducted by Lindquist (1974) pointed that retail store image was formed in varying degrees amongst many different attributes like merchandise selection or assortment, product quality, pricing, location, merchandise styling, fashion, service, and staff service.

Furthermore, its definitionstarted to get involved in customer attitudes and has been associated with the process of image development and formation (Marzursky and Jacoby, 1986). Amongst these definitions, the authors will accept the definition of James et al. (1976), who described it as "a set of attitudes based upon evaluation of those store attributes deemed important by consumers". According to the definition, customer attitudes are a learned phenomenon and store image relies on an individual's experiences related to a store.

It would be unwise to say that store image is simply formed by the extrinsic cues provided by marketing activities by a retailer. Although a retailer communicates the same message by using the same marketing vehicle to customers, it is natural that the degree of store image formation might be differently appeared by customer personality. As expected, it has become clear that customers differ in their perceptions and tend to select a store with image congruent with their own-self image (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974). It is, thus, inevitable to note influential factors concerned about store image

On the other hand, some researchers argued that developing retailer brand products might be able to establish an opportunity for improving store image and further, be used to differentiate a retailer from its competitors from a customer's perspective (PLMA, 1999). In the same vein, Corstjens and Lal (2000) found through their empirical research that the premium retailer brand distributed to provide better quality for customers played an important role in building store loyalty. In a word, customers who are loyal to a store are more likely to purchase retailer brands.

Rather than focusing on the examination of the extent to which retailer brands contribute to the formation process of store image, the authors will look at how the store image is concerned about customers buying both price-oriented and quality-oriented retailer brands, based on the previous research that retailer brands contribute to the formation process of store personality in a customer's mind.

Store image formation

With regard to the elements influencing store image formation, many authors have proposed a large number of factors like physical elements (e.g. Lindquist, 1974; Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986), while considerable efforts were made to investigate how much store image positively or negatively makes a contribution to the reduction of perceived risks such as financial, functional, physical, social, time, and psychological risks (e.g. Semeijn et al., 2004). First of all, it should be explored what kind of element influences store image. Regarding store image shape, Mazursky and Jacoby (1986) stated that image formation is a subjective phenomenon resulted from exposure to perceived reality field in which was surrounded by two basic worlds: labeled objective reality and perceived reality. In consistent with Martineau (1958), Rich and Portis (1964) stressed that with the more concrete elements of product assortment, price, and location, intangible factors played an important role in encouraging customers to visit a particular store. As the example of the tangible factors associated with image formation, TV advertising has an important impact on shopping frequency and perceived store image (Arons, 1961).

It is necessary to note what kind of element affects store image formation process in more detail, based on existing literature, particularly on the study researched by Lindquist (1974) as well as Kunkel and Berry (1968). As shown in Table 2, the former research categorised the elements affecting store personality, that is, store image into 9 groups, considering the previous research results found by 26 authors, whilst the latter literature divided store image components into 12 main elements, including subcomponents.

<Table 2> Store image components suggested by prior studies

Author	Components
Lindquist (1974)	(1) Merchandise, (2) Service, (3) Clientele, (4) Physical facilities, (5) Convenience, (6) Promotion, (7) Store atmosphere, (8) Institutional factors, and (9) Post-transaction satisfaction
Kunkel and Berry (1968)	(1) Price of merchandise, (2) Quality of merchandise, (3) Assortment of merchandise, (4) Fashion of merchandise, (5) Sales personnel, (6) Locational convenience, (7) Other convenience factors, (8) Services, (9) Sales promotion, (10) Advertising, (11) Store atmosphere, and (12) Reputation on adjustments
McGoldick (2002)	(1) Price of merchandise, (2) Services provided, (3) Quality of merchandise (4) Home services, (5) Range of merchandise, (6) Promotions, (7) Sales personnel, (8) Advertising, (9) Locational convenience, (10) Store atmosphere, (11) Other convenience factors, (12) Store layout(13) Clientele, (14) Reputation on adjustments, (15) Personality of store, (16) Institutional image, (17) Associations, and (18) Visual imagery

These above components play a paramount role in making customers form store image in their own right. Based on the external and internal marketing activity of retailers, it has become apparent through the previous empirical research that customers form store image. Surprisingly, it is evident that each factor differently influences a customer's image formation, as noted by prior research (e.g. Rich and Portis, 1964; Lindquist, 1974). It would be, therefore, expected that such a result is based on different demographic and social-economic factors. Consequently, customers visiting a store might be influenced by their experiences with shopping environment, including retail environment outside the store, when making a buying decision, that is to say, the close relationship between store image and customer attitudes towards retailer brands exists (Richardson et al., 1994, 1996).

Amongst the above image aspects investigated by 26 studies, one of the most frequently examined elements is merchandise quality, followed by merchandise assortment, whilst staff service was ranked at the last place (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986). Accordingly, it is essential to simplify a variety of store image components to gain reasonable research information from customers, and then, the authors categorised store image elements into 5 items: merchandise, services, physical facilities, institutional image, and promotions, with a few subcomponents in the research, as seen in Table 3.

Merchandise attributes

As noted in the previous section, product-related image components such as price of products, breadth of choice, depth of choice, good/poor quality products, display, well-known/unwell-known brands and the like are regarded as the core points to form store personality in a customer's mind (Semeijn et al., 2004), whilst Lindquist (1974) suggested that product image consisted of the following five attributes: quality, selection or assortment, styling or fashion, guarantees, and pricing. In the same vein, it has become apparent through the prior research that merchandise attributes are closely related to the store image formation of customers, in consistent with Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003) who emphasised that both variety and product quality were ranked at the highest position when customers perceived a store. Furthermore, Cardozo (1974) found that store image varied by product class. Consequently, as pointed by Semeijn et al. (2004), store image is one of the most important factors predicting customer attitudes towards retailer brands. In addition, Mitchell and Greatorex (1993) and Mitchell and McGoldrick (1996) emphasised that store image in a customer's mind indicated retailer brand quality and further, functions as a risk reliever.

<Table 3> Elements influencing store image formation

Item	Subcomponents	Item	Subcomponents
1) Merchandise attributes	Quality levels Product ranges Price levels National brands	2) Services	Staff service Return policy Delivery Payment method
3) Physical facilities	Physical facilities Store layout Convenience/ Parking Location	4) Institutional image	Social class appeal Reputation/Reliability After service Store atmosphere
5) Promotions	Sales promotion Advertising Membership card Demonstrations		

On the contrary, Jacoby and Mazursky (1984) highlighted that carrying a favourable brand could obviously improve customer attitudes towards products, in consistent with Porter and Claycomb (1997), who found through an empirical study that brand image importantly influenced overall store image. Their finding can be interpreted that displaying an inferior retailer brand on shelves harms favourable customer perceptions. In fact, given that retailers developed retailer brands with lower prices and poor quality in the 1970s, like generics focusing on the lowest price, it can be said that retailer image might be damaged. On the other hand, favourable brand image could not be harmed by unfavourable store image, whilst favourable store image could not improve unfavourable brand image (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003). As a result, customers can form negative store image due to inferior retailer brand products. Similarly retailer brands can affect store image (Jacoby and Mazursky, 1984). Moreover, a strong retailer brand development program will help a retailer to build favourable store image (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003).

Considering the above conflicting arguments, merchandise attitudes apparently influence customer attitudes towards retailer brandsand vice versa. What is important is that store image formation and retailer brand attitudes are closely interrelated. The authors accordingly propose the following hypothesises, based on the prior research examined PR (Price-oriented Retailer brand):

H 1 (a) Merchandise attributes significantly influence customers buying PR.

H 1 (b) Merchandise attributes significantly influence customers buying QR (Quality-oriented Retailer brand).

Services

As one of the most important store image components, services consist of many different subcomponents such as staff service, return policy, choice of payment methods, delivery reliability, opening hours, and so forth. These factors have been frequently measured to explore store image formation process by many authors (e.g. Myers, 1960; Kunkel and Berry, 1968).

Compared to hypermarket/discount stores without sales personnel at a store floor in the UK, multiple retailers like E-Mart, Tesco Korea, and Lotte-Mart, including department stores such as Hyundai, Shinsegae and so on in Korea, have placed the store staff sent by manufacturers, in order to replenish products on shelves and serve or stimulate customers to buy them (Cho, 2009). Although retailers adopted a self-service concept, in fact, Korean shoppers have been served at many service points by younger store staff such as parking area, information desk, selling floor, and the like, as confirmed by the field survey done by the authors. There is no doubt that image produced by store personnel like politeness, kindness, a decent appearance, product knowledge, and service mind are considered as part of store image formation processes. As the founder of Wal-Mart emphasised that greeting was a good way to communicate with customers, the politeness, manner, appearance, and taking skills of shopfloor personnel play an important role in making customers favourable to a store. Also, together with store cleanness, whether store staffs on the shop floor wear uniform influences the store image formation process of customers.

Also, regarding payment methods, it is widely accepted that M & S (Marksand Spencer) lost its own customers because of the late acceptance of other credit cards. It means that credit card service was one of the important service methods which retailers could compete with other retailers in those days, although it has been currently accepted by every retailer in Korea, irrespective of store size or retail formats, owing to a legal regulation.

Unlike a hard discount store for mat like Aldi and Lidle, German-based retailers, of course, most retailers have made a considerable effort to satisfy their customers with sophisticated delivery service system. Furthermore, it will be difficult to expect what kind of service retailers will create to differentiate them from their competitors in the future. In recent, with the increasing number of customers using a smart mobile phone, Korean retailers have introduced unexpected services such as price comparison service, delivery track service and cooking tips. These services are closely related to the store image development process of retailers (e.g. Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986).

On the other hand, opening hours are regarded as the element influencing shopping convenience, because of flexible labour time (McGoldrick, 2002). Thanks to the sophisticated information technology in the Korean marketplace, retailers can flexibly operate opening hours with less investment than ever before. As an innovative marketing vehicle to overcome limited shopping time, it is found that

Korean retailers have adopted the Smart-phone system which customers can buy whatever they want on the phone without directly visiting stores, while moving from working place to home or vice versa. It means that opening hours cannot become a shopping barrier any more.

There are also many different types of convenience subcomponents, like safety of area, desirable locations, proximity of other stores, and general ease of use. That is why most retailers have placed security guards on the shop floor, with the aim of preventing customer losses and protecting customers from unexpected accidents within a store. Although many academic authors have been interested in identifying the extent to which services influence a customer's perception associated with store personality, there is little literature looking at the roles of services in encouraging or discouraging customers to buy retailer brand products. In other words, even though it is possible to think that the subcomponents of services influence retailer brand customers, there is no evidence to demonstrate it. Furthermore, how the customers react to different retailer brand types has attracted less attention. Nevertheless, Manez et al. (2011) argued that higher quality services should be used to strategically sell higher quality products. Consequently, the research postulates that:

H 2 (a) Services rarely affect customers buying PR

H 2 (b) Services are closely related to customers buying QR

Physical facilities

There are many physical facilities provided by retailers, such as location, parking, store layout, ease of circulation, ease of finding products, elevators, moving walkers, trolley, and the like. As noted by many authors (e.g. Browns, 1987; Clarke and Rowley, 1995; Lord and Lundregan, 1999), a location issue amongst convenience subcomponents is regarded as one of the most important factors to succeed in the retailing sector. In other words, it can be interpreted that store accessibility or adjacency from a house or a working place to a store might significantly influence customers when selecting a shopping destination. In spite of public investment in both improving road networks and increasing use of public transport, many shoppers who want to visit a store with a car take account of accessibility (McGoldrick, 2002). When it comes to the evaluation of accessibility, there are a large number of criteria, such as public transport, traffic congestion, difficult manoeuvres and traffic signals (e.g. Kurose and Hagishimsa, 1995; Hass-Klau et al., 1999). Whether store location is perceived to be convenient or not is closely associated with the image formation of retailers or stores. Similarly, Collins-Doddand Lindley (2003) stressed that location would play an important role in making customers perceive retailer brands, whilst retailer brands might be used as a good method to take competitive advantages in a fierce market with strong locational competition.

With the increasing number of shoppers with a car, parking convenience has been considered as one of the important criteria, when choosing a retailer. In particular, the authors found through the field research that hypermarket/discount stores have provided women drivers with dedicated parking space, in accordance with the rapid growth of women driver rate, of course, in terms of service. Given that women dominate shopping for the most part, this service might be welcomed, and further, attract more female customers with a car. Unlike stores with outdoor parking area like Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda in the UK, retailers researched by the authors have operated their parking area within buildings, because of higher land prices. It is, thus, relatively difficult to park a car in an indoor parking area, due to narrow pathway. As for beginner drivers, this issue should be one of the most impressive subcomponents of store image.

As much as location, many authors have paid considerable attention into store layout issue to explore the formation process of store image (Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Lindquist, 1974; McGoldrick, 2002). As a representative subcomponent within physical facilities, store layout has been examined by many retail practitioners in Japan, in terms of sales volume improvement (e.g. Atsumi, 1992). The store layout is not only concerned about store image, but also closely related to how long customers stay at a store. In the past, it was accepted that differently operating the directions of escalators or moving walkers up and down could make a contribution to the increase of sales revenue, as a wisdom in the retailing sector, although it has been abandoned by some retailers, because customers claimed that it was an inconvenient layout. As Dick et al. (1996) pointed, time-limited customers might prefer a store with the layout considering the time savings afforded to hurried consumers and convenient store layout is able to stimulate their store loyalty. The store layout of hypermarket/discount stores, supermarkets, and convenience stores is characterised by line-grid types, which is easy to find products, unlike the department stores adopting racetrack types that emphasise exploration (Levy and Weitz, 2004). Owing to grid layout, it is relatively easier to find products customers want at grocery stores than department stores or speciality shops. However, some retail operators like Donquijo the, a Japanese retailer, have a tendency to make customers move around the entire shop floors to find products they want on purpose, with the aim of improving sales volume, because they believe that the longer customers stay at a store, the more sales volume increases. In recent, it has, however, been difficult to find such a retailer in Korea.

Whether shoppers can easily move throughout the entire store is an influential factor making customers favourable to the store. Needless to say, narrow main aisles tend to make shoppers frustrated whenever passing neighbour shoppers. Consequently, they might form negative store image and further, leave the store. That is to say, in order for a retailer to enhance space productivity, narrowing aisles might probably provoke sales volume decrease, due to unfavourable store image.

From a customer's point of view, it would be expected that spending time and efforts on going up and down stairs without lifts, escalators, or moving walkers at a store would be perceived as one of the terrible shopping experiences, although there is little literature related to those infrastructures as physical facilities. When currently establishing stores, installing those equipments is regarded as a basic condition to attract customers. Nonetheless, whether a retailer installs them at a desirable location within a store is directly associated with shopping convenience experienced by customers. It should be, thus, noted that the store image formed by shopping experiences provided by physical facilities might affect retailer brand customer attitudes.

In addition, McGoldrick (2002) highlighted that toilets, fitting rooms, smoking areas and restaurant/cafés as part of store infrastructures affect the store image of customers from a customer's point of view. These additional spaces for customers might be able to make customers feel better during shopping. The research, thus, hypothesises that:

H 3(a) Physical facilities strongly affect customers buying PR
H 3 (b) Physical facilities rarely affect customers buying QR

Institutional image

This item is based on both visible and invisible factors such as trustworthy, reliability, company philosophy, corporate image/reputation, store name, after service, store atmosphere, social class appeal, and corporate ethics, as proposed by McGoldrick (2002) and Lindquist (1974). As mentioned earlier, these elements are interrelated with each other when customers evaluate store image components. Accordingly, it is difficult to investigate these factors independently. Even though the authors have investigated the degree of each influence, institutional image is a complicated construct, that is, a mixed invisible shape in a customer's mind. Generally speaking, this item might be able to be formed by extrinsiccues such as advertising, public relation, mass media, and additional marketing activities provided by retailers, partly together with intrinsic cues like service quality. It is, therefore, difficult to distinguish the degree of these influences on customers from other items. Nevertheless, considerable efforts were made to identify their effects in this research.

With the increasing discretionary income of shoppers, it is natural that customers want to be recognised as a shopper at a higher social class. That is why many authors have been interested in this issue. Whether shoppers can feel themselves in a better status by shopping environment is closely related to store image formation (Lindquist, 1974). It is, furthermore, demonstrated that retailer brand consumption is associated with the awareness of social class groups. As evidence, British customers are more likely to avoid purchasing retailer brands for guests visiting their house, although customers buy them for their family (e.g. Livesey and Lennon, 1978). Even though British people get favourable store image to a particular retailer, they tend to avoid serving a retailer brand tea to visitors. Consequently, it has become apparent that buying retailer brands is rarely related to a social status improvement issue.

Rich and Portis (1964) measured the degree of store reputation as well as reliability when studying the store image of a department store. Reliability can be formed by the information gathered through a variety of sources like friends, magazines, news as well as shopping experiences at a store, whilst a retailer's reputation is regarded as a signal that summarises its past behaviour to forecast future actions from a customer's point of view(e.g. Martenson, 2007). Rather than indirect experiences, customers tend to rely on their experiences such as return. Of course, if a retailer does not adopt return policies, customers might not trust the retailer, and further, go to its competitors with distrust, irrespective of product quality, because of the customer perception developed by the above environmental factors.

Owing to the increasing market power of retailers, many authors have paid considerable attention to business ethics or corporate responsibility (e.g. Dubinsky and Levy, 1985). According to The Telegraph (2008), Tesco UK dropped Zimbabwe products, because of political crisis, that is, Tesco announced that the company could not deal with the products made under Mugabe's tyranny, and further, emphasised that the products Tesco has sold should be produced under an internationally-recognised regime. This trend spread out over British retailers. There is, also, another example happened in Japan in 1999. When one of the largest dairy manufacturers, Meiji Dairy, supplied defective milk products, most Japanese retailers stopped trading with the company to protect their customers from food poisoning. These examples imply that efforts to domestically or internationally take responsibility for social or political issues are more likely to make customers favourable to stores, in terms of retailer reputation, reliability, corporate ethics and the like.

After purchasing products, if customers are faced with unexpected product-related problems like physical defect and repair, they will need additional services from retailers or producers. How retailers deal with customers' requirements is the extension of making an effort to satisfy customers after selling products from a retailer's point of view. In case of food products, its process to satisfy unhappy customers might be straightforward, whilst in case of durable goods, particularly electronic goods such as TV, computer, refrigerator, air conditioner and the forth might need more sophisticated after services. Without these services, customers would hesitate to purchase them, and form negative store image.

Store atmosphere has been given much attention by many authors (e.g. Martineau, 1958; Arons, 1961; Kunkel and Berry, 1968). It is necessary to look at what kind of subcomponent is included in this item, because there are different views, according to authors' perspectives. As an example, a store layout was regarded as part of store atmosphere formation, because a good layout can convey good image to customers (e.g. McDougall and Fry, 1974), although this is involved in physical facilities. Associated with store atmosphere, shopping pleasant/unpleasant, the degree of store-crowded, in-store display except for promotion display, visual communications, lighting, colours, music, scent, interior/exterior décor, basic/stylish, and the like are given much attention.

With respect to consumer behaviours buying products at a store, Donovan et al. (1994) stated that pleasantness customers experienced the products or services provided by retailers was one of the paramount predictors to measure willingness to spend time as well as money at a store than originally planned. It should be, thus, noted that pleasure felt by customers, that is, shopping environment is more likely to encourage shoppers to stay at a store. Similarly, Holbrook and Gardner (1993) proposed in a study of music listening that serving music to customers within a store was a good method to make purchasers pleasant. Furthermore, it is recommended that aroma, lighting, touching, colouring, sound including music are a good method to stimulate customers to impulsively buy more products, while staying at a store (e.g. Truley and Milliman, 2000; Babin and Att away, 2000 Mattila and Wirtz, 2001). Store atmosphere-related literature commonly argued that those elements could make customers feel better or amazing by providing unexpected shopping atmosphere and play as a stimuli to encourage customers to buy more products.

Similarly, Mattila and Wirtz (2001) found that customers positively evaluated their shopping experiences, when ambient scent and background music at a store were matched to customer preferences. Lighting can be used to highlight product display and promotional areas, sculpt selling spaces, and further, capture a customer's psychological mood or feeling that strengthens store image (Levy and Weitz, 2004).

According to the prior research conducted by Semeijn et al. (2004), store atmosphere is closely related to retailer brand proneness at a store. Nevertheless, their research did not mention how store atmosphere differently affects customers buying PR or QR, that is to say, they overlooked how store atmosphere components influence customers choosing quality-oriented retailer brands. As noted earlier, much literature has focused on customers selecting price-oriented retailer brands like generics. In case of higher retailer brand quality, it might be expected that poor store image is not able to encourage customers to trust product quality.

Accordingly, this item results in the below propositions:

H 4(a) Institutional image rarely influences customers buying PR

H 4 (b) Institutional image strongly influences customers buying QR

Promotions

A promotion item here includes the following subcomponents: sales promotion, advertising, trading stamps, in-store demonstrations, store signage, symbols and colours, price reduction, seasonal sales, loyalty program and so on (e.g. Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Lindquist, 1974; McGoldrick, 2002, Levy and Weitz, 2004). Amongst the promotion ways, the trading stamp used in the past was abandoned due to the sophisticated information technologies. Since retailers introduced their own membership cards, the promotion methods manually managed by store personnel such as discount/exchange coupons, and tickets, have disappeared. To the authors'knowledge, it would be difficult to find the retailers using that kind of promotion in the Korean retailing market.

First of all, amongst promotion subcomponents, price cut has considerably attracted many authors' interest in exploring the extent to which the price reduction of national or retailer brands influences national or retailer brand customers (e.g. Grewal et al., 1994 Sethuraman, 1995 Aggarwal and Cha, 1998). Associated with price cut, Grewal et al. (1994) and Sethuraman (1995) argued that frequent price promotion would give rise to make consumers negatively react to a brand's perceived quality. Moreover, Aggarwal and Cha (1998) pointed that the price reduction of retailer brands to take customers away from competitors could not become a good marketing vehicle. As a consequence, in order to increase retailer brand awareness, the use of price reduction promotion should be reconsidered. It means that the price cut of retailer brands might not positively affect store image formation. In this point, it can be said that cutting product prices is closely related to the customer perception of a store, regardless of positive or negative influences.

Surprisingly, retailers have actively introduced in-store demonstrations such as testing products and food tasting in Korea. In particular, it is found through field research that grocery retailers, irrespective of retail formats, have provided customers visiting their stores with many opportunities to enjoy food tasting over and there at stores. Nonetheless, authors are less interested in measuring its effectiveness. Thus, the research asked customers the relationship between these promotions and the buying intention of PR as well as QR.

Due to the intensifying competition, retailers have invested a huge amount of marketing resources in improving customer perceptions. As evidence, giant retailers in the UK have continuously increased their advertising spending (Cho, 2009). Including sales events, price cut, and campaign activities, advertising has conveyed many different types of information to customers. In particular, the subcomponents of institutional image might be influenced by media or word-of-mouth. In fact, without exposure to mass media carrying retailer-related news, it would be difficult to know whether a retailer is ethic or makes a contribution to society. Moreover, this item is based on an abstractive concept. Together with McGoldrick (2002), Meenaghan (1995) highlighted that advertising plays an important role in creating image, whilst some researchers (e.g. Cunningham et al., 1982; Wills, 1987) emphasised that it was the strongest marketing tool to improve market power in a competitive marketplace. What is evident is that an advertising method can be used as an information source as well as an image-builder, given previous research results. It would be, thus, expected that how, when, and how often retailers advertise their products and services to customers visiting a store and potential customers directly influence the formation process of store image. Given the above arguments, the following hypothesises are suggested:

H 5 (a) Promotions strongly affect customers buying PR

H 5(b) Promotions strongly affect customers buying QR

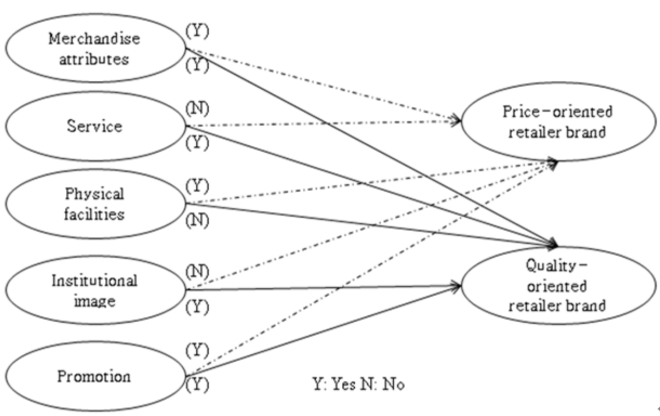
As mentioned earlier, it is unwise to say that the five items associated with store image formation independently influence customers buying products, including retailer brands. What is important, therefore, is that those factors are interrelated, even though the authors divided them into 5 categories on purpose. In other words, while each item influences others, according to the characteristics of each category, the degree of its influence would be shown differently. Based on the earlier hypothesises proposed, the authors concept ualised a research model, as seen in Figure 1.

Research methodology

Sample profile and data collection

The research explores the extent to which the subcomponents of store personality influence retailer brand customers in the grocery sector. As noted by Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003), the grocery sector in the retailing industry has accounted for 30 – 50 % of the whole retail spending. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining their influences in the grocery market.

Data were collected by adopting a self-administered survey method in front of well-known hypermarket/discount stores or supermarket stores as well as asking acquaintances to complete a questionnaire in their own right. Furthermore, the authors contacted households at our residences in person, in order to decrease data deviation resulted from the lack of data. Of course, before field survey, the authors pre-tested a questionnaire to minimize unavailability with 10 respondents. Furthermore, to assess the understand ability and avoid the inapplicability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with the three members of professional staff at Kongju National University (KNU) and 20 university students. Finally, the questionnaire was refined, based on their feedback and suggestions. With reference to the pilot test, some questions were deleted because they were deemed inappropriate and amended, because a few respondents were confused with retailer brand types. The researchers distributed a total of 200 questionnaires within two weeks in October 2011. In the end, except for 49 questionnaires, 151 available were returned in time to be analysed, that is, 75.5 % of all responses.



<Figure 1> Conceptual research model

In terms of research population profile, male respondents accounted for 39.7 %, while 60.3 % of respondents were female. It should be taken why women dominate research subjects into account. The female group was characterised by the major shoppers who are still responsible for housework, particularly, cooking in Korea. Age groups are varied from above "19" to less than "70", and further, the researchers avoided unbalanced population density, because mature customers are more likely to be loyal to national brands, as noted by previous research (e.g. Martenson, 2007). 20s respondents are for the most part undergraduates at university in which the authors work for, so during the lessons, the authors distributed questionnaires and took them back.

With regard to the questionnaire design, the authors categorised questions into six sections, including socio-demographic part. The first section is involved in customer attributes towards merchandise influencingstore image formation process, whilst the next part is concerned about services as an item affecting customers, followed by a physical facility section. The fourth section consists of the subcomponents of institutional image and finally, the fifth part is associated with a promotion item. Furthermore, there are four subcomponents using different 5-graded scales such as Likert scale, under each item, as shown in Table 3. In order to avoid the ambiguity of questions, the research integrated similar questions to one, based on the pre-test results. Finally, the last section is associated with socio-demographic questions to analyse the correlation between the degree of store image influence and them.

Analysis and findings

Reliability and validity

It is necessary to look at what kind of analysis method should be used in the research. As a stage of measuring the constructs suggested, the authors adopted a factor analysis technique to evaluate the constructs related to store image formation process. It was found that the values of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of the construct were significant (P-value=0.000), thereby making the factor analysis meaningful. In addition, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy test of a store has value of 0.864 which was greater than the recommended value of 0.7(Kaiser, 1974), and indicated a meritorious degree of common variance. In particular, amongst the subcomponents of merchandise attributes, quality levels were excluded, becauseits factor loading was 0.4, which implies that this figure does not contribute to research reliability. Unlike other constructs, therefore, merchandise attributes consist of three dimensions.

<Table 4> Descriptive statistics and reliability

	Factor loading	Mean	Cronbach's α
Merchandise attributes (eigen value= 1.061, % of variance=5.9%)			
Product Ranges	0.644	3.570	0.605
National Brands	0.673	3.420	
Price Levels	0.809	3.010	
Service (eigen value=1.259, % of variance=6.94%)			
Staff Service	0.571	3.680	0.666
Return Policy	0.545	3.540	
Delivery	0.774	3.660	
Payment Method	0.566	3.680	
Physical facilities (eigen value=1.17, % of variance=6.1%)			
Physical facilities	0.571	3.550	0.617
Store Layout	0.528	3.540	
Convenience/Parking	0.807	3.660	
Location	0.728	3.680	
Promotion (eigen value=1.421, % of variance=7.897%)			
Demonstrations	0.728	3.400	0.641
Advertising	0.423	3.450	
Membership Card	0.580	3.610	
Sales Promotion	0.529	3.420	
Institutional image (eigen value=5.736, % of variance=31.89%)			
Reputation/Reliability	0.692	3.640	0.762
After Service	0.597	3.490	
Store Atmosphere	0.686	3.680	

These results accordingly implied that the latent structural model has satisfactory fit and is meaningful to conduct out the research. Furthermore, the authors found that the eigenvalues for the five constructs were in excess of 1.0, and explained 58.8%, of the total variance respectively, which mean that the latent structural model is significant and incorporates as many reliable factors as possible, in parallel with the above results.

With regard to the research reliability that means the extent to which the constructs used are free from errors and are able to yield consistent results, the researchers used Cronbach's α to measure the internal consistency of the multi-items used in this study. Through reviewing the reliability tests for various dimensions of store image, quality-oriented retailer brands, and price-oriented retailer brands, the research confirmed that the Cronbach's α values of all of the dimensions were over 0.6, as shown in Table 4. It can be consequently claimed that they were all reliable.

Moreover, as part of efforts to increase or improve the reliability of the research, most of the variables used in previous studies as well as the questionnaire design were validated by the professional staff of KNU, before being administered. As a result, the content validity of variables can be acceptable.

As noted in Table 5, the correlation matrices of the data set were used to examine all potentially overlapping constructs. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), if average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than the squared intercorrelation result of the particular construct and other dimensions, the constructs can be accepted as valid. As all of the diagonal elements, which are the square root of the AVEs of the corresponding dimensions, were higher than the correlations between the target dimensions, the discriminant validity of all the dimensions in this study was assured.

<Table 5> Correlation matrix and AVE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Merchandise	.887						
Service	.420**	.834					
Physical	.407**	.524**	.855				
Promotion	.459**	.546**	.511**	.850			
Institutional	.392**	.616**	.479**	.593**	.868		
PRICE	.225**	.257**	.215**	.312**	.261**	N/A	
QUALITY	.161**	.198**	.167**	.215**	.147**	.525**	N/A

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

Test of hypothesis

The multiple regression method was employed with the five elements influencing the store image formation process of customers as an independent variable, and price-oriented retailer brand as well as quality-oriented retailer brand as a dependent variable. We set the significance level for this empirical study at 5 per cent, based on the results of statistical tests.

As the relationships between store image and price-oriented retailer brand are shown in Table 6, the R2 of regression model was 0.426. Given the R2, amongst the five independent variables, the only Promotion (P<.000**) dimension of storeimage was found to have a significant impact on price-oriented retailer brand, as its regression model is significant at p<0.01. As merchandise attributes, services, physical facilities, and institutional image did not have a significant impact on customers who are prone to purchase a price-oriented retailer brand type, the hypotheses 1 (a) and 3 (a) were rejected, as seen in Table 6 and Table 8. It can be said that they are not regarded as an influential factor, when customers buy retailer brand products, except for promotions provided by retailers.

Although many researchers argued that merchandise attributes, services, physical facilities, and institutional image played a paramount role in forming store image in customers'mind (e.g. Myers, 1960; Lindquist, 1974; Semeijin et al., 2004; Browns, 1987; McGoldrick, 2002), it is found that those elements are less likely to affect the decision-making process of customers on whether or not to choose retailer brand products in the Korean retailing market, regardless of retailer brand types. Why this sort of retailing context occurs should be mentioned later, together with the results of a quality-focused retailer brand type.

Nevertheless, promotion techniques are significantly related to customers who are prone to buy price-oriented retailer brand types, and further, the final proposition is available.

With respect to the relationships between store image formation and quality-oriented retailer brand types, on the other hand, the authors surprisingly found that its result was very similar to that of price-focused retailer brand types, as presented in Table 7. The R2 of regression model was 0.407, compared with 0.426 in case of price-oriented retailer brand types. Only the promotion (P<.008**) dimension of store image was positively related to quality-oriented retailer brand, as its regression model is significant at p<0.01.

Overall, like the case of a price-oriented retailer brand type, only hypothesis 3 (b) and 5 (b) were supported, while hypotheses 1 (b), 2 (b), and 4 (b) were rejected in turn, as seen in Table 8.

Findings

Needles to say, it is the widely accepted idea that the store image or store personality built in a customer's mind has a direct or indirect effect on when customers make a decision on buying retailer brand products, as noted by previous studies (e.g. Mitchell and McGoldrick, 1996; Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Semeijn et al., 2004; Vahie and Paswan, 2006). Furthermore, the previous literature commonly focused on exploring the degree of the influences of the store image components on retailer brand-prone customers, without distinguishing PR from QR.

As mentioned earlier, despite the fact that many aspects affecting store image formation, such as product attitudes, store service levels, retailer reputation and the forth, have been developed, through an empirical research, the authors found that those elements were not available in the Korean retailer brand market. Although the above researchers demonstrated that those factors were suitable to identify the relationship between store image components and retailer brand customers in the foreign markets in which retailer brand market shares were relatively higher, it can be said that applying such aspects to the Korean customers from a academician's point of view is premature, given that the retailer brand market is in its infancy.

<Table 6> Regression analysis on price-oriented retail brand

Dimensions	standardised β	t value	Prob.
Merchandiseattributes	0.077	0.840	0.402
Service	0.080	0.741	0.460
Physical facilities	0.021	0.208	0.836
Promotion	0.098	4.008	0.000**
Institutional	0.197	0.393	0.695
Adj. R2		0.426	
* = P<0.05, **= 0.01			

<Table 7> Regression analysis on quality-oriented retail brand

Dimensions	standardised β	t value	Prob.
Merchandise attributes	0.112	1.253	0.212
Service	0.084	0.745	0.458
Physical facilities	0.050	0.496	0.621
Institutional	-.050	-.449	0.654
Promotion	0.215	2.682	0.008**
Adj. R2		0.407	
* = P<0.05, **= P<0.01			

<Table 8> Detailed hypotheses results

Parameter	Description	Hypothesis supported
Hypothesis 1(a)	Merchandise attributes -> Price	No
Hypothesis 1(b)	Merchandise attributes -> Quality	No
Hypothesis 2(a)	Service -> Price	Yes
Hypothesis 2(b)	Service -> Quality	No
Hypothesis 3(a)	Physical facilities -> Price	No
Hypothesis 3(b)	Physical facilities -> Quality	Yes
Hypothesis 4(a)	Institutional -> Price	Yes
Hypothesis 4(b)	Institutional -> Quality	No
Hypothesis 5(a)	Promotion -> Price	Yes
Hypothesis 5(b)	Promotion -> Quality	Yes

First of all, the fact that the hypothesis 1 (a, b), 2 (b), 3 (a), and 4 (b) developed by the existing literature were rejected and the hypothesis 2 (a), 3 (b), and 4 (a) were supportedcan be interpreted that Korean customers are insensitive to such elements, when buying retailer brands. In other words, it is evident that the Korean customers are not influenced by many store image components, except for a promotion item. It is, furthermore, clear that they do not care about retailer brand types. Accordingly, those hypothesises are not accepted in this research. It is, however, not a goal to illustrate why this kind of phenomenon has happened here in detail, even though it might be expected that the retailer brand awareness of Korean customers is much lower than expected.

In case of H 1 (a, b), although Mitchell and McGoldrick (1996) highlighted that store image played an important role in making customers predict retailer brand quality, in consistent with Mitchell and Greatorex (1993), it should be noted that their finding was worthless in Korea. As pointed by Mazursky and Jacoby (1986), even though service factors are regarded as one of the important items to develop store image, they did not influence retailer brand customers in the Korean market. In the same vein, physical factors like location, store layout, and the like were also not considered as the important item influencing the customers buying retailer brands in the research. With respect to store atmosphere, that is, institutional image, Semeijn et al. (2004) believed that a variety of institutional image components could stimulate customers to buy more retailer brand products. However, the authors found that this argument has nothing to do with the Korean retailer brand market.

Nonetheless, one of the most important findings in the Korean retailer brand market is through empirical research that the Korean consumers are sensitive to a variety of promotions, regardless of retailer brand types, as expected by the authors. Rather than store image components which relatively need a long term period to be formed in a customer's mind, such as product attributes, service, physical facilities and institutional image, consumers tend to be influenced by short term marketing activities by retailers in Korea. Consequently, of the major five constructs influencing customers purchasing retailer brand types, based on previous research, the authors found that promotion-related store personality elements are closely associated with retailer brand customers in the Korean retail market.

Conclusions

This survey investigated how Korean customers react to retailer brand types with many different store image components, and further differ from consumers in well-developed retailer brand markets, as a first step in the Korean retailing academic world. What is evident is that amongst many elements forming store image, the only one, a promotion factor is closely related to the Korean customers buying retailer brands, as opposed to the generalised arguments that a large number of store image components influence the decision-making process on buying retailer brands. From an academician's point of view, this finding has provided a new insight into the examination of retailer brand customers, although Mitchell and McGoldrick (1996) have developed many measurement variables to identify the relationship between store image and retailer brand buying. Accordingly, the authors conclude that in the Korean retailing context, the empirical findings developed in the overseas academic world can be accepted in part.

Moreover, it is found that the Korean customers are not aware of retailer brand types, given that the four hypothesises were rejected, even though retailers have introduced different types of retailer brands. In addition, there was no particular difference between PR and QR from a customer perspective. Although the authors developed a few hypothesises and lacked their demonstrations, this research makes a contribution to understanding the Korean retailing sector, in particular, retailer brand markets. Also, the research confirmed that the academic theory established in foreign markets might not be able to be applied to Korean customers.

From a practitioner’s point of view, the research delivers a few implications. Retailers should allocate their marketing resources to increase the retailer brand awareness of customers, rather than focusing on introducing different types of retailer brands, given the research results. In turn, they should make an effort to make customers recognise the differences between PR and QR, in order to gain the proper product margins of QR.

On the other hand, the research suggests some future research directions, based on some research limit ations resulted from a sample size and the residential area of respondents geographically. Under the lower retailer brand awareness in the Korean marketplace, it would be to some extent unwise to conduct this research with sophisticated hypothesises. Accordingly, in the Korean retailing academic world, researchers should keep an eye on the Korean customers purchasing retailer brands to re-examine whether future research results will be similar to this research results. In other words, with the increasing market share of retailer brands, whether the existing academic findings will be applied to Korean customers in the future should be demonstrated again.

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