The Antecedents of Store Image and Customer Satisfaction

Banu Külter Demirgüneş, a

a Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Ahi Evran University, Turkey

Abstract

Definition of store image is argued to be useful if it predicts phenomena such as satisfaction, loyalty, customer retention and other attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Previous researches show that customers are affected by the store attributes and consider them to assess perceived benefits and attitudes. One of the biggest challenges for companies is to build a positive image. Knowing the alternatives which could be used to form a positive image is an important issue. A positive image which is created in the customer’s mind about store is seen to have a strong and positive influence on satisfaction. A satisfied customer is likely to be loyal to the store. Therefore, image and customer satisfaction gain importance in the stores which aim to survive. This study focuses on store image, customer satisfaction and the relationship between them. The study primarily explains these two concepts, and then provides a literature review on the researches related with them. The study presents researches in which store image and customer satisfaction are separately discussed, thus it also shows other variables which can be influential on these concepts. Implications for both store image theory and practices are discussed. The literature review reveals that store image plays an important role in customer satisfaction. Since most of the studies in literature are based on retail industry, in this study ‘store’ concept mostly refers to ‘retail store’.

Keywords: Store image; attributes of store image; customer satisfaction.

JEL: M31; M37; M39.

1. Introduction

Along with the changes in consumer behaviours in our country and the world recently, consumers’ preference regarding retail services have also rapidly changed. Profit margins of the retailers have started to decrease due to dynamic market structure and intense competition. Therefore, store image, customer satisfaction and subsequently store loyalty have gained great importance in the retail stores which aim to survive. The main purpose of the retail companies should be to raise awareness among hundreds of companies. And this can be obtained through creating a positive image in the customer’s mind.
The concept of image has an important role on the success of organizations. Organizations work hard to build the brand image of their firm and its good and services. They use advertising and sales attempts to create a favorable image of the store among the mind of the customer. Store chains should try to make consumer’s self-image and the consumer’s image of the store to be as similar as possible. Individuals use goods and services, including shopping behavior patterns, to construct and maintain their social images (Thomas, 2013:18).

When we look through literature, a great number of studies done about store image show that store image has a significant influence on the customer’s preference of the store, the satisfaction with the store (Samli, Kelly et al., 1998; Theodoris & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009; Meng, Liang et al., 2010; Chang & Fong, 2010) and store loyalty (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder, 2002:68; Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998). Beside the importance of store image, satisfaction has become the ultimate goal for marketers in recent decades. Particularly lately, increasing efforts is being focused on attempts to model and utilize this construct as a result of which many theoretical models and suggestions have been proposed (Rigopoulou, Tsiotsou et al., 2008:984). This study tries to reveal the antecedents of these two important concepts and the relations among them. It also shows the other important variables which store image and satisfaction lead to.

The focus of this paper is undertaking the concepts of store image and customer satisfaction. Several studies about these concepts that had been included in literature are defined. Following questions are tried to be answered. How could be define store image and customer satisfaction? What are the ways of forming a positive store image or what are the antecedents of store image? What is the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction? What are the antecedents of store satisfaction? What are the other variables that can be linked with these concepts? This study tries to highlight some of the important studies that will lead to future studies. Definition of the research by literature review in relation to the matter is considered to direct subsequent studies in terms of the creation of new models. Moreover, revealing the variables related with the concepts will enable wider perception of the matter. The study primarily explains these two concepts and gives a detailed literature review about the researches made in relation to these matters.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Store Image

Martineau (1958) was the first person who apply image idea in retail sales domain, and he called the force which can effect the customer decision-making as “store personality or image” (Chang & Tu, 2005:198). The concept covers not only visible attributes but also abstract factors. Symbols, colours, personnel’s attitude etc. are the key attributes on the perception of a store. According to Martineau, customer assesses store within the framework of a multidimensional benefit function. Concrete (selection, product quality, price etc.) and abstract (atmosphere, personnel service, ease of shopping etc.) attributes which form store image undertake a functional role. Store image reflects the store’s identity. Customer, on the other hand, prefers the store which is appropriate with his own image (Louis & Lombart, 2011:67). A positive image which is created against the retail store in the customer’s mind is highly important in protecting the
current number of customers, increasing their frequency of buying and gaining new customers. Because retail store communicates with the customer by creating an image. The business is able to introduce itself to the customer as it likes through creating the right image. Store image can pioneer many factors which will provide the retailer with profitability such as the decision of store election, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The retailer, who understands its importance, is aware of the fact that he has to use the image and the factors that form the image in the right manner.

The dominant attitudinal perspective that is taken in the literature treats store image as the result of a multi-attribute model. Image is expressed as a function of salient attributes of a particular store that are evaluated and weighted against each other. Store image has been defined as the complex of a consumer’s perceptions of a store on different (salient) attributes. Over the years different authors have distinguished different store attributes or characteristics that are part of the overall image towards the store (Imran, Ghani et al., 2013:76)

Since store image demonstrates a multidimensional structure, there is a significant number of studies on the attributes which form store image in marketing literature. The retailer can create a positive image in the consumer’s mind by knowing the attributes which form the image and use them in the right manner. Yoo & Chang (2005) classify the most important image attributes which are included in many researches as product (quality, price, diversity), store atmosphere, store facilities, store service (sales personnel service, loan service), store brand, facilities (ease of shopping, transportation) and promotion (Yoo & Chang, 2005:26). These attributes differentiate retailers among each other and include price, sales promotions, store atmospherics, quality, assortment (Hackl, Scharitzer et al., 2000). It is true that these factors are the main attributes that shape store image (Fazlzadeh, Sahebalzamani et. al., 2012). So this research outlines the features which can help retailers focus their strategies on these factors on appropriate consumer target.

Retail store can introduce itself to the consumer as it likes by taking these attributes as basis. Thus, the process of formation of the store image will have started. According to Kaul (2006), three main components are required in the formation of the store image. The first one is the store’s own image. And the one who will perceive the store and is called actor is the consumer. The second component is the process of perception and the third one is the perceived element. In a process where store related image is formed, the perceived element is the store itself (Kaul, 2006:6).

The first component which is called the store’s own image demonstrates a multidimensional structure. In the evaluation of the image, particularly components which are called real self and ideal self-become important. In its own image, particularly real self refers to how the consumer sees himself and ideal self refers to how the consumer wants to see himself. Another element emerges upon becoming aware of the fact that they are a member of a common group (Kaul, 2006:9).

The second element in the process of the formation of the store image is the perception process. In this process, there are two approaches which are the viewpoint of consumer’s value and compatibility. The consumer will select the store
which exhibits the best performance and provides him with the greatest value. And, based on the compatibility viewpoint, the consumer will prefer the brand which most resembles his own image (Kaul, 2006:12-13).

The third element in the formation of the store image is the object, i.e. the perceived store. This element emphasizes that store is not only a physical structure but it can also be distinguished with competitor stores through its other supplements as brand, name, symbol, design etc. (Kaul, 2006:26).

While forming store image, which attributes the store uses and how it can win back the favour of the customer becomes important. At this phase, the attributes which form the image are quite important. Attributes such as atmosphere, personnel, ease of shopping, physical appearance of the store are perceived as evaluation criteria for the customer. Several studies in literature regarding the effect of these factors and image on customer satisfaction is discussed. In fact, most studies related with store image (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998; Yoo & Chang, 2005) shows that firstly store image affects the customers then creates store satisfaction and store satisfaction leads to store loyalty.

2.2. Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the “consumer’s fulfillment response, which is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided a pleasurable level of consumption related fulfillment, including levels of under or over fulfillment” (Oliver, 1997). Satisfaction means meeting the customer’s expectations with the selected store; and the result of an evaluation made by the customer if he wishes to have more than expected. And store loyalty is formed as a result of satisfaction (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998:501). Satisfaction is a concept which is most addressed and concerned in the consumer behaviours. It is based on determining dynamic and favourite criteria for a valid selection. Selection is emphasized in the concept of satisfaction. Since this selection is made among the alternatives, now satisfaction has already the ‘concept of competition’ in its definition (Jaikumar, 2013:302). Accordingly, creating satisfaction always plays a role as a competition weapon. The pursuit of satisfying customers is considered as one of the most critical objectives undertaken by the companies. These companies which satisfy the customers have been shown to benefit from higher revenues and market shares (Fazlzadeh, Sahebalzamani et al., 2012). Identification and satisfaction of customer needs leads to improved customer retention. It is thus not surprising that companies spend substantial resources to measure and manage customer satisfaction (Imran, Ghani et al., 2013:75).

Besides the approaches which assert that customer satisfaction is associated with the corporate structure of the store in literature, (Thang & Tan, 2003) there are also approaches which state that the satisfaction that the product presents is a whole and customer satisfaction is a part of this whole with the contribution that the store makes to the product as well (Yi, 1993). In these studies which regard customer satisfaction as a part of the product satisfaction, this time, variables such as the performance of the product and the customer’s expectations from the product mediate satisfaction.

Satisfaction is also result from an evaluative outcome based on past exchanges with the trustee, with the evaluation based on past similar experiences. To save cognitive effort, people tend to form a stable set of beliefs based on past experience, which can be conveniently retrieved to infer new situations. Hence, a successful, and thus satisfying past exchange process which updates the customer’s confidence that the trustee will have the ability to succeed with future
exchanges (Fang, Qureshi et al., 2014:415). Similarly, satisfaction is obtained after evaluating the experience of using or consuming certain products (Dharmesti & Nugroho, 2013:57).

Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction after shopping depends on the comparison between the performance in the sales offer and the personal expectations of the customer. In general, satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the feelings of satisfaction or frustration as a result of the comparison of the perceived performance of a product and the personal expectations of the person. Since only dissatisfied customers can easily switch the product or the store, many businesses aim high satisfaction of their customers. Highly satisfied customers will be pleased and they will have strong loyalty to the business as a result. Thus, customer loyalty will be ensured (Kotler, 2000:36). What should be done at this point is to evaluate the influence of the services provided by the retailer on customer satisfaction.

Store image, customer satisfaction and store loyalty have been intensely studied for a long time both in western countries and Turkey. Most of the sources in relation to the matter (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998; Samli, Kelly et al., 1998; Theodoris & Chatzipanagiotu, 2009; Meng, Liang et al., 2010) set forth the result that these concepts constitute basis for each other. Copeland (1923) was among the first ones to handle satisfaction and loyalty concepts together and study on the concept. It is accepted that customer satisfaction has a positive influence on store loyalty and it is know that the trust towards the store and the store’s fulfilment of its promises are influential among the building blocks beneath this relationship (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder, 2002:68). Before arriving at the phase of customer satisfaction, the effective use of the components which are used for image formation and thus a positive image created in the customer’s mind are associated with customer satisfaction and satisfaction is associated with loyalty. Beside, most studies show that satisfaction influences repurchase, profit (Anderson, Fornell et al., 1994), in the long run, it leads to customer loyalty (Oliver 1997) and it helps to understand the future purchase behavior (Kasper, 1988).

This study presents the use of the concepts of store image and customer satisfaction in the previous studies through literature review. The study was limited to contain “store image” and “customer satisfaction”. The study mainly focuses on the relationship between the two above mentioned concepts and it also covers the researches where these concepts are handled separately. Most of these researches explain the variables which may be influential on these concepts. Thus, it is expected that this kind of a presentation can present a wider framework for the relationships between the variables while creating a conceptual model.

3. Exploring Store Image and Customer Satisfaction Relationship

Many theoretical studies about store image have been advanced in the past (Doyle & Fenwick, 1974). Most of the researches in the field of store image address the attributes which form image and the influence of these attributes on customer satisfaction, loyalty etc. assessments in relation to the store. There are many theoretical studies on store image, attributes forming the image and formation of the desired image in the customer’s mind as well as a great number of studies which research the causality between store image and other theoretical concepts. One of the concepts which test causality is “customer satisfaction”. This study primarily involves researches which take the causality between store images or attributes which can form image and customer relationship. Besides, in the studies
where multiple dependent variables are addressed, causality can be increased, research models can be extended and concepts such as loyalty, confidence, repurchase etc. can be included in this relationship. The study involves such researches too. Secondly, there are also studies in which causality of only store image and only customer satisfaction with other variables are tested.

Retail store’s success is hidden in the perception on its position in the market and meeting the needs of the consumers. Perceived store image can be used in improving store performance in a competitive environment (Samli, Kelly et al., 1998:27). Likewise, customer’s positive perception creates a positive influence on satisfaction and is indirectly effective on re-purchase intention (Meng, Liang et al., 2010:19). When considered in terms of store image, it can be said that the attributes which form the image create a perceived value of the store, and a positive perception is more likely to be effective on the intention.

Store image and store’s orientation towards customer relations is one of the most important ways of gaining loyal customer (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder, 2002). Customer satisfaction influences loyalty, and loyalty influences purchase behaviour in behavioural terms (Curtis, Abratt et al., 2011:5). Store image and the direction of customer relations create a strong and positive influence on store loyalty by means of positive influence, satisfaction, confidence and undertaking. The attributes which form store image influence the impressions in relation to the store (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder, 2002).

Among the studies done on the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction, Bloemer & Ruyter (1998) researched the “Relationship between Store Image, Store Satisfaction and Store Loyalty” and they made a literature scanning on these concepts. In their study in which they explained what kind of a relationship existed among the three concepts, they suggested a model which defines the relationship between “store satisfaction” and “store loyalty” by considering store image. The study showed that store image was influential on store satisfaction. The causality among store loyalty, store image and store satisfaction is also tested. Accordingly, store loyalty is shaped based on store satisfaction, and store satisfaction is shaped based on store image. It can be said that store image influences store satisfaction directly and loyalty indirectly (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998:499). Similarly Thomas (2013) has developed an empirical model linking customer loyalty to customer satisfaction and store image. The store image was seen to have a positive impact on customer loyalty through the mediating variable customer satisfaction (Thomas, 2013:18). Loyalty programs are designed to enhance loyalty where their effectiveness and relevance become more evident when a certain level of satisfaction is achieved (Omar, Musa et al., 2011:24).

Satisfaction is a measure of how customer’s expectations are met while customer loyalty is a measure of how likely a customer is to repurchase. Several prior researchers find a connection between satisfaction and loyalty. The relevance of satisfaction in gaining loyal customers and generating positive word of mouth is largely undisputed (Omar, Musa et al., 2007:367).

Yoo & Chang (2005) theoretically defined the attributes which form store image, and defined the most important attributes identifying store loyalty based on retail type. Accordingly, the influence of store image attributes on store
loyalty varies according to retail type. In big sized stores; store atmosphere, location, shopping facilities and service of sales personnel significantly influence store loyalty. In discount stores, on the other hand, advertisement, quality of goods, opportunity for credit and store atmosphere are the variables which significantly affect store loyalty. (Yoo & Chang, 2005:19). The stimulants related with store attributes such as exhibition of products, store atmosphere, in-store service, accessibility, reputation, promotion and facilities significantly influence the consumer’s preferences. Particularly, while the surroundings of the store is influential on the store’s performance (Kumar & Karande, 2000; Grewal, Baker et al., 2003); service quality creates a strong influence on satisfaction (Bawa, Gupta et al., 2013). Indeed, according to Donovan & Rossiter (1982), the feelings about the surroundings of the store can directly influence consumer behaviour. How the customer perceives attributes of store image is highly important in customer store choice decision. When we handle store image and the attributes which form store image as a stimulant, the consumer is expected to react against these attributes. Therefore, there is a relationship between with the stimulant and the reaction of the customer (Thang & Tan, 2003:193, 195).

Another study in which the causality between store image and customer satisfaction is tested shows that store image primarily influences customers, and then this creates store satisfaction and store satisfaction influences store loyalty (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998).

Store satisfaction is directly linked with store loyalty. The customer who contently leaves a store prefers the same store the next time. And the quantity of details (elaboration) is influential on satisfaction (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998:502). According to Bloemer & Ruyter (1998), the product diversity which is presented by the store, the attitudes that emerge based on store image and assessments positively influence store satisfaction. Similarly, Evaschitzky, Iyer et al., (2008) indicate that customer satisfaction is recognized as the cornerstone upon which long term relationships are built and maintained. It is an important predictor not only of customer loyalty, but also of the profitability of a company’s marketing activities. Most satisfaction antecedents are mediated by the customer satisfaction to customer loyalty (Dharmesti & Nugroho, 2013:66). Chang & Tu (2005) divided store image dimension into four operational variables “facilities, store service, store activities and convenience”. These variables can effectively predicted customer satisfaction and the customer loyalty (Chang & Tu, 2005:202).

In their study titled “Store Image Attributes and Consumer Satisfaction Based on Different Consumer Profiles in the Supermarket Industry in Greece”, Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou (2009) test the functional relationship between image attributes and customer satisfaction. The result of the research can be assessed in compatible with other fundamental findings in literature which are also mentioned above (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009:708). When we consider the heading “The influence of store image on customer satisfaction, loyalty and more generally customer evaluations”, it is seen that most of the researches are corroborative for the strong relationship between these concepts. However, there are also researchers who claim that store image is not sufficiently influential on the customer’s reaction, and this influence should be strengthened by other variables. As an example, in their study titled “Reformation of Store Equity and Store Image in Customer Oriented Stores”, Hartman & Spiro (2003) handled the concept of store image, together with the perception of store value. They state that store image is not sufficient alone
in customer preference. It is emphasized that store image is not sufficient alone to explain customer behaviours, and they try to conceptualize store value and increase the benefit of value in store activities. They also aim to make inferences to the parties by comparing these two concepts (Hartman & Spiro, 2003:1112).

In some of the studies which handle the concepts of image and satisfaction together in literature, variables such as loyalty, expectation, complaint are added among these concepts. Such studies rather aim to show the direct and indirect relationship among the variables. In their study where they created a multivariable conceptual model, Pileliene & Grigaliunaite (2013) showed that image directly influences the customer expectation, customer expectation directly influences the perceived value and satisfaction, and satisfaction directly influences loyalty and complaints (Pileliene & Grigaliunaite, 2013:110). Accordingly, conceptual model is primarily formed by image, and customer’s expectation and perceived value are added along. This study refers to the indirect influence of image on satisfaction.

There are very few studies in literature which address the causality between store image and customer satisfaction in different fields of retailing (except for food retailing). In this sense, it is quite interesting that Sondoh, Omar et al., (2007) applied the matter in the cosmetics industry. In their study titled “Satisfaction in the context of Colourful Cosmetics and the Influence of Brand Image on Commitment Intention”, the benefits of brand image on satisfaction and loyalty intention are tested within the context of colourful cosmetics products. In the study which was applied to ladies, the dimensions of the image which are named functionality and appearance significantly influence the commitment intention. The benefits provided by image result in functionality, being based on experience and positive relationship between appearance and satisfaction, and influence of satisfaction on customer loyalty (Sondoh, Omar et al., 2007:83). Here, we can say that marketers need to much more think about the benefits that image can provide the customers. Image, attributes that form it and benefits of image can vary based on industries. Another study which can be regarded as a different field and different viewpoint addresses green marketing operations of the business. The study deals with the reflection of green marketing and related operations on store image. The study which evaluates the business as associated with its environment friendly attitude, tests the influence of green corporate image on green customer satisfaction and green customer loyalty. Previous studies, on the other hand criticize that only corporate image, customer satisfaction and loyalty were much addressed but green innovation and environment friendly operations of the institution were not taken into account. Yet, green corporate image or environment friendly operations of the business can be influential on customer satisfaction and they can contribute customer loyalty (Chang & Fong, 2010:2836). Here, it can be concluded that the reflection of social responsibility awareness or, with today’s modern sense of marketing, social marketing applications of the business on image can create satisfaction.

It can be regarded as a different practice that store image and satisfaction are addressed in terms of electronic marketing which gradually becomes more important today. It can be said that store image in online purchase is an ignored matter in literature. However, while the customer decided to purchase online, he can be under the influence of offline store perception. It is supported through Lee & Tan’s studies (2003) that different strategies should be applied in online stores. Accordingly, online stores should determine a mass which avoids taking risks as their target market, and offline stores should target customers who can take more risks (Lee & Tan, 2003:884). In fact, each store type
(supermarket, department store etc.) even retailing without store, require different strategies (Ellickson, 2005). Here, in what type the sales of the store are mainly performed and their statistics are important for the store to define itself as it likes. Thus, satisfaction for both store and customer can be obtained only when the store’s position in the market is purified by customer’s expectation. In some cases, on the other hand, there are some exceptions which will survive and satisfy the customer in every format. For example, according to Singh (2013), stores in different formats can offer different service quality. Personnel in supermarkets can develop better customer relations when compared to hypermarkets and department stores. However, more communication means more customer satisfaction. And each store format should regard this as a general strategy (Singh, 2013:354).

The concept of store image is observed to have been addressed with store brand particularly in the recent years. The studies which deal with store brands are looking for the answer of the question how image is reflected in the brand (Semeijn, Van et al., 2004:247). Gradually increasing importance of store brand makes this issue important. Accordingly, when we consider the fact that store image influences the evaluations about the store brand, the reflection of the issue on product related attributes and subsequent customer satisfaction can be assessed as a further topic of study. Dodd & Lindley (2003) assert that when the store has its own brand, this will provide important opportunities in distinguishing the store from its competitors if this brand is also regarded as a unique brand image by the customers. Another study tried to measure the attitudes of the customers towards individual store image and their general attitudes towards store brand perception and store brand through regression analysis. The measurement results reveal a positive relationship (Dodd & Lindley, 2003:345). Likewise, Porter & Claycomb (1997) dealt with the influence of brand image on retail store image. Based on the results, brand image is the most valuable asset of a company and it is influential on the formation of a positive or negative brand image (Porter & Claycomb, 1997:373-374).

The above addressed studies are shaped over the causality between store image and customer satisfaction. There are also studies which involve different variables that can be influential on store image. Apart from store image, there are studies in literature which only address customer satisfaction as well. Most of these studies (Yi, 1993; Jayasankaraprasad & Kumar, 2012) deal with different antecedents that can be influential on customer satisfaction and some of them address the importance of customer satisfaction.

The most important thing in the formation of customer satisfaction should be finding the attributes which will ensure customer satisfaction and use them effectively. In his study titled “Determinants of Customer Satisfaction”, Yi (1993) deals with the influence of uncertainty on the process of the formation of customer satisfaction. Accordingly, in case of uncertainty of a product, customer’s expectation is directly influential on satisfaction. And in case the product is certain or it is easy to review the product, the element which is directly influential on satisfaction is the product’s performance. In both cases, positive evaluations on expectation and performance result in customer satisfaction (Yi, 1993:502-503). As long as there is no clear and objective standards at the phase of evaluation on consumption (new product, service etc.), the customer has much more expectations than before. (Cho & Johar, 2011:630). Recently, shopping centers (as big sized stores) have increasing value because of the changes in customer needs. Particularly
social changes (increasing in the number of working women, longer time left for entertainment etc.) create differences in customer’s behaviors (Forsberg, 1998:189). Some researchers suggest that people like to socialize outside their homes. Tauber (1972) asserts that certain groups of people like to shop at particular stores offer them opportunities to socialize with fellow shoppers (Fazlzadeh, Sahebalzamani et al., 2012). In addition shopping centers offer social facilities and the opportunity to satisfy different needs.

In order to compete with the factors mentioned above, the middle sized stores like supermarkets need to take action. One of the way is to segment the market. Because perception on benefits can be affected by demographic factors. Customers are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the stores responding to their perceived value. This is an important point, since perceived value is formed by needs and desires that changes with consumer characteristics. Zemguliene (2013) indicated that retail store image is affected by consumer characteristics such as gender and income. So consumers characteristics is another important issue that must be considered, while evaluating consumers’ perception of store and its reflection on satisfaction (Zemguliene, 2013:157). Thus, while intending for customer satisfaction, considering the demographic characteristics which are important for market segmentation seems as detail, but is greatly important.

Customer’s decision of a store is a process which actually seems simple but covers many factors and assessments. Even though the moment of decision seems to be short, the assessments made until that moment occupies the consumer’s mind. In this process those who provide strong and continuous loyalty with their customers are closer to success (Landsverk, Hughes et al., 2003:1). Customers use a number of store related criteria as preference factors.

As a result the underlying premise is that customer assessments of the attributes offered by a store result in affective response in the form of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In retail settings a variety of attributes may trigger comparisons and affective responses. The list includes price, location, convenience promotion, merchandise mix, quality, store design, atmosphere (Babakus &Bienstock, 2004:717). These variables have been identified as the main antecedents of store image and most of them have been found to have impact on satisfaction, mediated by store image. It is also true that this relation is likely to shape other behavioral intentions such as loyalty, purchase intention and purchase behavior.

4. Conclusion

As a result of the studies examined, it is concluded that store image primarily influences customers; this creates customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction influences customer loyalty. Most of the studies show that there is a strong and positive relationship between the store image and the satisfaction with the store. Unless store image and the attributes which form store image are assessed in detail, it is quite difficult to talk about the concepts such as customer satisfaction, repurchase intention, frequency of purchase and so on. As it is mentioned in some studies, the store’s formation of its own image is not sufficient alone, and it is necessary to determine an ideal image or an image which is appropriate with the image expectation that the consumer wishes to perceive. Here, shaping the image factors as target
market expects by assessing the consumer’s demographic criteria can be guiding for the store. Particularly, the assessment of socioeconomic factors can substantially answer what the customer expects from the store.

Not only the attributes form store image and influence impressions about store, but also customer’s personal characteristics shape the evaluations on store (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder, 2002). Here, we can conclude that stores should be careful about the harmony between the store attributes which determine the image and personal characteristics of the target market while forming an image.

The relationship between the store image and satisfaction pioneers store loyalty in many studies. When a conceptual model is considered, there is primarily image or the attributes which form the image; and secondly customer satisfaction and then loyalty. Here, it can be concluded that satisfaction is directly influential; and image is indirectly influential on loyalty. As is seen, concepts such as image and satisfaction create a behavioural outcome. Such studies can be shown as example for the studies where multiple causalities are tested.

Some of the conceptual models which are defined in relation to the topic in literature also cover the variables which can be influential on store image, and then make assessments about satisfaction with the store. The most studied one among these variables is the brand image. Accordingly, there is a harmonized relationship between brand image and store image particularly in retail stores. And this creates a positive influence on customer satisfaction.

Most of the researches in literature address food retailing. This study also deals with the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction in different fields. Concepts of image and satisfaction are explained in the fields of cosmetics products and online retailing apart from food retailing. The attributes which form image can vary in such studies but the influence of image on satisfaction continues.

Finally, literature involves studies which only handle customer satisfaction and other antecedents which can be effective on satisfaction are discussed. Product related attributes is one of the most important factors. Positive evaluations on product can be influential on satisfaction. Likewise, customer’s positive perceptions of the store own brand also result in satisfaction. Here, it can be concluded that researchers can focus on store image as well as product, and both product and store image can be addressed in the conceptual models. Determination of the levels of relationship between store image and brand image on satisfaction can be assessed as a subject of a different study.

Knowing how to create customer satisfaction will also provide benefit for consumers. Based on marketing conception, knowing the needs and requirements of the consumers and creating benefits to respond them is the basis for being customer oriented. Indeed, being customer oriented is also one of the most effective ways to create difference among competitors. The study reveals the models which were used in the previous studies and the causality between which variables were intensely determined by literature review. It is supposed that the study will be guiding for the academicians who will be conducting researches in this regard and particularly retail stores in terms of the application of the strategies.
In future researches, the effect of customer characteristics on store satisfaction-mediated by store image can be supported by theoretical models. Varies demographic factors and important variables such as purchase intention, customer retention, purchase behavior and loyalty likely to be influenced by can be included.

References


