SPECIAL SESSION: STORE IMAGE – THEORY, RESEARCH AND REALITY: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF STORE IMAGE ATTRIBUTES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the second in the special session on Store Image. This qualitative research focused on identifying those retail store image attributes perceived as important to female apparel consumers. Results indicated that Merchandise, Clientele as well as Service, in rank order, were considered as most important.

INTRODUCTION

The previous paper reports on the status quo of theoretical perspectives in the field of store image attributes. Theory remains "theory" without empirical evidence. This raises the question as to how consumers perceive store image attributes. Although no universal definition of store image exists all have in common that store image is based on the consumer's perception of reality.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

The following research problem was formulated: What retail store image attributes are perceived as important to female apparel consumers and how do they perceive Lindquist's proposed categories of store image attributes? The objectives of this study were: 1) to generate and describe retail store image attributes perceived as important to a selected group of female apparel shoppers and 2) to investigate how this group of apparel consumers perceives Lindquist's nine categories.

METHODOLOGY

In this exploratory research, focus groups were used as method of data collection. The sample population (n=37) consisted of account holders who purchased apparel from a selected apparel store during a specific time period. Different age and population groups were represented. A facilitator conducted eight focus groups. The non-verbal quali-quantive Schutte Visual Scale was employed to quantify responses. Transcriptions of the focus group responses were used to compile composite lists of attributes that were refined according to Lindquist's nine attribute categories. Aggregate ratings for each specific attribute and attribute category were calculated.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The results were reported according to the above mentioned objectives. Merchandise and Clientele were perceived as the most important attribute categories followed by Service. Physical facilities were perceived as the least important. No attributes relating to Convenience were generated. Respondents' descriptions of Lindquist's nine attribute categories differed from those provided by Lindquist. Findings indicate that Lindquist's categories could be considered as vaguely defined, not mutually exclusive, and in some instances excluding attributes perceived as important to the female apparel consumers included in this study. It could be concluded that Lindquist's description and categorization of store image attributes should be refined to provide a more appropriate framework for future research and to assist retailers in the strategic management of store image.

REFERENCES

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