

The Influence of Store Image and Corporate Image on Customer Satisfaction: A Study in Petrol Station's Convenience Store Patronage in Malaysia

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Abstract. The development of convenience store in Petrol Station has seen a dramatic change where all players has now move towards a standardized image to reflect their seriousness in expanding their retails business apart from distribution of petroleum products. This study is unique in the attempt to understand the intricate relationships between store image, corporate image on customer satisfaction. A total of 250 set of questionnaires were distributed to shoppers of convenience stores attached to a selected Petrol Stations in Penang. Out of 250 questions, 205 were received. However, only 203 were usable for the purpose of this study. Interestingly, the results of the regression analysis show that store image had no significant relationship with customer satisfaction on its own. However, there is a significant relationship if corporate image is regressed as a moderator to show that corporate image strengthened the relationship between store image and corporate image.

Keywords: marketing, customer satisfaction, corporate image, store image

1 Introduction

The development of a convenience stores in the Petrol Station in Malaysia has seen a dramatic changes with the introduction of bold ideas such as incorporating the stores with the famous fast food chains, providing of complementary business, providing space for online banking machines such as Automated Teller Machines (ATM), Cash Deposit Machines (CDM), Cheque Deposit Machines (CQDM), Passbook Update Machines (PBM), providing of postal and delivery services counters and many more. since Malaysia's retail landscape and consumers shopping pattern are evolved in nature are changing following trends that are also happening around the world, there remains a need for studying shoppers' behavior. Given the rapid rate at which new retail formats have been introduced in Malaysian market in recent times, it is imperative for Malaysian businesses to understand changing shopping behavior among customers' especially with regards to their preferred point or place of purchase. With growth in disposable incomes and improving infrastructure, consumers have a wider choice of stores where they can choose to shop. It is therefore necessary for retailers such as convenience store operators to understand shoppers' motivation and to attract customers residing beyond the catchment areas around their stores.

The simultaneous appearance of the above developments has resulted in several convenience stores attempting to build their organizations into strong brands by rebranding their stores or outlets. Among them was Shell Trading Malaysia Sdn Bhd, a business unit of the oil giant Royal Dutch Shell, responsible for managing the sale and distribution of Shell's motoring fuels in Malaysia. Shell has re-branded its petrol station convenience store as 'Select'. Local oil giant, "Petroleum Nasional" or PETRONAS through its retail arm; "Petronas Dagangan Berhad" has done the same and re-branded its

convenience store as “MESRA”. The other oil companies have follow suit. The research centered on the patronage of convenience stores attached to a Petrol Station. Due to this development, it is imperative that the inter-relationships between the store image, its corporate image and customer satisfaction which is hoped to help the industry players to expand their business. Useful information from the study can later be used as a guide in formulating comprehensive marketing strategies or developing a program for marketing activities. This study will also made an attempt to incorporate corporate image which has been recognize as a new key marketing tools in the 21st century.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Store Image

The term ‘image’ is currently used in a variety of context such as store image, corporate image, brand image, self image, and many more (Jantan & Kamaruddin, 1999). Image is expressed as a ‘function of the salient attributes of a particular store that are evaluated and weighted against each other’ (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998). Image can also be defined as ‘the way public perceives the company or its products’ (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) defined a store image as the sum of consumer perceptions about different characteristics and criteria, and suggested that it affects satisfaction directly and loyalty indirectly.

Jantan and Kamaruddin (1999) examined image attributes such as locations, merchandise, price, physical facilities, promotions and advertising, store atmosphere and service of store which influences shopping behavior of Malaysian consumers. Their findings suggest that location and service have a strong impact on the patronage behavior. Store image in the sense of the store as a brand is usually measured as consumers’ perception on store performance. This choice is based on the notion of value-percept diversity, i.e. customers are likely to be more satisfied with the offering as the ability of the offering to provide consumers what they need, want or desire increases relative to the cost incurred.

Store image can be defined as the way that consumers view the store, i.e. their impression or perception of the store. Theoretical foundation of store images is found in theories of brand images. Brand image is defined as “the consumer’s perception of the brand’s tangible and intangible associations” (Faircloth et al, 2001, p. 64). Aaker (1991) considers brand associations as “anything linked in memory in a brand” and brand image as “a set of brand associations, usually in some meaningful way (p.109). Keller (1993) conceptualized brand image as “perception about a brand and reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (p. 3). More specifically, brand image is brand associations consumers hold for a certain brand and consists of concrete attributes, benefit values and brand attitude (Keller, 1993, pp 4-5; Srinivasan, 1976; Biel, 1993, Park & Srinivasan, 1994). This definition is adopted in this study to capture the convenience store attached to a Petrol Station’s images.

Store images in previous studies are closely related to the multi-attribute model. Martineau (1958) defines store image as the way in which the store is defined in the customer’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes. Lindquist (1974) defines store image as “a structure of some sort that is tying together the dimensions that are at work (p. 30)” and conceptualized store images as 9 (nine) key attribute categories: merchandize, service, clientele, physical facilities, convenience, promotion, store ambiance, institutional factors and post-transaction satisfaction.

2.2 Corporate Image

According to the marketing literature, we have learned that brand reputation has been identified as a perception of quality associated with the name (Aaker and Keller, 1990). At company level, image has

been defined as perception of an organization reflected in the association held in customer loyalty (Keller, 1993).

The corporate image is based on what people associate with the organization or all the information such as perceptions, inferences and beliefs about it that people holds. Translated to a retailing context, it is likely that a favorable corporate image increases satisfaction with the store which in turn increases customer loyalty. Image in the service marketing literature was early identified as an important factor in the overall evaluation of the service and the company (Gronroos, 1984; Gummerson and Gronroos, 1998; Bitner, 1991). Separated from image as a function of accumulation of purchasing or consumption experience over time, most organization also provides intricate and noisy informational environment such as advertising, direct marketing, or public relations in order to retain existing customer and at the same time try to attract new customers.

Corporate image is believed to have the same characteristics as self-scheme (Markus, 1977) with regards to influencing the buyers purchasing decision, such as good corporate image stimulates purchase from one company by simplifying decision rules. In this context, corporate image becomes an issue of attitudes and beliefs with regards to awareness and recognition (Aaker, 1991), customer satisfaction and customer buying behavior (Fornell, 1992). Corporate image can be an extrinsic cue for both existing and potential buyers and may or may not influence customer loyalty such as willingness to provide positive word of mouth about the product or services. Corporate image is therefore assumed to have an impact on customer's choice of an organization when service attributes are difficult to be evaluated. In some instance, corporate image is establish and developed in the mind of consumers through the process of communication and knowledge. In some journals, they sometimes treat corporate image as an accumulated attitude experience towards the organizations.

It is very clear that it is particularly significant for services providers to have strong corporate image to ensure that the quality of their services and at the same time stimulate a positive word-of-mouth communication about their services. The role of (corporate) image has become more significant when competing services are perceived as virtually identical on performance, price, and availability (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998). Therefore, in the context of services, corporate image serves as an important factor influencing the perceptions of quality, customer's evaluation of satisfaction with the service, and customer loyalty (Anrdesassen and Lindestad, 1998). According to Gronroos (1993:229) for service companies, a corporate image is 'filter which influences the perception of the operation of the company'. According to Dowling (2002) the corporate image is a valuable intangible asset of an organization that is difficult to imitate and may assist to achieve superior financial performance.

Even when competing companies or corporations offer the same or distinctive products or services, customers may perceive differences based on company or brand image. Thus, it is necessary for organizations to work to establish their corporate image that differentiate them from the competitors. A company's corporate or brand image should convey a strong and singular message that communicates their products or services to the customers and these requires a comprehensive and systematic strategies.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

For centuries, the notion of satisfaction has been a key component in the understanding of human behavior by various disciplines. Satisfaction has been used by economists to indicate the effectiveness of a marketing system (Garner, 1981), by sociologist to reflect a society's social well being (Campbell, 1976), by psychologist to indicate individual's emotional feelings (Rubenstein, 1982), and by public policymakers to highlight problems in the marketplace (Scherer, 1980). In the marketing literature, satisfaction has been used by marketers (e.g. retail stores operators) as a corporate goal and viewed by

consumer researchers as a disequilibrium state for triggering subsequent post-purchase behavior (Oliver, 1980).

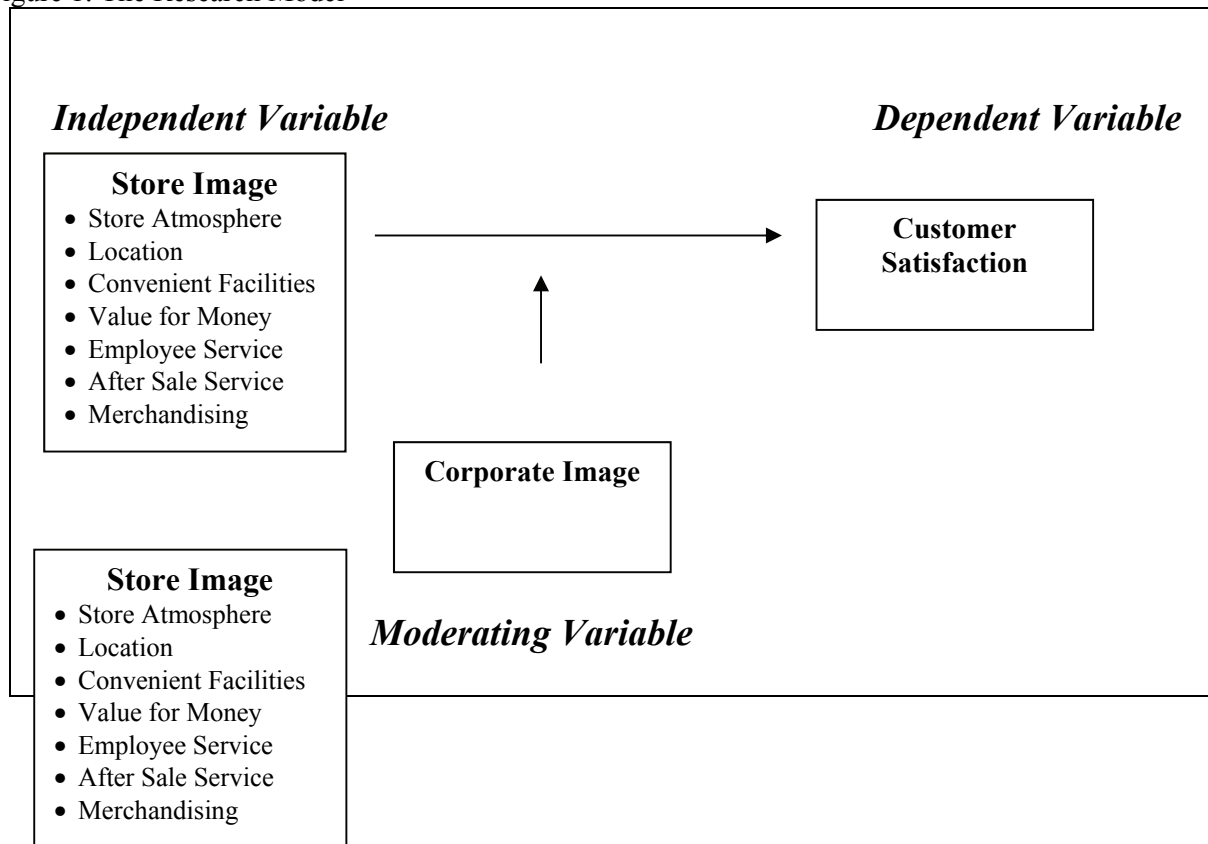
Customer satisfaction is one key intermediary objective in service environment. Customer satisfaction has also been defined in various ways. An important antecedent of loyalty is customer satisfaction. A positive impact of satisfaction is reported in repurchase behavior (Sambandam and Lord, 1995; LaBarbera and Mazursky, 1983), repurchase intention (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Cronin et al., 2000), positive word-of-mouth (Bitner, 1990; Swan and Oliver, 1989), customer retention (Bolton, 1998), and the use of continuously provided services (Bolton and Lemon, 1999). Customer satisfaction is a post-purchase evaluation of a service offered (Oh, 2000; Bolton and Drew, 1991). Howard and Sheath (1969) first denoted customer satisfaction as “a related psychological state to judge rationality between what a customer actually gets and gives”. Churchill and Surprenant (1982) suggested satisfaction is “an outcome of purchase and use resulting from buyer’s comparison of the rewards and costs of the purchase in relation to the anticipation consequences”. Oliver (1980) defined satisfaction as a “total psychological state when there is an existed discrepancy between the emerging emotion and expectation”. In 1996, Anton gives more present approach, he defined customer satisfaction as a state of mind in which the customer’s needs, wants and expectation throughout the product or service life have been met or exceeded, hence resulting in future repurchase and loyalty. Customer satisfaction has also been defined in various ways. After having evaluated on the service performance, customer can compare the results to the expectation prior to purchase or consumption of services.

Zeithaml and Bitner, (2000) defined that customer satisfaction as the customers’ evaluation of a product or services in terms of whether that products or services has met their needs and expectations. This satisfied customer would remain loyal, required service more often, fewer price sensitive and shall talk favorable things about the company. Customer satisfaction can be seen as a fulfillment of consumers’ consumption goals as experienced and described by consumers (Oliver, 2006). Satisfaction is consumers’ “judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under or over-fulfillment (Oliver, 1997, p.13)”.

3 The Research Model

The model consists of three variables, corporate, store image and customer satisfaction. Another variable is being introduced and incorporated into this model, i.e. corporate image; since all the convenience stores studied is part of established and prominent fuel distribution corporations. Customer satisfaction is the dependent variable and primary interest of this study. Store image is the independent variable whereas corporate image is the moderating variable between store Image and customer satisfaction.

Figure 1: The Research Model



Positive evaluations of image have additionally been linked to the customer satisfaction. Koo (2003) examined whether various store image components have a direct bearing on customer satisfaction towards a store in the discount retail environment. Many conceptualizations of store image have been advanced in the past (Doyle and Fenwick, 1874; James et al., 1976; Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Marks, 1976). The dominant attitudinal perspectives that is taken in the literature review treats store image as the result of a multi-attribute model where image is expressed as a function of the salient attributes of a particular store that are evaluated and weighted against each other. Osman (1993) suggests that customers' patronage behavior towards the specific store, in this case the convenience store is dependent on their image towards the particular store. The more favorable the store image, the higher would be the level of satisfaction of the customer. A study by Bloemer and Ruyter in 1998 confirmed the existence of strong relationship between customer satisfaction towards the store and the image of the preferred store. Thus we hypothesize that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between store image and customer satisfaction.

In the context of oil companies, their corporate image would definitely have an impact towards the image of the convenience stores operated under their flagship. Favorable store image strengthened by reputable and established corporate image would definitely increase the level of customer satisfaction towards the convenience store. Since the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction has been positively and significantly related, the presence of established corporate image would definitely strengthen the already established relationship. Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) suggests that when a customer is satisfied with the service or products they purchased from the store, the image of the company or organization will improve and this upgraded image will then influence satisfaction. Indeed, understanding the role of corporate image in the customer retention or building

the customer loyalty towards patronage the service of a convenience store in a petrol station should be further explored by the oil distribution companies. Thus we hypothesize that:

H2: The corporate image of the convenience store moderates the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction

4 Methodology

Population and samples consist of customers of a convenience store in petrol stations located in Penang Island. All five major stations are well known and internationally renowned corporation, i.e. Shell, EXXONMOBIL (ESSO and MOBIL) and Caltex. PETRONAS and BHPetrol is a local conglomerate with international business exposure. PETRONAS is a national oil company set up by the government to manage the country's oil and gas reserves while BHPetrol is a newly setup oil and gas corporations under the flagship of "Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera" or Armed Forces Development Board that took over the BP (British Petroleum) stations in Peninsular Malaysia in 2007.

A total of 250 set of questionnaires were distributed to shoppers of convenience stores attached to a selected Petrol Stations in Penang. Out of 250 questions, 205 were received. However, only 203 were usable for the purpose of this study. Hence, the response rate was 81.2%.

Construct measures were based on extensive review of the literature which consists of 4 variables, i.e. store image, corporate image, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Store image are conceptualized as "multidimensional concepts that a consumer perceives to be present in a convenience stores (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998; Lindquist, 1974; Bearden, 1977). Seven (7) different factors of convenience store images are drawn from previous studies (Yoo et al, 1998; Than & Tan, 2002; Wakefield & Baker, 1998; Brown, 1978; Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986; Samli et al, 1998; Wong & Teas, 2001; Timmermans et al, 1982; Lumpkin et al, 1985; Chowdury et al, 1998; Kumar & Kurande, 2000). Seven components that will be considered in measuring store image are Store Atmosphere, Location, Convenience, and Value for Money, Employee Service, After Sales Service and Merchandizing. This model is adapted for this study and the questionnaires on store images will have all the seven (7) components.

Corporate Image were measured based on 6 items developed by Bayol et al. (2001), which used the scale analyzing the customer satisfaction index in service sector. The similar measurements are being adapted for this study to determine the customer's perception towards the organization's under study.

One of the more popular ways of measuring customer satisfaction is by using a survey. Satisfaction surveys are a tool to collect data about what a customer thinks and feels about a product or service. To measure the customer's satisfaction, a measure developed by Oliver and Swan (1989) was used but the focus of study was modified to suit the subject matter under study, i.e. customer's satisfaction towards shopping in a convenience store.

5. Findings

5.1 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was performed separately to store image, corporate image, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Table 5 presents the summary of factor analysis for all four variables.

Table 1: Summary of Factor Analysis

	Store Image	Corporate Image	Customer Satisfaction	Customer Loyalty
KMO Measures	.576	.712	.517	.548
Bartlett Test of Sphercity	63.523	169.618	207.725	130.478
MSA Value for all items	>.50	>.50	>.50	>.50
% of Variance Explained	55.309	54.595	67.062	59.274
Components Extracted	5	1	1	1

The results shows Bartlett Test of Sphercity for the four variables is significant and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling is greater than 0.5. Inspection of the anti-image correlation matrix reveals that all the items have value of Measures of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) more than 0.5. Both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty do not have the rotated component matrix because there's only one component extracted, with eigenvalues of greater than 1. For corporate image, the rotated component matrix has 5 components. Table 6 shows the component analysis for store image

Table 2 Component Analysis for Store Image

Components of Store Image	Store Atmosphere	Convenient Facilities	Location	Value for Money	Employee Service	
Store Atmosphere 1	.603	.647	.780			
Store Atmosphere 2						
Store Atmosphere 3	.625					
Store Atmosphere 4						
Store Atmosphere 5	.664					
Location 1	.712		.477		.456	
Location 2						
Location 3						
Convenient Facilities 1						
Convenient Facilities 2						
Convenient Facilities 3						
Value for Money 1		-.500		.479		
Value for Money 2				.679		
Value for Money 3				.855		
Employee Services 1				.742		
Employee Services 2						
Employee Services 3						
Employee Services 4						
After Sales Service 1						
After Sales Service 2				.727		
Merchandising 1				.875		
Merchandising 2		.615				
Merchandising 3						

Merchandising 4					
Cronbach's Alpha	.652	.652	.652	.652	.652

Table 3: Summary of Mean and Reliability Analysis

No	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Store Atmosphere	4.31	0.25	5	.652
2	Convenient Facilities	3.34	0.44	4	.631
3	Location	4.16	0.45	2	.622
4	Value for Money	3.13	0.48	2	.697
5	Employee Service	4.43	0.29	2	.697
6	Corporate Image	4.24	0.26	6	.620
7	Customer Satisfaction	4.26	0.21	5	.500
8	Customer Loyalty	4.34	0.26	3	.643

For store image, the rotated component matrix has 5 components with 59.57% of the variance explained. A two-stage was used to categorized items to factors (Nunnally, 1978). First to make certain that a given item represented the construct underlying each factor, a weight of 0.30 were used as the minimum cut-off and secondly to avoid problems with cross-loadings, each item was required to clearly define only one factor (Snell & Dean, 1992). Operationally, if the difference between weights for any given item was less than 0.10 across factors, then the item will be deleted from the final scale (Snell & Dean, 1992).

Based on table 3, the Cronbach's Alpha score obtained for this study were all above 0.50, i.e. the minimum acceptable level. The coefficient alpha ranged from 0.50 to 0.70 (rounded up) indicating good inter-item consistency for each items.

5.2 Score Image and Customer Satisfaction

The results from the regression model shown in Table 4 show that only 15.1 % of the observed variability in business performance is explained by the 5 independent variables ($R^2 = .172$, Adjusted $R^2 = .151$).

The result shows there is no significant linear relationship between store image and customer satisfaction ($F = 8.186$, $p > 0.001$). The regression output is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Result of Multiple Regressions

Selected Variables	Beta Coefficient	t-value
Store Atmosphere	0.306	4.446*
Convenient Facilities	0.017	0.248***
Location	0.245	3.607*
Value for Money	-0.034	.624***
Employee Service	-0.020	0.768***
R^2	0.172	
Adjusted R^2	0.151	
Durbin Watson	1.555	
F-Value	8.186 ($p > 0.01$)	

*** $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$

Therefore, the result of analysis does not support *H1*.

5.3 Store Image and Customer Satisfaction with Corporate Image as Moderator

Multiple Regression was carried out to determine the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction moderated by the corporate image. As mentioned above, the convenience store under study are part of the large and established organizations, the reputation and image of the latter are well known. The regression attempted to determine whether the relationship between store image and customer loyalty enhanced by the corporate image of the convenience stores. The result of the regressions is as per Table 5 below.

Table 5: Result of Multiple Regressions

Selected Variables	Beta Coefficient	t-value
Store Atmosphere	0.203	3.153**
Convenient Facilities	0.138	2.164***
Location	0.213	3.357*
Value for Money	-0.220	-3.382*
Employee Service	0.127	1.952***
Mean Corporate Image	0.456	0.000*
R ² (Model 1)	0.278	
Adjusted R ²	0.259	
Durbin Watson	1.966	
F-Value	15.151 (p>0.01)	
R ² (Model 2)	0.408	
Adjusted R ²	0.390	
Durbin Watson	1.966	
F-Value	22.515* (p<0.01)	

***p<0.1, **p<0.05, *p<0.01

The coefficient of determination for model 1 The result shows there is no significant linear relationship between store image and customer satisfaction (F= 15.151 , p,> 0.001).

However, with the inclusion of corporate image, the The result shows there is a significant linear relationship between store image and customer satisfaction (F= 22.515 , p,> 0.001).

The value of R² for the model improved to 0.408 indicating that the presence of corporate image indeed enhance the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the results of the analysis support *H2*.

6. Summary and Conclusions

The objective of this research is to understand the relationship between store image, corporate image and customer satisfaction customer. Corporate image will moderate the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction. It is meant to find an answer to the research questions as outlined below.

1. What is the relationship between convenience store image and customer satisfaction?
2. Does customer satisfaction moderate the relationship between store image and customer loyalty?

The result of the regression analysis shows that store image and customer satisfaction on its own is not statistically significantly. The result also demonstrates that corporate image will strengthen the above relationship. In conclusion, customer satisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction.

In their research on corporate identity-image-reputation (Barnett et al., 2006) suggests that stores with favorable store image create customer satisfaction which in turn leads to store loyalty. Corporate image “is the result of an aggregate process by which customers compare and contrast various attributes of companies. This complex character of the image construct has in turn introduced a particular intricacy to the process of generating or creating an identical image for an organization. Businesses are aggressively and progressively looking into ways to coordinate their activities with the objective of trying to portray a single and established image.

This study extends the previous study in which it creates the connotation that store image on its own will not be valued by customer. While this is beyond the findings of this study, it is observed that convenience store operated by small petrol retailers do not receive much favorable attitude from the customers. Positive corporate image especially from large petrol retailers as confirmed in this study will improve customer satisfaction.

As a consequence of the influence of image on consumer behavior, this variable has acquired significant relevance during recent years and has become a key factor in the corporate strategies of an organization. Thus, it is worth emphasizing the growing interest of corporate image and explore into possibilities to utilize them as a source of competitive advantage. In fact a positive image will not only help the company to attract customers, but will also exercise a positive influence on the customer loyalty towards their organizations. In short, we may consider that corporate image is a strategic tool of great value for the operator of convenience store operators. Besides helping to achieve long-term objectives, it can turn into a source of competitive advantage. This is due to the fact that corporate image is one of the most difficult resources to imitate, as a consequence of the extensive time period that is needed to develop it until it is recognized by the public. Given that corporate image has the potential of influencing an organization’s competitive advantage and that a better understanding of image evaluations can be of strategic value when developing corporate strategies aimed at creating customer loyalty towards the service firm such as convenience store, an investigation of the interest that form the basis of customers’ judgments of image appears warranted. Several studies demonstrate that corporate image affects consumer product judgments and responses in a positive manner (Dacin and Brown, 1997).

The core of any business strategy is the customer value proposition, which describes the unique mix of product and service attributes, customer relations and corporate image that a company offers. It defines how organization will differentiate itself from competitors to attract, retain and deepen relationships with targeted customers.

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