

Study of Store Image Attributes Effect on Customer Satisfaction Among Malaysian Customers

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ABSTRACT

In today's retailing industry, two factors play the most important role, namely store-image and customer satisfaction. Overwhelming vast majority of changes in consumption patterns, lifestyle and economic as a whole, make retailers to consider these two factors and their correlation to obtain more profit and market share.

This study tries to find an association between store image attributes and customer satisfaction towards retail stores. In this regard, 7-Eleven Stores of Malaysia have been selected to examine this relationship and to determine which store image attributes have the most significant effect on customer satisfaction as well. In order to do that study follows the same model as Prokopi K. Theodoridis & Kalliopi C. Chatzipanagiotou (2009) which means examining the influence of six variables of store image that have been driven by Lindquist (1974) on customer satisfaction. In this work, data is collected from various resources. The primary data collection was based on a paper questionnaire and our target customers, consisting of 100 Malaysian respondents, who had at least once shopping experience with one of the branches of 7-Eleven in Malaysia. To analyze the data, SPSS and multiple regressions were used. The result of this study could be used by both designers and retail store managers to make a better decision about their store image and this could finally lead them to increase their customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Store Image Attributes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Store ambiance and environment becomes recently one of the main topics of numerous discussions to create a nice experience for customers. Engaging and encouraging customers to buy and recommend you to others (Barron and Harris, 2001; Kozinets et al, 2002). The concept of Store Image becomes important for the first time when Martineau (1958) talked about the personality of stores. This emphasized the effect of store image on customer's choice. (Stern et al, 2001; Visser, Du Preez & Janse Van Noordwyk, 2006). Through a store image, the store identity can transfer to consumers as a communication tool during pre-purchase decision making process. (North et al 2003). Generating this identity enables stores to compete with other retailers and creating more satisfaction and loyalty. Jim & Kim (2001) indicated that repurchase decision is an impact of experience that customers have for the first time in stores that could come from store's dimensions. Based on Hertman and Spiro (2005) Store image is a result of the impression of the whole perceived and expected experience in customers' memory that

gained currently or in the past. It had described that store image is a key factor influencing customer satisfaction (Bluemer and Ruyter, 1998; Koo, 2003). Also it affects patronage intentions (Heijden and Verhagen, 2004; Chang and, 2005). According to Anselmsson (2006), Hanson and Solgaard (2004), Carpenter and Moore (2006) indicated that product assortment has a significant influence on choosing retail format. Fox et al (2004) indicated that the US consumers are not sensitive about the price in buying from the stores. Price is important factor for customers to target where they want to shop (Desai and TuTalukdar, 2003). Also variety of product has an impact on store image. (Van Herpen and Pieters, 2002). Customers perception of service varies from store to store. (Kir Kup et al, 2004). Eroglu et al (2005) argued that the perceived crowding store has a negative aspect on store image.

Many searches have done by scholars (e.g. Birtwistle & Shearer, 2001; Kim & Han, 2000; Yun and Good, 2007) about store image and have published a variety numbers of dimensions for store image. Some research have focused on some certain element of store atmosphere like sound,

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light ,aroma to improve consumers perception about quality of merchandise(Baker et al ,2002), increase brand recognition and positioning and satisfaction(Beverland et al ,2006;Spangenberg et al ,2005). Staff is the asset of a store according to Oppewal and Beverland(2008) to make a strong relationship with customers and increase satisfaction . Thang& Tan indicated that store image that perceived by customers has an influence on store preference by customers. It shows that the store image affect store preference.The concept of customer satisfaction is a result of many distinct factors (McColl Kennedy and Schneider,2006). Understanding whole components of customer and organization or firm leads to better understanding of customer satisfaction. As a result it can cause an improvement in customer satisfaction (Naylor and Greco, 2002). The importance of clearly identifying the component of customer satisfaction creates the procedure and a template for business to grow easily (Haye, 2008). Customer satisfaction is a primary guide to store loyalty. (Caruana, 2000; Chang and Tu , 2005; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Yun and Good, 2007). Some perception about store image can effect satisfaction according to Anselmsson (2006). Customer satisfaction is a crucial element for both retailers and customers. Customer satisfaction has linked to other important variables like loyalty and customer retention.(Wong and Sohal, 2003; Gomez et al, 2004; Martenson, 2007). Chi and Qu (2007) examined the influence of store image on customer satisfaction. Net et al (1999) defined satisfaction as a result of perceived image. Regarding to review of loyalty concept store image according to Chang and Tu (2005) and store image attribute according to Bloemer and Odekerken (2002) is a key determinant of customer satisfaction.

However, there are several researchers have studied different aspect of satisfaction;it seems to key definition is more important than others. The first one transaction specific satisfaction refers to a sort of satisfaction about specific service encounter,so another name for his kind of satisfaction is service satisfaction. To compare another kind of satisfaction which is called cumulative satisfaction refers to the summation of all the experience that customers had during their purchase experience. Level of customer satisfaction is a key determinant for each firm to know how successful the firm is, as a result many surveys and investigations have done by different firms to find out the level of satisfaction and the key determinants of satisfaction, to have more of satisfied customers and

finally increase profit by keeping existing customers loyal and satisfying new customers.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study tries to investigate the relationship between store image attributes and customer satisfaction in 7-Eleven stores of Malaysia. Hence, the study takes customer satisfaction as a dependent variable in this research and elaborates the effect of independent variables namely store image attributes on this dependent variable towards 7-Eleven stores in Malaysia. Study focuses in Malaysian context to help marketer and managers of this special segment have a better understanding of their customers and improve retail industry businesses.

2.1 Gap of The Study

Based on several literature reviews, researcher realized that there are many researches regarding store image attributes component. In addition, in terms of customer satisfaction , store satisfaction and loyalty, previous researchers have done many investigations in different aspects but there are few research that tries to find out the relationship between customer satisfaction and store image attributes. Furthermore researcher has found that in the context of Asia in Taiwan or other countries some how similar researches have done but particularly in Malaysia in chain convenience store which is called 7-Eleven , there is no research in this aspect. Therefore, the study conducted to observe the relationship between store image and customer satisfaction in 7-Eleven stores in Malaysia.

3. STORE IMAGE

Store ambiance and environment becomes one of the main topics of numerous of discussion recently to create a nice experience for customers. Engaging and encouraging customers to buy and recommend you to others (Barron and Harris, 2001;Kozinets et al ,2002). The concept of Store Image becomes important for the first time when Martineau (1958) talked about the personality of stores Martineau (1958) who was the first one that defined store image towards retail stores, believed that the most important thing that affect customers decision is Store Image or appearance. He believed that store image could be affected by psychological elements as well as functional

quality. What we call functional quality is included in the quality of product or service, price of the product and the other factors related to quality of the store. Martinean (1958) indicated that there are four factors which most affect store image: symbols and colors, commercials, sales personnel and layout. We know that customers usually prefer to buy from different stores because of their different ways of the view. This emphasized the effect of store image on customer's choice (Stern et al, 2001; Visser, Du Preez & Janse Van Noordwyk, 2006). Through a store image the store identity can transfer to consumers as a communication tool during pre-purchase decision making process (North et al 2003). Generating this identity enables stores to compete with other retailers and creating more satisfaction and loyalty. Jim & Kim (2001) indicated that repurchase decision is an impact of experience that customers have for the first time in stores that could come from store's dimensions. Based on Hertman and Spiro (2005) Store image is a result of the impression of the whole perceived and expected experience in customers' memory that gained currently or in the past. It had described that store image is a key factor influencing customer satisfaction (Bluemer and Ruyter, 1998; Koo, 2003). Also it affects patronage intentions (Heijden and Verhagen, 2004; Chang, 2005). According to Anselmsson (2006), Hanson and Solgaard (2004), Carpenter and Moore (2006) indicated that product assortment has a significant influence on choosing retail format. Fox et al (2004) indicated that the US consumers are not sensitive about the price in buying from the stores. Price is important factor for customers to target where they want to shop (Desai and Tu Talukdar, 2003). Also variety of product has an impact on store image. (Van Herpen and Pieters, 2002). Customers perception of service is very different store by store (Kir Kup et al, 2004). Eroglu et al (2005) argued that the perceived crowding store has a negative aspect on store image.

3.1 Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a judgment process. It is about comparing between expectations and performance. Normally stores and retail industry consider price and quality and variety of their product as their key success factors to win other competitors. However using the traditional way of marketing cannot make them sure to be competitive in the market due to fast growth in customers need and quick develop in the industry and globalization.

The concept of customer satisfaction is a result of many distinct factors (Mc Coll Kennedy and Schneider, 2006). Understanding whole components of customer and organization or firm leads to better understanding of customer satisfaction. As a result it can cause an improvement in customer satisfaction (Naylor and Greco, 2002). The importance of clearly identifying the component of customer satisfaction creates the procedure and a template for business to grow easily (Haye, 2008). Customer satisfaction is a primary guide to store loyalty. (Caruana, 2000; Chang and Tu, 2005; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Yun and Good, 2007). Some perception about store image can effect satisfaction according to Anselmsson (2006). Customer satisfaction is a crucial element for both retailers and customers. Customer satisfaction has linked to other important variables like loyalty and customer retention. (Wong and Sohal, 2003; Gomez et al, 2004; Martenson, 2007). Chi and Qu (2007) examined the influence of store image on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction determines what needs to change and improve about service and products. (Chruchil and Superenant, 1982; Tes and Wilton, 1988). As such, customer satisfaction could be evaluated through four conditions: 1- Disconfirmation 2- Customer expectation 3- Product performance 4- Satisfaction. Parasurman et al (1993) used customer satisfaction theory to explain the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction. In addition he emphasized that the first experience of service quality can determine whether customers decide to repurchase the product or service or not. In order to reach an acceptable degree of customer satisfaction, customers expectation should have a balance relationship with actual perspective service. Level of customer satisfaction is a key determinant for each firm to know how successful the firm is, as a result many surveys and investigations have done by different firms to find out the level of satisfaction and the key determinants of satisfaction, to have more of satisfied customers and finally increase profit by keeping existing customers loyal and satisfying new customers.

3.2 All about 7-Eleven as a Chain Convenience Store

The origin of the company turns to Dallas, Texas, USA in 1927 when Joe C. Thompson, one of the employees of Southland Ice Company came up with this idea that can sell milk, egg and bread through his retail ice dock. He realized that this idea can help people meet their needs for

getting basic needs without going so far and he discovered that ice can protect these items from being spoiled. He and John Jefferson Green, together established the first known convenience store. After visiting Alaska in 1928 by Southland manager, he put a memento totem pole in front of his shop. As a result of attraction so many customers by seeing this totem the name of stores change in 'Totem Stores. Totem became 7-Eleven to reflect the new ideas of stores opening hours during 7 am to 11 pm all seven days a week and the unique and premier ideas that each stores should deliver the same service and product quality. By 1952, 7-Eleven opened its 100th store. In these days, store hours might exceed 11pm such as Las Vegas store, Fort Worth 24 hours stores which established in 1963 and first time of this experience was in 1962 in Austin, Texas.

The company started in 1927 as an ice house now has turned to the world largest franchisor and 7-eleven, Inc. has evolved to the world largest chain convenience store with about 7000 stores in the U.S and Canada. These well known 7-Eleven today is part of an international chain convenience stores, under the supervision of 7-Eleven Japan Co. Ltd, initially operate as a franchise includes more than 36,842 stores around the world who take over McDonald with 1000 stores in 2007. Currently in Norway for every 47000 Norwegians exist a 7-Eleven in comparison with Canada that for every 74000 Canadian offer a 7-Eleven. (International Directory of Company Histories, Vol. 32. St. James Press, 2000). Internationally, 7-Eleven licensees and affiliates operate more than 29,300 7-Eleven and other convenience stores in countries including Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mexico Singapore, Australia, Philippines, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

In Malaysia franchising has become the most successful marketing concept since it was started 60 years ago. To prove this claim we can refer to the increasing number of 125 franchise systems in 1995 to compare with existing 220 registered franchise systems with about 6000 franchises.

In Malaysia, the operator of all 7-Eleven outlets is 7-Eleven Malaysia Sdn.Bhd. 7-Eleven Malaysia operated on June 4, 1984 and has the great place and scene in retailing in Malaysia since the last 20 years. 7-Eleven Malaysia with more than 1000 stores still has the plan to increase the number of stores nationwide to attract more customers in different areas with various product and still keep in mind to be the first leader and innovator. In each store they sell about 2000 different products in addition to Slurped beverage and big gulp fountain and a variety of

services such as fax, photocopying, ATM, mobile phone recharge card, and looking for ready to eat products and Halal certified ones. Also they are trying to encourage community building and social responsibility framework to increase the level of health, education and wellbeing. Their mission is to be the favourite neighbourhood convenience store. Their mission is to serve all customers at premium level with high quality products and fabulous services in friendly, clean and innovative environment. On 6 April 2009, 7-Eleven Malaysia celebrates its 25th anniversary and opening the new store in Sunway Pyramid and still has a lot of plan and a long way to go with the financial help of AMB bank, Malaysia. 7-Eleven has excellent offer for local franchisor to join and operate a new store with the aim to increase the number of stores to 2000 in following years.

3.3 Research Methodology & Research Framework

In this study, questionnaire is designed to collect data according to variables which have been explained in literature review. According to the literature review, the operational framework is developed to act as guidance. This is a model including six variables of store image attributes as independent and cumulative customer satisfaction as dependent variable. We use the same model as (Prokopis K.Theodoridis, Kalliopi C.Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) have chosen which means investigating the effect of six variable of store image according to Lindquist(1974) on customer satisfaction. According to initial model provided by Prokopis K.Theodoridis and Kalliopi C. Chatzipanagiotou (2009) our six variables of store image are personnel, pricing, atmosphere, products, in store convenience and merchandise. We investigate their effect on customer satisfaction but in previous model four variables were chosen as most influence of store image on satisfaction and result is different in our research in Malaysia. Customer satisfaction is conceptualized as overall satisfaction like previous work of Bryant and Cha (1996).

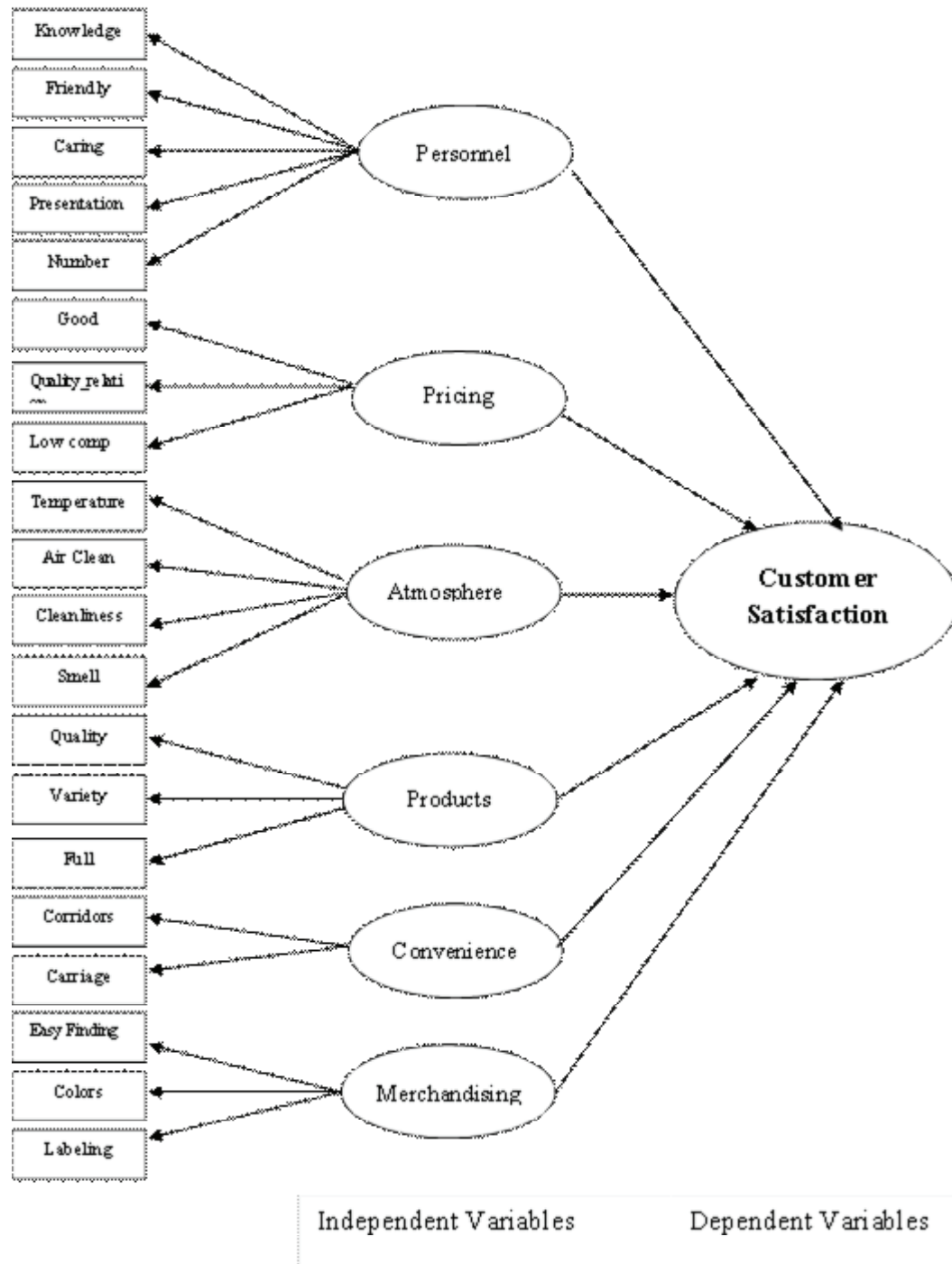
3.4 Hypotheses of Research Study

This research consists of six hypotheses:

H1

H0: A personnel does not show a significant difference on customer satisfaction.

Figure 1: Research Frame Work



- H1: A personnel shows a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
- H2
H0: price does not show a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
H1: price shows a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
- H3
H0: Atmosphere does not show a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
H1: Atmosphere shows a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
- H4
H0: product does not show a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
H1: product shows a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
- H5
H0: in store convenience does not show a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
H1: in store convenience shows a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
- H6
H0: merchandise does not show a significant difference on customer satisfaction.
H1: merchandise shows a significant difference on customer satisfaction.

3.5 Population and Sampling

Population size of this research would be customers of 7-Eleven stores in Malaysia. The samples are who buy at least once from 7-Eleven. At first 100 sets of questionnaire survey were prepared to collect information from our target customers, the questionnaires were distributed

Table 1: Demographic Analysis

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Gender		
Male	27	27.0
Female	73	73.0
Age		
Younger than 20	4	4.0
20-29	31	31.0
30-39	29	29.0
40-49	20	20.0
50-59	11	11.0
Older than 60	5	5.0
Income		
Less than 1000rm	9	9.0
1001 to 2000rm	41	41.0
2001 to 3000rm	29	29.0
3001 to 4000rm	13	13.0
More than 4000rm	8	8.0
Education		
Under high school	13	13.0
High school	27	27.0
University & college	41	41.0
Post graduate	19	19.0
Marital status		
Cohabitation	12	12.0
Married	22	22.0
Not married	49	49.0
Divorced	11	11.0
Widow	6	6.0

through them until 100 respondents were achieved. Questionnaires distributed face to face in some 7-Eleven stores in different states of Malaysia such as 7-Eleven in Cyberjaya, 7-Eleven in Kuala Lumpur and in Penang and more, gathering data started August 5, 2010 until August 25, 2010. Respondents are Malaysian citizen who have bought at least once from Seven-Eleven since last three months. Respondents have various demographic backgrounds but most of them are women between the ages of 20-29. Although the range of income in this research varies from less than RM1000 to RM4000, most of respondents receive about RM1001-2000.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The effective tool to gather data in this research is questionnaire. Questionnaire was handed to 100 customers. The questionnaire consists of questions which investigate about demographic background of customers and their experience of shopping at 7-Eleven stores based on research variables, their purchase satisfaction and frequency. Rest of questions ask about six proposed factors of this research namely purchase convenience, products, price, Personnel, atmosphere, merchandising. The Likert scale was used to rate respondent opinion which varied according to their evaluation from 1 to 5. Where 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree. The collected data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

4.1 Reliability Testing

The most famous way to recognize if we have the same result in different condition for the same sample is reliability testing which is used to find out consistency in group of data. Once α proportion shows 0.60 or higher is recognized the criteria for demonstrating internal

consistency (Uma Sekaran, 2003). The reliability of total Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha here is .936 which is acceptable. This means data and questionnaire is reliable.

4.3 Multiple Regression and Test of Hypothesis

It is used to determine the affiliation between some independent variables and a dependent variable (Pearson, 1908). Multiple Regression can be used to generate an equation to determine a specific ratio for independent variables. The greater proportion will cause more influence by this particular variable.

The greater overall R square can imply to the strong match between model and data.

- a. Predictors: (Constant), merchandise, price, personnel, product, atmosphere, convenience
- a. Dependent Variable: satisfaction

The correlation of personnel, product, price, atmosphere, in store convenience, and merchandise with customer satisfaction is analyzed. Table shows that R square is .339, which indicates that the predictors are counted for 33.9 of the total variance of customer satisfaction.

- a. Predictors: (Constant), merchandise, price, personnel, product, atmosphere, convenience
- b. Dependent Variable: satisfaction

Although the R square value is rather low, the predictors are significantly correlated with customer satisfaction. From Anova table and from model summary the p-value is smaller than .05, so it indicates that the whole model is statically significant.

Table 2: Reliability Testing

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
Personnel	.903
Price	.876
Atmosphere	.926
Product	.881
Convenience	.886
Merchandise	.947
Total	.936

Table 3: Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis**Model Summary**

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>	<i>RSquare Change</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>Change Statistics</i>		<i>Sig. F Change</i>
							<i>df2</i>		
1	.582 ^a	.339	.296	.52300	.339	7.938	6	93	.000

Each independent variable is driven from equations below:

Personnel: Total average of (knowledge, friendly, caring, presentation, number)

Price: Total average of (fair price, quality relation, low competitors)

Atmosphere: Total average of (temperature, air clean system, smell, cleanliness)

Product: Total average of (quality, variety, full shelves)

Convenience: Total average of (corridors, carriage)

Merchandise: Total average of (easy finding, color, labeling)

a. Dependent Variable: satisfaction

The result of whole statistics in this sub-section also shows that four variables of store image are acceptable ($p \leq 0.05$) including prices, personnel, atmosphere and merchandise, so hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H6 are supported. According to Coefficient Table (p value of personnel, price, atmosphere and merchandise respectively is .037, .038, .041 and .014). As β of merchandise is equal to 0.516, it has the greatest β of all which means merchandise is the most important predictor of customer satisfaction in this research and is followed by price ($\beta=0.126$), personnel ($\beta=0.123$) and atmosphere ($\beta=0.101$).

Table 4: ANOVA Table

<i>Mode</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1 Regression	13.027	6	2.171	7.938	.000
Residual	25.439	93	.274		
Total	38.466	99			

Table 5: Coefficient Table**Coefficient**

<i>Model</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval for B</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>		<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
1 (Constant)	1.886	.311		6.062	.0000	1.268	2.503
Personnel	.103	.116	.123	.889	.0376	.127	.332
Price	.110	.126	.126	.870	.0387	.141	.360
Atmosphere	.077	.151	.101	.510	.0411	.223	.377
Product	-.038	.168	-.047	-.226	.8210	-.371	.295
Convenience	-.153	.161	-.199	-.951	.3441	-.473	.167
Merchandise	.416	.166	.516	2.510	.0144	.087	.745

5. CONCLUSION

This study has tried to find out the variations of relationship between store image attributes and customer satisfaction towards 7-Eleven stores in Malaysia. In order to achieve this purpose, previous research on chain stores has reviewed, also to realize the concept of customer satisfaction and identifying its essential elements, study has investigated many sources. To elaborate the importance of store image variables and determine the definition and relationship and characteristics of each variable of research objectives many investigations have done.

The findings have summarized and identified several important factors as a conclusion of the study. Realizing the fact that, 7-Eleven store is a form of a single shop to sell daily requirements. The influence of economic growth and changing lifestyle makes this kind of store to grow fast and imposes them fast improvement. As this industry grows fast in the market we expect to see more numbers of stores gradually. According to researcher findings in this study although four hypotheses have accepted, the general assumption is acceptable and some of these variables are more important regarding the research topic, like:

Merchandise has the most significant effect on customer satisfaction and after merchandise, price, personnel and atmosphere respectively are important predictors of customer satisfaction towards 7-Eleven Malaysia. Most of the customers look for shops with different product and easy accessibility that 7-Eleven stores provides. The layout and location of 7-Eleven stores is also more attractive than other small, local supermarkets for most of the customers. In addition the base of previous literature, helpful staffs who can transfer information about products and product characteristics to customers and never ignore customers, add a great value to customers who need to buy easy and fast, as a consequence choose Convenience Stores to buy their requirements. Thus, customers feel more convenient through buying from 7-Eleven, they do not need to be in a long queue in comparison with big chain stores also their request handle faster and easier. Price is another variable which can influence satisfaction and as a result customers buying decision. For more customers price is an indicator that determines whether they like to buy from this kind of stores. However in 7-Eleven Stores price seems a bit higher than other regular shops and supermarkets but it worth to buy from 7-Eleven because customers believe in

the quality of product, its cleanliness and accessibility.

Moreover, according to previous researches, both personnel and atmosphere are other reasons to keep customers satisfied. The first impression of store image relies on the atmosphere and its appearance. Customers choose a store because of what they see and feel in that store. It is not only about cleanliness but also about clear shopping environment and attractable decoration. Then personnel are another key success factor in service industry. Keeping customers always in view and respect them, can make them happy enough to purchase again. Customers do not like to keep waiting, so handling customers fast and considering their complaint make them more satisfied. Friendly and trustworthy staffs create more loyal customers. As a result, the quality of service has a relationship with the way of staff treating the customers.

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