The Effect of Store Image Practices on Consumer Decision Making: A Study of Mobile Phone Retailers in Hanoi City

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this study aims to investigate the Vietnamese consumers' perception of mobile phone retailers' store image based on college students' perception in Hanoi City. First, to find out store image attributes valued by Vietnamese college consumers in Hanoi; second, to understand how college consumers' preference by comparing the well-known mobile phone retailers; and third, to provide both international and domestic retailers with suggestions for store image improvement.

Design/methodology/approach – The primary data for this study was collected through a web-based questionnaire survey with about 359 validated college student samples. The survey data was analyzed using SPSS. The factor analyses, K-mean cluster analysis, two-way ANOVA and independent sample t-test were performed to determine the important factors influencing choice of retailers.

Originality/value – This study expected to provide consumers' perception of store image and top concerns of making buying intention toward particular retailers.

Based on the results of this study, managerial insights and practical implications for marketing strategies in the mobile phone market are recommended accordingly.

Keywords: Store Image, Perception, Mobile Phone Retailers

INTRODUCTION

Imported digital products face the high competition in Vietnam, by eliminated tariffs on information technology products compliance of local industries (Doing Business in Vietnam: 2011; Maruyama and Trung 2007), create the attractiveness for this specific industry. Many retailers ran a series of promotions to combat the effects of the economic slowdown, and slashed the prices of many products in boosting demand, according to Vietnam Consumer Electronics Industry Report Q1 2010. Most of the electronic Vietnamese retailers are located in large cities due to higher income, and larger population (Loi, 2005), specifically, the phenomenon of the urban population broadens, which builds a promising market (e.g., Hanoi). According to the companies' website in 2012, it introduced the Gioi Di Dong (Mobile World), which is Vietnam's largest mobile phone retail chain, with 226 mobile phone stores and more than 20% of the market share

nationwide. FPT Corp. is the one of leading information technology/telecom conglomerate in Vietnam. Tran Anh Digital World JSC operates as an electronics retailer which is home-based in Hanoi, Vietnam. Nguyen Kim is one of domestic traders of electrical and electronics appliances in Vietnam and running hundreds of electronic appliance centers across the country. Vien Thong A is one of fast-growing retail chain-stores since 1997. However, as a result, local retail businesses are making efforts to increase their visibility amid a foreign invasion.

Store image has lot of advanced conceptualizations (Kunkel & Berry, 1968) as a key construct which is conceptualized as a function of a number of attributes. Retailers must ensure that they offer those products and services to meet customers' expectations. For instance, service levels, price perceptions and the variety of merchandise on offer (Hartman & Spiro, 2005). Logically, the more favorable store image attributes are, the more ability of store increase to attract customers. However, store patronage whether based on convenience, good service, attractive display and especially want extensive choice or the diversity of merchandise to be motivated to maximize benefits and minimize risks toward a booming developing country always attract researchers' attention in explaining consumers' shopping behaviors and predicting their intention.

Literature (e.g., Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Varley, 2005) which documented store image has influenced the individual's shopping behavior, store choice and store patronage. Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) reported a relationship between store image, store choice, customer satisfaction and store loyalty which implied the direct relationship between store image and patronage decisions (Assael, 1992; Wong & Yu, 2003). Other researchers indicated store image attributes have likelihood to increase consumer preference to ensure retailers viability in the face of escalating competition in the retail sector (Chang & Luan, 2010; Thang & Tan, 2003). Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) illustrates store image as 'the complex of a consumer's perceptions of a store on different attributes'. Store image appears to be a good determinant by 'easy to access store's website', 'easy to access store', 'store atmosphere', 'price', 'sales person services', 'promotion/information' and 'variety of merchandises' (Chang & Luan, 2010).

Due to the advancement in the technology of the Internet, shoppers can connect to the Internet by computers or mobile devices through peer-to-peer communication, online social networks and retailers establishing store's websites as a new approaching vehicle to their potential customers (Shankar & Yadav, 2011). A numerous retailers expand e-commerce system to build their websites combine with the physical stores to be the shopper-centric store layout and design (Shankar, et. al., 2011). By observation, the emergence of opportunities through Internet shopping in Vietnam market currently accounts for a small proportion of its revenues, because Vietnamese buyers prefer direct shopping instead of online shopping (i.e., immature to use credit card as online payment tool). However, Vietnamese educated consumers somehow tend to browse/surf online regarding product/store information for obtaining more word of mouth information among online communities or knowledge from webpages. Nonetheless, they still prefer to direct-shop in retail stores. More importantly, to establish positive image in both their physical store and store image may have significant advantages over their start-up competitors. Particularly, for a small business owners to develop a relationship and a bond to treat people who encountered moment based on mutual understanding, trust and pleasant interaction (Gremler & Gwinner 2000).

Meanwhile, Speece and Huong (2002) demonstrated that Vietnamese would put high consid-

eration on quality, service and price sensitive. Lichtenstein et. al., (1993) defined price consciousness as the degree to which the consumer focuses exclusively on paying low prices. Researchers demonstrate that there is a negative relationship between price and purchase possibility (Lichtenstein et. al., 1993) to enhance consumers paid more efforts in price-information searching to minimize risks and avoid making costly mistakes. Some of them act as a price maven (Sternquist et al., 2004) in willingness to search for low prices across time within stores/websites. Importantly, price becomes the key factor when consumers choose between shopping outlets in Hanoi (Maryama & Trung, 2007). Due to the rapid growth in number of outlets and selling space of electronics retailers reveal that the higher demand, the sector in Vietnam is already under intensive competition in first-tier cities (Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City), thus, to understand what attracts Vietnamese consumers to visit and to patronize a mobile phone store remains critical. Interestingly, the published researches on Vietnam mobile phone industry and consumer's perception of store image were underexposed. Indeed, the purpose of this study aims to investigate Vietnamese consumers' perception of mobile phone retailers' store image based on users' (e.g., college students) perspective in Hanoi City.

To address these deficiencies, firstly, what store image attributes valued by users' perception in Hanoi would be explored. Secondly, in comparing the well-known mobile phone retailers, the information sourcing and price consciousness effect on users' preference on physical store's image was investigated. Finally, the findings provide a better understanding of consumer attitudes and preferences with reference to the store image which could prove valuable to Vietnam retailers in designing and formulating relevant marketing strategies as a guideline of store image improvement for both international and domestic retailers. Therefore, the conceptual framework, listed as follows.
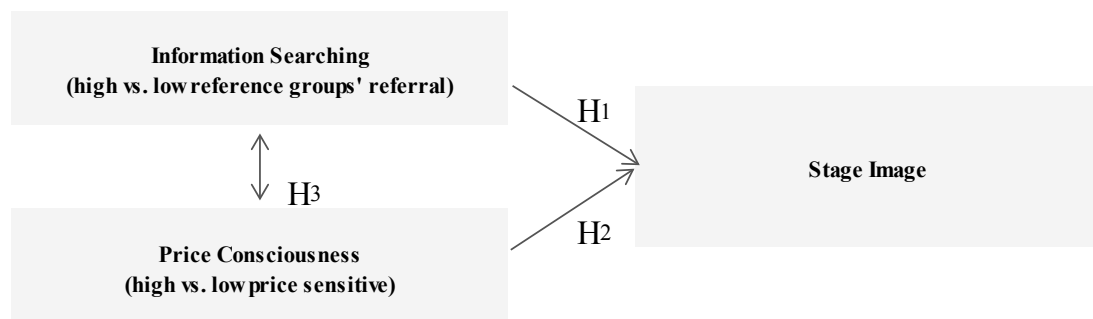

Figure 1. The conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

Subjects, design and procedure

A 2 price consciousness (high vs. low) x 2 information searching (reference groups' referral (high vs. low) between-subjects design was used to measure their effects on their favorite stores' image constructs. According to the Report of Electronics and appliance specialist retailers 2011,

five major mobile phone retailers were chosen such as Mobile World, Nguyen Kim, Tran Anh, FPT and VienThonh A. In the Vietnam NetCitizens Study (2011) conducted by Cimigo, nearly 56% of its urban population areas are already connected to the internet, with Hanoi leading at 64% internet penetration rate. To date, Vietnamese paying behavior prefers paying by cash instead of paying through credit card. Shoppers who perceive more risk associated with online shopping channels as well as less willing to purchase online (Bhatnagar, Misra, & Rao, 2000) was excluded in this study to identify subjects were associated with traditional physical shopping behavior.

The self-report survey was distributed by random at University of Industry in Hanoi through the online questionnaire of SurveyExpression.com. They shared similar demographics such as age, education level and socio-economic status. About 400 questionnaires were distributed, 41 samples were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete responses. Therefore, the 359 validated respondents were obtained to represent the college students' sample (male: 45.4%; female: 54.6%) to for the subsequent analysis.

The analytical procedure used included three steps. First, to analyze the data collected and verify the research assumptions, a principal component analysis (PCA) to perform firstly to retain the best representing item of the factor for store image themes that existed among Vietnamese college students. Second, K-mean cluster analysis was used to segment high and low reference groups and price consciousness users who shared similar profiles across the shopping physical mobile phone stores were identified. On the other hand, it applies an analysis of the relationship (e.g., information searching and price consciousness), which identifies any distinguishing characteristics across the two groups (i.e., high and low). The significant level is set at 0.05. Finally, a two-way ANOVA analyses was used to characterize the difference in terms of the information searching for reference groups' referral behavior and consciousness factors toward store image attributes.

Hypotheses

> H_1 The higher reference groups' referral information searching is, the more favorable attitude towards store image perception will.
>
> H_2 The higher price consciousness perception is, the more favorable attitude towards store image.
>
> H_3 The degree of price consciousness will moderate the relationship between information searching (reference groups' referral) and favorite store image.

Measurement

Information searching (independent variable) asked subjects the extent to which they agreed to the five statements regarding their resourcing/discussing information behavior with the seeking channels to be identified:

(1) Searching information from experts,

(2) Seeking information from acquaintance,

(3) To discuss with my close friends/relatives,

(4) Consumers' evaluation reports/reviews/sites and

(5) Consulting mobile phone retailers.

These five items were each anchored by 'Not at all' (1), 'slightly agreement' (2), 'fairly agreement' (3), 'quite agreement' (4), and 'strong agreement'(5). The Cronbach's coefficient al-

pha of these five items is 0.695.

Price consciousness (independent variable) asked subjects the extent to which they agreed to the five statements regarding their resourcing/discussing information behavior with the seeking channels to be identified:

(1) Do extra effort to find lower prices,

(2) Money saved is not worth the time and effort to find lower prices,

(3) Concern about low prices and product quality.

The scale items were anchored from 'not at all' (1) to 'strong agreement' (5). The Cronbach's coefficient alpha of these three items is 0.714.

The major dependent variable, *store image* to be given with a 5 point Likert scales from 'not at all' (1) to 'very importance' (5) (Chang & Luan, 2010). It was measured by asking the subjects to judge the relative importance of store image attributes in mobile phone retailers comparison to influence their shopping behavior when they make the decision of where to shop. Factor analysis of the 16 store image statements yielded 3 factors with an eigenvalue > 1.00. After excluding statements that did not have a loading of at least .50 on any factor, a second factor analysis was run. Fourteen statements were retained for three factors as shown in Table 1. Factor loading ranged from .566 to .798 with 59.056 percent of the total variance explained. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the factors is 0.881 that interpretation of the store image factors was very straightforward.

The seven statements that load on factor 1 (professional and reliable service) shows the general impression that walking up to mobile phone store would focus on knowledgeable salespeople, after-sale services, store design and layout, joyful interaction with service provider , store atmosphere, employees' integrity and trustworthy and speed of service at checkout. Factor 2 (ample brands, quantity and range) included statements that suggest that enough merchandise quantity, range of merchandise selection, presentation of information, variety of merchandise brands were sensitivity to respondents. Factor 3 (obtaining better deals) relates preference to deal with the same salespeople for business rapport establishment in store opening hours to get discounts or special deals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents indicated their latest mobile buying from supermarkets/hyper supermarkets (19.2%), small private stores (42.6%), electronics and home appliances supermarkets (22.8%), operator outlets/agents (11.4%) and others (3.9%; such as unknown buying place such as gift-receiving). For the next switch mobile phone intention, Table 2 demonstrates the relative importance of these eight attributes of store image priorities and is ranked from the highest to the least mean score; 'variety of merchandise' (M=2.45), 'store design' (M=2.38), 'promotion/information' (M=2.35), 'store atmosphere' (M=2.31), 'easy to access stores' (M=2.31), 'salesperson services' (M=2.27), 'easy to access store's website' (M=2.24) and 'price' (M=2.17) accordingly. Result showed that a variety of merchandise, store design and promotion/ information seem to be the driven dimensions for higher attractiveness as customer perception.

Surprisingly, price was the lowest in store image dimensions towards positive store attrac-

tiveness. In other words, our respondents incline to select a mobile phone retailers would more prefer to consider whether store can support enough variety of merchandise ranges instead of focusing on price pursuing lower price. Furthermore, based on the ranks of Electronics and Appliance Specialist Retailers in Vietnam-2008, there was a large changes between the retailers in 2013 which it proves the necessarily of this research because the competition keeps changing. Respondents rank their favorable emotional feelings among the top five well-known and successful mobile phone retailers. Table 2 indicates that Mobile World is most preferred store image ranking on 'variety of merchandise', 'store design', and 'easy to access store', and Tran Anh is the 2nd place. Tran Anh is most preferred store image ranking on 'promotion/ information', 'store atmosphere', 'salesperson service', 'easy to access to store's website', and 'price'. For promotion/information attribute, Mobile World surpasses Nguyen Kim at 2nd place ranking, but it cannot surpass Tran Anh. Surprisingly, for the store atmosphere, salesperson service easy to access store' website and price attributes, Mobile World is far behind of Tran Anh and FPT. Findings also indicate FPT and Nguyen Kim on some dimensions located at 3rd place of marketing position from respondents' perspectives.

Table 1. Factor analysis results of store Image

Factors with store image items loading	Factor loading		
	Professional and reliable service	Ample brands, quantity and range	Obtaining better deals
Knowledgeable salespeople	.76336		
After-sale services	.70108		
Store design and layout	.67484		
Joyful interaction with service provider	.61943		
Store atmosphere	.61937		
Employees' integrity and trustworthy	.57766		
Speed of service at checkout	.56616		
Enough merchandise quantity		.7981	
Range of merchandise selection		.7451	
Presentation of information		.6667	
Variety of merchandise brands		.6145	
Prefer to deal with the same salespeople			.7870
Opening hours			.6267
Get discounts or special deals			.5843
Eigenvalues	5.659	1.410	1.198
Percentage of variance explained	40.423	10.073	8.559
Accumulated percentage of variance explained	59.056		
KMO	.871		
Bartlett Test	2022.245		

Moreover, Table 3 shows a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) which is conducted to test H_1 by examining whether there was a significant effect on users' preference on physical store image among respondents with different information searching for reference groups'

referral behavior. H_2 is hypothesized that shoppers perceived the interest of price consciousness can result in a higher level of preference towards the particular stores. Specifically, we assume H_3: the existence of interaction between information searching for reference groups' referral intention and price consciousness can increase store image towards shoppers' selection a store to walk up (Table 4). As we expected, this result indicated that the higher the reference groups' referral information searching is, the more favorable attitude towards store image perception will to support H_1 (p<0.001). Surprisingly, there are no statically significant main effects emerging between level of price consciousness and store image, thus, H_2 without support (p=0.254). It implies that the shoppers perceived either a higher-degree or lower-degree of price sensitivity towards the store image will not affect respondents' when choosing where to shop. Rather, the results revealed the predicted interaction.

Table 2 The priority of related importance of store image and its favorite store ranking

Attributes of store image (Mean)	Favorite store ranking		
	1st place (Mean)	2nd place (Mean)	3rd place (Mean)
Variety of Merchandise (2.45)	Mobile World (2.58)	Tran Anh (2.52)	Nguyen Kim (2.47)
Store design (2.38)	Mobile World (2.49)	Tran Anh (2.469)	FPT (2.465)
Promotion/Information (2.35)	Tran Anh (2.52)	Mobile World (2.42)	Nguyen Kim (2.32)
Store atmosphere (2.31)	Tran Anh (2.45)	FPT (2.35)	Mobile World (2.31)
Easy to access stores (2.31)	Mobile World (2.53)	Tran Anh (2.50)	FPT (2.30)
Salesperson services (2.27)	Tran Anh (2.37)	FPT (2.31)	Mobile World (2.30)
Easy to access store's website (2.24)	Tran Anh (2.41)	FPT (2.35)	Mobile World (2.34)
Price (2.17)	Tran Anh (2.30)	FPT (2.23)	Nguyen Kim (2.15)

In order to study the influence of the shoppers' lower- and high-degree price consciousness group on store image, t-test was performed on the data. We hypothesized an interaction between the information searching for reference groups' referral and price consciousness factors for store image H_3 was supported (p<0.001). It was framed as that there was significant difference in the responses between two price consciousness groups. Based on these results, the price consciousness inclines to moderate the relationship between information searching (reference groups' referral) and favorite store image. It implies the lower-degree price sensitive shoppers (M=3.77) tend to have more influenced by higher-information searching for reference groups' referral to increase store their image in comparison with higher-degree price consciousness group (M=3.60).

### Table 3 Results of two-way ANOVA tests

	Store Image			
	DF	Mean Sum of Squares	F Value	P Value
Information searching (high vs. low)	1	28.139	55.763	0.00***
Price consciousness (high vs. low)	1	0.659	1.307	0.254
Information searching X Price consciousness	1	4.544	9.005	0.003**

*** p < .001, ** p < .01

Table 4 Independent sample t-test: group statistics

Dependent variable: Store image

Price consciousness group	Information searching group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	P-Value
Low	Low	75	2.84	.98	-6.375	0.000
	High	56	3.77	.55	-6.875	0.000
High	Low	50	3.21	.57	-3.824	0.000
	High	92	3.60	.60	-3.865	0.000
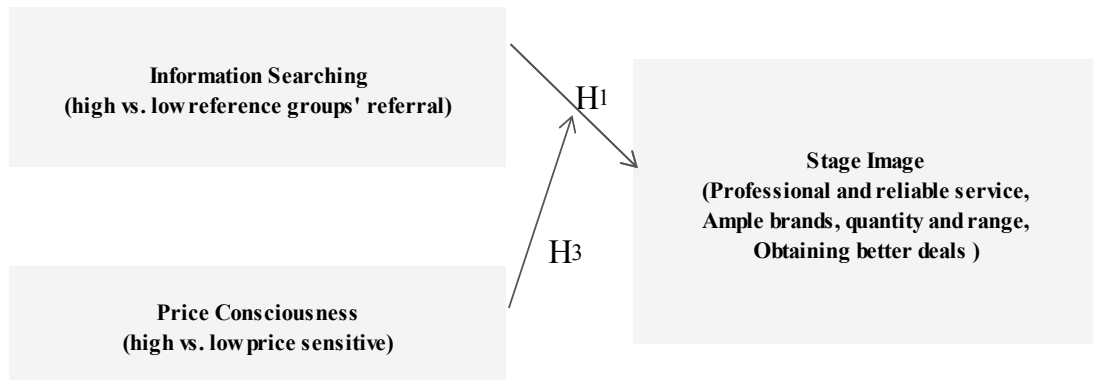
Figure 2 Results of H_1 and H_3 were supported

CONCLUSIONS

This study re-identified three distinct store image attributes among a sample of Vietnamese college mobile phone users and overcame the weakness of (Chang & Luan, 2010) by exploring the relationships of store image and other variables such as information seeking and price consciousness effect on consumers' behavior in retail shops introduced after the economic re-form. At this current condition, our educated respondents are browsing and surfing online for obtaining more word of mouth information and knowledge from webpages/online communities but they still prefer to shop directly in stores. Meanwhile, it further focused on a comparison of college students whose different level of information searching for reference groups' referral intention and to extent of price conciseness would affect their store image perception. Rather, findings reported the higher the reference groups' referral information searching is, the more favorable attitude towards store image perception will. This was appropriate managerially since, in Vietnam's emerging market for exposure mobile phone physical store shopping inten-tion by concerning information searching for reference groups' referral and price conciseness is

likely to be concentrated among a few.

Firstly, this study provides updating information to specify what the top three well-known, favorite mobile phone retailers' rankings are in Hanoi City, Vietnam. In general, respondents perceived the top three favorite ranking priority of Mobile World, Tran Anh and FPT based on most of the store image attributes, expect 'promotion/information', 'easy to access stores' and 'price'. Findings suggest that the FPT Corp. should improve their image through 'promotion and information' and 'easy to access store'. In the 'price' issue, our findings suggest college students perceived the highest to latest ranking for getting the best price available while shopping at Tran Anh, FPT, Tran Anh, Vien Thong A and Mobile World accordingly. Results also implied that Tran Anh has the competitive ambition to beat Mobile World in Hanoi city, even for some of attributes even Mobile World is somehow behind of FPT. Specifically, this study can be replicating method and procedure in the mobile phone retailers in the South urban city (i.e., Ho Chi Minh City) to comparison the similarity and difference among college users (Chang & Luan 2010).

Unexpectedly, the perception of Vietnamese college students in Hanoi city places more and more relative importance on 'variety of merchandise' than other attributes, i.e., store design, promotion/information, store atmosphere, easy to access stores, salesperson services, easy to access store's website, and price. Results indicate that retailers/managers require keeping a wide range of mobile phones in stores and these findings also support the view of (Speece & Huong 2002). Although past researches (Ronald, Subhash & Douglas 2001; Sarah, 2002; William, Monroe & Dhruv 1991) documented that price-consciousness would be an important factor affecting shoppers' buying decision. Indeed, findings found the price issue has been statistically shown to be the least in priority for consideration in switching mobile phone shows that college students are likely to be satisfied with the current market price and suggests marketers to pay greater attention on other attributes to form their favorite store image.

Furthermore, results indicated our college students sample expected firstly to receive 'professional and reliable service' in order to consultative with them. It should be aware that consumers dislike service providers who act as being too 'salesman-like' and as suggested HR managers and salesperson have to understand what consumers want to be consultative especially talk about the idea of not being "too salesman-like" when it comes to commitment gaining. Therefore, to avoid any cheesy, aggressive and superficial salesperson of whatever product or service they are pitching should be taking into account. Furthermore, the 'ample brands, quantity and range' in providing top-quality sources for a wide range of novelty and specialty items and service would satisfy to meet shoppers' needs. However, respondents prefer to deal with the same salesperson for getting better deals in store hours, although the price consciousness in this study insignificantly affect physical store's image. As our respondents' perception, they expect to have a good relationship with salespersons to get the better deal. From that point, the retailers can motivate their salesperson to approach customers and keep tightly in touch with customers, and encourage consumers to apply loyal card or special discount.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should attempt to establish the relationship between both physical shop-

ping and other psychological and behavioral variables. By examining physical shopping-store image in the context of a more fully articulated conceptual framework, understanding of this mode of shopping will increase in an emerging market. Therefore, efforts aimed at converting these physical store shoppers into loyalty buyers should strive to make them aware of how the store image formatting as well as Internet browsing information for word of mouth referral can be generalized to national-wide buying as well. Further, Vietnam physical shoppers could be compared with physical shoppers from other countries to provide additional insight into the nuances of the mobile phone store image. Meanwhile, retailers and managers should pay attention on the online image to attract the shoppers, thus, further research is needed to investigate the relationship between customer's preference and store patronage both online and offline.

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