

The Effects of Store Convenience on Retail Patronage in Kenyan Supermarket Shoppers

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Abstract

Convenience involves satisfying demands by making goods and services available to customers at the point of sale. The important elements of convenience are location, store hours, pedestrian traffic, vehicular traffic, parking facilities, transportation, clear prices, trolleys, fitting rooms. This study sought to determine the effect of store convenience on retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was anchored on integrated theory of patronage preference and behavior. The positivism research philosophy and exploratory research design were used. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire and data was analysed using simple linear regression method. The findings revealed that key convenience factors included proximity to the store, ease of locating products on shelves, accessibility of store using public means, easy checkout and store hours that favored shopping. The study also concluded that store convenience significantly positively influences retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya.

Key Words: *Store convenience, Retail Patronage, Supermarket Customers, Kenya*

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I. Introduction

The greatest goal for any retailer is patronage of customers. As a guide towards this goal, retailers aim to discover the basis for consumers shopping where they do (Teller & Floh, 2014). Convenience refers to an individual's ability to continue with shopping with ease and minimize time and effort costs (Makhita & Khumalo, 2019; Reimers, 2013). The typical consumer shops for groceries more than any other product categories, supermarkets for convenience have to do more to ensure positive store image perceptions and customer satisfaction (Esberg et al., 2012). Levy et al. (2018) further argue that retailers survive and prosper because they satisfy a group of consumer's needs more conveniently than their competitors. Esberg et al., (2012) advance that consumer perceptions are guided by expectations. In retail environments, the complex sets that make up the retail mix and other shoppers help in the formation of expectations. These expectations act as the hypotheses that the shoppers seek to confirm.

Retail patronage describes a close and sustainable relationship developed between a patron and his client (Blut et al., 2018). It comprises of store visits, intent to purchase, purchase behavior, value of purchase and word of mouth recommendations. Purchase behavior may include willingness and likelihood to buy as well as actual purchase (Srivastava & Natu, 2014). Retail patronage is a result of the successful positioning of retail factors such as convenient location, good store atmospherics, low prices, product assortments, high quality products, excellent customer service, store layout and cleanliness, (Blut et al., 2018; Burlison & Oe, 2018). Watanabe et al. (2013), failed to establish a positive relationship between promotion, convenience and retail patronage.

This study was anchored on integrated theory of patronage preference and behavior (Sheth, 1983). Integrated theory of patronage preference and behavior describes and explains individual patronage behavior from selection of outlets to actual purchase behavior in a store. Amongst the major challenges for big long-established brands is competition from smaller players who are more flexible and adapt to changes quite fast. The increase in competition has forced supermarkets to not only expand their range of products but to also pay attention to service quality and brand loyalty (Muturi, 2018; Levy et al., 2018). This study sought to determine the effect of store convenience on retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya.

II. Literature Review

Convenience refers to an individual's ability to continue with shopping with ease and minimize time and effort costs (Makhita & Khumalo, 2019; Reimers, 2013). Satisfaction with a store therefore is influenced by the amount of time and effort involved during the shopping activity. According to Blut et al. (2018), convenience has to do with distribution, which involves satisfying demands by making goods and services available to customers at the point of sale. The important elements of convenience are location, store hours, pedestrian traffic, vehicular traffic, parking facilities, transportation, clear prices, trolleys, fitting rooms (Breytenbach, 2014; Reimers, 2013). Reimers and Chao (2014) advance four dimensions of convenience; time saving that would relate to one stop shopping and extended shopping hours; spatial convenience that relates to proximity of other retail centers, access convenience that regards travel to and from a store and parking convenience.

According to Levy et al. (2018) the type of location to be selected should be in line with the shopping behavior, size of the target market as well as the retailers' positioning in the target market. The type of shopping behavior of supermarket shoppers is mainly convenient (minimize effort to get product) and comparison shopping. According to Chadwick and Piartrini (2018) convenience results in time savings, makes a location more accessible and reduces consumer efforts. It reduces shopper effort when a product is measured in terms of ease of decision-making, ease of benefits, ease of access, ease of transaction and ease of post-transaction benefits.

Chang and Luan (2010) found that convenience factors to be important when choosing a hypermarket. The factors were ease of finding goods, opening hours, convenient location and parking. Dhurup et al. (2013) found ease of movement in the mall, amount of walking required, store hours and aisle positions to influence store choice decisions. Hosseini et al. (2014) found shopping comfort enabled by convenience factors to be important in building store image and affects customer perception and store choice. Kumar (2016) found convenient geographical location, waiting time at billing counters to be important factors when making patronage decisions. In a study on product quality, convenience and brand loyalty, Belwal and Belwal (2017) found parking facilities, cleanliness, access to ATMs, merchandising, and efficiency at payment counters among hypermarkets in Oman. Teller and Floh (2014) confirmed that location related attributes drive actual patronage behavior.

On the other hand, Chadwick and Piartrini (2018) found that convenience was not significantly correlated with brand loyalty in a retail chain of stores. Teller and Gittenberger's (2011) study on elderly supermarket shoppers did not find a relationship between store accessibility and patronage. Blut et al. (2018) found that parking, proximity from home/work and shopping infrastructure unlikely to satisfy customers but instead have direct effects on patronage intention but do not have an effect on WOM. The dimensions of store convenience vary among studies, it is indeterminate what role it plays in retail patronage in the local context, as well as which dimensions are most influential.

III. Research Methodology

The study used an explanatory research design as a research design. Target population of the study was made all shoppers of supermarkets in Kenya. Nairobi was the representative county since it is the capital of Kenya and hosts the highest number of large supermarkets. The study only targeted shoppers of supermarkets that were registered with the Retail Trade Association of Kenya (RETRAK). Supermarket shoppers were estimated to be 53% of the Kenyan population (Nielsen, 2020). The study variables were operationalized as follows: Store convenience as time convenience, spatial convenience, access convenience and parking convenience (Reimers, 2013; Breytenbach, 2014; Chang & Luan, 2010). Retail patronage as store choice, store loyalty and word of mouth recommendations (Ha & Im, 2012; Breytenbach, 2014). The relationship between store convenience and retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya was tested using simple linear regression analysis at 5 percent significance level.

IV. Research Findings and Discussions

The study sought to determine the effect of store convenience on retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was guided by the following null hypothesis;

H₀: Store convenience has no effect on retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya
The findings area presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Regression Results

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.415 ^a	0.172	0.169	0.55162		
Analysis of Variance						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.435	1	18.435	60.584	.000 ^b
	Residual	88.546	291	0.304		
	Total	106.981	292			
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.103	0.243		8.65	0.000
	Store Convenience	0.463	0.059	0.415	7.784	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Retail Patronage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Store Convenience

The findings revealed that the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.172. This implied that store convenience explained 17.2% of the variation in retail patronage. The model was significant in overall ($F = 60.584 > 3.84$, $P\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$). The model of store convenience on retail patronage had good predictive power. Store convenience had a beta coefficient of 0.463, $t = 7.784 > 1.96$ and $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$. Thus hypothesis that store convenience has no effect on retail patronage among supermarket customers in Nairobi, Kenya was rejected. The coefficient of store convenience implied that for every one unit increase in store convenience, retail patronage would increase by 0.463 units other factors held constant.

These findings indicated that store convenience had a positive significant effect on retail patronage. The resulting regression model was;

$$RP = 2.103 + 0.463SC$$

Where

RP= Retail Patronage

SC= Store Convenience.

The results conform to those of Belwal and Belwal (2017) who in a study on supermarkets in Oman found that store service, convenience, merchandise and communications (advertisements, contests and promotions) influences retail patronage. Kiboro's (2020) in a study underscores the role of perception and store image in driving customer purchase intentions among shoppers in Kenya.

V. Conclusions

Important convenience related factors included proximity to the store, ease of locating products on shelves, accessibility of store using public means, easy checkout and store hours that favored shopping. The importance of store convenience in making patronage decisions has been proven. As such it is paramount for retailers to focus on strategies that will attract customers to their store, be on top of their minds when choosing which supermarkets to patronize as well as getting them to purchase, return to the stores and spread positive word of mouth to others

VI. Recommendations

Retailers could use this study's findings to design products strategies that ensure there is a wide assortment of products at different price levels and quality products at fair prices to provide value to shoppers. They can also use the findings as a guide, to train sales personnel, adopt convenient payment methods, design of supermarket layouts and infrastructure outside the supermarkets. They can also use the findings to design promotional strategies including loyalty programs, sales promotion, in-store promotions and credible advertisements. Given the role of the self-concept, marketers can use it to better target their customers.

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