

## **Important Determinant of Consumers' Retail Selection Decision in Malaysia**

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*Malaysian retail market has seen interesting growth of new types of retail outlets such as the hypermarkets and specialty stores in the last 15 years. With the rising of many types of retail institutions in the Malaysian market, consumers have more choices in selecting the place where they make their purchase. How do consumers choose among alternative retail outlets when purchasing different types of products? What important factors influence customer's store selection decision? Unlike many other studies on retail selection decision which investigated store factors that influence store choice, this study aimed to test the influence of other variable i.e., type of products that may have influence on store choice. The findings of this study suggest that consumer retail choice is influenced by many factors and at the same time, results also show that retail selection decision differs according to the types of goods purchased. The current study had categorized the important determinants of retail store selection in Malaysia which comprise factors such as (1) Store Personnel and Physical Characteristics of the Store; (2) Advertising by the Store; (3) Store Convenience & Merchandise Selection; (4) Store Location; (5) Peer influence; (6) Product Variety and Quality; and (7) Services offered by Store.*

**Keyword:** retail selection decision, store choice.

### **1. Introduction**

Retailing in Malaysia has grown significantly over the years witnessing foreign retailers with expanded retail brands entered the country, offering a wider choice of selection to consumers in terms of brands and styles. The retailing landscape continues to gain sophistication with new retailing formats, products and services being introduced. Overall, grocery retailers saw an increase in current value terms in 2010. As grocery retailers especially hypermarkets, started to carry non-grocery products, such as home appliances, they began to compete with purely non-grocery retailers. With consumers demanding wider choices from retailing, and taking on more international tastes, competition within retailing in Malaysia intensified. Key players include both local and foreign players. However, foreign retailers such as GCH Retail, Tesco Stores, AEON Co and Carrefour have been expanding aggressively in Malaysia, replacing many local players from the leading positions within retailing. In 2010, only three local players, The Store Corp, Econsave Cash & Carry, and Parkson Corp. were in the top 10 players in terms of share value. (Euromonitor International 2011)

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Malaysian's retail landscape started with traditional neighborhood grocery stores, mini market, pasar malam (night market) and wet market. It then shifted to department store and supermarket before the emergence of shopping malls, hypermarkets and drugstores. The Malaysian shopping trends have shifted from stand alone traditional grocery outlets and department stores to hypermarkets and shopping malls. Shopping malls are largely urban phenomena, mainly because urbanities are more able and willing to incur higher expenditure when shopping.

Modernization and urbanization has changed the Malaysian retail landscape in recent years. The small and traditional mode of retailing in highly urbanized areas is moving towards complexes and hypermarket. The loose restrictions by Malaysian government on foreign retailers had increased the opportunities for foreign retailers. For example, the policy granting hypermarket licenses to an area with a population of less than 350,000 had witnessed the hypermarket expanding to the urban cities as well as secondary towns. Supermarkets on the other hand had expanded slowly in terms of outlets and selling space. In Malaysia, supermarket refers to a mixed type of retailer, which combines department store and supermarket under one roof. Hypermarkets provide convenience, better variety and more competitive price. Hypermarket which targeted low to middle income consumers compete aggressively in term of pricing strategies. Department stores offer premium products and target middle to high income customers. At the same time, independent grocery outlets such as wet market and "mom and pop" stores remain popular among rural residents.

### ***Problem statement***

Consumers in the retail market are found to be loyal to several stores, thus the phrase 'polygamous loyalty' is used to describe the consumer shopping behavior (Worthington and Hallsworth 1999). Some of consumers tend to be cherry pickers, i.e. they are not loyal to one store, and instead, they shop around for bargains (Mogelonsky 1995).

The current study attempts to discover consumer store choice and determinants of the store selection decision in Malaysia. Although there are many studies on store selection, not many studies have been conducted in developing countries such as Malaysia, where the retail landscape is changing with the emergence of new retail formats. Past studies have investigated determinants of retail selection which uncovered factors such as store location, image, atmosphere and service but few studies have distinguished the factors affecting store choice by different product types such as groceries versus shopping goods. From the industry perspectives, better segmentation of the retail market may warrant better retail strategies to serve targeted customers. This study differs from the earlier studies on store choice because it considers customer store selection based on the types of products purchased. Furthermore the current study also takes into account the influence of non-store factors which is left behind by previous studies.

The main motivation of the current study is to discover the effects of distinguishing feature of Malaysian retail industry (the existence of conventional retail institutions such as hypermarket, department store and supermarket, together with 'traditional stores' such as small independent specialty store (sundry shop) and small independent grocery stores which mainly practice scrambled merchandising, i.e. retailers carry many unrelated items under one roof) on customer store choice. This

scenario makes it interesting to investigate the important determinants of Malaysian consumer store selection decision. Specifically, this study aims to discover whether customers choose different store when purchasing grocery items and shopping goods.

***Research objectives***

1. To determine store choice across different formats for different product types: groceries and shopping goods.
2. To identify what is the most preferred store across various retail formats
3. To investigate the important factors influencing customers' store choice

**2. Literature Review**

The stream of research on retail selection includes studies on store choice, retail outlet selection and store patronage behavior. Recognizing the importance of patronage behavior, researchers have tried to define consumers' store patronage behavior and develop dimensions that measure patronage. Osman (1993, p. 137) delineated five variables that measure the degree of loyalty patronage from past studies: "(1) the percentage of purchases of a specified product category at a chosen store, (2) the frequency of visits to the store in relation to other stores during a certain period of time, (3) the ratio of ranking between stores, (4) the propensity to shop at the store in the future, and (5) the extent of the customers' willingness to recommend the store to their friends." In his study of patronage behavior, Osman (1993) proposed a more simplified definition of patronage behavior: "the repeat purchase behavior at a particular store for either the same products or any other products" (p. 135).

In a study of apparel store patronage behavior, Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992) defined patronage behavior as store choice behavior that represents an individual's preference for a particular store for purchasing products. More recently, Pan and Zinkhan (2006) identified retail patronage as having two dimensions: (1) store choice (a consumer's choice to patronize a particular store) and (2) frequency of visit (how often a shopper patronizes that store). They also found that retail image was a major predictor for explaining shopping frequencies. As discussed above, the degree of store loyalty or patronage behavior can be measured by using various variables. Past studies on store loyalty or patronage behavior, however, have used either one or a combination of several of these variables for this measurement.

***Determinants of Store Attributes***

Mokhlis et al., (2006) in their effort to understand how consumers make store choice decisions given a set of store attribute preferences, have emphasized the extent to which consumer attaches "importance" to attributes of individual stores. This interest is grounded in the traditional multi-attribute model set forth by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) depicting the relationship between belief, attitudes and behaviour. They posit that a person's attitude toward a given object is a summation of beliefs about the object's attributes weighted by the evaluation of the importance of these attributes. Within this model, beliefs involve perceptions of the object's attributes. In addition to beliefs about an object's attributes, this model accounts for the importance assigned to an attribute. Thus, attitude can vary substantially by how important attributes are to a consumer.

Applied to the retail situation, the multi-attribute model indicates that a consumer's attitude toward a retail store is a function of (a) the degree of importance attached by the consumer to various store attributes, and (b) the consumer's perception of the degree to which a retail store possesses each attribute. According to Moye (2000), consumers engage in a comparison process in their minds to determine whether their evaluation of the relative importance of store attributes aligns with their perceptions of these attributes. If the two factors match, then the consumer chooses the store. Consumer compares the importance of store attributes with the store image (i.e. overall perception) to determine acceptable and unacceptable stores. If consumers "perceptions of the store attributes are positive, then they may decide to purchase from the store". On the other hand, if consumers "perceptions of the store attributes are negative, then they are unlikely to shop in the store" (Engel et al. 1995).

In an effort to determine how consumers organized their shopping trips when faced with an increasingly enlarged set of retail formats, Popkowski-Leszczyc and Timmermans (2001) found that consumers tended to choose a variety of stores and overall consumers preferred to shop at specialty stores. Furthermore, consumers were increasingly likely to select a single store when prices were lower, parking costs were less, better assortments were offered, travel time was reduced and checkout lanes were shorter. Lee and Johnson (1997) found that customer expectations of store attributes also differ according to store type. They observed that customers did not expect much customer service at discount stores while they expected extensive service from specialty stores.

A study by Cassill et al. (1993) found that consumers chose to patronize individual department stores for clothing purchases when a combination of factors was present: the stocking of particular brands; the presence of national and own-branded products; and where garments offered functional value rather than fashion appeal. Recently, Paulins and Geistfeld (2003) showed that apparel store preference is affected by type of clothing desired in stock, outside store preference, shopping hours and store advertising. Accordingly, consumers perceptions of store attributes were found to vary by store type. Arnold, Handerman and Tigert (1996) surveyed low-priced department store shoppers in five different cities in the US and Canada. They found that a store which was identified as being the best on the performance attributes such as locational convenience, price and assortment of merchandise was more likely to be patronized by customers. The study also revealed that a store identified as having a strong community reputation not only directly affected store choice, but also moderated the effect of location, price and assortment attributes.

### ***Determinant of Store Selection***

Past store choice research has focused more on grocery stores compared to other types of retail institutions (Barnard and Hensher, 1992; Bell, Ho and Tang, 1998; Bell and Latin, 1998). In the grocery store choice study, (Montgomery and Lodish (2004) found that store selection responds more on varying level of assortment (in particular at grocery stores) and promotion than price. The consumer evaluations of retail stores ranges from merchandise assortment, merchandise quality, service in general, personnel, store lay-out, convenience, cleanliness and atmosphere (Mazursky and Jacoby 1985; Hildebrandt 1988; Blackwell et al. 2001; Levy and Weitz 2001).

The overall store assessment is termed as store image, which is a function of the service output offered, of advertising and promotion campaign as well as of the pricing strategy selected by the stores (Solgaard and Hansen 2003, p.170). Store location had received much attention in retail selection (Bell et al. 1988; Stanly and Sewall 1976; Verhallen and de Nooij 1982). Price level, assortment and distance (location) appear as anticipated to be important drivers for consumer selection between store formats (Solgaard and Hansen 2003).

Although some customers purchase the entire shopping list at a single store, many household shop at multiple stores (cherry pickers) to get the best bargain. However, most of the cherry pickers are risk-averse in their purchase decisions, thus they normally study retailers' ads before selecting stores to visit (Fox and Semple, 2002). Acting upon the past literature, the current study attempts to identify consumer store patronage for different types of goods and the determinants of store selection.

### **3. Methodology**

The current study seeks to explore consumers' store patronage behavior across different retail formats. It is proposed that consumers' store patronage behavior will vary by their perceived relative importance of retail store environmental cues and demographic characteristics of the respondents. The research focuses on consumers' purchase behavior of two product types: groceries and shopping goods in five different store formats: hypermarket, supermarket, department store, traditional retail (specialized stores, groceries and minimarket) in Malaysia.

#### ***Data collection:***

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase was carried out using qualitative approach and in the second phase, a survey was carried out. At the exploratory stage, both focus group and depth interviews were conducted. Two focus group interviews (10 participants in each group) were conducted to discover the underlying motives of store selection decision. Depth interviews were conducted with eight (8) different respondents (the interviews were stopped at the eight respondents because the researcher had discovered the uniformity of the responds). The questionnaires were developed based on these qualitative research results and a review of past literature. Questionnaires were distributed among retail customers in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Only those persons who are directly involved in their household purchase decision are eligible to become respondents. The respondents' profile is presented in Table 1.

The instrument was developed based on measures adopted from previous works, plus several items being adapted to cater to the current research setting. Multi-items measures were then assessed for its reliability and unidimensionality. Following (Churchill 1979), 48 items were generated to measure retail selection decision. Seven professors/associate professors in business and marketing served as assessor to evaluate the content/face validity of the items.

Respondents were asked to select their preferred store when purchasing groceries versus when purchasing for shopping products. Customers were also asked to select their choices of retail stores from hypermarket, supermarket, department store, wet market, and traditional retail store (specialized store, grocery, minimarket). When answering the questions, respondents were asked to relate to their store choice

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when making grocery shopping and shopping for shopping-goods. Grocery products include fresh produce, dairy products, frozen foods and beverages. For shopping products, customers indicate their preference of store for purchasing tools, book, goods related to music, beauty care/perfumes and ladies accessories.

### **Data analysis:**

Data from 151 usable questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 18.0. Both descriptive and inferential analyses were performed.

**Table 1: Respondent's Profile**

Item	N	Percentage	Item	N	percentage
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Marital Status</b>		
Male	61	39.9	Single	54	35.3
Female	90	58.8	Married	97	63.4
<b>Occupation</b>			<b>Race</b>		
Private sector	79	51.6	Malay	108	70.6
Government sector	21	12.7	Chinese	20	13.1
Self-employed	32	20.9	Indian	18	11.8
Unemployed	19	12.4	Others	5	3.3
<b>Household income</b>			<b>Level of Education</b>		
Less than RM2000	112	73.2	Secondary School	95	62.1
RM2001-RM4000	28	18.3	Diploma	32	20.9
RM4001-RM6000	6	3.8	First Degree	24	15.7
More than RM6000	5	3.3			

Note: RM1 = USD3.1

Source: Survey

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Store Choice for Groceries**

Table 2 represents grocery goods bought in the different kind of stores. Respondents were asked to indicate their store choice when purchasing different products under the grocery and shopping-goods categories. The findings show that for majority of the grocery goods, customers prefer to purchase it from hypermarket and wet market, as compared to supermarket or a typical sundry shop. For example, findings show that about 40% respondents buy fruits and vegetables from the hypermarket and another 40% buy fresh produce from the wet market. When purchasing dairy products, 41.8% respondents indicated that they normally purchased it from supermarket and almost 40% said that they buy dairy products from hypermarket. The findings show that when purchasing for fresh produce (such as fruits, vegetables, chicken/meat, and fish), consumers prefer both hypermarket and wet markets, in which both stores scored almost the same percentages.

**Table 2: Shopping Specific Goods in Different Store Types**

Goods	Hyper market (%)	Department Store/Super market (%)	Traditional retail (specialized stores, groceries and minimarket) Traditional (%)	Wet Market (%)	Don't Know (%)	Others (%)
Dairy Products	39.2	41.8	20.3	-	-	0.7
Bread	35.3	34.0	31.4	-	0.7	2.6
Rice	52.9	14.4	26.8	3.9	-	0.7
Beverages	39.9	38.6	20.3	0.7	4.6	5.2
Frozen Foods	60.8	20.9	2.6	17.0	-	2.0
Fruits	43.8	20.3	9.8	41.8	-	2.0
Vegetables	43.8	20.9	9.2	41.8	-	1.3
Meat/chicken	39.9	20.9	9.2	42.5	-	0.7
Fish	29.4	17.0	7.8	39.2	0.7	11.1
Clothing	42.5	19.0	8.5	13.1	2.0	19.6
Shoes/sandal	55.6	30.7	3.3	0.7	0.7	13.7
Sports Goods	57.5	24.2	4.6	0.7	0.7	11.8
Toys	54.2	37.9	3.3	-	-	3.3
Stationery goods	49.0	28.1	21.6	-	-	3.3
Groceries	41.8	28.8	26.1	0.7	-	6.5
Household appliances	75.2	10.5	7.2	-	-	5.2
Kitchen utilities	75.8	8.5	0.7	-	1.3	13.7
Furniture/decoration	65.4	7.2	3.9	-	-	19.6
Detergent and household cleaning	65.4	26.1	5.2	0.7	1.3	-
Personal Cleaning	51.6	28.1	8.5	0.7	0.7	10.5
Plants/gardening	47.1	17.0	3.3	3.3	3.3	28.1
Tools/ bricolage	52.9	8.5	7.2	0.7	2.0	35.9
Books	42.5	11.1	6.5	0.7	3.3	35.9
Goods related to music	43.8	8.5	3.9	-	6.5	34.6
Goldsmith/Jewellery	36.6	8.5	3.3	-	3.9	45.8
Beauty care/perfumes	53.6	9.2	1.3	-	3.9	41.8

# Respondents are allowed to choose more than one store

#### 4.2 Store Choice for Shopping Products

When purchasing for shopping goods, such as goldsmith/jewellery/ladies accessories, almost 50% respondents indicated that they prefer other stores (45.8%) compared to hypermarkets, supermarket, departments store or wet market. On the other hand, respondents indicated strong preference for hypermarket compared to supermarket, department store, wet market or other stores, when purchasing tools, books, goods related to music, and beauty care/perfumes. For products other than mentioned above, almost 40% of respondents chose other store compared to supermarket, department store and wet market.

#### 4.3 Determinants of Retail Store Selection

To determine the important factors influencing choice of retail outlet, the Principal Component Factor Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was performed for the 48 items measuring retail store selection. The visual inspection on the anti-image correlation matrix showed that the correlations are below threshold value of .30. The result indicated that the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) was significant (Chi-Square 6331.289, p-value < 0.0001). The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was high at 0.913. This KMO value of 0.913 is excellent since it exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974). The two results of (KMO and Bartlett's) suggest that the data is appropriate to proceed with the factor analysis procedure.

Two rounds of EFA were performed before it extracted seven (7) distinct dimensions with eigenvalue exceeding 1.0. The total variance explained for the seven dimensions is 70.900. The contributions from component 1, component 2, component 3, component 4, component 5, component 6, and component 7, are 45.812, 7.093, 4.405, 4.253, 3.646, 2.955, and 2.736 respectively. Table 3 presents the rotated components matrix for dimensions of retail selection.

Factor 1 was named as '*Store Personnel and Physical Characteristics of the Store*' since it comprised items measuring store personnel and the physical characteristics of the store. Store personnel refer to preferred attributes of store personnel such (as providing information and solution) as preferred by customers. Whereas, the physical characteristics of the store refers to physical evidence seen by the customers at the store such as ease of moving in the store, ease of searching products, cleanliness of the store and etc. Factor 2 was named as '*Advertising by the Store*' since it reflects the advertisement carried out by the store to attract customers. Advertising by the store also referred to external communication made by the store in attracting customers to visit their outlets.

Factor 3 was named as '*Store Convenience & Merchandise Selection*' to refer to the convenience of parking, other nearby stores, nearness of store location, and the degree of merchandise selection and the quality of products offered. Factor 4 was named as '*Convenience of Reaching the Store*' to reflect the ease of driving to the store, store distance from customers' home, time taken to reach the store and the availability of public transport.

Factor 5 emerged as '*Friends and Store*' to reflects the selection of retail outlets are highly dependent on word of mouth communication, since customers are more prone to frequent stores that are patronized by their relatives and friends. Factor 6 was named as '*Product Variety and Quality*' since it consists of the items measuring product variety and quality that the customer seek from the store. Factor 7 was named as '*Services Offered by Store*' to reflect the services provided by the store for the customer convenience such as credit card payment and delivery services.



**Table 3: Extracted Component from EFA (Pilot Study)**

Scale Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
<i>Factor 1 – Store Personnel and Physical Characteristics of the Store</i>							
Public utilities	.758						
Cheap relative price	.740						
Value offered equal to price charged	.729						
Availability of fitting rooms	.725						
Ease of moving in the store	.710						
Ease of finding items	.707						
Courtesy of store personnel	.699						
Lot of product offered at special price	.694						
Helpfulness of store personnel	.680						
Speed of checkout	.668						
Availability of public toilet	.640						
Product warranty	.639						
Friendliness of personnel	.629						
Value offered	.627						
Variety of brands selection	.616						
Cleanliness of store	.586						
High stock level	.519						
<i>Factor 2 – Advertising by the Store</i>							
Helpfulness of ads		.817					
Informativeness of ads		.797					
Attractiveness of promotion		.774					
Believability of promotion and ads		.755					
Frequency of ads and promotions that attract consumers		.699					
Loyalty card programs		.639					
<i>Factor 3 –Store Convenience &amp; Merchandise Selection</i>							
Convenience of other stores			.734				
Availability of parking lot			.713				
Strategic location			.608				
Variety of product selection			.526				
<i>Factor 4 – Convenience of Reaching the Store</i>							
Ease of drive				.806			
Time taken to reach the store				.797			
Store distance from home				.785			
Availability of public transport				.595			
<i>Factor 5- Friends and Store</i>							
Store liked by friends					.890		
Store known by friends					.864		
Numbers of friends patronizing the store					.797		
<i>Factor 6 –Product Variety and Quality</i>							
Dependability of product						.585	
Variety of well-known brands						.546	
Quality of product sold						.523	
<i>Factor 7- Services offered by Store</i>							
Credit card payment							.793
Acceptance of credit card							.717
Product delivery services							.568
Eigenvalue	21.073	3.263	2.026	1.957	1.677	1.359	1.158
Total Variance (70.900)	45.812	7.093	4.405	4.253	3.646	2.955	2.736

Source: Survey

From the EFA performed to determine the factors considered in retail selection decision, seven(7) factors emerged: (1) *Store Personnel and Physical Characteristics of the Store*; (2) *Advertising by the Store*; (3) *Store Convenience &*

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*Merchandise Selection; (4) Convenience of Reaching the Store; (5) Friends and Store; (6) Product Variety & Quality; (7) Services Offered by Store.*

Cronbach's alpha for each determinant of retail store selection was performed to measure its reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for (1) Store Personnel and Physical Characteristics of the Store; (2) Advertising by the Store; (3) Store Convenience & Merchandise Selection; (4) Convenience of Reaching the Store; (5) Friends and Store; (6) Product Variety & Quality; (7) Services offered by Store are 0.966, 0.936, 0.861, 0.882, 0.881, 0.860, and 0.742 respectively. The reliability measures exceeded the minimum value of 0.6 as recommended by Nunally (1978).

### **5. Conclusions and Implications**

The current study focuses on the household-level shopping behavior across retail formats. Hypermarket seems to be the most preferred retail choice for purchasing groceries. At the same time, consumers also make their grocery purchases in other types of retail establishment, which may indicate a 'polygamous loyalty' across the various retail formats. Although some customers shop around to find the best bargain, time limitation will force them to end up shopping the entire list in a single store. The findings may indicate that bigger retail outlet such as hypermarket is a popular choice among consumers to purchase their products ranging from bread, rice, toys, toiletries, gardening, and hardware items.

Although the selection of retail outlets is dependent on the types of goods purchased, the current trend in Malaysian retail market shows that customers prefer retail store that provide many things under a single roof. There are groups of customer who prefer shopping malls as compared to stand alone store. Although hypermarket is relatively a new phenomenon in Malaysia, the findings reveal interesting aspect of consumer shopping behavior as it indicates the growth potential of this kind of retail institution. The results indicate that Malaysian customers are fast adopters of this new retail formats as they choose to shop for most of their goods in hypermarket. Besides the size and store atmosphere, the success of hypermarket in capturing Malaysian market might be due to its everyday low pricing strategy, which may warrant future research into this area.

Determinants influencing store choice can be grouped into 3: store attributes; retail strategies; and customer characteristics. Our results provide insights into the determinants of retail store selection decision, hence can be applied by retailers who want to capture Malaysian market in designing retail store formats. The findings may also assist in determining image dimensions of retail stores. The results of the study also suggest that store attributes play an important role in influencing consumer whether to choose or not to choose specific stores.

#### ***Recommendation for future studies***

The generalization of findings from this research is however limited due to its small-scale design. A larger scale study which includes customers from different demographic and geographic areas may provide more representative findings. Furthermore, a larger sample size might lead exploratory factor analysis to emerge into different set of determinant factors. Another factor which may contribute to further enrich this area of research is to determine the relationship between social

class and retail selection decision. As evident in Malaysia, consumer from different social class may prefer to shop at different retail establishment.

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