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The Moderating Role of Shopping Frequency on the Relationship Between Store Image and Satisfaction: Evidence from Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

In the fast-moving retail industry, consumer needs guide purchasing decisions. While several studies have explored the basic characteristics of consumers' store choice strategies, the industry would benefit from further analysis. This study examines Cyprus consumers' supermarket shopping behaviour, identifies store image expectations, evaluates expectation differences across consumer profiles, and explores the effect of shopping frequency on the relationship between store image and satisfaction. We surveyed 692 consumers from eight cities in Cyprus, which has a unique social, cultural, and political environment. Four store image criteria were identified: services, atmosphere, prices, and location and convenience. The findings suggest that store image expectations differ significantly by gender, ethnicity, and shopping frequency and that shopping frequency moderates the relationship between services and satisfaction as well as between atmosphere and satisfaction. By elucidating the store choice factors important to consumers, these findings provide valuable information to managers of operating supermarkets and potential competitors.

JEL Classifications: *M0, M1, M2, M3*

Keywords: Cyprus, retailing, shopping frequency, store choice, store image, supermarket

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I. INTRODUCTION

Consumers' perceptions of store image affect their retail store patronage behaviour (Hutcheson and Moutinho, 1998; Thang and Tan, 2003). Previous research has shown that store image attributes differ across retail sectors (Birtwistle et al., 1999; Gosh, 1994), with each retail store additionally having a distinct perception of consumers based on salient elements of the retail mix (Bloemer and de Ruyter, 1998). Zeithaml (1988) has identified product, service quality, and store image attributes that influence store choice behaviours. Studies on retailing have revealed that service quality and internal and external store appearance have become prominent in influencing consumer choices and in differentiating one retailer from another (Chang and Wildt,1994). In this fiercely competitive environment, retailers must understand the roles of store attributes to better satisfy customers, thereby improving sales performance and increasing customer retention and loyalty (Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009).

Despite vast research on store image, few studies have been conducted in Mediterranean countries, where the markets may not reflect findings in other regions. Cyprus is a small island in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea where Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities constitute the majority of the population, living side by side and sharing many aspects of the unique Cypriot cultural, demographic, and political environment. There are 339,275 people living in the north and 848,300 people living in the south of the island. Retailing and wholesaling constitute 14.1% of the GDP in the south of the island. In terms of supermarket retailing in the south, the grocery sector has been growing rapidly for the past 15 years, following international trends. As of 2014, there were 132 hypermarkets/supermarkets, and local retail chains and global retailers made up 55% of the total sales in the retail grocery sector (Olympios, 2015). Due to the lack of data about the grocery retail sector in the north, interviews were conducted with managers of the leading supermarket retailers and their key suppliers. These interviews revealed that retailing and wholesaling constitute 14% of the GDP in the northern part of the island, and the retailing sector has been growing by approximately 23% annually for the past two years. Out of 1,300 grocery retailers, only 50 may be classified as supermarkets according to the American Marketing Association's (2017) definition; furthermore, these are only local supermarkets and a few local chains. While talks for the unification of the island have yet to come to a conclusion, Turkish and Greek Cypriots have been able to travel freely and purchase products and services in both regions since 2003, expanding cross-regional spending over the years. Credit card usage statistics show that in the first half of 2019, Turkish Cypriots spent €18.8 million, with the highest share of transactions being in supermarkets in the south. Greek Cypriots, however, spent €5.7 million in the north, primarily on credit card transactions, hotels, casinos, fuel, and fruit and vegetables (Yeni Düzen ,2020; LGC News, 2018). Hence, as competition intensifies, both current and potential supermarket retailers must have a thorough knowledge of consumers' store choice behaviour and be aware of how consumer expectations may differ across demographic profiles in Cyprus.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers' perceptions of store image affect their retail store patronage behaviour (Hutcheson and Moutinho, 1998; Thang and Tan, 2003). Previous research has shown that store image attributes differ across retail sectors (Birtwistle et al., 1999), with each retail store additionally having a distinct image in the minds of consumers based on salient elements of the retail mix (Bloemer and de Ruyter, 1998). Zeithaml (1988) has identified that product, service quality, and store image attributes influence store choice behaviours. Studies on retailing have revealed that service quality and internal and external store appearance have become prominent in influencing consumer choices and in differentiating one retailer from another (Chang & Wildt, 1994). In this fiercely competitive environment, retailers must understand the roles of store attributes to better satisfy customers, thereby improving sales performance and increasing customer retention and loyalty (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009).

When making store preference decisions, consumers go through a cognitive process wherein they evaluate store alternatives against a set of personally important criteria, similar to the process they undertake while making purchasing decisions. Indeed, these criteria are the expectations stores must meet to satisfy consumers' needs. When evaluating alternative stores, consumers try to identify the stores that will fulfil their expectations. Thus, their evaluation is subjective (Home, 2002). Studies on store preference criteria have identified store image as an important determinant of consumer preference (Erdem et al., 1999). Martineau (1958) defined store image as 'the store personality or image, the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes' (p. 47).

Research regarding the identification and measurement of the components of store image has focused on different retail store categories. An extensive amount of research, conducted in various countries, has focused specifically on supermarket preference. Skinner (1969) identified pleasant shopping experience, prices, social influences, nearness to other services, availability of meat products, advertising, convenience, and location as the basic consumer motives concerning supermarket selection in the United States. Thirty-seven years later, Carpenter and Moore (2006) found that cleanliness, product selection, price competitiveness, crowding, courtesy of personnel, and ease of access are the most important store attributes for U.S. supermarket customers. Merchandise quality and prices (Severin et al., 2001) and product quality, the convenience of the location, and value for money (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003) were identified as the key drivers of supermarket preference for Canadian consumers. Hutcheson and Moutinho (1998) determined the quality of product and staff, additional services, availability of parking and petrol, ease/speed of use, and value for money to be the underlying constructs of Welsh consumers' supermarket preferences. Four studies conducted in similar years in northern European countries were identified. Home (2002), found fresh fruit and vegetables, a versatile range of goods, fair pricing of goods, friendly salespeople, reliable shopkeepers, the ability to find goods easily, clearly marked prices, and cleanliness and neatness of the store as the most important preference criteria of Finnish consumers, while Landsverk et al. (2003), in their research in Norway, identified price as the most important supermarket preference criterion. Semeijn et al. (2004) concluded that layout, merchandise, and service are the main components of store image for Dutch consumers. In Denmark, Hansen and Solgaard (2004) identified product variety as the most important common factor influencing store preference across discount stores, hypermarkets, and traditional supermarkets.

Research in neighbouring Mediterranean countries reveals similar results. Baltas and Papastathopoulou (2003) identified merchandise quality, merchandise variety, and store locations as the most important store preference criteria for Greek consumers. Six years later Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) found products, pricing, atmosphere, personnel, merchandising, and in-store convenience constitute the main supermarket store image attributes for Greek consumers. In two studies conducted in Turkey, Tabak et al. (2005) identified product variety, accessibility, product quality, and general price level as the most influential image criteria, while Külter and Polat (2007) suggested that store atmosphere, product quality and variety, service amenities, and price elements are the most important criteria for Turkish consumers. In two studies carried out in the northern part of Cyprus, Guneren (2012) found services, product variety, convenience, and price/value were the most important store preference criteria, and Dagli (2014) identified added benefits, non-price essentials, pricing, and personnel as the most important.

Previous studies have also focused on the role of demographic variables in consumers' store image expectations. The common finding is that store image expectations differ significantly by gender (e.g., Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) and age (e.g., Külter and Polat, 2007; Hawes and Lumpkin, 1984) but not by other consumer characteristics like education, occupation, income, and household size. Satisfaction has also attracted considerable attention from researchers. Previous studies have shown that consumers' perceptions of retail store attributes influence satisfaction (Bloemer and de Ruyter, 1998; Chang et al., 2015; Kim and Jin, 2001), and satisfied customers are more inclined to repurchase and become loyal (Thang & Tan, 2003). Bloomer and de Ruyter (1997) suggested that store loyalty is built through store satisfaction, which is built on store image.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Aim and originality

Previous research conducted on Cyprus consumers has concentrated on either the north or the south of the island, ignoring the free movement of people from one side to the other and the possibility of unification, which is a scenario businesses and investors must consider. Thus, the focus herein is first to identify the store image factors important to consumers in Cyprus, and then to provide insight into how shopping frequency moderates the relationship between store image factors and satisfaction. Our first hypothesis is:

H1: Store image expectations differ significantly by consumer profile.

Previous studies have focused on store image perception, shopper satisfaction, and shopper loyalty, but none have analysed the moderating role of shopping frequency. Thus, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Shopping frequency moderates the relationship between each of the store image attributes and shopper satisfaction.

The authors know of no other study in the field of marketing that has been conducted across both the northern and southern areas of Cyprus concurrently. Furthermore, the present study uniquely analyses the moderating role of shopping frequency on the relationship between perceived store image attributes and satisfaction.

B. Methods

Data were collected from a total of 692 conveniently selected consumers who reported having an active role in supermarket shopping for the household. Comprising this sample, 390 consumers live in four main cities in northern Cyprus (Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia, and Morphou) and 302 live in four main cities in southern Cyprus (Nicosia, Larnaca, Limassol, and Paphos). The field study was conducted by leading professional research companies in both regions.

C. Data-collection tools

The consumers were surveyed using a five-part questionnaire. The first part consisted of 29 store image attributes, derived from the relevant literature, to identify respondents' expectations from an ideal supermarket. The respondents were asked to assess each attribute using a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). In the second part, respondents were asked to evaluate the supermarket they visited regularly according to the same 29 store image attributes using a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), to identify their perceptions. The third part consisted of four questions about the respondents' supermarket shopping behaviours, including shopping frequency, and one question about their overall satisfaction with the supermarket that they usually visit. In the fourth part, respondents were asked whether they would switch to another supermarket if they faced an unfavourable change and to identify five such change criteria. Satisfaction was defined and measured as overall satisfaction rather than as a transaction-specific post-purchase evaluation. In the last part of the questionnaire, respondents identified themselves according to 11 demographic variables, including ethnicity.

The questionnaire was developed in English. Translations to Turkish and Greek and back to English were undertaken by Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot professional translators. Before finalising the questionnaire, to ensure face validity, feedback was received from experts, including managers and suppliers of supermarkets and academics. The experts reviewed the draft questionnaire and made comments on the language, general structure, content, flow, duration, explicitness, and sufficiency of the measurement tools. In line with the feedback received, some statements were rephrased and some attributes were removed to eliminate redundancy.

IV. RESULTS

The final sample had the following structure: gender (female: 61.8%, male: 38.2%), age group (≤25 years: 18%, 26–35 years: 18%, 36–45 years: 19%, 46–55 years: 20%, 56–65 years: 23%, over 65 years: 2%), education (primary: 14%, high school: 36%, undergraduate: 42%, graduate: 8.1%), residence (North Nicosia: 22%, Famagusta: 17%, Kyrenia: 11%, Morphou: 7%, South Nicosia: 17%, Larnaca: 7%, Limassol: 12%, Paphos: 4%), and ethnicity (Turkish Cypriot: 32%, Greek Cypriot: 40%, Turkish: 19%, Greek: 2%, British: 3%, Other: 4%).

Of the respondents, 22.4% visited supermarkets every day, 28% visited four to five times per week, 27% visited two to three times per week, and 16% visited once or twice per month. Regarding preferred supermarkets, 91% of the respondents visited one supermarket regularly. 58.3% shopped regularly from a local chain, 29.6% shopped regularly from a local market, and 12.1% shopped regularly from a global chain. More than 78% of the respondents shopped alone, 76% preferred to shop on weekdays, and 91.3% were satisfied with the supermarket they visited regularly. Cleanliness of the store; competitive prices; and the availability of fresh food such as fruit, vegetables, and dairy products were identified as the top three store attributes critical for respondents, any unfavourable change which would result in switching to a competitor. Less than 1% of the respondents rated criteria about store atmosphere as critical to their satisfaction. Table 1 summarises the consumers' shopping behaviour.

Table 1
Shopping behaviour of the respondents

Supermarket Type Regularly Visited		**Shopping Time**	
Local Chain	58.3%	Weekdays	76.0%
Local Market	29.6%	Weekends	24.0%
Global Chain	12.1%		
Satisfaction with the Supermarket Regularly Visited		**Shopping Partner**	
Satisfied	91.3%	Alone	78.9%
Not satisfied	8.7%	With spouse	14.7%
		With spouse and kids	2.5%
		With parents	3.3%
		With friends	0.6%
Shopping Frequency		**Switching Reason**	
Everyday	22.4%	Cleanliness	13.0%
4-5 times/week	28.1%	Competitive prices	12.1%
2-3 times/week	27.2%	Availability of fresh food	11.8%
Once/week	15.5%	Product variety	8.4%
1-2 times/month	6.8%	Product quality	8.4%
		Discounts and sales promotions	7.8%
		Price/quality balance	7.6%

To identify store image factors affecting consumers' supermarket preference, exploratory factor analysis was conducted with maximum likelihood extraction using the direct oblimin rotation method. Direct oblimin rotation is appropriate when it is reasonable to correlate among constructs, as is common in social sciences (Hair et al., 2016). Items with eigenvalues of one or greater were extracted, and factor loadings lower than 0.40 and those with cross-loading were excluded from further analysis. Four factors explaining 57.22% of the total variance were extracted, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.60 to 0.84, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Factors and reliability of store attributes

Factor labels and statements	**Factor loading**
Services	
Cleanliness and tidiness of shelves	0.800
Cleanliness of staff	0.788

Kindness of staff	0.751			
Obligingness and enthusiasm of staff	0.714			
Existence of price tags on products/shelves	0.604			
Freshness of food products (vegetables, fruits, and dairy)	0.597			
Scent in the market	0.592			
Store atmosphere				
Colours used inside the market		0.770		
Music in the market		0.659		
Spacious corridors		0.590		
Illumination of the market		0.584		
Spacious interior design		0.505		
Price				
Discounts and special offers			0.846	
Low prices compared to major competitors			0.833	
Location and convenience				
Car parking				0.761
Located close to home/work				0.694
Layout of the market				0.585
Cronbach's alpha (α)	0.84	0.72	0.68	0.60
Variance explained (%)	31.1	10.9	7.7	7.5
Total variance explained (%)	57.22			

The first factor accounting for the largest variance in store image attributes (31.1%) was 'services', consisting of factors concerning the cleanliness and tidiness of shelves, cleanliness and kindness of staff, and availability of fresh food. The scent in the market was perceived to be a signal of cleanliness and freshness. The second factor was 'store atmosphere', characterised by colours, music, illumination, spaciousness, and interior design. The third factor was 'price', made up of factors concerning discounts, low/competitive prices, and promotions. The fourth factor, 'location and convenience', comprised the availability of car parking, the location, and the layout.

The compliance indices obtained from the results of the confirmatory factor analysis reveal that a four-factor solution is an acceptable model of supermarket selection factors when compared with the expected critical values of the related indices, meaning that each factor correctly represents the items of which it is comprised. Table 3 shows these goodness-of-fit indices.

Table 3
Goodness-of-fit indices

Compliance measures	Model
χ^2/sd	2.890
Goodness-of-fit index	0.948
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index	0.928
Normed fit index	0.910
Relative fit index	0.889
Incremental fit index	0.939
Tucker–Lewis index	0.925
Comparative fit index	0.938
Root mean of square error average	0.052

The reliability of the scale was tested using the Cronbach's alpha and split-half internal consistency tests. The Spearman–Brown coefficient of 0.803, Guttmann split-half coefficient of 0.802, and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.831 reveal that the scale was reliable.

The first hypothesis was that store image expectations would vary by consumer profile, and the results are shown in Table 4. A *t*-test analysis revealed that women and men differ significantly in their expectations regarding services, price, and location and convenience ($t=-3.657$, $p\leq0.0001$; $t=2.089$, $p\leq0.05$; and $t=2.643$, $p\leq0.05$, respectively) but not regarding store atmosphere. In all three dimensions, women have higher expectations than men. ANOVA results regarding ethnicity and expectations showed that there is no significant difference between Greek Cypriot and Greek consumers in their expectations regarding services and location and convenience factors. Likewise, no significant difference was identified between the expectations of Turkish Cypriot and Turkish consumers regarding services and location and convenience factors. Greek Cypriot and Greek consumers differed significantly from Turkish Cypriot and Turkish consumers ($p\leq0.001$) and British consumers ($p\leq0.001$), who also differed significantly from the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish consumers ($p\leq0.001$). Greek Cypriot and Greek consumers have relatively higher expectation levels than Turkish Cypriot and Turkish consumers, and British consumers have relatively lower expectation levels than the other consumer groups for both factors. Greek and British consumers did not differ significantly in their store atmosphere expectations, with relatively lower expectation levels, and they differed significantly from all other consumer groups. ($p\leq0.001$). British consumers also differed significantly from all other consumer groups in their price expectations, while Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, Greek, and Turkish consumers did not differ significantly in this regard ($p\leq0.001$). The results further show that expectations do not differ significantly by age, education, income, or household size.

Further analysis concerned whether the expectations of consumers differ according to shopping frequency. In line with the opinions of the supermarket managers contacted, the respondents visiting a supermarket more than once per week were termed 'frequent shoppers', whereas those visiting less than twice a week were termed 'less-frequent shoppers'. A *t*-test analysis showed that expectations differ significantly between the two groups only regarding store atmosphere ($t=4.500$, $p\leq0.0001$), with frequent shoppers having higher expectation levels. According to these findings, H1 is partially supported.

Table 4

T-test and ANOVA post hoc findings (expectations)

	Services		**Store atmosphere**		**Price**		**Location and convenience**	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Gender								
Female	3.21	0.28	(a)		3.80	0.54	2.96	0.43
Male	3.13	0.33			3.71	0.60	2.87	0.46
Ethnicity								
Turkish Cypriot	3.10	0.31	2.44	0.43	3.79	0.53	2.84	0.43
Greek Cypriot	3.27	0.27	2.36	0.45	3.71	0.61	3.06	0.34
Turkish	3.16	0.30	2.53	0.40	3.88	0.51	2.81	0.58
Greek	3.34	0.14	2.02	0.40	3.63	0.60	2.90	0.28
British	2.97	0.23	2.14	0.36	3.39	0.58	2.77	0.34
Shopping frequency								

Frequent shoppers	(a)	2.45	0.42	(a)	(a)
Less-frequent shoppers		2.27	0.49		

Note: (a) denotes no significant difference ($p \geq 0.05$). SD is the standard deviation.

To test the second hypothesis, hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine the moderating role of shopping frequency in the relationship between store image perceptions and satisfaction. Non-categorical variables were standardised before entering the regression model. Demographic variables which were found to have significant importance on perceptions entered the analysis in the first step. The interaction terms obtained by multiplying services by shopping frequency and store atmosphere by shopping frequency contribute significantly to the related model and suggest that shopping frequency significantly moderates the relationship between services perception and satisfaction, shown in Table 5, and store atmosphere perception and satisfaction, shown in Table 6.

Table 5
Hierarchical regression analysis: The moderating role of shopping frequency on the relationship between services perception and satisfaction

Step	Variable	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β
1	Gender	0.027	0.003	-0.002
	Age	0.097*	0.049	0.054
	Education	0.089*	0.087*	0.090*
	Ethnicity	-0.046	0.044	0.029
2	Shopping frequency		-0.003	0.014
	Services		0.343*	0.368*
3	Services × Shopping frequency			-0.103*
	Model F	3.917*	15.567*	14.458*
	Total R^2	0.024	0.128	0.137
	ΔR^2	0.024	0.104	0.009

Note: * $p \leq 0.01$

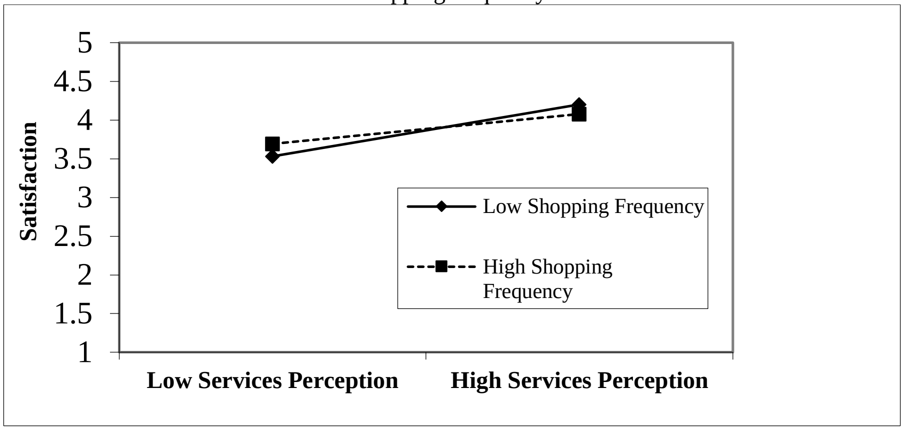
Table 6
Hierarchical regression analysis: The moderating role of shopping frequency on the relationship between store atmosphere perception and satisfaction

Step	Variable	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β
1	Gender	0.027	0.003	-0.004
	Age	0.097*	0.070	0.071
	Education	0.089*	0.091*	0.090*
	Ethnicity	-0.046	0.014	0.002
2	Shopping frequency		-0.046	-0.053
	Store atmosphere		0.242*	0.249*
3	Store atmosphere × Shopping frequency			-0.095*
	Model F	3.917*	9.287*	8.894*
	Total R^2	0.024	0.080	0.089
	ΔR^2	0.024	0.057	0.009

Note: * $p \leq 0.01$

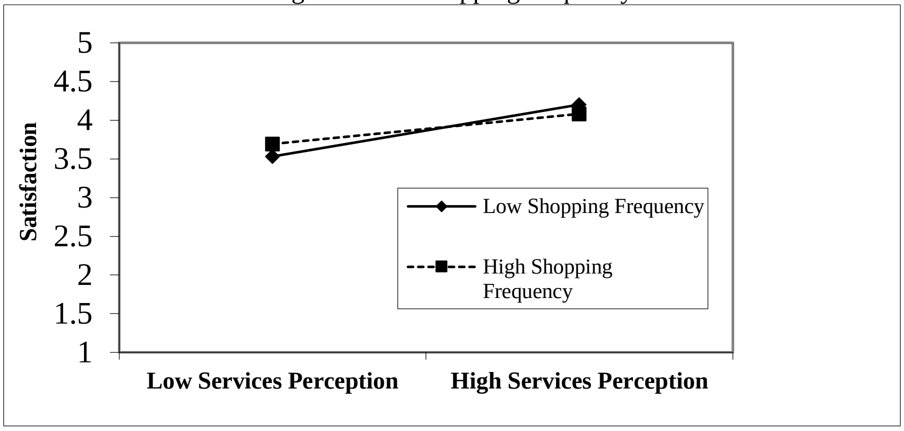
Figure 1 illustrates the moderating effect of shopping frequency on the relationship between services perception and satisfaction. At lower levels of services perception, frequent shoppers have higher satisfaction levels than less-frequent shoppers. However, at higher levels of service perception, the satisfaction of less-frequent shoppers is higher than frequent shoppers, showing that improvement in the perception of services leads to a higher effect on the satisfaction of less-frequent shoppers.

Figure 1
The relationship between services perception and satisfaction for low and high levels of shopping frequency



The moderating effect of shopping frequency on the relationship between store atmosphere perception and satisfaction is illustrated in Figure 2. At lower levels of store atmosphere perception, satisfaction of frequent shoppers is slightly higher than less-frequent shoppers. At higher levels of store atmosphere perception, less-frequent shoppers have higher satisfaction than frequent shoppers. Thus, improving store atmosphere boosts the satisfaction of less-frequent shoppers, while it has a lower positive effect on the satisfaction of frequent shoppers.

Figure 2
The relationship between store atmosphere perception and satisfaction for low and high levels of shopping frequency



The hierarchical regression analysis results show that shopping frequency does not moderate the relationship between the other two image factors and satisfaction ($p \geq 0.05$), lending partial support to H2.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite significant academic and commercial research, many uncertainties remain about how consumer behaviour affects store preference (Knee, 2002) and consumer expectations tend to differ from one market to another. This study makes a necessary contribution to the limited research carried out in Cyprus regarding supermarket selection. The results of this study can guide businesses in both northern and southern Cyprus in developing retail strategies.

The study has investigated factors affecting supermarket choice criteria of Cyprus consumers and has presented an analysis of whether these expectations differ according to the consumer profile. Four attributes have been identified, namely, services, store atmosphere, price, and convenience and location.

Services concern the presence of clean, kind, and enthusiastic staff and the availability of products on clean, tidy shelves with price tags. According to Grönroos (1991), intangible service attributes concern the functional quality of the store; that is, how consumers obtain a service, rather than the technical quality of the store, which regards the quality of the products themselves. Supermarket shopping is a self-service concept, where interaction with staff is quite low compared to other retail store formats, yet previous studies (e.g., Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Home, 2002; Koo, 2003; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) have also identified the human factor as a common store image attribute. The development of positive staff–customer relationships can play a significant role in satisfaction and can provide a key differential advantage. This finding is unsurprising within the context of Cyprus where interaction among people is high; it is common to see customers chat with one another or with store personnel. The development of customer–staff relationships also provides managers with a unique opportunity to obtain first-hand information about customer satisfaction, allowing managers to make any necessary corrections. Furthermore, fresh fruit and vegetable revenues in the supermarkets varied between 12% and 20%; therefore, in contrast to frozen or processed foods, fresh food products are a prerequisite for Cyprus consumers. Cleanliness of the store and fresh food products were ranked as the first and third issues in which any discontent might lead customers to switch to a competitor. Thus, service attributes are critical for consumer satisfaction.

Store atmosphere, as identified by previous researchers (e.g., Koo, 2003; Stanley and Sewall, 1976; Thang and Tan, 2003; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009), was found to be the second most important store image attribute in this study. Thang and Tan (2003) stated that a pleasing store atmosphere enhances the quality of the visit and thus increases consumer preference for the store. A stimulating store atmosphere can induce specific emotional outcomes (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006) and lead consumers to spend more time and money in the store (Donovan et.al.,1994). However, although the store atmosphere aspects of colour, music, lighting, spaciousness, and interior design were identified as important factors for consumers in their choice of store, these factors were not considered to be issues that would cause consumers to switch to another supermarket in response to a negative change. Frequent shoppers have significantly higher store atmosphere expectations than less-frequent shoppers. The majority of the consumers on the island visit supermarkets frequently, generally on the way home from work; therefore, they visit the same supermarkets repeatedly and are familiar with the layout of the store. Consequently, they have small shopping baskets and spend a short amount of time in the market. Moreover, they have strong relationships with the store personnel and the confidence that any grievances they may have will be addressed.

The third important attribute identified was prices, consisting of discounts and competitive pricing. While price has emerged as an important variable in studies related to grocery shopping behaviour (e.g., Landsverk et al., 2003; Severin et al., 2001; Tabak et al., 2005; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009), some studies have shown that price is not the only factor that determines supermarket preference and that consumers spend a short time making decisions regarding price (Dickson and Sawyer, 1990). However, competitive prices were ranked as the second issue in which any discontent might lead consumers to switch to a competitor. Consumer expectations with regard to prices do not differ according to shopping frequency and residence; however, price was found to be more important to women than to men. Previous research has found that women make the highest number of purchases in a family (Blaylock and Smallwood, 1987) and that elderly women undertake this task in most cases (Dholakia, 1999). Women in Cyprus have more control over grocery shopping decisions, and they want to purchase the highest-quality food products at the lowest possible prices. British consumers were found to differ significantly from all other groups concerning price, to which they assign relatively less importance. British consumers living on the island are mostly retired people who have relatively higher disposable incomes than the other consumer groups studied.

The last factor, location and convenience, has also been frequently identified in previous research conducted in different countries (e.g., Baltas and Papastathopoulou, 2003; Belwal and Belwal, 2017; Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Skinner, 1969). Store selection is highly influenced by the geographic locations of retailers (Brooks et al., 2004), and the proximity of the store influences consumers' patronage decisions (Baltas and Papastathopoulou, 2003; Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009). Due to insufficient public transportation, car ownership is high throughout the island; therefore, consumers prefer stores with parking facilities.

The relationship between perceptions of services and store atmosphere and satisfaction were found to be affected by shopping frequency. It was found that at lower levels of services perception, frequent shoppers have slightly higher satisfaction levels than less-frequent shoppers, whereas at higher levels of services perception, less-frequent shoppers have higher satisfaction. This may be because frequent shoppers spend less time in the store and do not consider supermarket shopping as a leisure activity. The moderating role of shopping frequency on the relationship between store atmosphere perception and satisfaction is found to be similar to the case of services and satisfaction. This may be because frequent shoppers visit the supermarket more than once per week, mostly during weekdays after work, and tend to spend less time in the market, purchasing daily items as quickly as possible. These consumers shop frequently and are familiar with the layout of the store, enabling them to finish their shopping quickly with little regard to the store’s atmosphere. However, less-frequent shoppers spend more time in the market and have larger baskets; hence, even an incremental improvement in the atmosphere of the store leads to a higher positive effect on their satisfaction.

Grocery shopping is a task-oriented activity (Babin et al., 1994) to acquire useful products (Kim and Jin, 2001), and consumers’ shopping motives are influenced by culture and by the socioeconomic conditions of the market (Roth, 1995). Therefore, the findings of previous studies conducted in different cultural and socioeconomic settings are not directly relevant to the markets considered in the current study. As competition intensifies, supermarket managers should consider the competitive benefits of a more-favourable store atmosphere. Thang and Tan (2003) have determined that store atmosphere influences store loyalty and repurchase behaviour, and Berman and Evans (1998) have argued that consumers who like a store's atmosphere stay longer and prefer to shop more frequently.

Cyprus is a small island with a low population. Distances are short, and word-of-mouth communication is effective; customers hearing of higher quality fresh produce or price discounts at another supermarket may simply change their route to try a different store. This places great pressure on supermarket managers to monitor the prices, discounts, and sales promotion activities of their competitors as well as the type and quality of their products. Store managers should never sacrifice hygiene and should employ staff with good communication skills to build relationships with customers. Staff can also observe customers' behaviours and report discontentedness. The availability of fresh food products is critical; managers must ensure that fresh food products, especially bread, dairy, fresh vegetables, and fruit, are available every day. A favourable store atmosphere, high level of services, superior fresh food products, competitive prices, and excellent location and car parking facilities would allow stores to increase the time customers spend in the store and stimulate conspicuous buying, creating a high-quality image and emotional outcomes in customers such as happiness and trust.

The focus of this study is supermarket image criteria of Cyprus consumers; therefore, the results may not be directly applicable to consumers in other countries and other retail store categories. However, researchers may wish to replicate the study in other Mediterranean islands, such as Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Crete, and Malta to examine whether Mediterranean island consumers have similar behaviours. Replicating the study in other retail store categories across Cyprus would help businesses to remain competitive in case of a possible unification of the island. Examining the moderating role of shopping frequency on the relationship between store image attributes and satisfaction in different retail store categories would provide useful information to managers while designing marketing strategies targeted toward consumers with different shopping frequencies.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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