Factors influencing consumers' patronage intentions in Kuwait

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Abstract
Grocery shopping is considered a critical and routine element of consumer behavior. Hence, numerous studies have been conducted to understand the factors influencing shoppers' behavior. Employing a cross-sectional design, this paper aims at describing the shopping behavior of hypermarket consumers in Kuwait. Results show that nationality, payment options, and the day of the week are critical factors influencing consumers 'patronage intentions.

1-Introduction

Grocery shopping is considered a critical and routine element of consumer behavior. Hence, numerous studies have been conducted to understand the factors influencing shoppers' behavior. What is more, in the last several years, the movement of many French and American retailers to India, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and other countries has gained momentum. To illustrate, a number of international grocery retailers such as Carrefour, Gèant, City Center and Lu & Lu hypermarkets have entered the Kuwaiti market. (Fayez and Labib; 2016, Capital Standards, 2010).

In many developing countries, spending on food and groceries is rapidly increasing due to factors such as an increase in per capita disposable income, globalization and global interactions, advancements in information and communication technologies, increased the relative importance of education, and more health awareness among consumers (Faloye 2014; Heiens, Pleshko, &Aldousari 2016; XU, Zhou, and Lone; 2016). Additionally, a transformation of consumers' lifestyles, accelerated migration to cities and urbanization, and an increased number of consumers who belong to higher income class groups have contributed to the increased consumption (Calvo, Cristina, and Levy, 2015; Naik et al. 2015, Jabir, Kapoor and Moorthy, 2010).

As a result, promising markets in many developing nations around the world have emerged. In the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, markets were ranked fourth and fifth respectively in global retail attractiveness (Capital Standards, 2010). In addition, according to the latest available estimates, the growth in the Kuwaiti retail business was 22% in the period from 2010 and 2013, reaching a value of 55.65 billion dollars. Meanwhile, the local retail market is forecast to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 6.7% between 2013 and 2018 (The Report: Kuwait, 2015).

These markets were able to attract many of the western forms of retailers such as convenience stores, discount stores, supermarkets, specialty stores, department stores, variety stores, and hypermarkets. The Government's Union of Cooperative Societies controls the food and groceries retail business in Kuwait. This Union comprises of all grocery stores, convenience stores, supermarkets, and hypermarkets. The operations of private retailers are limited mainly to commercial areas. The first private hypermarket retailer in Kuwait was Sultan Center, established in1980.

In 2008, the Kuwaiti government agreed upon permitting the Union to import goods directly from different suppliers. These decisions aimed at reducing the cost of obtaining goods at lower prices and providing cooperatives with a economical advantages. Nevertheless, international retailers such as Carrefour, city center, Lu &Lu and Gèant have expanded their presence in Kuwait

(Capital Standards, 2010). More recently, another Kuwaiti private hypermarket was established under the name of Savco.

The presence of global food retailers and hypermarkets had boasted the competition in the Kuwaiti market. Remarkably, in spite of changes taking part in the foods and grocery retail sector in Kuwait and the increased relative importance of that sector, the buying behavior of consumers has not been subject to any study yet. The focus was on measuring the size and volume of the sector rather than on the buying behavior of consumers. Thus, the purpose of this study is to shed light on this behavior using a large sample of consumers who are buying their needed foods and groceries from aforementioned hypermarkets in Kuwait.

2-Literature Review

The issue of buying behavior of foods and groceries was subject to many studies that tackled this behavior from different perspectives. The first group of studies focused on describing the behavior and the decision-making process. Studies from this group revealed some important insights into consumer buying behavior. The main points of interest were the frequency that consumers visit grocery stores, the amount of money they spent, preferred time for shopping of foods and grocery products, and preference to buy groceries from a particular store. (Rosenbloom, 1983; Woodside and Trappey, 1992; Messinger& Narasimhan. 1997; Fox, Montgomery &Lodish, 2004; Sinha & Banerjee, 2004 and French, Shimotsu, Wall &Gerlach, 2008).

The second group of studies focused on the effect of consumers' perceptions of store atmosphere and store image on store patronage. Several factors leading to store patronage were explored. For example, it has been found that sales employees and store atmosphere attributes had a positive influence on consumer satisfaction, which, in turn, had a direct impact on word of mouth and patronage intention (Chang, Cho, Turner, Gupta and Watchravesringkan, 2015). Other store environmental cues were also found to affect store patronage, including store design, product prices, interpersonal service quality, merchandise quality, the time and effort exerted by the consumers to get what they need of foods and groceries, and perceived psychic cost (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002). Furthermore, waiting expectations, customer density and presence of classical music were all found to affect store patronage intentions (Grewal, Baker, Levy & Voss, 2003).

The third group of studies compared online and offline purchasing behavior in terms of: brand loyalty (e.g. Danaher, Wilson & Davis, 2004); shopping behavior (Faloye; 2014, Andrews &Currim, 2004); the importance of brand names (e.g. Degeratu, Rangaswamy& Wu, 2000), and consumers' perception of the advantages and disadvantages of shopping online for groceries (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005 and Eaglescliffe, 2016). A third stream of studies has examined the consumer traits of internet shoppers in terms of their lifestyles (Brengman*et al*. 2005), or their psychographic characteristics (Aldousari et al. 2016; Barnes, Bauer, Newmann& Huber, 2007).

The current research belongs to the first group of studies. It aims at describing the shopping behavior of consumers in Kuwait when they come to buy their needed foods and groceries from hypermarket stores.Due to the nature of this study, a questionnaire was designed especially for this purpose, containing a number of questions to be empirically answered. The questions were the following:

When consumers come to buy their needed foods and groceries, which hypermarket store they prefer? How consumers rank hypermarket stores operating in Kuwait in terms of their preference? In addition, does this rank vary by the nationality of consumers (Kuwaitis vs. Expatriates)?

- How many times per week consumers visit their preferred hypermarket stores to buy food and groceries?
- What is the percentage of loyal consumers to hypermarket stores?
- How much consumer spends on foods and groceries monthly? Does it vary by buyer's nationality (Kuwaitis vs. Expatriates)?

3-Study Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature as a cross-sectional design was used. The sample of this study comprised of adult retail customers shopping for food and grocery from all hypermarket store branches in the State of Kuwait. Due to the lack of time and budget, an intercept sample was employed (Dabholkar, Thrope&Rentz, 1996; Sinha & Banerjee, 2004 and Jayaankaraprasad, 2010). Data was collected at all branches of the five hypermarket stores (Sultan center, Carrefour, Gèant, City center, and Lulu hypermarket). Only one hypermarket store was excluded from the study, namely "Savco," because it was just beginning its operations during the data collection time. Consumers were interviewed in comfortable places prepared specially for the data collection purpose at the front of the five hypermarket stores. The data was collected using a self-administering structured non-disguised questionnaire. Two thousand consumers representing the study sample filled out this questionnaire. Table (1) shows the structure of this sample. As shown in this table, the Kuwaiti respondents represent 47.8%, while expatriates represent 52.2% of the total sample. In this regard, the sample composition reflects the structure of the population living in Kuwait taking into account that the number of expatriates living in Kuwait exceeds the number of nationals. In addition, the percentage of the males in the sample is higher than the percentage of females. This is because in Kuwait males tend to shop for food and groceries more than females, especially among expatriates.

Socio-economic and demographic characteristic	Kuwaiti	Expatriates	Total
Gender			
- **Male**	507	727	1234 (61.7%)
- **Female**	448	318	766 (38.3%)
Number of people in a household:			
- **One person**	308	406	714 (35.7%)
- **Two persons**	265	281	546 (27.3%)
- **3-5 persons**	273	264	537 (26.9%)
- **More than 5 persons**	109	94	203 (10.2%)
Monthly income (Kuwaiti Dinar):			
- **500 or less**	193	317	510 (25.5%)
- **501-1000**	302	390	692 (34.6%)
- **1001-1500**	294	153	447 (22.4%)
- **1501-2000**	110	123	233 (11.7%)
- **2001-3000**	26	26	52 (2.6%)
- **More than 3000**	30	36	66 (3.3%)
Total	955 (47.8%)	1045 (52.2%)	2000

Table (1) Study Sample Structure

3.1 Survey Instrument

On the basis of the previous studies, a questionnaire was developed to answer research questions. Several types of questions were used, including dichotomous, multiple choice, and ten-point itemized rating scale. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part 1 measures food and grocery shopping behavior from hypermarket stores. Part 2 measures the store factors affecting consumer preference of one hypermarket store over the others. Part 3 measures some consumer socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents.

3.2 Data Analysis and Results

The data was analyzed using SPSS version 24 to answer research questions. The first question was "*When consumers come to buy their needed foods and groceries, which hypermarket store they prefer? How consumers rank hypermarket stores operating in Kuwait in terms of their preference? In addition, does this rank vary by the nationality of consumers (Kuwaitis vs. Expatriates)?* Table (2) shows that the most preferred hypermarket store is "Sultan Center" where 38.2% of respondents prefer to buy their needed food and groceries. Carrefour comes in the second place with 26.5%. The least preferred hypermarket store was Géant with only 9.6% of respondents prefer to buy from it.

Hypermarket store name	Number of consumers	Percentage
Sultan Center	764	38.2%
Carrefour	531	26.5%
City center	263	13.2%
Lulu Hypermarket	251	12.6%
Géant	191	09.6%
total	2000	100%

Table (2): Hypermarket store preference in descending order

Furthermore, the analysis of the data showed that the rank of hypermarket stores based on consumers' preference varies by the nationality (Kuwaitis vs. expatriates). Table (3) shows the relative median ranks of those stores by both Kuwaitis and expatriates. It is clear from Table (3) that Kuwaitis preference is different from that of expatriates. The median test was used to examine if such difference is statistically significant or not. All median tests appeared to be statistically significant at 0.000.

Hypermarket store name	Number of Kuwaiti customers	Median Kuwaitis rank	Number of Expatriate consumers	Median Expatriates rank
Sultan Center	551	1	213	2
City center	74	5	189	3
Lulu Hypermarket	100	3	151	4
Carrefour	134	2	397	1
Géant	96	4	95	5
Total	955		1045	

Table (3): Consumer median preferences of hypermarket stores in Kuwait

"Sultan Center" was the most preferred hypermarket store for Kuwaitis, while "Carrefour" was the most preferred hypermarket for expatriates. Since "Sultan Center" is a Kuwaiti company, Kuwaiti customers tend to highly support it. Patriotism tends to be very high among Kuwaitis and that is why they prefer "Sultan Center" as a Kuwaiti company. Among the 746 consumers who prefer "Sultan Center," there were 551 Kuwait consumers. This number represents around 74% of all consumers who prefer to buy their food and grocery items from "sultan". On the other hand, in most cases, the monthly salary of expatriates tends to be lower than that of Kuwaitis, and since "Carrefour" prices are in general lower than those offered by "Sultan Center", the majority of expatriates prefers to buy their needed food and groceries from it.

The second question in this study dealt with the frequency that consumer shops hypermarket stores to buy his/her needed food and groceries. Table (4) summarizes the answers to this question.

Frequency	Number of customer	Percent	Number of Kuwaiti customers	Percent	Number of expatriate customers	Percent
One time	779	39.0%	464	48.6%	315	30.1%
Two times	660	33.0%	276	28.9%	384	36.7%
Three times	320	16.0%	123	12.9%	197	18.9%
Four times	104	5.2%	42	4.4%	62	5.9%
Five times	59	3.0%	22	2.3%	37	3.5%
Everyday	78	3.9%	28	2.9%	50	4.9%
Total	2000	100%	955	100%	1045	100%

Table (4): Number of shopping times per week

From this Table, it is evident that the majority of consumers prefers to shop either one time or two times a week. This preference represents around 72% of the total sample. Due to time limitations and effort savings desire, consumers prefer to minimize the number of times they go to the store to buy their food and groceries. This table indicates also that almost 49% of Kuwaiti customers prefer to buy their food and groceries only one time a week, and around 29% prefer to do that two times a week. On the other hand, around 37% of expatriates prefer to buy food and groceries two times a week and 30% of them prefer to do that one time a week. This means that the number of shopping times for food and groceries from hypermarket stores varies by the nationality of consumers (Kuwaitis vs. Expatriates). To test such difference statistically, Chi-Square test was used. Chi-Square value was equal to 73.248 with 4 degrees of freedom and it was significant at 0.000. Such results confirmed the existence of a difference between the preferred number of shopping times of Kuwaitis and expatriates. Kuwaitis prefer to buy food and grocery items once a week, while expatriates prefer to do that two times a week.

The third question was dealing with store patronage. In this research, store loyalty was defined operationally as buying 80% or more of needed food and groceries from the same hypermarket store. Table (5) shows the results regarding hypermarket store patronage in the Kuwaiti market.

Percentage of groceries bought from the same hypermarket	Number of customer	Percent	Number of Kuwaiti customers	Percent	Number of expatriate customers	Percent
80%	373	45.8%	158	46.2%	215	45.6%
85%	24	2.9%	12	3.5%	12	2.5%
90%	224	27.5%	98	28.7%	126	26.7%
95%	17	2.1%	12	3.5%	5	1.1%
100%	176	21.6	62	18.1%	114	24.2%
Total	**814**	**100%**	**342**	**100%**	**472**	**100%**

Table (5): Hypermarket Store Patronage Behavior in Kuwait

The results reported in Table (5) indicate two important facts regarding hypermarket store loyalty. First, only 40.7% of the total sample exhibits hypermarket store patronage. Second, expatriates tend to be more loyal than the Kuwaitis. Among those loyal customers, 42% are Kuwaiti customers and 58% are expatriates. Chi-square was used to test the statistical difference between Kuwaitis and expatriates' loyalty to hypermarket stores. The value of Chi-square was equal to 18.097 with one degree of freedom and significant at 0.000. This means that Kuwaitis tend to be less loyal to hypermarket stores compared to expatriates.

The fourth question dealt with the average of monthly spending by consumers on food and groceries. Since the estimation of this average will be made in a range, the normality of the distribution of the monthly spending variable was examined. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used for this examination. The test was statistically significant at 0.001 indicating that average spending variable is normally distributed. It was assumed that spending on food and groceries relies heavily on consumer income level and the number of people living in the household. Therefore, the average of monthly spending was estimated for different monthly income categories and for a different number of household sizes Table (6) shows estimated averages of monthly spending on food and groceries for the whole sample across different income categories.

Income category	Number of consumers	Ave. monthly spending	Percentage increase in spending	Standard deviation	Standard error	Range of spending
500 or less	510	141	---	58	3	138-144
501 to 1000	692	247	75%	55	2	245-249
1001 t0 1500	447	321	30%	49	2	319-323
1501 to 2000	233	378	18%	48	3	375-381
2001-3000	052	419	11%	120	16	403-435
> 3000	066	453	08%	72	9	444-462

Table (6): Estimated average of monthly spending on food and groceries for different income categories in Kuwaiti Dinars (Total sample) *

As seen in Table (6), the average spending on food and groceries per month is increasing as consumer monthly income increases. On the hand, as monthly income increases, the percentage increase in the average spending is decreasing. Such results confirm the old Engel's law, which states "as income increases, the income percentage spent on food will decrease."

The average of monthly spending on food and groceries was also estimated for both Kuwaitis and expatriates across the same income categories. The results of this estimation are shown in Table (7).

Income category	Num. Kuwaiti customer	Ave. monthly spending	Num.expatriate customers	Ave.monthly spending	t- value	d.f.	Sig.
500 or less	193	137	317	144	- 1.327	508	0.185
501-1000	302	242	390	250	- 2.088	960	0.037
1001-1500	294	314	153	332	- 3.788	445	0.000
1501-2000	110	381	123	376	0.789	231	0.432
2001-3000	026	423	026	394	1.614	50	0.113
> 3000	030	464	36	449	0.894	64	0.375

Table (7): Relationship between income category and total spending

As indicated in Table (7), a significant difference in spending exists between two income categories. Only those expatriates earning between 501 and 1500 K.D. spend more than Kuwaitis do. In the other income categories, both Kuwaitis and expatriates spend the same amount of money on food and groceries monthly.

The level of spending on food and groceries was also estimated based on the size of the household. Table (8) shows the results of these estimations.

Household Size	Number of consumers	Ave. monthly spending	s.d.	Standard error	Range of spending
One person	714	155	54	2	153-157
Two persons	546	259	33	1	258-260
3-5 persons	537	340	38	2	338-342
More than 5 persons	203	452	46	3	449-455

Table (8): Average of monthly spending on groceries for different household sizes

As shown in Table (8), when the number of people living in a household increases, the average of monthly spending on food and groceries will also increase. A further analysis indicated that this average for Kuwaitis is different than that for expatriates as shown in Table (9). When there is only one person in the household, Kuwaitis spend more than expatriates. On the other hand, when the number of people living in the same household is getting larger (more than three persons), expatriates spend more than Kuwaitis do. When only two persons live in a household, spending on food and groceries is the same for Kuwaitis and expatriates.

household size	Number of Kuwaiti customer	Ave. monthly spending	Number of expatriate customers	Ave. monthly spending	t-value	d.f.	Sig.
One person	308	162	406	150	2.194	712	0.004
Two persons	265	259	281	258	0.301	544	0.763
3-5 persons	273	336	264	343	- 1.992	535	0.047
> 5 persons	109	444	094	376	- 2.857	201	0.005

Table (9): Relationship between household size and spending

The fifth question dealt with the number of persons going together to a hypermarket to buy needed foods and groceries. Table (10) shows the answer to this question. The Results in this table indicated that more than half of sample prefers to shop alone, while only 25% of them prefer to shop with another person. The lowest percentage represents those consumers who prefer to shop with more than two persons.

Number of persons	frequency	percentage[
One person	1153	57.7%
Two persons	0503	25.2%
More than 2 person	0344	17.2%
Total	2000	100%

Table (10): Number of persons going shopping together

The next question was related to the preferred time for buying foods and groceries from a hypermarket store. Results reported in Table (11) show that around 61% of consumers prefer to buy during the weekdays, while only 39% prefer the weekends.

Time of week	frequency	percentage
Week days	1212	60.6%
Week ends	0788	39.4%
Total	2000	100%

Table (11): preferred time for buying groceries

The last question was about factors affecting consumer preference of hypermarket. Table (12) presents these factors in order from the highest to the lowest

Factor	Points (scale from 1-10)
Store opening hours	8.2
Store product assortment	8.1
Store product quality	8.0
Store cleanliness	8.0
Store space	7.9
New product introduction	7.8

Table (12): Factors affecting consumers' preference of a hypermarket

The primary factor affecting store preference is the store opening hours. Customers tend to prefer those hypermarket stores which are opened for longer hours. Both Sultan center and Carrefour are opening for twenty-four hours, seven days a week. The second factor was the store product assortment. Consumers prefer those hypermarket stores that carry a broader product assortment and deeper product lines. Both product quality and store cleanliness come in the third place. Store space was given the fourth important factor. The larger the store the more consumers would prefer to buy from it. Of course, store space reflects the breadth of the product assortment carried by the store. New product introduction came in the fifth place. Consumers prefer stores constantly introducing and offering new products.

4- Discussion and managerial implications

This study aimed at describing consumers' shopping behavior for foods and groceries from hypermarket stores in Kuwait. The analysis of data collected from 2000 customers revealed several points that warrant more discussion in this section. First, the results showed that Kuwaitis prefer to get their food and groceries from Sultan Center. As Sultan Center is a Kuwaiti company, more than 57% of Kuwaiti consumers choose this store as the most preferred hypermarket. This means that Sultan Center should focus mainly on Kuwaiti customers as its main target. The product assortment offered by this store should reflect the needs of this target by carrying more luxurious and highly priced food and grocery items, such as expensive imported cheese, chocolates, fruits and vegetables, and meats among others. However, Sultan Center was ranked as the second preferred hypermarket by expatriates. This is because some food items carried by this store are imported from Egypt, and the Egyptian community represents the second largestforeign community living in Kuwait. However, because the prices in this store are higher than that of the other hypermarkets, many other expatriates do not prefer to buy their food and groceries from it. The results also show that City center is a least preferred hypermarket for Kuwaitis. City Center was the second hypermarket established in Kuwait to compete with Sultan Center. City Center is an Indian-owned and managed company and caters mainly for expatriates living in Kuwait. The results also demonstrated that Géant hypermarket was the least preferred store for expatriates. This hypermarket is a French-owned company and was the last foreign hypermarket to get into the Kuwaiti market. It is located in a basement of a large shopping mall and its location is little far from places where many expatriates are living. Also, at the time of data collection, this hypermarket was not open 24 hours. Recently, the management of this hypermarket decided to keep open all its branches in Kuwait twenty -four hours, seven days a week. This might enhance the position of this store in the marketplace, especially considering that the results of this study showed that the number of opening hours is the major factor in selecting and preferring a hypermarket store.

Second, the results showed that the majority of consumers prefers to pay only one or two visits to the hypermarket store during the week. This means that consumers prefer to stop by a hypermarket once or twice a week and get all wanted food and grocery items from it. Hence, a store that carries more product lines and a more variety within each line would be able to attract more customers. Sales can be enhanced by paying more attention to the assortment of the products carried by the store.

Third, the results showed that almost 41% of consumers are loyal to a given hypermarket store, and expatriates tend to be more loyal than the Kuwaitis. Hence, the store management should take into account the factors that make customers loyal and develop a strategy to increase a percentage of loyal customers within the customers. One of the crucial factors for enhancing the store patronage is building a permanent relationship with customers. This can be done by using a monetary bridge policy. Only Sultan Center is applying this policy by using Sultan Center card. This card allows consumer to get free grocery items worth 5 K.D. when his/her accumulated purchases reach 100 K.D. Another policy that can be used to enhance store patronage is related to the quality of service provided inside the store. Services such as returning merchandizes, using rain checks for discounted items which ran out of stock during the sales time, helping customers locate needed items inside the store, or helping customer to take his/her filled shopping cart to the place where his/her car is parked might also make the customer more loyal to the store.

Fourth, based on an estimated average of monthly spending on food and groceries, stores should target those customers with income ranging from 501 to 1500 K.D. and large households. Sales revenue generated from this target is higher than that generated from customers with a higher income level and smaller household sizes. This can be done by carrying more family size products offered at reasonable prices. In addition, it can be done by packing several units of the same item together and sell it at a discounted price.

Fifth, the results indicate that customers prefer to buy their needed food and groceries alone and during the week days. Stores during the weekends will be very crowded with many people are going to the store as only window shoppers and not actual buyers. Usually, there is a high strain on the parking lots and sometimes it becomes very difficult to find a place to park. Hence, stores should plan its employee capacity based on this result. More cashers need to be employed during the weekdays to minimize the waiting time for paying for purchased merchandizes and serving customers in a better way.

Finally, the results showed that store opening hours, its product assortment and quality, store space and cleanliness, and introducing new products are the main factors affecting customers' preference and selection of a given hypermarket store. Management of all hypermarket stores in Kuwait should focus on those factors to increase store traffic and preference.

5- Research limitations and direction for further research

This study focused only on the behavior of consumers when they come to buy their needed food and groceries from hypermarket stores in Kuwait. However, one new hypermarket store was not included in this study because it was starting its operations during the data collection time. In addition, the behavior of buying groceries and food from cooperative societies was not covered in this study.

Thus, future research might examine how to deal with such a behavior and subsequently make a comparison between buying behavior from government cooperative societies and private hypermarket stores. A description of those consumers who prefer to buy mainly from government cooperative societies and those who prefer to buy from private hypermarket stores should be made. Finally, hypermarket store patronage should be the subject of some more research studies in the future.

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