Effects of ideal image congruence and organizational commitment on employee intention to leave ☆

Jennifer Yurchisin [a,1], Jihye Park [b,*], Matthew O'Brien [c,2]

[a] Department of Consumer, Apparel and Retail Studies, School of Human Environmental Sciences, University of North Carolina Greensboro, 210 Stone Building, Greensboro, NC 27402, USA
[b] College of Business Administration, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, #305 Research Building, 270 Imun-Dong, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul 130-791, Korea
[c] Department of Marketing, Foster College of Business Administration, Bradley University, 1501 West Bradley Avenue Peoria, IL 61625, USA

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among employee self-image/store image congruence, employee–store commitment, and employee intention to leave within the context of retail stores. Data were collected using a survey method. Usable questionnaires were completed by 276 retail store employees. Path analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Results revealed employee self-image/store image congruence was positively related to store image attractiveness. In turn, store image attractiveness was positively related to employee–store commitment both directly and indirectly through intrinsic job satisfaction. Lastly, both intrinsic job satisfaction and employee–store commitment were negatively related to employees' intention to leave.

1. Introduction

Approximately 20% of retail employees voluntarily resign from positions each year (Curtis and Wright, 2001), which results in significant increases in managerial costs from recruitment, selection, and training (Curtis and Wright, 2001; Gustafson, 2002). Additionally, an estimated $3,000 to $10,000 is required to replace each hourly employee who resigns (Gustafson, 2002). Hence, employee turnover, defined here as "the ratio of the number of organizational members who have left during the period being considered divided by the average number of people in that organization during the period" (Price, 1977, p. 15), is a significant problem in the retail industry. Due to these exorbitant costs and additional factors such as loss of employee talent, potential damage to organizational culture, and inability to produce experienced staff, it is in every retailer's best interest to isolate and attempt to control the antecedents of employee turnover.

One way in which retailers could reduce turnover is to increase employee–store commitment and ultimately reduce employees' intention to leave the store (Cohen, 1993; Ingram and Lee, 1990;

Iverson and Deery, 1997; McNeilly and Russ, 1992). Commitment to a store "involves an active relationship with [the store] such that individuals are willing to give something of themselves in order to contribute to the [store's] well being" (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226). Individuals who are committed to the store for which they work tend to feel loyal, which translates into both a smaller desire and propensity to resign from a position as compared to individuals who feel no such commitment. Accordingly, identifying factors that increase employees' level of work commitment is a first step to investigating human resource management issues in the retail organization.

Although not previously examined, one factor that might be related to work commitment is the amount of similarity that exists between the employee's self-image and the store's image. Individuals possess beliefs regarding who they think they are as people that are referred to as self-concepts or self-images (Rosenberg, 1979). Furthermore, individuals tend to possess similar beliefs regarding retail stores. Beliefs about the characteristics a store possesses collectively form what is known as that store's image (Martineau, 1958; Keaveney and Hunt, 1992; Zimmer and Golden, 1988). From a consumer perspective, research has shown consumers generally like to shop in stores that possess an image similar to their own (Dornoff and Tatham, 1972; Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Stern et al., 1977). Additionally, research has shown individuals like to work in stores in which they like to shop (Goldsberry et al., 1999). Accordingly, it is logical step to test the notion that individuals like to work in stores that exhibit store images similar to their self-images.
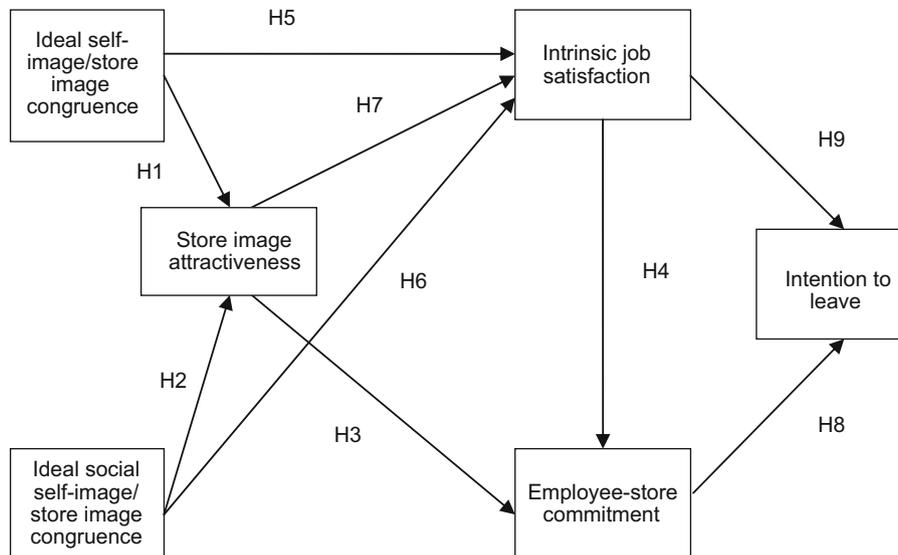
Fig. 1. The proposed model

Provided with the logic above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships among the employee's ideal self-image/store image congruence, commitment, and employee intention to leave. In the following section, we utilize the concepts of self-image/store image congruence (Dornoff and Tatham, 1972; Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1989), consumer identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), organization identification (Dutton et al., 1994), and salesperson job satisfaction and commitment (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Mowday et al., 1979) to develop hypotheses that form a theoretically integrated model. This proposed model can be seen in Fig. 1.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Self-image/store image congruence

In what is often cited as the first formal definition of the concept, Martineau (1958) described store image as "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). Since, researchers have identified both the functional qualities (e.g., general store characteristics, physical characteristics, price, personnel, promotion, convenience, product, and services) and psychological attributes (e.g., modern vs. traditional, friendly vs. formal, classy vs. folksy, casual vs. sophisticated, sexy vs. plain, high status vs. low status) consumers use to evaluate store image (Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1989). Additionally, researchers have found consumers' evaluations of store image have practical consequences. For example, when consumers evaluate a store's image positively, they tend to frequent the store more often (Darley and Lim, 1999) and report a greater level of purchase intention (Bloemer and Odekerken-Schroder, 2002) than when they evaluate a store's image negatively.

Consumers' positive and negative evaluations of a store's psychological attributes, or what Sirgy and Samli (1985) refer to as the store's "symbolic image," may, in part, be influenced by consumers' evaluations of themselves. The way in which an individual evaluates himself or herself is referred to as self-image. Self-image has been defined as the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). A person's overall self-image is composed

of multiple perspectives of reference resulting in four self-image dimensions: actual self-image, ideal self-image, actual social self-image, and ideal social self-image (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 2000). A person's actual self-image refers to the way in which he or she currently sees himself or herself with respect to a collection of personal attributes. The ideal self-image refers to the way in which a person would like to see him- or herself in terms of a group of personal traits. Actual social self-image refers to the way in which an individual believes that others currently perceive him or her with respect to a set of personal attributes. Lastly, ideal social self-image refers to the way in which an individual would like others to see him or her in terms of personal characteristics.

Several researchers have found that congruence between a store's symbolic image and one or more aspects of a consumer's self-image (i.e., actual self-image, ideal self-image, actual social self-image, ideal social self-image) has an impact on shopping behavior. While some evidence from earlier studies (e.g., Stern et al., 1977) indicates all four types of self-image have an impact on consumer behavior, most research findings point to the two forms of ideal self-image (i.e., ideal self-image and ideal social self-image) as having a more prominent influence on consumer behavior than the two forms of actual self-image (i.e., actual self-image and actual social self-image). Dornoff and Tatham (1972) found that of these two aspects (ideal vs. actual) of self-image, congruence between a consumer's ideal self-image and symbolic store image had a greater influence on store preference than the congruence between actual self-image and symbolic store image. In terms of social self-image, Sirgy and Samli (1985) found that, when congruence existed between a store's symbolic image and consumers' ideal social self-image, consumers tended to evaluate the store positively and be loyal. However, no significant relationships were found among store loyalty, store evaluation, and congruence between symbolic store image and consumers' actual social self-image. Sirgy and Samli's (1985) findings indicating that congruence between a symbolic store image and a consumer's ideal, as opposed to actual, social self-image had an influence on that consumer's behavior, are consistent with those of Dornoff and Tatham (1972), who found that congruence between symbolic store image and a consumer's ideal self-image had a greater influence on store preference than congruence between symbolic store image and a consumer's actual self-image. Hence, it seems likely that the way in which people would like to be seen, either by themselves or by others,