

**EXPLAINING ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTIONS: A MULTI-CHANNEL
STORE IMAGE PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

This study is one of the few empirical works addressing the impact of offline and online store impressions on consumer online purchase intentions. Building upon the literature on store image and consumer online purchasing, we propose positive effects of online store image and suggest mixed influences of offline store image perceptions. Drawing on a sample of 630 customers of one of the largest music retail stores in the Netherlands, hypotheses are tested. The empirical results clearly support the assumed positive effect of online store image, and confirm that the influence of offline store image on online purchase intentions can be positive as well negative. We discuss the implications of our research, and conclude with directions for further research.

Keywords: online store image, offline store image, online purchase intention, clicks-and-bricks, multi-channel

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1. Introduction

Numerous researchers have studied the impact of the online store on consumer online purchasing. A key limitation of the vast majority of these studies concerns their focus on the online store as single channel of shopping. Many scholars have studied the online store purely as an online player, despite the fact that a growing number of firms have launched online stores next to traditional retail outlets (Dholakia et al., 2005; Van Birgelen et al., 2006). Building upon competitive advantages such as a stable customer base, experience, trust (Grewal et al., 2004), brand strength, and cross-promotional opportunities (Min and Wolfinbarger, 2005), these clicks-and-bricks firms are expected to be the most successful online retail format in the future (Grewal et al., 2004; Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Balasubramanian et al., 2005).

Following the growth of the number of firms applying the clicks-and-bricks strategy, consumers increasingly use both online stores and traditional outlets when engaging in online purchase behavior (Wallace et al., 2004). Being exposed to the online and offline channel, it is expected that consumer online purchase behavior is affected by perceptions of both channels (Peterson et al., 1997; Bhatnagar et al., 2002, 2003). The amount of academic studies addressing the impact of multi-channel store perceptions on online purchase behavior is sparse.

Research into multi-channel purchasing has studied either the difference between online

and offline purchase behavior (e.g. Alba et al., 1997; Brynjolfsson and Smith, 2000; Danaher et al., 2003), or the relationships between multi-channel perceptions and channel-independent overall perceptions like satisfaction, loyalty (e.g. Shankar et al., 2003) and retention (e.g. Verhoef and Donkers, 2005). Except for a few studies into cross-channel service perceptions (e.g. Bhatnagar et al., 2002, 2003), there seem to be no empirical works addressing the extent to which offline and online store perceptions contribute to consumer online purchase behavior. Therefore, the influence of traditional stores and online stores on online purchasing requires empirical exploration (Browne et al., 2004) to fill an existing research gap.

Of specific interest would be a study considering the impact of traditional store image and online store image (Elliott and Speck, 2005). Reflecting overall channel perceptions, offline and online store image are assumed to affect online purchasing. While there is relative consensus on the positive effect of online store image on online purchasing (Katerattanakul and Siau, 2003; Van der Heijden and Verhagen, 2004), contrasting views exist on the effect of offline store impressions. Perceptions of physical outlets can function as positive reference points (Bhatnagar et al., 2002, 2003), but might as well affect online purchasing negatively since benefits like social interaction (Alba et al., 1997) and shopping experience (Mathwick et al., 2002) cause online consumers to shop offline. This implies that, if we truly want to explore the nature of the relationship between the traditional store and the online store on online purchasing, adoption of a multi-channel store image perspective incorporating these contrasts is likely to be crucial. In this research we use a multi-channel store image perspective, and assess the impact of store image (i.e. overall impressions of the traditional store) and online store image (i.e.

overall impressions of the online store) on intentions to purchase via an online store. Our aim is to answer the key research question, “how, and to what extent, does offline store image and online store image affect consumer online purchase intentions?” The main contributions of this research are that we assess the impact of the traditional retail outlet and the online store in a multi-channel context, and gain new insights into the congruency and differences in the roles of both channels as determinants of online purchase intentions.

2. Theoretical foundations and hypotheses

In this section we introduce the key notions of our study, and deliberate on their conceptualization as used in the development of hypotheses. Next, hypotheses are postulated.

2.1 Store image and online store image

The concept of *store image* has received substantial attention since the late 1950's. Several definitions of store image exist. Martineau (1958) labels 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). According to Kunkel and Berry (1968), retail store image is “the total conceptualized or expected reinforcement that a person associates with shopping at a particular store” (p.22). Houston and Nevin (1981) define store image as, “the complex of a consumer's perceptions of a store on functional attributes and emotional attributes” (p.677). Although store image definitions are based on different perspectives, their essence is rather similar (Hartman and Spiro, 2005). Most

researchers stress that store image is a total impression of tangible or functional factors *and* intangible or psychological factors (Lindquist, 1974; Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975; Zimmer and Golden, 1988). These factors are also referred to as *store attributes* (Houston and Nevin, 1981). “Functional store attributes” applies to features such as merchandise selection, prices ranges and store layout (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986). “Psychological store attributes” refers to characteristics such as the manner of the sales staff, service level, and reputation (Rich and Portis, 1964). The overall impression of both store attribute groups results in a composite picture of the store (i.e. store image), based on its interacting components, and usually more than the sum of its parts (Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975; Zimmer and Golden, 1988; Keaveney and Hunt, 1992).

Despite agreement concerning the multi-dimensional nature of store image (Samli et al., 1998), there is little consensus regarding dimensions which form store image and how to measure store image (Chowdury et al., 1998). In this research, drawing upon the store image literature, store image is seen and measured as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the following dimensions: merchandise, value for money, service, store atmosphere, and store layout (Arons, 1961; Fisk, 1961; Rich and Portis, 1964; Kunkel and Berry; 1968; Lindquist, 1974; Bearden, 1977; Kelly and Stephenson; 1967; Samli et al., 1998; Chowdury et al., 1998; Martineau, 1958; Bearden, 1977).

Similar to traditional store settings, consumers perceive the attributes of online stores and form overall online store impressions (Lohse and Spiller, 1999). This overall impression has been referred to as *online store image* (Van der Heijden and Verhagen, 2004), e-store image (Lim and Dubinsky, 2004) or virtual store image (Katerattanakul and Siau, 2003). Building upon store image research (cf. Lohse and Spiller, 1999;

Katerattanakul and Siau, 2003), online store image is defined here as a consumer's overall impression of the functional, or observable, attributes (e.g. assortment, pictures, product descriptions, navigation bars) and psychological attributes (e.g. reputation, privacy, reliability) of an online store. Although the importance of online store image has been highlighted (e.g. Katerattanakul and Siau, 2003; Wilde et al., 2004; Jiang and Roosenboom, 2005), the vast majority of research is rather conceptual and exploratory in nature. In this paper we adopt the work of Van der Heijden and Verhagen (2004), one of the few empirical online store image studies. Accordingly, online store image is seen as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the following facets: online store usefulness, online store enjoyment, online store ease of use, online store style, online store familiarity, online store trustworthiness and online store settlement performance.

2.2 The influence of offline store image on online purchase intentions

Regarding the influence of offline experiences on online customer evaluations the findings in the literature are mixed. Some researchers (Alba et al., 1997; Mathwick et al., 2002) argue that benefits like offline social interaction with salespersons and customers and the shopping experience in the store trigger consumers to shop offline rather than online. In other words, it is assumed that the better the offline store experience, the less inclined customers are to shop online, e.g., a *negative* effect. However, recent research cast doubt on this assumption (Bhatnagar et al., 2002, 2003). These researchers show that experiences while shopping in physical outlets can have a *positive* effect on customer online perceptions, as they serve as a reference point. Specifically, they show that the

influence of online experiences *and* offline experiences are both very important in the formation of online expectations.

Although the effect of offline store image on online purchase intentions has not been studied yet, the studies on the negative and positive influence of offline features on online perceptions provide guidance. Based on this research, we argue that some dimensions of offline store image might have a negative effect on online buying behavior while other dimensions of offline store image may stimulate customers to buy online. For instance, it is understandable that components like offline store atmosphere negatively influence online purchase intentions. When an offline store has a nice atmosphere, customers might be less inclined to buy online from the same firm, as they like to be in the physical store. It is the physical shopping environment that offers a rich set of stimuli like store atmosphere, product display and assortment, and the store layout that make customers prefer buying from the offline store over the online channel (Mathwick et al., 2002; Wikstrom, 2005). These aspects are difficult for customers to experience in the virtual context. Experiencing the atmosphere, touching the product, and walking around in the store satisfy sensory needs that cannot be satisfied buying online (Wikstrom, 2005). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1: Offline store merchandise (a), offline store layout (b), and offline store atmosphere (c) will have a negative influence on online purchase intentions.

On the other hand, other dimensions of offline store image are found to positively influence online buying behavior. As consumers do not feel able to value and trust e-

stores to the same extent as they value a physical store, they use reference points, like service level and reputation of the physical store (Wikstrom, 2005). This idea of using references is found in the trust literature claiming that trust in one party can act as a proof source when dealing with another party (Verhagen et al., 2006) as well as in psychology research in which it is also referred to as ‘analogies’ (Gregan-Paxton and John, 1997) and ‘inferences’ (Ford and Smith, 1987). The idea that knowledge in one domain is used while reasoning about another domain is put forward in a marketing context by Bhatnagar et al. (2002, 2003). Their research shows that the quality of offline service provision is generalized to the online context and consequently positively influences online customer perceptions and purchase intentions.

Furthermore, we argue that offline value for money may act as a reference point for customers who buy online. Value for money is an aspect that is similar in the offline and online shopping context, and could therefore act more easily as a reference point than for instance store layout. That is, customers generalize to a greater extent when aspects are perceived as more similar to each other (Bhatnagar et al., 2002). Indeed, Goolsbee (2001) demonstrates that customer perceptions of offline prices and offerings stimulate customer to also check online offerings and prices of that particular company. If companies are positively perceived with respect to value for money offline, customers will also check the online prices of that store, especially as they expect more value for money from the e-channel of that particular firm (Wikstrom, 2005). We hypothesize:

H2: Offline store service (a) and offline value for money (b) will have a positive influence on online purchase intentions.

2.3 The influence of online store image on online purchase intentions

Several studies have empirically demonstrated that the individual dimensions of online store image, like ease of use, significantly influence online purchase intentions or related constructs (Van der Heijden and Verhagen, 2004; Van Dolen and De Ruyter, 2002; Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Childers et al. 2001; Novak et al., 1999; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001). Furthermore, Van der Heijden and Verhagen (2004) argue that the construct of online store image and its related dimensions have a positive influence on online customer perceptions like attitudes and purchase intentions. Since we replicate their study, we hypothesize, in line with their findings, that:

H3: Online store usefulness (a), online store enjoyment (b), online store ease of use (c), online store style (d), online store familiarity (e), online store trustworthiness (f) and online store settlement performance (g) will have a positive influence on online purchase intentions.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

To assess the impact of online and offline store image on consumer online purchase intentions a survey design was adopted. This approach seemed most appropriate for the study since its purpose was to relate variables (see Creswell, 1994). The target population of this study consisted of a panel of 1500 registered customers of one of the largest music retail stores in the Netherlands. To serve its customers in the Dutch market, the music store applies a network of 190 physical outlets and a webstore. At the time of

the research, the panel members had voluntarily signed up, and had not been exposed to any ensuing questionnaires. Consequently, there was only marginal chance on participation fatigue and panel conditioning to bias the data capture and analysis (Toh and Hu, 1996). An e-mail invitation was sent to the panel members, inviting them to participate in the test by clicking on a hyperlink directing them to an online questionnaire. As incentive, respondents were asked to fill in their e-mail address to engage in the raffle of a book gift certificate of 100 euro. Next to socio-demographics questions, the online questionnaire addressed perceptions of online and offline store image, as well as online purchase intentions.

3.2 Measures

The measures for the online store image dimensions were taken from Van der Heijden and Verhagen (2004) who, building upon the measurement development process of Churchill (1979), developed reliable and valid semantic differentials for specific online store image components, including *online store usefulness*, *online store enjoyment*, *online store ease of use*, *online store style*, *online store familiarity*, *online store trustworthiness*, *online store settlement performance*. We slightly adapted the target specificity of the items to make them more applicable to the context of the study (i.e. purchasing compact discs via a particular webstore). To measure the offline store image dimensions *merchandise*, *value for money*, *service*, *store atmosphere* and *store layout*, we collected items from the established literature on store image. The items were derived from reliable store image scales (e.g. Fisk, 1961; Kelly and Stephenson, 1967; Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Stephenson, 1969; McDougall and Fry, 1974; Marks 1976; Golden et al., 1987;

Chowdhury et al., 1998; Grewal et al, 1998; Samli et al., 1998). Following the vast majority of store image researchers, we applied the semantic differential as measurement instrument and tailored the items to the concept under study (cf. Mindak, 1961; Sharpe and Anderson, 1972; Dickson and Albaum, 1977). The measure of online purchase intention was directly taken from Jarvenpaa et al. (2000). We made some minor modifications to adapt the construct to the current research setting. In particular, we added the product category (a compact disc) to make the items more suitable to the context of the study, and changed the specific time horizons (“three months”, “the next year”) to broader terms (“Short term”, “The longer term”) (cf. Van der Heijden et al., 2003).

4. Results

4.1. Sample demographics

Of the 1500 panel members, 630 responded and completely filled in the online questionnaire (completion rate 42%). The characteristics of the respondents are displayed in table 1. The demographics imply that the results of our study are biased towards young experienced Internet users, mostly males, who purchase compact discs in on- and offline settings. Since the majority of the respondents is familiar with purchasing via the offline and online channel of the music store under study, the results are likely to be biased towards repeat purchases.

Table 1: Socioeconomic and demographic sample characteristics (n= 630)

	% of respondents (n)		% of respondents (n)
Gender		Owner Loyalty card	
Male	61.4% (387)	No	60.6% (382)
Female	38.6% (243)	Yes	39.4% (248)
Age		Time online per day	
10-14	2.1% (13)	< 30 minutes	4.6% (29)
15-24	38.6% (243)	30 minutes	9.7 (61)
25-34	26.3% (166)	1 hour	21.4 (135)
35-44	18.3% (115)	2 hours	26.5% (167)
45-54	11.7% (74)	3 or >hours	37.8% (238)
> 55	3.0% (19)		
Frequency of buying CDs		Frequency of visiting the online CD store	
Never	10.4% (66)	Never	1.3% (8)
< Once per year	12.9% (81)	< 1 to 2 times per month	6.0% (38)
1-6 times per year	44.3% (279)	1 to 2 times per month	24.1% (152)
Once per month	21.3% (134)	Weekly	36.3% (229)
Two times per month	6.3% (40)	A couple of times per week	25.7% (162)
Once or more per week	4.8% (30)	Daily	6.5% (41)
Amount of money spend on CDs per month		Internet experience	
0 – 5 euro	13.7% (86)	Very inexperienced	2.4% (15)
6 – 10 euro	13.7% (86)	Inexperienced	0.8% (5)
11- 20 euro	29.4% (185)	Neutral	14.6% (92)
21-30 euro	17.2% (109)	Experienced	56.7% (357)
31–40 euro	10.3% (65)	Very experienced	25.6% (161)
41-50 euro	8.6% (54)		
> 50	7.1% (45)		
Number of CDs bought via the physical CD outlet during the last year		Number of CDs bought via the online CD store during the last year*	
None	10% (63)	None	34.4% (217)
One	11.7% (74)	One	16% (101)
Two	14.1% (89)	Two	17.5% (110)
Three	11.6% (73)	Three	7.8% (49)
Four	11.7% (74)	Four or more	24.3% (153)
Five or more	40.8% (257)		
		Subscription to digital newsletter	
		No	7.3% (46)
		Yes	92.7% (584)

4.2. Validity and reliability tests

To confirm the internal consistency and dimensionality of the online store image construct a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. Using Amos 5.0 with maximum likelihood estimation (Arbuckle, 2003), the goodness of fit indices were computed. Except for the chi-square test (935,767, $df = 303$, $p < .001$), which has to be interpreted with care due to its sensitivity to large sample sizes (Bearden et al., 1982; Hair et al., 1998; Stewart and Segars, 2002), all goodness of fit indices confirmed the internal consistency and dimensionality of the online store image construct (GFI 0.90; AGFI .87; NFI, .92; TLI, .93, CFI .94; RMSEA .058).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to assess the internal consistency and discriminant validity of the offline store image measures using principle components analysis with varimax rotation. The data passed the thresholds for sampling adequacy (KMO measure of sampling accuracy 0.934, Bartlett's test of sphericity 10517.5, $p < .001$). Although some items significantly tapped two factors, these loadings were not substantial (i.e. loading $> .40$; see Netemeyer et al., 2003). Additionally, since all items clearly loaded highest on their intended factor, preliminary evidence of internal consistency and discriminant validity was provided. The convergent and discriminant validity of the offline store image measures were further assessed using a correlation matrix. The matrix demonstrated high inter-item correlations within each construct, while correlations with items from other constructs were substantially lower ($< .7$), thereby indicating internal consistency and measure distinctness. Next we assessed the reliability for all measures by computing Cronbach's alphas (listed in Table 2).

Table 2: Item overview and reliability analysis (n=630)

	Reliability (α)		Reliability (α)
Offline store merchandise *	.92	Online store usefulness *	.80
Limited selection of CDs — Unlimited selection of CDs		Little information about the CDs—much information about the CDs	
Uninteresting products— interesting products		Little value for money—a lot of value for money.	
CDs I I don't like — CDs I like		Uninteresting offers—interesting offers.	
CDs I don't want — CDs I want		Bad alignment with my interests—good alignment with my interests.	
Offline store value for money *	.86	Online store enjoyment *	.90
Unreasonable prices for value— Reasonable prices for value		Boring site—fun site.	
Little value for money – Much value for money		Little pleasure to browse through—great pleasure to browse through.	
Bad buys on products – Good buys on products		Unattractive site—attractive site.	
Offline store service *	.94	Online store ease of use *	.91
Unfriendly personnel – friendly personnel		Hard to use—easy to use.	
Few helpful salesmen – Many helpful salesmen		Bad representation of the CDs—good representation of the CDs	
Bad service – good service		Hard to navigate the site—easy to navigate the	
Bad reputation – Good reputation		Inflexible site—flexible site.	
Unknowledgeable sales personnel – Knowledgeable sales personnel		Hard to learn how to use the site—easy to learn	
Slow checkout – fast checkout			
Offline store atmosphere *	.87	Online store trustworthiness *	.91
Dull store – bright store		Unreliable enterprise—reliable enterprise.	
Unattractive store — Attractive store		Bad reputation—good reputation.	
Old-fashioned – modern		Does not keep my personal data confidential— does keep my personal data confidential.	
		Unsafe financial settlement—safe financial settlement.	
Offline store layout *	.88	Online store style *	.85
Unorganized layout – well organized layout		Unhelpful—helpful.	
Crowded shopping – spacious shopping		Unfriendly—friendly.	
Messy – neat		Less knowledgeable—very knowledgeable.	
		Calm—pushy.	
Online purchase intention **	.79	Online store familiarity *	.79
How likely is it that you would consider purchasing a CD from this website in the longer term?		Infrequently seen advertisements on the Internet— frequently seen advertisements on the Internet.	
How likely is it that you would consider purchasing a CD from this website in the short term?		Infrequently seen advertisements outside Internet— frequently seen advertisements outside the Internet.	
How likely is it that you would return to this store's website?		Unknown enterprise—well known enterprise.	
		Online store settlement *	.87
		Slow delivery—fast delivery.	
		Limited choice of delivery options—wide choice of delivery options.	
		Unreliable delivery—reliable delivery.	
		Slow financial settlement—fast financial settlement.	

* measured on a 7 points semantic-differential; ** measured on a 7 points likert scale

All alphas exceed the 0.70 threshold for more established research (cf. Hair et al., 1998) and, except for online store familiarity and online purchase intention (both 0.79), meet or surpass 0.80 indicating very good reliability.

4.3 Regression analysis

To address the impact of the dimensions of online store image and offline store image on consumer online purchase intentions, multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple regression results when regressing online and offline store image on online purchase intention (n=630)

	R^2	Adj. R^2	Beta (β)	T-value	Sig.	VIF-score	Result hypothesis
Online purchase intention	.340	.327					
Offline store merchandise			.04	.715	.475	2.555	H1a: rejected
Offline store layout			-.04	-.865	.387	2.311	H1b: rejected
Offline store atmosphere			-.11	-2.162	.031	2.244	H1c: accepted
Offline store service			-.01	-.285	.776	2.151	H2a: rejected
Offline store value for money			.13	2.899	.004	1.821	H2b: accepted
Online store usefulness			.12	2.427	.015	2.099	H3a: accepted
Online store enjoyment			.10	1.982	.043	2.355	H3b: accepted
Online store ease of use			-.02	-.398	.691	2.021	H3c: rejected
Online store style			-.03	-.565	.572	2.835	H3d: rejected
Online store familiarity			.12	3.350	.001	1.167	H3e: accepted
Online store trustworthiness			.14	2.919	.004	2.241	H3f: accepted
Online store settlement performance			.31	7.414	.000	1.674	H3g: accepted

The results show that the online store image and offline store image together explain 33% of the purchase intention variance. The offline store image variables that have a significant impact on the intention to purchase include: *offline store atmosphere* ($\beta = -.11$; $p < .05$) and *offline store value for money* ($\beta = .13$; $p < .01$). As such, hypotheses 1c and 2b are accepted, while hypotheses 1a, 1b and 2a are rejected. The online store image dimensions that do significantly effect the intention are: *online store settlement performance* ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), *online store trustworthiness* ($\beta = .14$; $p < .01$), *online store familiarity* ($\beta = .12$; $p < .01$), *online store usefulness* ($\beta = .12$; $p < .05$), and *online store enjoyment* ($\beta = .10$; $p < .05$). This implies that hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3e, 3f, and 3g are accepted, while hypothesizes 3c and 3d are rejected. A post-hoc multicollinearity analysis revealed that none of the VIF-scores exceeded the cutoff value of 10 (Hair et al., 1998), indicating that the regression analysis had not been not subject to multicollinearity.

5. Discussion and recommendations

This research has demonstrated that impressions of both the online and the offline store can influence consumer online purchase intentions. As such, our work contributes to the relatively unexplored field of multi-channel research and online purchasing. Adoption of the multi-channel store image perspective has verified the role of online store image as positive determinant of online purchase intentions, and provided evidence for the ambiguous role of offline store impressions. Building upon our findings some concluding observations can be made.

We have demonstrated that online store image functions as a strong predictor of online purchase intentions, adding to the literature on online store image (e.g.

Katerattanakul and Siau, 2003; Van der Heijden and Verhagen, 2004). Regarding the individual online store image dimensions, online store settlement performance clearly can be labeled as the strongest determinant. The trustworthiness, familiarity, usefulness and enjoyment of the online store also contribute to purchase intentions, but their impact is relatively moderate. These findings slightly contrast with the study of Van der Heijden and Verhagen (2004), who highlighted the role of trustworthiness as dominant online purchase intention determinant. These dissimilarities might be caused by differences in research contexts. The research of Van der Heijden and Verhagen focused on purchasing via a pure-online player, while our study explicitly addressed online purchasing in clicks-and-bricks settings. It is assumable that online store trust is less of an issue in a clicks-and-bricks context, since consumers can use the offline store as a supplementary trust source (Tang and Xing, 2001).

Our research results indicate that the influence of offline store image on online purchase intentions can be positive as well as negative, as hypothesized. The online store atmosphere dimension has a negative impact on online purchase intentions, while the influence of the value for money dimension is positive. Offline store image perceptions adding to in-store atmospherics are likely to keep customers away from online purchase experiences, and provide the offline store with a differential advantage (cf. Fowler et al., 2007). Value for money, on the other hand, is likely to be used as positive reference point for online purchasing. Clicks-and-bricks retailers should recognize the complex relationships between offline store image and online purchasing, and are most likely to benefit from balanced investments in store atmospherics and value for money to stimulate both online and offline sales.

Although our research has validated the ambiguous relationships between offline store image and online purchasing, no support was found for the impact of the dimensions merchandise, store layout and store service. Probably, consumers do not consider a physical outlet's merchandise when purchasing online since their online shopping expectations are more strongly driven by the attractiveness of the online channel to bring large assortments together (Alba et al., 1997). With respect to store layout, our findings corroborate with findings in the store patronage literature. Low levels of direct importance on consumer purchasing have been reported, possibly because the influence of store layout is mediated by consumer cognitions and emotions (Lam, 2001). The nonsignificance of the service dimension, to conclude with, might be explained by the focus of our study on compact discs. CDs are relatively low risk products. Likely, the impact of offline service perceptions will be stronger for high-risk products since proof sources are more necessary in high-risk situations (Verhagen et al., 2006). Future research will have to address the validity of the assumptions above.

A limitation of our research concerns sample bias. The majority of our respondents had experience with purchasing via the online store under study. Consequently, our findings are biased towards repeat purchase intentions. It is plausible to assume that the impact of online and offline store image differs for initial purchase intentions. Due to the absence of experience, first time purchases can be perceived as more risky. In such situations, consumers heavily rely on the credibility of the shopping environment as a resource for final decision-making (Verhagen et al., 2006). First time online buyers who do have experience with purchasing via the traditional outlet, are likely to rely substantially on their offline impressions as proof source. This might have

an upward-biasing effect on the impact of offline store image on initial online purchase intentions. However, first time online buyers lacking purchase experience with the traditional outlet are likely to depend profoundly on their online store perceptions. This situation, almost equivalent to purchasing via a pure online player, demonstrates that the impact of offline store image is likely to be negligible while the effect of an online store image dimension, like trustworthiness, is expected to be very strong (see also Van der Heijden and Verhagen, 2004). Since attracting new customers is as important for most clicks-and-bricks retailers as retaining existing ones, these assumptions demand far more theoretical foundations and empirical explorations. We have planned such research for the near future.

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