Identifying Attributes and Key Dimensions of Online Store Image: The Qualitative and Quantitative Approach

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This study is about identifying attributes consisting consumers' online store image and underlying dimensions. Considering that the existing traditional store image studies have been revised and refined through diverse research methods and context, online store image studies so far have been conceptually and methodologically limited. In this regard, this study adopted qualitative approach to retrieve an exhaustive list of online store image attributes, and also adopted quantitative approach to identify online store image dimensions and to achieve external validity of the results.

Data was collected through online survey of panel, after considering the behavioral characteristics of sample frame and the possibility of sampling bias.

As a result, this study identified 33 attributes and 6 dimensions of online store image, Purchase Process and Reliability, Depth and Width of Site Attraction, Cost and Time of Delivery, Price Competitiveness, Product and Information Availability, and Post purchase Services. This result should offer the comprehensive measurement scale of online store image, and also should be a cornerstone of consumers' online retail patronage model.

Ⅰ. Introduction

When there is a dramatic change in the way of doing business, the first question that arises is whether traditional operations will still work. As a way of answering the question, numerous theories or business models are tested relative to the change, so that more efficient and fully adapted theories are born. Today, a new technology is challenging the fundamental basis of traditional retailing. As newly designed terms such as 'one-to-one' marketing, 'customer centric,' or 'cyberconsumers' (Wind and Mahajan, 2001) reflect, the Internet is transforming not only

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the nature of consumer behavior but also the retail practice of interacting with consumers. Based on this revolutionary change, the examination of how consumers perceive an online store should be a starting point of building an online stores' own retail strategy.

How consumers perceive retail stores, often referred as a retail store image, has been treated as a major antecedent explaining consumers' retail patronage behavior. Work by Martineau in 1958, titled 'The Personality of the Retail Store,' started this area of inquiry. Numerous studies have supported Martineau's point of view: store image conceptualization and the underlying dimensions (Lindquist 1974-1975; Mazursky and Jacoby 1986; Keaveney and Hunt 1992), store image differentiation across various types of retail establishments and product class (Doyle and Fenwick 1974; Hirschman, Greenberg, and Robertson 1978; Cardozo 1974), and methodological refinement (Hawkins, Albaum, and Best 1975; Zimmer and Golden 1988; Steenkamp and Wedel 1991; Wong and Teas 2001). Compared to the abundance of studies on store image in the brick-and-mortar context, a number of studies on online store image has still left limitations regarding the identification and the validation of online store image dimensions. In specific, there has been no agreement on the type of online store investigated in the image studies. Some dealt with online stores expanded from the same brand brick-and-mortar stores (e.g. gap.com, lotte.com), some considers pure online stores not related with any type of brick-and-mortar stores (e.g. bizrate.com), and others examined online stores adding brick-and-mortar stores recently (e.g. ebay.com). This complexity seems inevitable as consumers prefer more diverse channel. However, considering that the results of image studies for each case would be different, this study limits the type of online store to pure online stores to achieve valid and reliable results by using homogeneous online stores sample. On the other hand, online image studies, depending on the previously identified image components (Wilde, Kelly, and Scott, 2004) often called for a qualitative research method to conceptualize online store image as a 'gestalt' (Zimmer and Golden 1988, p.266), while others had to borrow image components from other studies, such as online store design (Lohse and Spiller, 1999), e-Satisfaction (Szymanski and Hise, 2000), or e-Service quality (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2002). Therefore, this study investigates pure online store image using both the qualitative and quantitative approach to capture the richness of store image. Moreover, an analogy between identified online store image components and traditional retail store image components provide a starting point of building efficient strategy in a multi-channel retail environment.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Dimensions and attributes of store image: brick-and-mortar specific

Although there has been an agreement on that store image is more than the sum of its attributes (Oxenfeldt, 1974), identifying those attributes has been a continual research question. This is important, because only when controllable image variables are identified, can retailers utilize them in developing strategies that correspond to a positive image to their customers. In early store image studies, the dimensions tended to be identified too simply or too exhaustively. For example, Martineau (1958) presented four personality factors: layout and architecture, symbols and colors, advertising, and sales personnel, whereas Kunkel and Berry (1968) and Berry (1969) developed a rather exhaustive list of components of department store image, composed of 12 components (i.e. price of merchandise, quality of merchandise, assortment of merchandise, fashion of merchandise, sales personnel, locational convenience, other convenience factors, services, sales promotions, advertising, store atmosphere, and reputation on adjustments) and 43 subcomponents. We need to note that those dimensions are listed for covering as much of the overall store image as possible, so there is a lack of distinction and a lot of overlap among the dimensions.

Several subsequent studies dealing with a different scope of image attributes were summarized by Lindquist (1974-1975). He adopted a meta-analytic approach to 19 previous image related studies, and identified nine image attribute groups. The value of this study is not only in the exhaustive listing of image attributes, but also in the arrangement of dimensions ordered by their frequency. Merchandise selection or assortment was ranked highest as 42% of the sample studies commonly addressed. Likewise, merchandise quality (38%), merchandise pricing (38%), locational convenience (35%), merchandise styling and fashion (27%), service in general (27%), and salesclerk service (27%) were ranked in respective order. This categorization has been widely cited in a majority of the research on store image (Sirgy and Samli 1985; Zimmer and Golden 1988; Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman 1994; Samli, Kelly and Hunt 1998; Mitchell 2001; Wilde, Kelly, and Scott, 2004).

Among them, the methodological advance achieved by Zimmer and Golden (1988) should be noted. They criticized that the ratings of researcher-specified attributes might only partially capture the consumer's image of a retailer, and suggested a content analysis of open-ended image data obtained

from consumers. A series of content analysis identified 220 original themes and a final list of 47 image categories, including both attribute-specific and nonattribute-specific dimensions. Even though using a content analysis has limitations relative to the difficulty of coding and quantifying the results compared to scaled responses, this approach should get attention as a closer step to capture the gestalt of store image.

2.2 Dimensions and attributes of store image: online environment specific

Whereas traditional store image research has been productive in terms of identifying underlying dimensions and their relationship to store patronage behavior, the importance and value of store image has not been articulated enough in an online retail environment. Before the emergence of studies directly examining online store image and validating its dimensions, online store attributes were investigated as antecedents of various constructs in e-tailing, such as e-satisfaction, e-service quality, or online patronage behavior. For example, Szymanski and Hise (2000) identified convenience, merchandising including product offerings and product information, site design, and financial security as four antecedents of e-satisfaction; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra (2002) found five criteria that customers use in evaluating e-Service quality, which were information availability and content, ease of use or useability, privacy/security, graphic style, and fulfillment; Reibstein (2000) suggested ten important store attributes when consumers shop online, including product representation, product prices, product selection, on-time delivery, ease of ordering, product information, level and quality of consumer support, product shipping and handling, posted privacy policy, and website navigation and looks. Considering the research trend that a store image as a meta-construct has been examined to be determinants of consumer satisfaction, service quality, or patronage behavior, those studies seem to provide a sound base for online store image attribute investigation. However, using attributes from other constructs as indicators of online store image should be criticized, since the attributes are merely able to measure online store image implicitly.

The similar point could be made on Korean research trend on online store image attributes and dimensions. Suh and Kim (2002), in their study on the relationship of Internet shopping mall characteristics and emotional response, identified 6 factors, reliability, customer services, contents, products, security and payment, interactivity, and 32 Internet shopping mall characteristics. Resulting attributes and dimensions

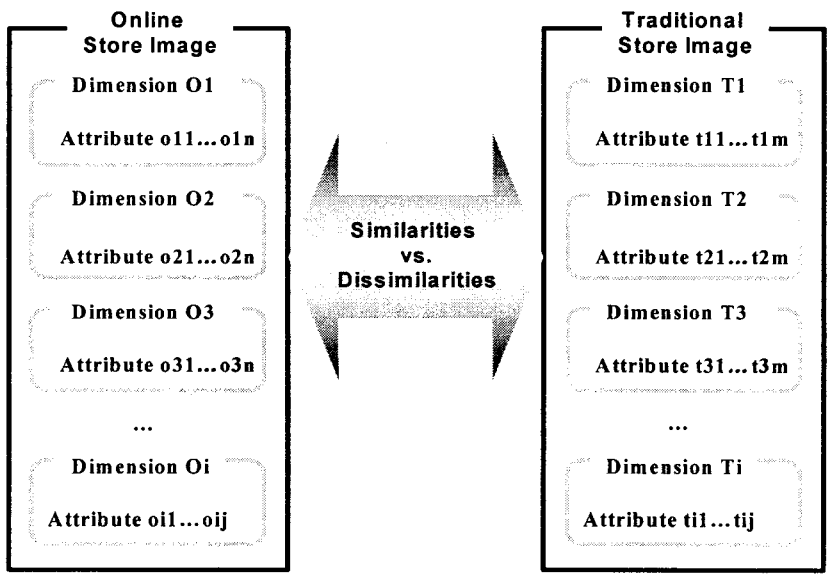
were partly retrieved from existing store image literature. However, this study broadly focused on online store characteristics rather on online store image. Likewise, Lee and Park (2000) investigated 5 factors of web service quality, web page appearance, information completeness, company reliability, customer orientation, responsiveness, which were subjectively adopted from measures of information systems servuce quality (Watson, Pitt, and Kavan, 1988).

On the other hand, there have been only a handful of studies directly examining online store image. An exploratory study done by Hopkins and Alford (2001) suggested a multi-dimensional scale to measure the e-tailer image construct by making an analogy between "Real Store" and E-tailer, and identified seven dimensions, atmosphere, personnel, convenience, merchandize, price, service, self-concept (self/site image congruence). However, the resulting dimensions and attributes were difficult to generalize, since they were retrieved from only one online store (express.com) for all two stages of the study. Lohse and Spiller (1999), on the other hand, examined 42 online stores and suggested 13 attributes, in relation to merchandise, services, promotion, and navigation, for designing an ideal online store. Even though the enhanced generalizability, the attributes were not retrieved based on actual consumers' image perception, but created by researchers' analogy between 'real stores' and online retail stores. Similarly, Ahn and Lee (2002) suggested 6 dimensions and 19 attributes of online store image determinants, which initially pooled from existing literature based on authors' selection. More recently, Wilde, Kelly, and Scott (2004) found three image dimensions, which are core demands, institutional factors, and information, with 22 underlying attributes. In specific, core demands included 10 attributes related to delivery, ease and security of transaction, merchandise, and navigation; Institutional factors consisted of 6 attributes regarding reputation and search facilities; and Information dimension includes 6 attributes related to salesclerk services and product presentations. The result is evident that there are similarities and differences in components and associated attributes between retail and e-tail environment. As authors admitted, however, using one e-tailers' customers as the study sample should limit the generalizability of the resulting dimensions, and authors also suggested the further qualitative research to explore, develop, and refine online store image attributes and dimensions.

III. Research questions and framework

The review of the previous literature on brick-and-mortar/online store image could be summarized as follows. First, there are evident similarities and dissimilarities, in terms of image attributes and dimensions, between traditional store image and online store image. This implies that online store image should not be examined by simple analogies between the two. Secondly, a study on online store image should reflect how actual consumers perceive online stores, that is, using online store features as store image attributes might not be valid. Thirdly, the previous research continuously suggested the development of measurement being able to capture the richness of online store image, which is feasible by adopting qualitative research methods. Moreover, considering that the need for a comprehensive investigation on online store image is not limited to a certain country's research stream, this study should contribute to online store image study in general, with more sophisticated results. Therefore, this study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to identify online store image attributes and corresponding dimen-

〈Figure 1〉 Conceptual Framework



Oi = Online store image dimensions, where i = 1, 2, ..., N
oij = Number of attributes in ith dimension of Online store image, where j = 1, 2, ..., n
Ti = Traditional store image dimensions, where i = 1, 2, ..., M
tij = Number of attributes in ith dimension of Traditional store image, where j = 1, 2, ..., m

sions. In specific, an in-depth interview technique was used to retrieve the initial pool of online store image attributes, and then the dimensions were identified by exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Also, the resulting attributes and dimensions were compared to those of traditional store image, so that a comprehensive analogy between the two would be possible. Consequently, the research questions and conceptual framework (Figure 1) were developed as follows:

Research question 1: What are online store image attributes?

Research question 2: What are the corresponding online store image dimensions?

Research question 3: How are resultant online store image attributes and underlying dimensions different from traditional store image attributes and dimensions?

Ⅳ. Research Methodology

4.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews to retrieve initial pool of online store image attributes were performed with 26 U.S. consumers who have used the Internet as a shopping channel, within a four-week period. The age of interview sample was between 18 and 55, including 21 female and 5 male. Since this interview was intended to retrieve as many attributes as possible from the interviewees, the interview was continued until no new attributes were detected (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and the questions asked ranged from overall Internet usage to a specific shopping experience. The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet room, and all interviews were audio-taped according to the interviewee's consent. The amount of total recordings was 230 minutes and 33 attributes were retrieved through a careful process. For example:

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Interviewer: *What was your first online purchase?*

C3.: *I bought a digital camera. That was the first. Normally, I'm the type of person that if I'm buying something, I want to look at it, touch it, feel it, try it on. . . so, I normally don't purchase anything. I would just look on the computer. That was the first thing that I purchased because it was cheaper that way, significantly cheaper, and it didn't matter that it was going to take five days.*

Interviewer: *But there's a lot of retailers who sell digital cameras on-line. How did you select which one?*

C3: O.K. I went to Cnet.com. (It has) anything electronic that you would want, but it's cheaper. It finds the cheapest thing that you want. So, I wanted a Cannon S-200 digital camera. So, I just went on Cnet and typed in Cannon S-200 and it showed me the cheapest prices on the Internet that had it.

...

***Interviewer**: Do you feel those websites like Best Buy and Cannon.com are similar to each other, or different?*

C3: To me, every website is the same.

***Interviewer**: What do you see from the website, for example?*

C3: I just can't tell any of them apart. They all kind of look the same. They all have their different products and different things you can click on. . .they have a bunch of pictures, it's colorful. So, to me, they're really no different.

***Interviewer**: Even though the web sites are similar, eventually you find one website and dig into it, and buy something. What do you think makes you to choose one?*

C3: Mainly, if I see something out that I like. If I liked that sweater and I asked you where you got it and you told me, I might go home and get on the website of that store. Mainly, if I see something, or I hear about something. . .like, I know I want a good rain jacket for Christmas. So, I've been going around to Columbia.com and Northface, because I know that they sell good jackets there. So, that's the only reason I would go to a specific website. If I know I want something and I know they have it. (from Interview #7)

In this conversation, the actual attributes retrieved were 'reality features (look, touch, feel, and try),' 'wide selection of merchandise,' 'cheapest,' 'search by typing key words,' 'colorful,' 'friends suggest to visit.' The content validity of retrieved attributes was checked by three experts in the online retailing and consumer behavior area. As a result, all 33 attributes (Table 1) were kept and developed into 33 items of 5-point Likert scale (1= "Strongly Disagree" to 5="Strongly Agree") for further analysis.

4.2 Survey sampling and data collection

4.2.1 Consumer sample criteria

To define a consumer sample frame, this study followed the results of an online consumer survey from National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), since NTIA, in the U.S. Department of Commerce, used the broadest data, based on the September 2001 U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (NTIA, 2002).

〈Table I〉 Initial store image attributes retreived from Interviews

Attributes	Freq.
Competitive price	11
Variety of merchandise	11
Easy Return	9
Easy Exchange items	9
Safety of financial info. give-out	9
Good deal (best thing for the lowest price)	8
Low shipping cost	8
Carries items can't be found around	8
Reality features (touch, feel)	7
Reality features (quality/larger pictures)	7
Pin-pointing search engine	7
Friends suggest to go to xxx.com (WOM)	6
Find my way around easily	5
Every step has been confirmed	5
Fast Delivery	4
Notification about sale event	4
Reliability of retailers / recognizable retailers	4
Good quality	3
Quick response, good customer service	3
Fast shipping	2
Mention / promise on safety	2
Easy to browse	2
Eye-catching site design	2
User rating, user comments	2
Detailed information on product description	2
Big sales	2
Helpful contents (not only product info)	2
Pretty colors	1
Tells me about stock-out situation	1
Payment option flexibility	1
Tracking system after order	1
Easy price comparison	1
Good assortment	1

Based on the notable characteristics of online users identified in the NTIA survey, the following consumer sample frame was defined. First of all, there is an obvious positive relationship between family income and online usage, suggesting that family income should be considered in consumer sampling. That is, to avoid possible sampling bias, the family income distribution of the final study sample should be as close as the income distribution of the NTIA survey result (i.e. 5.5% of the total sample belongs to 'Less than $15,000' family income category, 6.2% belongs to '$15,000-$24,999,' 8.8% belongs to '$25,000-$34,999,' 14.4% belongs to '$35,000-$49,999,' 21.1% belongs to '$50,000-$74,999,' and 31.2% belongs to '$75,000 and above'). Secondly, age differences in terms of Internet usage has been reduced. Compared to the role of family income on Internet usage, age is not a considerable variable in consumer sampling. However, the consumer group younger than 17 will be excluded from the sample frame because they usually are inactive as online 'shoppers,' even though they showed active connection to the Internet. Several other online consumer surveys supported this point of view (Harris Interactive, 2002; Nielsen/NetRatings, 2003). In specific, Harris Interactive defined the profile of the U.S. online population with an age 18 and older, since consumers in this range are financially independent. This independency, in turn, will affect the consumption pattern differently. In this regard, a consumer in this study was defined as a consumer who has shopped online at least once and are between the ages of 18 and 64.

4.2.2 Online store sample criteria

Since store image is one of the consequences of consumers' shopping experience involving a particular store (Berry, 1969), this study selected specific online stores. To achieve substantial sample size, however, selected online retailers should be familiar to the respondents. Considering that the 'familiarity' was mainly reflected on 'high traffic' or 'high sales volume' of online retailers, the top 20 Internet retailers by sales volume (Stores, September 2000) and the top 20 shopping sites by traffic (Alexa.com) were examined. Among them, two online retailers were selected, so that **Amazon.com** and **Dell.com** represented general merchandise online retailers and specialty online retailers, respectively, based on the following screening procedure.

First of all, multi-channel retailers were excluded in this study, because consumers' retail image for multi-channel retailers might be the result of mixed perceptions between offline retail image and online retail image. Therefore, in order to measure

the pure online store image, multi-channel retailers, such as JCPenney.com, were excluded. Secondly, transaction method was considered. In the list, retailers who adopt 'auction' as a transaction method are significantly popular in the online environment, partly because one of the unique characteristics of the online environment, 'interactivity,' offers consumers an easy exchange of their shopping information. However, auctioning involves distinctive shopping procedures (i.e. bidding or out-bidding, as well as consumers that participate in auctioning develop unique shopping strategies) compared to the general online retailer-consumer transaction case. Therefore online retailers adopting the auction (e.g. E-bay) as their transaction method were also excluded from this study.

4.2.3 Data collection and sample characteristics

Data has collected through an online survey, since an online survey (web survey) is parallel to the previous studies on consumer behavior in e-commerce (Wilde, Kelly, and Scotte, 2004; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003). Moreover, considering the advantage of using an online consumer panel (Schonlau, Fricker, and Elliott, 2002), such as self-selection bias, lower cost, or faster turnaround time, 1000 members of a commercial online survey agent, surveyz.com, were randomly selected and then invited participant in the study via e-mail. A total of 512 completed responses resulted from the invitations. Among them, 418 useable responses were obtained.

In terms of sample characteristics, the income distribution of the sample (i.e. 6.9% 'Less than $15,000' family income category, 8.2% '$15,000 - $24,999,' 10.5% '$25,000 - $34,999,' 16.5% '$35,000 - $49,999,' 23.5% '$50,000 - $74,999,' and 34.4% '$75,000 and above') showed a similar pattern to that of the NTIA survey results, implying that no further stratification was needed. Around 75% (n=320) of the respondents reported 'some college' or higher level of education experience. The most frequent age category, between 35 and 54, allowed for 60% (n=247) of the total sample, and the proportion of female and male respondents were 61.7% (n=258) and 38.3% (n=160), respectively.

4.3 Statistical analysis

It is often recommended when there is no strong theory about the constructs underlying responses to the measures (DeCoster, 2003) to first perform an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) then a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Given the fact that online store image attributes and the corresponding dimensions have not yet been specified from a theoretical perspective, an EFA was first performed to get a rough dimensional pic-

ture of the online store image attributes and then the EFA result was applied to a CFA to 'confirm' resulting dimensional structure from the EFA, supported by Amos 5 software. In this study, however, fitting a CFA model constructed from the EFA results to the same total survey sample had the following problems (Byrne, 2001; DeCoster, 2003). First of all, if the EFA results are put into a CFA using the same data, this is merely 'fitting' the data and not 'confirming' a theoretical construct. Secondly, it is conventional that an initial (a priori) model has undergone a series of modifications to get a possible best (final) model. If the same data is used both for an EFA and a CFA, even though a CFA could achieve highly significant fit indexes, a totally new data set is needed to test the validity and to confirm the predictability of the model, which was not available for this study. Therefore, this study divided the sample used for EFA into two sub data sets, by random sample selection process using SPSS. The first sub-data set (n = 194) was used to fit a priori CFA model constructed from the results of the EFA. Then, the second sub-data set (n = 224) acted as a validation sample, and was used to check the validity of the model finalized from the previous CFA.

V. Results

5.1 Exploratory store image dimensions resulting from EFA

An EFA, using a correlation matrix as an input matrix, principal component analysis as an extraction method, and Varimax with Kaiser normalization as a rotation method extracted six components having an Eigenvalue over one, which explained approximately 68% of the total variance (Table 2). Six exploratory online store image dimensions were identified: Purchase Process and Reliability; Depth and Width of Site Attraction; Cost and Time of Delivery; Price Competitiveness and Communication; Product and Information Availability; and Post-purchase Services. From the 33 items identified, 7 items were ignored for the factor interpretation and further analysis, since they loaded at a low value or cross-loaded to the other factors. Therefore, six online store image dimensions and 26 image attributes were found and used for the following CFA.

〈Table 2〉 Store image dimensions resulting from EFA

Item description	Purchase process and Reliability	Depth and Width of Site Attraction	Cost and Time of Delivery	Price Competitiveness and Communication	Product and Information Availability	Post-purchase Services
The checkout procedure on XXX.com1 is easy	**0.79**	0.18	0.24	0.27	0.16	0.06
The checkout procedure on XXX.com is clear	**0.79**	0.16	0.24	0.30	0.15	0.08
I can easily find my way around in XXX.com	**0.76**	0.41	0.14	0.12	0.20	0.16
The XXX.com website is easy to browse	**0.74**	0.46	0.10	0.10	0.20	0.21
XXX.com makes searching simple by typing key-words	**0.67**	0.40	0.21	0.02	0.26	0.24
XXX.com lets me track my orders	**0.64**	0.15	0.36	0.29	0.25	0.04
I believe XXX.com protects my financial privacy	**0.64**	0.22	0.33	0.32	0.15	0.17
XXX.com is a reliable place to shop	**0.57**	0.23	0.41	0.36	0.21	0.06
The site design of XXX.com is eye catching	0.25	**0.76**	0.15	0.17	0.12	0.16
XXX.com uses attractive colors on their sites	0.20	**0.70**	0.20	0.24	0.19	0.14
XXX.com offers quality pictures of the products	0.35	**0.63**	0.36	0.14	0.22	0.04
XXX.com offers me a detailed product description	0.40	**0.60**	0.27	0.26	0.20	0.00
XXX.com offers a lot of helpful information beyond product information	0.30	**0.56**	0.33	0.34	0.27	0.06
XXX.com lets me compare prices easily2	0.23	0.47	0.19	0.26	0.29	0.26
XXX.com has everything I want2	0.18	0.43	0.18	0.41	0.21	0.30
XXX.com offers me flexible payment options2	0.25	0.40	0.28	0.34	-0.09	0.30
Shipping by XXX.com is fast	0.25	0.23	**0.74**	0.14	0.09	0.15
I can get my product delivered as quickly as I want from XXX.com	0.27	0.21	**0.71**	-0.07	0.17	0.19
XXX.com offers me a low shipping cost	0.15	0.19	**0.68**	0.31	0.07	0.14
The product presentation from XXX.com helps me to get real feel for the product2	0.26	0.46	0.49	0.24	0.26	0.05
XXX.com offers good quality products2	0.46	0.25	0.47	0.36	0.23	-0.02
XXX.com has big sales events	0.14	0.37	0.19	**0.62**	0.13	0.26
XXX.com offers me a good deal	0.34	0.25	0.43	**0.56**	0.19	0.11
When I contact XXX.com, it responds to me as quickly as I want	0.33	0.16	0.15	**0.56**	0.12	0.27
The prices offered by XXX.com are competitive	0.36	0.27	0.45	**0.54**	0.19	0.05
XXX.com has notified me when it has a sales event2	0.24	0.27	0.04	0.46	0.11	0.31
My friends shop at XXX.com2	0.32	0.18	0.03	0.46	0.39	0.16
XXX.com carries a lot of brand names	0.26	0.12	0.24	-0.01	**0.70**	0.17
Other customersi˜ comments provided by XXX.com help my shopping process	0.19	0.31	0.09	0.05	**0.69**	0.17
XXX.com carries items I cannot find locally	0.11	0.18	0.10	0.39	**0.65**	-0.04
XXX.com has told me about a stock-out situation when it affected my order	0.25	0.07	0.11	0.28	**0.52**	0.31
When I have had to exchange the item purchased from XXX.com, the process was easy	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.22	0.15	**0.83**
When I have had to return the item purchased from XXX.com, the process was easy.	0.13	0.14	0.20	0.15	0.19	**0.82**

[1] XXX.com appeared either as Amazon.com or as Dell.com, depending on respondents shopping experience
[2] Items were ignored for the factor interpretation and further analysis

5.2 Store image dimensions resulting from CFA: From a priori model to model validation

An a priori confirmatory factor model was constructed based on the EFA result as a theoretical base, and was fit to the first sub-data set (n=194). Overall, the fit indices showed poor fit. The normed x^2 (x^2/ *df*) was 3.69, larger than the recommendation by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). GFI and CFI were .704 and .801, all smaller than the guideline suggested by Bentler (1990). Likewise, RMSEA of .118 was deemed too large compared to the most recent RMSEA cutpoints elaborated by MacCallum, Brown, and Sugawara (1996). This suggested that a priori model should be specified further based on appropriate references, such as modification indices or standardized residual covariances.

A series of model specifications was performed. For example, two items 'I can easily find my way around in XXX.com' and 'I believe XXX.com protects my financial privacy' were excluded because they were cross-loaded to the other constructs, implying a low discriminant validity. Also, 'When I contact XXX.com, it responds to me as quickly as I want' was moved to the Post-purchase service construct from the Price competitiveness and communication construct based on the better model fit.

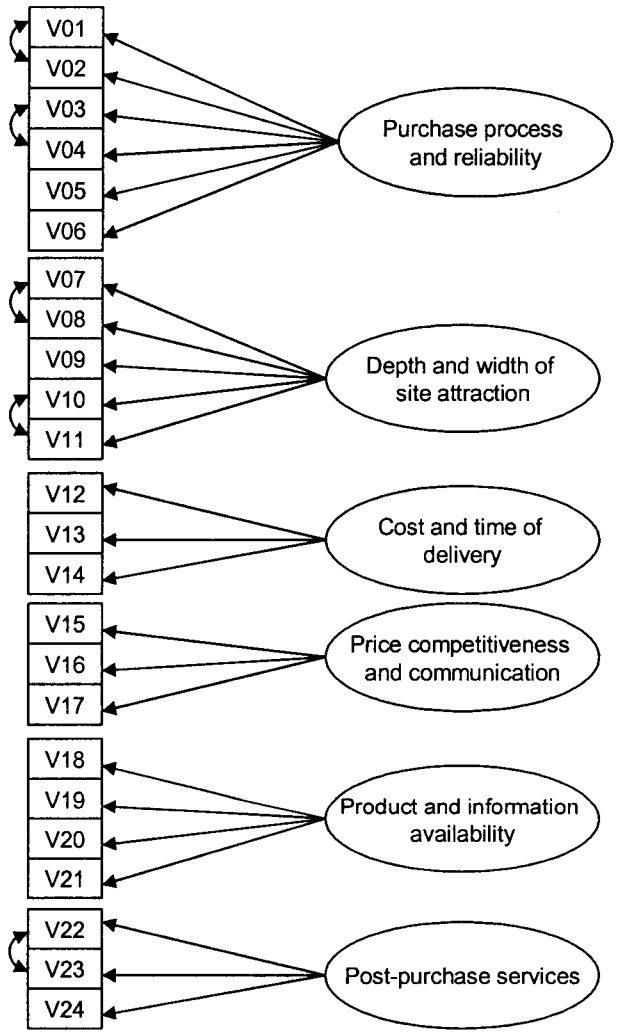
As a result of the specification process, the model fit was significantly enhanced and the model achieved a good fit to the data (x^2/df=1.63, GFI=.866, CFI=.953, RMSEA=.057). The standardized path weights of all 24 items were also significant, with a coefficient ranged between .497 and .856 and the critical ratio ranging from 6.53 through 14.22 (Table 3). In addition, the standardized residual covariances of the model showed all coefficients less than positive or negative 2.58 (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1988), suggesting that the final model (Figure 2) did not require further model specification.

The next step was to check whether the good fit achieved with this particular data set could be generalized to another data set. In order to confirm the external validity of the final model, the second sub-data set (n=224) was used. The model seemed to be robust, with x^2/df=1.98; GFI=.855; CFI = .947; and RMSEA=.067. With the good fit indices, all the standardized path coefficients and the covariance estimates for the hypothesized paths were also highly significant, indicating that the hypothesized paths and factor structure were all strongly supported.

〈Table 3〉 Online store image dimensions and attributes resulting from CFA

Dimensions	Attributes	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.
Purchase process and Reliability	V01. XXX.com is a reliable place to shop	0.787	0.046	12.66
	V02. XXX.com lets me track my orders	0.753	0.051	11.89
	V03. XXX.com makes searching simple by typing key-words	0.731	0.058	11.38
	V04. The XXX.com website is easy to browse	0.761	0.058	12.06
	V05. The checkout procedure on XXX.com is clear	0.818	0.052	13.41
	V06. The checkout procedure on XXX.com is easy	0.793	0.058	12.77
Depth and Width of Site Attraction	V07. XXX.com offers a lot of helpful information beyond product information	0.789	0.059	12.56
	V08. XXX.com offers me a detailed product description	0.768	0.055	12.06
	V09. XXX.com offers quality pictures of the products	0.814	0.051	13.20
	V10. XXX.com uses attractive colors on their sites	0.720	0.053	11.05
	V11. The site design of XXX.com is eye catching	0.735	0.055	11.38
Cost and Time of Delivery	V12. XXX.com offers me a low shipping cost	0.641	0.071	9.09
	V13. I can get my product delivered as quickly as I want from XXX.com	0.750	0.061	11.07
	V14. Shipping by XXX.com is fast	0.770	0.058	11.46
Price Competitiveness	V15. The prices offered by XXX.com are competitive	0.854	0.048	14.16
	V16. XXX.com offers me a good deal	0.856	0.051	14.22
	V17. XXX.com has big sales events	0.680	0.059	10.27
Product and Information Availability	V18. XXX.com has told me about a stock-out situation when it affected my order	0.726	0.059	10.63
	V19. XXX.com carries items I cannot find locally	0.607	0.070	8.51
	V20. Other customers' comments provided by XXX.com help my shopping process	0.648	0.067	9.22
	V21. XXX.com carries a lot of brand names	0.634	0.067	8.97
Post-purchase Services	V22. When I have had to return the item purchased from XXX.com, the process was easy	0.497	0.052	6.53
	V23. When I have had to exchange the item purchased from XXX.com, the process was easy	0.502	0.046	6.62
	V24. When I contact XXX.com, it responds to me as quickly as I want	0.804	0.074	10.03

〈Figure 2〉 Model for Online Store Image Dimensions and Attributes



VI. Conclusion and Discussion

6.1 Online store image attributes vs. Traditional store image attributes

This study identified 33 online store image attributes, based on 26 in-depth interviews with U.S. online consumers. Among the 33 attributes, 'competitive prices' and 'variety of merchandise' were identified with the highest frequency (Table 1). This result supported the findings of previous research, that is, merchandise and price related

attributes are the core attributes for online store operations (Hopkins & Alford, 2001; Reibstein, 2000, 2002; Szymanski & Hise 2000; Wilde, Kelly, and Scott, 2004). Also this finding suggested that an online store is not different from a traditional store in terms of a retailer's core functions (e.g. offering various merchandise and lower prices), by considering that price and merchandise have been the most frequently addressed attributes in traditional store image studies (Lindquist, 1974-1975).

Even though 'Return and exchange of purchased items' is neither a unique attribute for online store studies nor considered critical in traditional store studies, it was frequently addressed during the interviews. The reason for the high frequency could be traced back to the unique way of returning or exchanging required in an online shopping environment. When online consumers have to return their purchased items, they have to mail back the item to the online retailer. Generally, various service features are offered by the online retailer, such as whether the retailer offers return packages, free return shipping, tracking system to confirm that the retailer receives the item, and whether the retailer is quick to refund money. In addition, the exchange of the item could be more complex because of the second delivery. According to the interviews, it is evident that this perceived inconvenience plays a critical role in forming the store image both before and after the purchase.

> *Interview #18: I just bought a fleece on-line. . . I don't know what I was thinking, I bought a medium and I wanted a small. So, I had to go into the computer a couple of days ago and to see what their policy was. Usually, when I buy something, I don't think I'm going to return it. . . that's the trouble with on-line sources, because you have to really like it because it's a pain, especially if you have to pay for shipping to return it. Then you have to pay for shipping for them to return it to you. I think that's just a pain, but that's what I'm going to have to do so for this fleece··· I still have the packaging, the box that came in. (I'm going to return it and have to pay for shipping). So, basically, I have to pay for three shipping and handling. . .I think that's ridiculous··· (In response to the question, "Did you check their policy?") It doesn't really say anything (about them covering the cost of returns). I guess that's a concern, or a hassle. If I had bought it at the mall, all it would take is a 10-15 minute drive to return it. . .*

'Security concern for consumers' financial information' is a new attribute compared to traditional store image attributes, and has been frequently cited in various online shopping studies, sometimes as privacy (Wilde, Kelly, and Scott, 2004) or sometimes as

security in general (Szymanski & Hise, 2000; Hopkins & Alford, 2001). This study also confirmed that security concerns could be an influential attribute for online shopping, however, this concern seems to be diminishing as consumers become more experienced with online shopping, from both direct and indirect experience.

> *Q: Did you feel frustrated to have to put your credit card number in?*
> *Interview #4: I thought it was different. It kind of felt like it wasn't safe. Then after I realized it's getting safer and safer. . .*
> *Q: If you could pick one feature or attribute you are looking at in a certain website what would that be?*
> *Interview #2: Simplicity. It's simple and it's easy to find what you're looking for, that's the only thing I really ask for . . . and obviously that it's secure site. If my friends or family have recommended it to me, then I trust it.*

It is interesting to note that 'low shipping cost' is more frequently identified than other closely related attributes identified in this study, such as 'fast shipping' and 'fast delivery.' The underlying factor of this finding could be a distinctive characteristic of online consumers: price-sensitivity. Since some consumers are eager to find the lowest total price for a purchase, it seems that each component of the total price structure in their online shopping, including product price, shipping price, and tax, is emphasized more than other attributes.

'Reality features,' including how real the consumers feel the presented products are and the quality of the product presentation itself, are new and unique to an online shopping environment and present major challenges for online retailers. It is difficult for online retailers to achieve the level that consumers can actually touch, feel, and try the products in reality, even though highly advanced technological features have been developed to present the products. From the consumer side, the concern that the product they purchase might not be the same as the one they see through the websites usually extends, in turn, to the return and exchange concern. In this regard, online retailers should understand the role of 'reality features,' not only as an attraction but also as a way of reducing additional costs involved in post-purchase services.

The attributes identified with lower frequency were: 'good deal,' 'easy price comparison,' 'good quality,' 'good assortment,' and 'detailed information on product description,' 'notification of sales event,' 'other consumers' rating/comments,' 'my friend says to go to xxx.com,' etc. Among them, 'my friend says ~' is an attribute that retailers cannot directly manage inside their online store boundaries, however, as the interview

with interviewee #2 revealed, consumers' close friends or family seems to play a crucial role in relieving their security concerns or uncertainty regarding online shopping in general, just like WOM (word-of-mouth) provides the same function in a traditional shopping environment. Further, suggestions from family or friends usually provides consumers with a basis of trust for the retailer. Therefore, this attribute seems to be an underlying attribute of 'reliability of retailers.'

6.2 Online store image dimensions vs. Traditional store image dimensions

After identifying attributes, this study identified six underlying online store image dimensions: Purchase Process and Reliability, Depth and Width of Site Attraction, Cost and Time of Delivery, Price Competitiveness, Product and Information Availability, and Post-purchase Services. First of all, among 6 attribute items in the Purchase Process and Reliability dimension, two pairs of items, 'checkout procedure is easy' - 'checkout procedure is clear' and 'easy to browse' - 'pinpointing search engine' were highly correlated, which suggests the possibility to eliminate one attribute in each set when this dimension faces further sophisticated study, such as scale development for online store image. In addition, it is very interesting to note that the attributes related to Purchase Process and the attributes related to Reliability of the Stores are under one dimension. In other words, Reliability of the Stores and various stages of procedural aspects of shopping (Purchase Process) share a significant amount of variance, which suggests consumers' perceived reliability of the store is not from a single attribute or feature, but it might be from the whole purchase process, starting with product search and ending with checkout.

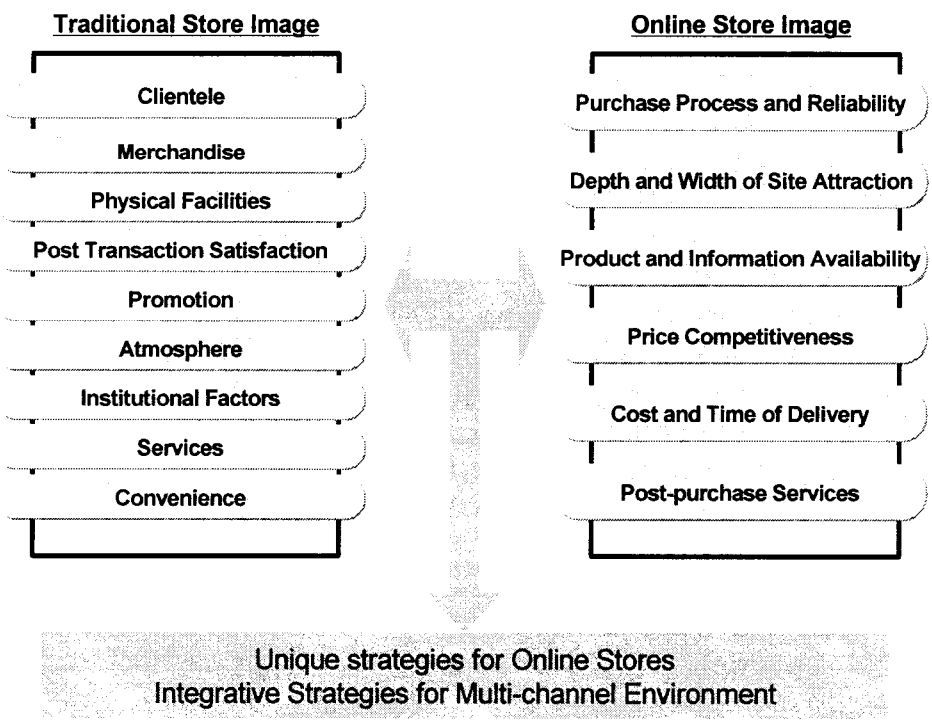
Depth and Width of Site Attraction was composed of five image attribute items. As indicated from the name of this dimension, this dimension is mainly composed of the features that attract consumers to online retailers' websites. In detail, 'eye-catching design' and 'attractive colors of a website' seems to be able to grab consumers' attention during their wide exposure to other websites for online shopping, whereas 'quality of product presentation,' 'detailed product information,' or 'information beyond product description' are the features attracting consumers to websites, such that consumers stay longer in the website to enjoy the quality product pictures or to absorb a wide range of information. It is highly likely that consumers who were satisfied with those attributes would come back to that website.

Cost and Time of Delivery included 'fast shipping,' 'fast delivery,' and 'low shipping

cost.' It should be noted that the attributes in this dimension are not combined with other dimensions (e.g. purchase process) but stand alone as one dimension, even though the concept of this dimension is part of the shopping process. Having Cost and Time of Delivery as one separate dimension seems to be quite reasonable, according to the fact that delivery is one of the most unique processes in online shopping, which gives consumers a great deal of uncertainty and, with which consumers do not have to deal with in a traditional shopping environment.

The last dimension Post-purchase Services was composed of 'return items,' 'exchange items,' and 'quick response.' Among the attributes, 'quick response' was originally designed to be under the Price Competitiveness and Communication dimension based on the EFA results (Table 2). However, the CFA procedure revealed that 'quick response' was highly correlated with 'exchange of items,' which suggested 'quick response' should be in the same dimension. This finding implies the situation that consumers' need for a 'quick response' might be greatly increased when they have to exchange items.

〈Figure 3〉 Traditional Store Image Vs. Online Store Image



In this regard, online retailers should provide easy and fast ways of contact consumers, especially after the purchase.

When the resulting online store image dimensions were compared to traditional store image groups suggested by Lindquist (1974-1975), shown in Figure 3, six dimensions of online store image and nine dimensions of traditional store image were not completely compatible. This was more evident when the attribute composition of each dimension between the two were compared. For example, traditional Merchandise dimension included 'quality,' 'selection,' 'assortment of merchandise,' and even 'pricing,' thus two online image dimensions Product and Price are analogous to the traditional Merchandise dimension. The incompatible nature between traditional image dimensions and online image dimensions appears to suggest that it is desirable to develop distinctive online retail strategies based on its own image attributes and dimensions. Those contingent strategies should be much more appropriate to implement and communicate to consumers in an online retail environment, rather than applying previously established strategies based on traditional store image attributes and dimensions to the online retail setting.

Ⅶ. Implications and Further Study

7.1 Implications

This study explored and identified online store image attributes and corresponding dimensions more exhaustively. Compared to previous online store image research that selected attributes from other e-commerce research, such as e-satisfaction or e-service quality, this study retrieved several unique attributes strictly focusing on online store image from a series of in-depth interviews. In addition, compared to the previous research depicting a rough analogy between traditional store image attributes and dimensions and those of online retailing, this study identified online store image dimensions and attributes under each dimension through empirical analysis with actual online consumers. In this regard, the online store image dimensions and attributes found in this study should contribute to existing retail image research in a more significant and reliable way.

Moreover, this study identified online specific image dimensions that distinguished from traditional image dimensions, such as 'depth and width of site attraction,' and 'cost and time of delivery.' Different from traditional retailers, online retailers should more focus on the way of letting consumers

be attracted to and stay longer at online stores to reduce significantly high churning rate in online environment. Also, considering that cost and time of delivery correlated with other image dimensions, 'price competitiveness' and 'purchase process and reliability,' online retailers should strongly concern about hassel-free fulfillment of consumers' order.

In addition, based on the findings in this study, online retailers should be able to understand how their image is developed and what the important image attributes or dimensions are that they should focus on. For example, online consumers who purchased from Amazon.com evaluated highly 'availability of information about stock-out-situation (mean=4.51, s.d.=1.51),' whereas 'return or exchange of the items purchased (mean =3.21, s.d.=.59)' was evaluated less favorably. This suggests that Amazon.com should be aware that consumers want better post-purchase service, and should focus on building strategies to serve this need.

Since this study adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodology, the resulting attributes and dimensions should be easily and comfortably developed into online store image measurement scale and the reliability of the scale should be tested in diverse context. Also given the existing findings that consumer perceived store image is an antecedent of retail patronage behavior, including satisfaction and loyalty, measuring online store image is a starting point of building an online retail patronage model.

7.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

First of all, even though the retailers sampled in this study had been carefully selected through an elaborated screening process, the online store image attributes and dimensions identified were confirmed only by consumers using two online retailers, Amazon.com and Dell.com. In this regard, the resulting online store image attributes and dimensions should be tested and retested across various kinds of online retailers until those are theorized. Also, this study limited the type of online store sample to pure online stores. Considering recent multi-channel retail environment, online store image studies involving other types, such as stores began with off-line then added online, or stores began with pure online then added off-line, should be examined further. Consequently, the comprehensive image comparison among pure off-line, pure online, and on/off-line stores should be viable.

The relatively small sample sizes and response rate (51.2%) used in this study seems to limit the results to achieve the highest level of generalization. One of the reasons for the sample reduction could be

found in the design and the wording of the questions in the survey. In this study, online store image was operationalized as consumers' perceived store image resulting from at least one transaction between the consumer and online retailer. Based on the definition, respondents were forced to choose either Amazon.com or Dell.com depending on their previous shopping experience, and the consumers who had not made a transaction with either of them were asked to stop taking the survey. If the online store image was initially operationalized in a broader way, such as consumers' perceived store image resulting from previous online shopping experience 'in general,' and the questions were worded in more generic terms to include experienced responses as well as responses from expectation, a larger sample could have been collected. Therefore, a study involving more broadly defined online store image could be conducted to examine whether there are any dissimilarities between the two studies based on a different definition, in terms of resulting online store image attributes and dimensions.

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온라인 점포 이미지의 속성들과 핵심차원의 확인을 위한 연구
- 정성적 및 정량적 접근을 토대로 -

김민성* · 안광호**

Abstract

본 연구는 소비자가 인식하는 온라인 점포의 이미지를 구성하는 주요 속성 (attributes)들과 그 핵심차원들(dimensions)을 확인하는데 그 목적이 있다. 특히 기존의 오프라인 점포 이미지와 관련된 연구들이 다양한 연구방법론을 통해 오랜 기간에 걸쳐 축적되어 온 것에 비해, 현재까지 온라인 점포 이미지에 관한 연구들은 그 속성들을 확인하는 기초적 연구에 있어서도 연구자의 주관에 따라 선택된 웹페이지 속성들을 사용하거나, 혹은 브랜드이미지와 온라인 점포 이미지의 형성에 영향을 미치는 선행변수들을 그 속성으로 차용함으로써 보다 신뢰성과 타당성을 가진 온라인 점포 이미지 측정을 위한 노력이 부족하였다. 이에 본 연구는 질적 연구방법과 양적 연구방법을 함께 사용함으로써, 질적 방법을 통한 광범위한 이미지 속성의 발견과 양적 방법을 통한 주요 이미지 차원의 발견 및 외적 타당성 제고를 함께 도모하고자 하였다.

자료의 수집은 모집단인 온라인 소비자들의 특성과 표본선정에 따른 오류를 고려하여, 패널을 이용한 온라인 설문으로 진행되었다.

실증분석결과, 온라인 점포 이미지는 33개의 하부속성과 6개의 핵심차원(구매과정과 소매점의 신뢰성, 소매점매력도의 깊이와 폭, 배달에 드는 비용과 그 신속성, 가격 경쟁력과 의사소통, 제품과 정보의 제공정도, 그리고 구매 후 서비스)으로 구성되어 있음이 확인되었다. 기존의 연구에서 밝혀진 바와 같이, 점포 이미지가 소비자의 점포애고행동(retail patronage behavior)의 선행변수임을 미루어 볼 때, 본 연구는 온라인 점포의 이미지를 측정하기 위한 포괄적인 측정도구를 제공하고, 나아가 소비자의 온라인 점포선택 모델의 기초를 마련할 것으로 기대된다.

주제어: 온라인 점포 이미지, 질적 연구방법, 양적 연구방법, 측정도구의 신뢰성과 타당성, 소비자 점포애고행동

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