



# The effects of online and offline information sources on multiple store patronage



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between multiple store patronage (MSP) and information source usage both online and offline. In particular, this study investigates the detailed effects of information sources on MSP rather than considering whether consumers choose online or offline sources. In prior studies, MSP has been conceptualized using the consumer cost–benefit framework and relates to consumer multiple store usage. However, even though prior studies have emphasized the importance of information sources in the cost–benefit framework, those that consider MSP have not tested the sources' effects. This current study conducts empirical count data analysis in the Japanese sports shoes retail market. The results reveal that consumers evaluate information sources using more detailed divisions than simply online and offline. This study contributes to studies on MSP because it is the first to identify the impact of information source usage on MSP.

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## CHINESE ABSTRACT

这项研究的目的是探究多次商店光顾（MSP）与信息源在线上 and 线下的使用之间的关系。特别要说明的是，该研究调查的是信息源对MSP产生的具体影响，而不是关注消费者选择的的信息源是线上的还是线下的。在之前的研究中，MSP的概念已经通过消费成本效益框架得以形成，并且MSP与消费者多次商店使用之间存在联系。然而，尽管之前的研究已经强调了信息源在成本收益框架中的重要性，但是那些涉及MSP的研究并没有检验信息源所产生的影响。目前这项研究对日本运动鞋零售市场进行了经验性统计数据进行分析。结果表明，消费者会使用比简单的线上线下更为细化的分类来评估信息源。这项研究是首个阐明了信息源使用对MSP所产生影响的研究，因此可以为那些MSP相关研究提供帮助。

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## 1. Introduction

Consumer retail patronage behavior has attracted research attention for several decades (e.g., Arnold et al., 1983; Ganesh et al., 2010; Monroe and Guitinan, 1975). Although earlier studies focused on determinants of retail patronage (Dodds et al., 1991; Tellis and Gaeth, 1990), recent studies have focused more on patronage patterns, in particular multiple patronage behavior (e.g., Baltas et al., 2010).

Prior studies postulated that patronage is loyalty toward a single store. However, retail patronage behavior is considered more complex from the perspectives of consumer utility maximization (e.g., Baltas et al., 2010), the plurality of loyalty (e.g., Uncles et al., 1995), and the retail market structure (e.g., Luceri and Latusi, 2012). Store choice behavior was traditionally regarded as consumer utility maxi-

mization behavior (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006). However, such utility maximization is not limited to patronizing a single store: Consumers allocate their selections to several stores in order to maximize utility when shopping. Further, there are arguments about consumers' polygamous loyalty (Dowling and Uncles, 1997). For example, researchers have recently developed a greater interest in market structure, which influences consumer choice patterns among alternatives (Luceri and Latusi, 2012; Maruyama and Wu, 2014).

Consumer retail patronage results from the relationship between consumer shopping behavior and the retailers' approach. Consumer shopping behavior among stores involves consumer information search behavior regarding products and retail characteristics. Since Copeland (1923) conceptualized product categories based on consumer buying habits, information seeking has been highly related to shopping among stores. When consumers patronize multiple stores, they are expected to acquire information about each store in terms of both product and retail-related information in order to maximize utility. Thus, it is anticipated that information search behavior relates to multiple store patronage patterns.

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In terms of the cost reduction of information seeking and visiting stores, the advent of e-commerce (EC) is expected to influence consumer information searches and shopping behavior (e.g., [Bakos, 2001](#); [Neslin et al., 2006](#)). However, little is known about the relationship between consumer information usage and store patronage.

Information source refers to the source from which consumers obtain information about products. Its importance has been emphasized in information search behavior studies ([Ratchford, 1982](#)). Early studies on information searches through the Internet emphasized that online and offline searches are considered substitutes ([Ratchford et al., 2003](#)) because Internet usage reduces the cost of consumer information-searching ([Bakos, 2001](#)). More recently, [Singh et al. \(2014\)](#) showed that consumers use online and offline information sources as complements. Thus, the means of using different information sources should influence multiple store patronage patterns.

The purpose of the current study is to examine the effects of consumer information usage on multiple store patronage. In particular, the research focuses on information sources in both online and offline contexts. Consumers who use EC are expected to use fewer stores in order to reduce shopping costs; but if they tend to use various kinds of information related to products, they may willingly visit stores in order to seek information. This suggests that the way of using information sources relates to the patronage set size of stores.

Considering market structure as an influencing factor on multiple store patronage, the authors conducted a survey in Japan, a country that is characterized by its large variety of store formats, the competitiveness of the retail business, EC growth, and the popularity of retail loyalty schemes.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. First, a literature review on multiple patronage and information searching is presented. Next, methodological issues that include data collection and measurements are discussed. Count data analysis is then conducted to test the hypotheses by using the data collected through the online survey in Japan. Following this, the analysis and findings are presented. Finally, the study's research implications, contributions, and limitations are discussed.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Multiple store patronage

Retail patronage behavior has involved consumer store choices since choice alternatives first appeared ([Arnold et al., 1983](#)). Specifically, consumers were previously expected to choose a single store among alternatives in order to maximize utility. Determinants that influence such choices in relation to utility have been analyzed ([Pan and Zinkhan, 2006](#)).

Although retail patronage studies often focused on the patronage of a single store, some studies pointed out that consumers use multiple stores for their daily shopping ([Baltas et al., 2010](#); [Popkowski Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997](#)). One way of considering this is to say that when consumers have multiple purposes, they shop at multiple stores ([Fox et al., 2004](#)). In other words, consumers use multiple stores or formats to satisfy multiple purposes that cannot be satisfied with a single store. However, a visit to a single store does not necessarily correspond to a single purpose. [Gijbrecchts et al. \(2008\)](#) revealed that even consumers with a single purpose use multiple stores. They explained that consumer multiple store shopping behavior is based on consumer motivation to minimize the cost of shopping.

Other, recent studies have shown an interest in consumer patronage of multiple stores ([Baltas et al., 2010](#); [Luceri and Latusi, 2012](#); [Maruyama and Wu, 2014](#)). This is because most consumers habitually visit, and have loyalty toward, more than one store ([Uncles et al., 1995](#)). [Baltas et al. \(2010\)](#) investigated multiple store pat-

**Table 1**

Summary of studies on multiple store patronage.

Factor	Variable	Effects	Article
Sociodemographics	Age	–	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a>
	Employment	–	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a>
	Income	–	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a> ; <a href="#">Maruyama and Wu (2014)</a>
	Female	+	<a href="#">Luceri and Latusi (2012)</a>
	Amount to spend	+	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a>
	Shopping frequency	+	<a href="#">Maruyama and Wu (2014)</a>
Perception	Car use	+	<a href="#">Maruyama and Wu (2014)</a>
	Family size	+	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a>
	Store brand orientation	+	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a>
	Satisfaction	–	<a href="#">Baltas et al. (2010)</a>
	Promotion orientation	+	<a href="#">Maruyama and Wu (2014)</a>
Market structure	Number of competitors	+	<a href="#">Luceri and Latusi (2012)</a>

ronage both conceptually and empirically. For example, multiple store patronage has been conceptualized based on the consumer cost-benefit framework rather than focusing only on cost minimization ([Baltas et al., 2010](#)). If the cost to shop and search for information is high, or the benefit of shopping at a primary store is high, consumers use fewer stores.

Prior studies operationalized the patronage set size, which refers to the number of patronized stores as a variable for consumer multiple store patronage. Consumer traits and market structure were also considered influential factors on multiple store patronage ([Table 1](#)).

### 2.2. Multiple store patronage and information search

Multiple store usage is associated with consumer information search behavior and the issue of consumer loyalty. [Dowling and Uncles \(1997\)](#) considered the polygamous nature of consumer loyalty rather than behavior that showed complete loyalty to particular brands. They argued that this polygamous nature prevents companies from conducting successful loyalty programs. Moreover, [Uncles et al. \(1995\)](#) identified that consumers have divided behavioral loyalty toward multiple stores and they visit multiple stores habitually in the long term.

In addition to divided behavioral loyalty, the novelty seeking of consumers is important. [Popkowski Leszczyc and Timmermans \(1997\)](#) revealed that variety-seeking activity is important in order to understand consumer multiple store usage. A recent study identified that consumers who have high search intentions, such as cherry pickers ([Fox and Hoch, 2005](#)), use more stores ([Maruyama and Wu, 2014](#)). In this regard, the relationship between multiple store patronage and information searching is important in order to comprehend consumer multiple store usage.

The importance of the source of information has been emphasized in studies on consumer information searches ([Beatty and Smith, 1987](#); [Kiel and Layton, 1981](#); [Ratchford, 1982](#)). Consumers' external search for information (e.g., through retailers, media, and interpersonal dimensions) requires effort ([Beatty and Smith, 1987](#)). In addition, the costs of information searches and consumers' ability to search for information differ according to each source ([Ratchford, 1982](#)). This is because each information source has its own characteristics that involve different types of cost for consumers. For example, a product-specific specialized information source, such as magazines, requires consumers to have high familiarity and knowledge about the product ([Strebel et al., 2004](#)). In addition, information from shop assistants requires actual trips to stores, which means that the choice of infor-

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