

## Determining the Distance Consumers Are Willing to Travel to a Store: A Structural Equation Model Approach

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**Abstract :** This research investigates the impact of patronage determinants on the distance consumers are willing to travel to patronize a tire shop. Although store patronage has been acknowledged as an important domain and has received substantial research interest, most of the studies so far conducted focus on grocery retail, leaving other categories of goods widely unexplored. In this study, we focus on car tires and provide a new perspective to the specific factors that influence tire shop patronage. An online survey of consumers' tyre purchasing behaviour was conducted among private car owners in Belgium. A sample of 864 respondents was used in the study, with almost four out of five of them being male. 84% of the respondents had purchased a car tyre in the last 24 months and on average travelled 22.4kms to patronise a tyre shop. We tested the direct and mediated effects of store choice determinants on distance consumers are willing to travel. All hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Our findings show that with an increase in the consumer's age the distance they were willing to travel to a tire shop decreased. Similarly, consumers who deemed proximity an important determinant of a tire shop our findings confirmed a negative effect on willingness to travel. On the other hand, the determinants price, personal contact and professionalism all had a positive effect on distance. This means that consumers actively sought out tire shops with these characteristics and were willing to travel longer distances in order to visit them. The indirect effects of the determinants flexible opening hours, family recommendation, dealer reputation, receiving auto service at home and availability of preferred brand on distance are mediated by dealer trust. Gender had a minimal effect on distance, with females exhibiting a stronger relation in terms of dealer trust as compared to males. Overall, we found that market relevant factors were better predictors of distance; and proximity, dealer trust and professionalism have the most profound effects on distance that consumers are willing to travel. This is related to the fact that the nature of shopping goods (among which are car tires) typically reinforces consumers to be more engaged in the shopping process, therefore factors that have to do with the store (e.g. location) and shopping process play a key role in store choice decision. These findings are very specific to shopping goods and cannot be generalized to other categories of goods. For marketers and retailers these findings can have direct implications on their location strategies. The factors found to be relevant to tire shop patronage will be used in our next study to calibrate a location model to be utilised to identify the optimum location for siting new tyre shop outlets and service centres.

**Keywords :** dealer trust, distance to store, tire store patronage, willingness to travel

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