

**A STUDY OF BEHAVIOR AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS
IN LEADING CONVENIENCE STORE**



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IN LEADING CONVENIENCE STORE**

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ABSTRACT

Convenience store provides simple purchasing and play very important role in Thai's daily life, particularly people live in Bangkok metropolitan area. In this study, consumer behavior is observed by examining perceptions of retail convenience. 7-Eleven is selected as a case study because it is the largest retail chain in Thailand with highest revenue. Dimensions of retail convenience including access, search, transaction, and possession convenience are studied by using in-depth interview among Thai consumers who live in Bangkok. The results show that the most important attributes are close to home or work in access convenience, store layout in search convenience, quick payment method in transaction convenience, and discount and promotion in possession convenience. In addition, food and beverage are the most popular products sold at 7-Eleven stores.

KEY WORDS: 7-Eleven / Retail convenience / Dimensions of retail convenience/ Bangkok / Convenience store

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Convenience Stores in Bangkok context

The fastest growing retail food sector is convenience store business (Santella and Sirikeratikul, 2013). It contributes 15 percent of the total fast moving packaged consumer goods (FMCG) in Thailand (Santella and Sirikeratikul, 2013). According to report of USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, an average of 7.6 million customers shop at convenience stores each day (Santella and Sirikeratikul, 2013). Thai convenience retail sector are very competitive. CP All, the owner of 7-Eleven franchise, undergoes growing competition from Tesco Lotus Express, Mini Big C, Tops Daily, and Family Mart. Consequently, the convenience stores re-focus their sales strategies on food items and added new food product lines, especially ready-to-eat meals. Foods and beverages account for 70-80 percent of total product assortment in convenience stores (Santella and Sirikeratikul, 2013).

Bangkok is the center of most trading and the center of Thailand's economy. Nowadays, people change their eating lifestyle, especially in Bangkok and suburb areas. There are more rural people move from their hometowns to work and live in the capital city of Thailand. They have tight schedule and limited time for eating. Students are more focus on their studies and special tutions after daily school life. These changing lifestyles bring them to eat outside home and convenience is more important to them due to time constraint. In response to a growing demand among metropolitans, convenience stores provide variety of foods and beverages in their stores. They become very popular food shops or food stores in Bangkok and neighboring provinces.

Obviously, convenience stores become important part of the daily life of metropolitans nowadays. This new trend impacts the development of the retail industry and Thailand economy.

Today's consumers are more time-conscious than the past. This is called a new type of consumers (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). Retail convenience means time and effort saving in consuming for retail environment.

1.2 Company Background: “7-Eleven” convenience store

The leading player in Thailand and the world convenience store is 7-Eleven, which accounts for 53 percent of total convenience store sales (Santella and Sirikeratikul, 2013). 7-Eleven stores in Thailand is the world's third largest 7-Eleven network after Japan, and the United States (Santella and Sirikeratikul, 2013).

7-Eleven is the largest convenience store with almost 53,000 stores in 16 countries (CP All Plc., 2014). 7-Eleven becomes one of the world largest retailers at gasoline stations (CP All Plc., 2014). On April 28, 1999, 7-Eleven, Inc. changed the ownership from Southland Corporation to Seven and I Holdings Co., the owner of 7-Eleven's Japan (CP All Plc., 2014). 7-Eleven originated the convenience store concept after playing a key role for convenience to consumers, such as selling milk, bread and eggs (CP All Plc., 2014). Their stores adjust themselves to serve customers' need and preferences of local consumers with 2,500 different products and services with high quality (CP All Plc., 2014). 7-Eleven set fair retail price with quick transaction (CP All Plc., 2014). The stores provide clean and friendly shopping environment. Sizes of stores are different from 216 to 270 square meters (CP All Plc., 2014). They also concern on location selection where customers are easy to access with high visibility (CP All Plc., 2014). 7-Eleven's food offerings have various lines of prepared-fresh daily products including ready-to-eat foods, sandwiches, salads and bakery (CP All Plc., 2014).

CP All Plc. (the “Company”) is the franchisee of 7-Eleven convenience stores in Thailand. The Company has an exclusive right to operate business under the Area License Agreement with 7-Eleven, Inc., USA (CP All Plc., 2014). There are a total of 7,429 stores nationwide in 2013 (CP All Plc., 2014). There are 3,395 stores located in Bangkok and neighboring areas (46 percent) and 4,034 stores operated in provincial areas (54 percent). In Thailand, there are three types of 7-Eleven stores, i.e.

3,248 corporate-owned stores (44 percent), 3,593 franchise stores (48 percent), and 588 sub-area license stores (8 percent) (CP All Plc., 2014). In Q1 of 2014, there are 1,244 visitors per store daily with average daily sales per store at 75,953 baht (CP All Plc., 2014).

The Company expand 607 new stand-alone stores and stores in gas stations in 2013 (CP All Plc., 2014). CP All plan to open approximately 600 new stores each year, with the target number of 10,000 in the 2018 (CP All Plc., 2014). They emphasize on serving ready-to-eat foods with fresh, clean, and safe, as well as inventing and developing new products with their business partners to create new products and services for the stores.

Table 1.1 Operational Highlight (Yearly) (CP All Plc., 2014)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of stores						
Corporate stores	2,671	2,794	2,834	2,926	2,984	3,248
Franchise stores	1,813	2,130	2,541	2,884	3,320	3,593
Sub-area stores	294	346	415	466	518	588
Total stores	4,778	5,270	5,790	6,276	6,822	7,429
New stores opened	499	492	520	486	546	607
No. of store (PTT/Non-PTT)						
Non-PTT	4,065	4,462	4,920	5,350	5,842	6,373
PTT	713	808	870	926	980	1,056
No. of store (By geography)						
Bangkok (incl. Sub-urban) stores	2,433	2,603	2,786	2,977	3,177	3,395
Provincial stores	2,345	2,667	3,004	3,299	3,645	4,034
Avg Customer/store/day	n/a	n/a	1,221	1,224	1,290	1,294
Avg Sales per ticket* (Baht)	n/a	n/a	51	54	58	62
Product sales mix* (%)						
Non-Foods	27.6%	27.7%	27.1%	27.2%	27.2%	27.5%
Foods	72.4%	72.3%	72.9%	72.8%	72.8%	72.5%
Gross margin mix* (%)						
Non-Foods	n/a	n/a	23.3%	24.0%	24.3%	24.7%
Foods	n/a	n/a	25.5%	25.5%	25.7%	25.9%
Avg Daily Store Sales / store (Baht)	68,709	72,393	78,316	82,265	91,781	78,371*

1.3 Purpose of the study

Previous study provided a better understanding of consumer expectations regarding convenience stores (c-store) in a Latin American context. The results showed that the significant attributes for Chilean consumers are related to the access dimension of convenience such as access to the store, parking facilities and hours of operation (Bianchi, 2009). Some studies indicated the top three reasons provided for not patronizing a c-store were (1) inconvenient location, (2) high prices and (3) loyalty to other retailers (Felicia, 2000). Understanding consumer behavior and expectations are important for retail sector (Bianchi, 2009).

This thematic paper aims to investigate consumer behavior in the leading convenience store. The secondary objective is to examine perceptions of retail convenience in leading convenience store. The study is focus on the most popular convenience store with the largest retail chain in Thailand i.e. 7-Eleven.

1.4 Research Questions

In this paper, I adopt some questions from Bianchi, 2009 and Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010 regarding investigating consumer expectations of c-stores. As the CP All's investor publication shows that the authors discriminate between Bangkok and other provinces, I decide to emphasize on Bangkok area (CP All Plc., 2014). It is a city with high population and consumer behavior is changing from the past. I present the following research questions (1) What attributes are significant to consumers when shopping at 7-Eleven convenience stores? (Bianchi, 2009); (2) Why the popular products are important to find at 7-Eleven convenience stores? (Bianchi, 2009); (3) What are perceptions of retail convenience for customers? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Convenience stores concept

Berry and his colleagues define convenience store as “all types of convenience that reduce consumers’ time or effort in shopping, such as operating hours, or credit availability, belong to the domain of service convenience” (Berry, Seiders, and Grewal, 2002). The concept of service in convenience store is contributed by location, hours of operation, payment conditions, employee service and assistance, parking, and store access.

According to location research, the first benefit of store location is the most attractive option for customer’s selection (Jaravaza & Chitando, 2013). Most customers decide to shop at the nearest c-stores or on their way from work to home (Jaravaza & Chitando, 2013). Moreover, location is important in terms of the strategic management because it can be a sustainable competitive advantage (Jaravaza & Chitando, 2013).

Some researches reveal the significant characteristics convenience store have to achieve high customer satisfaction including customer service, cleanliness of the store, feelings of personal safety, store image, employees, and the product assortments (Lassk, 2000a, 2000b; Rapp and Islam, 2006; Sparks, 2000; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988; Welsh et al., 2003; Worthington, 1989).

In 2000, Seiders, Berry and Gresham initiated another type of convenience called retail convenience. In retail business, consumers’ time and effort costs in relation to shopping are comprised of retail service (Seiders, Berry and Gresham, 2000). In addition, Seiders, Berry, and Gresham, 2000 explain that convenience store is a multidimensional construction. They invented the model of convenience retailing with the following dimensions: access convenience, search convenience, possession convenience, and transaction convenience. Search and possession conveniences are the unique dimensions, which are different from service convenience. But, these

dimensions are applicable to retail industry (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010).

Retailers have to deal with a new type of consumer who emphasize on the resource of time (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). They consider time as worth as money when time value is less than money (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). Nowadays, consumers tend to be more time-concerned than the past (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). Therefore, the significant concept is related to the benefit of convenience to consumers (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010).

2.1.1 Access convenience

Access convenience mainly focuses on the speed and ease consumer reaching a retailing store. Its characteristics include accessible location, parking availability, hours of operation, proximity to other stores, and telephone and internet access (Bianchi, 2009). The most important factor is easy accessibility because it is related to the choice of shopping places (Bellenger, Robertson, and Greenberg, 1977). The store must respond their need in terms of location and accessibility first. This includes adequate parking and facility to decrease walking (Bellenger, Robertson, and Greenberg, 1977). Typically, consumer who do not enjoy shopping prefer to reach store quickly and easily (Hansen and Deutscher, 1977). Meanwhile, they also like speedy checkout process (Hansen and Deutscher, 1977).

2.1.2 Search convenience

Search convenience is the speed and ease of consumer in finding the products, they intend to purchase (Bianchi, 2009). It consists of the following characteristics: focused merchandising, intelligent store design and layout, knowledgeable sales persons, customer interactive systems, and visual merchandising practices, especially product displays, packaging, and signage (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Bianchi, 2009). A study explains that the store atmosphere affects customer's perception and patronage intention (Grewal et al., 2003). Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988 found that convenience store's customers prefer a staff to assist them but they do not desire to spend much time on long conversation.

2.1.3 Transaction convenience

Transaction convenience means the speed and ease of customers to complete payment transaction (Bianchi, 2009). This includes different payment methods, quick service, well-trained employees, and effective systems for the check out (Bianchi, 2009). Moreover, consumer consider fast payment as an element of time saving (Lambert, 1979). Lemmink and Mattsson, 1998 discovered that the staff providing good service has high impact to service quality and increase customer loyalty to the c-stores. In addition, an important factor to keep consumer shopping at the store is salespeople (Tauber, 1972). They prefer to shop with friendly staff and have social experience (Tauber, 1972).

2.1.4 Possession convenience

Possession convenience is the speed and ease of consumer occupying the expected products. The major components are the strong in-stock position, timely production, or timely delivery. Variety of goods and services are benefit to the retail store choices (Arnold, Oum, and Tigert, 1983; Koelemeijer and Oppewal, 1999; Louviere and Gaeth, 1987), and, sometimes, it is more important than prices (Stassen, Mittelstaedt, and Mittelstaedt, 1999).

Table 2.1 A model of convenience retailing with four dimensions (Seiders, Berry, and Gresham, 2000)

Dimension(s)	Aspect(s)	Examples of Studies
Access convenience	<p>The major aspects are the speed and ease, which consumers can reach convenience stores.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Parking • Store hours • Proximity to other stores 	(Bellenger, Robertson, and Greenberg, 1977; Bianchi, 2009; Hansen and Deutscher, 1977)

Table 2.1 A model of convenience retailing with four dimensions (Seiders, Berry, and Gresham, 2000) (cont.)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone and internet access. 	
Search convenience	<p>It is the speed and ease with which customers can find the products they intend to buy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merchandising • Intelligent store design and layout • Knowledgeable salespersons • Helpful clerk. 	(Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Bianchi, 2009; Grewal et al., 2003; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988)
Possession convenience	<p>This dimension is the speed and ease with which consumers receive expected products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong in-stock position • Timely production and delivery. 	(Arnold, Oum, and Tigert, 1983; Bianchi, 2009; Koelemeijer and Oppewal, 1999; Louviere and Gaeth, 1987; Stassen, Mittelstaedt, and Mittelstaedt, 1999)
Transaction convenience	<p>It means to the speed and ease with which consumers effect transactions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different payment methods • Quick service • Well-trained employees • Well-designed service systems • Time saving 	(Bianchi, 2009; Lambert, 1979; Lemmink and Mattsson, 1998; Tauber, 1972)

2.2 Previous study

Lassk, 2000 identified convenience store customer's view of product offerings is to provide more products to maximize customer satisfaction. Additionally, this study explained the reason of non-user, to understand the non-patronized behavior (Lassk, 2000). These reasons were inconvenient location, high prices, and loyalty to their own retailers (Lassk, 2000).

Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988 explained that the emotional factor has impact both customers and the staffs. They tested positive and negative effects (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988). Staff with high sales and long line of customers has less positive behavior than employees in the slow stores (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988).

Worthington, 1988 explained the concept of convenience store is different in each area. As stores expanded in many areas, the convenience store is necessary to adapt store formats to be suitable for their local residence (Worthington, S 1988). This study focused on stores in Northern Ireland and explored the unique characteristics of the convenience store (Worthington, S 1988).

Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010 examined the viewpoints of retail convenience. The researchers compared two formats i.e. traditional store and online shopping (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). The key measurements were the retail convenience with four dimensions including access, search, transaction, and possession (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). Apart from possession convenience, the in-store customers have less favorable viewpoints on the retail convenience (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010).

Yahagi and Kar, 2009 studied the perspective of internationalization on 7-Eleven Japan. The authors studied all three systems of convenience stores management including operation, product development and procurement, and supply chain management (Yahagi and Kar, 2009). In addition, this research included the concept of continuous creative adaptation in terms of localization and internationalization (Yahagi and Kar, 2009).

According to the data collection from a group of customers in the Southeastern USA's convenience stores, heavy users bought from different stores and visited more frequent than the light users (Pleshko & Al-Houti, 2012). In the other word, light users have higher loyalty than the heavy users (Pleshko & Al-Houti, 2012).

There was no differentiation between two types of customers on the following factors; awareness number, the number of stores considered for future purchase, the purchase percentage of the second most purchased outlet, perceived risk, or satisfaction (Pleshko & Al-Houti, 2012). This study focused on identifying type of consumer by frequency of shopping (Pleshko & Al-Houti, 2012). Customers who visit stores more than thirteen times per month are classified as heavy users (Pleshko & Al-Houti, 2012).

Rapp and Islam, 2006 revealed that leading Japanese convenience stores (CVS) provide banking services as mini-banks. The main reason behind this service is creating opportunity under economic crisis (Rapp and Islam, 2006). They found advantage of 24/7 strategy to attract consumer to convenience store because the shops earn commission from banking service (Rapp and Islam, 2006). Moreover, it increases more store traffic and attracts customers to visit store frequently (Rapp and Islam, 2006). This is an interesting model to adopt to the convenience stores with similar circumstances, including 7-Eleven in USA (Rapp and Islam, 2006).

All mentioned researches focused on convenience stores in terms of segmentation of heavy and light users, internationalization and localization, creating model for convenience store, relationship between consumer and employees, and customer satisfaction. However, there is some gap between consumer and a model of retail convenience in many aspects. Therefore, it is interesting to explore how four dimensions of convenience stores affect consumer behavior, particularly in leading convenience store.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Aforementioned studies with many factors lead to create conceptual framework (Figure 2.3). The model includes characteristics of retail convenience in four dimensions including access, search, transaction, and possession convenience. Retail convenience mainly focuses on time and effort costs customers pay to retail store. Exploring to the four dimensions is to understand consumer behavior related to retail convenience.

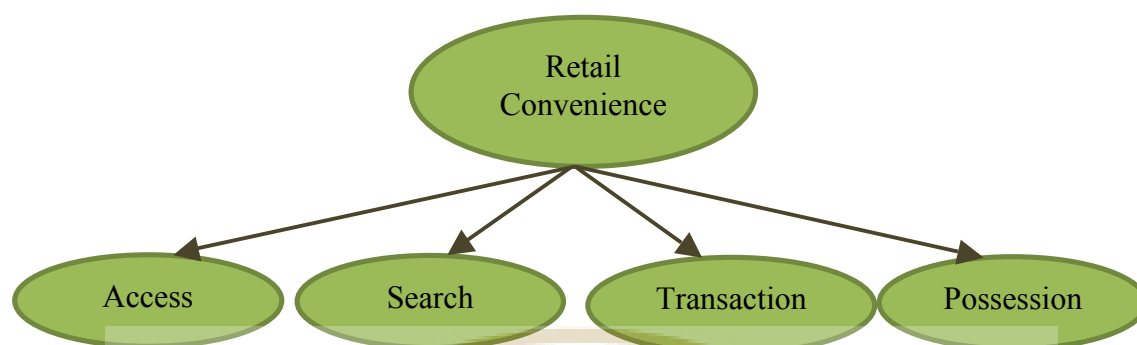


Figure 2.1 Retail convenience for convenience store shoppers (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

Table 2.2 Convenience store attributes for consumers (Bianchi, 2009)

Attributes	Dimension of Convenience
Quick access to the store	Access convenience
Parking availability	
Close to home	
Close to work	
Tidy and clean store	Search convenience
Employee service and advice	
Safe environment	
Store layout	
Payment options	Transaction convenience
Available cashiers	
Product assortment	Possession convenience
Low prices	
Discounts and promotions	

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The data collection is both primary and secondary. Interviewing end customers is the primary data. However, I gather the company's background, theories and explanations from various sources such as website, e-database, textbooks, journals. These secondary data are applied to study in this paper. For example, I choose a research on investigating consumer perceptions in convenience store in Chile, to compare some attributes to the Thai market.

Motivational researchers chose an unstructured, extensive interview to answer the questions, regarding consumer behavior (Zikmund, 2003). The interviewer has to encourage the respondents to answer the questions without influencing outcomes. The interviewer's role is very important (Zikmund, 2003). Additionally, international business researchers found that the in-depth interviews are more efficient than focus groups because they present a mean to get quick assessment of consumer behavior (Zikmund, 2003).

Open-ended questions are selected because they are not limited by choice or scaling the measurement. The participants can present hidden reasons, which they are not able to specify in the closed-end questions. The open-ended question is a set of questions, which provide the opportunity to freely express their individual opinions, rather than being controlled by the choices of questions (Zikmund, 2003). This also serves as a "safety value" (Zikmund, 2003).

3.2 Data Collection

The methodology of this paper is qualitative research and interview approach for in-depth information. I choose to study convenience store because it is important to the Thai economy with highly increased number of stores every year. In

the past, it is difficult to find convenience store and consumer have to go to either modern trade retailers or traditional grocery stores. Nowadays, modern convenience stores including 7-Eleven, Family mart, and Lawson shop are visible on every corner of major streets and gasoline stations. Moreover, some hypermarket retailers introduce smaller size of the store to compete with the convenience stores, such as Mini Big-C and Tesco Lotus Express shops.

7-Eleven convenience store in Thailand is selected as the case study. There are 3,395 branches in Bangkok metropolitan areas in 2013 and keep growing rapidly (CP All Plc., 2014). It is a good model to study because it has the significant growth for many years with highest market share in Thai's convenience store market. With rapid change in consumer behavior particularly people in Bangkok and urban areas, target respondents for the interview were selected in Bangkok metropolitan area.

To answer all research questions, I select in-depth interview to collect data from target group because it provides opportunity to openly answer my questions without being influenced by other respondents or limited their opinions by the close-ended answers. Moreover, I can clarify the respondent individually if the question is not clear and I can observe their reactions when they answer the questions.

3.3 Interview Process

I choose the target interviewees with age older than 18 years old and shopped at 7-Eleven during the past month as criteria. Total numbers of respondents are 20 in different ages and genders. The reason to use age group higher than 18 years old is to eliminate buying influence from their parents.

My interview is individual which normally spend around 20-30 minutes to get all answers. Prior appointments have been made for all interviews. It took me 15 days to complete total interview process.

The first research question is “What attributes are the most significant for shopping at 7-Eleven?” The objective of this question was to provide the most important factors when shopping at 7-Eleven. This is to identify the reasons, which attract customers to purchase products at leading convenience stores (Bianchi, 2009). The interviewer focuses on four dimension of convenience, consisting of access,

search, transaction, and possession convenience.

The second research question is “Why the popular products are important to find at 7-Eleven convenience stores?” I provide an interview question to find which the most purchased products. Other indirect questions are to support the relation of buying aforementioned products.

Last research question is “What are perceptions of retail convenience for customers? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)” I divide interview questions into four group to support each attributes of retail convenience. However, some questions are related to other questions in different group. The interviewer will categorize each dimension of consumer perceptions in retail convenience.



CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

This thematic paper, “A Study of Behavior and Consumer Perceptions in leading convenience store”, is based on four dimensions of retail convenience. This chapter focuses on analysis of data from the interview in order to answer all research questions. Data collected from in-depth interview and all respondents answered 17 interview questions.

4.1 Demographic Data

The total respondents are consisting of 10 males and 10 females. Age range is 19 - 34 years old. Four participants are studying at university with income less than 10,000 baht per month. The remaining participants are employees with income more than 10,000 baht per month.

4.2 General Information

Some participants explained that they sometimes purchase nothing because they went there to relax or cannot find the desired products. This group of respondents spends average 779 baht per month on shopping at 7-Eleven store. Respondents with highest spending amount are the employees, who buy all products in daily life. Average number of visiting store is 16 times per month. Some respondents often visit shops but they purchase small

4.3 Data Analysis

Many retailers have to deal with a new type of consumer who emphasize on the resource of time (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). According to the interview information, the primary reasons for shopping at 7-Eleven are convenience when they are in hurry, convenience in terms of access easily, and also whenever they are hungry. These factors reflect the time-constraint. Most participants intend to reach at the easiest accessible stores because they prefer to save their valued time. For example, one employee spends less time on shopping commodity products because his schedule is tight. Therefore, his main shopping place is 7-Eleven nearby his home. In addition, time constraint enables customers to shop frequently at convenience store during rush hour or journey from home to work place. Buying commodity products from 7-Eleven is also supportive factor to help consumers manage their time efficiently. Some participants mentioned that necessity has more value than price. They realize that even the price is higher than other types of stores but time factor enables them to purchase it immediately from 7-Eleven.

Table 4.1 The respondents' main reasons for shopping at leading convenience store

Main reason(s) for shopping at 7-Eleven store
Buy something to eat
Easily find many branches
In a hurry
A variety of products
Necessity

4.3.1 Retail convenience

In retail business, consumer's time and effort, related to the shopping, are important to the retail service (Seiders, Berry and Gresham, 2000). An important reason for shopping at convenience store shows the relationship between time and effort. Customers prefer less time to access the nearest convenience store when they want to get the desired products. A respondent explains clearly that she will not go to 7-Eleven if she has to take a bus (female, 27 years old, employed). It reflects that

shopping at 7-Eleven does not only spend less time but also save the effort. They also note that a large number of the stores are convenience to access. Most participants prefer to shop at the nearest store. In conclusion, consumers consider a nearest convenience store to shop.

The most popular products customers buy at 7-Eleven are food and beverage, mostly ready-to-eat food, such as sandwich, burger and ready-made meal boxes. However, they do not have brand preference for food and beverage. They can find a variety of food and beverage at 7-Eleven store and it is also different from other store such as recipe, promotion, and brand.

Table 4.2 The respondents' significant attributes each dimension.

	Access Convenience	Search Convenience	Transaction Convenience	Possession Convenience
1 st Ranking	Close to home/work	Store layout	Quick payment method	Discount and promotion
2 nd Ranking	Parking facility	Tidy and clean store	Cashier availability	Product assortment (Brand)

4.3.1.1 Access Convenience

Access convenience focuses on the speed and ease of a consumer reaching a retail store. There are many factors of access convenience including quick access to the store, close to work or home, parking availability and store closing time. 17 respondents frequently shop at 7-Eleven stores close to home or work.

Quick access is not crucial factor of access convenience. There are three females and one male mentioned about this issue. Many participants normally buy breakfast and snack at 7-Eleven. “I can walk there easily when I cannot think of what to eat.” (Female, 26 years old, employed). This shows easy and quick access a store is important to convenience store. Besides, many respondents visit the store when they are hungry, particularly late night, and when they are in a hurry, 7-Eleven is their favorite choice with diversity of food and beverage. Besides, some respondents go to the store without any purpose, just want to be relaxed by window-shopping. They end

up buy some products unexpectedly. Some consumers with intention to buy specific products focus on quick access to get their products faster.

Most of the respondents emphasize on the parking availability. Parking availability has impact to customers above 23 years old and often drive car. They can carry bigger shopping bag meaning buy more when they can park their car there. One participant who drives motorcycle to shop normally parks her motorcycle on the street and quickly buys products. Minority of the respondents shows that parking facility is not important to buying necessity products.

17 participants have concern on “Close to home or work” location. Firstly, it is important to family who wants some product urgently or wants to buy commodity products (Male, 22 years old, student and Female, 27 years old, employed). They went to the nearest convenience store to their homes because they cannot find it elsewhere when they need that product immediately. Secondly, some customers go to stores by walking, therefore, they will visit the nearest store to shop. If the location is too far away, she will not buy from convenience store (Female, 19 years old, Student). Thirdly, some customers have limited time to shop so they prefer to shop at one-stop store. It means she does not go to other places to buy some foods (Female, 29 years old, employed). Fourthly, the nearest location depends on occasion. For example, he/she mostly shops at 7-Eleven close to home during school vacation. “I go to 7-Eleven near my university during study time” (Female, 20 years old, Student). Fifthly, shopping at 7-Eleven helps customers to manage their schedule efficiently. They can buy some products before starting their work and go to office on time. Finally, most participants spend their time on travelling. They do not like to visit different place, therefore, the nearest 7-Eleven will be chosen.

Some respondents shop at 7-Eleven while they drive cars to their destinations. She stops her car and buys some food at the store because she avoids traffic congestion (Female, 31 years old, employed).

Few participants visit 7-Eleven after other retail store closing time. A man explains that he buy some snack at 7-Eleven when other food shop closed. A woman shops at 7-Eleven when other stores closed, especially after midnight.

In conclusion, the most important factor of access convenience is location either close to home or work. Parking is important with men driving cars.

4.3.1.2 Search Convenience

Search convenience is the speed and ease of customer finding the required products (Bianchi, 2009). Search convenience has following factors: tidy and clean store, employee service and advice, safe environment, and store layout (Bianchi, 2009).

Most of the respondents mentioned on tidy and clean store, and store layout as most important factors for search convenience. There is no significant difference between gender and age in “store layout” issue. However, female customers are concern on the store’s tidiness and cleanliness than male customers.

Eight males and eleven females explain that store layout is important for shopping at 7-Eleven stores. They notice that the layout is similar in most branches. “The layout is similar in all stores” (Female, 27 years old, employed). The participants agree that store layout can save time to find their required products. With similar store layout, they can find the desired products easily. In addition, some respondents mention that categorization is a component of good store layout. The store with well-categorized and well-organized helps consumers to reach the products faster during rush hour.

“Tidy and clean store” is a factor female participants concern more than male. “If store is dirty, customers will not trust on the quality of store” (Female, 26 years old, employed). Some respondents like clean floor and mention the store should not have cockroach. Tidy shelves reflect store’s image and awareness. It motivates the purchasing behavior.

Most respondents satisfied with “employee service and advice”. They can help customers to find some products faster and motivate sales. In addition, the staff can inform the customers when the promotion items are out of stock. However, one female respondent complains the employee service about providing inaccurate information about the promotion.

In conclusion, most participants concern on “store layout” and “tidy and clean store” because categorization and standardization of store layout enable participants to access desired products easily wherever they visit.

4.3.1.3 Transaction Convenience

Transaction convenience means to the speed and ease of customers can effect and amend transaction (Bianchi, 2009). Most of respondents mention the importance of both quick payment method and cashier availability.

Most respondents pay cash but some use 7-card or smart purse for the payment. They agree that cash is the simplest way and convenience. Most of respondents are not convenient while they pay by 7-Eleven card. It could delay checkout process. Some participants are not comfortable to keep track on the money balance. Sometimes, they forgot to top up money so they have to waste longer time at cashier counter.

Most respondents are satisfied with “Cashier availability”. However, they complain the slow checkout service in rush hour. They feel uncomfortable when waiting for long line. Most customers can accept the checkout speed but a medical student faces the problem with twenty people waiting in line (Male, 23 years old, student). He denies buying any products from the stores because he could not go to study on time (Male, 23 years old, student).

4.3.1.4 Possession Convenience

Product’s brand is important to most respondents. However, it does not has significant difference when comparing to pack-size availability. In term of product assortments, brand is important because consumer will select the same brand as they normally use at home. Brand creates consumer’s perception on reliability. Consumers with strong purchase intention often choose only a few specific brands. They prefer variety of products with trusted brand.

A few respondents mention on “Low price”. They understand high prices in convenience store. Some participants explain that it saves time so they can pay for the products. Its price is acceptable for most customers. Furthermore, participants often go to hypermarket when they prefer low price. Only one male participant always shops at 7-Eleven and rarely goes to hypermarket. His primary reason is time concern because he is very busy to shop anywhere.

Discount and promotion are important factors for the purchase decision. Most respondents prefer promotion particularly discount. Three respondents are collectors of stamp to redeem prizes. Normally, price at convenience store is higher

than hypermarket, but promotion will attract them to buy particularly food and beverage.

4.4 Data Discussion

According to a conceptual framework, this paper emphasizes on retail convenience, a detailed description of four dimensions of retail convenience. The subsequent explanation is provided to clarify the time and effort costs of retail convenience.

Table 4.3 Comparisons of attributes in previous study and finding each dimension

Attributes from previous study	Dimension of Convenience	Attributes in this finding
Quick access to the store Parking availability Close to home Close to work Store hours Proximity to other stores Telephone and Internet access	Access convenience	Quick access to the store Parking availability Location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close to home/work - On the way
(Bellenger, Robertson, and Greenberg, 1977; Bianchi, 2009; Hansen and Deutscher, 1977)		

Table 4.3 Comparisons of attributes in previous study and finding each dimension (cont.)

<p>Tidy and clean store</p> <p>Employee service and advice</p> <p>Safe environment</p> <p>Merchandising</p> <p>Intelligent store design and layout</p> <p>Knowledgeable salespersons</p> <p>Helpful clerk</p> <p>(Bianchi, 2009; Grewal et al., 2003; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988)</p>	<p>Search convenience</p>	<p>Tidy and clean store</p> <p>Employee service and advice</p> <p>Store environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attractive poster <p>Store layout</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Similarity in each branch - Well-categorized - Full shelf <p>Safe environment</p>
<p>Payment options</p> <p>Available cashiers</p> <p>Different payment methods</p> <p>Quick service</p> <p>Well-trained employees</p> <p>Well-designed service systems</p> <p>Time-saving elements</p> <p>(Bianchi, 2009; Lambert, 1979; Lemmink and Mattsson, 1998; Tauber, 1972)</p>	<p>Transaction convenience</p>	<p>Quick payment method (Cash)</p> <p>Available cashiers</p>
<p>Product assortment</p> <p>Low prices</p> <p>Discounts and promotions</p> <p>Strong in-stock position</p> <p>Timely production and delivery</p> <p>(Arnold, Oum, and Tigert, 1983; Bianchi, 2009; Koelemeijer and Oppewal, 1999; Louviere and Gaeth, 1987; Stassen, Mittelstaedt, and Mittelstaedt, 1999)</p>	<p>Possession convenience</p>	<p>Product assortment</p> <p>Acceptable prices</p> <p>Discounts and promotions</p>

4.4.1 Access Convenience

Most consumers prefer to shop at store's location close to home/work. They will buy only few products at convenience stores. This is related to Jaravaza and Chitando, 2013 that the first benefit of store location is the most attractive option for customer's selection. This is related to *access convenience* for 7-Eleven convenience store. The finding shows that customer decisions are based on store convenience because many consumers has time constraint. Additionally, there is some research support the factor of access convenience. Hansen and Deutscher, 1977 found that grocery store shoppers focus on easy accessibility of stores. However, it is different from Bianchi, 2009 in term of parking facility. Chilean consumers prefer to shop at convenience stores located in gas station (Bianchi, 2009). Moreover, finding parking is the main problem for consumer (Bianchi, 2009). In contrast, this problem does not appear among consumers in Bangkok. They have many choices to reach the store such as stopping the cars on street, letting someone to buy things while driver waiting or walking to the nearest store.

4.4.2 Search Convenience

Search convenience is important to consumers because the store should provide easy accessibility to reach desired products with simple layout. Once consumer visit any 7-Eleven stores, it is convenient to get desired products without taking time because every store has similar store layout. Similarly, Bianchi, 2009 explains characteristic of search convenience is intelligent store design and layout. Other characteristic is visual merchandising practices, such as product displays, packaging, and signage. These characteristics are similar to the finding which customers are satisfied with how stores display product at the eye level, suitable shelves, and also excellent layout. In terms of signage, some respondents mention that the stores provide clear product tag and promotion poster to find products easier. Customers who are not familiar with the store layout can receive benefit from the categorization, which improves speed and ease to reach the required products. As Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988 explain customer prefer clerk to assist them with short conversation. The finding is similar to customers in Bangkok. When they cannot find products on shelves, most of them would go directly to a clerk or staff to ask. With

short conversation, they normally enjoy requesting only for help. Moreover, clean store is one of their concerns (Hansen and Deutscher, 1977). It is similar to customers in Bangkok who also concern on clean floor and tidy shelves.

4.4.3 Transaction Convenience

In term of *transaction convenience*, the payment method customers accept is only cash. Paying by credit or member card will waste check-out time. Even customers who owned member cards, they feel uncomfortable to pay by cards. As they spend longer time on topping up money in card, it is duplicated process. This is directly related to Lambert, 1979 that fast payment is an element of time saving for consumer. Customers have high satisfaction on cashier availability. However, it is not similar with Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988 explain that emotional factor is related to both customers and staffs in stores. In Bangkok, clerk with high sales rarely show uncontrollable emotion and most customers understand the situation in rush hours. There are some customers who are familiar with visiting 7-Eleven explaining that salespeople and customers recognize each other. They find social experience in convenience store because staffs are friendly and nice to talk with. This situation is similar to Tauber, 1972 because salesperson motivates customers to shop at store.

4.4.4 Possession Convenience

One of major component in possession is retailer's strong in-stock position (Bianchi, 2009). The relevant finding is customers' perspective that they prefer to see full shelves and available items, even on promotion. Some customers cannot get desired products because supply of the store is less than aggressive demand. According to Stassen, Mittelstaedt, and Mittelstaedt, 1999, the retailers differentiate by their product assortments. It would enable customers to save time from a multiple-store trip. This does not affect customers in Bangkok because their main shopping places are not this leading convenience store where they mostly buy necessary items. They only shop commodity products or food and beverage at convenience store when they are necessary. Product assortment is positive to customer need (Stassen, Mittelstaedt, and Mittelstaedt, 1999). It explains that most customers need various

sizes or brands in different situation, including small pack size for travelling, same brand for daily use, and any substitution for urgent purposes.

4.5 Recommendation

As the dimensions of retail convenience are highly related, the consumers are difficult to differentiate each dimension in their mind. They think in general terms of, “Shopping at convenience store is saving my time and effort.” This is similar to Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010 so the dimensions of retail convenience enable the store to understand consumer behavior. Furthermore, the convenience store is necessary to adapt formats to their local residence (Worthington, 1988). Therefore, it is necessary to develop stores to serve customers’ need in different area of Bangkok. This paper would provide recommendation in terms of retail convenience, consisting of access, search, transaction and possession convenience.

4.5.1 Recommendation to Theory

A conceptual framework identifies that there are 4 attributes, consisting of access, search, transaction, and possession convenience, in retail convenience. The finding indicates that access convenience is the most important factor to customers in Bangkok.

Access convenience means good location which close to home or work is crucial attribute because respondents mention as the main reason for shopping at convenience store and confirm in the following answers. Although Bianchi, 2009 mentions on access convenience is important to Chilean customers, this is different in some factors of access convenience that emphasizes on quick access to the store, payment options, and parking availability, rather than close to home or work.

According to the finding, store layout is important factor of *search convenience*. It is relevant to Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010 because it is a factor, which enables consumers to make their purchase decision. 7-Eleven customers mostly realize that good store layout is important to them, typically saving time. As Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988 found that convenience stores’ customers prefer clerk to assist

customers, this point is less important in Thai convenience stores. The reason is that consumers rely on themselves to find desired products with good categorization and standardization on every store.

Transaction convenience

The finding of *transaction convenience* focuses on cash as the efficient payment method for customers. Some customers prefer rapid checkout with 7-Eleven card. This is directly related to Lambert, 1979 that fast payment is an element of time saving for consumers. Many countries have different payment methods for customers. In Thailand, customers do not like other method with the reason of delaying the checkout time.

As the finding of *possession convenience* is relevant to discount and promotion, it reflects that consumer needs to find option to get benefit from a stores. Most of sales promotion is related to discount or saving money, rather than redeem premium prize. Stassen, Mittelstaedt, and Mittelstaedt, 1999 suggest that a variety of products and services in store are more influence than prices. Therefore, product assortment can attract consumers to buy without price consideration. Furthermore, Arnold, Oum, and Tigert, 1983; Koelemeijer and Oppewal, 1999; Louviere and Gaeth, 1987 support that store can create benefit with providing a variety of goods and services to serve their customer's needs.

Although low prices or promotions are not mentioned as salient attributes for consumers when shopping at convenience store, several interviewees mentioned that although prices are expected to be higher than grocery stores, they can't be too high or consumers will not be willing to purchase the merchandise.

4.5.2 Recommendation to Implication

In term of *access convenience*, consumers always visit location next to home or work. Therefore, marketing strategy should provide the suitable plan for these groups of customers. Access convenience is related to get products from the store. If customers access the stores easily but the desired products are not available on the shelf, they could switch to other stores. As many stores are located in suitable area, the stores should maintain stock level to respond their customer demand. The company should implement supply chain management and predict adequate stock in each store,

especially promotion items. In addition, each store should provide parking facility. For example, store manager should prepare few parking lots for shopper, who wants to grab some products within few minutes. It is beneficial to non-local residents who do not familiar with the 7-Eleven location. They should inform customers by posting signs in front of the store. It is not only providing convenience but also increasing customer satisfaction.

Search convenience is to understand consumer's need. As the store's layout is easy to reach the desired products and the categorization is well organized, customers are well satisfied. The company should design additional layout for the product display for specific demographic and psychographic. This will attract the bigger group of consumers. The store should merchandise the products attractively to get attention from customers. Besides, the stores should display complementary products close to each other. Good product display can gain incremental sales from customers.

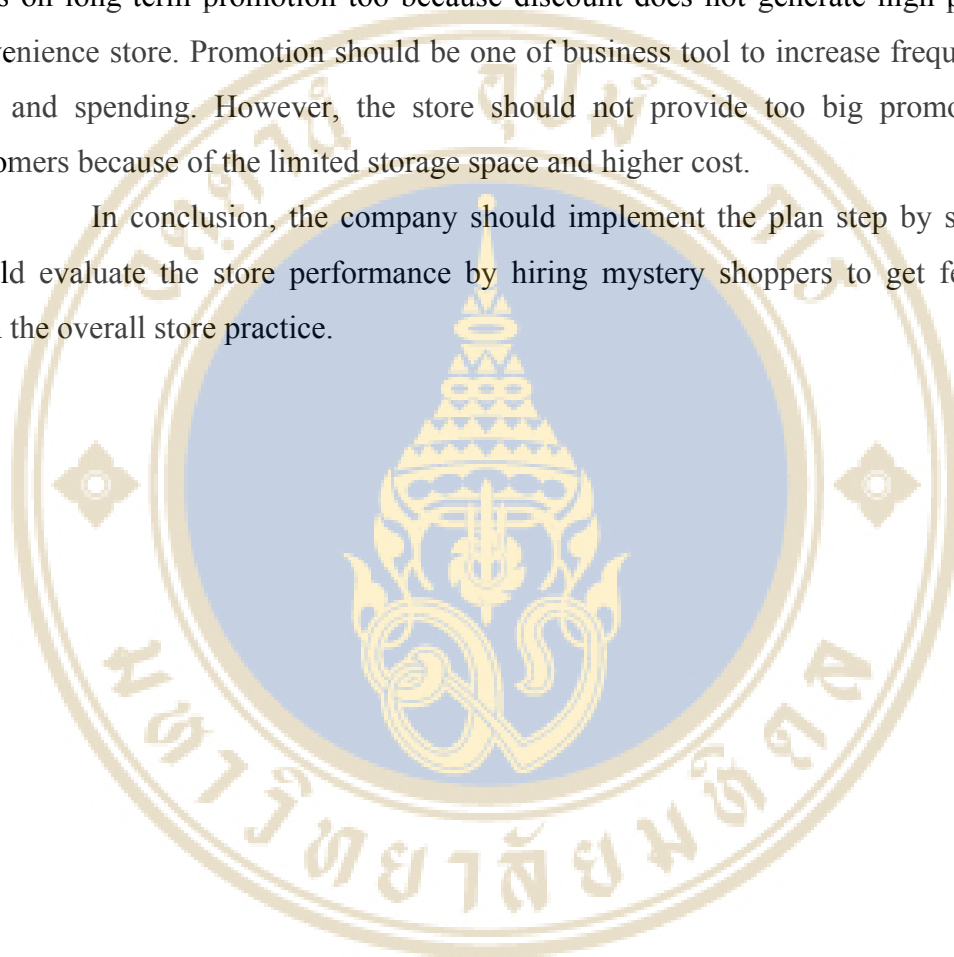
With the limited size of shop, it should provide diversity of products and service to serve all aspects of convenience. Nowadays, 7-Eleven provide many ready-to-eat products, which are convenient to customers. According to this study, it is good strategy to serve customers in different environments. The company should prepare more unique products for different occasions such as gifts, souvenirs, as well as healthy food or snack. The concept of convenience store in Thailand emphasizes on self-service so that store should offer additional service with low cost and create one-stop-service center for customers. For example, postal service and banking service are included at convenience store. It will be more convenient to customers but the company should study in depth for these services.

At 7-Eleven store, the significant attributes of *transaction convenience* are quick payment method and available cashier. As cash is the quickest payment method and customers do not want to change the way of their life, the company should develop efficient payment method to reduce check out time. Nowadays, people do not like using 7-Eleven member card with many reasons. Therefore, the company should develop the new card with solution on topping up money, checking balance, and synchronizing card with other kind of service. Intensive survey should be done periodically to study consumer behaviors in different time. Customer relationship

management should also be done to increase customer satisfaction. Moreover, the stores should solve problem of long waiting time during heavy traffic.

Promotion is one of the *possession convenience*. Shoppers tend to be attracted by interesting promotions. The company should launch and develop regular price promotions to increase sales of the store. Although price in convenience store is acceptable, the promotion will increase more satisfaction. However, the store should focus on long-term promotion too because discount does not generate high profit to convenience store. Promotion should be one of business tool to increase frequency of visit and spending. However, the store should not provide too big promotion to customers because of the limited storage space and higher cost.

In conclusion, the company should implement the plan step by step and should evaluate the store performance by hiring mystery shoppers to get feedback from the overall store practice.



CHAPTER V

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Limitations and Further Research

Some limitations occur in this research, including timeframe, selection of interviewees and coverage area.

Timeframe of this research is limited. Data collection depends on availability of interviewees. When there is short time for interview, it cannot cover all target groups. If there is more time available, the researcher can add more participants.

In term of interviewee selection, the limitation is age and number of respondents. The researcher has to limit number of respondents to twenty people because data collection from many interviewees requires long time to interpret and analyze. A larger number of interviewees can provide more accurate information but data collection process should take longer time as well. Although, the selected age groups are limited, it is an opportunity to study different age group in future. Different demographics can also provide better perspective on the consumer behavior.

This finding focuses on Bangkok area, which is an interesting place to study consumer behavior. However, there are many provinces with high economic potential such as Chiangmai, Phuket, Chonburi, not covered by this survey. Their behavior could be different from people in the capital city so that it is good opportunity for further research. In addition, other issue such as the difference between rural and city consumers should also be studied.

As this research uses qualitative method to collect data, further research should study consumer behaviors by quantitative method in bigger group of consumer. It could enable the researcher to understand more samples and compare with this finding.

5.2 Conclusion

Research Question No. 1	What attributes are the significant to consumers when shopping at 7-Eleven convenience stores? (Bianchi, 2009)
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To answer the first research question: What attributes are the significant for consumers when shopping at 7-Eleven convenience stores? The finding of main reason for shopping at 7-Eleven shop is convenience but consumers could not differentiate clear explanation in their mind. Buying something to eat, easily finding many branches, a hurry, offering a variety of products and necessity and overall reasons to shop at leading convenience store. However, all main reasons are the part of retail convenience, consisting of time and effort. It is related to Seiders, Berry and Gresham, 2000.

Research Question No. 2	Why the popular products are important to find at 7-Eleven convenience stores?
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The popular product is food and beverage. It is significant to purchase at convenience stores because consumers concentrate retail convenience, which they value on time and effort. The main factors, which they mention in the research are access convenience and search convenience. As they spend less time on daily shopping because of tight schedule and choosing the nearest stores, they prefer the easiest way to access the stores. Furthermore, most customers are able to recognize store layout to access desired products with less effort because of categorization and similarity with other branches.

Research Question No. 3	What are perceptions of retail convenience for convenience store customer?
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Last research question is to clarify how perceptions of retail convenience for convenience store customer. Each dimension of convenience reflects consumers' point of view.

Firstly, customers focus on location close to home/work and parking availability as one of access convenience. Once they purchase simple products such as commodity products, food and beverage and necessary products in daily basis, they rarely spend much time on shopping. The finding also proves that parking availability is important to customers and they do not attempt to find parking facility. They do not access to the stores if there is no parking lot. They usually shift to other stores because it is low involvement products, which they can find desired products easily.

Secondly, attributes of search convenience are composed of store layout and tidy and clean store. The finding indicates that store layout enables customers to access their desired products with little attempt. They do not waste time to find products. Moreover, the characteristic of store is tidy and clean. It reflects quality and ensures that stores' owner pays high attention to serving customers.

Thirdly, the major factors of transaction convenience are quick payment method. It is obvious that customers prefer to finish checkout rapidly. The stores should provide the fast service in purchase decision.

Finally, discount and attractive promotion is significant to gain a greater proportion of customers. However, the finding proves that there is less customer loyalty because they expect more convenience than boundary to the stores.

In conclusion, the most important attributes are close to home or work in access convenience, store layout in search convenience, quick payment method in transaction convenience, and discount and promotion in possession convenience. Understanding consumer behavior creates benefit to company. Retail convenience could help to diversify general term of convenience with focusing on time and effort. However, it depends on each area of store location. Environment affects changing of retail convenience. This perspective on retail convenience also leads to implementation effectively.

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APPENDIX A: List of demographic data questions

Interview	
Demographic information	
1. Gender	<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female
2. Age	_____ Years old
3. Marital status	<input type="radio"/> Single <input type="radio"/> Married <input type="radio"/> Others (Divorced, Widowed): _____
4. Occupation	<input type="radio"/> Student <input type="radio"/> Unemployed <input type="radio"/> Employed (Please identify: _____)
5. Income/ Allowance (Per Month)	<input type="radio"/> Below 10,000 baht <input type="radio"/> 10,001-20,000 baht <input type="radio"/> 20,001-30,000 baht <input type="radio"/> 30,001-40,000 baht <input type="radio"/> 40,001-50,000 baht <input type="radio"/> Over 50,000 baht
General Question	<p>How many times have you shop at 7-Eleven in a month?</p> <p>Answer: _____ time(s) per month</p> <p>What is your average spending at 7-Eleven in a month?</p> <p>Answer: _____ bath per month</p>
Note	

APPENDIX B: List of interview questions

Interview Questions

(1) What are your main reasons for shopping at 7-Eleven? (Bianchi, 2009)

(2) Which products you mostly purchase from 7-Eleven c-stores? (Bianchi, 2009)

Access convenience

(3) What type of location you visit store most? Why? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Bianchi, 2009)

(4) Do you think location is important to your shopping? Why? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

(5) What is your reason to shop at the store with parking facility? How do this factor affect your purchasing decision? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

Search convenience

(6) How do you like the store arrangements to get your desired product? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Bianchi, 2009)

(7) What type of product should be displayed or located near the entrance most? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

(8) Which area should food and beverage be located in store? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

(9) What is your shopping style at 7-Eleven? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

(10) How is the store environment important to you? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Bianchi, 2009)

Transaction convenience

(11) Which payment method you normally use? (Bianchi, 2009)

(12) How do you satisfy with the check-out speed? Why? (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010)

(13) How is your attitude toward salespeople? (Bianchi, 2009)

(14) What do you think when the cashier telling you the new promotion? (Bianchi, 2009)

Possession convenience

(15) How do you like the store's promotion? What type of promotion you like most?

(Bianchi, 2009)

(16) What is more important to you between pack-size and brand availability? Why?

(Bianchi, 2009)

(17) Have you ever experience with stock-out? How do you feel about this situation?

(Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Bianchi, 2009)

