A comparative investigation of consumers' attitudes toward marketing practices of hypermarket retailers in Thailand

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Abstract:

Purpose The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of hypermarket retailers' marketing efforts by exploring consumers' attitudes toward marketing practices (CATMPs) of three retailers (Tesco-Lotus, Big C, and Carrefour) in Thailand.

Design/methodology/approach A non-probability convenience sampling procedure was employed. The data were collected from an intercept survey administered face to face. Three versions were tailored to each specific hypermarket retailer using similar questions related to consumers' attitudes toward different areas of marketing practices. The measures were adapted from the Index of Consumer Sentiment toward marketing and consumers' attitudes toward marketing.

Findings The results showed that although Thai consumers displayed different attitudes toward retail services, positive advertising, and fair price, they expressed similar attitudes toward business provisions and product quality across samples. Main and interaction effects of a limited number of demographic variables were also identified.

Research limitations/implications Multinational hypermarket retailers need to understand the similarities and differences related to areas of their marketing practices to be able to market effectively to Thai consumers. However, since the data were obtained from one city, the major limitation in the study is the generalizability of the findings.

Originality/value This study is among the first to attempt to investigate CATMPs of multinational hypermarket retailers operating in Thailand.

Keywords: consumers | marketing practice | hypermarket retailers | Thailand

Article:

Despite fierce competition, economic turmoil, and changing consumer demand, the international retail market expansion of big-box hypermarket retailers such as Wal-Mart, Tesco, Big C, and Carrefour has remained aggressive in many Asian countries ([35] Shannon, 2007). According to an ACNielsen (2003) report, Thailand is the leading Asian country in its development of multinational hypermarkets ([21] Hargrave-Silk, 2004). Academics and practitioners alike contend that consumers' rising purchasing power (the result of economic recovery and improved consumer confidence) coupled with improved living standards and high demand for modern retail formats may have contributed to this prolific expansion ([36] Shannon and Mandhachitara, 2008; [38] The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2005).

Thailand's economic recovery - reflected in the performance of retail trade and hypermarket sales in this country - has been a key player in the retail sector. Retail sales in Thailand reached almost 50 billion USD in 2003, an increase of 20 percent since 2000; sales are expected to steadily increase over the next five years regardless of the impact of global recession ([38] The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2005). [6] Business Monitor International's (2005) report estimated that in 2008, more than 60 billion USD was generated by the hypermarket sector alone, an increase of 150 percent compared to 2001. In a recent [14] Euromonitor International (2009d) report, hypermarket sales in Thailand reached 64 billion USD with a total of 163 outlets in 2008, a growth of 37 and 34 percent in terms of sales and number of outlets since 2005, respectively. Such impressive numbers are driven by three major multinational retailers: Tesco (hereafter Tesco-Lotus), Big C, and Carrefour. These retailers are expected to continue to increase their presence in Thailand over the next few years ([3] Barrett, 2007; [35] Shannon, 2007) with expected sales of almost 100 billion USD from 233 stores nationwide in 2013: increases of 53 and 43 percent, respectively, as compared to 2008 ([11], [12], [13] Euromonitor International, 2009a, b, c). These impressive numbers not only signal the intense intra-competition among these multinational retailers, they also indicate the existence of inter-competition between these big-box retailers and traditional small local retailers as well. Given such intense competition accompanied by beliefs among Thai consumers that multinational companies are likely to offer superior quality products and services as well as reasonable prices, it is surprising that few researchers have investigated the effectiveness of modern marketing practices among these companies. Particularly, absent is research on the cross-group comparison of consumers' attitudes toward marketing efforts delivered by foreign-owned hypermarket retailers. Researchers have acknowledged the theoretical and managerial importance of consumers' attitudes toward marketing practices (CATMPs) in predicting the nation's economy and developing effective management decisions ([9] Cui et al. , 2008; [19] Gaski and Etzel, 2005). Thus, it is critical to understand how CATMPs affect their shopping experiences in the marketplace.

The purpose of the study, therefore, is to contribute to our understanding of hypermarket retailers' marketing efforts by exploring CATMPs of three retailers (Tesco-Lotus, Big C, and Carrefour) in Thailand. These three retailers have been selected because of their high-sales volumes, market share, and popularity among today's Thai consumers. Specifically, the study attempts to:

- examine the influential role of demographic characteristics on Thai CATMPs; and
- empirically compare Thai CATMPs in the areas of provision of goods and services, retailing environment, advertising, pricing, and product quality of these three retailers.

This information is both relevant and valuable given the fierce competition among retailers who attempt to dominate this single lucrative market. The information disseminated in this study can be employed by these retailers to capitalize on their strengths and improve their weaknesses, thereby sustaining a competitive market advantage.

An overview of hypermarkets in Thailand

According to [4] Berman and Evans (2007), a hypermarket is a combined supermarket and discount department store occupying 75,000-150,000 square feet in size and stocking more than 50,000 items. The development of hypermarkets has been widespread throughout Thailand since 1994 when Big C opened its first hypermarket. Other multinational hypermarkets currently operating in Thailand are Tesco-Lotus, a UK-based company, and Carrefour, a French-based international retail chain. Today Tesco-Lotus is the largest leading hypermarket in Thailand, followed by Big C and Carrefour with retail sales values of 3.2 billion, 2.3 billion, and 755 million USD, respectively. To date, Tesco-Lotus has the highest numbers of outlets (71 stores), followed by Big C (61 stores), and Carrefour (30 stores), respectively ([14] Euromonitor International, 2009d) and these retailers carry their own private labels offered to price-conscious consumers ([33] Reutterer and Teller, 2009; [36] Shannon and Mandhachitara, 2008).

These modern multinational chains tend to share similar overall strategies developed around marketing mix concepts that attempt to enhance consumers' shopping experiences. Such strategies have been implemented through a variety of marketing practices, including offering assortments of merchandise, providing quality products and services at relatively low prices, and developing retail promotional campaigns. Consequently, consumers are likely to evaluate such practices favourably due to the benefits associated with them (e.g. saving money and time, averting risk) ([36] Shannon and Mandhachitara, 2008). As such, hypermarkets have gained popularity and attracted significant attention from consumers ([24] Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; [34] Roslin and Melewar, 2008).

Despite their similarities, these retailers differ in their strategies to meet the demands of different types of consumers. For instance, Tesco-Lotus, the most active and aggressive player in the Thai retail industry, has announced a market expansion plan wherein it will offer different retail formats such as discount stores, small grocery stores, supermarkets, and, recently, a "community mall". Tesco-Lotus has continued to focus on a strong promotional campaign, the "Roll Back", with an emphasis on low price ([13] Euromonitor International, 2009c; [35] Shannon, 2007). Big C, in contrast, has positioned itself as an "inexpensive and fun" place to shop, as reflected in its advertising campaign, "more than just low prices" ([28] Mulchand, 2003). The company continues to provide a wide assortment of quality products with low prices; it has expanded its private label to lure consumers in low- and middle-income brackets through direct mail and in-store promotions ([11] Euromonitor International, 2009a). Carrefour has emphasized the renovation of its existing stores by adding a wide variety of merchandise and improving the shopping environment. The company also provides its own private label products with the slogan "everyday savings for everyone". However, Thai consumers are not familiar with Carrefour's advertising campaign due to its infrequent employment of promotional campaigns as compared to its rivals ([12] Euromonitor International, 2009b).

Consumers' attitudes toward marketing practices

During the 1970s, increased societal concern related to businesses prompted scholars' interest in studying CATMPs by examining consumers' sentiments toward a variety of transactional aspects of business such as marketing mix, consumer responsibility, consumerism, and governmental regulations ([2] Barksdale and Darden, 1972). Later, [18] Gaski and Etzel (1986) modified Barksdale's measures and named this the Index of Consumer Sentiment toward marketing (ICSM), used to assess consumers' perceptions of marketing practices as related to products, prices, promotion (emphasis on advertising), and distribution (manifested by retail service). Since then, the ICSM has been widely employed to examine consumers' attitudes toward domestic and cross-cultural marketing practices; its widespread use is due partly to its acceptable psychometric properties and its ability to explain economic forecasts such as the consumer satisfaction index and the consumer price index ([8] Chan and Cui, 2004; [9] Cui et al. , 2008; [17] Gaski, 2008; [19] Gaski and Etzel, 2005; [26] Lysonski et al. , 2004).

Recently, [32] Peterson and Ekici (2007) have argued that ICSM measures may possess some problematic features (e.g. low-model fit resulting from confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), low-factor loadings) as evidenced in [8] Chan and Cui's (2004) study of Chinese consumers; thus, Peterson and Ekici in their study of Turkish consumers have proposed business provision as another dimension of consumers' attitudes toward marketing. They argued that product dimension as proposed in the ICSM tends to capture the quality or defect of products; business provision, in contrast, captures a broader picture of business activity. Thus, the inclusion of a business provision dimension would provide a better understanding of CATMPs in developing countries. They contend that business provision "represents not only the utility of a firm's core offerings, but the value of added features and enhancements, as well as consumer choice in these offerings" ([32] Peterson and Ekici, 2007, p. 351). Thus, business provision may be a key acquisition consumption dimension because it assesses core products or services a company delivers to meet consumers' desires ([32] Peterson and Ekici, 2007). Accordingly, Peterson and Ekici developed and empirically examined a measure for consumers' attitudes toward marketing that consists of four multi-item scales: business provision, advertising, price, and retail service, which revealed acceptable psychometric properties and predictive abilities in their study.

Hypotheses development

The increased interest in examining consumers' perceptions of marketing practices brought by multinational hypermarkets in Thailand has prompted this study. The literature suggests that selected demographic characteristics such as gender and income level are often related to CATMPs ([17] Gaski, 2008; [18] Gaski and Etzel, 1986; [39] Webster, 1991). For example, [18] Gaski and Etzel (1986) found that women were likely to display more favourable attitudes toward marketing practices than men. A more recent study by [17] Gaski (2008) reported similar results related to disparities between men and women in terms of their attitudes toward marketing practices; he also found that women exhibited negative attitudes toward advertising as compared to men because women actively seek information during high-involvement purchase decisions which may cause them to disagree with advertising messages. According to a theory of allocation of shopper responsibilities within a household, women continue to assume more shopping responsibility than men ([31] Pashigian and Bowen, 1994). Thus, it is plausible to expect that women might display higher demand for retail services, quality of the product, better price, and better business provision than men. However, other researchers may argue that social changes related to an increase in women's average educational level and their massive incorporation into the workforce have transformed the traditional women's shopping roles within a household, resulting the dilution of traditional shopping roles of these women ([30] Otnes and McGrath, 2001). Consequently, it is reasonable to predict that gender may not create significant differences in terms of attitudes toward marketing practices.

Related to income level, [17] Gaski (2008) further found that consumers with high-income brackets displayed positive attitudes toward marketing practices related to product quality and price, but negative attitudes toward marketing practices related to retail services. It is also evident, in the context of billboard advertising, that those with higher income level tend to be less receptive to advertising than those with lower income level ([16] Fortenberry and McGoldrick, 2011). The reason could be that high-income individuals generally tend to be highly educated, which make them become more critical of advertising because of higher educational training. On the other hand, other evidences from more general advertising contexts revealed that mid-income families tend to display favourably attitudes toward fashion and magazine advertising as compared to low-income families ([16] Fortenberry and McGoldrick, 2011). [37] Soley and Reid (1983) also found that mid-income families tend to be more satisfied with information value of advertisements. Thus, based on the previous findings and arguments discussed above, it might be not possible to establish a consistent relationship between gender or income level and CATMPs.

In addition, another demographic characteristic such as a person's career (being an employee versus being a student) may help explain the differences in attitudes toward marketing practices. It may be possible to anticipate that those who are employed might possess different degree of attitudes toward marketing practices as compared to students whose monthly allowances were mainly from their parents. However, little research has examined the relationship between career and CATMPs. Owing to the growth of hypermarket expansion in Thailand, the research related to the influences of selected consumers' demographic characteristics on their attitudes toward marketing practices has been limited. Furthermore, this study attempts to explore such relationships in the context of hypermarket retailing, the direction and the magnitude of the influences of selected demographics on CATMPs need further investigation. Based on the aforementioned research, it is hypothesized that a meaningful relationships exists between demographic characteristics and CATMPs. Thus, it is expected that:

H1. There will be significant differences between selected demographics of consumers such as gender, income level, and career and their attitudes toward marketing practices of hypermarket retailers.

Owing to the dearth of studies related to CATMPs specific to individual retailers, knowledge about the degree of CATMPs of hypermarket retailers is limited. However, we do know certain characteristics of the retailers operating in the Thai market; for example, Tesco-Lotus is considered a hypermarket leader with the highest sale volumes, number of outlets, and market share, followed by Big C and Carrefour, respectively ([14] Euromonitor International, 2009d). Its market leadership may give Tesco-Lotus the power to launch a preemptive strike via working with the manufacturers, resulting in lower prices as compared to their competitors ([29] Organski, 1968). Using [10] Ehrenberg et al. 's (1990) double jeopardy phenomenon, it can be further explained that a firm that is a market leader may benefit in that consumers are likely to have favourable attitudes toward the firm, patronize the store more often, and become more loyal to the firm. A number of consumer researchers ([27] Mazursky and Jacoby, 1985; [40] Zeithaml, 1988) also contended that market leadership could be employed as a signal of quality. That is, consumers are likely to believe that a firm that is a market leader carries superior quality products and services. In addition, based on the strategic management literature, the firm can take advantage of its position as a market leader, which thus affects brand loyalty, absolute cost advantages, economies of scales, switching costs, and entry barriers ([22] Hill and Jones, 2001). Based on the aforementioned research, it is anticipated that:

H2. There will be significant differences among Thai consumers related to their attitudes toward marketing practices across three hypermarket retailers. That is, Thai consumers are likely to display the highest attitudes toward marketing practices delivered by Tesco-Lotus, followed by Big C and Carrefour, respectively.

Research methodology

Sampling and procedure

The study was conducted in a mid-sized city in central Thailand. The data were collected during summer 2009 at different locations in the city (e.g. university campus locations such as the cafeteria, university centre, and off-campus student dormitory as well as open-air markets and shopping malls). A non-probability convenience sampling procedure was employed. The data were collected from an intercept survey administered face to face. A quota sample of at least 150 participants from each sample (i.e. 75 students and 75 non-students) was used to ensure a certain degree of variability within each sample and offer statistically significant comparisons across samples. In addition, researchers employed quota sampling for both genders and ages via their own judgement to ensure a broad cross-section of consumers ([32] Peterson and Ekici, 2007). Although these samples are not representative of the general population, this approach met our goal of having comparable samples across a large variety of retailers. In addition, students were used in the sample for three reasons. First, college students provide certain degree of homogeneity in a matched sample sense related to demographic and socio-economic backgrounds ([25] Lysonski et al. , 1995). Using a relatively homogenous group such as college students helps minimize random error that might occur in a more heterogeneous sample ([7] Calder et al. , 1981). The university used for data collection in the study is the "local college" and approximately 90 percent of the students were from the local area and/or surrounding areas (nearby provinces), thus further minimizing confounding effects that might have resulted from using samples drawn from non-local residents ([41] Zhou et al. , 2010). Second, since these three hypermarket retailers were located in proximity to the university (one was within walking distance while the other two were within ten to 15 minutes' driving distance), students tended to have greater access to these retailers and could have become their prime market. Finally, these students were likely to have freedom when making their own choices when purchasing products/services and patronizing retailers.

Three versions of the survey were tailored to each specific hypermarket retailer (Tesco-Lotus, Big C, and Carrefour). Each version of the survey contained similar questions specific to the five aspects of CATMPs delivered by these three retailers. Participants were approached by the researchers and asked whether they had ever visited one of the three retailers. In the event that participants had visited multiple hypermarket retailers and/or visited multiple times during the past two weeks, the researchers instructed participants to recall their most recent visit. Then, the researcher gave the participants the survey that pertained to the particular retailer the participants recalled.

Measurement

Owing to the research design (i.e. intercept approach) utilized in the current study, the length of the survey and response fatigue factors were taken into account, resulting in a 14-item measure of CATMPs. Scales measuring retail service, positive advertising, fair price, and business provision were assessed using three items; these scales were adapted from [32] Peterson and Ekici's (2007) consumer attitude toward marketing measures. These measures were modified from the original ICSM developed by [18] Gaski and Etzel (1986). These 12-item four dimensions of consumer attitude toward marketing measures have revealed an acceptable degree of reliability and validity in Peterson and Ekici's study of Turkish consumers. In addition, the product quality dimension was assessed using two items; these scales were adapted from [18] Gaski and Etzel's (1986) study. Special care was taken when selecting these two items from Gaski and Etzel's ICSM measures because some items assessing the product quality as originally developed by Gaski and Etzel were not suitable to be employed in the study's current context (they seem to assess the product quality at the macro level;, e.g. "The quality of most products I buy today is as good as can be expected"). In addition, when Thai consumers and the manager at one of these hypermarket retailers were asked, they agreed that some items assessing product quality seemed to be redundant. As a result, it is believed that combining [32] Peterson and Ekici's (2007) and [18] Gaski and Etzel's (1986) scales that capture five critical dimensions of CATMPs would provide us with a comprehensive scale to assess these three hypermarket retailers at the micro level, which consequently helps us better understand CATMPs delivered by these retailers (Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.]). All of the items were measured by a five-point Likert-type scale (1 - "strongly disagree" and 5 - "strongly agree"). Participants' demographic characteristics were also assessed.

The English version of the questionnaire was developed, then translated into Thai by a bilingual university faculty member. This translation was then back-translated by another bilingual faculty member from the same university to ensure the surveys' compatibility ([5] Brislin et al. , 1973). If any discrepancies were found, the translators conferred until agreement. The Thai survey was then reviewed by a panel of Thai consumers (consisting of students, college professors, and businessmen) to ensure commonality of understanding; afterwards, slight modifications were made.

Results

Participants' characteristics

A total of 450 questionnaires (150 questionnaires for each group) were handed out. In total, 414 questionnaires were returned complete (142 from Tesco-Lotus, 138 from Big C, and 134 from Carrefour), for a 92 percent total response rate. The gender of participants was almost equally distributed. Approximately 87 percent of participants indicated having at least a bachelor's degree. About 46 percent were full-time students, 25 percent worked for public companies (e.g. bankers, engineers), 14 percent worked for the government (e.g. university faculty and staff, high school teachers), and 14 percent were self-employed. Almost 90 percent reported having a personal

Table I. Participants' characteristics

Demographic information	All (n = 414) n	%	Tesco-Lotus (n = 142) n	%	Big C (n = 138) n	%	Carrefour (n = 134) n	%
Gender								
Male	191	46.1	66	46.5	68	49.3	57	42.5
Female	223	53.9	76	53.5	70	50.7	77	57.5
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
$x^2_{(2)} = 1.252$; $p = 0.535$								
Education[a]								
Less than primary school (< more 6)	4	1.0	2	1.4	1	0.7	1	0.7
High school (more 6)	15	3.6	8	5.6	1	0.7	6	4.5
Vocational school	11	2.7	3	2.1	5	3.6	3	2.1
Four-year undergraduate	358	86.5	115	81.0	122	88.4	121	90.3
Graduate	23	5.6	12	8.5	8	5.8	3	2.2
Missing	3	0.7	2	1.4	1	0.7	0	0
$x^2_{(8)} = 11.617$; $p = 0.169$								
Career								
Student	190	45.9	59	41.5	64	46.4	67	50.0
Government officers	59	14.3	25	17.6	24	17.4	10	7.5
Company officers	102	24.6	27	19.0	39	28.3	31	23.1
Self-employed	59	14.3	30	21.1	10	7.2	19	14.2
Missing	4	1.0	1	0.7	1	0.7	2	1.5
$x^2_{(6)} = 20.860$; $p = 0.002$								
Personal monthly income (Baht)								
< 10,000	230	55.5	89	62.7	60	43.5	81	60.5
10,000-20,000	129	31.2	29	20.4	61	44.2	39	29.1
20,001-30,000	28	6.8	12	8.5	9	6.5	7	5.2
30,001-50,000	8	1.9	3	2.1	3	2.2	2	1.5
50,001-70,000	4	1.0	1	0.7	2	1.5	1	0.7
> 70,001	6	1.5	4	2.8	1	0.7	1	0.7
Missing	9	2.2	4	2.8	2	1.5	3	2.2
$x^2_{(10)} = 23.241$; $p = 0.010$								
Age (years old)								
18-23	178	43.0	55	38.7	55	39.9	68	50.7
24-35	203	49.0	71	50.0	73	52.9	60	44.8
36-45	25	6.0	13	9.2	8	5.8	4	3.0
46-55	3	0.7	1	0.7	1	0.8	1	0.7
+ 55	2	0.5	1	0.7	0	0	1	0.8
Missing	3	0.7	2	1.4	1	0.7	0	0
$x^2_{(8)} = 13.442$; $p = 0.098$								

Note: [a]Equivalent to the US educational system.

monthly income less then 20,000 Baht. Also, approximately 92 percent of participants were between 18 and 35 years old.

Assessing five-factor structure, reliability, and validity of the measures

CFA via LISREL 8.3 was performed, using maximum likelihood estimation, for a combined sample and an individual sample to examine the measurement structure and examine how well the data fit the hypothesized measurement structure. To assess the goodness of fit of the model, absolute fit indexes such as chi square ($\chi 2$), standardized root mean residual (SRMR), and normed chi-squared ($\chi 2$ /df) and incremental fit indexes such as incremental fit index (IFI) and comparative fit index (CFI) were used. Values equal to 0.90 or higher for the IFI and CFI, below 0.08 for the SRMR, and below 3.0 for the $\chi 2$ /df indicate a well-fitting model ([23] Hu and Bentler, 1999). Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.] showed that despite a significant $\chi 2$ across samples, the 14-item, five-factor model of CATMPs fits the combined sample satisfactorily. For an individual sample, Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.] further revealed that Tesco-Lotus and Big C samples fit satisfactorily and the Carrefour sample fit reasonably.

CFA was also further used to assess the psychometric properties (reliability and validity) of the measures. According to [15] Fornell and Larcker (1981), composite reliability represents shared variance among a set of observed variables measuring an underlying construct. Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.] showed that the composite reliability estimates for each latent construct for a combined sample and an individual sample were greater than 0.60, a cutoff value for acceptable reliability for a study with an exploratory nature ([20] Hair et al. , 1998). Furthermore, Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.] revealed that factor loadings of the indicators for the underlying constructs were all significant at the 0.001 level and completely standardized factor loadings were quite high for a combined sample and an individual sample, suggesting that convergent validity was established ([1] Bagozzi et al. , 1991). That is, each indicator taps facets of the intended construct. Discriminant validity among constructs was further assessed by examining whether the square correlation between two constructs was lower than the average variance extracted for each construct ([15] Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Results revealed that these conditions were met for a combined sample and an individual sample; therefore, the constructs investigated in the study were distinct from each other, confirming discriminant validity. Thus, it is concluded that the measurement model meets all requirements for psychometric property.

Hypotheses testing

Examining the influence of demographic characteristics and CATMPs

In light of the satisfactory fit of the 14-item, five-factor model of CATMPs and the psychometric property for a combined sample, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed to examine the relationships of demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, career, and income level) to the five areas of marketing practices. Career type was grouped into two groups: students and employees. Similarly, income level was also grouped into two groups: low and moderate income (those with monthly income level higher than 50,000 Baht was deleted). Results revealed that both gender (Wilks' λ =0.94, F =2.33, p <0.05) and income (Wilks' λ =0.97, F =2.28, p <0.05) had significant impacts on retail service (F =4.75, p <0.05; F =6.55, p <0.05, respectively).

Table II. Means, standard deviations, and CFA results of CATMPs

		All (n = 414)		Tesco-Lotus (n = 142)		Big C (n = 138)		Carrefour (n = 134)	
Items	**Dimensions/descriptions**	**Means (std.)**	**Loadings**	**Means (std.)**	**Loadings**	**Means (std.)**	**Loadings**	**Means (std.)**	**Loadings**
	Business provision (BP)	CR = 0.77		CR = 0.83		CR = 0.74		CR = 0.71	
		AVE = 0.53		AVE = 0.63		AVE = 0.49		AVE = 0.46	
X1	Provides the goods I want	3.34 (0.82)	0.72 * *	3.48 (0.93)	0.80 * *	3.36 (0.81)	0.57 * *	3.16 (0.65)	0.89 * *
X2	Provides the services I want	3.20 (0.78)	0.76 * *	3.20 (0.82)	0.84 * *	3.22 (0.86)	0.76 * *	3.18 (0.64)	0.59 * *
X3		3.10 (0.73)	0.71 * *	3.18 (0.81)	0.73 * *	3.07 (0.76)	0.74 * *	3.05 (0.58)	0.50 * *
	Retailing service (RS)	CR = 0.82		CR = 0.85		CR = 0.80		CR = 0.73	
	Provides the shopping experience I want	AVE = 0.60		AVE = 0.65		AVE = 0.57		AVE = 0.48	
X4	Serve customers well	3.12 (0.79)	0.77 * *	3.32 (0.81)	0.80 * *	2.95 (0.81)	0.76 * *	3.08 (0.70)	0.72 * *
X5	Retail salespeople are very helpful	3.11 (0.78)	0.72 * *	3.27 (0.83)	0.75 * *	2.99 (0.85)	0.72 * *	3.07 (0.59)	0.56 * *
X6	Provide adequate service	3.16 (0.82)	0.83 * *	3.42 (0.92)	0.86 * *	2.97 (0.84)	0.79 * *	3.10 (0.61)	0.78 * *
	Positive advertising (reverse coded) (PA)	CR = 0.76		CR = 0.80		CR = 0.75		CR = 0.70	
		AVE = 0.52		AVE = 0.57		AVE = 0.51		AVE = 0.43	
X7	Most advertising is annoying	3.21 (0.85)	0.65 * *	3.10 (0.96)	0.73 * *	3.44 (0.88)	0.54 * *	3.11 (0.62)	0.67 * *
X8	Most advertising makes false claims	3.16 (0.78)	0.83 * *	3.13 (0.85)	0.83 * *	3.28 (0.83)	0.94 * *	3.05 (0.63)	0.67 * *
X9	Most advertising is intended to deceive rather than inform	3.19 (0.80)	0.66 * *	3.11 (0.81)	0.70 * *	3.32 (0.83)	0.60 * *	3.14 (0.76)	0.63 * *
	Fair price (FP)	CR = 0.78		CR = 0.81		CR = 0.82		CR = 0.65	
		AVE = 0.55		AVE = 0.59		AVE = 0.60		AVE = 0.39	
X10	Reasonable prices given the high costs of doing business	3.12 (0.72)	0.60 * *	3.18 (0.78)	0.63 * *	3.11 (0.78)	0.65 * *	3.06 (0.59)	0.44 * *
X11	Fair prices	3.20 (0.73)	0.80 * *	3.31 (0.74)	0.81 * *	3.09 (0.81)	0.83 * *	3.19 (0.60)	0.75 * *
X12	Satisfied with the prices I pay	3.23 (0.81)	0.80 * *	3.33 (0.79)	0.84 * *	3.15 (0.90)	0.83 * *	3.21 (0.73)	0.64 * *
	Product quality (PQ)	CR = 0.73		CR = 0.71		CR = 0.77		CR = 0.71	
		AVE = 0.58		AVE = 0.55		AVE = 0.62		AVE = 0.56	
X13	Offered high-quality products	3.06 (0.71)	0.68 * *	3.03 (0.77)	0.69 * *	3.02 (0.71)	0.76 * *	3.15 (0.63)	0.84 * *
X14	Satisfied with the quality of product I paid for	3.15 (0.74)	0.83 * *	3.25 (0.84)	0.79 * *	3.06 (0.72)	0.81 * *	3.13 (0.63)	0.64 * *

Table II. *(continued)*

Fit indexes				
X^2, df	166.55 * *, 67	192.87 * *, 67	111.69 * *, 67	185.32 * *, 67
X^2 / df	2.49	2.88	1.67	2.77
SRMR	0.0409	0.0636	0.0636	0.0871
CFI	0.977	0.948	0.966	0.829
IFI	0.977	0.941	0.966	0.834
Phi matrix				
BP - RS	0.55 * *	0.64 * *	0.45 * *	0.55 * *
BP - PA	-0.09	-0.09	-0.05	-0.19 *
BP - FP	0.53 * *	0.61 * *	0.51 * *	0.42 * *
BP - PQ	0.58 * *	0.72 * *	0.61 * *	0.28 * *
RS - PA	-0.15 * *	-0.14	-0.11	-0.11
RS - FP	0.55 * *	0.58 * *	0.56 * *	0.42 * *
RS - PQ	0.44 * *	0.65 * *	0.35 * *	0.17
PA - FP	-0.08	-0.07	-0.07	-0.06
PA - PQ	-0.10 *	-0.17 *	0.08	0.04
FP - PQ	0.40 * *	0.61 * *	0.45 * *	-0.07

Notes: *Indicates $p < 0.05$ and * *indicates t-value > 3.45 and $p < 0.001$; CR – composite reliability; AVE – average variance extracted

Tukey's HSD *post hoc* analysis on gender further indicated that males had a more positive attitude toward retail services than females did (M_{Male}=3.24 vs M_{Female}=3.03). Also, Tukey's HSD *post hoc* analysis on income also revealed that those with moderate-income levels had more positive attitudes toward retail service than their low-income counterparts ($M_{Moderate\ income}$=3.26 vs $M_{Low\ income}$=3.03). Interestingly, two-way interaction effects (career×income) (Wilks' λ=0.96, F=3.11, p<0.01) were found to had significant relationship with the fair price area of marketing practices (F=4.98, p<0.05). Tukey's HSD *post hoc* analysis on two-way interaction effect (career×income) indicated that students with low income had a more positive attitude toward fair price than students with moderate income and those employed in the low-income brackets, but not with those with those employed in the moderate-income brackets ($M_{Student\ low\ income}$=3.26 vs $M_{Employee\ moderate\ income}$=3.22 vs $M_{Student\ moderate\ income}$=3.14 vs $M_{Employee\ low\ income}$=2.97). No other interaction effects were found (Table III). Thus, *H1* was partially supported.

Examining the differences in CATMPs across retailers. The differences related to the five dimensions of CATMPs existed across individual samples were further examined. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted using the GLM procedure in SAS with CATMPs as dependent variables, the type of hypermarket retailer as the independent variables, and two demographic variables (career and income) as covariates.

The χ^2 analysis revealed a significant association between the hypermarket retailer variable and the two demographic variables, career and income ($\chi_{(6)}^2$=20.86,p<0.01; $\chi_{(10)}^2$=23.24,p<0.01, respectively) (Table I). These two demographic variables were included as covariates in subsequent MANCOVA and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) attempts accordingly because it was important to demonstrate that differences, if any, in CATMPs were attributed to the type of hypermarket retailer variable, not to demographic variables such as career and income.

The MANCOVA results revealed that the mean responses in five dimensions of CATMPs (business provision, retail service, advertising, price, and product quality) were significantly different across three groups (Wilks' λ=0.88, F=5.51, p<0.001) (Table IV). Thus, H2 was partially supported. In addition, the results of the multivariate test revealed that demographic variables related to career and income accounted for significant variance in dependent variables (Wilks' λ=0.93, F=1.96, p<0.05; and Wilks' λ=0.75, F=4.77, p<0.001, respectively). Specifically, the ANCOVA results further revealed significant differences related to retail service (F=13.80, p<0.001), positive advertising (F=9.93, p<0.001), and price (F=3.34, p<0.05) across samples. However, no significant differences were found related to business provision (F=2.07, p>0.05) and product quality (F=1.01, p>0.05) across samples (Table IV).

Tukey's HSD *post hoc* analysis further revealed that participants significantly exhibited more favourable attitudes toward retail service delivered by Tesco-Lotus than by Carrefour and Big C ($M_{Tesco-Lotus}$=3.33 vs $M_{Carrefour}$=3.08 vs M_{BigC}=2.97). However, no significant difference was found between participants for retail service delivered by Carrefour versus Big C. In contrast, participants significantly exhibited more favourable attitudes toward positive advertising offered by Big C than Tesco-Lotus and Carrefour (M_{BigC}=3.35 vs $M_{Tesco-Lotus}$=3.11 vs $M_{Carrefour}$=3.10). However, no significant difference was found between participants for positive advertising offered by Tesco-Lotus and Carrefour. Furthermore, participants significantly displayed more favourable attitudes toward prices offered by Tesco-Lotus than Big C ($M_{Tesco-Lotus}$=3.28 vs M_{BigC}=3.10), but these results were not significantly higher than those for Carrefour ($M_{Tesco-Lotus}$=3.28 vs $M_{Carrefour}$=3.16). Likewise, no significant difference was found between consumers on prices offered by Carrefour vs Big C ($M_{Carrefour}$=3.16 vs M_{BigC}=3.10).

Table III. MANOVA and ANOVA results on CATMPs among demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Mean					
	Business provision	**Retail service**	**Positive advertising**	**Fair price**	**Product quality**	**Multivariate F**
Gender (G)						2.33*
Male	3.21	3.24	3.16	3.17	3.16	
Female	3.22	3.03	3.21	3.19	3.06	
F-value	0.41	4.75*	2.95	0.06	3.45	
Career (C)						1.34
Student	3.25	3.08	3.19	3.24	3.04	
Employee	3.18	3.17	3.18	3.13	3.16	
F-value	0.37	0.09	0.11	1.73	1.49	
Income (I)						2.28*
Low	3.22	3.03	3.18	3.17	3.09	
Moderate	3.20	3.26	3.19	3.20	3.12	
F-value	0.01	6.55*	0.06	0.91	0.01	
G*C						0.62
Male-low income	3.22	3.13	3.15	3.17	3.10	
Male-moderate income	3.20	3.30	3.16	3.16	3.19	
Female-low income	3.27	3.06	3.21	3.28	3.01	
Female-moderate income	3.15	3.00	3.21	3.09	3.11	
F-value	0.23	0.95	0.04	0.09	0.42	
G*I						1.01
Male-low income	3.14	3.08	3.09	3.08	3.13	
Male-moderate income	3.26	3.38	3.21	3.24	3.19	
Female-low income	3.27	3.00	3.23	3.22	3.07	
Female-moderate income	3.11	3.10	3.17	3.15	3.03	
F-value	4.10*	0.58	0.32	1.67	1.93	
C*I						3.11**
Student-low income	3.28	3.06	3.19	3.26	3.02	
Student-moderate income	3.15	3.21	3.18	3.14	3.14	
Employee-low income	3.11	2.97	3.15	2.97	3.23	
Employee-moderate income	3.21	3.27	3.20	3.22	3.12	
F-value	1.65	0.50	0.10	4.98*	2.38	
G*C*I						1.45
Male-student-low income	3.19	3.07	3.19	3.15	3.02	
Male-student-moderate income	3.29	3.29	3.04	3.22	3.32	
Male-employee-low income	3.06	3.08	2.96	2.97	3.27	
Male-employee-moderate income	3.26	3.40	3.24	3.25	3.16	
Female-student-low income	3.13	3.05	3.20	3.32	3.02	
Female-student-moderate income	3.00	3.13	3.33	3.06	2.94	
Female-employee-low income	3.15	2.88	3.32	2.97	3.20	
Female-employee-moderate income	3.14	3.09	3.13	3.17	3.05	
F-value	0.46	0.02	5.57*	0.67	1.35	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Discussion, conclusions, and recommendations

This is one of the first studies that attempts to provide an exploratory investigation of Thai CATMPs of foreign-owned hypermarkets in Thailand. Specifically, the current study sought to determine whether any demographic characteristics influence consumers' attitudes toward five aspects of marketing practices (business provision, retail service, advertising, fair price, and product quality) and whether any differences exist related to these areas of marketing practices delivered by three retailers: Tesco-Lotus, Big C, and Carrefour. The current measures of CATMPs employed in the study have been modified from two existing literatures, Gaski and Etzel's (1986) ICSM and Peterson and Ekici's (2007) CATM, and revealed acceptable psychometric quality and applicability for the combined sample and an individual sample.

Both gender and income were found to have significant effects with attitudes toward retail service. That is, men were likely to display more favourable attitudes toward retail service than women. Men often tend to patronize hypermarket stores less frequently than women, resulting in a lower expectation of services as compared to women. In addition, those within the moderate-income bracket tended to exhibit a more positive attitude toward retail services than those with low incomes. Those with moderate-income levels may more highly regard the efforts of these hypermarket retailers to provide superior retail service and were therefore more appreciative of these efforts than low-income consumers. This finding somewhat contradicts Gaski's (2008) study, which reported that those in high-income brackets displayed unfavourable attitudes toward retail services. However, Gaski examined the influence of income on the macro level of CATMPs, while the current study examined such relationships at the micro level. Interestingly, career and income were found to have a significant interaction effect with attitude toward fair price. Students in low-income brackets tended to believe that these retailers offer affordable pricing strategies. Given the fact that almost 90 percent of Thai students are given monthly allowances from their parents, they must budget their allowances effectively. As such, the modern market strategy of low pricing by hypermarket retailers is likely to be viewed positively among these consumers.

When further examining the similarities and differences relative to individual aspects of CATMPs across individual samples, the study revealed interesting results. Overall, Thai consumers do not hold favourable attitudes toward the business provision across samples. That is, Thai participants tend to believe that these retailers (Tesco-Lotus, Big C, and Carrefour) have equally met their expectations in terms of delivering desired goods, services, and shopping experiences. Such results seem to confirm the overall marketing strategy that these retailers have emphasized (Euromonitor International, 2009d; Reutterer and Teller, 2009). In addition, the results revealed that Thai participants feel these retailers offer products of similar quality and are satisfied with the product quality received regardless of purchase point (Tesco-Lotus, Big C, or Carrefour). These retailers may carry similar products and brands, resulting in consumers' inability to differentiate among the quality of the products carried by these retailers. Such results may also reflect the quality of private label brands: consumers may perceive them similarly. However, such issues need further investigation.

More importantly, results revealed that three aspects of marketing practices were perceived differently among Thai consumers: retail service, positive advertising, and fair price. Regarding retail service, Thai consumers expressed more favourable attitudes toward Tesco-Lotus than Carrefour and Big C. That is, these participants tended to believe that salespersons at Tesco-Lotus were more helpful and better served their customers than their rivals. However, participants seemed to feel that services offered at either Carrefour or Big C were not similar. Such results echo Shannon's (2007) comments, stating that Tesco-Lotus is the most aggressive hypermarket with billion of dollars invested in the Thai market (e.g. opening new stores, offering recruitment and employee training programs). Also, Big C and Carrefour have been viewed as market followers rather than market leaders; thus, these retailers may take more precautions than their major rival, Tesco-Lotus, who is more of a risk taker.

Interestingly, despite advertising efforts, the “Roll Back” low-price campaign by Tesco-Lotus, which is easily recognized among Thai consumers, was not necessarily successful. Our results revealed that these participants favoured advertising efforts by Big C, which they found to be less annoying, to contain fewer false claims, and to be more informative as compared to Tesco-Lotus's campaign. The frequency of the “Roll Back” promotional campaign may have caused consumers to become satiated, resulting in annoyance and the feeling that the retailer is less trustworthy as these efforts become questionable on the part of the retailer. Furthermore, Big C's advertising was viewed positively among the participants as compared to Carrefour's campaign. Since Carrefour has not spent much in terms of advertising in Thailand, these results were not unsurprising. In addition, consumers' favourability toward Big C's promotional efforts reflect the company's successful attempts to reach out to its target consumers through direct mail and in-store promotions (Euromonitor International, 2009a). Such media may be more effective than television advertisements, in contrast to Tesco-Lotus's assumptions. However, Thai participants did not view advertising as either more or less favourable when comparing Tesco-Lotus and Carrefour. This finding suggests that Tesco-Lotus may have to revisit the effectiveness of its advertising efforts.

Lastly, Thai consumers tended to be satisfied with Tesco-Lotus's fair pricing strategy as compared with Big C's pricing strategy. However, they viewed the pricing strategies offered by Tesco-Lotus and Carrefour as equally fair. The high number of Tesco-Lotus stores in the Thai market may have signalled to Thai consumers that the company has put forth a great deal of effort in doing business in Thailand; thus, they may believe that the company offers reasonable prices given how much money the company has spent overall. In addition, fair pricing is not Carrefour's major strategy; it emphasizes a greater variety of merchandise and renovated stores. In contrast, Thai consumers perceived fair pricing strategies offered by Carrefour and Big C similarly, as Carrefour is also moving its focus to store renovation and offering a variety of merchandise. Overall, although there were some slight differences among consumers with regard to merchandise pricing across samples, our results seem to suggest that hypermarkets equally attract price-conscious consumers (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Roslin and Melewar, 2008).

Overall, the results offer insights applicable to these retailers, suggesting that if these retailers want to be successful in the Thai market, they need to strengthen certain areas and continue to improve others. For example, Tesco-Lotus needs to capitalize on its retail service provisions and pricing strategies. However, the company may have to revisit its advertising messages, making sure that the intended message is being perceived as anticipated. Also, commercials may need to be aired less frequently in order to not annoy or wear out consumers. In contrast, Big C must improve its retail services, possibly through employee training programs. Another area Big C needs to improve is to offer prices that are reasonable to the consumers. The company needs to be aware that consumers are usually cross-shopping and sometimes remember merchandise prices; in addition, the company may also need to continue checking their competitors' prices to ensure that they remain competitive. However, Big C's advertising is successful, including their frequency and the message transmission; overall, the company seems to be viewed favourably among consumers. Carrefour needs to step up its efforts if it wants to be successful in Thailand by improving its retail services and prices. Being a follower does not guarantee that the company will survive in this competitive market. Lastly, there are certain areas of marketing practices that these companies may need to take advantage of, such as business provision and product quality, to be market leaders. It is believed that some of these companies are aware of such areas and are striving to provide their consumers the ultimate shopping experience. For example, efforts like the community mall businesses that emphasize the concept of shopping within a neighbourhood (Tesco-Lotus) and Generation 4 concept stores focused on a fun shopping experience (Big C) tend to reflect the companies' attempts to provide better business practices to their consumers. It is further suggested that merely providing a variety of merchandise and brand names, like Carrefour, may be insufficient for survival. Nevertheless, it is suggested that these retailers still need to strengthen all areas of marketing practices being investigated in the current study because such efforts will eventually aid them to being perceived as a market leader that may in turn result in high-sale volumes and market expansion (Ehrenberg et al., 1990). In addition, Thai consumers seem to possess a greater degree of spending power than ever before; this phenomenon may have prompted multinational hypermarket retailers to spend significant capital on improving their marketing approaches.

Limitation and future research directions

As with any other studies, the current study possesses some limitations. Although the sample included a cross-section of Thai consumers between 18 and 63 years old, the responses were obtained from only one city, limiting the generalizability of findings. Second, this study only investigated CATMPs across retailers; the impact of a number of marketing practices on consumers' total shopping experiences and their repeat visits needs to be investigated in future research. Third, the current study only focuses on foreign-owned hypermarket retailers: future research should compare foreign-owned and local retailers operating in the same market. Last, a longitudinal study would be fruitful to examine changes in consumers' perceptions of different marketing practices across these retailers over time; such insight can be provided to assess the effectiveness of marketing strategies performed by such retailers.

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