

## **Factors Influencing Consumer Decision-Making Process of Thai Frozen Food Products**

Manitchanan Chatthipmongkol and Kittisak Jangphanish  
Thonburi University, 248 Petkasem 110 Alley, Nongkangphlu,  
Nongkame, 10160 Bangkok, Thailand

**Abstract:** Frozen foods play an important role in both economic and business aspects of Thailand. For decades, frozen foods have been promoted as a major source of Thailand's income. In addition, a number of people who work outside have less time to cook food for each meal. The demand of frozen food products increases rapidly among the changing society in Thailand. Thus, this study attempted to find factors influencing consumer decision-making process of Thai frozen food products in order to develop ways in which Thai frozen foods can meet consumer needs and become competitive in the global market. The purposes of this study were to analyse the consumer decision-making process of Thai frozen foods to analyse the marketing mix of 4Ps: product, price, place and promotion influencing the consumer decision-making process of Thai frozen foods and to find the relationship between the marketing mix of 4Ps and the consumer decision-making process: need recognition, prepurchase search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and postpurchase evaluation. As the result, in the overall aspect of each marketing mix, the factor that the consumers considered primarily buying decision was product whereas the other factors that the consumers used in buying decision were promotion, place and price, respectively. The study's results found that the sales promotions of frozen foods influenced consumers' need recognition. The fair prices for quantity, the various distribution channels, the reachable advertising and publicity in various media and the overall aspect of promotion influenced prepurchase search. The overall aspect of product and the reputation of brand influenced evaluation of alternatives. The reachable advertising and publicity in various media and the overall aspect of price influenced purchase behavior. Finally, the fair prices for quality influenced postpurchase evaluation.

**Key words:** Consumer decision-making process, consumer needs, frozen foods, marketing mix, price

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Thailand is a land of the most abundant food resources in the world. Many people visiting in Thailand are mostly surprised with a lot of food stalls in anywhere they go. According to a tropical climate throughout the year, Thai people in the country are accustomed to the lifestyle of growing plants, vegetables and fruits every season and feeding animals for living and trading. It is acceptable that "There are fish in the waters. There is rice in the fields", one of Thai proverbs demonstrates that Thailand has fertile water and soil for agriculture and livestock. Nowadays, it has been known that Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) whose member countries each possess a rich culinary heritage is a region of abundance with a huge variety of fresh foods and raw ingredients and the region has also been accurately described as "The kitchen of the world" (Phoklang, 2013).

We can see that lifestyle has presently been changed because people must struggle and survive in the competitive society. Both life in a workplace and working hours are so important that cooking food for meals wastes time. Surveys had showed that >50% of women worked outside of the home, a dramatic increase since 1970 and this number was expected to rise to 65% by 2010 (Ferrell *et al.*, 2002). It is undeniable that life in city is always in a hurry to get things done. Living in a hurried life has become a city lifestyle which people need to save more time for cooking. It is more convenient and easier to go shopping for frozen and prepared foods in a store and keep them in the freezer. In addition with high average temperatures almost the entire year, fresh foods are easily rotten or worm-eaten. Eating damaged food allows some diseases to spread in our body and poison us until sickness such as stomach ache, vomit, fever and diarrhoea. Freezing is a commercial and domestic preservation method with which fresh and prepared foods

can be stored for longer periods. In case of crisis situation in many countries, this process is used for strategic food stocks. In 1991, frozen foods were firstly introduced to Thai consumers whereas they were well known for their taste sensation, reasonable price, safe and cleaning process in 1993. It is acceptable that at the present, the various frozen foods including Ready To Eat (RTE) and ready to cook are commercially sold through retailing and wholesaling. Frozen food with nutrients must be stored in the freezer at 0°F (-18°C) to stop bacteria from growing but not to kill most bacteria. The foods in the freezer will have little change in their protein value and the longest period of preservation at 18 months. The important thing that makes frozen foods different from packaged foods or dried foods is their quality closing to fresh meals after heating in microwave oven between 4-7 min. Several kinds of instant and dried foods are less nutritionally useful than frozen foods. Besides, chilled food is a preservation process of food below 8°C. It is a fact that a wide range of foods through this process still remains as good taste as fresh foods after heating in microwave oven around 1-2 min but they cannot be preserved >7 days in the freezer.

For the past 5 years, Thailand's frozen food market has continuously grown. The growth opportunity of Thai frozen food products has tended upwards because entrepreneurs can communicate effectively with customers by providing the proper information and the variety of their products with nutrition, good taste and safety. Thai people are getting more familiar with ready meals and ready to cook because of the change of consumer lifestyle and they are provided to almost all convenient stores and supermarkets which access widely to target consumers. Many manufacturers are expanding their investment in new product development, including production capacity in order to satisfy customers with product variety, low price and attractive promotion. Besides, the advance of technology in household products, especially refrigerators and microwave ovens are positively related to the frozen food products. They can bring the versatility and convenience that consumers need for their busy life. As a result of meeting the requirement of consumers, the frozen foods become popular not only in Thailand but also in many countries. Thai Frozen Food is mainly exported to Japan, USA, Australia, Libya, Italy, Canada, Saudi Arabia, China, Egypt and South Africa. Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP, 2014) reported that in 2014 Thailand's frozen food export to top 10 trading partners decreased by 2% from 2013. The competitiveness on export market becomes more challenging. As shown in Fig. 1, we can see information about Thailand's frozen

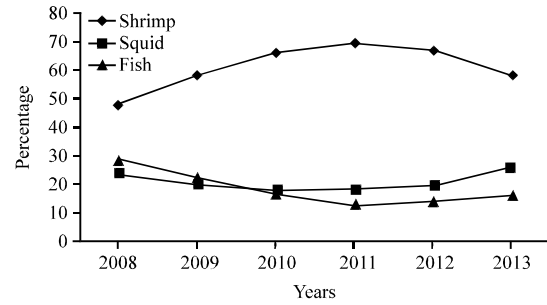


Fig. 1: Percentage of Thailand's frozen food export to EU (TFFA, 2014a, b)

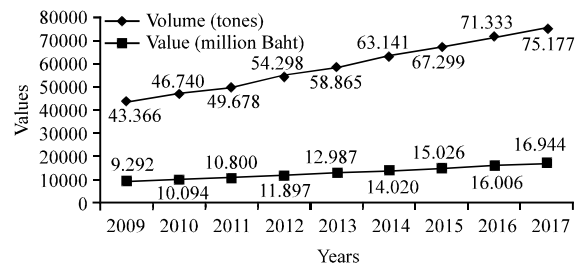


Fig. 2: Volume and value growth of frozen processed food in Thailand (EI, 2014)

food export to the European Union (EU) from 2008-2013. It compares the percentage of frozen products in three different kinds of foods: shrimp, squid and fish. According to the line graph, 48% of frozen shrimp was exported by 2008, increasing to 69% by 2011. It can be seen that only 28% of frozen fish was exported in 2008 but this decreased to 16% by 2013. The result was that frozen shrimp in Thailand represented the highest percentage of exports to EU in 2011 while the change was less marked in 2013. It is also noticeable that the percentage of fish did not rise but dropped between 2009 and 2011. However, the percentage of frozen squid remained almost unchanged between 2010 and 2012, being 17 and 19%, respectively but rose markedly after that so that by 2013 frozen squid represented 25% of exports.

With regard to Thailand's frozen processed food market, the line graph from Fig. 2 shows frozen processed food in the volume and value growth in Thailand between 2009 and 2017. Apparently, the volume and value of frozen processed food in Thailand have tended to grow steadily since 2009. In 2014, the volume and value growth of frozen processed food increased slightly 7 and 8% from 2013. It is surprising that the growth of frozen processed food will have almost doubled with 73% of volume and 82% of value between 2009 and 2017 whereas the volume and value will keep growing at the same speed with a further increase of approximate 6% between 2015 and

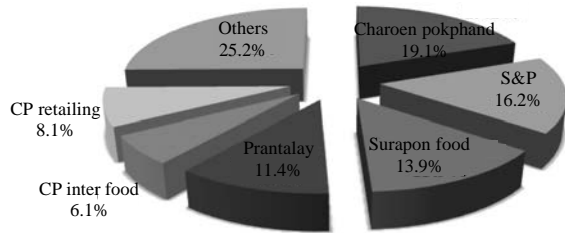


Fig. 3: Market share of Thai frozen processed food 2013 (EI, 2014)

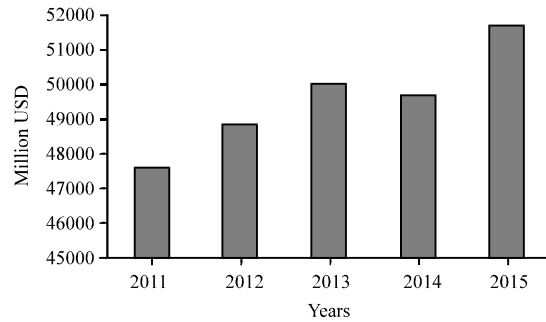


Fig. 4: Thai consumer behavior of expenditure on food (EI, 2014)

2016. In addition, by 2017 the growth of frozen processed food is predicted approximately 75,177 tons with sales increasing to 17 million Baht. As shown in Fig. 3, the pie chart shows the market share of Thai frozen processed food classified by enterprises. In 2013, Charoen Pokphand group, the biggest market leader in Thailand, consisted of a number of companies operating in frozen processed food, namely Charoen Pokphand Foods with a market share of 19%, CP retailing and marketing with a market share of 8% and CP Inter Food (Thailand) with a market share of 6%. By 2013, S&P Syndicate constituting 16% of the market shares became the second leader in the frozen processed food market while the percentage of Surapon Foods' market share represented 14% of the total. Charoen Pokphand has its own convenient stores such as 7 Eleven and CP Fresh Mart to distribute and offer various products under the following brand names: CP, EZYGO and Jade Dragon. S&P Syndicate, Surapon Foods and Prantalay use the marketing strategy of family branding or umbrella branding involving a single brand name for a number of products sold to the market, namely S&P, Surapon and Prantalay. It is generally accepted that family branding uses the same brand name to cover a group of products or product lines and the major arguments for using family branding are reduced costs and transfer of customer satisfaction from one product to another bearing the same name (Mullins and Walker, 2010). In addition of frozen food market, Fig. 4 compares the figures of Thai consumers' expenditure on food between 2011 and 2015. From the data, we can see that the total amount of money which Thai consumers spent on food was greater in 2013 than in 2011 and 2012 whereas there was a decrease of approximately 49,600 million USD spent on food in 2014. This represents that by 2015 the greatest change is estimated to be nearly 52,000 million USD which Thai consumers will probably spend on food.

**Purposes of the study:** The purposes of this study were: to analyze the consumer decision-making process of Thai frozen foods, to analyze the marketing mix of 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) influencing the consumer

decision-making process of Thai frozen foods and to find the relationship between the marketing mix of 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) and the consumer decision-making process (need recognition, prepurchase search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and postpurchase evaluation).

**Literature review:** Foods from different brands cause different taste, quality, appearance and kind of products that will probably not be able to respond all customers' satisfaction. To expand an investment in the emerging markets, Thai frozen food industries need to understand customer decision-making process and meet their needs. Most frozen food products are technologically developed to provide superior customer value and response customer satisfaction through the marketing mix of 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion). Customer satisfaction is the individual's perception of the performance of the product or service in relation to his or her expectation and the marketing mix consists of a company's service and/or product offerings to consumers and the methods and tools it selects to accomplish the exchange (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Due to marketing strategies, the elements of marketing mix are formed as product strategy, pricing strategy, distribution strategy and integrated marketing communication strategy. To be successful, every organization requires effective planning and a marketing strategy focused on achieving its goals and objectives and satisfying customers' needs and wants (Ferrell *et al.*, 2002). The consumer decision process intervenes between the marketing strategy as implemented in the marketing mix and the consumer satisfaction. The consumer decision process model represents a roadmap of consumers' minds that marketers and managers can use to help guide product mix, communication and sales strategies (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001). In term of a simple model of consumer decision making shown in Fig. 5, the input as a starting stage for

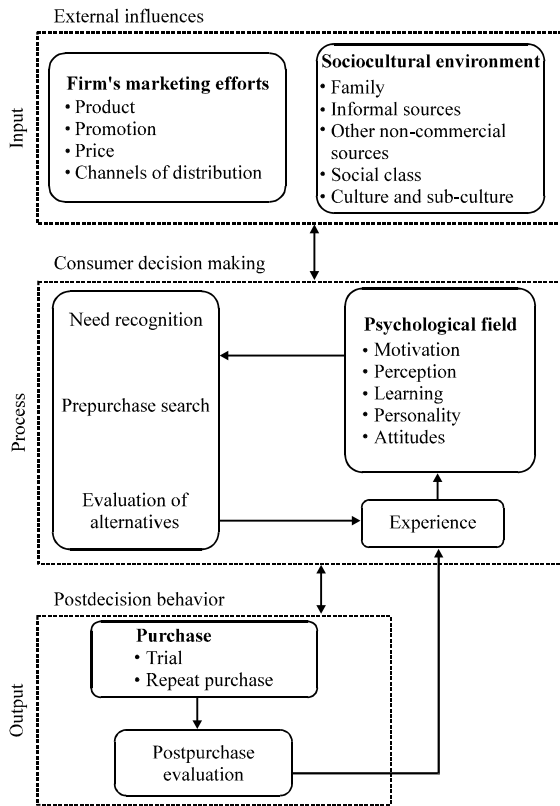


Fig. 5: A simple model of consumer decision marking (consumer behavior (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007))

understanding the process of consumer decision making consists of two external influences such as firm's marketing efforts (products, promotion, price and channels of distribution) and sociocultural environment (family, informal sources, other non-commercial sources, social class and culture and subculture) and the output stage of the consumer decision-making model comprises purchase behavior and postpurchase evaluation. As the process stage of the model shows, the psychological factors (motivation, perception, learning, personality and attitudes) affect how the external inputs from the input stage influence the consumer's recognition of a need, prepurchase search for information and evaluation of alternatives through which the experience gained, in turn, affects the consumer's existing psychological attributes (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

Typically, consumers use five stages while making decisions through need recognition, prepurchase search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase (trial and repeat purchase) and postpurchase evaluation. The starting point of consumer decisions results from perceived problem. Everyone buys a product if they have a problem, a need or a want. Firstly, need recognition occurs when an

individual senses a difference between what he or she perceives to be the ideal versus the actual state of affairs (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001). The marketing mix as an external influence helps consumers recognize an imbalance between present status and preferred state. When need recognition occurs, consumers begin searching for information through recalling past information stored in the memory and seeking information in the outside environment. We can distinguish between two levels of engagement the search; a person simply becomes more receptive to information about a product and the person may look for reading material, phoning friends, going online and visiting stores to learn about the product (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Consumer search is related to decision information. Increasingly, consumers are using the internet for their search needs, particularly generic products, specific retailers and products. The internet can help to reduce costs of information search and make it easier for consumers to make informed decisions. At the third stage of decision process, the consumer is to evaluate alternatives after the prepurchase search. The criteria consumers use to evaluate the brands that constitute their evoked sets are usually expressed in terms of important product attributes (Schiffman *et al.*, 2001). It is obviously necessary that consumers must evaluate some important product attributes from a number of accepted brands known as evoked set. However, different consumers may use different sets of attributes to evaluate brands within the same product category (Mullins and Walker, 2010). At the purchase process, consumers must choose the most important product attribute among their alternatives. Although, consumers intend to purchase a specific product or brand, they are sometimes persuaded by retailers, price, advertising, salesperson or sales promotion at the store and change their mind to buy different product or brand from the first intention. Consumers tend to choose stores by considering such characteristics as location, price, assortment, personnel, store image, physical design and services (Boone and Kurtz, 2002). It's true that consumers decide not to buy or buy because of attitudes of others and unanticipated situational factors. Purchase behavior is possibly influenced by sales promotions from manufacturers such as coupons, product samples, premiums or prizes in order to make a trial purchase and create a satisfied consumer for repeating the purchase. Generally, the three types of purchases are trial purchases, repeat purchases and long-term commitment purchases. Marketers must persuade consumers to try to use a product for the first time through the five aspects of promotional mix: sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, advertisement and public relations. Thus, a trial is the

exploratory phase of purchase behavior in which consumers attempt to evaluate a product through direct use (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). A repeat purchase usually represents that consumers are satisfied with product and willing to buy it again. After the purchase, the consumers can gain the experience of buying and keep the information of product that they will recall in future decision making. The consumers evaluate the performance of product whether they are satisfied or not. Thus, satisfaction and dissatisfaction will be considered after consumers purchase a product. If they feel satisfied with that product, it can meet consumer's expectation. There are three types of expectations: equitable performance expectation, ideal performance expectation and expected performance expectation (Schiffman *et al.*, 2001). If the actual performance of product meets the equitable or ideal performance expectation, the consumer will be satisfied or extremely satisfied. When the product fulfills the consumer's expectation, it will be actually consumed.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The sample who had ever consumed frozen foods by Surapon Foods PLC and lived in the area of Prakanong District in Bangkok Metropolis, consisted of randomly selected 400 people. The tool used for data collection was questionnaire. The data was then analyzed with several statistic techniques including percentage, frequency, mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and  $\chi^2$ -test with using SPSS/PC for Windows Version 13. The index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was  $>0.5$ . The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was  $>0.70$ . The following details showed the phrases of this research methodology:

- During this initially launched study, the aim was that not only literature review but also involved theories, concepts and principles were concluded by content analysis
- The content was analyzed to develop a research tool such as a questionnaire that was important to collect survey data from the population. For personal data, the questionnaire was designed by using closed-ended questions. The 5-point Likert scale questions (1 lowest, 5 highest) were used to collect the data of 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) affecting the consumer decision-making process of frozen food products. The respondents were restricted to choose among the given multiple choice answers in each aspect of the consumer decision-making process

- Before the actual questionnaire was used for collecting survey data, it had been verified by three experts. The questionnaire was tested for evaluating content validity from index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC)  $>0.5$
- To analyze the reliability by using the Cronbach's alpha, the improved questionnaire was tried out with 30 people who were not in the sample. The reliability was statistically calculated to  $>0.7$
- After analyzing the reliability, the actual questionnaire was used in the randomly selected sample
- The statistic techniques for analyzing all of the data were percentages, frequency, mean, standard deviation,  $\chi^2$ -test with using SPSS/PC for Windows Version 13

#### **RESULTS**

The findings obtained from the research had showed as follows:

The personal data classified by gender, age, career, education and salary was statistically analyzed as percentages. The result showed that 59.2% of men and 40.8% of women aged of 26-35 years were students holding Bachelor's degree and gaining average monthly income between 10,001 and 20,000 Baht.

As shown in Table 1, the result showed that according to all aspects of marketing mix, the total average was 3.72. It can be seen that the total averages of each aspect were 3.73 (product), 3.72 (place), 3.71 (promotion) and 3.70 (price), respectively. Firstly, in the aspect of product, the averages of the good taste and nutrition, the various menu, the guaranteed quality and safety, including the reputation of brand were 3.86, 3.75, 3.73 and 3.59 in the order described. Secondly, in the aspect of place, the averages of frozen foods placed by retailers at Point of Purchase (POP), the convenient distribution channels, the well-known distribution channels and the various distribution channels were 3.79, 3.72, 3.71 and 3.67. Thirdly, in the aspect of promotion, the same average of the special sales promotions during holidays or festivals, the other sales promotion including the reachable advertising and publicity in various media was 3.71. Lastly in the aspect of price, the averages of the fair prices for quality, the fair prices for quantity and the clearly visible price tags of frozen foods by Surapon Foods were 3.72, 3.69 and 3.69 in the order described.

After using the  $\chi^2$ -test of association, the result showed that there was no statistically significant association between the overall aspect of the consumer decision making process consisting of need recognition,

**Table 1: 4Ps influencing the consumer decision-making process of frozen food products**

The aspects of 4Ps	Mean	SD
<b>Product</b>		
The taste and nutrition of frozen foods are as good as freshly cooked foods	3.86	0.85
The menu of frozen foods has a good variety of items	3.75	0.88
The brand of frozen foods is well-known	3.59	0.91
The food quality and safety are guaranteed by means of GMP/HACCP/ISO with expiry dates on packaging	3.73	0.91
Total	3.73	0.52
<b>Price</b>		
The prices of frozen foods are fair with their quality	3.72	0.86
The prices of frozen foods are fair with their quantity	3.69	0.88
The price tags are clearly visible	3.69	0.87
Total	3.70	0.59
<b>Place</b>		
The distribution channels of frozen foods are various	3.67	0.93
The distribution channels of frozen foods are convenient	3.72	0.92
The distribution channels of frozen foods are well-known	3.71	0.87
Frozen foods that retailers place at Point of Purchase (POP) are easily grabbed	3.79	0.90
Total	3.72	0.59
<b>Promotion</b>		
There are special sales promotions of frozen foods during holidays or festivals	3.71	0.90
There are other sales promotions of frozen foods such as discount, buy 1 get 1, etc.	3.71	0.89
The advertising and publicity of frozen foods are reachable to everyone in various media	3.71	0.89
Total	3.71	0.62
Total of 4Ps	3.72	0.38

prepurchase search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and postpurchase evaluation and the overall aspect of marketing mix. However, the result of data analysis by using the  $\chi^2$ -test of association between need recognition and each aspect of marketing mix showed that in the aspect of promotion, there was a relationship between need recognition and the other sales promotions since, the p-value (0.031) was less than the significance level (0.05). Besides, there was not a relationship between need recognition and other aspects.

Secondly, the result of data analysis by using the  $\chi^2$ -test of association between prepurchase search and each aspect of marketing mix showed that in the aspect of promotion, there was a relationship between prepurchase search and the overall aspect of promotion since the p-value (0.001) was less than the significance level (0.01). There was also a relationship between prepurchase search and the reachable advertising and publicity in various media since the p-value (0.000) was less than the significance level (0.01). In the aspect of price, there was a relationship between prepurchase search and the fair prices for the quantity of frozen foods since the p-value (0.028) was less than the significance level (0.05). Moreover, in the aspect of place, there was a relationship between prepurchase search and the various distribution channels since, the p-value (0.016) was less than the significance level (0.05) whereas there was not a relationship between prepurchase search and other aspects.

Thirdly, the result of data analysis by using the  $\chi^2$ -test of association between evaluation of alternatives and each aspect of marketing mix showed that in the aspect of product, there was a relationship between

evaluation of alternatives and the overall aspect of product since the p-value (0.041) was less than the significance level (0.05). There was also a relationship between evaluation of alternatives and the reputation of brand since the p-value (0.030) was less than the significance level (0.05) whereas there was not a relationship between evaluation of alternatives and other aspects.

Fourthly, the result of data analysis by using the  $\chi^2$ -test of association between purchase and each aspect of marketing mix showed that in the aspect of price, there was a relationship between purchase and the overall aspect of price since the p-value (0.046) was less than the significance level (0.05). In addition, in the aspect of promotion, there was a relationship between purchase and the reachable advertising and publicity in various media since the p-value (0.031) was less than the significance level (0.05) while there was not a relationship between purchase and other aspects.

Lastly, the result of data analysis by using the  $\chi^2$ -test of association between postpurchase evaluation and each aspect of marketing mix showed that in the aspect of price, there was a relationship between postpurchase evaluation and the fair prices for quality since the p-value (0.030) was less than the significance level (0.05) however, there was not a relationship between prepurchase evaluation and other aspects.

## DISCUSSION

In the overall aspect of each marketing mix, the factor that the consumers considered primarily buying decision

was product whereas the other factors that the consumers used in buying decision were promotion, place and price, respectively. In the aspect of product, the factor that the consumers considered primarily buying decision was the taste and nutrition of frozen foods whereas the other factors that the consumer considered were the various menus, the guaranteed quality and safety and the well-known brand of frozen foods, respectively. Generally, the consumers care the most of what they buy to eat for their health because food is one fundamental type of needs that everyone's survival depends on. They realize the importance of eating tasty food with nutrition due to the healthcare and well-being trends. For example, in the late 1990s, new heart-healthy sandwiches and later Atkins friendly wraps-bowing to the growing popularity of the carbohydrate-controlled Atkins diet were introduced by Subway, the ubiquitous American sandwich chain (Mullins and Walker, 2010). Most food producers and manufacturers are able to free many consumers from worrying about what nutrition is in their meal. A number of foods with good taste and nutrition are delightfully consumed. It is accepted that taste and nutrition are simply attainable ways to create satisfied customers. Poonsopin (2012) suggested in her research that frozen foods by EZYGO from Charoen Pokphand Group should be improved their taste to satisfy customers. In addition, it is a fact that taste is an integral element of product-related decisions. Krispy Kreme is another example of good taste that can help the firm to grow at 25% per year. Many customers are fanatics, raving about the taste and going way out of their way to find a Krispy Kreme location (Aaker, 2005). Recently, the firm has opened new branches in department stores and become quickly popular in Thailand.

In the aspect of place, the factor that the consumers considered primarily buying decision was frozen foods placed by retailers at Point of Purchase (POP) whereas the other factors that the consumer considered were the convenience, the reputation and the variety of distribution channels, respectively. It is undeniable that according to expanding many new branches, the retailers have category and space management to put a number of different products and brands in stores and sell them as much as they can. Nowadays, many frozen food producers and manufacturers sell their products through, the point of purchase displays. Boone and Kurtz (2002) explained that they directly benefit the retailer by creating special displays designed to stimulate sales of the item being promoted. Most consumers make decision to buy incidentally at the point of purchase without shopping lists. Some reports indicate that up 70% of purchase

decisions in grocery and drug stores are made in store aisles, often aided by the prompt of a POP attention grabber (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001). If the store places promoted products in the right space and position, it can increase a large sales volume. The right position of product that consumers make purchasing decision is at eye level because the products can be accidentally grabbed.

In the aspect of promotion, the factors that the consumers considered identically buying decision were the special sales promotions during holidays or festivals, the other sales promotions and the reachable advertising and publicity in various media. Because of advanced technologies, the internet and satellite dishes and cable TV as mass media become easily accessible and rapid communication tools that marketers use to persuade consumers to make a purchase. Sales promotions, advertising and publicity are three major aspects of mass communications. Mainly, their functions are to inform, to remind and to persuade consumers to try or buy products. Kotler and Keller (2012) asserted that after a 20 years decline in milk consumption among Californians, the advertising agency commissioned by the California Milk Processor Board (CMPB), Goodby, Silverstein and Partners, developed a novel approach to pitching milk's benefits, so the "got milk?" tagline reminded consumers to make sure they had milk in their refrigerators. In addition, the sales promotions, advertising and publicity are needed to attract new consumers, to keep present consumers and to snatch market share. In the \$85 billion promotion industry, marketers use all types of sales promotions, including games, contests, sweepstakes and coupons to persuade new and existing customers to try their products (Boone and Kurtz, 2002). Nunthasriwivat (2012)'s research revealed that most consumers who made decision to buy frozen food products preferred sales promotions such as discounts, premiums and collectible cards.

In the aspect of price, the factor that the consumers considered primarily buying decision was the fair prices for the quality of frozen foods whereas the other factors that the consumer considered secondly were the fair prices for the quantity of frozen foods and the clearly visible prices of frozen foods. It is true that the fair prices for quality influence distinctly consumers' evaluation of the purchase decision. A product's or service's performance value is the quality of physical outcome of using the product or service (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). When consumers buy frozen foods, they seek such performance values as quality of ingredients, flavors and features. Before setting price, the company must consider

target customers some of whom buy higher price because they make decision from value known as customer value. Mullins and Walker (2010) demonstrated that customer value is the customer's perception of what the product or service is really worth. Thus, price is consistent with the value and benefits that customers receive. The customers always expect the benefits from what they purchase, therefore they consider whether the quality of product is worth to purchase or not. If the quality of the frozen food meets what customer expected, the customer will feel satisfied and is willing to spend money purchasing. Charoenpibool's research suggested that frozen food products should show a clearly visible price tag on packaging in order that the consumer could consider quality at a reasonable price before the purchase decision. Nunthasriwivat's research showed that price tags including fair prices for products such as quantity and quality were pricing factors that encouraged consumers to make decision more quickly.

The results of relationship between the process of consumer buying decision and the marketing mix of 4Ps were severally discussed as follows:

The results found that in the overall aspect, the marketing mix of 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) did not influence the consumer decision making process consisting of need recognition, prepurchase search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and postpurchase evaluation. It is noticeable that the marketing mix used in Surapon frozen foods to form a marketing plan is still ineffective. Not only does the firm put an inconsistent marketing strategy into action but also operate it incompletely. The marketing strategy of the firm is also not cohesive in activities to capitalize its strengths, so it cannot deliver superior value to consumers. Surapon Foods had better develop effective marketing strategies to complete consumer needs and wants in order that the consumers decide to buy its products. It is obvious that the marketing mix is widely used in every part of businesses to put a defined strategy and implement it completely whereas many companies are unable to use appropriately the marketing strategy. In many instances, the organizations of frozen food products cannot plan effective marketing strategies. Poonsopin (2012)'s research revealed that the marketing mix comprising product, price, place and promotion did not influence the consumer's purchasing decision behaviour on EZYGO frozen food in Bangkok Metropolis. Because the company had no differentiation strategy, the consumers were not interested in the marketing mix of EZYGO for their buying decision. Jangkam's research pointed out that there was no relationship between the marketing mix of 4Ps and

the consumer buying decision of Prantalay frozen food products because the marketing strategy of Prantalay was not effective enough.

The results found that the sales promotions of frozen foods such as discount, buy 1 get 1 and others influenced consumers' need recognition. The sales promotions as marketing communication tools are able to lead consumers to realize the problem and remind them of a need. Sheth and Mittal (2004) asserted that marketing communications, product or service samples, window shopping and so on, have their utility precisely because they serve as problem-recognition stimuli. Apparently, the sales promotions can be an important factor of external stimuli that arouse consumer's desire for products. Kotler and Keller (2012) insisted that sampling has gained popularity in recent years companies such as McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks have given away millions of samples of their new products because consumers like them and they often lead to higher long-term sales for quality products. When Coca-Cola introduced its Surge soft drink to the marketplace, nearly seven million free samples were distributed (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001).

After the research findings, the fair prices for quantity, the various distribution channels, the reachable advertising and publicity in various media and the overall aspect of promotion influenced prepurchase search. It is assumed that the information of frozen foods about the fair price for quantity, the various distribution channels, the reachable advertising and publicity in various media and the overall promotion which the consumers search from recalling past experience in the memory and seeking in the external environment. If the consumer cannot retrieve enough from memory or is unsure of the credibility of the information in memory, he or she may have to engage in search of the outside environment for useful information on which to base a choice (Schiffman *et al.*, 2001). In today's digital world, the consumers can find the information of what they are interested to search on the internet. Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) explained that rather than visiting a store to find out about a product or calling the manufacturer and asking for a brochure, manufacturers' Web sites can provide consumers with much of the information they need about the products and services they are considering. On the internet, the consumers are able to compare the prices offered by frozen food vendors in the various distribution channels and access the online information of promotion, advertising and publicity.

However, the result showed that there was no relationship between product and prepurchase search. It is highly likely that the consumers are able to retrieve their



past information of taste and nutrition from their memory whereas they may not respond to their food sensation on the internet. Mullins and Walker (2010) asserted that sensory information such as touch and smell which can be important for evaluating foods and similar products, cannot be displayed on the Web. In Thai frozen food markets, there were a few famous brands (CP, S&P, Surapon and Prantalay) and popular menus which the consumers have already known; therefore, they can recall those brands and menus stored in their memory. Kotler and Keller (2012) insisted that the most effective information often comes from personal or experiential sources. In addition, the frozen food producers and manufacturers can assure consumers of such good quality and safety with GMP/HACCP/ISO that they feel safe from allergen contamination without searching for more information.

The result revealed that the overall aspect of product and the reputation of brand influenced evaluation of alternatives. The factors that consumers evaluate their choices to purchase were product attributes and brands in the evoked set, constituting the number of alternatives actually considered in making a purchase decision. Thai frozen food producers and manufacturers attempt to educate consumers about product attributes such as taste and nutrition, a variety of menu or guaranteed quality and safety that they believe as important benefits in evaluating a particular of product. Boone and Kurtz (2002) pointed out that TFC tries to influence consumers to purchase its Progresso brand of soup by asking them to consider taste rather than tradition as an evaluation criterion and induce them to expand the evoked set to include the product being marketed. Moreover, the product and brand perceptions are based on consumers' past experience stored in the memory. If they are satisfied with product and brand, they will always recall them to evaluate among alternatives. It is increasingly possible that Thai frozen foods can be customized to meet consumers' satisfaction with important attributes of product and well-known brand. For instance, McDonald's also has a food studio to satisfy consumers with developing foods for the local tastes of consumers in every region. Keegan and Green (2005) asserted that McDonald's builds its reputation by promising and delivering three things to customers: inexpensive food with consistent taste regardless of location; quick service; and a clean, familiar environment, so McDonald's frequently adapts its food to suit local tastes.

However, the result showed that the fair price for quantity, the various distribution channels, the reachable advertising and publicity in various media and the overall promotion were not associated with purchase stage in the

consumer decision-making process. Even though, the consumers do not consider them in the purchase decision, those factors are probably used for additional information to support alternative products and brands or for more knowledge about the other elements of marketing mix are related to products and brands. McDonald's can be an example of Hello Kitty Promotion. In celebration of Hello Kitty's 40th anniversary, McDonald's chain in Thailand introduced a series of Hello Kitty Bubbly when the consumers made a purchase of any 100 Baht meals. To celebrate a new millennium in Singapore, after McDonald's introduced a series of six wedding costumed Hello Kitty dolls with the purchase of its extra value meals in the first month, McDonald's had ranked in 20 million US dollar from the meal and Kitty set (Schutte *et al.*, 2004).

As a result of this study, the reachable advertising and publicity in various media and the overall aspect of price influenced the purchase behavior. The factors that the consumers decide to purchase Thai frozen foods are price, including advertising and publicity. Apparently, the consumers make a purchase due to the fair prices for quality and quantity, including the clearly visible price tags on the product. Most Thai frozen food producers employ reference prices, referring to the quality and quantity that the consumers expect to pay for and compare with the reasonableness of price. Kotler and Keller (2012) explained that fair price is what consumers feel the product should cost. It is also true that the price tags which the retailers display on the frozen food products describe the regular prices from the producers and the sale prices. Regardless of the particular reference price used, the idea behind all this is to encourage consumers to form more favorable impressions about the actual price's reasonableness (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001).

Moreover, the result showed that the reachable advertising and publicity in various media were associated with the purchase stage. It can be seen that the advertising and publicity in various media of Thai frozen foods are able to send the effective communication messages to stimulate consumers for the purchase decision. Evaluating the effectiveness of various media can involve looking at the response of different market segments to advertising, including images, attitudes and purchase behavior (Ferrell *et al.*, 2002). The strength of advertising and publicity also claims about the attributes of Thai frozen food products and brands which the consumers use for evaluating among alternatives. One reason the markers of Tic Tac breath mints chose actress Kimberly Quinn in its new commercials was that she reflects the attributes of the brand in terms of being friendly, approachable and trustworthy (Blackwell *et al.*,

2001). For another example, it has been suggested that red wine was preferred because red is an attribute of good luck for most Chinese and is the color of China (Schutte *et al.*, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

The fair prices for quality influenced postpurchase evaluation. We can see that the consumer satisfaction after buying depends on the perception of performance value. When they spend money purchasing frozen foods, they expect the good quality. To understand the concept of good quality, the consumer judges on product attributes: the quality of ingredients, flavors, colors, freshness and others. Aaker (2005) insisted that consumers tend to look for attributes that they believe indicate quality. The perceived quality truly reflects value which the consumer expects after buying. Many Thai frozen food producers promote themselves based on the quality of taste and nutrition. It is true that the consumers consider value of things other than taste and nutrition; the price, the freshness, the convenience, the time and effort required to buy products. In this case, even the best meal in a great restaurant can be viewed as a poor value if the price is too high in term of monetary and/or nonmonetary costs (Ferrell *et al.*, 2002). Sheth and Mittal (2004) demonstrated that price value is the fair prices and other financial costs incurred in acquiring the product. If the consumer perceives price value from the quality of the frozen foods as equitable performance expectation, they will be satisfied with the food and probably buy it again.

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