

THE IMPACT OF GENDER ON PURCHASE DECISION AND
BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF THAI CONSUMERS
ANALYSING CONSUMERS IN THAILAND

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Executive Summary

The study attempts to highlight the impact and influence of the demographic variable gender on the consumption and purchase of ready to eat products in Thailand. The growing trend towards Western-style eating habits for the Thai male and female consumers has brought an increase in the growth of the quick service industry in the region with an increase in the demand for ready to eat products such as fast food items, packaged snacks, diner specialities, chilled and frozen RTE products. The study attempts to analyze the relationship between **gGender** and psychographic variables including product attributes such as taste, price, convenience, brand and service quality to identify eating habits and buying behaviour trends for each gender type. The study makes use of in-depth interviews of Thai RTE consumers ~~along with empirical study~~ to highlight the particular impact of **gGender** on the consumption of RTE products.

21 Chapter 1: Introduction

2.1.1 Background and statement of problem

The study aims at analyzing the buying behaviour, user preferences and various factors that affect the purchase decision of Thai consumers with regards to Ready-to-eat Meals or Instant Foods. The term 'Ready-to-eat' encompasses a wide variety of packaged and instant or cooked meals that reflects convenience, economical prices and great taste. This research specifically makes use of information available to analyze consumer buying trends for fast food meals with emphasis on the gender impact on purchase decisions and consumption. The concept of ready to eat meals was originally developed and initiated to facilitate people who are too busy to prepare or cook their own meals including those who want to savour the taste of special delicacies that cannot be prepared at home.

The ready-to-eat meal packages such as fast food items and diner specialities largely attract people and busy professionals who are unwilling to cook their own food or those that are looking for convenience. In Thailand there is a huge demand for ready-to-eat meals especially fast food and restaurant specialities while households also tend to buy packaged meals frequently. Studies reveal that over the last twenty years there has been a gradual change in the lifestyle and living patterns of the Thai consumers and statistics reflect an increase in the purchase of packaged foods and ready to eat meals with fast food items leading the list. The product Chilled Ready-to-eat foods have also experienced a sharp increase in sales as reflected by its current value term that increased by 17% in 2008 amounting to 2.6 billion Thai Baht (Morse, 2009).

Changes in the lifestyle of Thai males and females over the years have brought about a change in the eating habits and food preferences of Thai consumers. This coupled with the growing forces of modernization and technological advancements have provided marketers to introduce new products in the market that cater to different segments of the target market. Globalization and technological growth have sparked changes in the lifestyle of people not only in Thailand but across the world. The Thai market has experienced this rapid change in terms of the evolution of consumer consumption trends, food suppliers, purchase behaviour and the consumers' health (Lovell, 2010).

Today, ready-to-eat meals including fast food and packaged goods are food becoming increasingly popular amongst both the Thai men and women of all ages with adults in the age range 18-35 reflecting more affinity for RTE products primarily due to their different taste, convenience and affordable price. The trend has become more common amongst the working class that represents professionals affiliated with business enterprises and other institutes comprising of both males and females. The variety available in ready-to-eat food products has provided the busy working class who do not have enough time to prepare their meals to enjoy the convenience and taste that comes with the RTE products (Kotler, 2000).

The rise in the RTE retail outlets and quick service industry in Thailand over the years has primarily been due to the consumers' inclination towards western food concepts and consumption trends. Today males and females in Thailand influenced by the western ways of convenient consumption and RTE adoption have given rise to a culture that reflects western-style eating habits. These trends are very dominant in Bangkok that is popular for the wide variety of fast food outlets and ready to eat products.

To better understand the effect and impact of gender on the consumption of ready to eat meals it is important to understand the various product attributes, marketing elements and the psychographic factors that contribute to the eating habits for males and females. By better understanding the relationship between these factors and each gender category the marketers can position their products in a more effective manner by incorporating patterns identified to cater to each market segment for males and females (Parry, 2001).

Studies reveal that attributes such as demographics and psychographics play an important role in the purchase process and decision-making for any product affecting consumer buying behaviour. For any product, attributes such as the price, brand, appeal, convenience and conformity to consumer requirements play an important part in the decision-making process for the consumer. In Thai ready-to-eat food products, psychographics and demographics play significant roles in determining consumer preferences and buying behaviour. For ready-to-eat or RTE meals such

attributes or product features would include the price of the product, its taste and appeal, convenience, packaging and the particular brand that the product belongs to. All these features affect the purchase process and decision-making dynamics for the Thai consumers (Parry, 2001).

Studies reveal that psychographics largely contribute to consumer preferences and consumption patterns when RTE meals are concerned. These include personal preference such as the need to spend leisure time by eating out in diners or at a fast food outlet or the need for ease and convenience that comes with RTE meals as they are less time-consuming because of being readily available. Statistics show that demographics tend to define strong buying patterns for such packaged foods and ready to eat meals in Thailand. These factors include age, gender, education and income level that also contribute to psychographic profiles.

Statistics reveal that teenagers and families with a strong education background and stable income source tend to buy more RTE meals and there is a high preference for fast food products and packaged goods amongst such households in Thailand. For the purpose of this particular research the focus is on studying the impact and effect of the demographic factor 'Gender' on the consumption of RTE meals. The research would focus on the preferences of the ready to eat meals with regards to males and females with an intent to study the underlying factors such as price, convenience, brand and individual preference of males and females for the consumption of such meals. The relationship between each of the contributing product attributes with Gender needs to be studied in detail to gauge the specific impact of gender on the buying behaviour and consumption patterns of Thai consumers with regards to the Ready to eat meals and packaged foods (Morse, 2009).

Changes in the lifestyle of Thai males and females over the years have brought about a change in the eating habits and food preferences of Thai consumers. This coupled with the growing forces of modernization and technological advancements have provided marketers to introduce new products in the market that cater to different segments of the target market. Globalization and technological growth have sparked changes in the lifestyle of people not only in Thailand but across the world. The Thai market has experienced this rapid change in terms of the evolution of consumer consumption trends, food suppliers, purchase behaviour and the consumers health (Lovell, 2010).

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Studies and researches conducted over the years to find out the significance of the demographic variable Gender on the selection and consumption of RTE food products reveal that the factor gender is not significant to the purchase, selection or re-purchase of RTE products as males and females both tend to consume RTE meals and fast food items in Thailand exhibiting little difference in the consumption patterns. The difference however lies in the psychographic factors and marketing mix elements that affect the purchase decision and consumption patterns for both males and females. For each gender category factors such as taste, price, place, packaging and convenience may hold different priority levels which then tend to translate into purchase decisions (Chitraporn, 2011).

To better understand the effect and impact of gender on the consumption of ready to eat meals it is important to understand the various product attributes, marketing elements and the psychographic factors that contribute to the eating habits for males and females. By better understanding the relationship between these factors and each gender category the marketers can position their products in a more effective manner by incorporating patterns identified to cater to each market segment for males and females (Parry, 2001).

The rise in the RTE retail outlets and quick service industry in Thailand over the years has primarily been due to the consumers inclination towards western food concepts and consumption trends. Today males and females in Thailand influenced by the western ways of convenient consumption and RTE adoption have given rise to a culture that reflects western style eating

habits. These trends are very dominant in Bangkok that is popular for the wide variety of fast food outlets and ready to eat products.

Studies reveal that the Thai spending on these ready to eat meals has increased over the years with the period 1999-2005 witnessing an increase of almost 40% on the consumption of RTE products. On average males and females tend to eat fast food meals and packaged foods several times during a week with average spending ranging between 100-200 Thai Baht and above. Research further reveals that RTE meals and fast food items such as fried chicken, pizza and French fries have become highly popular amongst teenagers and adults compared to the traditional rice and noodles (Kotler, 2000).

The impact of foreign fast food chains that deliver tasty and affordable RTE meals have had a considerable impact on the consumption preferences and eating habits for males and females in Thailand. Along with the price and taste for such meals comes ease and convenience that are two key motivating factors that drives consumption of such products across the market for both males and females. Stay-at-home females or ladies working in offices are both looking for less time consuming ready to eat meals for their families while males during their work routines find it easier to buy a quick RTE meal that is both tasty and economical (Lovell, 2010).

This trend has further been facilitated by the delivery services offered by many of the quick service outlets and fast food chains that deliver the RTE meals to the office or home in quick time saving the need for males and females to purchase raw materials, commute and prepare the meal. Men and women find it equally convenient to purchase fast food items including chilled and frozen ready to eat meals that just need to be warmed before consumption as they save time and money. The most important driver for such RTE products amongst both males and females is the taste of these RTE products and meals such as pizzas, burgers, chicken and frozen desserts that lure the consumers in each gender category to purchase the product (Parry, 2001).

In fact one aspect why gender is not significant to Fast food or RTE consumption in terms of gender differentiation is the fact that both males and females prefer the great taste and the variety that accompanies the ready to eat products providing for a product attribute that attracts both types

of consumers in almost equal proportions. There are variations in the type of RTE meals that are preferred by males and females individually along with other attributes that affect the purchase decision such as price and place. The relationship and significance of each of these factors will be studied in detail in the data analysis section to gauge the overall impact of gender on Thai food consumption (Parry, 2001):

Studies reveal that gender entails variety in the eating habits and consumption behaviour with most males and females preferring different types of food in RTE products. While most females prefer items such as salads and French fries most males prefer fried chicken and different flavoring for burgers and pizzas as opposed to females. The gender impact on RTE meals consumption is significant from the perspective of price and affordability as some studies reveal that more males eat out in diners as price of the RTE meals and fast food items is an attribute that has a strong relationship when it comes to the selection of products by males and females.

2.21.2 Purpose of study

The consumer demand and preference for Ready-to-eat meals has grown considerably in Thailand over the years primarily due to the introduction of inexpensive, tasty and convenient food items available for easy consumption. This coupled with the changing lifestyle trends of Thai Consumers with an inclination towards western consumption patterns has paved the way for retailers to introduce new RTE products in the market. The demographic factor ~~g~~Gender also has a significant role to play in the consumption and purchase of these RTE meals as males and females tend to exhibit different psychographic profiles and eating habits. The results obtained through the analysis of gender impact on RTE food consumption in Thailand can be used by marketers to cater to different target markets and segments.

2.31.3 Research objectives and question

The ~~particular-specific~~ research is ~~aimed-aim of the current study is at- to gain some~~ gaining an insight into the buying behaviour, individual preferences and consumption patterns of the Thai consumers with regards to RTE meals. ~~The research aims to -maintain~~ focusing on the impact of the demographic factor 'gender' on the consumption and purchase of such ready-to-eat meals.

Hence the research question developed is as follows:

How does gender affect the purchase decision and buying behaviour of Thai consumers with regards to Ready to eat Meals?

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The intent is to study in detail ~~some of the~~ key drivers that may motivate Thai consumers to purchase ready-to-eat meals with emphasis on the individual buying patterns exhibited by males and females. The ~~Gender~~ gender differentiation aspect will be studied by evaluating the relationship between the gender factor and marketing mix elements including psychographic factors to gauge the impact of each gender category on the purchase and consumption of RTE meals. The objectives of the research are hence highlighted below:

- To understand the growth and development of the Quick service industry in Thailand as a result of the change in consumption patterns and lifestyle dynamics for Thai consumers.
- To study the various drivers and key factors that have led to the increase in the preference and consumption of ready-to-eat meals by Thai consumers.
- To evaluate the ~~G~~gender differentiation with regards to the selection, purchase and consumption of ready-to-eat meals including the key drivers that motivate each gender category, males and females.
- For the purpose of assessing and evaluating the impact and effect of the demographic factor ~~g~~Gender in consumption of RTE meals, study in detail the contribution of psychographic factors such as personal preference, attitude and product perception including product features such as price, taste, convenience and brand to the consumption of RTE meals for each gender category.
- To better understand the significance of ~~G~~gender on consumption of RTE meals and its overall impact through the review of the relationship between the above highlighted factors or marketing mix elements and the demographic factor gender.
- To recommend suggestions for enhanced marketing productivity and product positioning through evaluation of the results derived by studying the impact of gender on the RTE consumption by Thai males and females highlighting further areas of additional research.

The particular research question is:

How does Gender affect the purchase decision and buying behaviour of Thai consumers with regards to Ready to eat Meals?

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

3

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of previous research on preferences to read-to-eat meals especially research targeted at the desired population being studied; Thailand. It introduces some significant background information for the case study that comprises the main focus of the research described throughout the thesis. It is imperative to establish a context of the literature review by first providing:

1. An explanation of its specific purpose for this specific case study
2. Comments on the previous treatment of RTEs, gender influence on preference to consume RTEs, and other psychographic factors that may influence its consumption.
3. The indication of scope of the work presented in this chapter.

The main aim of the literature review was to survey previous studies on RTEs consumption based on gender and other factors that may impact their increased consumption. This was necessary for scoping out the major data collection requirements for primary research to be conducted and it developed part of the emergent research design process (Denscombe, 2003). The approach adopted for this particular review finds its foundation in grounded research work. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2002), this approach is considered acceptable in terms of familiarizing existing research before collecting primary data; although it may contradict the advice presented in original grounded theory.

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1. Appreciating previous work in the field of interest served three purposes in the current study;
2. Providing direction in the construction of data collection tools; guarding against the risk of overload at primary data collection stages.
3. Understanding the findings from existing literature into a formal review aided in maintaining the current study's sense of direction and perspective.
4. Raised opportunity for comprehending a critical analysis of the actual *meaning* of the data collected when the study reached the stages of data analysis.

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A wide variety of secondary data references were used as the major bibliographic tools for recognizing relevant literature for review. Relevant publications were found in the literature for a great number of academic domains such as psychology, business studies, food technology studies, marketing studies, psychology, urban studies, and strategic management. Many of these publications take the form of research papers. Systematic literature searching led to key publications on RTFs and the psychosocial factors that give preference to their consumption. Studies were targeted that permitted analysis of psychosocial aspects, such as gender, to be included. The literature reviewed in this study is thematically analyzed to allow an organized way of grouping relevant material in addition to its scrutiny.

2.2 Relationship between Gender and Consumption

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In modern society enactments of *doing* gender, such as masculinity, femininity, manhood, womanhood, and sexuality are connected to how an individual presents themselves (Roberts, 1998). Often times, these individual presentations are influenced by cultural expectations of what is considered appropriate to the perceived gender identity. Consumption of diverse products and services contribute to the presentation of one's self and gender identity. All the way from the clothes, hairstyles, accessories, choice of food and other purchases or activities that a person engages in has the ever present factor of gender (Zayer et al., 2012). Due to this phenomena many firms have increased their desire to build a long terms consumer/brand relationship by comprehending the factors that influence them in such a crucial way. According to Fournier (1998) a primary feature of the consumer brand relationship is the self/concept link; the extent to which a

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brand delivers important identity concerns. Self-congruency theorists such as Rosenburg (1979); Ross (1971); and Sirgy (1986) have suggested that consumers have the tendency to purchase items and brands that are consistent with their person image. Kates (2002) argues that the most important and focal part of self-image was indeed an individual's gender identity.

Marketing practices have solicited the use of gender-self in a wide variety of markets. Marketers currently use sex as an important segmentation variable but also as a means to develop implicit meaning by taking into consideration gender related cues to a specific brand (Kidd and Nicholls, 1999; Zayer et al., 2012). The consumer's gender identity and sexual orientation has been used to target consumers in emerging gender market segmentations. For example, many marketers are pinpointing *metrosexual* individuals, this is defined as males who are heterosexual, hip, concerned with their appearance, and are in touch with their feminine side (Palan 2001). However studies such as Palan (2001) only report biological sex and treat the component as the sole determinant of gender-related behaviour. Ye and Robertson (2012) note that gender has become interchangeable with sex because such a dichotomous variable provides a comfort zone for researchers when it comes to measuring and interpreting the consumerist implications of gender. However, this kind of approach, such as that used in Palan (2001) overlooks the important differences between sex and gender and results in a bias research and distorted representations of complex gender related marketing.

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Early gender identity and consumer behavior research such as Bem (1981); Fischer and Arnold (1994); Palan (2001); and Spence (1993) suggest that gender identity plays a significant role consumer behavior ranging from assisting the individual in information processing to connecting the them to the rest of world; by-coordinating the individual's perceptions to developing attitudes about appropriate social behaviors/behaviours. Sirgy (1986) theorized that brand perceptions areperceptions are congruent to consumers' gender image; and gender-self can develop strong gender congruency effects, especially in terms of brand loyalty. According to a study conducted by Fry (1971) and Cathy and Mitchell (2003) consumers preferred goods or spokespersons that match their sense of femininity or masculinity; but not ~~simontaneous~~simultaneously, and these determinations have a tendency to be influenced by the gender of the spokesperson.

Psychological gender role as plays an important factor in a consumer's choice of products and brands. This varies from sex as a sole gender difference based on the premise the men are masculine and women are feminine. Evidence from studies such as Bem (1981), Braun and Traore (2015); and Rudrappa and Collins (2015) suggest that an individual's psychological gender identity is not necessarily parallel to their biological sex. According to Bem (1974) masculinity and femininity are orthogonal psychological traits and individuals will identify with each trait to varying degrees.

Craig and Liberti (2007); Kang (2003); and Massoni (20064) found in their studies that psychological gender, including masculinity and femininity, can impact a consumer's product and brand choices. Placed in a specific set of circumstances, such as gift shopping, psychological gender may explain a greater amount of difference in consumer behavior than sex as seen in Craig and Liberti's (2007) study. According to Bem (1974) when categorizing consumer behavior, feminine gender identity is guided by communal orientation while on the other hand masculinity is guided by an agency orientation. — ty their

2.3 Marketing Mix Theories and Gender Consumption

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The marketing mix theories are also important in analyzing how the male and female consumers tend to be affected by the highlighted factors and product attributes. The marketing mix generally consists of productive elements that can be utilized by the enterprise or firm to motivate the consumer and the purchase process in a positive manner. The intent of using the right combination of the marketing mix is to influence the product demand and the consumers into developing a positive brand image thereby enhancing the brand value and increasing the opportunities for repurchase of the particular product or service offered (Parry, 2001).

The marketing mix for ready to eat meals such as fast food items and packaged goods including diner specialties includes elements such as types of RTE meals consumed, restaurant types or brand, service quality, price, convenience, location and promotional stuff. Most ready to eat meals are recognized by their particular brand, packaging, unique taste and service quality that signifies

convenience hence consumers tend to relate to such marketing mix elements for these products. For such ready to eat products the marketing mix theories would focus on ensuring that the product delivered to the market or offered in the market is complete from the marketing mix perspective with regards to related attributes such as taste, price, place and convenience that cater to both males and females (Chitraporn, 2011).

The marketers would focus on incorporating specific food preferences for the products that are most likely to be repurchased by this consumer category which would include attributes such as taste and affordability while positioning for RTE products that fit the psychographic profile for women would include emphasis on marketing mix elements such as taste, restaurant and service quality. Better positioning of such ready to eat meals for both types of consumer types would entail focusing on introducing the right combination of marketing mix for males and females in the offered products. An analysis of the various attributes and product features of the RTE products and their relationship with the demographic variable can provide an insight into the right combination of marketing elements to use for each market segment (Lovell, 2010).

Packaging, design and the specific restaurant quality including brand name can significantly affect selection and purchase decisions for the ready to eat meals as both males and females tend to relate to such psychographic factors. The image projected by the attributes tends to develop the overall brand image for the specific product. Based on the hedonic or utilitarian sides for a consumer, both males and females would develop different perceptions and attitudes towards the RTE product with regards to its packaging, service quality and brand appeal. Repurchase for the same product is also facilitated when the consumer starts to recognize and develop a psychological relevance with the product that caters to his or her needs (Kotler, 2000).

For this reason many ready to eat retailers and fast food outlets tend to use strong, vibrant colours to signify their brand and make their product a standout in the market. Both males and females relate to these design characteristics and package features which help them in making repurchase decisions. This is especially true for the teenagers in Thailand who prefer eating a variety of fast food items and ready to eat meals that come as chilled or frozen packages. This is because both male and female consumers teenagers or adults develop an affinity for these products

that is not only facilitated by their eating preference but also by their psychographic relevance to product features such as packaging, labels, design and restaurant ambience (Parry, 2001).

Many males prefer to eat out in diners and quick service restaurants because they prefer the environment and ambience around the place. For many households in Thailand and females especially the attributes such as service quality and cleanliness are important drivers for making purchase decisions. Therefore many females prefer restaurants that focus on food hygiene and quality delivery. Price is also a fundamental marketing mix element that affects the males and females purchase decisions or buying behaviour when the ready to eat products are concerned as studies reveal that consumers in Thailand are price-sensitive with males being more conscious of the affordability aspect reflecting strong utilitarian values. For many male and female consumers especially household heads and parents if teenagers who prefer RTE meals this is a significant factor affecting buying decisions.

In Thailand fast food prices are relatively higher than the local food outlets however considering the income brackets of families and consumers that prefer to consume RTE products the marketers tend to define product prices that cater to consumer preferences. This is also exhibited by the increased amount of consumer spending on fast food items and packaged goods. For better positioning of the ready to eat products with regards to gender specific marketing the price is a factor that can further be optimized by marketers as it is a marketing mix element that is shown to be significant for the demographic variable gender (Parry, 2001).

Another marketing mix element that also holds significance when the consumer buying behaviour is concerned is the promotion factor. Promotion is considered as a marketing activity that disseminates the benefits and merits of the product being offered to the customer while providing him with an incentive in parallel to his purchase. Promotional offers can vary from company to company but most ready to eat firms and fast food outlets in Thailand make use of a wide variety of promotional features such as discount coupons, samples, premiums and refunds. The Thai male and female consumers are largely attracted by such promotions and advertisements which helps the marketers to get to know their customer base and their preferences

in a much better way and also enables established brands to stimulate and enhance their sales (Lovell, 2010).

Advertisement and promotional stuff tends to have a strong influence on the buying behaviour of the ready to eat product consumers. Studies reveal that the diners and places that offer discount coupons and meals at discounted prices or with free merchandise tend to attract more consumers. This is important with regards to both males and females who are equally influenced and attracted by lucrative promotional offers by quick service diners and fast food outlets.

Marketers also tend to focus on the channel distribution for the ready to eat products ensuring that the offered products are easily available to both males and females. It has been shown by studies that location is not significant for the variable gender as both males and females prefer eating at diners located near their offices or homes. In Bangkok for example ready to eat products are available throughout the place in large retail outlets while fast food chains are spread across the region to provide convenience to the consumer on the go or those looking for quick service. The option of quick service delivery at home or office is also provided to males and females for ease and convenient eating (Kotler, 2000).

Product Attributes affecting Conceptual Purchase Framework

Most of these marketing mix elements are part of the product attributes that have a significant impact on developing the psychographic profiles for various types of consumers. This is similar for the ready to eat meals where the consumers are affected by product attributes such as taste, price, convenience packaging and restaurant type. For both males and females these attributes strongly relate to their hedonic or utilitarian values thus contributing to their eating habits, buying behavior and consumption patterns. Most of the brand and market research focuses on the particular product attributes to further explore marketing prospects and segmentation.

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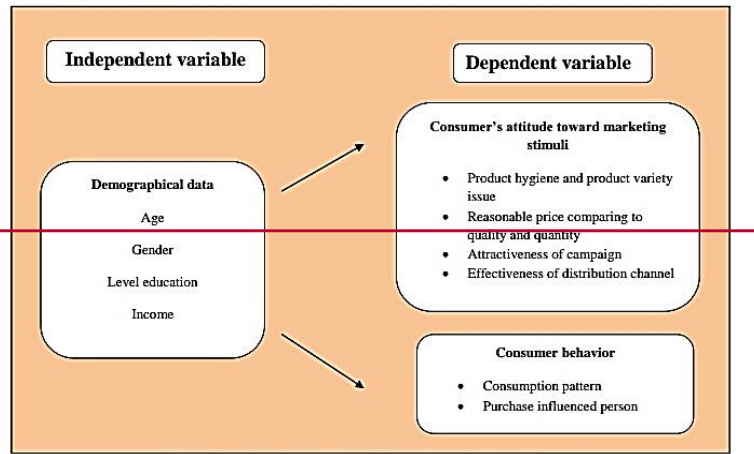


Figure 2: Consumer purchase framework - conceptual model (Chitraporn, 2011)

When gauging the impact and the particular effect of gender on the selection, purchase and the consumption of ready to eat meals and fast food products the product attributes such as taste, price, brand, packaging, convenience and place must be analyzed to assess the particular significance of the demographic variable gender on the consumption of RTE products. These product attributes include the marketing mix elements that have a strong impact on the purchase decision of the consumers and their food preferences. The product attributes for the RTE products are discussed in detail below to gain a better understanding of how each attribute contributed to the purchase decision for males and females in Thailand (Parry, 2001).

Taste

The taste for any food item is considered as the most important factor in determining its market value and prospective sales with regards to consumer liking and affinity for the specific product. For RTE or ready to eat products the taste is considered a key driver of consumption when gender is considered. As more males and females tend to select and buy ready to eat meals such as fast food products and packaged goods the main motivational factor behind the purchase and repurchase of these products is the unique and different taste associated with each type of these products that lures the Thai male and female consumers into buying these products (Kotler, 2000).

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The taste is a factor that has a strong relationship with the gender reflecting the significance of the factor gender on RTE food consumption. Many of the teenagers both male and female who tend to frequently purchase RTE meals from quick service restaurants tend to do so because of the great taste and colossal variety of RTE products in the market.

Price

The price for any product is the most important factor that determines customer affinity and repurchase probability. The more affordable a product is for a customer the more number of times it would be repurchased adding to the brand value. A prime reason for many of the Thai male and female consumers buying ready to eat products is the affordability aspect that attracts both types of consumers to buy fast food items and packaged foods. This is especially true for households and the working class that earn a reasonable amount of income every month averaged between 20,000 to 30,000 Thai baht.

Males and females whose earnings fall into this income bracket tend to purchase these RTE meals regularly as they are inexpensive and most of the males including women find it easy to spend money on the ready to eat meals. With males and females eating RTE meals many times during a week including households that consume ready to eat products many times in a month, the price is a key driver that motivates both types of consumers to purchase such products. The price is also shown to be significant for gender showing a strong relationship as price tends to affect purchase decisions for males and females separately as per studies (Lovell, 2010).

Convenience

The unique selling point or USP for any RTE product can be defined as convenience. The increased number of consumption of the ready to eat meals and the growth in the number of the quick service restaurants and fast food outlets has primarily been due to Thai consumers finding it convenient to buy ready to eat meals as they save time and money. For both males and females this is the driving factor for the purchase decision of consumers especially the working class and females at homes as this brings ease for them. Busy professionals do not have the time to prepare the food at home hence ready to eat meals come handy for both types of consumers (Kotler, 2000).

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The convenience that comes with the ready to eat products is shown to have a strong relationship with gender however the product attribute is not significant for gender when it comes to the selection and purchase of RTE foods. It is however a factor that most contributes to both males and females buying such meals and opting to repurchase the same products. The gender factor is not significant for the less amount of time associated with the ready to eat products as both males and females tend to prefer and buy RTE products for the ease and convenience that accompanies these food items.

Brand & Packaging

The visual appeal and packaging of any product will add to the positive perception of the customer for that product. Many customers often select products because of their packaging and attractive presentation. This is also considered a factor that adds to the brand image and brand value. For RTE products the brand image is further enhanced by the handy and light weight packaging that comes with most of the products (Parry, 2001):

Consumers tend to relate to particular brands mainly because of the unique taste and the packaging for the food item. Females usually prefer burgers and fries hence the consumption for brands that sell such items would be significant for these brands. For males items such as fried chicken and pizza would be more preferable and therefore consumption for such brands would be significant for males or consumers that tend to prefer such foods. Teenagers are also mostly attracted by the packaging and brand image of fast food items and the RTE products. Hence the brand and packaging also plays an important part in affecting the purchase and selection of RTE products for each consumer type. This is also reflected in the customer base for each particular brand as customer loyalty for a product would facilitate repurchase of that product (Kotler, 2000):

Place

This is also an important factor that motivates the consumers into buying the products as the Thai males and females are attracted by quick service restaurants and fast food outlets that are located near their homes and offices. Place is a significant marketing mix component that ensures effective product positioning. The construction of fast food outlets and retail points across Thailand ensure that the product is available to the target market adding to its value. Many males and females find it easy to buy RTE meals from nearby outlets as it caters to the attitudes and perceptions of many consumers looking for convenience (Parry, 2001):

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As per study conducted by Lovell (2010) to study the increasing ready to eat meals consumption by consumers in Bangkok, the economic growth and development exhibited by Thailand had been primarily due to the consumer spending on food especially fast food items and ready to eat meals. This growing trend amongst both male and female consumers can be attributed to the RTE product attributes highlighted earlier mainly taste, less preparation time, convenience, price and packaging including place. Studies reveal that these product attributes form a strong relationship with repurchase decisions for these products by the Thai consumers.

Statistical studies conducted by Lovell (2010) to analyze the relationship amongst the repurchasing and the product attributes for ready to eat meals suggest that taste is amongst the top independent factor for repurchase decisions while convenience, price and less preparation time follow close reflecting the strong impact of these product attributes on the buying behavior of Thai consumers and their decision to repurchase such products. Marketers can use the statistical evidence from such researches to design products for each consumer segment or target market accordingly and to better position their ready to eat products.

The factor price according to Lovell (2010) holds prime significance when product sales and driving customer buy-ins is concerned. Thai males and females that belong to the working class are the primary drivers for sales of such ready to eat meals including teenagers who prefer fast food items on a large scale. Females and males from the working category do not have enough time to prepare the meals and generally harbor a perception that caters to quick ready to eat meals as they provide ease and convenience along with affordability. For both male and female consumers in Thailand, price and convenience are important triggers of repurchase of RTE meals.

The trend for female consumption pattern has largely been affected by the increase in the number of females working at offices rather than staying at home confined to house chores. This transition of females moving from 'stay at home' ladies to 'working women' has brought a change in the eating habits of most females infusing the pattern into their families such as kids and spouses. Working women generally have less time to prepare meals at home hence buying ready to eat meals for their family is more convenient for them. Also the fact that household income dynamics

and earning head statistics that have witnessed a change over the years with females also contributing to family income has facilitated the change in consumption patterns for Thai consumers. For households parents that are influenced by the teenagers inclination towards fast food items and RTE meals now include both males and females who contribute to the increasing sales of RTE products (Kotler, 2000).

For males and females the age bracket 20-45 shows the highest inclination towards the consumption of fast food items and ready to eat meals that the marketers can target. Further with the growing Thai economy and household income there will be an increasing demand for RTE foods by both males and females but the marketers must position specific RTE foods based on psychographic profiles exhibited by males and females in order to cater to both types of consumers.

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2.4 Ready to Eat (RTE) Food Products

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The ready-to eat (RTE) market has seen a surge in interest by consumers due to the emergence of technology, steady economic growth, and cultural shift (Reed et al., 2003). Gradually convenience is considered one of the most important and desirable attributes in food product and has been translated into a great deal of product categories, including the highly sought after RTA described as a growth area in many markets, particularly that of developed countries such as the United States, the UK, and a large portion of Europe (Peeraput and Chaipoopirutana Sirion, 2016; Piaseu et al., 2004; Rodas-Moya et al., 2017). Several factors have surged its consumption, but the most notable is considered as changing consumer trends and lifestyles which have significantly contributed to development of read to eat meals. Reed et al. (2003) argues that most often, consumers want a meal to eat, or at most one that can be easily assembled at home, rather than opting out for ingredients to prepare and cook. Studies such as those of Kinsey et al. (1996) and Caraher et al. (1999) found a major amount of de-skilling, de-domestication, and redundancy of traditional cooking skills; although they have also noted an increased interest in food. In addition to fulfilling the requirement of convenience, there needs to be sensory appeal of products, in that it must taste good, or else there will be no purchasing activity (Piaseu et al., 2004).

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Studies, such as Parry (2001) reveals that attributes such as demographics and psychographics play an important role in the purchase process and decision making for any product affecting consumer buying behaviour. For any product, attributes such as the price, brand, appeal, convenience and conformity to consumer requirements play an important part in the decision making process for the consumer. In ready-to-eat food products, psychographics and demographics play significant roles in determining consumer preferences and buying behaviour. For ready-to-eat or RTE meals such attributes or product features would include the price of the product, it's taste and appeal, convenience, packaging and the particular brand that the product belongs to. All these features affect the purchase process and decision-making dynamics for the consumers (Parry, 2001).

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Chitraporn (2011) examines the significance of the demographic variable gender on the selection and consumption of RTE food products reveal that the factor gender is not significant to the purchase, selection or re-purchase of RTE products as males and females both tend to consume RTE meals and fast food items exhibiting little difference in the consumption patterns. The difference however lies in the psychographic factors and marketing mix elements that affect the purchase decision and consumption patterns for both males and females (Chitraporn, 2011). For each gender category factors such as taste, price, place, packaging and convenience may hold different priority levels which then tend to translate into purchase decisions (Chitraporn, 2011).

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In fact one aspect why gender is not significant to Fast food or RTE consumption in terms of gender differentiation is the fact that both males and females prefer the great taste and the variety that accompanies the ready-to-eat products providing for a product attribute that attracts both types of consumers in almost equal proportions. There are variations in the type of RTE meals that are preferred by males and females individually along with other attributes that affect the purchase decision such as price and place.

According to a statistical study by Morse (2009) teenagers and families with a strong education background and stable income source tend to buy more RTE meals and there is a high preference for fast food products and packaged good. For the purpose of this particular research the focus is on studying the impact and effect of the demographic factor 'gender' on the consumption of RTE meals. The research would focus on the preferences of the ready-to-eat meals with regards to males

and females with an intent to study the underlying factors such as price, convenience, brand and individual preference of males and females for the consumption of such meals. The relationship between each of the contributing product attributes with gender needs to be studied in detail to gauge the specific impact of gender on the buying behaviour and consumption patterns of Thai consumers with regards to the ready to eat meals and packaged foods; an aspect that was lacking in the study conducted by Morse (2009).

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As per studies Kotler (2000) conducted a study examining how consumers choose RTE products based on what gives them pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Kotler (2000) found that hedonic consumers tend to place more emphasis on restaurant and product features such as location, food taste and cleanliness or brand while utilitarian consumers focus more on price, affordability and quick service or convenience. Generally the utilitarian values for the ready to eat meals amongst consumers hold priority compared to hedonic values when selection and purchase of the ready to eat products is concerned as both males and females consider convenience and price to be the key drivers for their purchase decisions (Kotler, 2000). Using a larger data sample consisting of both males and female representation in equal numbers can provide an insight into the hedonic or utilitarian significance for each gender category (Kotler, 2000). However, Kotler's study does not provide significant insight into a consumer's decision making pattern as the methodology of the study used a questionnaire which provides relatively small insight into the purchasing process. However, the current study will look to overcome the issues in Kotler (2000) by focusing on an in-depth interaction with respondents.

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3.12.5 Content Review Thailand's Ready to Eat Market

According to Chitraporn (2011), people that lie within the same demographic category can reflect different types of psychographic profiles as individual preferences, attitudes towards a product and demographic attributes would differ for each individual. Thus both these aspects, demographics and psychographic are beneficial approaches that must be utilized for positioning and marketing products through a collaborative approach that makes use of both these approaches in the best way to enhance marketing efforts and their success. To analyze the gender impact on the buying

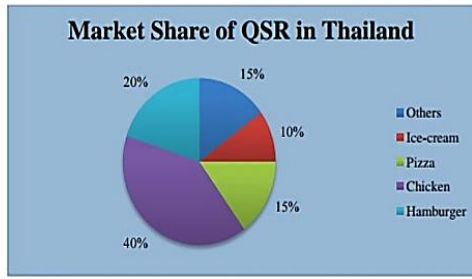
behaviour and consumption trends of Thai consumers for RTE foods it is hence necessary to study in detail the psychographic attributes and RTE product features that define purchase trends for males and females. The evaluation of such factors would also help in gauging the gender differentiation with regards to the RTE food products further providing an understanding of the segmentation and consumption percentage for each gender category.

Males and Females exhibit different individual preferences and eating habits reflecting variation in their buying behaviour and consumption trends as discussed in section 2.2. ~~Gender differentiation is a concept that is applied to various products such as clothing, cosmetics and hairstyles to better position products in the market. Similarly factors~~ such as preferences, psychographic, price and product features also largely affect the buying decisions for males and females when it comes to selecting, buying and consuming food especially ready-to-eat foods. The trend for food consumption has witnessed a change over the last two decades in Thailand with households and adults within the age range 18-35 showing a keen interest in purchasing fast food items and packaged meals. The quick service restaurants in Thailand have also grown since the inception of this consumption trend and affinity for RTE meals. Fast food is considered as one of the most distinctive example of the collaboration between people, technology, globalization and innovative concepts with retailers such as McDonalds, Burger King, KFC and Pizza Hut gaining immense popularity amongst the consumers in Thailand (Kotler, 2000).

The increase in the growth of fast food outlets, diners and RTE retailers in Thailand has infused a significant change in people's eating habits and food preferences. With the increase of new RTE retailers more males and females in Thailand are actively involved in the selection and consumption of fast food goods and ready-to-eat meals. The increase in demand for RTE meals by Thai male and female consumers is due to the marketing mix elements and psychographic factors that lure the males and females to purchase RTE meals.

According to a survey conducted by A.C. Nielsen, Chitraporn (2011) states that almost 75% of Thai consumers mentioned that the ready-to-eat meals are easy and convenient as there is no time consumed in preparation of these foods. While 83% of the consumers across the world staged that convenience and ease are the key drivers for the purchase and consumption of these fast foods and RTE meals. 40% of the Thai consumers said that ready-to-eat meals were inexpensive and

cheaper to purchase than the raw materials needed to prepare the meals. The second key driver for the consumption of such ready-to-eat meals was the economical costs associated with the products.



3.2

3.3 Figure 1: QSR Market Share (Chitraporn, 2011)

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The growth of new RTE retailers across Thailand and the variety of products they offer such as fast food meals, chilled RTE, packaged foods and frozen RTE have created an opportunity for economic growth and productive competition in the market. The fast food industry has the highest growth percentage in Thailand with males and females opting to buy Rte meals from fast food outlets and quick service restaurants rather than going to a fancy restaurant or preparing frozen or chilled RTE at homes. The market share for quick service industry market amongst the restaurant industry in Thailand is 20% as cited by PCOCI (Kotler, 2000).

The main factor that has contributed to the males and females opting to consume fast food is the demographics and the marketing mix elements according to Chitraporn (2011). Most makes and females in Thailand have adopted a consumption pattern much similar to the western consumers with preferences for convenient RTE meals increasing with time. Most of the consumers highly affected by this change include males and females ranging from teenagers to busy professionals working at enterprises. The study of the product attributes and psychographics would further provide an insight into the individual buying behaviour of males and females including its overall impact on RTE consumption.

2.5.1 Gender Impact and Marketing Mix

The increasing trend of Thai consumers towards the consumption of ready to eat meals such as the fast food items, frozen ready to eat meals and packaged goods enabled one to gain an insight into the particular factors that contribute to this trend and the inclination of the males and females towards the adoption of Western-style eating habits. Ready to eat meals are highly popular amongst the Thai consumers primarily because of their taste, affordability and the convenience factor that is associated with such meals. The attributes and features of such ready to meals are lucrative enough to attract the various types of consumers belonging to different age groups and educational backgrounds (Parry, 2001).

As highlighted earlier, the demographic factor gender tends to have strong relationships with various product attributes such as price, taste, place and convenience. Studies suggest that quick service restaurants and fast food outlets across Thailand provide an opportunity to male and female consumers to relieve themselves from hunger and the time-consuming preparation methods of self-cooked meals by enjoying the benefits of quick service meals at affordable costs. The particular product perception and attitudes towards the use of the ready to eat products for both the males and females would help provide a clearer understanding of the eating preferences and consumer behaviour (Lovell, 2010).

According to studies conducted to evaluate the attitudes and psychographic factors that lure males and females to dine out and consume ready to eat meals suggest that there are generally two factors or values that contribute to the product image or the attitude towards eating out. These two values are classified as hedonic value and utilitarian value where hedonic value is related to the emotional quotient or aspect such as feelings, mood and perceptions regarding the product whereas the utilitarian value is associated with the value of functional aspects or reasoning that is reflected by values such as price, feasibility, convenience and fullness (Chitraporn, 2011).

The attitudes of consumers with hedonic and utilitarian features are further explained by these studies by exploring factors such as price, place, taste, service quality and menu variety, brand value, promotional incentives and diner facilities through consumer responses. An analysis of such factors tends to further shed light on the hedonic and utilitarian values that are exhibited by each

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consumer type for a particular product. For any demographic variable people would tend to reflect different psychographic profiles with a mix of the hedonic and utilitarian values. These psychographic profiles for demographic factors are then used by marketers to position their products and cater to different market segments.

For an RTE or ready to eat products the males and females in Thailand exhibit different psychographic profiles with consumer behaviour for each gender category dependant on the highlighted hedonic and utilitarian values. For males these hedonic and utilitarian values project a strong affinity for ready to eat meals with values such as place, price and taste being largely significant while for females a different combination of both these value types would make up the psychographic profile leading to variation in the consumption pattern for RTE meals (Parry, 2001).

2.5.2 Product attributes affecting Conceptual Purchase Framework

Most of these marketing mix elements are part of the product attributes that have a significant impact on developing the psychographic profiles for various types of consumers. This is similar for the ready to eat meals where the consumers are affected by product attributes such as taste, price, convenience packaging and restaurant type. For both males and females these attributes strongly relate to their hedonic or utilitarian values thus contributing to their eating habits, buying behavior and consumption patterns. Most of the brand and market research focuses on the particular product attributes to further explore marketing prospects and segmentation.

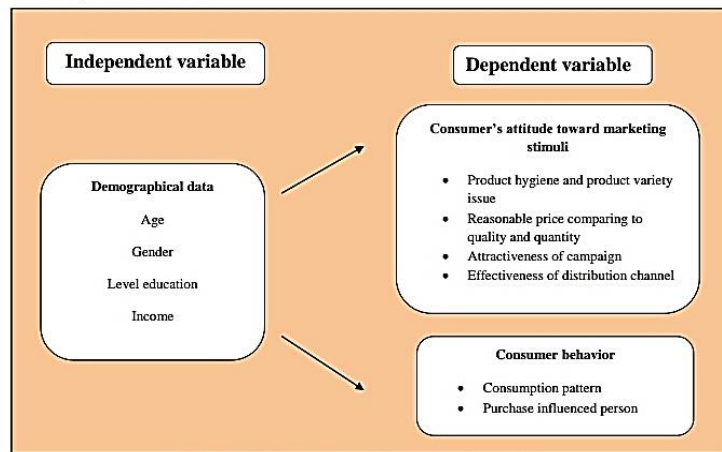


Figure 2: Consumer purchase framework - conceptual model (Chitraporn, 2011)

When gauging the impact and the particular effect of gender on the selection, purchase and the consumption of ready to eat meals and fast food products the product attributes such as taste, price, brand, packaging, convenience and place must be analyzed to assess the particular significance of the demographic variable gender on the consumption of RTE products. These product attributes include the marketing mix elements that have a strong impact on the purchase decision of the consumers and their food preferences. The product attributes for the RTE products are discussed in detail below to gain a better understanding of how each attribute contributed to the purchase decision for males and females in Thailand (Parry, 2001).

2.5.2.1 Taste

The taste for any food item is considered as the most important factor in determining its market value and prospective sales with regards to consumer liking and affinity for the specific product. For RTE or ready to eat products the taste is considered a key driver of consumption when gender is considered. As more males and females tend to select and buy ready to eat meals such as fast food products and packaged goods the main motivational factor behind the purchase and repurchase of these products is the unique and different taste associated with each type of these products that lures the Thai male and female consumers into buying these products (Kotler, 2000).

The taste is a factor that has a strong relationship with the gender reflecting the significance of the factor gender on RTE food consumption. Many of the teenagers both male and female who tend to frequently purchase RTE meals from quick service restaurants tend to do so because of the great taste and colossal variety of RTE products in the market.

2.5.2.2 Price

The price for any product is the most important factor that determines customer affinity and repurchase probability. The more affordable a product is for a customer the more number of times it would be repurchased adding to the brand value. A prime reason for many of the Thai male and female consumers buying ready to eat products is the affordability aspect that attracts both types of consumers to buy fast good items and packaged foods. This is especially true for households and the working class that earn a reasonable amount of income every month averaged between 20,000 to 30,000 Thai baht.

Males and females whose earnings fall into this income bracket tend to purchase these RTE meals regularly as they are inexpensive and most of the males including women find it easy to spend money on the ready to eat meals. With males and females eating RTE meals many times during a week including households that consume ready to eat products many times in a month, the price is a key driver that motivates both types of consumers to purchase such products. The price is also shown to be significant for gender showing a strong relationship as price tends to affect purchase decisions for males and females separately as per studies (Lovell, 2010).

2.5.2.3 Convenience

The unique selling point or USP for any RTE product can be defined as convenience. The increased number of consumption of the ready to eat meals and the growth in the number of the quick service restaurants and fast food outlets has primarily been due to Thai consumes finding it convenient to buy ready to eat meals as they save time and money. For both males and females this is the driving factor for the purchase decision of consumers especially the working class and females at homes as this brings ease for them. Busy professionals do not have the time to prepare the food at home hence ready to eat meals come handy for both types of consumers (Kotler, 2000).

The convenience that comes with the ready to eat products is shown to have a strong relationship with gender however the product attribute is not significant for gender when it comes to the selection and purchase of RTE foods. It is however a factor that most contributes to both males and females buying such meals and opting to repurchase the same products. The gender factor is not significant for the less amount of time associated with the ready to eat products as both males and females tend to prefer and buy RTE products for the ease and convenience that accompanies these food items.

2.5.2.4 Brand & Packaging

The visual appeal and packaging of any product will add to the positive perception of the customer for that product. Many customers often select products because of their packaging and attractive presentation. This is also considered a factor that adds to the brand image and brand value. For RTE products the brand image is further enhanced by the handy and light weight packaging that comes with most of the products (Parry, 2001).

Consumers tend to relate to particular brands mainly because of the unique taste and the packaging for the food item. Females usually prefer burgers and fries hence the consumption for brands that sell such items would be significant for these brands. For males items such as fried chicken and pizza would be more preferable and therefore consumption for such brands would be significant for males or consumers that tend to prefer such foods. Teenagers are also mostly attracted by the packaging and brand image of fast food items and the RTE products. Hence the brand and packaging also plays an important part in affecting the purchase and selection of RTE products for each consumer type. This is also reflected in the customer base for each particular brand as customer loyalty for a product would facilitate repurchase of that product (Kotler, 2000).

2.5.2.5 Place

This is also an important factor that motivates the consumers into buying the products as the Thai males and females are attracted by quick service restaurants and fast food outlets that are located near their homes and offices. Place is a significant marketing mix component that ensures effective product positioning. The construction of fast food outlets and retail points across Thailand

ensure that the product is available to the target market adding to its value. Many males and females find it easy to buy RTE meals from nearby outlets as it caters to the attitudes and perceptions of many consumers looking for convenience (Parry, 2001).

As per study conducted by Lovell (2010) to study the increasing ready to eat meals consumption by consumers in Bangkok, the economic growth and development exhibited by Thailand had been primarily due to the consumer spending on food especially fast food items and ready to eat meals. This growing trend amongst both male and female consumers can be attributed to the RTE product attributes highlighted earlier mainly taste, less preparation time, convenience, price and packaging including place. Studies reveal that these product attributes form a strong relationship with re-purchase decisions for these products by the Thai consumers.

Statistical studies conducted by Lovell (2010) to analyze the relationship amongst the repurchasing and the product attributes for ready to eat meals suggest that taste is amongst the top independent factor for repurchase decisions while convenience, price and less preparation time follow close reflecting the strong impact of these product attributes on the buying behavior of Thai consumers and their decision to repurchase such products. Marketers can use the statistical evidence from such researches to design products for each consumer segment or target market accordingly and to better position their ready to eat products.

The factor price according to Lovell (2010) holds prime significance when product sales and driving customer buy-ins is concerned. Thai males and females that belong to the working class are the primary drivers for sales of such ready to eat meals including teenagers who prefer fast food items on a large scale. Females and males from the working category do not have enough time to prepare the meals and generally harbor a perception that caters to quick ready to eat meals as they provide ease and convenience along with affordability. For both male and female consumers in Thailand, price and convenience are important triggers of repurchase of RTE meals.

The trend for female consumption pattern has largely been affected by the increase in the number of females working at offices rather than staying at home confined to house chores. This transition of females moving from 'stay at home' ladies to 'working women' has brought a change in the

eating habits of most females infusing the pattern into their families such as kids and spouses. Working women generally have less time to prepare meals at home hence buying ready to eat meals for their family is more convenient for them. Also the fact that household income dynamics and earning head statistics that have witnessed a change over the years with females also contributing to family income has facilitated the change in consumption patterns for Thai consumers. For households parents that are influenced by the teenager's inclination towards fast food items and RTE meals now include both males and females who contribute to the increasing sales of RTE products (Kotler, 2000).

For males and females the age bracket 20-45 shows the highest inclination towards the consumption of fast food items and ready to eat meals that the marketers can target. Further with the growing Thai economy and household income there will be an increasing demand for RTE foods by both males and females but the marketers must position specific RTE foods based on psychographic profiles exhibited by males and females in order to cater to both types of consumers.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature review assessed a diverse amount of literature pertaining to the topics of ready to eat products, their markets and particularly the Thai market. The review was also able to provide insight to how gender may play a role in the consumption of products. Various studies such as Kotler (2002) and Parry (2001) will play a significant role in developing the methodology of the current study which is presented in the following chapter. The issues, bias, and gaps found in a majority of the literature assessed are attempted to be filled with the current study, making it a significant contribution to this field of study. -various

~~As per studies hedonic consumers tend to place more emphasis on restaurant and product features such as location, food taste and cleanliness or brand while utilitarian consumers focus more on price, affordability and quick service or convenience. Generally the utilitarian values for the ready to eat meals amongst consumers hold priority compared to hedonic values when selection and purchase of the ready to eat products is concerned as both males~~

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~~and females consider convenience and price to be the key drivers for their purchase decisions. Using a larger data sample consisting of both males and female representation in equal numbers can provide an insight into the hedonic or utilitarian significance for each gender category (Kotler, 2000).~~

Marketing Mix

~~The marketing mix theories are also important in analyzing how the male and female consumers tend to be affected by the highlighted factors and product attributes. The marketing mix generally consists of productive elements that can be utilized by the enterprise or firm to motivate the consumer and the purchase process in a positive manner. The intent of using the right combination of the marketing mix is to influence the product demand and the consumers into developing a positive brand image thereby enhancing the brand value and increasing the opportunities for repurchase of the particular product or service offered (Parry, 2001).~~

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~~The marketing mix for ready to eat meals such as fast food items and packaged goods including diner specialities includes elements such as types of RTE meals consumed, restaurant types or brand, service quality, price, convenience, location and promotional stuff. Most ready to eat meals are recognized by their particular brand, packaging, unique taste and service quality that signifies convenience hence consumers tend to relate to such marketing mix elements for these products. For such ready to eat products the marketing mix theories would focus on ensuring that the product delivered to the market or offered in the market is complete from the marketing mix perspective with regards to related attributes such as taste, price, place and convenience that cater to both males and females (Chitraporn, 2011).~~

~~The marketers would focus on incorporating specific food preferences for the products that are most likely to be repurchased by this consumer category which would include attributes such as taste and affordability while positioning for RTE products that fit the psychographic profile for women would include emphasis on marketing mix elements such as taste,~~

restaurant and service quality. Better positioning of such ready to eat meals for both types of consumer types would entail focusing on introducing the right combination of marketing mix for males and females in the offered products. An analysis of the various attributes and product features of the RTE products and their relationship with the demographic variable can provide an insight into the right combination of marketing elements to use for each market segment (Lovell, 2010).

Packaging, design and the specific restaurant quality including brand name can significantly affect selection and purchase decisions for the ready to eat meals as both males and females tend to relate to such psychographic factors. The image projected by the attributes tends to develop the overall brand image for the specific product. Based on the hedonic or utilitarian sides for a consumer, both males and females would develop different perceptions and attitudes towards the RTE product with regards to its packaging, service quality and brand appeal. Repurchase for the same product is also facilitated when the consumer starts to recognize and develop a psychological relevance with the product that caters to his or her needs (Kotler, 2000).

For this reason many ready to eat retailers and fast food outlets tend to use strong, vibrant colours to signify their brand and make their product a standout in the market. Both males and females relate to these design characteristics and package features which help them in making repurchase decisions. This is especially true for the teenagers in Thailand who prefer eating a variety of fast food items and ready to eat meals that come as chilled or frozen packages. This is because both male and female consumers teenagers or adults develop an affinity for these products that is not only facilitated by their eating preference but also by their psychographic relevance to product features such as packaging, labels, design and restaurant ambience (Parry, 2001).

Many males prefer to eat out in diners and quick service restaurants because they prefer the environment and ambience around the place. For many households in Thailand and females especially the attributes such as service quality and cleanliness are important drivers for making purchase decisions. Therefore many females prefer restaurants that focus on food

hygiene and quality delivery. Price is also a fundamental marketing mix element that affects the males and females purchase decisions or buying behaviour when the ready to eat products are concerned as studies reveal that consumers in Thailand are price-sensitive with males being more conscious of the affordability aspect reflecting strong utilitarian values. For many male and female consumers especially household heads and parents if teenagers who prefer Rte meals this is a significant factor affecting buying decisions.

In Thailand fast food prices are relatively higher than the local food outlets however considering the income brackets of families and consumers that prefer to consume RTE products the marketers tend to define product prices that cater to consumer preferences. This is also exhibited by the increased amount of consumer spending on fast food items and packaged goods. For better positioning of the ready to eat products with regards to gender specific marketing the price is a factor that can further be optimized by marketers as it is a marketing mix element that is shown to be significant for the demographic variable gender (Parry, 2001).

Another marketing mix element that also holds significance when the consumer buying behaviour is concerned is the promotion factor. Promotion is considered as a marketing activity that disseminates the benefits and merits of the product being offered to the customer while providing him with an incentive in parallel to his purchase. Promotional offers can vary from company to company but most ready to eat firms and fast food outlets in Thailand make use of a wide variety of promotional features such as discount coupons, samples, premiums and refunds. The Thai male and female consumers are largely attracted by such promotions and advertisements which helps the marketers to get to know their customer base and their preferences in a much better way and also enables established brands to stimulate and enhance their sales (Lovell, 2010).

Advertisement and promotional stuff tends to have a strong influence on the buying behaviour of the ready to eat product consumers. Studies reveal that the diners and places that offer discount coupons and meals at discounted prices or with free merchandise tend to attract more consumers. This is important with regards to both males and females who are

equally influenced and attracted by lucrative promotional offers by quick service diners and fast food outlets.

Marketers also tend to focus on the channel distribution for the ready to eat products ensuring that the offered products are easily available to both males and females. It has been shown by studies that location is not significant for the variable gender as both males and females prefer eating at diners located near their offices or homes. In Bangkok for example ready to eat products are available throughout the place in large retail outlets while fast food chains are spread across the region to provide convenience to the consumer on the go or those looking for quick service. The option of quick service delivery at home or office is also provided to males and females for ease and convenient eating (Kotler, 2000).

Product Attributes affecting Conceptual Purchase Framework

Most of these marketing mix elements are part of the product attributes that have a significant impact on developing the psychographic profiles for various types of consumers. This is similar for the ready to eat meals where the consumers are affected by product attributes such as taste, price, convenience packaging and restaurant type. For both males and females these attributes strongly relate to their hedonic or utilitarian values thus contributing to their eating habits, buying behavior and consumption patterns. Most of the brand and market research focuses on the particular product attributes to further explore marketing prospects and segmentation.

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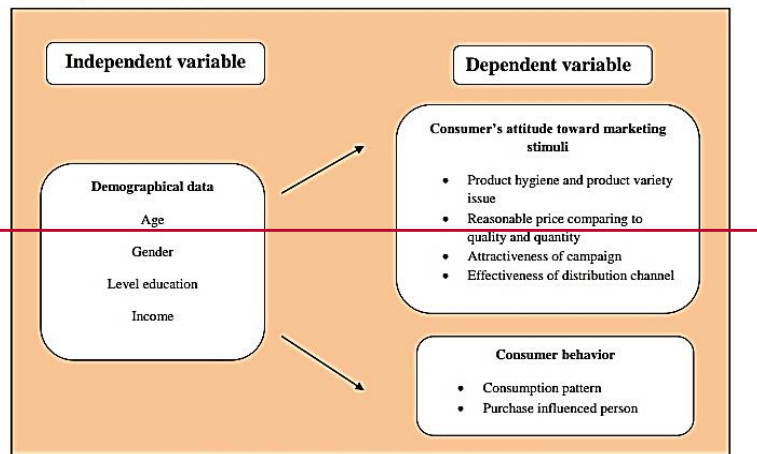


Figure 2: Consumer purchase framework – conceptual model (Chitraporn, 2014)

When gauging the impact and the particular effect of gender on the selection, purchase and the consumption of ready to eat meals and fast food products the product attributes such as taste, price, brand, packaging, convenience and place must be analyzed to assess the particular significance of the demographic variable Gender gender on the consumption of RTE products. These product attributes include the marketing mix elements that have a strong impact on the purchase decision of the consumers and their food preferences. The product attributes for the RTE products are discussed in detail below to gain a better understanding of how each attribute contributed to the purchase decision for males and females in Thailand (Parry, 2001).

Taste

The taste for any food item is considered as the most important factor in determining its market value and prospective sales with regards to consumer liking and affinity for the specific product. For RTE or ready to eat products the taste is considered a key driver of consumption when gender is considered. As more males and females tend to select and buy ready to eat meals such as fast food products and packaged goods the main motivational factor behind the purchase and repurchase of these products is the unique and different taste

associated with each type of these products that lures the Thai male and female consumers into buying these products (Kotler, 2000).

The taste is a factor that has a strong relationship with the gender reflecting the significance of the factor gender on RTE food consumption. Many of the teenagers both male and female who tend to frequently purchase RTE meals from quick service restaurants tend to do so because of the great taste and colossal variety of RTE products in the market.

Price

The price for any product is the most important factor that determines customer affinity and repurchase probability. The more affordable a product is for a customer the more number of times it would be repurchased adding to the brand value. A prime reason for many of the Thai male and female consumers buying ready to eat products is the affordability aspect that attracts both types of consumers to buy fast good items and packaged foods. This is especially true for households and the working class that earn a reasonable amount of income every month averaged between 20,000 to 30,000 Thai baht.

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Males and females whose earnings fall into this income bracket tend to purchase these RTE meals regularly as they are inexpensive and most of the males including women find it easy to spend money on the ready to eat meals. With males and females eating RTE meals many times during a week including households that consume ready to eat products many times in a month, the price is a key driver that motivates both types of consumers to purchase such products. The price is also shown to be significant for gender showing a strong relationship as price tends to affect purchase decisions for males and females separately as per studies (Lovell, 2010).

Convenience

The unique selling point or USP for any RTE product can be defined as convenience. The increased number of consumption of the ready to eat meals and the growth in the number of the quick service restaurants and fast food outlets has primarily been due to Thai consumers finding it convenient to buy ready to eat meals as they save time and money. For both males

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and females this is the driving factor for the purchase decision of consumers especially the working class and females at homes as this brings ease for them. Busy professionals do not have the time to prepare the food at home hence ready to eat meals come handy for both types of consumers (Kotler, 2000).

The convenience that comes with the ready to eat products is shown to have a strong relationship with gender however the product attribute is not significant for gender when it comes to the selection and purchase of RTE foods. It is however a factor that most contributes to both males and females buying such meals and opting to repurchase the same products. The gender factor is not significant for the less amount of time associated with the ready to eat products as both males and females tend to prefer and buy RTE products for the ease and convenience that accompanies these food items.

Brand & Packaging

The visual appeal and packaging of any product will add to the positive perception of the customer for that product. Many customers often select products because of their packaging and attractive presentation. This is also considered a factor that adds to the brand image and brand value. For RTE products the brand image is further enhanced by the handy and light weight packaging that comes with most of the products (Parry, 2001).

Consumers tend to relate to particular brands mainly because of the unique taste and the packaging for the food item. Females usually prefer burgers and fries hence the consumption for brands that sell such items would be significant for these brands. For males items such as fried chicken and pizza would be more preferable and therefore consumption for such brands would be significant for males or consumers that tend to prefer such foods. Teenagers are also mostly attracted by the packaging and brand image of fast food items and the RTE products. Hence the brand and packaging also plays an important part in affecting the purchase and selection of RTE products for each consumer type. This is also reflected in the customer base for each particular brand as customer loyalty for a product would facilitate repurchase of that product (Kotler, 2000).

Place

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~~This is also an important factor that motivates the consumers into buying the products as the Thai males and females are attracted by quick service restaurants and fast food outlets that are located near their homes and offices. Place is a significant marketing mix component that ensures effective product positioning. The construction of fast food outlets and retail points across Thailand ensure that the product is available to the target market adding to its value. Many males and females find it easy to buy RTE meals from nearby outlets as it caters to the attitudes and perceptions of many consumers looking for convenience (Parry, 2001).~~

~~As per study conducted by Lovell (2010) to study the increasing ready to eat meals consumption by consumers in Bangkok, the economic growth and development exhibited by Thailand had been primarily due to the consumer spending on food especially fast food items and ready to eat meals. This growing trend amongst both male and female consumers can be attributed to the RTE product attributes highlighted earlier mainly taste, less preparation time, convenience, price and packaging including place. Studies reveal that these product attributes form a strong relationship with re-purchase decisions for these products by the Thai consumers.~~

~~Statistical studies conducted by Lovell (2010) to analyze the relationship amongst the repurchasing and the product attributes for ready to eat meals suggest that taste is amongst the top independent factor for repurchase decisions while convenience, price and less preparation time follow close reflecting the strong impact of these product attributes on the buying behavior of Thai consumers and their decision to repurchase such products. Marketers can use the statistical evidence from such researches to design products for each consumer segment or target market accordingly and to better position their ready to eat products.~~

~~The factor price according to Lovell (2010) holds prime significance when product sales and driving customer buy-ins is concerned. Thai males and females that belong to the working class are the primary drivers for sales of such ready to eat meals including teenagers who prefer fast food items on a large scale. Females and males from the working category do not~~

have enough time to prepare the meals and generally harbor a perception that caters to quick ready-to-eat meals as they provide ease and convenience along with affordability. For both male and female consumers in Thailand, price and convenience are important triggers of repurchase of RTE meals.

The trend for female consumption pattern has largely been affected by the increase in the number of females working at offices rather than staying at home confined to house chores. This transition of females moving from 'stay at home' ladies to 'working women' has brought a change in the eating habits of most females infusing the pattern into their families such as kids and spouses. Working women generally have less time to prepare meals at home hence buying ready-to-eat meals for their family is more convenient for them. Also the fact that household income dynamics and earning head statistics that have witnessed a change over the years with females also contributing to family income has facilitated the change in consumption patterns for Thai consumers. For households parents that are influenced by the teenagers inclination towards fast food items and RTE meals now include both males and females who contribute to the increasing sales of RTE products (Kotler, 2000).

For males and females the age bracket 20-45 shows the highest inclination towards the consumption of fast food items and ready-to-eat meals that the marketers can target. Further with the growing Thai economy and household income there will be an increasing demand for RTE foods by both males and females but the marketers must position specific RTE foods based on psychographic profiles exhibited by males and females in order to cater to both types of consumers.

Conclusion

43 Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview of Methodology-Introduction

The current study aims to highlight to a small extent the consumer buying behavior and consumption trends that when it comes to picking and purchasing different kinds of ready to eat meals for a small sample of Thai male and female consumers. The purpose of the study is to set preliminary research using a different approach in understanding the role that gender plays on decision making for Thai consumers. The study looks to focus on a small set of preferences of male and female consumers on the purchase and use of RTE products available in the Thai market. A gap pinpointed from the literature review found that most studies used only quantitative techniques to assess the preferences, purchasing behavior, and the role of gender in the RTE product market for—es

The particular research aims at highlighting the consumer buying behavior and consumption trends with regards to the choice and purchase of different types of Ready to eat meals for Thai male and female consumers. The intent is to understand and find out the impact of gender on the decision making process for Thai consumers with a focus on the individual preferences of male and female buyers on the purchase and usage of ready to eat products in the market. To gather substantial qualitative and quantitative data for the purpose of meeting the research objectives highlighted in the previous section 1.3. The current research uses the interpretivist paradigm as its research approach which influences the data collection, sampling, and data selection strategy. It is important that the research methodology employ comprehensive data collection techniques and

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analytics procedure to further provide justified responses to the research question. The research methodology therefore makes use of both the primary and secondary research methods to collect sufficient information for thorough analysis. The primary method utilised is the in-depth interview of Thai consumers to gain an understanding of the consumer buying behavior while the secondary research method includes literature review and case study analysis.

4.13.2 Research procedures A Design approach and Objectives

The research involves detailed primary and secondary research methods and their application to collect required information that would facilitate the development of productive and insightful inferences related to the research topic. For this study information regarding the buying trends for ready to eat meals and packaged goods for Thai male and female consumers need to be obtained from the various online and published sources including patterns that correspond to the psychographic profile for each gender category. The product attributes such as taste, price, brand, convenience and brand need to be studied in relation to each gender category including patterns that exhibit psychographics such as personal preferences and individual product perceptions for males and females. The detailed methodology objectives for this research are hence highlighted below:

- To collect sufficient information to understand the growth trends for ready to eat meals and quick service industry products in Thailand including the patterns that reflect an increase in the demand for RTE foods by Thai consumers.
- To collect adequate data using both qualitative methods and quantitative from different sources specifically in-depth interviews for evaluating the key drivers and marketing mix factors that contribute to the increasing demand for ready to eat products by Thai male and female consumers and that affect the decision making process for the product.
- To gather statistical evidence from online and published sources including information from existing researches conducted for the same purpose in order to evaluate the buying patterns of Thai male and female consumers with regards to RTE foods for the purpose of analyzing the impact of gender on Thai RTE foods consumption.

- To collect sufficient qualitative ~~and quantitative~~ data regarding the psychographic factors highlighted earlier including the RTE product attributes in relation to buying trends for Thai male and female consumers.
- To collect information from online and published sources regarding the relationship between the above highlighted pscographic/product based factors and Gender variable for the Thai consumers.
- To collect relevant information in order to provide recommendations for product marketing and positioning derived through data analysis while highlighting the areas for additional research.

Based on the objectives outlined above, the most suitable strategy for conducting research is will be based on the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is an approach to social science that opposes the positivism of natural science. The research approach assumes that reality as we know it is constructed inter-subjectively through the meanings and comprehension developed socially and experientially (Angen, 2000). Interpretivism is rooted in the premise that there is no separation of subject and object, meaning that a researcher’s values are inherent in all phases of the process (Angen, 2000). Due to this, Interpretivism approaches are heavily relied on naturalistic methods such as interviewing and other qualitative approaches (Bulmer, 1986). Such as method maintains an adequate form of dialog between the research and those with whom interaction is taking place in order construct a meaningful reality. Typically qualitative methods are used under such a paradigm.

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3.3 Qualitative Data Collection Methods

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The chosen form of conducting the current study is using of semi-structured in-depth interviews. This particular methods allows for a researcher to gather highly detailed information or knowledge from a subject that questionnaires and surveys cannot obtained. Poliet and Beck (2006) defined interviews as a means of data collection that allows one person or the interviewer to ask questions to another person; interviewee. Polit and Beck (2006) go on to argue that interviews can be conducted either face-to-face or through a telephone. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) agree that interviews are the most commonly used methods for data collection in a qualitative study.

Hennink et al. (2010); Peters et al. (2015); and Whiting (2008) have noted that interviews are differentiated into different types including: structured, semi-structured, and un-structured. The chosen method for the current study is semi-structured interviews; these are in-depth interviews that are organized around a set of predetermined questions while other questions have a tendency to emerge from conversation. Peters et al. (2015) urged for researchers to make semi-structured interviews a personal and intimate process in which there is open, direct, verbal questions used to produce detailed narratives from the individual being interviewed. Melia (2000) argues that interviewers need to ensure control over the interview process by asking questions only and contributing very little to the process. On the other hand, Oates (2015) disagrees and countries that by attempting to control the interview process results in disrespect of the role of the participant and only treats them as a means for producing data. The current study has developed predetermined questions (see appendix A) which will be asked to Thai consumers of RTE products.

Interviews will be conducted on Skype, which is a video and voice calling service used through the Internet. Oates (2015) argues that the Internet has allowed researchers an increased geographical reach for their studies as it gives them a wide range of participants to target. The concern that internet access may exclude participants or possible respondents is becoming less relevant as the use of the internet for work and social activities has increased since its inception. Denzin et al. (2011) have reported that many researchers now use Skype to access hard to reach participants over a geographically dispersed area at apparently no cost. Also, there is the positive advantage of both Skype users being safe and not invading each other's private space. For this reason, participants of the current study were contacted and interviewed through Skype. Each of the interviews is to be conducted for 45 minutes.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

Due to the limitations of access to a wide variety of individuals over the entire geographical location of Thailand, a smaller sample size was aimed for. This meant that a total sample size of 10 ($N=10$) was taken in which five respondents were female and five were male. The sampling strategy used for this was purposeful random sampling. This strategy looks at a random sample but uses a small sample size as the potential sample is larger than can be handled. The purposeful

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random sampling strategy's goal is credibility and not representativeness or the ability to generalize the study. As the research is looking to study male and female consumers in the Thai population which is a total of 67.01 million as of 2013 it would be impossible with the limited resources and time to even begin to sample a portion of this population. Therefore, Bangkok was chosen as a suitable area to cover with the help of a colleague who advertised participation in the study. Participation in the current study was totally voluntary and of the population was also manageable there are 30,000 individuals close to the residence of the researcher. Therefore, access and selection to a mere ten individuals randomly was easy to arrange. The process aimed to reduce judgement within the traditional purposeful sampling strategy because the cases used were picked at random without regard to the program's outcome.

3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis Methods

After obtaining data from interviews the data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Flannery (2016) thematic analysis is considered as a common form of analyzing qualitative data. Wright et al. (2011) explains that thematic analysis places emphasis on pinpointing, examining, recording, patterns or *themes* in a specific set of data. The themes are recognized as a set of patterns throughout the data sets that are considered as relevant to the specific situation associated to the research question. It is through thematic analysis that a researcher can identify themes which become categories that are analyzed (Braun & Clarke 2006; Guest 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2007; Francis et al. 2010; Wright et al. 2011; Fugard & Potts 2015). Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007); Francis et al. (2010) have provided the process of coding which is used in six steps to establish a pattern in order to gain meaningful insights. The six phases are identified as follows;

1. Understanding the data
2. Developing initial code
3. Searching and highlighting themes from codes
4. Reviewing identified themes
5. Giving themes a definition and name
6. Producing the final report

The thematic analysis provides a great deal of emphasis on analyzing themes within an interview data set. Academics (Braun & Clarke 2006; Guest 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2007; Francis et al. 2010; Wright et al. 2011; Fugard & Potts 2015) have argued that thematic analysis is not just

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counting the phrases or words within a text; but it moves on to recognize different embedded ideas within the data.

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4.23.6 Sources of Data Collection and Statistical Analysis

The research makes use of sophisticated and comprehensive primary and secondary research techniques such as in depth interviews and literature review including case study analysis. The primary technique employed for this study included telephonic-Skype interviews with ten Thai consumers of Ready-to-eat meals with the sample consisting of 5 males and five females. The data source for the qualitative information is therefore the in depth interviews. The secondary research techniques include literature review from online and published sources regarding the purchase trends and buying behaviour of Thai male and female consumers for RTE foods while cCase studies were also reviewed that consisted of empirical studies conducted to gauge the relationship between Gender-gender and RTE consumption patterns. The secondary data sources therefore include online articles, blogs, journal publications, e-newspapers, research papers and published sources such as books,magazine articles, Statistical reports and newspapers.

4.3—Secondary Sources:- Content Analysis

Along with primary research, the secondary research techniques for this study include the detailed review and analysis of relevant information pertaining to the RTE food consumption patterns exhibited by Thai male and female consumers. The emphasis is on gathering sufficient qualitative and quantitative data to meet the methodology objectives highlighted in the previous section 3.2. The need for the comprehensive research is met by reviewing literature gathered from various secondary sources such as related online articles, Journal publications, blog posts, research papers consisting of study related to the same topic, books, newspapers, statistical reports and case studies that include empirical techniques to gauge the significance of gender on RTE foods consumption for Thai consumers.

4.43.7 Assumption of the study

The research assumes that the readers of this study have thorough understanding and knowledge of basic marketing concepts and principles such as the marketing mix elements of price, people, place and promotion including concepts related to consumer buying behavior and the decision making process for the consumer along with the related factors that affect this purchase process. Further the study assumes that the readers have sufficient knowledge of demographic factors such as age, gender and education including psychographic factors such as individual preferences, consumer attitudes towards the product and perceptions which tend to affect the purchase decision making framework generally.

3.8 Conclusion

The current study's research methodology takes on an interpretivist paradigm which dictated the use and design of a qualitative research approach. The reason that a qualitative approach was to gain insight on consumer preference, a gap that was lacking in many studies assessed in the literature review. The qualitative research approach included the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten respondents based in Bangkok, Thailand. This included a division of respondents based on gender, five males and five females. The interview data is to be analyzed using a thematic analysis which will identify and categorize themes found in the interview data. The thematic analysis for the current study uses a set of six steps.

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— Limitation of the study

The research and study related to the impact and affect of Gender on RTE foods consumption by Thai consumers is limited to the sample of ten consumers that consists of five males and five females that have been interviewed for the purpose of finding out the food preferences and buying behavior of each gender category. The primary research data sample should be large enough including the application of additional methods such as survey questionnaires to provide an accurate account of the gender differentiation for Thai consumers with regards to RTE foods. The secondary research is limited to existing studies that include a normal sample size to evaluate the significance of Gender on RTE foods consumption. The accuracy and reliability of the gathered data is also a limitation for this study.

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54 Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section, provides an insight into the consumer buying behavior and consumption trend for the male and female consumers in the Thai market for ready to eat meals. The section also provides an analysis of the impact and the affect of gender on the consumption of ready to eat meals in Thailand. The relationship between the various psychographic and product features with the gender category will be highlighted providing an insight into the importance of the demographic variable gender for RTE foods in Thailand. The data collected will be analyzed to evaluate individual eating habits of males and females including the drivers that lure males and females into selecting and buying ready to eat foods.

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4.2 Demographic Overview of Respondents

The aim of the study was to begin to understand how gender plays a role in preference for purchasing RTE products in Thailand. However, it is evident that factors other than gender play a role in persuading customers to opt out for RTE products rather choosing traditional home cooked meals. The interviewees included five males and five females; their other socio-economic characteristics are outlined in the table below.

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Table 4.1- Interviewees' Socio-economic Characteristics

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Participant	Age	Profession	Education Level	Income Level
F1	43 years old	Oncology Nurse	Masters	20,000 Thai Baht
F2	25 years old	Student	Masters	10,000 Thai Baht
F3	38 years old	Chambermaid	Less than Secondary School	4,634 Thai Baht

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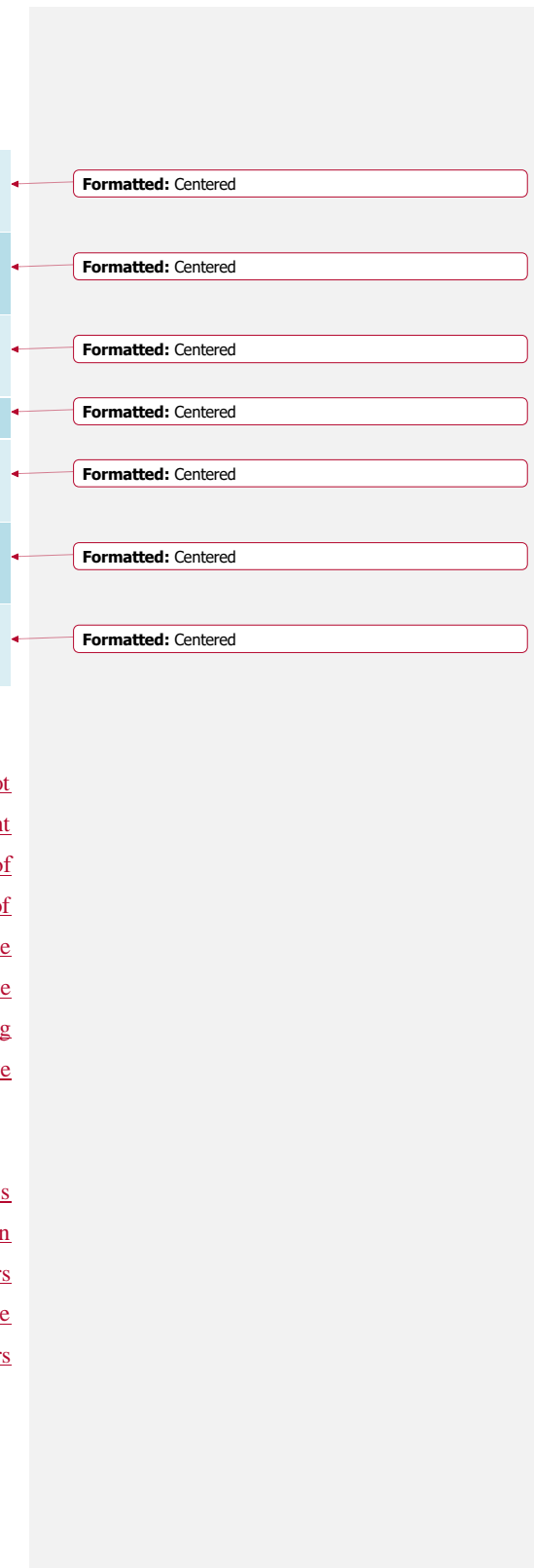
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<u>F4</u>	<u>39</u> years old	<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Masters</u>	<u>17,000 Thai Baht</u>
<u>F5</u>	<u>35</u> years old	<u>Accountant</u>	<u>Bachelors</u>	<u>21,000 Thai Baht</u>
<u>M1</u>	<u>34</u> years old	<u>Product Analyst</u>	<u>Masters</u>	<u>18,000 Thai Baht</u>
<u>M2</u>	<u>42</u> years old	<u>Postman</u>	<u>Secondary School</u>	<u>9,600 Thai Baht</u>
<u>M3</u>	<u>34</u> years old	<u>Programmer</u>	<u>Bachelors</u>	<u>16,500 Thai Baht</u>
<u>M4</u>	<u>34</u> years old	<u>Accountant</u>	<u>Masters</u>	<u>22,000 Thai Baht</u>
<u>M5</u>	<u>29</u> years old	<u>Student</u>	<u>Masters</u>	<u>15,000 Thai Baht</u>



Based on the analysis of respondents, all interviewees were educated except for F3 who had not finished secondary school; M2 was educated, but not as educated as the remaining eight interviewees. A majority of respondents (i.e. six in total) had obtained a Master’s degree of education which accounts for 18 years of schooling. Based on our sample, the average income of respondents is 15,000 Thai baht. According to the National Statistical Office in Thailand, the national monthly average income was 13,000 Thai Baht by July 2016. So the cumulative average of this study’s participants is well above the average. Also, 8 out of 10 participants were making above the national average income. It can be concluded that participants may be living above modest lifestyles which are comfortable.

All the females and males chosen as the sample for this research belonged to the professional class or office-going category with most of the respondents or participants holding technical education degrees and belonging to high-middle class category. The average age of respondents is 35.3 years old which is between the predicted characteristics identified from the literature review. Average age of individuals who preferred the use and consumption of RTE products was between 25 years old and 40 years old.

Almost six out of ten 60% of the respondents were married with kids while the remaining participants were single. Prior permission with regards to the confidentiality and the provision of the information provided by the participants was obtained from the interviewees as part of the ethical requirements for the research paper. The participants were informed that all information provided as part of the interview would be kept confidential and will be used only for the defined purpose of the research. Permission was obtained from the participants before asking them to provide the responses for the interview stating to them clearly why the interview was being conducted and how their responses would benefit the particular study or research.

4.3 Gender Influence on RTE consumption-In depth Interview Analysis;Thematic Analysis of Interviews

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In order to understand the consumer attitude towards the consumption of ready to eat meals it is important to analyze the marketing mix elements and their impact on the decision making for both males and females in the Thai RTE market. An analysis of how gGender relates to each of these 4P elements or the product attributes will help in the insightful evaluation of the impact of such factors on the consumption and repurchase of the ready to eat meals. The study makes use of qualitative research techniques to find out the particular factors that contribute to the eating habits and consumption patterns of the Thai male and female consumers for which purpose data has been gathered through a questionnaire prepared keeping the research objectives in mind.

The intent is to evaluate the contribution of each of these product attributes to the purchase decisions for males and females highlighting the hedonic and utilitarian values of each gender category in the process. To better understand the impact of the psychographic variables and the product attributes in the buying behaviour of the Thai consumers with regards to ready to eat meals it was important that reliable data be gathered with a data sample that reflected equal representation of the males and females to gain a clear understanding of the buying behavioral characteristics of each gender type.

The primary data gathered therefore included an in-depth interview consisting of open-ended questions related to the marketing mix elements and their association with the consumption and purchase of ready to eat meals. The interviews were conducted through telephone with the chosen sample consisting of 5 males and 5 females. All the females and males chosen as the sample for this research belonged to the professional class or office-going category with most of the respondents or participants holding technical education degrees and belonging to high middle class category. The average age bracket for the sample population was 22-35 which is considered as the age category that mostly consumes ready to eat meals in Bangkok.

Almost 60% of the respondents were married with kids while the remaining participants were single. Prior permission with regards to the confidentiality and the provision of the information provided by the participants was obtained from the interviewees as part of the ethical requirements for the research paper. The participants were informed that all information provided as part of the interview would be kept confidential and will be used only for the defined purpose of the research. Permission was obtained from the participants before asking them to provide the responses for the interview stating to them clearly why the interview was being conducted and how their responses would benefit the particular study or research.

In order to provide further insight into this, two examples of interviews conducted in this study is shown in below;

Interviewee 1- Female Participant

- What is your occupation and particular business area of profession?

I'm a clinical oncology nurse at a leading healthcare institute in Bangkok and I've been working at the hospital for the last ten years. My professional area of expertise is the healthcare services that I've been affiliated with now for a long time.

- What according to you is the concept of Ready-to-eat meals and how do they benefit the community at large?

Ready to eat meals are those fast food products that you get these days at places like Pizza Hut, McDonalds and Burgers joints. I feel they come handy as they don't need any cooking time and people who got busy schedules can just order their favourite meals without any hassle. Professionals like us who got busy routines have no time to prepare food at home most of the times so ready to eat saves the day. Most of these fast food meals are also liked by my kids and other children so busy mothers can get their family tasty food in less time. I guess there are loads of different kinds of ready to eat meals in the market like frozen foods and other packaged meals by C.P Foods and S&P which is good since there is so much variety that you can choose from.

● *How often do you purchase and consume ready to eat meals or your favorite RTE products?*

Well it depends on my schedule as I usually buy take-aways from diners or fast food places when I don't have enough time to prepare a meal at home. It also depends on the leisure time that I spend with my family and kids. I would say that it's mostly several times in the month especially on weekends as we order food at home or go out for dining with the kids. For my lunch at the hospital, I sometimes order RTE meals once or twice during the week. Also when I go to the supermarket for my groceries I usually buy frozen foods for my family along with some packaged items like snacks.

● *What type of Ready to eat meals do you usually prefer to consume or repurchase?*

I usually like to eat pizza with salad as it is nutritional and keeps my weight in check but sometimes when I'm having lunch at the clinic with the staff then I like to order sandwiches with fruit salads. My kids really like the chicken burgers that you get from places like McDonalds with French fries so I buy that often for the kids. Like I said earlier frozen ready to eat meals like frozen pizzas, fried sea food and packaged snacks are usually part of my purchase list when I go to the supermarket as my family likes to have frozen meals as well. I'm more particular about my diet so I prefer less fattening food like salads and seafood.

● *Why do you purchase the frequently consumed ready to eat meal or RTE meal?*

The main motivational factor for my purchase of ready to eat meals and fast food products is convenience and taste. The place that I order pizza from most of times makes great pizza just the

way I like it and because I'm their regular customer so they offer me discounts from time to time. With my busy schedule at the clinic I prefer the RTE meals to be delivered in quick time at my house or the clinic and they should taste good. The reason for me buying frozen RTE meals is also the same since they taste good and are hygienic which is good for me and my family.

- How much do you normally spend on the purchase and consumption of RTE products?

I usually spend around 1000 bahts on average I guess on my meals that I order for myself and the ones that I get for my family. The spending goes up to 1500 baht I believe at times because sometimes my family decides to go out and eat at a nice diner or I feel like spending some leisure time with my kids on weekends and having my favourite fast food meal. So I guess the average spending would be around a 1000-1500 baht which is convenient for me because of the earnings that I make. Ready to eat meals are really not that expensive nowadays.

- Please describe your favourite Ready to Eat product and its particular attributes that you believe are key drivers for your purchase decision.

I was just telling you about the pizza parlor that makes delicious pizza that I often order because of its great taste. For me taste is really important because the food that you're eating has to be good enough for you to enjoy your meal time. So this place provides quality service taking extra care about food hygiene and quick delivery. They also provide me discounts now and then as I am a patron there and my family also really likes the pizza from that place when we order at home. The good thing about that is the fact that you get tasty and clean food delivered to your home in less time so your family is happy including yourself.

- In your opinion, what you think is the impact of RTE products on human health? And what is the role of society in this regard?

The RTE products have a great impact on the community since you see so many people being affected in different ways by these foods. Professionals like us who don't usually have enough time to manage meals throughout the day find it easier to order a meal from the nearest RTE outlet and the stay at home mothers have a large variety to choose from for their kids and family so that the meals include both convenience and delicious food which brings peace of mind that is good for

health. I guess the ready-to-eat meals have a positive impact on the society because they bring ease, taste and affordability. The impact on health is obviously a consideration but I tend to choose my meals appropriately and so should the consumers especially kids. They should have the fast food items in moderation and adults should pick healthier option instead of fattening products.

•—Is there an alternate to RTE, given the increasingly fast environment we live in? Do you think this industry will grow further in the coming years?

Alternative to RTE? Well I can't really say if there can be any appropriate substitute for the meals that they offer in fast food outlets and Rte diners. The existing products are fine and I guess what is needed is for the RTE industry to include healthier forms of the product as I guess they can be nice alternatives to the current products in the market. There are so many people out there who find it really easy and convenient to buy Rte meals and save time which is why there is a growing demand for such foods in the market and I guess the industry will continue to grow in the future and keep making nice products that are tasty and healthy as well.

•—How do you think these products and/or industry can be improved? Is there any need and room for improvements?

Yes, of course. There is room for improvement in the existing ready-to-eat products as they contain fattening stuff especially the fast food items like chicken burgers and fried food items. They can cause problems such as obesity and hypertension which is why I said earlier that these meals must be consumed in moderation while selecting foods that are healthier. The industry that makes such food items should take notice of this aspect concerning human health and should therefore introduce products in the market that include nutritional values like less oils and fried foods with more grilled food items including vegetables and less additives.

Interviewee 2—Male Participant

•—What is your occupation and particular business area of profession?

I work at an Electronics Engineering firm as a Product Analyst. My professional business area is Engineering Management and I've been working here since 2011.

•—What according to you is the concept of Ready-to-eat meals and how do they benefit the community at large?

Ready-to-eat meals are the quick precooked foods that save you time and inconvenience. I guess Ready-to-eat meals are pretty popular these days in Bangkok since you see a fast food place or a diner at every corner. Most of these meals taste really nice and I find them really good because they make my lunch breaks enjoyable. My family uses these ready-to-eat products most often and all my family members like the taste and convenience that these products offer. These days loads of people buy fast food and frozen RTE products as they are mostly available from almost everywhere in Bangkok.

I can say they do have benefits for the community because my colleagues are often complaining about the problems they have with meals management at home sometimes due to less time so most of them order meals at the office during lunch as it is more easy for them to order food than to wait at homes for their lunches to be prepared for office take-away. Then you get these frozen products that you can store at home in the refrigerator and just heat up when you're hungry so that also is really beneficial as men who do not know how to cook can just heat up the meal and eat. They aren't that expensive as well I guess at least not for the professionals compared to their benefits.

•—How often do you purchase and consume ready-to-eat meals or your favorite RTE products?

Well, considering the amount of ordering that I do for my lunch at the office and my dining with the family I would have to say many times during the week as I often order meals during the week in the office and at home sometimes during the weekdays. With my family I usually dine out during the weekend so that would be quite often during the month. To be exact I consume ready-to-eat meals at least two to three times during the week and then on weekends with my family when I go out to dine and spend time with my two children.

•—What type of Ready-to-eat meals do you usually prefer to consume or repurchase?

I usually like to have fried chicken and ready-to-eat Thai specialties such as fried rice and fish or shrimps that they serve at nice diners. My family thinks these specialties are a bit expensive but

they taste really good and I enjoy every time I go out to eat Thai RTE with my family at quick service restaurants. When I'm ordering food at the office with my colleagues during lunch time I have grilled chicken and cheese burgers and chicken nuggets that are also my favourite because they taste really nice. I don't eat a lot of frozen ready to eat products but chilled RTE such as cold sandwiches and flavored desserts are really good.

•—Why do you purchase the frequently consumed ready to eat meal or RTE meal?

The ready to eat meal that I frequently order at the office is the fried chicken and Burger that I really like because the fast food place makes it really nice and delivers it in quick time so I usually eat that when I'm with my colleagues at the workplace. I believe taste and convenience including price are important drivers that make me go for a repurchase. My family and I usually go out and dine at this local diner that offers really delicious Thai specialties that are really tasty and personally I think they are not that expensive. The place has a nice ambience and the restaurant offers quick service so we don't have to wait for our order to be served for too long.

•—How much do you normally spend on the purchase and consumption of RTE products?

I tend to order frequently because of my job role and my routine which has me usually consuming ready to eat meals at the office for my lunch so I mostly spend around 1500 to 2000 Thai baht on the meals and the dining that I do with my family. That is probably an approximate because sometimes my family would ask me to take them to a pizza place or some nice diner so it depends on the requirements or a particular situation at times but I guess that would be the average spending for me somewhere around 1500 to 2000 baht.

•—Please describe your favourite Ready to Eat product and its particular attributes that you believe are key drivers for your purchase decision.

When I'm having the food at my office I really like to order the fried chicken and grilled chicken cheese burger from the fast food place near our office. I really enjoy the food from there because the chicken tastes really nice and my colleagues like it too. Besides they provide us special meal offers that are lucrative and have reasonable costs. The best thing about ordering from this place

is that it provides amazing food that I like at appropriate price with quick delivery service so for me that's very convenient.

●—In your opinion, what you think is the impact of RTE products on human health? And what is the role of society in this regard?

The ready to eat products are beneficial for the community at large because they provide many benefits to the consumers which can be seen by the growing trend of the Thai people purchasing and consuming such products. They however have some negative effects on the human health as well which can be seen from the incidents of people suffering from coronary diseases and obesity due to the excessive consumption of such foods. These foods also do not have the essential nutrients that you can get from organic forms of other food items and cooked meals. So I guess the consumption of RTE meals does entail some health implications and the society needs to be aware of it. People should be more careful when they are selecting RTE products and should select healthier meals that can be consumed in appropriate quantities.

●—Is there an alternate to RTE, given the increasingly fast environment we live in? Do you think this industry will grow further in the coming years?

Well I don't believe there can be alternatives to the ready to eat meals as the people today need such products to bring convenience to their lives while being able to enjoy tasty meals while on the go. Food is a necessity and I guess RTE foods are the requirements for the busy and fast life of today especially for people who are working at offices or in other fields. If they start making products that are healthier and nutritional then that would be a nice thing as people today are too busy to consider health aspects of such foods but the awareness must be there and the industry should make healthy food items. There are huge prospects for the industry I guess for the future as the demand for RTE is increasing and the people will continue to purchase and consume such fast food products due to the taste, convenience and large variety so the industry will grow too.

●—How do you think these products and/or industry can be improved? Is there any need and room for improvements?

There is certainly room for improvement in the existing ready to products as they contain too much fat substance that is not good for the health. Most of the frozen and packaged RTE products include preservatives which can also prove harmful as I've heard from people and other sources so therefore it is important that the manufacturers of such food items pay attention to these aspects and introduce healthier options in the market. They should include products with less fat content and nutrient rich raw materials that have a positive impact on human health. They should also try to limit the use of preservatives and flavor enhancers so that the health is not affected.

As it can be observed from the above two examples, the first question of the interview was aimed at soliciting responses from the participants regarding their professional background and particular business area of expertise. While processing the data obtained from all the 10 interviews conducted, it was observed that for most of the males, the business area relevant to their professional background was Engineering Management and Marketing. While 60% of the male respondents were working as part of the Electronics Engineering department at a leading electronics firm, the remaining 40% of the respondents were associated with the marketing of software products. For the females, the professional area of expertise was nursing, healthcare, education and medical services with 60% of the females working as doctors and nurses while 40% were related to the education sector with participants working as instructors and faculty heads.

The second question of the interview was aimed at obtaining an understanding of the perception of the male and female Thai consumers with regards to the ready to eat meals and their particular advantages and benefits. This was also important as the question would help gain an insight into the attitudes of the consumers specifically each gender category to find out their association level with the RTE food consumption and purchase. The males were asked what according to them was the concept of ready to eat meals and how did they envisage such products and their benefits in relation to the community at large? To this most of the male respondents replied by stating that the ready to eat meals were the typical fast food items and diner specialties available in the market and according to them such RTE products were very beneficial for the community primarily due to their convenience and impressive food variety.

While males had a considerable amount of understanding regarding the ready to eat meals, the female participants provided much in-depth responses stating that RTE foods were not only convenient but they incorporated an entire gamut of products ranging from packaged meals, fast food products, diner specialities, frozen and chilled Ready to eat meals. Further, all females said they thought that the RTE meals although not too nutritional compared to organic or home cooked meals however very convenient, inexpensive and tasty providing the professional class with ease and the freedom to choose from a colossal variety.

The third question of the interview was concerned with the frequency of the purchase of ready to eat meals by the males and females in Thailand to get a clear understanding of how often the males and females preferred to dine out, order in or repurchase an RTE product. This question would also help provide an insight into the impact of gender on the eating habits and consumption patterns. The males mostly responded by saying that they often ordered or dined out at fast food place and diners with their colleagues and their families with 60% of the male respondents saying that they usually ate many times during the month while 40% of the males stated that they ordered 2 to 3 times during the week.

The consumption pattern reflected somewhat similar patterns with females mostly ordering the food at the home or office rather than going out to dine as compared to the male respondents. The frequency of consumption was almost the same with 3 out of 5 females stating that they ordered one to two times during the week because of their job routines while they usually ate out at diners with their family on weekends. More specifically, ~~60%~~three of the females mentioned that they ate many times during the month with patterns reflecting more ordering of food rather than dining out while ~~20%~~one of the female respondents (F3) said that they ate many times during the week while the remaining ~~one (F2)~~20% of the respondents said that they ordered two or three times during the month.

The fourth question of the interview was aimed at gaining an insight into the different types of ready to eat food items and fast food products that were preferred by the Thai male and female consumers. The question particularly focused at asking the participants regarding their favourite RTE meals and products that they most frequently purchased. The responses received for this

question would help provide an insight into the types of foods that were specific to each gender category and the motivation behind the repurchase decision for both males and females. While 4 out of 5 males stated that they preferred to go out and dine with colleagues during their lunch break mostly buying fast food products such as chicken burgers and fried chicken, pizza and local Thai specialities offered at quick service restaurants, ~~20%~~one of the males (M2) said that they preferred ordering rather than going out and enjoyed having rice and seafood along with packaged desserts.

The responses from the females were more focused on the wide variety of fast food items available in the market and most of the responses were more particular about the aspect of health and nutrition when it came to the purchase of ready to eat food items and the fast food meals. While ~~60%~~three out of five of the females said that they preferred to order their meals and that their favourite meal and pizza and salad along with fried chicken, ~~40%~~two of the remaining females stated that they liked to order Thai specialities and local fast food products available in the market such as chicken burgers and fries mostly because their family preferred to have fast food meals, especially their kids. The female responses also reflected the inclination towards frozen ready to eat meals such as chicken, frozen pizza and vegetables that they often purchased as it was easier for them to include in the dinner for their family. ~~80%~~Four of the females mentioned that they ~~often purchased~~often purchased frozen ready to eat meals.

The next question was related to the particular product features of the ready to eat meals and the fast food items that affected the consumer buying behaviour and repurchase decision. The respondents were asked to describe their favourite ready to eat meal and its particular characteristics that motivated them to repurchase that product. Such a question would help identify specific product attributes and marketing mix elements that most contributed to the psychographic profiles for the male and females thus having a positive impact on the buying behaviour and eating preferences of the Thai consumers with regards to ready to eat products.

While the males preferred to buy their favourite meals because of the nice taste and quick service delivery of the diner or fast food outlet, the females mostly preferred to order their favourite meals due to the food hygiene taste and quick service delivery. Most of the male respondents showed inclination towards aspects such as restaurant quality, great taste and nice ambience of the

restaurant the female responses were more focused on the price and promotion elements of the ready to eat meals. Most of the men preferred eating out at Thai seafood diners and fast food outlets while females preferred ordering pizza, salads and fast food items.

The next question of the interview was related to the particular reason for the males and females reasons of buying the fast food items and the ready to eat meals especially with a focus on the product attributes and the features that enabled them to go for a repurchase. The question would help provide an insight into the factors of the marketing mix that would make the males and females consumers go for a repurchase with regards to their favourite meals and fast food items. The males mostly responded by saying that the most important drivers for them and the purchase of ready to eat meals were the convenience , taste and the affordable price of such fast food products and RTE meals. ~~Almost 60%three out of the five~~ of the males said that taste and the price were key drivers for the repurchase of their favourite meals while 4 out of 5 men said that they preferred to eat ready to eat meals as they included convenience and ease. The responses from men reflected the fact that the males focused more on hedonic values such as taste and mood including product variety and brand.

With regards to the responses from females ~~four out of the five~~80% of the females said that they preferred to have meals that tasted good but that were nutritional as well with a focus on hygiene and the specific quality of food delivered. While females mostly preferred their favourite meals due to the fact that they were tasty and provided convenience the males focused on restaurant type and price. The main focus of the females for repurchase was based on taste and utilitarian values such as service quality and hygiene. Most of the females stated that the food that they usually ordered at the office or home included promotional features such as discount coupons and quick delivery which is why they preferred ordering from that place mostly.

The next question related to the interview was based on the particular spending patterns of the Thai male and female consumers and the average spending on Thai ready to eat products. This question was focused on gaining an insight into the importance of ready to eat meals for the male and female consumers and their spending on these meals in particular. The responses from the males suggest that the males usually spent on average between 1500 to 2000 Thai baht on RTE meals in a month

which they considered was appropriate with regards to their earnings. While 4 out of 5 males spending on ready to eat meals was between the highlighted bracket the remaining ~~20% of the male participants~~ stated that they spent less than 1500 baht on the RTE meals.

The female spending pattern reveals similar trends with regards to spending however the spending bracket for most of the females that is ~~four out five~~ ~~most 80%~~ of the females ~~was had spent~~ between 1000-1500 Thai baht ~~a month~~. The remaining ~~20% one of the~~ female responses were related to a spending of less than 1000 baht per month for RTE products.

The eighth question of the interview was aimed at gaining an insight into the awareness of consumers regarding the impact of these ready to eat products on the health of the people in the community. The factors related to the nutritional and health based aspects also tend to have an impact on the purchase decision and eating habits of the Thai consumers. It has already been highlighted through studies conducted earlier for the same purpose that the Thai females are more conscious about their health and weight aspects when consuming ready to eat meals or fast food items compared to males which is reflected by their particular eating habits as females tend to order healthy items such as salads and grilled chicken meals or pizza while men tend to dine out frequently and prefer fried chicken items and fried food products.

In response to this question, ~~60%~~ ~~three out of five~~ of the males responded by stating that the ready to eat meals that they bought were not too healthy in terms of nutrition and the type of nutrients that constituted the meal and that they were aware of the fact that the RTE meals they consumed were not too healthy. 2 out of 5 males replied by saying that they were not too aware of the nutritional elements and health aspects related to the Thai ready to eat meals. Further they said that the increase in the amount of RTE meals being consumed was also leading to health problems in the society and that the community should be more aware of the nutritional aspects of such food products.

The female responses revealed that the gender type of women was more conscious about the nutritional feasibility of the fast food items and ready to eat meals and hence the food items that they mostly ordered for themselves included health and nutritional aspects. This was also reflected

by the extra care that they took when ordering food to ensure that food hygiene was maintained and that they ordered food rich in nutrients. While 80%four out of five of the females said that they mostly ordered salads and vegetables along with their meals instead of fries and fried items 20%one of the female respondents (F4) said that they did not consider nutrition most of the times when consuming such meals. Most of the female respondents said that the society needed to be aware of health issues related with the consumption of such items and it was the responsibility of the community to spread this awareness and choose foods that provide health benefits.

The next question of the interview was associated with the alternatives to the foods and the increase in the growth of such ready to eat meals, their producers and retailers. The question was aimed at gaining an insight into the perspective of the consumers regarding the feasibility of RTE meals for the fast life and growing community in existing times. The male respondents mostly said that the need of the meals in retrospect of the busy life of most of the Thai consumers these days is reflected by the growing trend of such food products and there can be no alternative to RTE meals except that the producers and the industry starts to offer more healthy items including non-fat, vegetables and nutritional products in their product mix. All the males replied by saying that there was no alternative to RTE meals and that the industry would grow in the coming years since there was an increasing demand throughout Bangkok for the ready to eat meals and fast food items especially by the consumers belonging to the professional category.

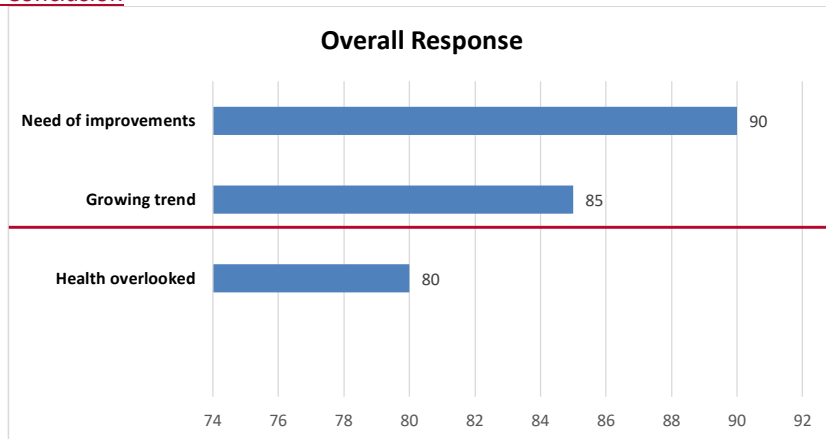
The female responses were similar with 80%four out of five of the females stating that health aspects often were overlooked when purchasing such meals especially when busy life and routines are involved. They further stated that the increasing trend of teenagers and adults was reflective of the growth and development of the Thai RTE food industry in the coming years. 20%One of the female respondents said that the alternative to RTE food could be only healthy foods and as the community becomes more health conscious the industry might shift towards the production of healthy ready to eat meals.

The last question of the interview focused on the need for improvement in the Thai ready to eat products and the industry at large emphasizing the need for enhancement in the current products being offered in the market. When asked if there was any particular need for the Thai ready to eat

meals to be improved and how to improve them in case of 'yes', the males mostly replied by saying that the current products definitely needed improvement in terms of the use of healthier raw materials and preservatives or additives. There was an agreement amongst all the males concerning the need to improve the industry for ready to eat meals and the use of more healthy items to prepare such meals.

The females also were of the opinion that the fast food items needed to be improved in the sense that more healthier raw materials such as vegetable oil and unsaturated fats including whole wheat products to overcome the risks associated with trans fat leading to obesity and hypertension should be used for the production of RTE products. The frozen RTE meals and packaged snacks included many preservatives and chemical based flavoring enhancers that had a negative impact on human health and needed to be reduced. The industry, they said needed to be aware of this fact and should try to produce RTE products that provide benefits for the community in terms of healthy consumption.

4.4 Conclusion



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The in depth interview responses of the sample population consisting of ten male and female consumers in total belonging to the professional class reflect the increased importance and relative need of the ready to eat meals in the life of these Thai consumers. While most of the patterns and trends related to RTE consumption and purchase decision show similarities for both gender types,

differences exist within the type of RTE food purchased and bought including the psychographic profiles that indicate a slightly hedonic pattern for males and utilitarian trend for female consumers. The busy routines and professional requirements of the male and female consumers have led to an increase in the consumption and growing demand for such products that provide both gender types with the ease and convenience including amazing taste that they are looking for.

Empirical Study: Impact of Gender on RTE food consumption

An empirical study conducted to find out the impact of Gender on the consumption and purchase of ready to eat products by Chitraporn and Pattaraporn (2011) for Thai consumers reveals that there are similarities in the pattern of fast food consumption and RTE meals by the males and females. The study was conducted by using a sample population consisting of 185 males and 215 females with consumers from different age groups and education backgrounds such as teenagers, professionals, stay at home people and elderly consumers. The empirical study focused at analyzing the trends exhibiting by the gender for RTE consumption for which the Pearson chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between Gender and other elements such as price, brand, place and promotion.

Gender * Number of consumption Crosstabulation

			Number of consumption				Total
			Almost everyday	A few times per week	A few times per month	Less than once per month	
Gender	Female	Count	8	54	86	67	215
		% within Gender	3.7%	25.1%	40.0%	31.2%	100.0%
Male	Count	3	49	91	42	185	
	% within Gender	1.6%	26.5%	49.2%	22.7%	100.0%	

Figure 3: Relationship between Gender & RTE food consumption (Chitraporn, 2011)

H0: There is no association between gender and fast food and RTE consumption.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between gender and fast food /RTE

The above null hypothesis was used to determine the significance of gender on the ready-to-eat products consumption. The hypothesis testing reveals that the P-value for this scenario is 0.103 and X2 value is 6.175 according to Chitraporn (2011) which shows that the null hypothesis is true and hence can be accepted as the p-value is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Therefore the results show that there is no significant relationship between gender and fast food consumption or ready-to-eat meals.

The study further tests the relationship between gender and RTE meal selection or fast food selection. As per the figure below the null hypothesis for this scenario can be accepted as the p-value estimated through pearson test is 0.355 according to Chitraporn (2011) which shows that the relationship between gender and the fast food selection is not too significant.

H0: There is no association between gender and various in fast food and RTE selection

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between gender and various products in fast food and RTE

Gender
*** I like fast food because of various in food selection Crosstabulation**

			I like fast food because of various in food selection					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Female	Count	7	45	72	74	17	215
		% within	3.3%	20.9%	33.5%	34.4%	7.9%	100.0%
Gender								
	Male	Count	5	35	54	65	26	185
		% within	2.7%	18.9%	29.2%	35.1%	14.1%	100.0%
Gender								
Total		Count	12	80	126	139	43	400
		% within	3.0%	20.0%	31.5%	34.8%	10.8%	100.0%
Gender								

Figure 4: Relationship between Gender & RTE food selection (Chitraporn, 2011)

Both males and females agree to the fact that the fast food and RTE products available in the market are not good for their health. The attitudes towards taste, packaging, convenience and brand for ready-to-eat meals do not show significant differences for both the consumer types.

The next hypothesis testing involved the analysis of the impact of gender on prices for the RTE product. For this scenario the p-value estimated by using the data collected through participant responses was 0.930 which was greater than 0.05 revealing the fact that the price ranges were not significant with regards to the consumption of ready to eat products by either gender (Chitraporn, 2011).

H0: There is no association between gender and price ranges of RTE products.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between gender and price ranges of RTE products.

*** I like fast food because of various price ranges Crosstabulation**

			I like fast food because of various price ranges					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Gender	Female	Count	7	36	83	80	9	215
		% within Gender	3.3%	16.7%	38.6%	37.2%	4.2%	100.0%
Gender	Male	Count	4	35	71	66	9	185
		% within Gender	2.2%	18.9%	38.4%	35.7%	4.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	11	71	154	146	18	400
		% within Gender	2.8%	17.8%	38.5%	36.5%	4.5%	100.0%

Figure 5: Relationship between Gender & RTE food prices (Chitraporn, 2011)

The null hypothesis can hence be accepted revealing that price range does not have significant impact on males and females in Thailand when purchasing RTE meals. However both males and females agree that RTE products are not worth the price that they are offered at with regards to quality and quantity.

The testing for the relationship between gender and service quality reveals that there service delivery is not significant to the gender as both males and females believe that they prioritize service quality such as quick delivery, restaurant quality and food hygiene when purchasing such meals according to Pattaraporn (2011).

H0: There is no association between gender and delivery service.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between gender and delivery service.

Gender
*** I like fast food because they provide home delivery service Crosstabulation**

		I like fast food because they provide home delivery service					Total	
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Gender	Female	Count	4	6	25	96	84	215
		% within	1.9%	2.8%	11.6%	44.7%	39.1%	100.0%
		Gender						
	Male	Count	1	6	32	83	63	185
		% within	.5%	3.2%	17.3%	44.9%	34.1%	100.0%
		Gender						
Total		Count	5	12	57	179	147	400
		% within	1.3%	3.0%	14.3%	44.8%	36.8%	100.0%
		Gender						

Figure 6: Relationship between Gender & RTE food delivery service (Chitraporn, 2011)

The null hypothesis can be accepted for the scenario as the estimated p-value is 0.357 which is greater than 0.05 while the χ^2 value is 4.378. Both males and females are of the opinion that service quality largely affects their purchase decision when RTE products are concerned.

The last hypothesis testing included the identification of the significance of gender on the promotion element of the marketing mix. The hypothesis testing revealed that there is a relationship between promotion and gender with females being more influenced by men with regards to discount coupons and promotional offers when purchasing ready to eat products (Chitraporn, 2011).

H0: There is no association between gender and discount coupons for RTE.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between gender and discount coupons for RTE.

Gender
*** I buy fast food because of discount coupon Crosstabulation**

			I buy fast food because of discount coupon					Total
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Female	Count	12	42	64	75	21	214
		% within Gender	5.6%	19.6%	29.9%	35.0%	9.8%	100.0%
Gender	Male	Count	21	35	65	42	22	185
		% within Gender	11.4%	18.9%	35.1%	22.7%	11.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	77	129	117	43	399
		% within Gender	8.3%	19.3%	32.3%	29.3%	10.8%	100.0%

Figure 7: Relationship between Gender & RTE food promotional features (Chitraporn, 2011)

The estimated p-value for this scenario was 0.035 which is less than 0.05 while the X² value is 10.377 showing that the null hypothesis is not true. Hence more female consumers tend to purchase RTE meals that are accompanied by promotional offers.

65 Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This section of the research provides a summarized account of the results deciphered in the previous section to provide justified answers for the research question. The conclusions related to the impact and effect of male and female food preference and eating patterns will be highlighted that eventually contribute to the decision making process for ready to eat foods. Additional areas of research will also be presented in this section along with an account of recommendations for better marketing and positioning of ready to eat foods based on the conclusions derived from the analysis of Thai male and female RTE foods consumption preferences and buying behavior.

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5.2 Conclusion & Discussion

The responses from the interview provide an insight into the factors associated with the characteristics of the ready to eat meals such as taste, convenience, brand, packaging and price which have a strong impact on the purchase decisions of males and females. The way these factors affect the buying behaviour for both the male and female consumers in Thailand does not show stark differences for each gender type as the responses from the interview reveal that the product attributes do not influence the eating habits of males and females with varying patterns. For most of the product attributes both the males and females buying behaviour is affected in a similar pattern with both gender types reflecting an increased affinity towards the consumption and repurchase of ready to eat products.

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An example of this is the attribute taste where both men and women equally prioritize taste when making purchase decisions for ready to eat meals. The responses show that both males and females are equally likely to consume different types of ready to eat products and fast food items with regards to the frequency with which each gender category purchases, orders or dines in for RTE meals. As depicted by the interview responses, the males and females usually order food and

consume Fast food items many times during the month with an average spending between 1000-2000 Thai baht (Chitraporn, 2011).

The difference lies in the fact that men usually go out to dine in restaurants more frequently than females as they believe it is inexpensive and there is more variety to choose from while females usually prefer to order at home or at the office. The convenience factor is an element that is common to both gender type and thus is a key driver for the purchase and consumption of RTE products by both the male and female consumers in Thailand. Both males and females equally prioritize ease and convenience offered by such food products when ordering their food or deciding to repurchase fast food items or ready to eat meals (Lovell, 2010).

While females exhibit a psychographic profile that is characterized by utilitarian values such as food hygiene, price, healthy food, quick service delivery, males are dominated by a psychographic profile that reflects hedonic values such as brand, food variety, restaurant quality, mood and taste of the product. This is also evident by the fact that females usually prefer to purchase or order healthy food items such as salads and grilled chicken or pizza while men prefer eating food products such as fried chicken, fried rice and Thai specialities with frequent dining in restaurants. Place is a factor that is given due importance by both the gender types as males and females equally relate to brand type and service quality while females are more influenced by the promotional factor such as discount coupons and premium offers (Kotler, 2000).

The empirical study conducted by Chitraporn (2011) and analysed during the literature review; further provides evidence of the fact that similarities exist between the buying behaviour and consumption patterns for both the males and females reflecting that the demographic variable gGender is not significant for RTE foods consumption as also evident from the current study. Both males and females according to the empirical studiescurrent study consume fast food and Rte-RTE meals with almost similar frequency while their purchase decisions and eating preferences are equally affected by factors such as taste, brand, convenience, packaging, restaurant type and service quality. The study shows that there is no relationship between gender and variables such as taste, price, product and place while there is a relationship between gender and promotion with females being more influenced by discount coupons and premium offers which enable them to

purchase RTE products more frequently than males ~~(Parry, 2001)~~. These conclusions were also drawn in the study conducted by (Parry, 2001).

The patterns and trends revealed by the current study can be used by marketers to better position their ready to eat products with an emphasis on the psychographic profiles exhibited by both the gender types. As females tend to respond better to promotional aspects as compared to males hence the marketers can target the female consumers by offering ready to eat products with discount coupons. The growing concern for the health impact of such RTE products as pointed out by the male and female consumers participating in the interview needs to be considered and the marketers should concentrate on introducing healthy RTE foods in the market that have a positive impact on human health. This is also vital for the growth and sustainability of the RTE industry as they have a key role to play in the development of the quick service market and in shaping up consumer attitudes towards ready to eat products (Lovell, 2010). Further areas of research should focus on the detailed analysis of eating patterns and buying behaviour of each gender type for RTE products by using a larger data sample of Thai consumers focusing on different types of RTE products.

5.3 Limitation of the study

The research and study related to the impact and effect of gender on RTE foods consumption by Thai consumers is limited to the sample of ten consumers that consists of five males and five females that have been interviewed for the purpose of finding out the food preferences and buying behavior of each gender category. The primary research data sample should be large enough including the application of additional methods such as survey questionnaires to provide an accurate account of the gender differentiation for Thai consumers with regards to RTE foods. It was due to the limitations of resources, both time and financial that had led to the extremely small sample size. The secondary research is limited to existing studies that include a normal sample size to evaluate the significance of Gender on RTE foods consumption. Also, there were very limited studies available in academic literature to provide a true empirical picture of gender and consumption association of RTE foods. The accuracy and reliability of the gathered data is also a limitation for this study.

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7 Appendix A Appendix

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Interview Questionnaire

- 1 *What is your occupation and particular business area of profession?*
- 2 *What according to you is the concept of Ready-to-eat meals and how do they benefit the community at large?*
- 3 *How often do you purchase and consume ready to eat meals or your favorite RTE products?*
- 4 *What type of Ready to eat meals do you usually prefer to consume or repurchase?*
- 5 *Why do you purchase the frequently consumed ready to eat meal or RTE meal?*

- 6** *How much do you normally spend on the purchase and consumption of RTE products?*
- 7** *Please describe you favourite Ready to Eat product and its particular attributes that you believe are key drivers for your purchase decision.*
- 8** *In your opinion, what you think is the impact of RTE products on human health? And what is the role of society in this regard?*
- 9** *Is there an alternate to RTE, given the increasingly fast environment we live in? Do you think this industry will grow further in the coming years?*
- 10** *How do you think these products and/or industry can be improved? Is there any need and room for improvements?*

11 Bibliography

108 Appendix B

Female Interviewee Transcript

Interviewee 1- Female Participant

- What is your occupation and particular business area of profession?

I'm a clinical oncology nurse at a leading healthcare institute in Bangkok and I've been working at the hospital for the last ten years. My professional area of expertise is the healthcare services that I've been affiliated with now for a long time.

- What according to you is the concept of Ready-to-eat meals and how do they benefit the community at large?

Ready to eat meals are those fast food products that you get these days at places like Pizza Hut, McDonalds and Burgers joints. I feel they come handy as they don't need any cooking time and people who got busy schedules can just order their favourite meals without any hassle. Professionals like us who got busy routines have no time to prepare food at home most of the times so ready to eat saves the day. Most of these fast food meals are also liked by my kids and other children so busy mothers can get their family tasty food in less time. I guess there are loads of different kinds of ready to eat meals in the market like frozen foods and other packaged meals by C.P Foods and S&P which is good since there is so much variety that you can choose from.

- How often do you purchase and consume ready to eat meals or your favorite RTE products?

Well it depends on my schedule as I usually buy take-aways from diners or fast food places when I don't have enough time to prepare a meal at home. It also depends on the leisure time that I spend with my family and kids. I would say that it's mostly several times in the month especially on weekends as we order food at home or go out for dining with the kids. For my lunch at the hospital, I sometimes order RTE meals once or twice during the week. Also when I go to the supermarket for my groceries I usually buy frozen foods for my family along with some packaged items like snacks.

- What type of Ready to eat meals do you usually prefer to consume or repurchase?

I usually like to eat pizza with salad as it is nutritional and keeps my weight in check but sometimes when I'm having lunch at the clinic with the staff then I like to order sandwiches with fruit salads. My kids really like the chicken burgers that you get from places like McDonalds with French fries so I buy that often for the kids. Like I said earlier frozen ready to eat meals like frozen pizzas, fried sea food and packaged snacks are usually part of my purchase list when I go to the supermarket as my family likes to have frozen meals as well. I'm more particular about my diet so I prefer less fattening food like salads and seafood.

- Why do you purchase the frequently consumed ready to eat meal or RTE meal?

The main motivational factor for my purchase of ready to eat meals and fast food products is convenience and taste. The place that I order pizza from most of times makes great pizza just the way I like it and because I'm their regular customer so they offer me discounts from time to time. With my busy schedule at the clinic I prefer the RTE meals to be delivered in quick time at my house or the clinic and they should taste good. The reason for me buying frozen RTE meals is also the same since they taste good and are hygienic which is good for me and my family.

- How much do you normally spend on the purchase and consumption of RTE products?

I usually spend around 1000 bahts on average I guess on my meals that I order for myself and the ones that I get for my family. The spending goes up to 1500 baht I believe at times because sometimes my family decides to go out and eat at a nice diner or I feel like spending some leisure time with my kids on weekends and having my favourite fast food meal. So I guess the average spending would be around a 1000-1500 baht which is convenient for me because of the earnings that I make. Ready to eat meals are really not that expensive nowadays.

- Please describe your favourite Ready to Eat product and its particular attributes that you believe are key drivers for your purchase decision.

I was just telling you about the pizza parlor that makes delicious pizza that I often order because of its great taste. For me taste is really important because the food that you're eating has to be

good enough for you to enjoy your meal time. So this place provides quality service taking extra care about food hygiene and quick delivery. They also provide me discounts now and then as I am a patron there and my family also really likes the pizza from that place when we order at home. The good thing about that is the fact that you get tasty and clean food delivered to your home in less time so your family is happy including yourself.

- In your opinion, what you think is the impact of RTE products on human health? And what is the role of society in this regard?

The RTE products have a great impact on the community since you see so many people being affected in different ways by these foods. Professionals like us who don't usually have enough time to manage meals throughout the day find it easier to order a meal from the nearest RTE outlet and the stay at home mothers have a large variety to choose from for their kids and family so that the meals include both convenience and delicious food which brings peace of mind that is good for health. I guess the ready to eat meals have a positive impact on the society because they bring ease, taste and affordability. The impact on health is obviously a consideration but I tend to choose my meals appropriately and so should the consumers especially kids. They should have the fast food items in moderation and adults should pick healthier option instead of fattening products.

- Is there an alternate to RTE, given the increasingly fast environment we live in? Do you think this industry will grow further in the coming years?

Alternative to RTE? Well I can't really say if there can be any appropriate substitute for the meals that they offer in fast food outlets and Rte diners. The existing products are fine and I guess what is needed is for the RTE industry to include healthier forms of the product as I guess they can be nice alternatives to the current products in the market. There are so many people out there who find it really easy and convenient to buy Rte meals and save time which is why there is a growing demand for such foods in the market and I guess the industry will continue to grow in the future and keep making nice products that are tasty and healthy as well.

- How do you think these products and/or industry can be improved? Is there any need and room for improvements?

Yes, of course. There is room for improvement in the existing ready to eat products as they contain fattening stuff especially the fast food items like chicken burgers and fried food items. They can cause problems such as obesity and hypertension which is why I said earlier that these meals must be consumed in moderation while selecting foods that are healthier. The industry that makes such food items should take notice of this aspect concerning human health and should therefore introduce products in the market that include nutritional values like less oils and fried foods with more grilled food items including vegetables and less additives.

119 Appendix C

Male Interviewee Transcript

Interviewee 2- Male Participant

- What is your occupation and particular business area of profession?

I work at an Electronics Engineering firm as a Product Analyst. My professional business area is Engineering Management and I've been working here since 2011.

- What according to you is the concept of Ready-to-eat meals and how do they benefit the community at large?

Ready to eat meals are the quick precooked foods that save you time and inconvenience. I guess Ready to eat meals are pretty popular these days in Bangkok since you see a fast food place or a diner at every corner. Most of these meals taste really nice and I find them really good because they make my lunch breaks enjoyable. My family uses these ready to eat products most often and all my family members like the taste and convenience that these products offer. These days loads of people buy fast food and frozen RTE products as they are mostly available from almost everywhere in Bangkok.

I can say they do have benefits for the community because my colleagues are often complaining about the problems they have with meals management at home sometimes due to less time so most of them order meals at the office during lunch as it is more easy for them to order food than to wait at homes for their lunches to be prepared for office take-away. Then you get these frozen products that you can store at home in the refrigerator and just heat up when you're hungry so that also is really beneficial as men who do not know how to cook can just heat up the meal and eat. They aren't that expensive as well I guess at least not for the professionals compared to their benefits.

- How often do you purchase and consume ready to eat meals or your favorite RTE products?

Well, considering the amount of ordering that I do for my lunch at the office and my dining with the family I would have to say many times during the week as I often order meals during the week in the office and at home sometimes during the weekdays. With my family I usually dine out during the weekend so that would be quite often during the month. To be exact I consume ready to meals at least two to three times during the week and then on weekends with my family when I go out to dine and spend time with my two children.

- What type of Ready to eat meals do you usually prefer to consume or repurchase?

I usually like to have fried chicken and ready to eat Thai specialties such as fried rice and fish or shrimps that they serve at nice diners. My family thinks these specialties are a bit expensive but they taste really good and I enjoy every time I go out to eat Thai RTE with my family at quick service restaurants. When I'm ordering food at the office with my colleagues during lunch time I have grilled chicken and cheese burgers and chicken nuggets that are also my favourite because they taste really nice. I don't eat a lot of frozen ready to eat products but chilled RTE such as cold sandwiches and flavored desserts are really good.

- Why do you purchase the frequently consumed ready to eat meal or RTE meal?

The ready to eat meal that I frequently order at the office is the fried chicken and Burger that I really like because the fast food place makes it really nice and delivers it in quick time so I usually eat that when I'm with my colleagues at the workplace. I believe taste and convenience including price are important drivers that make me go for a repurchase. My family and I usually go out and dine at this local diner that offers really delicious Thai specialties that are really tasty and personally I think they are not that expensive. The place has a nice ambience and the restaurant offers quick service so we don't have to wait for our order to be served for too long.

- How much do you normally spend on the purchase and consumption of RTE products?

I tend to order frequently because of my job role and my routine which has me usually consuming ready to eat meals at the office for my lunch so I mostly spend around 1500 to 2000 Thai baht on the meals and the dining that I do with my family. That is probably an approximate because

sometimes my family would ask me to take them to a pizza place or some nice diner so it depends on the requirements or a particular situation at times but I guess that would be the average spending for me somewhere around 1500 to 2000 baht.

- Please describe your favourite Ready to Eat product and its particular attributes that you believe are key drivers for your purchase decision.

When I'm having the food at my office I really like to order the fried chicken and grilled chicken cheese burger from the fast food place near our office. I really enjoy the food from there because the chicken tastes really nice and my colleagues like it too. Besides they provide us special meal offers that are lucrative and have reasonable costs. The best thing about ordering from this place is that it provides amazing food that I like at appropriate price with quick delivery service so for me that's very convenient.

- In your opinion, what you think is the impact of RTE products on human health? And what is the role of society in this regard?

The ready to eat products are beneficial for the community at large because they provide many benefits to the consumers which can be seen by the growing trend of the Thai people purchasing and consuming such products. They however have some negative effects on the human health as well which can be seen from the incidents of people suffering from coronary diseases and obesity due to the excessive consumption of such foods. These foods also do not have the essential nutrients that you can get from organic forms of other food items and cooked meals. So I guess the consumption of RTE meals does entail some health implications and the society needs to be aware of it. People should be more careful when they are selecting RTE products and should select healthier meals that can be consumed in appropriate quantities.

- Is there an alternate to RTE, given the increasingly fast environment we live in? Do you think this industry will grow further in the coming years?

Well I don't believe there can be alternatives to the ready to eat meals as the people today need such products to bring convenience to their lives while being able to enjoy tasty meals while on

the go. Food is a necessity and I guess RTE foods are the requirements for the busy and fast life of today especially for people who are working at offices or in other fields. If they start making products that are healthier and nutritional then that would be a nice thing as people today are too busy to consider health aspects of such foods but the awareness must be there and the industry should make healthy food items. There are huge prospects for the industry I guess for the future as the demand for RTE is increasing and the people will continue to purchase and consume such fast food products due to the taste, convenience and large variety so the industry will grow too.

- How do you think these products and/or industry can be improved? Is there any need and room for improvements?

There is certainly room for improvement in the existing ready to products as they contain too much fat substance that is not good for the health. Most of the frozen and packaged RTE products include preservatives which can also prove harmful as I've heard from people and other sources so therefore it is important that the manufacturers of such food items pay attention to these aspects and introduce healthier options in the market. They should include products with less fat content and nutrient rich raw materials that have a positive impact on human health. They should also try to limit the use of preservatives and flavor enhancers so that the health is not affected.