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The Effect of Accessibility and Retail Service Quality on Repeat Purchase in the Traditional Store of the Consumer

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the influence of accessibility and retail service quality of traditional retail stores on consumers' repeat purchase decisions. The sample consisted of 400 consumers who had made repeat purchases from traditional retail stores in the Su-ngai Kolok District, Narathiwat Province. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, specifically stepwise multiple regression analysis. The quantitative findings revealed that consumers perceived a high level of accessibility to traditional retail stores, which included: (1) proximity of the store to their residence, (2) ease of travel, (3) short travel time, and (4) low transportation costs. Additionally, retail service quality was rated at a high level across several dimensions: physical aspects, reliability, interpersonal interaction, problem-solving, and store policies. The regression analysis indicated that four factors—accessibility, interpersonal interaction, store policies, and physical aspects—could jointly predict 61.9% of the variance in consumers' repeat purchase decisions.

Keyword: Accessibility; Retail Service Quality; Repeat Purchase; Traditional Store

1. INTRODUCTION

Retail business is one of the most important economic activities that drives both national economic and social development. It plays a key role in enhancing living standards and the overall quality of life for the population. Acting as a crucial intermediary, the retail sector connects producers with consumers through an inclusive market system involving a large number of participants, including manufacturers, wholesalers, logistics providers, and laborers. Moreover, retail business represents the lifestyle and culture of communities and localities (Institute of Trade Strategies, 2023), making it an integral part of many people's lives. In Thailand, the retail sector accounts for 15.9% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), second only to the manufacturing sector (26.8%), highlighting its substantial contribution to the commercial economy (Phongwora, 2016).

Retail businesses in Thailand are typically divided into two main categories: Traditional Trade, commonly known as "mom-and-pop" stores, focuses on selling daily consumer goods. These stores often lack formal store layout, categorization, or decoration and are usually operated by a single owner or family. Modern Trade involves high investment, well-organized store layouts, categorized products, and systematic operations. These businesses use modern service technologies and distribution centers, allowing them to offer lower prices and negotiate better terms with suppliers. The growing popularity and rapid expansion of modern trade—through branches and franchises—have posed significant challenges to traditional retailers. The dominance of large, often multinational, modern retail corporations has been made possible by their financial strength, economies of scale, and business diversification (Banluesin & Soykratok, 2018). As a result, many small traditional retail stores have been forced to shut down (Intharamuenwai & Chamchong, 2020). However, traditional retailers can still survive by strengthening their market presence, improving their competitiveness, and building customer trust to encourage repeat purchases. Among the key success factors are accessibility and service quality, which significantly influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Accessibility plays a vital role in retail success. Location and ease of access are critical for attracting and retaining customers. Retail outlets that are easy to reach increase the likelihood of customer visits and purchases (Sophonpattanabundit & Patanthabutr, 2022; Larsen et al., 2020). Especially in border towns such as Su-ngai Kolok District, Narathiwat Province—which is adjacent to Malaysia and serves as a hub for goods and services—the accessibility of retail stores determines their ability to compete. Most traditional stores in this area are family-run businesses passed down through generations. Yet, the growing number of modern retail outlets—such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and wholesale stores—has shifted consumer preferences away from traditional options. This shift highlights the need for local traditional retailers to adapt by improving access and service delivery to retain their customer base. In addition to accessibility, retail service quality is another crucial factor that influences customer satisfaction and repeat purchase decisions. Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996) proposed the Retail Service Quality Scale, which consists of five key dimensions: personal interaction, store policy, physical aspects, reliability, and problem-solving. High-quality service builds trust and leaves a lasting impression, encouraging consumers to return.

Past service experiences shape consumer attitudes and play a direct role in determining whether customers will make repeat purchases (Sivapalan et al., 2022).

Given the above context, this study aims to examine the influence of accessibility and retail service quality on consumers' repeat purchase decisions in traditional retail stores in Sungai Kolok District, Narathiwat Province. The findings are expected to guide local retailers in developing effective strategies that align with consumer needs, thereby increasing their competitiveness and ensuring the long-term sustainability of traditional retail businesses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Accessibility to Traditional Retail Stores

Accessibility is one of the key factors influencing consumer behavior in service selection, particularly in the context of traditional retail stores. Among these factors, store location stands out as a primary determinant in customers' store choice decisions. Most consumers tend to shop at retail outlets that are geographically closest to them. As emphasized by Wilbard, Mbilinyi, Maliva & Mkwizu (2018), location decisions carry strategic significance, enabling retailers to develop sustainable competitive advantages.

This notion is further supported by Bondemark (2020), who defines accessibility as the ease with which consumers can enter and exit a retail location. Retailers must account for several external variables—such as road infrastructure, traffic conditions, and potential physical barriers—that may influence a customer's journey to the store. Zhou et al. (2020) elaborate that effective accessibility is shaped by multiple factors including travel time, cost, distance, and speed, all of which contribute to the consumer's perception of convenience.

Based on a synthesis of recent literature, the conceptual framework for Accessibility to Traditional Retail Stores can be structured into four key dimensions:

a. Proximity to Residential Area

The distance between a consumer's home and the retail store is a critical determinant of purchasing behavior. According to Access Development (2016), consumers residing closer to retail outlets are more likely to make frequent visits. In contrast, stores located farther away face increased competition from more conveniently located alternatives.

b. Short Travel Time

In modern urban settings, consumers prefer to minimize travel time. Jaravaza and Chitando (2013) argue that store location and operating hours significantly influence time-sensitive shopping decisions. Even marginal differences in travel time can affect consumer store

preference. In their study on supermarket customers, travel time was cited as the most important factor (81%), followed by service quality (80%), location convenience (78%), ambience (65%), price affordability (62%), proximity to complementary outlets (56%), and store visibility (48%).

c. Ease of Travel (Ease of Access)

Unhindered travel, facilitated by well-maintained roads, adequate parking, and low congestion, enhances perceived store accessibility. Oviedo et al. (2022) propose evaluating accessibility on two levels: macro-accessibility—connectivity between the consumer's residence and the retail store—and micro-accessibility—internal ease of movement, including parking space and store layout. Both are crucial in shaping the overall retail experience.

d. Low Travel Costs

Travel-related expenses are another influential factor, particularly in a digital era where consumers can easily compare alternatives online. Marshall and Pires (2018) found that lower travel costs, whether through affordable public transportation or short driving distances, positively impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. Retailers located in cost-effective, accessible areas are more likely to retain customers over time.

The accessibility is a multidimensional concept encompassing proximity, affordability, travel time, and ease of movement. Together, these elements significantly shape consumer engagement and loyalty within traditional retail environments.

2.2 Retail Service Quality

Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996) developed the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) as a measurement tool for assessing service quality in retail stores. The scale builds upon the SERVPERF model and comprises 28 items—17 derived from SERVPERF and 11 newly developed from qualitative research. These 28 items are categorized into five dimensions specifically tailored to the retail business context.

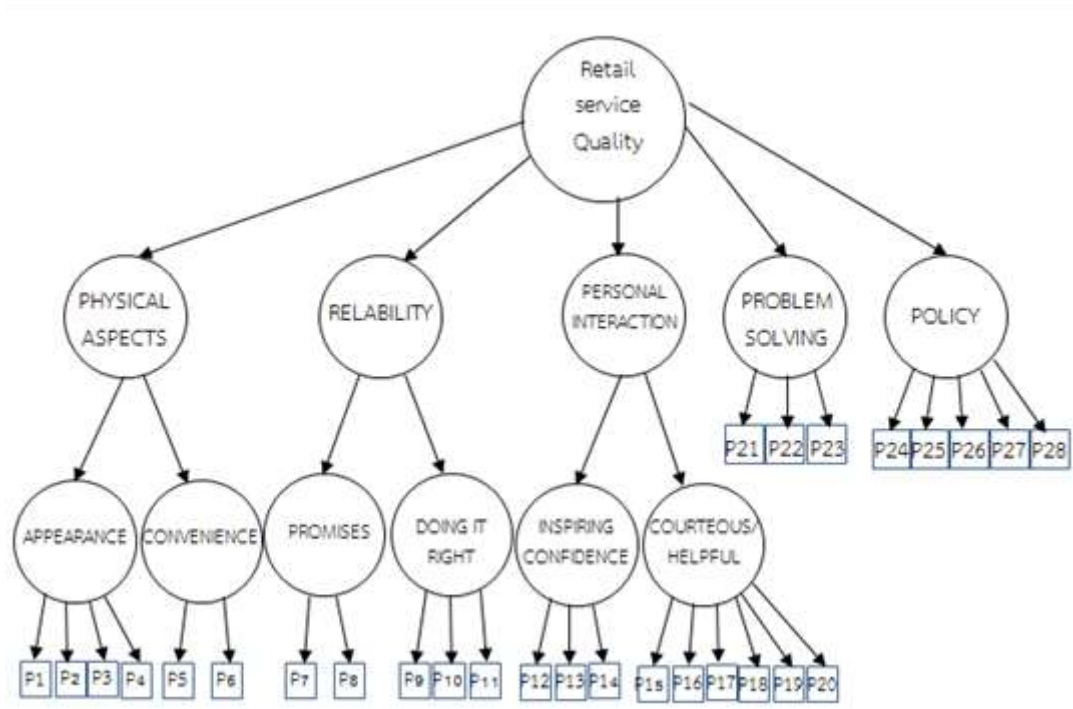


Figure 1: Hierarchical Structure of Retail Service Quality

Source: Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz, (1996)

a. Physical Aspects

This dimension extends beyond the SERVQUAL concept of “Tangibles” by incorporating elements of customer convenience. It includes two sub-dimensions: 1) Appearance includes four items related to the modernity of equipment and fixtures, amenities within the store, and service-related materials. 2) Convenience includes two items related to store layout for easy product location and ease of movement within the store.

b. Reliability

This dimension aligns with the “Reliability” dimension in SERVQUAL and consists of two sub-dimensions: 1) Promises includes two items measuring whether the store fulfills its commitments and delivers services on time. 2) Doing It Right includes three items assessing service accuracy, product availability, and correct transaction processing.

c. Personal Interaction

This dimension evaluates interpersonal service encounters and includes two sub-dimensions:

Inspiring Confidence consists of three items assess staff knowledge, behavior, and the safety of the transaction. Courteous/Helpfulness includes six items measure prompt service, communication during service, responsiveness to requests, personalized attention, courtesy, and telephone support.

d. Problem Solving

This dimension addresses how the store handles returns, exchanges, and complaints. It includes three items: Handling of returns and exchanges, Sincerity in problem resolution, Staff capability in dealing with complaints

e. Policy

This dimension reflects store policies that directly impact perceived service quality. It includes five items: Product quality, Parking convenience, Store hours, Acceptance of major credit cards, Store-branded credit card offerings.

The RSQS has been widely applied in various countries to assess service quality in convenience stores. For example, in 2001, it was used in a study of department stores in Hong Kong and later in 2005 in Chachoengsao, Thailand, to explore the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth behavior. The scale has also been adopted in India, Vietnam, and the United States (Chatnaraset, 2010). Although SERVQUAL has been used in various service contexts, it has limitations and inconsistencies when applied to retail environments. RSQS was thus developed specifically to address the unique aspects of retail service quality. The five dimensions—Physical Aspects, Reliability, Personal Interaction, Problem Solving, and Policy—are essential tools for measuring retail service quality. Retailers that continuously improve across all RSQS dimensions can enhance perceived service quality, leading to customer retention and repeat purchases (Nguyen et al., 2015). Therefore, for studies on service quality in traditional retail stores, the RSQS is highly recommended. Researchers may adapt or expand the dimensions based on the specific context of the study, as the RSQS is designed for comprehensive analysis of retail service quality (Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996). This study of traditional retail service quality utilizes the RSQS model, focusing on the five main dimensions: Personal Interaction, Policy, Physical Aspects, Reliability, and Problem Solving—each serving as a key factor influencing repeat purchase decisions.

3. METHOD

3.1. Population and Sample

The population consisted of consumers who made repeat purchases from traditional retail stores in Sungai Kolok District, Narathiwat Province. As the exact number of the population was unknown, the researcher determined the sample size using Cochran's formula (1977) for unknown populations. A total of 400 samples were obtained. The variables related to retail service quality were based on the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) developed by Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996), which includes five dimensions: 1) Personal Interaction

2) Policy 3) Physical Aspects 4) Reliability 5) Problem Solving. Additionally, the study considered Retail Store Accessibility (Reachable Access), consisting of: 1) Travel distance 2) Travel time 3) Travel cost 4) Travel convenience. (Lättman et al., 2018)

3.2. Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used as the research instrument to collect data on retail service quality, accessibility to retail stores, and repeat purchase behavior. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point rating scale.

3.3. Data Analysis

The statistical methods used for data analysis included Mean ($\bar{x}$), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Stepwise Multiple Regression Result

Factor	(B)	(β)	t	sig
Constant	.328		2.166	.031
Accessibility	.503	.456	10.968***	.000
Personal Interaction	.406	.336	6.327***	.000
Policy	.229	.204	3.597***	.000
Physical Aspects	-.158	-.135	-2.974**	.003

F = 160.50*** R = .767 R² = .619 Adj. R² = .615 Std.Err. = .610

Note significant *** at the .001 level, ** at the .01 level

The findings of this study reveal that multiple factors—including accessibility, personal interaction, and policy—positively and significantly influence repeat purchases in traditional consumer stores, whereas the physical aspect has a negative and significant influence on repeat purchases.

a. Accessibility and Repeat Purchase

Accessibility is a universal factor influencing customer loyalty across geographic settings (Ngatia, Maranga, & Miricho, 2022). In this study, accessibility—including factors like proximity to residence, ease of travel, short travel time, and affordable transport costs—was found to significantly influence repeat purchase decisions in traditional stores

b. Personal Interaction and Repeat Purchase

The findings of this study indicate that personal interaction plays a crucial role in driving repeat purchase behavior in traditional retail stores. This aligns with the work of Chatzoglou, Chatzoudes, Savvidou, Fotiadis, & Delias, (2022) who emphasize that how personnel treat customers during service encounters significantly affects consumer preferences, with friendliness and attentiveness being particularly valued.

In this study, respondents evaluated statements such as “The staff are ready to serve according to customer needs,” and “The staff pay attention to each individual customer and serve them sincerely and in a friendly manner.” These items reflect the importance of personalized service and the emotional connection fostered during interactions. When staff clearly communicate, show a willingness to help, and consistently act politely—as reflected in other items such as “The staff clearly tell customers when their request will be fulfilled” and “The staff are always courteous to customers”—it builds trust and a sense of being valued.

c. Policy and Repeat Purchase

In this study, consumers responded positively to items like “The store offers high-quality and standardized products,” and “There is convenient parking available for customers.” These reflect the operational aspects of a retail store that influence the customer experience beyond just personal interaction.

Furthermore, respondents acknowledged the importance of “convenient operating hours” and “a variety of payment methods”—factors that make the shopping process smoother and more adaptable to diverse customer needs. As Mahfooz (2014); Rizvi & Sabir (2018) argue, a holistic retail policy that ensures convenient purchasing, flexible payment, and reliable after-sales service fosters a strong sense of trust and satisfaction, which encourages repeat visits.

d. Physical Aspects and Repeat Purchase

This study identified a significant negative relationship between physical aspects and repeat purchase behavior in traditional retail stores. Although modernization efforts—such as upgrading shelves, installing checkout counters, and redesigning store layouts—are intended to enhance convenience, they may inadvertently weaken the emotional attachment customers have to familiar retail environments. When the store's identity changes, customers may feel disconnected, which can reduce their intention to repurchase. In contrast, Musasa and Tlapana (2023) found that in modern retail formats like malls and supermarkets, physical enhancements—such as clear signage, wide aisles, and adequate lighting—positively

influenced shopping frequency. These differing outcomes underscore the importance of context in evaluating the impact of physical store features.

Traditional retailers should therefore modernize with care, ensuring improvements like cleanliness, organized product displays, and supportive shopping tools enhance the customer experience without eroding the store's familiar atmosphere. Maintaining this balance can help preserve customer loyalty while keeping the shopping environment functional and appealing.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study carry important implications for traditional retail store management and policy design. The significant positive effects of accessibility, personal interaction, and policy on repeat purchase behavior suggest that traditional retailers should. Enhance store accessibility by ensuring that stores are located near residential areas and are easy to reach with minimal travel time and cost. Retailers should take into account public transportation routes, parking availability, and walking convenience when selecting or maintaining store locations.

Strengthen personal interaction by training staff to provide friendly, attentive, and personalized service. Positive human interaction fosters emotional connections and trust, which are essential for encouraging repeat purchases in traditional retail settings.

Implement Supportive Policies: Offer customer-centric policies such as clear store hours, multiple payment options, product quality assurance, and convenient parking. These policies enhance the overall shopping experience and foster customer loyalty.

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