

The Development of Distribution Channel Strategies for Modern Retail Organizations

Samaporn Nualsut,

Sujinda Promkum and Seksan Werasuk

Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat university, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: seksan_wer@nstru.ac.th

Abstract

This quality research aims to: 1) study the development of distribution channels for modern retail organizations, 2) examine factors influencing the development of distribution channel strategies for modern retail organizations, and 3) develop multichannel distribution strategies for modern retail organizations. The sample group consists of eight participants, including retail managers and experts in the retail industry, who were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, with the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) employed to gather insights from experienced individuals. The research instrument used was an interview form focused on the development of distribution channel strategies for modern retail organizations. The data were analyzed using content analysis.

The findings revealed that distribution channel strategies for modern retail organizations comprise four key components: 1) analyzing customers, 2) developing strategy, 3) designing sales channels, and 4) implementation and evaluation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that retail organizations in Thailand collect and assess customer data from each sales channel to better understand customer needs. This approach will enable efficient management of a diverse marketing channel mix, thus enhancing the overall performance of modern retail organizations in the region.

Keywords: Retail Business; Quality Research; Distribution Channel Strategies;

Introduction

The retail business plays a crucial role in Thailand's economy, generating revenue second only to industrial sector, and providing the second-largest source of employment after agriculture. It directly impacts the livelihoods of the population. Therefore, retail business is a key economic activity in driving the overall economic and social development of Thailand. Moreover, it serves as a catalyst in improving living standards and the quality of life for the population. The retail business acts as an intermediary, connecting and distributing products from manufacturers or wholesalers to the final consumers for personal or household use, rather than for business purposes (Shamin & Ghazali, 2014). It represents the final link in connecting producers and consumers, playing a crucial role in adding value to products. By reducing distribution costs for manufacturers and making it easier for consumers to access them, retail businesses ensure that goods are sold and that operations continue" (Taylor & Francis, 2013). In Thailand, the retail industry has generated significant market value and revenue for the country. In 2020, its worth reached approximately 2.3 trillion baht, reflecting an increase of 42.85%, or 17.07% of the nation's GDP (National Economic and Social Development Council,

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2021). Projections for 2021 suggest an expansion of 3.0-5.01% for the retail sector (Kasikorn Research Center, 2021). This demonstrates the continuous development of retail business in Thailand, leading to heightened competition within the industry. As a result, customer acquisition and retention have become more challenging and dynamic. Like global retail businesses, Thailand's retail sector has been affected by various factors, including economic changes, industry competition, and advancements in communication technologies. The proliferation of the internet, social media, and smartphones with 4G and 5G networks has enabled consumers to access product information, specifications, prices, and quality assessments independently. In response, retail operators have expanded their sales channels to offer unique consumer experiences (Verhoef et al., 2019), implementing multichannel marketing strategies to build relationships and sell products (Ali & Brook, 2018) to consumers. However, managing multiple sales channels presents increased marketing complexity for retailers. Improper implementation may result in failure to achieve objectives, particularly in effectively reaching and responding to diverse consumer needs. To address these challenges, the concept of "Distribution Channel Strategy Development for Modern Retail Business Organizations" has been widely adopted across various industries, including consumer goods, business-to-business (B2B) sales, retail businesses, and other service sectors (Jupiter, 2016). This approach aims to create added value through the process of customer attraction, retention, and development (Neslin et al., 2016). Implementation is carried out through multiple channels, such as physical stores, catalogs, websites, social networks, mobile platforms, direct sales, distributors, call centers, and other platforms (April, 2012), enabling businesses to optimize the management of their diverse marketing channel mix (Neslin & Shankar, 2019). In conclusion, the ongoing expansion of the retail business has led to intensified competition. Advancements in communications and telecommunications technologies have compelled retail businesses to adapt by shifting from relying solely on traditional single-channel retail stores, as in the past, to embracing multichannel marketing. This research aims to develop strategies tailored to the retail industry in Thailand. Given these considerations, the researcher intends to conduct a study on "Development of Distribution Channel Strategy for Modern Retail Organizations" to expand and enhance knowledge competitive advantages.

Research Objectives

1. To study the development of distribution channel strategy for modern retail organizations.
2. To examine factors influencing the development of distribution channel strategy for modern retail organizations.
3. To develop multichannel distribution strategies for modern retail business organizations.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The key informants for this study include:

1) Retail business executives: 4 individuals representing four types of retail businesses, comprising:

(1) Direct Selling (Multi-Level Marketing: MLM) – Giffarine Skyline Unity Co., Ltd.,

(2) Hypermarket – Big C Supercenter Public Co., Ltd.,

(3) Direct Marketing – TV Direct Co., Ltd., and

(4) Convenience Store – CP All Public Co., Ltd.

2) Experts with expertise in the retail industry: 4 individuals, including 2 university professors in the fields of marketing and retailing, and 2 retail business consultants. The total sample size is 8.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to gather insights from experienced individuals.

Research Method

Step 1: Literature Review

The researcher conducted a review of relevant concepts, theories, and previous studies related to multichannel retailing, multichannel marketing, and multichannel customer management strategies. The findings were used to develop distribution channel strategies for retail businesses in Thailand and to create data collection tools, including an in-depth interview script and a questionnaire.

Step 2: Development of In-depth Interview Script

The researcher created an in-depth interview tool for key informants, based on literature review findings.

Step 3: Conducting In-depth Interviews with Retail Business Executives, Experts, and Multichannel Marketing Specialists

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the first group of key informants, consisting of executives from four types of retail businesses: Direct Selling, Hypermarket, Direct Marketing, and Convenience Store. The researcher selected companies that represent each type of business, which included Giffarine Skyline Unity Co., Ltd., Big C Supercenter Public Co., Ltd., TV Direct Public Co., Ltd., and CP All Public Co., Ltd. The total number of business executive key informants interviewed was 4. The second group of key informants, made up of experts, included university professors specializing in marketing and retailing, as well as retail business consultants, totaling 4 individuals. The information collected was used for analysis and to summarize the key points from the interviews.

Step 4: Verification and Development of Distribution Channel Strategies for Modern Retail Organizations

The data obtained from Step 3 was used to verify or refine distribution channel strategies synthesized from the literature review, aiming to develop effective distribution channel strategies tailored specifically for retail businesses in Thailand.

Research Instrument

The study employed a loosely structured interview script, developed by the researcher, featuring open-ended questions aimed at exploring strategies for developing distribution channels for modern retail organizations. The questions were formulated based on a literature review of strategies for developing distribution channels for modern retail organizations and were aligned with the research objectives. The draft script was validated by experts to ensure accuracy, content validity, and appropriate language usage. The final interview script included 14 questions, as detailed below:

1. An in-depth exploration of whether distribution channel strategies are significant for modern retail organizations and how they contribute to their success.
2. An in-depth investigation into whether there is agreement with the distribution channel strategies for modern retail organizations and how these strategies should be structured to suit multichannel retail businesses in Thailand.
3. An In-depth examination of the five-step distribution channel strategy framework for modern retail executives, focusing on how steps should be added or reduced and identifying the most critical steps for achieving organizational goals.
4. A detailed examination of customer analysis for multichannel retail businesses in Thailand to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in understanding behavior across sales channels.
5. An in-depth exploration of how to develop a multichannel strategy for retail businesses and the reasons behind these strategies.
6. A detailed examination of how to design sales channels for multichannel retail businesses in Thailand, and the rationale behind these approaches.
7. An in-depth exploration of how to implement strategies in retail businesses to achieve organizational goals.
8. A thorough examination of which key performance indicators should be utilized and the strategies for achieving the best outcomes in evaluating the respondent's retail business.
9. An in-depth inquiry into how multichannel retailing strategy should be structured to ensure the achievement of organizational goals.
10. Insights into how multichannel customer satisfaction strategies should be implemented for retail businesses and why this approach is crucial for achieving the highest levels of efficiency and effectiveness.
11. An in-dept inquiry into multichannel customer management strategies, emphasizing their role in creating synergy across sales channels, leading to a competitive advantage and ensuring long-term sustainability for retail businesses.
12. A thorough examination of how the customer segmentation strategy within the distribution channel strategy for the respondent's retail business should be applied across sales channels to achieve sustainable success.
13. A thorough examination of how the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy within the respondent's retail business's distribution channels should be utilized across sales channels to drive success.
14. An in-depth exploration of how to collect and utilize customer database from each sales channel within a multichannel retailing strategy to assess customer needs and maximize its potential benefits.

Research Design

This study is qualitative research focused on developing distribution channel strategies for modern retail organizations, based on the framework of Neslin & Shankar (2021).

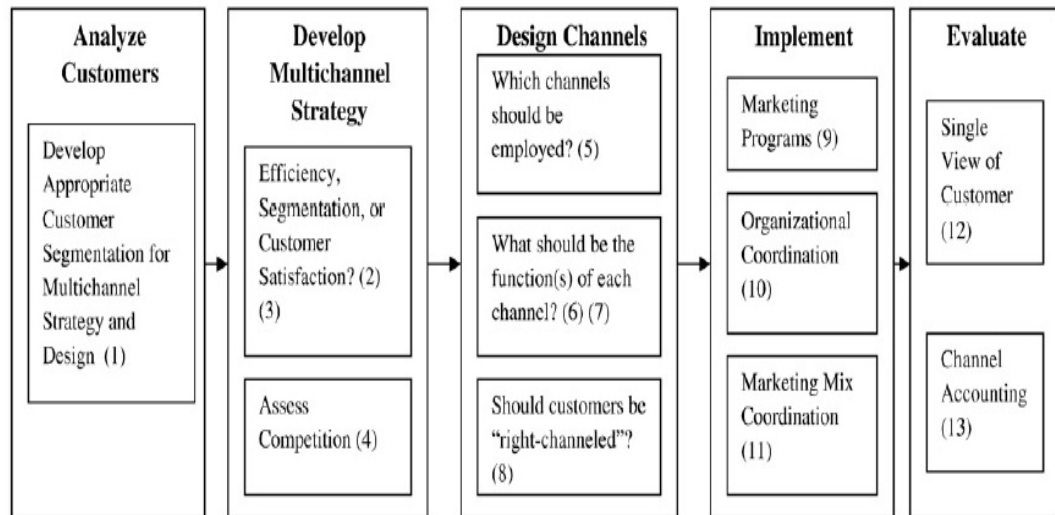


Figure 1: The distribution channel strategy framework by Neslin & Shankar (2021)

Results

Based on in-depth interviews and data synthesis, it was found that the distribution channel strategy for retail businesses in Thailand includes four main components: 1) Analyze customers, 2) Develop multichannel strategy, 3) Design sales channels, and 4) Implement and evaluate. The details are as follows:

1. Analyze customers

In the retail business, customers are the most important because they purchase essential goods for daily living, both consumables and durables. Therefore, prioritizing branch expansion to secure advantageous locations over competitors is necessary. This should be accompanied by developing and selecting personnel to improve work systems and customer databases to ensure standards. Cultivating an organizational culture that encourages employees to be aware and proud of being part of the business is also essential. Customer analysis play a key role in developing and improving product selection and management processes, ensuring that high-quality products are available to meet the needs of the target audience.

2. Develop multichannel strategy

The development of strategies within this framework requires staying up-to-date, embracing change and making continuous improvements, while leveraging technology to enhance the business's capabilities, ensuring sustainable growth over time. Promotion is often used as a key strategy to attract consumers and stimulate demand. However, it is important to conduct market analysis to understand customer needs and behaviours, as well as analyse competitors and the environment that affects product sales. Promotional activities, such as discounts, gifts, or buy-one-get-one offers, should be implemented only after conducting these analyses. In today's intensely competitive retail environment, businesses must adapt to strengthen their competitive capabilities and strategic advantage through efficient

management. Customer behaviour should be analysed to prioritize actions, potentially starting with one sales channel and expanding gradually once a clear and effective approach is established.

3. Design sales channels

The core of retail business lies in channel design, which emphasizes marketing effectiveness in building customer relationship and serves as a primary tool for enhancing business competitiveness. Since this type of business must prioritize customers, success in multichannel retail requires careful attention to sales channel design that fosters customer relationships. These relationships must be founded on trust and customer acceptance to generate repeat purchases, leading to long-term customer retention. This is achieved through quality relationship-building by staff, who earn customer trust by offering diverse product options and maintaining adequate inventory. Executives provide training to shape employee behaviors that cultivate positive customer- business relationships. Prioritizing customer benefits leads to acceptance and trust.

4. Implement and evaluate

Marketing operations in this business require clearly defined strategies for each sales channel, specific customer segmentation, and established sales targets. This process also involves an exchange of information between the business and customers. Listening to customer needs for all business decisions is a crucial first step in creating the marketing mix. This operational framework helps businesses understand their value from the customer's perspective and highlights key business priorities. To drive business growth and expand business opportunities, as well as to understand who the customers are and how to engage with them for business success, it is essential to study customer needs in order to ensure their satisfaction. This process must be approached from customers' perspective, guaranteeing that each individual receives the highest level of service in alignment with the business objectives. When customers are satisfied, they are likely to engage in word- of- mouth promotion, recommending our business to others.

Discussion

The researcher developed a Multichannel Retailing Strategy for Thai Retailers to meet the diverse needs of customers across multiple channels, ensuring sustainable business operations in Thailand's highly competitive environment. This aligns with the concept of multichannel customer management, corresponding with the research of Tarun lalbahadur kushwaha's (2007), titled "essays on multichannel marketing." The study aimed to examine multichannel marketing strategies, where information and product/ service offerings are simultaneously presented to customers through two or more sales channels. The findings can be discussed based on the framework presented in Figure 1, as outlined below.



Figure 2: Model for developing a distribution channel strategy for modern retail organization.

1. Analyze customers

In customer analysis, businesses must conduct an in-depth examination of customer preferences and needs for products and services across each sales channel. This ensures that services are tailored appropriately to each channel. Analyzing customer behavior within the different sales channels facilitates the formulation of strategies for effective customer management which is crucial for segmenting target customers based on their respective sales channels. Customer analysis across various sales channels is crucial for understanding purchasing decisions and building loyalty. This aligns with the study by Joseph Pancras (2015), titled "Essays On Consumer Personalization," which aimed to examine service delivery tailored to individual customer needs, such as what to sell, who to sell to, and pricing strategies. The research emphasized personalized service through individually targeted advertising approaches. Additionally, the study explored sales promotion through the use of coupons to drive market growth and provide specialized product categories tailored to customer needs. It examined the application of diverse customer purchasing histories to inform appropriate business strategies for maximizing profitability. The research also highlighted how special coupon usage in retail businesses could strengthen competitive advantage. Furthermore, it emphasized the development of frameworks to assess the impacts of product category allocation and price-related promotions in retail businesses. These frameworks would enable more effective forecasting and provide solutions to critical issues for retail operators. Additionally, this also corresponds with the study by Lei Karen Wang (2008) on "Empirical Models of Consumer Behavior in Retailing," which aimed to deepen the understanding of customer behavior in retail business. The research utilized retail customer database analysis to derive conclusions for more effective marketing decisions. The empirical analysis of purchasing behavior was identified as crucial for increasing sales and profitability. Similarly,

this aligns with the study on diverse customer management approaches by Preety Awashi and Purnima S. Sangle (2012). Their findings revealed that information technology utilization, various strategies, and quality sales and service contribute to successful customer management that focuses on marketing, customers, competitors, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve customer-oriented goals. These elements impact retail business profitability and enhance current and future marketing capabilities. Moreover, the research on multichannel marketing management by Tracy Anna Rickman and Robert M. Cosenza (2007) demonstrated that culture, behavior, language, social status, and communication contribute to the success of multichannel marketing management. Multiple customer contact channels were found to enhance customer management satisfaction, contribute to business expansion planning that relates to management, control, and administration in operational formats that increase efficiency, reduce costs, and generate profits. This approach also serves as a decision-making tool within a customer-centric framework, beginning with customer analysis, understanding customer needs, developing customer databases, and designing various channels to reach customer segments with different lifestyles.

2. Develop multichannel strategy

Identifying specific customer needs is a key element of multichannel marketing management. The development of strategies to evaluate operational performance, utilize customer databases, and manage customer relationships are all critical components of multichannel marketing management. Consistent with the study on diverse customer management approaches by Preety Awashi and Purnima S. Sangle (2012), their findings revealed that information technology utilization, various strategies, and quality sales and service contribute to successful customer management that focuses on marketing, customers, competitors, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve customer-oriented goals. These elements impact retail business profitability and enhance current and future marketing capabilities. It also is in line with the study on channel management in customer demand management by Weimin Dong (2008), which identified two key channels that contribute to the development of customer demand management: (1) managing limited resources to carry out various activities, and (2) managing resources to ensure environmental diversity, which serves as an effective marketing model for multichannel customers. The development of customer responsiveness starts with: 1) frequency of purchases, 2) purchase volume, 3) return behavior, and 4) profit margins from purchases. In line with the study by Jayoung Choi and Jihye Park (2016) on multichannel retailing in South Korea, it was identified that the diversity in demographic factors and sales formats constitutes a key aspect of multichannel retailing in the country. Given the various factors currently impacting the retail business, including lifestyle, values, the economy, society, law, and the rapid advancement of technology, relying solely on a single channel to engage target customers is no longer sufficient. There is a need to develop and implement multichannel retail strategies to effectively respond to these dynamics. For instance, convenience stores offer high-quality products that meet customer needs at reasonable prices, providing convenience and excellent service compared to competitors. Correspondingly, White et al. (2012) studied the impact of service quality on multichannel retailing and revealed that service quality directly impacts multichannel retailing and affects brand awareness, value recognition, and customer loyalty. Additionally, the activities outlined in multichannel distribution strategies for modern retail businesses provide a clear and logical framework, enabling decision-making to be carried out effectively and serving as a guide for

managing, controlling, and administering operations, particularly with the use of technology to enhance efficiency.

3. Design Channels

The design of sales channels should be focused on enhancing their potential through the effective coordination of various channels, tailored to align with customers' purchasing needs. This is critical for improving business competitiveness. Additionally, the development of multichannel strategies aimed at effectively fostering customer satisfaction and facilitating purchases across diverse channels will enhance the growth potential of various sales channels. The use of multichannel marketing for product distribution allows businesses to remain competitive in the market. It is clearly demonstrated that companies with a larger number of branches gain a competitive advantage in terms of location and positioning. As retail businesses strengthen their leadership within the industry, they experience continuous growth, which in turn intensifies competition. Therefore, an effective distribution channel strategy for modern retail organizations must equip them to adapt to shifts in the economic environment and advancements in communication technologies, such as the internet, social media networks, and mobile devices, which provide consumers with easy access to product purchase information. In line with the study by Kathleen Ferris-Costa (2011), which examined eWOM through Mavens, Buzz Agents, and Followers, it was concluded that the internet has significantly increased consumption by providing customers with enhanced access to information, enabling easy price and quality comparisons. Furthermore, customers now have the opportunity to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behaviors. Specifically, the pursuit of customer status contributes to value creation and desired outcomes, illustrating that information disclosure decreases the likelihood of customer spending on products promoted through sales promotions. Accordingly, businesses should strategically select and present multiple channels to enhance the convenience of customer purchases, while designing management structures that align each sales channel with customer purchasing behaviors.

4. Implement and Evaluate

Customer satisfaction and increased purchasing behavior, whether through regular or repeat purchases, result from implementing multichannel strategy, which creates a competitive advantage. Customer responses to retail services through multiple channels proves more effective than single-channel approaches. Performance evaluation plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of practical multichannel strategies. Moreover, evaluations must be conducted at different time periods, appropriate to customer decision-making processes across various sales channels. This helps in understanding multichannel customer purchasing decisions. Different customers express varying levels of genuine satisfaction across each sales channel, corresponding to their responses to marketing activities specific to those channels. Accurate evaluation of customer attitudes across different service channels significantly benefits the development of customer loyalty. This aligns with the study by Weiling Zhuang (2010), titled "balancing customer and marketing inputs to maximize the value experience," which found that customer engagement in co-creation activities and acceptance-building initiatives benefits both entrepreneurs and customers. The study identified factors influencing customer purchase experience and response behaviors, including: 1) Relational service context 2) Customer-dominant service context 3) Service provider-dominant service context with customer participation. Customer participation manifests in two forms: as information sources and as development participants. Setting customer goals helps improve value in customer participation and benefits, leading to improved response behaviors such as satisfaction and

word-of-mouth (WOM). Service providers must establish clear goals to enhance customer service delivery and achieve success. This is consistent with the research by Shyam Gopinath (2011) on online word-of-mouth communication, which revealed that online word-of-mouth presentations impact business operations. The content of such presentations serves as advertising that significantly impact optimal pricing strategy. Notably, increasing the proportion of satisfactory content leading to higher profits by accelerating the new product distribution.

Suggesgtions

Suggesgtions for this research.

1. The academic findings of this research will serve as a valuable foundation for further exploration of multichannel distribution strategies for retail organizations in Thailand, particularly in promoting practices that are both effective and widely accepted by all stakeholders. Researchers hope that this study will contribute to the continued growth and development of the retail industry in the future.
2. Entrepreneurs can leverage the decision-making model for multichannel distribution strategies in retail organizations by utilizing the findings from this study as a guideline in formulating distribution strategies. This will enable them to better address customer needs and enhance the effectiveness of their business operations.
3. Entrepreneurs can leverage the development of multichannel retail distribution strategies as guidelines to improve marketing operations, thereby creating effective differentiation and prominence, while maximizing consumer reach.
4. Entrepreneurs and relevant government agencies can apply these strategies to benefit the economic system, society, and nation. Businesses, organizations, stores, and product owners can implement multichannel retail distribution strategies efficiently to maximize benefits and meet future target group needs.
5. Multichannel distribution strategies of retail organizations require sales staff with good interpersonal skills, who are polite, cheerful, and have a pleasant demeanor for services such as product demonstrations, among other services.
6. The establishment of business alliances through creative relationships between businesses fosters mutual benefits. Strategic partnerships, which involve the sharing of information and assets, are another crucial factor.
7. Studies have shown that location is one of the important factors that consumers consider when selecting services. Therefore, organizing products into categories, ensuring they are easily accessible, and maintaining a clean store environment not only enhances the store's appearance but also promotes consumer convenience when using the service. Moreover, providing designated parking spaces for customers is also essential.
8. Efforts should be made to offer a diverse range of products across all categories and introduce new products that outperform competitors. This includes sourcing products from multiple suppliers, selecting each item from the supplier offering the lowest price. Pricing strategies should include analyzing competitors' offerings and adjusting prices to remain competitive, or offering lower prices.

Suggestions for future research.

1. The concepts and theories related to the development of multichannel distribution strategies for retail organizations in Thailand are rarely discussed in academic literature or published by experts and scholars. Therefore, it is essential for stakeholders to prioritize this issue as an urgent matter and work towards increasing the development and availability of such academic resources.

2. The model presented in this research for developing the multichannel distribution strategies for retail organizations in Thailand still requires further contributions from many other scholars to deepen the exploration and expansion of knowledge. This will allow for the enhancement of its content, making it more comprehensive and ultimately beneficial for future applications.

3. Since Thailand is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) with the obligations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the regulation of retail trade should be clear and stringent. Additionally, such measures should comply with the various provisions outlined in the General Agreement.

4. Entrepreneurs must understand the changing circumstances and adapt to ensure their businesses remain competitiveness and survive in the current environment. This requires promptly addressing weaknesses and strengthening advantages, which will serve as a crucial foundation. Additionally, creating differentiation from competitors will help attract customers and meet the diverse needs of consumers.

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