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The effect of time stress on store loyalty: A case of food and grocery shopping in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive environment, consumers face a hectic pace of life and are often time pressured when managing their occupation and family. This study investigates the effects of time pressure stress on store loyalty in the context of food and grocery shopping in Thailand. Additionally, this research introduces the concept of shopping motivations (i.e., utilitarian and hedonic motivation) to explain how and why time-stressed shoppers may be loyal to particular retail stores. The philosophy of utilitarian-oriented motivation asserts that time-stressed consumers are more loyal toward a preferred store where they may shop with minimal exertion of time and energy. In addition, this study indicates that shoppers who experience time stress may be responding to hedonic motivations related to food and grocery shopping.

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1. Introduction

Currently, there is fierce competition within the retail industry; it is imperative that retail marketing academics and practitioners fully comprehend the evolving needs of customers and are able to respond to these needs precisely and effectively. Previous studies have analyzed shopper behaviors and attitudes that affect retail outcomes as a first step toward determining how those behaviors are influenced by various factors, such as store image and store attributes (e.g., [Huddleston et al., 2008](#); [Nesset et al., 2011](#)), shopping motivations and values (e.g., [Cai and Shannon, 2012](#); [Carpenter, 2008](#); [Eroglu and Machleit, 1990](#); [Jones et al., 2006](#); [Morschett et al., 2005](#); [Moschis et al., 2004](#); [Wagner and Rudolph, 2010](#)), and situational factors including time pressure and various types of stress (e.g., [Kim and Kim, 2008](#); [Mathur et al., 2003](#); [Moschis, 2007](#); [Vermeir and Van Kenhove, 2005](#)).

This study focuses on the implications of time pressure stress and its effects on shopper behavior. Time stress is a situational factor frequently encountered by consumers ([Park et al., 1989](#)), particularly among dual-income households ([Burke, 1986](#); [Lewis and Cooper, 1987](#)) and for persons who experience work-related stress ([Anglin et al., 1994](#)). [Kim and Kim \(2008\)](#) note that time pressure often impacts the consumer decision-making process, including shopping activities. When individuals experience time pressure, they are generally more task-oriented, rather than pleasure-seeking in their shopping activities. In theory, when an individual is stimulated by any perceived stress or stressor, he/she will exert effort to

readjust or cope with that stress ([Lazarus and Folkman, 1984](#)). In this research, the concept of shopping motivations (i.e., utilitarian/hedonic motivation) has been introduced to explore its potential to develop an understanding of the effects of time stress on store loyalty, particularly with regard to the food and grocery retail sector.

The food and grocery shopping (FGS) sector has numerous unique characteristics that entice researchers to explore this field of study. First, FGS is an industry that includes a key shopping activity that all households must perform; in many cases, this activity consumes a majority of household shopping expenditures. As reported by [Deloitte \(2015\)](#), top global retailers operate in the food and grocery product industry, including Wal-Mart (USA), Costco (USA), Carrefour (France), Tesco (UK), and Metro AG (Germany). Second, although FGS may be considered a shopping activity, [Park et al. \(1989\)](#) note that it constitutes a routine type of behavior where consumers repetitively perform the same type of tasks. Some may view FGS as a tedious chore or a task. [Aylott and Mitchell \(1999\)](#) determine that shoppers experience more stress when grocery shopping than any other type of shopping. Third, previous studies revealed the entertaining or hedonic aspect of shopping at supermarkets (e.g., [Nguyen et al., 2007](#)), superstores (e.g., [Yim et al., 2014](#)), and discount retailers (Target, Wal-Mart, K-Mart) ([Carpenter, 2008](#); [Carpenter and Moore, 2009](#)).

Food and grocery shopping may be an enjoyable activity in Thailand because Thai shoppers tend to have fewer time constraints in regard to their shopping activities ([Shannon, 2009](#)). Food and grocery retailing is an important context for researchers to analyze the application of relevant theories (e.g., theory of stress, coping response strategy, and shopping motivation). Thus, the primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between time pressure stress and store loyalty. In addition, the investigation will analyze

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the mediating roles of utilitarian and hedonic shopping motivations in the context of food and grocery shopping.

This study contributes to the existing retail marketing literature in multiple aspects. First, this study investigates the relationship between time stress and store loyalty. This study leads to an improved understanding of the relationship between shoppers' high time stress and loyalty to preferred retail stores and suggests potential benefits of this contribution to the knowledge of psychology and marketing. According to [Selye \(1956\)](#), when an individual is threatened by an internal or external change in circumstance which is perceived as stress, that change will affect that individual's homeostatic equilibrium, resulting in a desire to reestablish his/her equilibrium. [Carver et al. \(1989\)](#) suggest that there are two major coping responses individuals utilize to respond to stress: problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused coping responses primarily confront the situation and attempt to solve the stress-inducing problem. Alternatively, the goal of emotional-focused responses is to reduce stress and/or manage the emotional distress ([Carver et al., 1989](#)). These two coping responses are also known as "approach versus avoidance" responses. To further explain the consequence of time stress on customer loyalty, this study introduces the concept of shopping motivation (i.e., utilitarian and hedonic orientation), which may be an underlying motivation of loyalty. Thus, utilitarian and hedonic motivations may partially explain why shoppers behave as they do.

Second, although previous studies indicate that stressors influence consumer behavior (e.g., [Duhachek, 2005](#); [Herrington and Capella, 1995](#); [Iyer, 1989](#); [Kim and Kim, 2008](#); [McAlexander et al., 1993](#); [O'Guinn and Faber, 1989](#); [Park et al., 1989](#); [Stone et al., 1988](#); [Van Kenhove and De Wulf, 2000](#); [Vermeir and Van Kenhove, 2005](#); [Viswanathan et al., 2005](#)), few have empirically tested these effects in Eastern societies, which may differ from Western societies in terms of culture, values, and lifestyles. For instance, the Thai culture is a highly collectivist culture, compared to the individualistic culture in many Western countries. Thais tend to stay connected to their extended family, living with parents and siblings even after completing their education and beginning a career. These cultural and lifestyle differences influence consumption behavior, including shopping behaviors. Therefore, this study may enhance the understanding of how time pressure influences shopping behavior in the context of Eastern retailers.

Third, an additional key contribution of this research is the specific focus on the "Food and Grocery Shopping" (FGS) sector. FGS may be considered as the most important retail sector; food and groceries are major expenditures for most consumers and/or households. Moreover, while many shoppers may view FGS as a necessary task or chore, studies have revealed the entertaining and enjoyable aspects of grocery shopping (e.g., [Carpenter, 2008](#); [Carpenter and Moore, 2009](#); [Yim et al., 2014](#)).

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

Although stress is a chief concept in behavioral sciences ([Moschis, 2007](#)), it has gained little attention in consumer research ([Lepisto et al., 1991](#)) and marketing ([Moschis, 2007](#)). Therefore, this study investigates the effects of stress in the retail context, particularly as it relates to food and grocery shopping. Furthermore, shopping motivations may enhance our understanding of the relationship between stress and shopper behavior. Although task-oriented or utilitarian motivations may provide explanations for an individual's initial purpose for shopping at retail stores, hedonic shopping motivations have also been explored by marketing scholars for several decades. The non-product related aspects of shopping activities, such as pleasure from bargaining, learning about new trends, or gratification derived from the shopping experience itself, were analyzed by [Tauber \(1972\)](#). Thus, these two shopping motives may explain

the relationship between time stress and consumer grocery shopping behavior in terms of store loyalty.

2.1. Time stress and store loyalty

The concept of stress has been widely investigated in various fields including psychology, health, and sociological sciences, resulting in thousands of research findings ([Thoits, 1995](#)) that have revealed sources, consequences, and moderating factors of stress. The pioneering research on stress was conducted by [Selye \(1956\)](#) who placed attention on the effects of noxious stress on physiological change in animals. Subsequently, [Holmes and Rahe \(1967\)](#) developed a list of major life changes that cause stress to human beings; this research attracted attention and interest to this field of study.

According to [Moschis \(2007, p. 430\)](#), "stress" may be broadly defined as "a stimulus, a response, or a combination of both". The stimulus definition emphasizes external conditions of life situations or events ([Moschis, 2007](#)). The response definition refers to a state of stress in which an individual is viewed as being stressed and reacting to this state ([Lazarus and Folkman, 1984](#)). Deviations between these two definitions have led to divergent theories on stress: objective and subjective. Subjective stress is more popular in research as its definition is deemed more beneficial and less criticized ([Elder et al., 1996](#); [George, 1989](#)). Moreover, in regard to duration, stressors may also be categorized into two types: acute and chronic ([Aneshensel, 1992](#)). An acute stressor is primarily equated with objective, discrete events that do not result from a person's emotional functioning, such as last minute shopping for a gift or approaching a work deadline. A chronic stressor (e.g., income condition, change in family structure) is generally equated with subjective states, influenced by emotional functioning and often lacks a clear origin or point in time.

Theoretically, stress motivates individuals' efforts to cope with behavioral demands and emotional reactions that are evoked by that stress ([Lazarus and Folkman, 1984](#)). When consumers face a stressful situation, efforts will thus be made to respond to or cope with that stress ([Anglin et al., 1994](#)). Coping response strategies may be classified into two major categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused ([Lazarus and Folkman, 1984](#)). Problem-focused coping strategies are directed at solving the problem or managing the stressful situation, for instance, searching for more information, finding alternative means of gratification, making alternate choices, developing new standards of behavior, and engaging in a direct action. Alternatively, emotion-focused coping responses intentionally manage emotions primarily through cognitive processes, including avoidance, selective attention, or seeking information from the environment that may minimize the threat ([Moschis, 2007](#)). The use of coping strategies for managing a high level of stress is likely to vary among consumers based on their efficaciousness; a more efficacious consumer may focus on problem-solving responses, while a less efficacious consumer may rely on strategies that address negative emotions created by stress.

In today's competitive societies, people are often overwhelmed by work and family duties. Most individuals endure chronic and pervasive time pressure ([Kim and Kim, 2008](#)). Individual time demands have been linked directly to an increase in role conflict and role ambiguity ([Parasuraman and Alutto, 1984](#); [Schaubroeck et al., 1989](#)) and are considered to be direct source of work-family conflict in both work and family domains ([Bacharach et al., 1991](#); [Bedeian et al., 1988](#); [Frone et al., 1992](#)). Previous studies commonly assume that consumers are time-stressed when work deadlines approach and feel relieved when those laborious periods have passed ([Kim and Kim, 2008](#)).

Time pressure stress has been indicated as a significant situational factor that impacts the consumer decision-making process

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