The Roles of Health Consciousness and Service Quality toward Customer Purchase Decision

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Abstract

The study investigates how marketing mix factors are mediated by health consciousness and service quality in creating fresh fruit buying decisions of customers in Vietnam. This study employs samples of customers in Vietnam via the survey questionnaire. The authors have used a total of 256 responses that acquired the valid criteria. The compound of data analysis comprises reliability test, validity test, exploratory factor analysis, group analysis and multiple regression analysis to structure the hypothesized model. Respectively, the structural equation model (SEM) is applied to conduct the multiple multivariate equations. By the assumption of causal-effect relationship between independent variables such as marketing mixed factors, and mediator as health consciousness and service quality, which potentially impact on purchase decision; the SEM method is deployed. The results reveal that consumers have paid no attention to the marketing mix factors, but they care much about service quality and health consciousness. Thus, health consciousness and service quality are effective mediators. These findings are new and contribute to the consumer behavior and retail marketing literature. The findings of this study can provide assistance to managers in the given field to understand more easily the consumer behavior about fresh fruits, then improve their own performance.

Keywords: Fresh Fruits, Mediators, Service Quality, Health Consciousness, Purchase Decision, Marketing Mix

JEL Classification Code: I12, M31, N35

1. Introduction

Vietnam is rapidly recognizing the development of modern retail chains. This business format is recording rapid growth in the country. Specifically, the new format is accounting for 25% of total retail industry (The Ministry of Industry and Trade). The modern retail business consists of supermarkets and shopping centers, which are located in cities across the country. In addition, Vietnam is known as one of the big agricultural countries in Asia, which results in a strong fruit industry in the country.

In addition, the fresh fruit industry is one of the first priority in customers' demand since their income has increased significantly. By that fact, at all levels of food retail systems, the concentration of accelerating sale volume in fresh fruit demonstrates it is an essential factor contributing to Vietnamese food retail industry. Nevertheless, the expanding middle-income class in the world leads to higher living standards on every aspects of life, and it also means that food safety and hygiene are the main concerns of most consumers. That is the reason why, besides the dominance of traditional foods channel in retail market (traditional market/ food retailer/grocer, etc.), there are many modern food channels (e.g. hypermarkets, supermarkets, convenience store, etc.), which are developing and expanding quickly.

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To the best of our knowledge and prior research, the existing relationship between marketing mixed factors toward customer purchase decision has been looked at (Mihart, 2012, Lilien, 1979, Luan & Sudhir, 2010). Nevertheless, there are fewer studies on the F&B retail industry involved in expediting the mediating effect of variables such as health consciousness and service quality. Respectively, those psychological aspects demonstrated as essential components contributing to the process of making decision from the customer point of view

As a result, the primary objective of this research explores two angles. On one hand, within the context of fresh fruit retail industry in the Vietnamese market, the relationship between marketing mixed factors (price, place, promotion, and product) and purchase decision displayed as insignificant effect result. On the other hand, with the involvement of health consciousness and service quality factors, these deliberately help the psychology of customer and are clearly explained via the mediating roles effect between marketing mixed factors and customer purchase decision.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Health Consciousness (HC)

Health consciousness refers to consumers' awareness of their health issues when choosing daily foods such as vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, etc. (Hsu et al, 2016, Botonaki et al, 2006, Kraft & Goodell, 1993). There have been many studies that indicate consumers increasingly care about their health through eating and drinking. (Bunton & Burrows, 1995, Sobal et al, 2006). This is reflected in four levels of health consciousness, including (1) health attention, (2) awareness of potentially harmful foods, (3) proactive learning and seeking health information, and (5) improving health with good products and creating the maximum conditions for the superiority of these products (Herzlinger, 2006). Therefore, fresh fruit is always the first choice and gradually becomes the trend of consumers in the context of unsafe hygiene nowadays in Vietnam (Figuié et al, 2004). For this reason, health consciousness is the key factor that triggers consumer purchase decisions in the "fresh fruit" industry (Botonaki et al, 2006, Chinnici et al, 2002, Padel & Foster, 2005). In addition, to convince customers to develop a good judgment about the safety level of their fresh fruits, businesses in the industry have come up with a mixed marketing strategy including good products (Product), higher prices (Price), high-end places (Place), and good promotion programs (Promotion) (Constantinides, 2002). Based on the above analyses, the authors put forward the first two hypotheses as follows:

H1: The marketing mix strategy positively affects HC in the field of fresh fruits.
H2: HC positively affects consumer purchase decisions in the field of fresh fruits.

2.2. Service Quality (SQ)

Service quality is a contentious concept in both academia and industry (Zeithaml et al, 1996, Haywood-Farmer, 1988, Cronin & Taylor, 1992). There are many different views such as the service quality is the comparison between actual perception and customer expectations; if the real feeling is greater or equal, we can say that a product or service is sold with high-quality service and vice versa (Oh, 1999, Davis & Heineke, 1998, LeBlanc, 1992). However, many scholars argue that service quality is a component of customer service that arises whenever the customer is satisfied (Sureshchandar, 2002). Or simply, service quality is just perceived by the customer experience and not fixed in the long run (Hu et al, 2009, Maklan & Klaus, 2011). In this study, the authors define service quality as a holistic concept that encompasses a process of customer service to help customers set their expectations through the products and services provided. Therefore, service quality is also one of the important factors that contribute to the decision of consumers (Linh et al., 2019), especially in the field of fresh fruits (Gale and Wood, 1994). So, familiar to health consciousness, service quality is just the feeling of customers, and will be greatly affected by the marketing mix program (Lee at el, 2000). Based on these reasons, the paper proposes a couple of hypotheses as follows:

H3: Marketing mix positively affects SQ in the field of fresh fruits.
H4: SQ positively affects consumer purchase decisions in the field of fresh fruits.

2.3. Effects of Marketing Mix (4Ps) on Consumer Purchase Decision

The 4Ps – product, price, place, and promotion – over time has proven its superior effects in speeding up sales, expanding market, as well as competing well in the marketplace (Constantinides, 2002). This shows that enterprises are more and more willing to invest in marketing activities (Svendsen at el, 2011, Keller, 2009). Therefore, marketing nowadays is becoming the third battle after the traditional ones such as research and development and costs reduction (Flint, 2004, Chen, 2006). Thus, the positive impact of marketing mix on the consumer purchase decision is obvious (Srinivasan et al, 2016, Bayus, 1988, Pedrick & Zufryden, 1991). Therefore, in this section, we develop a fifth hypothesis:

H5: *Marketing mix positively affects consumer purchase decisions in the field of fresh fruits.*

2.4. The Mediating Roles of HC and SQ

The above analysis shows the direct and positive effects of marketing mix, health consciousness, and service quality on buyer decisions (Gronroos, 1978). These effects, in turn, have been demonstrated in previous studies for various industries such as retail, fast food, coffee and so on (Vignali, 2001, Hwang & Cranage, 2010, Qin & Prybutok, 2008). In this study, the authors also attempt to point out the mediating roles of health consciousness and service quality in the direct relationship of marketing mix and consumer decision-making. The mediating relationships exists since buyer's decision-making is a concept that describes a process in which consumers go from identifying needs, seeking information, selecting and evaluating suppliers, and finally making decisions rather than just making a decision right away (Howard & Sheth, 1969, Nyaga et al, 2010). This irrational or fast-paced situation can occur in many industries, but it is very unlikely for the fresh fruit industry as customers are difficult as well as have a clear awareness of the value they are expecting (Dolan & Humphrey, 2000, Roitner-Schobesberger et al, 2008). Therefore, the decision-making process in the fresh fruits sector will go through several mediators including health consciousness and service quality, which might be different from traditional products (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). Based on those, two final hypotheses are formulated:

H6: *HC plays a mediator in the effect of marketing mix on consumer purchase decision in the field of fresh fruit.*
H7: *SQ plays a mediator in the effect of marketing mix and consumer purchase decision in the field of fresh fruit.*
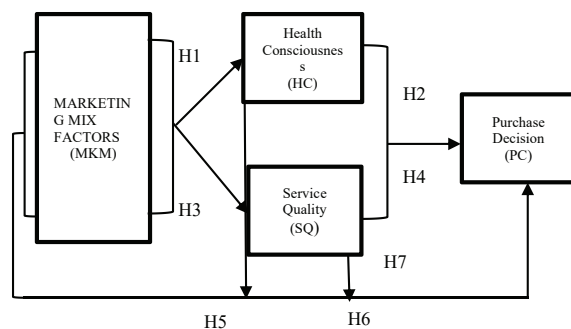
2.5. The Proposed Study Model

Based on the above arguments, this study presents the research model that includes the impact factors of marketing mix, health consciousness, and service quality as shown in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, the next steps will be conducted to provide evidences for the stated hypotheses, meanwhile to provide appropriate implications for managers in the give field.

H1: *Marketing mix positively affects HC in the field of fresh fruits.*
H2: *HC positively affects consumer purchase decision in the field of fresh fruits.*
H3: *Marketing mix positively affects SQ in the field of fresh fruits.*
H4: *SQ positively affects consumer purchase decision in the field of fresh fruits.*
H5: *Marketing mix positively affects consumer purchase decisions in the field of fresh fruits.*
H6: *HC plays a mediator in the effect of marketing mix on consumer purchase decision in the field of fresh fruit.*
H7: *SQ plays a mediator in the effect of marketing mix and consumer purchase decision in the field of fresh fruit.*

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Measuring Scales

Base on previous literature preview, the measurement scales are adjusted and added to fit the particularities of Vietnam's fresh fruit retail market. In this study, there were five items in the group of independent variable marketing mixed factors; 10 items of mediating variables as health consciousness and service quality; and eight items in the group of dependent variable regarding purchase decision. As a result, the following table displays how the measuring scales were established (see Table 1).

3.2. Sampling and Analyzing Tool

With the aim of analyzing numerical data to explore the factors that impact on buying decision in the fresh fruits in Vietnam, the quantitative approach was reasonably adopted. The advantages of this method are more reliable and objective. Researchers may use statistics to generalize findings and reduce or restructure a complex problem (Creswell, 2003).

Target sampling respondents for this research are customers who purchased fresh fruits in the Vietnamese supermarkets and convenience stores. The structured questionnaires were directly and conveniently delivered to

Figure 1: proposed study model

Table 1: Measurement of Scales

Variables	References
Marketing Mix Factors	Pedrick and Zufryden, 1991 Bayus, 1988 Constantinides, 2002 Srinivasan et al, 2016
Health Consciousness	Kraft and Goodell, 1993 Bunton and Burrows, 1995 Chinnici et al, 2002 Sobal et al, 2006 Padel and Foster, 2005 Botonaki et al, 2006 Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008 Hsu et al, 2016
Service Quality	Cronin and Taylor, 1992 Gale and Wood, 1994 Zeithaml et al, 1996 Haywood-Farmer, 1988 Butz et al, 2005 Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008 Hu et al, 2009 Maklan and Klaus, 2011
Purchase Decision	Howard and Sheth, 1969 Dolan and Humphrey, 2000 Roitner-Schobesberger et al, 2008 Nyaga et al, 2010

them by individual interviewers. In fact, sample statistics need to be reliable and should represent the whole population parameters as much as possible. For the EFA, the minimum sample size is at least five times the number of items (Hair et al., 2006). Recently, we used Hair's formula $5N + 80$, N = question items Hair (2010), and there were 38 items that need to be analyzed. Therefore, at least 270 completed questionnaires should be required and the expected response rate is at least 80%. In this case, the authors have used a total of 280 respondents, out of which only 256 responses had acquired the valid criteria. All fill-in questionnaires will be checked for completeness and coded. Items in the questionnaires are input on data file with the support of the SPSS and AMOS software.

3.3. Data Analysis and Mediation-Effect Testing

The compound of data analysis comprises reliability test, validity test, exploratory factor analysis, group analysis, and multiple regression analysis to structure the hypothesized model. Respectively, the structural equation model (SEM) was applied to conduct the multiple multivariate equations. As a result, the mediation test was involved to assess the relationship between mediators and dependent and independent variables (Hair et al, 2009).

In particular, according to Baron and Kenny (1986), the chain causal-effect result extracting from mediation test indicates the influence of independent variables on mediators that affect dependent variables. The specific outcomes for mediation test were embodied through the indirect effect figures, which were identified by bootstrapping for non-parameter data (Bollen & Stine, 1990). The assumption of causal-effect relationship between independent variables such as marketing mixed factors (MKM), and mediators like health consciousness (HC) and service quality (SQ), potentially impact purchase decision (PC); the SEM method is deployed.

4. Findings

4.1. Reliability and Validity of Testing Results

Cronbach's alpha is used first to test the reliability of measurement scales of concepts. The items that have item-total correlation<.3 will be deleted, and the standard for a scale to be chosen is Cronbach's alpha>.6 (Nunnally & Burnstein, 1994). Exploratory factor analysis is appropriate when KMO>.5, Bartlett's test have sig < 0.05, % Cumulative > 50%. Items with low loadings and high loading are removed from the measurement model on a one-by-one basis. The items with factor loading <.4 or Cross Factor loading > 0.3 will be deleted (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). A factor loading is the correlation coefficient between an observed variable and its factors. We expect the dimensions of relationship quality relate to each other, therefore extraction method used is principal axis factoring and rotation of factors used is Promax. By the given metric in Table 2, it indicated that all reliable and valid criteria were satisfied.

4.2. Model Fit Indices and Convergent Test

Table 3 shows the thresholds for (χ^2), (CMIN/df), (RMSEA), (CFI); (GFI) (Hair et al., 1998, 2010; Byrne, 2001, 2010; and Ernest et al., 2008)

By applying the regulation as CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.5, MSV < AVE, Table 4 served the criteria of convergent test quite well.

4.3. Summary of the Hypothesis Testing

After overcoming the conditions of the EFA and CFA models, the authors continue to use the SEM model to examine direct and indirect effects in the structural research model (see Figure 1). These results will not only help test the seven proposed hypotheses, but will also help to draw the final results and meanings of the research model.

The final results of the SEM model displayed in Table 5 show that, out of the seven hypotheses, only hypothesis 5

Table 2: Summary of Reliability and Validity

| Variables | Items | Mean | SD | Loadings | | Cronbach's Alpha |
				EFA	CFA	
MKM	MKM2	4.22	0.683	0.65	0.77	0.789
	MKM3	4.33	0.690	0.78	0.75	
	MKM4	4.17	0.682	0.62	0.77	
HC	HC1	3.91	0.779	0.68	0.73	0.778
	HC2	3.95	0.767	0.70	0.76	
	HC4	3.93	0.794	0.72	0.70	
SQ	SQ3	4.11	0.668	0.66	0.68	0.756
	SQ4	4.73	0.660	0.75	0.78	
	SQ5	3.89	0.635	0.61	0.67	
PC	PC4	3.75	0.782	0.59	0.63	0.760
	PC7	4.20	0.725	0.62	0.86	
	PC8	3.79	0.715	0.85	0.74	

Table 3: Model fit indices

	X^2	X^2 / df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Model Fit	198.504	1.535 < 3	0.921 > 0.9	0.955 > 0.9	0.048 < 0.08

Table 4: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and MSV

Variables	CR	AVE	MSV
Marketing Mix Factors: MKM	0.875	0.503	0.371
Health consciousness: HC	0.864	0.519	0.189
Service Quality: SQ	0.891	0.578	0.371
Purchase decision: PD	0.859	0.552	0.189

Table 5: The results of hypothesis testing

	Hypotheses	Result	Sig
H1	The Marketing Mix factors directly and positively impact on Health Consciousness in context of Fresh Fruits consuming	Supported (.669)	.004
H2	Health Consciousness positively impacts on consumer purchase decision in context of Fresh Fruits consuming	Supported (.188)	0.033
H3	The Marketing Mix directly and positively impacts on Service Quality in context of Fresh Fruits consuming	Supported (.277)	.008
H4	SQ has a direct and positive impact on consumer purchase decision in the field of Fresh Fruits.	Supported (.175)	0.017
H5	Marketing Mix has a positive and direct impact on consumer purchase decisions in the field of Fresh fruits.	Rejected (-.042)	.666
H6	Health Consciousness mediately impacts on the relationship between Marketing Mix and consumer purchase decision in the field of Fresh fruit.	Full mediation (0.38)	.002
H7	Service Quality mediately impacts on in the relationship between Marketing Mix and consumer purchase decision in the field of Fresh fruit.	Full mediation (0.283)	.001

(H5) could not pass the test with significance level less than .05. In other words, there is no direct impact of marketing mix factors on customers' decision to buy fresh fruits. The remaining six hypotheses were adopted with significant level. Specifically, the direct impact of marketing factors on health consciousness (H1) and service quality (H3) exists. While in turn, health consciousness and service quality also have the direct impacts (H2, H4) on customers' decision to buy fresh fruit.

So, the mediating roles of health consciousness (H6) and service quality (H7) are likely to work well in structural models. The results of the research show that there really exists the full mediating roles of these two factors in a relationship of marketing mix and the decision to buy fresh fruits. Through health consciousness and service quality, elements of marketing will lead to buying decisions at 0.38 and 0.283.

Thus, hypotheses H6 and H7 are supported. This is an interesting result compared to previous studies when only giving the direct impacts of the marketing mix to the buying decision, but ignoring mediating impacts of related factors. Specifically, this study identifies the roles of health consciousness and service quality.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The is one of the initial studies that give the structural model about the existence of mediating roles of two factors belonging to the fresh fruit retail industry in Vietnam. Through customers, this structure model was verified by EFA, EFA, and SEM methods. In doing so, the authors focus on testing a total of seven theoretical hypotheses drawn from the relevant literature.

The analysis results show that the direct impact of marketing mix factors on customers' decision to buy fresh fruits in Vietnam does not exist. This result is different from many studies on different fields, which show opposite results (Mihart, 2012, Lilien, 1979, Luan & Sudhir, 2010). In addition, although there is no direct impact of marketing mix factors, those are still very important in making a buying decision, but through two intermediary variables – health consciousness and service quality. This result offers a new perspective for managers or researchers in the given field when implementing customer-oriented marketing programs (Chen, 2006).

Specifically, managers should focus on clarifying the differences between traditional fruits through clear information about health consciousness and service quality to convince customers. In other industries, marketers may need to focus on promotion or advertising, but in the field of fresh fruit, there is a need to exploit the quality that fruits can bring to customers. This is the core factor for sustained success.

Since, this paper is a small research article, it is not possible to cover all the factors that influence customer buying decisions as well as analyze the multi-dimensional perspective from different customers. Therefore, future research should focus more deeply on the model of multidisciplinary factors that underlie sustainable buying decisions of customers in a given field.

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