

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN THE SERVICE MARKETING MIX AND BRAND IMAGE IN CONVENIENCE STORES

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Received: December 4, 2025 / Revised: January 21, 2026 / Accepted: January 23, 2026

Abstract

This study examines the determinants of Brand Image in modern trade convenience stores in Udon Thani, Thailand, addressing the limited research on regional consumer behavior using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. Data from 498 consumers were analyzed via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the results identify Customer Experience as a significant mediator between the marketing mix and Brand Image. Among the 7Ps, Price and Place emerged as the dominant drivers, exerting both direct and indirect effects, while Process influenced Brand Image solely through the mediation of Customer Experience. Conversely, Promotion and People were not statistically significant, suggesting that consumers in this context prioritize utility and speed over social interaction and promotional campaigns. These findings highlight distinct regional consumer behaviors, indicating that in emerging secondary markets, functional value and operational efficiency may outweigh lifestyle attributes. From a practical perspective, retailers should prioritize competitive pricing and frictionless service processes to build sustainable brand equity.

Keywords: Brand Image, Customer Experience, Service Marketing Mix, Convenience Stores, S-O-R Framework, PLS-SEM

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Introduction

The global modern trade sector has undergone a paradigm shift, evolving from simple transactional outlets into integrated lifestyle hubs (Yufriadi et al., 2024). Convenience stores, in particular, have emerged as pivotal community centers, leveraging innovations such as digital payment integration and last-mile delivery services to meet the increasing consumer demand for speed and accessibility (Heikkinen, 2024). While these trends are well-documented in metropolitan capitals, the retail environment in Thailand is aggressively expanding into regional economic centers. Udon Thani, a strategic gateway to the Northeast (Isan), presents a unique market landscape characterized by rapid urbanization mixed with distinct local consumer behaviors (Kerdpitak, 2024; Nualsut et al., 2024).

Currently, the convenience store sector in Udon Thani is defined by a saturated mix of major national franchises, for example, 7-Eleven, aggressive domestic chains, such as Lotus's Go Fresh and Mini Big C, and modernized local retailers. This intense density has created a hyper-competitive environment where product assortment is standardized and switching costs are negligible. Consequently, functional attributes alone are no longer sufficient to guarantee success. Retailers face the pressing issue of commoditization, necessitating a deeper understanding of the drivers that sustain competitive advantage (Tajeddini et al., 2023). In this context, a distinct and positive Brand Image serves as the primary psychological differentiator essential for long-term survival

(Raddats et al., 2024).

Despite the importance of this sector, existing literature predominantly focuses on capital cities, creating a significant gap in understanding regional dynamics (Chen & Kamarudin, 2024; Srikhamhaeng et al., 2024). Specifically, there is limited empirical research on how Customer Experience (CX) mediates the relationship between marketing inputs and Brand Image in secondary markets like Northeastern Thailand (Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2020; Zhang et al., 2025). To address this, this study grounds its analysis in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and Services Marketing theory. This approach posits that the extended Marketing Mix (7Ps), Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence, acts as the environmental Stimulus that triggers an internal Organism (Customer Experience), which subsequently shapes the Response (Brand Image) (Ahmed et al., 2024; Herzallah et al., 2025; Kong & Ratasuk, 2024; Niu et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study advances academic knowledge by extending the S-O-R model into the specific context of provincial retail in developing economies. It creates new knowledge by isolating the specific mechanism through which service marketing elements translate into Brand Image, moving beyond direct-effect models to highlight the mediating role of experience. Practically, the findings provide actionable strategies for retail managers in Udon Thani. By identifying which marketing mix factors most significantly drive positive customer experiences, practitioners

can prioritize resource allocation, such as investing in process efficiency over generic Promotion, to build a resilient Brand Image tailored to local market realities.

Objectives

Based on the identified research gap, the primary objectives of this study are to examine the Influence of the 7Ps Marketing Mix on Brand Image in modern trade convenience stores in Udon Thani and to determine the mediating role of Customer Experience in this relationship. Furthermore, the study aims to identify which specific elements of the marketing mix (Stimuli) most effectively activate a positive customer experience (Organism) within a regional market context.

Literature Review

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

To comprehensively understand consumer behavior within the modern trade sector, this study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, originally proposed by Russell and Mehrabian (1974) in the field of environmental psychology. The S-O-R model posits that environmental cues (Stimuli) trigger an internal emotional and cognitive state (Organism), which subsequently leads to a behavioral or attitudinal reaction (Response) (Chen & Kamarudin, 2024; Laato et al., 2020). In the context of retail marketing, this framework has become a seminal lens for analyzing how store environments influence

shopper behavior (Niu et al., 2025).

Within this study, the Stimulus (S) represents the controllable environmental factors, specifically the extended Marketing Mix (7Ps) that consumers encounter during their shopping journey (Ho et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2025). The Organism (O) represents the internal processing of these stimuli, conceptualized here as Customer Experience, the holistic internal evaluation comprising cognitive, affective, and social responses to the retailer's offering (Nguyen et al., 2025). Finally, the Response (R) represents the outcome, Brand Image, which signifies the resulting mental picture and associations formed in the consumer's mind (Tahir et al., 2024). The S-O-R framework is particularly appropriate for this study as it logically explains the mechanism of transformation: it suggests that marketing strategies (7Ps) do not directly force a brand image but rather cultivate it through the intermediate filter of the customer's experience (Zar Aung, 2020).

The Extended Marketing Mix (7Ps)

The marketing mix concept, originally popularized as the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) by McCarthy (1960), was later expanded by Bitner and Booms (1981) to include three additional elements, People, Process, and Physical Evidence, specifically to address the complexities of the service industry. For modern trade convenience stores, which function as hybrid product-service providers, the 7Ps are widely accepted as the critical determinants of performance (Ahmed et al., 2024).

This extended mix encompasses Product, which refers to the variety, quality, and availability of goods, and Price, which covers pricing strategy, perceived value, and promotional discounts (Wichmann et al., 2022). Place relates to store location, accessibility, and convenience, while Promotion involves advertising, loyalty programs, and customer communication (Wichmann et al., 2022). The service-specific elements include People, referring to staff competence, friendliness, and service behavior; Process, describing the efficiency of service delivery, transaction speed, and ease of navigation; and Physical Evidence, referring to the store's atmosphere, cleanliness, layout, and tangible aesthetics. Collectively, these seven factors form the operational foundation of the modern trade environment.

Customer Experience

Customer Experience (CX) has evolved in contemporary literature from a transactional metric to a multidimensional construct. Meyer and Schwager (2007) define customer experience as the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. Verhoef et al. (2009) further expanded this to include cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the retailer. In the competitive landscape of Udon Thani, CX acts as the critical differentiator; it is the lived reality of the brand that bridges the gap between what a company promises (Marketing Mix) and what the consumer perceives (Brand Image) (Kuppelwieser, 2025).

Brand Image

Brand Image is defined by Keller (1993)

as the perceptions of a brand reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. Unlike brand identity (what the company creates), brand image is what customers actually perceive. Tahir et al. (2024) emphasize that a strong brand image creates value by helping consumers process information, differentiating the brand, and generating reasons to buy. In the commoditized convenience store market, a positive brand image is the ultimate strategic asset, driving long-term loyalty and trust (Ratasuk, 2022; Xu & Hu, 2022).

The Convenience Store Context in Udon Thani, to address the lack of specific context noted in previous research, this study focuses on Udon Thani, a regional economic hub where the retail landscape differs significantly from metropolitan areas. The market is characterized by a high density of both international franchises and local modern trade chains, serving a consumer base that prioritizes functional convenience and speed. Unlike in capital cities, where lifestyle attributes may dominate, the Udon Thani market operates on utilitarian principles, necessitating a specific investigation into how standard marketing mixes perform in this unique, highly competitive setting.

Hypothesis Development

The Influence of 7Ps on Customer Experience and Brand Image

Extensive empirical evidence supports the positive relationship between marketing mix elements and consumer perceptions (Farid et al., 2023). Studies in the retail sector consistently show that optimized stimuli, such

as fair pricing, efficient processes, and helpful staff, enhance customers' internal states (Experience) (Kumar & Agrawal, 2024; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2023; Teichmann et al., 2026). For instance, high-quality Physical Evidence, for example, clean, well-lit, and decorated stores, has been proven to reduce psychological stress and increase browsing time, thereby improving the overall experience (Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2020). Consequently, these positive experiences accumulate to form a favorable Brand Image (Lyreaksmey & Ratasuk, 2024; Naing & Ratasuk, 2025; Tran & Nguyen, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). Therefore, it is hypothesized that the 7Ps have a significant positive effect on both Customer Experience and Brand Image.

H1: Product has a positive influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H2: Price has a positive influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H3: Place has a positive influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H4: Promotion has a positive influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H5: People has a positive influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H6: Process has a positive influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H7: Physical evidence has a positive

influence on brand image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

The Mediating Role of Customer Experience

While the 7Ps are necessary inputs, recent literature suggests they are not sufficient on their own to build a robust brand image without a positive underlying experience. The S-O-R framework suggests that the Organism (CX) mediates the relationship between the Stimulus (7Ps) and Response (Image) (Hochreiter et al., 2022). This implies that a well-designed store (Stimulus) only translates into a prestigious brand image (Response) if the customer successfully navigates and enjoys the interaction (Organism) (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024; Herzallah et al., 2025). Thus, Customer Experience is proposed to mediate the relationship between the Marketing Mix and Brand Image.

H1a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between Product and Brand Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H2a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between Price and Brand Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H3a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between Place and Brand Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H4a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between Promotion and Brand Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H5a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between People and Brand Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H6a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between Process and Brand

Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

H7a: Customer Experience mediates the relationship between Physical Evidence and Brand Image of Modern Trade Convenience Stores in Udon Thani.

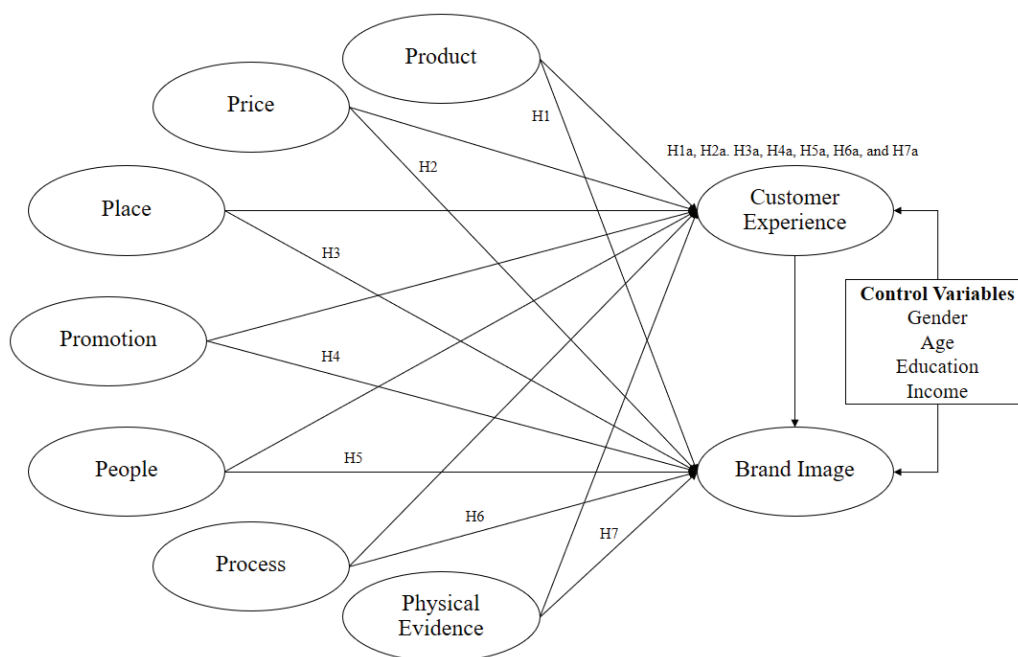


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to empirically examine the Influence of the 7Ps marketing mix on brand image, with customer experience as a mediating variable. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was selected as the primary statistical tool over Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM) for several strategic reasons. First, the primary objective of this research is prediction-oriented, focusing on explaining the variance (R^2) in the dependent constructs, Customer Experience and Brand Image, rather than theory confirmation. Second, PLS-SEM is superior in

handling complex models with many structural path relationships and is robust against non-normal data distributions, which are common in social science survey research (Hair et al., 2021).

Population and Sampling

The target population consists of consumers who actively patronize modern trade convenience stores in the Udon Thani province, a major economic hub in Northeastern Thailand. As the exact population size is unknown (infinite population), the sample size was determined based on the 10-times rule (Hair et al., 2012). With the research instrument

containing a total of 47 measurement items, the minimum required sample was calculated as $47 \times 10 = 470$ respondents. The final sample of 498 respondents exceeds this threshold, ensuring sufficient statistical power for the PLS-SEM analysis.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who met specific inclusion criteria: they must be residents of Udon Thani and have purchased goods or

services from a convenience store within the last 3 months. This ensured that all participants possessed recent, valid service experiences relevant to the study's variables.

Table 1 indicates a balanced gender distribution (52.36% female) and a predominantly young-adult sample (51.38% aged 30-39), with the majority holding high school diplomas (43.31%) and earning less than 13,000 Baht per month.

Table 1 Respondents' Characteristics

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	242	47.64
	Female	256	52.36
Age	18+	19	3.74
	19-29	203	39.96
	30-39	261	51.38
	40-49	25	4.92
Education	High School	220	43.31
	Higher Vocational Certificate (Diploma)	147	28.94
	Vocational Certificate	77	15.16
	Bachelor's Degree	64	12.60
Income	<13000	168	33.07
	13001-15000	110	21.65
	15001-18000	133	26.18
	18001-23000	23	4.53
	23001-28000	74	14.57

Data Collection

Data was collected using an online, self-administered questionnaire distributed via social media platforms and local community groups. This method ensured a broad reach and convenience for respondents. The data collection period spanned four weeks. To maintain data quality, the digital form included mandatory fields to prevent missing data and a screening question, Have you visited a convenience store in Udon Thani in the past 3 months?, to immediately disqualify ineligible participants.

Questionnaire Design

The research instrument was developed based on an extensive literature review and structured into four sections: 1) Screening, 2) Demographics, 3) Consumer Behavior, and 4) Research Variables. The core constructs, including 7Ps, Customer Experience, and Brand Image, comprised a total of 47 items, all measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Measurement scales were adapted from validated items in previous studies to ensure content validity (Ratasuk & Buranasompob, 2021; Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2020; Tedjokusumo & Murhadi, 2023).

Data Analysis Strategy

The collected data were analyzed using WarpPLS software, adhering to the two-stage approach recommended by Hair et al. (2021). The first stage evaluated the measurement model for indicator reliability (Factor Loadings), internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha,

Composite Reliability), convergent validity (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT). The second stage assessed the structural model by testing path coefficients (β), explanatory power (R^2), and collinearity (VIF). Mediation analysis utilized a bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples, while Common Method Bias (CMB) was assessed using the Full Collinearity VIF approach.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. All participants were informed of the study's academic purpose prior to participation. Informed consent was obtained digitally; respondents were assured that their participation was strictly voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. To protect privacy, all data were collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information (PII) was recorded.

Results

This session presents the empirical findings obtained through the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. Following the two-stage analytical procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2021), the study first evaluates the measurement model to establish the reliability and validity of the constructs. Subsequently, the structural model is assessed to test the hypothesized relationships, examine the mediating effects, and determine the predictive power of the proposed theoretical framework.

Table 2 Convergent Validity, Reliability, Multicollinearity, and Common Method Bias (CMB)

Construct / Item	FL	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Brand Image		0.774	0.832	0.683	1.740
This convenience store is reliable and offers high-quality products/services.	0.750				
Shopping at this store reflects my personal identity or lifestyle.	0.747				
My visits to this store evoke pleasant feelings and sensations.	0.652				
I believe this store is socially responsible and operates ethically.	0.700				
This store feels connected to the local community and culture.	0.722				
Product		0.726	0.775	0.659	1.359
The convenience store offers a wide variety of products.	0.781				
The products available are generally of high quality.	0.753				
I find the products, especially fresh items, to be fresh and appealing.	0.712				
The convenience store usually has the specific items I am looking for.	0.675				
The store's private label products are of good quality.	0.641				
Price		0.742	0.753	0.678	1.422
The prices at this convenience store are competitive compared to other stores.	0.738				
I feel that the products offered provide good value for money.	0.724				
The prices at this store are fair.	0.851				
The store's promotional pricing (discounts, deals) is effective.	0.678				
I believe the prices accurately reflect the quality of the products.	0.616				
Place		0.796	0.873	0.694	1.515
The convenience store's location is very convenient for me.	0.815				
The store's operating hours are convenient for my shopping needs.	0.714				
The store is easily accessible (e.g., easy to enter/exit, good parking).	0.778				
The store layout makes it easy to navigate and find products.	0.748				
I can easily find the products I need within the store.	0.640				

Table 2 Convergent Validity, Reliability, Multicollinearity, and Common Method Bias (CMB) (Cont.)

Construct / Item	FL	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Promotion		0.787	0.861	0.647	1.594
The promotional offers (e.g., discounts, bundles) from this store are attractive.	0.746				
The store's communication about promotions is clear and easy to understand.	0.740				
I benefit from the store's loyalty program (if applicable).	0.756				
The store effectively engages customers on social media about promotions.	0.652				
The in-store promotional materials (e.g., signs, displays) are appealing.	0.654				
The promotions I receive feel personalized to my needs.	0.619				
People		0.771	0.865	0.685	1.435
The staff at the convenience store are friendly and welcoming.	0.711				
The staff are knowledgeable and helpful when I have questions.	0.798				
The staff appear professional and well-groomed.	0.749				
Staff members are usually available when I need assistance.	0.720				
The staff are capable of resolving any issues or problems I encounter.	0.684				
Process		0.837	0.863	0.587	1.507
The checkout process at the convenience store is fast and efficient.	0.886				
My transactions are always accurate.	0.743				
The service I receive is consistently good.	0.663				
Returning or exchanging products is easy.	0.671				
The store offers convenient payment method options.	0.684				
Physical Evidence		0.743	0.782	0.666	1.805
The convenience store is always clean and well-maintained.	0.743				
The store has a pleasant atmosphere.	0.755				
The store's equipment and facilities (e.g., refrigerators, shelves) are modern.	0.742				
The visual merchandising and product displays are appealing.	0.761				
The store's temperature is comfortable.	0.656				

Table 2 Convergent Validity, Reliability, Multicollinearity, and Common Method Bias (CMB) (Cont.)

Construct / Item	FL	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Customer Experience		0.798	0.898	0.651	1.751
Shopping at this convenience store is easy and efficient.	0.729				
I feel satisfied and enjoy my shopping trips to this store.	0.708				
The store's visual appeal and comfort make my visit pleasant.	0.726				
My interactions with staff are positive and make me feel valued.	0.797				
This store effectively fulfills my immediate needs and solves my problems.	0.642				
My overall experience at this convenience store is very positive.	0.653				

Note: FL =Factor Loadings, CA = Cronbach's Alpha, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, VIF = Variance Inflation Factors.

Table 2 presents the evaluation of the measurement model. Construct reliability and internal consistency were confirmed, as all Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeded the 0.70 threshold, ranging from 0.726 to 0.898. Convergent validity was also established, with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values spanning from 0.587 to 0.694, surpassing the 0.50

criterion, and factor loadings predominantly exceeding 0.70 (Cheung & Wang, 2017; Ratasuk, 2024). Furthermore, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all constructs remained well below the conservative limit of 3.3 (ranging from 1.359 to 1.805), confirming the absence of lateral collinearity and Common Method Bias (CMB) (Kock, 2015; Ratasuk, 2023)

Table 3 Discriminant Validity Using HTMT Ratio

	Brand Image	Product	Price	Place	Promotion	People	Process	Physical Evidence	Customer Experience
Brand Image									
Product	0.718								
Price	0.830	0.759							
Place	0.742	0.797	0.743						
Promotion	0.846	0.838	0.825	0.788					
People	0.804	0.849	0.786	0.824	0.723				
Process	0.728	0.789	0.785	0.809	0.749	0.773			
Physical Evidence	0.754	0.819	0.754	0.786	0.756	0.774	0.747		
Customer Experience	0.798	0.812	0.777	0.722	0.833	0.794	0.739	0.787	

Discriminant validity was further examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, which is considered a more robust criterion than the traditional Fornell-Larcker criterion (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). As shown in Table 3, all HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85, with the highest value being 0.849 (between People and Product) (Ratasuk & Naing, 2025). This confirms that all constructs are empirically distinct, ensuring that respondents clearly differentiated among the concepts in the proposed model.

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model assessment revealed a highly robust fit for the empirical

data. The Average Path Coefficient (APC = 0.098, $p = 0.007$) and Average R-squared (ARS = 0.450, $p < 0.001$) were both statistically significant, confirming the model's predictive validity. The Tenenhaus Goodness of Fit (GoF) index was 0.472, surpassing the threshold for a large effect size (0.36), indicating that the model performs exceptionally well at explaining the data (Kock, 2015). Specifically, the model explains 44% of the variance in Customer Experience ($R^2 = 0.44$) and 46% of the variance in Brand Image ($R^2 = 0.46$). Furthermore, the model is free from multicollinearity issues, with an Average Block VIF (AVIF) of 2.110 and an Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF) of 1.404.

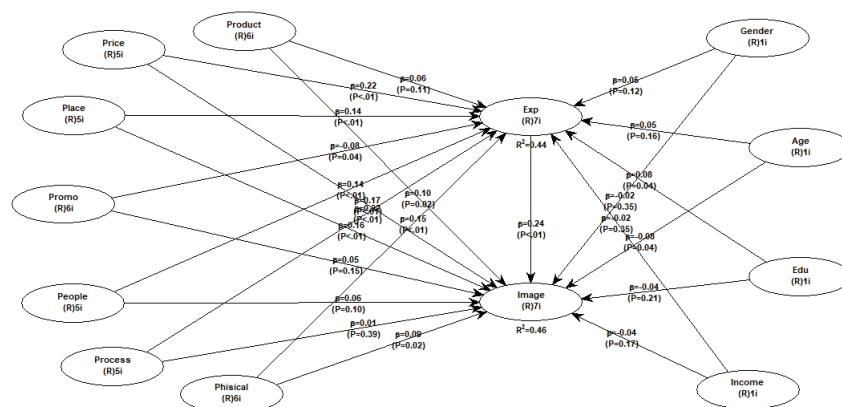


Figure 2 PLS-SEM Results

Hypothesis Testing

Figure 2 illustrates the PLS-SEM results. To clearly delineate the relationships, the findings are categorized into predictors of Customer Experience, direct predictors of Brand Image, and indirect (mediating) effects.

1. Predictors of Customer Experience

The analysis reveals that Price ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$), Place ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), and

Process ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$) are significant positive predictors of Customer Experience. This indicates that functional efficiency and value are the primary drivers of the customer's internal state in this context.

2. Direct Predictors of Brand Image

Customer Experience ($\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as the most significant positive predictor of Brand Image. Regarding the

marketing mix elements, the analysis supported H2 (Price) ($\beta = 0.174, p < 0.001$), H3 (Place) ($\beta = 0.157, p < 0.001$), H1 (Product) ($\beta = 0.096, p = 0.016$), and H7 (Physical Evidence) ($\beta = 0.094, p = 0.018$). Conversely, H4 (Promotion), H5 (People), and H6 (Process) were not statistically significant direct predictors of Brand Image ($p > 0.05$). Among the control variables, only age showed a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.078, p = 0.042$), whereas Gender, Education, and Income did not.

3. Mediating Effects (Indirect Effects)

The mediation analysis, conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples, examined whether the 7Ps influence Brand Image indirectly through Customer Experience. The results supported H2a (Price) ($\beta = 0.054, p = 0.007$), H3a (Place) ($\beta = 0.035, p = 0.030$), and H6a (Process) ($\beta = 0.053, p = 0.022$). This indicates that Customer Experience significantly mediates the impact of Price, location, and service processes on brand image. Notably, Process influences Brand Image solely through this indirect path. However, the indirect paths for Product (H1a), Promotion (H4a), People (H5a), and Physical Evidence (H7a) were not statistically significant, suggesting that for these elements, the Influence on brand image is either direct or operates through mechanisms not captured in this specific mediation path.

Discussion

This study empirically validates the S-O-R framework within the context of Udon Thani convenience stores, confirming that

Customer Experience (Organism) acts as the critical mediator between marketing stimuli and Brand Image (Response). The results support the theoretical assertion that environmental stimuli must be processed through an internal organismic state to effectively elicit a consumer response (Hochreiter et al., 2022; Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024; Herzallah et al., 2025). Specifically, Customer Experience emerged as a significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.242, p < 0.001$), reinforcing recent evidence that in a commoditized market, the internal affective state serves as the primary filter for brand evaluation (Lyreaksmey & Ratasuk, 2024; Naing & Ratasuk, 2025; Tran & Nguyen, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025).

Among the 7Ps, Price and Place were the dominant drivers, exhibiting both significant direct and indirect effects. This finding reflects the pragmatic nature of consumers in regional economic hubs, who prioritize functional value and accessibility over the lifestyle attributes often emphasized in capital cities. This behavior aligns with retail studies indicating that fair pricing and convenience are paramount for enhancing customers' internal states (Kumar & Agrawal, 2024; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2023; Teichmann et al., 2026). In contrast, Product and Physical Evidence demonstrated only significant direct effects. In this context, tangible quality and store atmosphere function as hygiene factors, direct cues of competence and reliability (Farid et al., 2023; Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2020), rather than emotional drivers of the mediated experience.

Notably, Promotion, People, and Process

showed no significant direct influence, offering novel insights into the regional market. The non-significance of Promotion and People suggests a low-involvement, efficiency-driven consumer behavior paradigm distinct from major urban centers. The lack of impact from Promotion likely stems from market saturation, where consumers view campaigns as a standard industry baseline, while the insignificance of People reflects the sector's shift toward low-touch service models. However, Process revealed a unique, significant indirect effect. This implies that operational efficiency acts as an invisible engine; consumers do not directly equate fast checkout with brand prestige, but efficient processes create the positive experience that builds the brand (Kumar & Agrawal, 2024; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2023; Teichmann et al., 2026). Collectively, these findings fill a critical research gap, demonstrating that in emerging secondary cities like Udon Thani, functional attributes outweigh the social factors typically dominant in metropolitan studies.

Conclusions

This study concludes that building a strong Brand Image in the modern trade sector of Udon Thani relies heavily on mastering the fundamentals, Price and Place, and leveraging Customer Experience as a critical mediator. While Product and Physical Evidence serve as direct pillars of quality, operational efficiency (Process) works indirectly in the background to enhance the customer experience. The S-O-R framework effectively maps this dynamic,

proving that external store attributes (Stimuli) must be converted into a positive internal experience (Organism) to solidify the brand (Response).

Theoretical and Academic Contributions

This research makes significant theoretical contributions by expanding the application of the S-O-R framework and the 7Ps Marketing Mix to the context of provincial retail in developing economies, a setting where these theories have been under-applied. It challenges the universality of the 7Ps by demonstrating that in regional markets, People and Promotion may lose their predictive power due to market saturation and the utilitarian nature of shopping. Furthermore, it creates new knowledge by isolating Customer Experience as a mandatory mediator for Process and Price. This nuance refines the S-O-R theory, showing that some stimuli (such as Process) require the Organism to be activated to affect the Response, while others (such as Product) act directly.

Practical Implications

For business practitioners and store managers in Udon Thani, the findings suggest a strategy focused on competitive pricing and maintaining prime, accessible locations, as these are the non-negotiable drivers of brand image. Management should aggressively prioritize investment in automated checkouts and inventory speed (Process) over costly long-term training in hospitality and relationship building (People), as the former demonstrated greater impact on CX and Brand Image in this region. Managers must realize that Process is

the engine of experience; a fast, frictionless checkout improves the customer's internal state, which, in turn, improves the brand image, even if the customer doesn't explicitly credit the brand for the speed.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

The study is limited by its geographical focus on a single province (Udon Thani) and its cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to track how

brand image evolves as regional urbanization progresses. Additionally, comparative studies using data from Bangkok or other regions (e.g., Chiang Mai) would be valuable for statistically validating the Capital vs. Regional differences proposed in this discussion. Qualitative exploration is also recommended to investigate why Promotion is insignificant, determining whether it is due to ad blindness or lack of relevance, thus uncovering the cognitive reasons behind this insight.

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