

# A Study of Preferences for Traditional and Modern Shopping Environments in Bangkok, Thailand: Preliminary Results

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## Problem Statement

Traditional market shopping environments (see Figure 1) have long been an important part of Thai culture, meeting the economic, social, and psychological needs of Thai people. However, the introduction of western-style shopping environments, a result of the globalizing economy, has begun to change this. New, large-scale, commercial developments, especially shopping malls, are being developed primarily in modern-western styles, which have little relationship to native culture or traditions. The modern shopping environments have been successful economically. Traditional shopping environments are being replaced by westernized malls, resulting in a loss of cultural identity. Because of the size of these modern shopping malls and amount of land needed they require, they are typically developed along the city edge contributing to the problem of urban sprawl. In order to meet the needs of Thai shoppers, while at the same time preserving Thai culture and heritage, architects and planners must understand the preferences and attitudes of Thai shoppers toward different types of shopping environments. The purpose of this study is to identify attitudes and preferences of Thai shoppers toward shopping environments, both traditional markets as well as the newer westernized shopping centers.



Figure 1: An example of traditional outdoor markets

## Method

The following research questions are posed: 1) Do Thai shoppers distinguish between modern and traditional shopping environments in making shopping decisions? 2) What are the physical characteristics of shopping environments that Thai shoppers prefer? 3) How do Thai shoppers differ in their preferences and attitudes based on age, shopping needs and habits, and other demographic characteristics?

This paper presents preliminary findings of an ongoing research. The purposes of this research are to; 1) identify environmental factors influencing the preferences of Thai shoppers related to their shopping needs and habits, and their demographic backgrounds; 2) provide guidelines for the development of new shopping environments that respond to the cultural tradition and heritage of the Thai people; 3) provide recommendations for modifying traditional shopping markets so they can better meet the needs of shoppers today so they will be more likely to survive in the new economy.

This research adopted Content Identifying Methodology (CIM) developed by Kaplan (1979). CIM utilizes shopper's preference ratings of different shopping environments, both modern and traditional, to identify underlying dimension of preferences (Kaplan 1979). In this research 51 color photographs were collected from various shopping environments in Bangkok Metro area and rated by 356 respondents using 1-5 Likert scale (1 = not preferred, 2 = preferred a little, 3 = preferred somewhat, 4 = preferred, 5 = very much preferred). In several public and residential settings in Bangkok, potential respondents, representing general Thai shoppers, were approached and asked if they would participate in a survey. In addition to preference ratings the survey consisted of questions on perceived shopping needs and habits, on demographic backgrounds of the participants and requesting free comment on selected scenes.

The preference scores were analyzed using factor analysis. Ratings of the 51 scenes were analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis with promax rotation. As Hair (1998) recommends, according to the size of the sample, scenes that loaded higher than .30 were considered significant and included in the analysis (Hair et al 1998). Five factors were extracted according to change in slope of the scree plot. Fifty percent of the total variances in preference were explained.

The factors are groups or sets of scenes called dimensions. The scenes grouped in a factor because

they have a similar pattern of preferences. There is some visual stimulus that is causing viewers to react to the scenes in a similar way. The researchers examine the scenes in each dimension to identify stimuli that are common to each scene in the dimension.

Factor scores were used as dependent variables in multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVA) with categorical variables from shopping habit and demographic data as independent variables. The statistically significant (.05) results from multivariate test were follow-up tested on each dependent variable, and further post hoc testing was done using the Bonferonni method. All tests were conducted at .05 significance level.

Average means preference for the 5 dimensions were analyzed using ANOVA to compare preferences for the different environments. Content analysis was done on free comment data for selected scenes to help identify the environmental factors that were influencing people's reactions to the scenes in each dimension.

## Results

The results indicate that whether a shopping environment is modern or traditional is a primary factor in people's reaction to the scene. Of the 5 dimensions, 2 are composed entirely of scenes that are traditional and 2 consist of scenes, which depict modern environments; with the fifth being the only dimension with scenes of both traditional and modern shopping environments. The traditional shopping environments grouped into two subtypes—*traditional outdoor markets*, and *traditional fresh markets*.

Modern shopping environments also grouped into two subtypes—*typical modern malls* and *modern malls with exposed products*. Both modern and traditional shopping environments grouped on the same dimension when they contained vegetation in relatively small outdoor spaces. This dimension was titled *outdoor markets with vegetation*.



Figure 2: An example of the most preferred dimension, typical modern malls.



Figure 5: An example of modern malls with exposed products, the fourth most preferred dimension.



Figure 3: An example of the second most preferred dimension, outdoor markets with vegetation.



Figure 6: The least preferred dimension, traditional outdoor market.



Figure 4: An example of the traditional fresh markets, tied for the second most preferred dimension.

#### Preference by Dimension:

ANOVA was used to test for significant differences in mean preference for the dimensions (see Table 1). Interestingly, the dimension with the highest mean preference for scenes contained in that dimension was the *typical modern mall* (see Figure 2) dimension (3.1). The second most preferred dimension was a tie with the *out door markets with vegetation* (see Figure 3) (2.9) and *traditional fresh markets* (see Figure 4) (2.9). The fourth most preferred dimension was the *modern mall with exposed products* (See Figure 5) (2.8). The least preferred dimension was the *traditional outdoor market* (see Figure 6) (2.3).

Table 1: Mean of preference scores of Thai shopping environment dimensions.

Rank	Dimension	Mean Preference
1	Typical modern malls	3.1
2	Outdoor markets with vegetation	2.9*
3	Traditional fresh markets	2.9*
4	Modern malls with exposed products	2.8
5	Traditional outdoor markets	2.3

All means are significantly different (ANOVA test at .05 level of significance) than all other means in lower rank order except those with an asterisk, which are not significantly different from the next lower order mean.

#### Factors Influencing Preference:

The content analysis of free response questions suggest three broad reasons for differences in preference: 1) the cleanliness and organization of space 2) the presence of vegetation and 3) opportunities for socialization and recreation. Each of these is discussed in more detail below.

The most frequent comments for scenes in the most preferred dimension, *typical modern malls*, were that the space was well-organized and spacious spaces with a clean, comfortable, and pleasant atmosphere. On the contrary, the less preferred *modern malls with exposed products* were referred to as poorly organized, tight and closed space. For traditional environments, the more preferred *fresh markets* were also referred to as well-organized and clean, while the less preferred *traditional outdoor markets* were mentioned as poorly-organized, dirty and dangerous.

The opportunities for social and recreation activities are represented by the appearances of the spaces that allow the possibility to wander around the shopping displays that provide opportunities to sit, rest, eat or drink and socialize. Scenes presenting these opportunities occurred most often in the most preferred *typical modern malls* in the form of central areas, seats, and cafés. Typical modern malls were also mentioned by the respondents as comfortable and that they want to be or sit there. These opportunities are also present in the second most preferred dimension *outdoor markets with vegetation*. The scenes in this dimension consisted

of sitting areas and landscape. They were mentioned as shady, natural, pleasant, and having a sense of community. The presence of green vegetation or nature has been found to be an important factor in other environmental preference studies.

The results of this research are consistent with preference framework developed by Kaplan and Kaplan (1983). This framework suggests that content such as trees and nature have positive influence on preference and that places with a sense of mystery (spacious environments with the opportunity to move through and explore further) and high legibility (well organized easily understood places) are also preferred. A greater sense of mystery present in scenes in the *typical modern malls* dimension results in higher preference than scenes in *modern malls with exposed products*. Legibility is a factor in causing *fresh markets* to be more preferred than *traditional outdoor markets*, since *fresh markets* tend to be laid-out and displayed in a more-organized manner. People are able to make better cognitive maps of the market.

#### Shopping Behavior Variables:

Shopping behaviors play important roles in how people select places for shopping. They will select the places they perceived as suitable for their shopping needs. Analyses of preferences for shopping environments, using MANOVA, demonstrate significant differences among different group of shoppers for different shopping environments.

#### Shopping as a Social Activity:

The results of this research indicate, that in addition to meeting pragmatic needs for acquiring food and goods, that shopping is also a social activity. Family shopping habits, the number of people shopping together, time spent shopping, preferred time of day for shopping and the age and gender of the shoppers are all important factors in shopping environment preference.

Table 2: Relationships between environmental factors and shopping behavior and demographic backgrounds

Variables	Traditional outdoor markets	Traditional fresh markets	Typical modern malls	Modern malls with exposed products	Mixed outdoor markets with vegetation
Place decision			together than husband		together than wife
Shopping companion	family member, assistant, 1-2 friends	family member than 3+ friends	3 + friends	assistant	
Shopping time		Morning and noon	afternoon, evening		
Time spent					3+ than 1-2 hours
Age	51+	older	under 51		
Gender		female			male

Note: Significantly different categories under .05 level from post hoc tests were selected and reported in relation to the type of shopping environments

**Family and Group Shopping Habits:** Shoppers from families that all members decide the place to shop together significantly prefer *typical modern malls* and *outdoor markets with vegetation*. The families may need the places that offer them the most opportunities to sit, eat and socialize. Shoppers who go shopping with large groups of friends significantly prefer *typical modern malls*, which also offer the best possibility to relax and socialize. On the other hand, shoppers who go shopping with small groups of friends, a family member, or an assistant (a driver or a housekeeper) significantly prefer *traditional outdoor markets*, *traditional fresh markets*, and *modern malls with exposed products*. These shoppers may be looking for “economic value” more than social activity. Low and negotiable prices were frequent terms from the content analysis that were associated with traditional environments.

**Time of Day:** Shoppers who shop in the afternoon and evening significantly prefer *typical modern malls*, while shoppers who shop in the morning significantly prefer *traditional fresh markets*. People who shop in the morning are probably more interested in obtaining products at their freshest.

Recreation or social shopping is probably more frequent later in the day.

**Age group:** Younger shoppers significantly prefer *typical modern malls* to other shopping environments. These younger shoppers may need more opportunity for social interaction in comfortable environment of *typical modern malls*. On the contrary, older shoppers seem to like traditional markets more than modern malls. The older shoppers may be used to traditional shopping environments and traditional ways of shopping such as negotiating price.

**Time spent shopping:** Shoppers who normally shop 3 hours or longer significantly prefer *outdoor markets with vegetation*. Since these shoppers spend longer time in the place, the opportunity to rest in shaded, sitting areas with vegetation would be important for them.

**Gender:** Female shoppers significantly prefer *traditional fresh markets*. Since women are often in the role of providing food for their families, fresh markets offer fresh products and foods, as also mentioned as having high quality by the respondents. Male shoppers significantly prefer *outdoor markets with vegetation*. Again, the opportunity to socialize may be more important to male shoppers.

### Implication for the Future

The results of this research have implications for two aspects of design, planning and management of shopping environments: first, implications for the new shopping environments; and second, implications for enhancing existing traditional shopping environments. Each of these is discussed further below.

**New Shopping Environments:** New shopping environments should include those characteristics of the *modern malls* dimension, which was the most preferred dimension in the analysis. These characteristics include:

- A clean, well-organized appearance, including tidy product displays with well-defined and reasonably spacious circulation ways.
- Opportunities for resting and socializing, including benches, sitting areas and eating areas.
- Spatial arrangements that provide a sense of mystery – that is spacious arrangements of products and goods through which shoppers can move to explore and discover the goods and products being offered for sale.
- Vegetation to increase aesthetic quality and lower temperatures, particularly in outdoor environments.

In addition, as a means of preserving existing culture traditions new developments should experiment with including areas for more traditional style market stalls and vendors within the new shopping environment. These could include fresh markets and specialty booths that could compliment stores commonly found in modern shopping environments. In addition to preserving Thai culture traditional style market areas could add color and a lively vitality to the more sterile modern shopping environment.

Enhancing Traditional Environments: The results of this research found that traditional shopping environments was the least preferred dimension. If traditional style Thai markets are to survive economically their appeal must be enhanced. This can be done in two ways: first, improve some of the existing negative characteristics that are commonly associated with traditional market environments, and second, by including features that will make them more responsive to a broader spectrum of Thai shoppers. Each of these is discussed in more detail below.

This research found that traditional Thai shopping environments are often perceived as being dirty, crowded and unsafe, making them unpleasant places for people to spend time. Traditional shopping environments need to be enhanced to make them more preferred and to attract a wider range of shoppers, thus preserve their viability. This can be achieved by:

- Enhancing maintenance to keep the environments clean.
- Increase the sense of security by adding lighting where necessary, reducing crowding and providing visible security measures (video cameras and security guards).
- Provide more order to the display areas and circulation system. When coupled with reduced crowding this will make the market more legible (people will have a better cognitive map of the market layout) and increase the sense of mystery (the ability to wonder through the displays and discover things).
- Preserve the existing preferred characteristics traditional markets, such as: fresh and specialty products, low and negotiable price, convenient location and access, and full interaction with products and sellers.

To attract a broader range of shoppers, traditional market environments need to include opportunities for rest and comfort, and increase opportunities for socialization. This can be done by:

- Provide trees and other vegetation to increase the aesthetic quality, as well as, provide shade and cooler temperature.
- Provide opportunities for resting, including benches and sitting areas.
- Provide opportunities for social interaction by including sitting areas, open restaurants and cafés, gathering spaces and public spaces for entertainment and cultural events.

An example of how these physical changes could be accomplished is included in Figure 7. The diagram depicts; a) the general layout of traditional markets; b) a first step improvement by adding vegetation, c) a second step improvement by widening secondary isles and adding sitting areas; and d) a third step improvement by adding gathering areas with landscape, including vegetation, sitting areas, and lawn. The improvements suggested not only increase aesthetic quality and opportunities for rest and social interaction, but also increase imagability of the place in terms of nodes, landmarks, and districts (Lynch 1960).

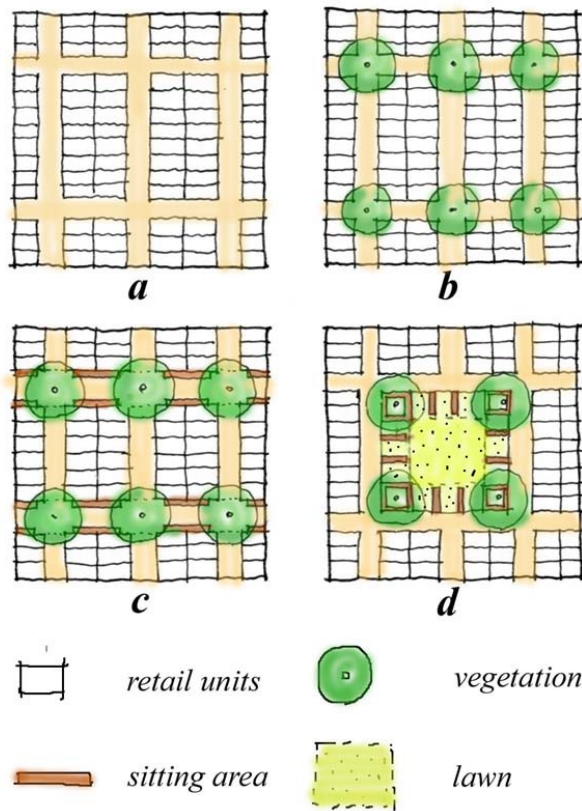


Figure 6: Graphic diagram of improvement for traditional environments

### Conclusion:

The results of this research indicate that by identifying the preferences and perceptions of Thai shoppers it is indeed possible to preserve aspects of the traditional Thai market place, an important part of Thai culture and heritage. This can be done by incorporating aspects of the traditional Thai market in new shopping environments and by enhancing existing traditional markets to give them broader appeal and make them more viable in today's economy.

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