

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION-SEEKING STRATEGIES
USED TO BUILD TRUST AND REDUCE UNCERTAINTY
AMONG CUSTOMERS OF MCDONALD'S RESTAURANTS
IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

The Dissertation Presented to
The Graduate School of Bangkok University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Interpersonal Communication

by

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2011

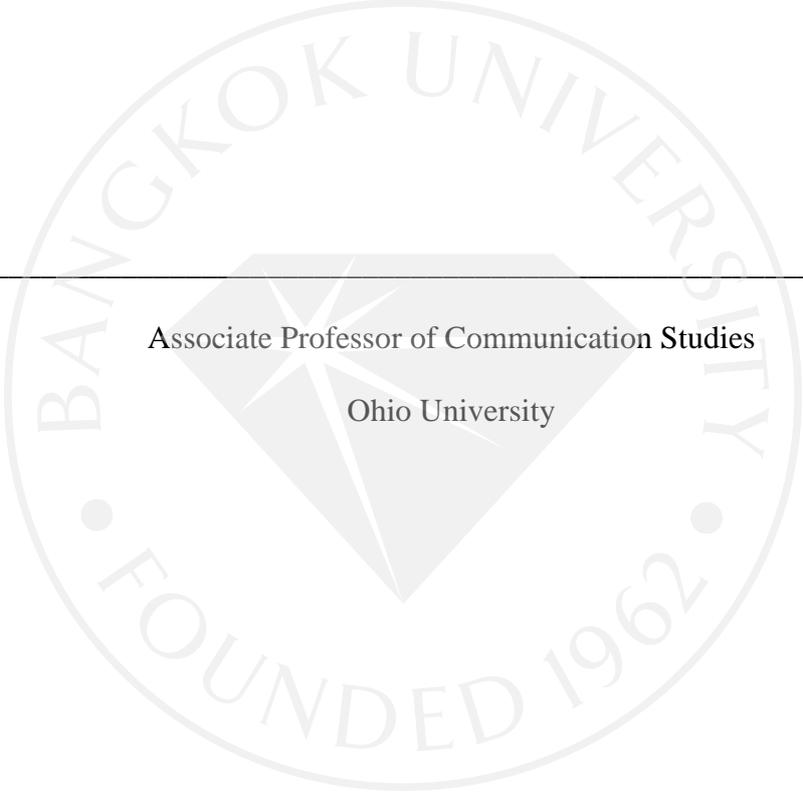


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Communication and Information-Seeking Strategies Used to Build Trust and Reduce
Uncertainty Among Customers of McDonald's Restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand

(306 pp.)

Advisor of dissertation: Assoc. Prof. Anita C. James, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Today, organizations have increasingly expanded their businesses into the international markets as global brands. Globalization enables information and knowledge to be easily and thoroughly disseminated to many areas. In order to achieve success when a global brand goes local, the organizations have to understand the uncertainty of customers and implement communication strategies with the customers to match the diversity of the locales. McDonald's is one of the most famous and familiar international brands in many countries, including Thailand. The purposes of this research study were to examine the communication strategies that McDonald's in Thailand (McThai Company) executes to provide information and build trusting relationships with Thai customers, as well as to reduce customers' uncertainty. Furthermore, this study investigated the issues that provoke customers' uncertainty and the information-seeking strategies that McDonald's Thai customers prefer to employ to reduce their uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services.

Qualitative methods, i.e., in-depth interviews and focus groups, were conducted in this study. On the part of McThai Company, the Communications and

PR Director and the Communications and PR Consultant were recruited as the participants for an in-depth interview. In term of customers, twelve McDonald's Thai customers were interviewed as the participants in the in-depth interviews. Also, two focus groups with an additional twelve McDonald's Thai customers were held.

The findings from the study revealed that the communication strategies that McDonald's/McThai executed was integrated marketing communications (IMC), including above the line and below the line strategies. Moreover, the results indicated that McDonald's/McThai attempted to build trusting relationships with the customers through QSC and V strategies, supplier strategy strategies, and community strategies. The findings showed McDonald's used appropriate amount of communication and IMC as strategies to decrease customers' uncertainty. The customer in-depth and focus group interviews revealed that McDonald's Thai customers had uncertainty about McDonald's price, promotion, taste, facilities, and nutrition, and employed eleven strategies, including discount coupons, communication technology, mass media, point of purchase, direct asking, direct observation, previous experience, third-party discussion, word-of-mouth communication, competitive brands, and perceived reward, to acquire more information about McDonald's products or services.

A quantitative method, e.g., survey research (N=414), was used to measure the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty when compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants. The findings showed that the more often customers visited or interacted with McDonald's restaurants the higher the customers' trust in the reliability, dependability, faith of McDonald's products and services, and the greater the customer loyalty. In term of customers' uncertainty, the results showed that the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurant affected the levels of customers'

uncertainty in price, promotional incentives, taste, and nutrition, with frequent visits resulting in lowering uncertainty.



Approved: _____

Signature of Advisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals who assisted and supported me to complete this dissertation. Throughout this project, I continuously received academic suggestions and emotional support from these individuals, so I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to all concerned with the completion of this project.

I would like to, first, wholeheartedly acknowledge my advisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anita C. James, who willingly devoted her scholarly knowledge and emotional support to me continuously. When I encountered any problems, she always encouraged me and helped me solve those problems. I appreciated that she made a great effort to push me to the completion of this project. I would like to say that it is the most pride in my educational life that you are my advisor. My special thanks also go to Prof. Dr. Raymie E. McKerrow for providing many useful suggestions, revising words in this research, and sincerely giving the spiritual encouragement to me. I cannot delete the picture that you attempted to strongly help me finish my research and accomplish my ultimate educational ambition. Thank you so much for your concern for me. In addition, my sincere thanks extend to Dr. Scott Titsworth, one of my committee members, and to all of my professors with whom I attended the classes at Ohio University. Without these professors, the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible.

Also, I greatly thank Dr. John Hitchcock, Assistant Professor of Educational Studies at Ohio University. I very much appreciate his efforts and endurance in instructing me to conduct good research. He contributed his time and guided me about methodological research, not only when I studied at Ohio University, but when I came back to Thailand. This usually helped me overcome difficult problems and

encouraged me to develop quality research. I learned a lot of knowledge from you. You are my idol for teaching research. Thank you so much.

My sincere appreciation extends to other dissertation committee members. Especially, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosechongporn Komolsevin, the Director of the program who provided more invaluable comments, useful recommendations, and significant encouragement that made me achieve in this project. I can say that Dr. Rosechongporn is the first person who helped me when I started this program. Additionally, my true gratitude extends to Prof. Dr. Pote Sapianchai, and Asst. Prof. Dr. Booncharn Thongprayoon, who provided academic comments and valuable guidance for this dissertation. Also, special thanks to Mr. Somsak Nakhalajarn, the lecturer of the Faculty of Social Work and Social Welfare at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University. He is a specialist in social research and social statistics. His expert knowledge and willing assistance supported me in creating the valid instruments and effective data analysis for the quantitative research section.

This project could not be completed without sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences from the interviewees and respondents. Especially, Ms. Saichon Submakudo, the director of the Communication and Public Relations Department of McThai Company, who was very willing to share information about McDonald's communication strategies in Thailand.

A special appreciation goes to Dr. Busaba Chaijinda, Vice President for Administrative Affairs at Sripatum University Chonburi, and all the Administration Committee, who approved financial support and promoted me to attend this Ph.D. program. I had more opportunities to improve my knowledge and vision in

communications. This program has developed my research in this discipline. Thank you for believing in me.

A big acknowledgement should also go to Mr. Suebsakdi Apairatana. His deep knowledge and wise guidance always enlightened me to criticize the phenomenon that I encountered in this research. Great thanks for giving moral support and devoting your valuable time to advice me.

Next, I would like to say thanks to my Bangkok University classmates. They always offered honest assistance. Thank you for our friendship that drove me to complete this project and program. I am grateful for studying with them all.

Finally, my wholehearted gratitude is devoted to my family. My dad, Mr. Surin Rinrattanakorn and my mom, Ms. Pleon Rinrattanakorn, who are the most important encouragement that pushed me to complete this project and study in the doctoral program. Specially, I would like to extend my gratitude to my uncle, Mr. Hardip Singh, while I studied in the doctoral program, my uncle willingly provided assistance to me in giving moral support, offering help in U.S., as well as giving academic insights for implementing instruments in this research. Thank you for your attention. I really appreciate your assistance.

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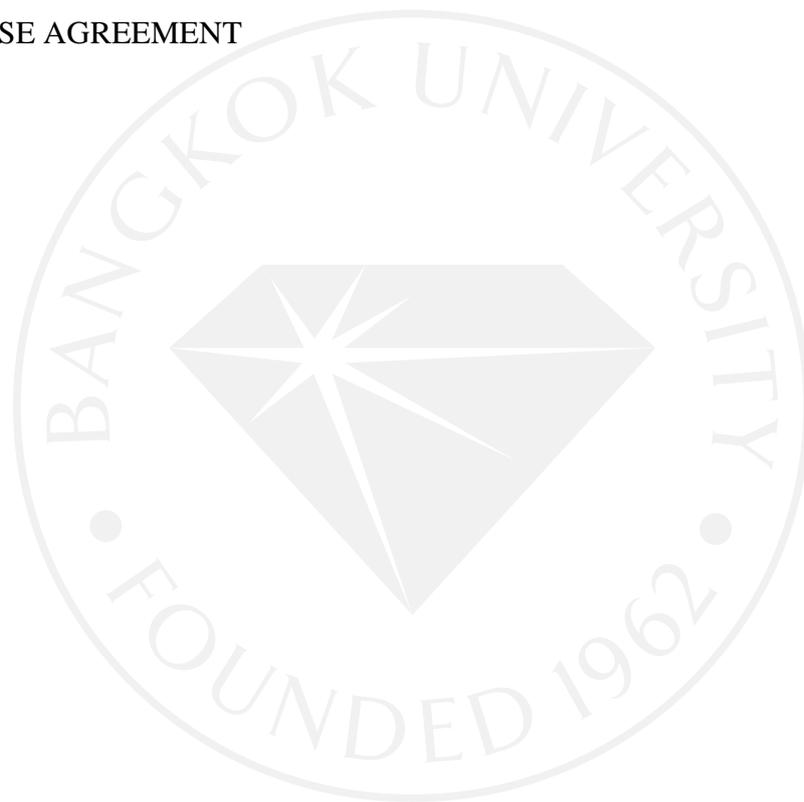
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

In this research, I was interested in exploring the relationship between McDonald's quick service restaurants and McDonald's Thai customers through the lens of building trusting relationships and Uncertainty Reduction Theory. I explored the communication strategies that McThai Company, McDonald's in Thailand, uses to provide information to the customers and build trusting relationships with its customers as well as reduce customers' uncertainty about its products and services. Moreover, I investigated the uncertainty that Thai customers encountered in the relationship with McDonald's restaurants and the information-seeking strategies that customers employed to cope with uncertainty regarding products and services. Furthermore, I measured the level of customers' trust and uncertainty compared with the frequency of customers visiting McDonald's restaurants. Satisfactory management of these issues usually led to long-term relationships between McDonald's and its customers and influenced customers' purchase intention as well.

History of McThai Company

McDonald's began when two brothers, Dick and Mac McDonald, built a drive-thru restaurant in California with fast service and great success in the revolutionary fast food service industry. The real opportunity came when Raymond Albert Kroc suggested the idea of opening several restaurants to the two brothers, and on April 15, 1955, the McDonald's Corporation was established in Illinois. Raymond Albert Kroc opened the first franchised McDonald's hamburger restaurant.

McDonald's is now the leading global food service retailer with more than 30,000 local restaurants in more than 100 countries (McThai, 2008a).

In Thailand, the first McDonald's restaurant was opened in 1985 when Mr. Dej Bulsuk and a friend wrote to the McDonald's headquarter to express their interest in expanding the franchise to Thailand. Mr. Dej attended Hamburger University to study McDonald's operations and gained actual experience at a McDonald's restaurant in Hong Kong. Mr. Bulsuk and McDonald's Corporation later registered McThai and opened the first McDonald's restaurant on March 16, 1985, at Amarin Plaza. By 2009 there were 115 McDonald's restaurants across Thailand. Currently, McDonald's restaurants in Thailand provide convenient services anywhere and anytime, including breakfast meals from 5:00 to 11:00 a.m., Drive Thru, Dessert Kiosk, McCafé, and McDelivery on telephone number 1711 from 9 to midnight, and unlimited internet and power access for customers. Indeed, McDonald's holds a single agenda: to provide one hundred percent total customer satisfaction (McThai, 2008a).

Philosophy of McThai Company

The philosophy of McDonald's is based on the QSC and V formula. With strict QSC and V standards, McDonald's restaurant serves with quality, speed, warmth, friendly service, cleanliness, and a value for the money. The QSC and V can be explained in the following (McThai, 2008d):

Quality

McDonald's has always ensured that customers receive food products with the best ingredients, quality control methods, and proven preparation procedures to guarantee a safe, great tasting product. McDonald's quality also refers to the quality

of management which is tasked with managing facts, valuing people, and improving every aspect of their business (McThai, 2008d).

Service

The foundation of their service, which is fast and friendly, has always been used as the technique to enhance and exceed customer expectations. This process can be continued through training crew members to create great customer experiences (McThai, 2008d).

Cleanliness

This principle has been used since the day that Ray Kroc opened his first restaurant. The restaurant always offers the cleanest and freshest facilities from the kitchen and dining room to the restrooms and parking lots, including taking an active part in local environment efforts, sponsoring recycling and clean-up campaigns (McThai, 2008d).

Value

McDonald's offers very reasonable prices for the total experience customers receive when they pay, including great food, friendly folks, a clean environment, and quick and accurate service (McThai, 2008d).

Culture of McThai Company

McDonald's operates crew and restaurants based on the crew members' abilities, called Talent Management, which many national and local organizations have used as the significant principle of administration. The expansion of this business focuses on the human resource investment to receive valuable results. The restaurant emphasizes that the human resource is the most valuable aspect for the organization to create life-time achievement and maintain great quality of

management as well as develop the crew members' abilities. Many significant aspects are implemented to create advantageous competition.

Strong culture in the company

The strength of McThai crew members can be described with the simple phrase 'STEP UP' as the tangible aspects of value and belief. This 'STEP UP' slogan is also used to manage crew members and efficiently operate the business to develop, improve, and evaluate the performance of crew members in relation to the existing culture and receive the expected qualified crew members (McThai, 2008c).

S–Sanook (Fun) at work: to be happy, energetic, and enthusiastic at work

T–Team to win: to share the same goal, trust, and confide in one other

E–Exceed customer expectation: to understand and respond beyond customer expectation

P–People: to continue to support people's development, appreciate and recognize each success with respect

U–Ultimately ownership: to work like the owner, take risks, and search for the best solution

P–Passion to win: to love determination and an eagerness for success

The culture is further represented through Ronald McDonald, the mascot of McDonald's. Ronald McDonald really knows how to blend into different cultures.

Instead of waving a friendly *hello* as in western countries, Ronald, the culturally aware company mascot, gives a Thai *wai* in Thailand (McThai, 2008c).

Providing different working positions to challenge the crew member's abilities

McDonald's offers crew members different positions to challenge their abilities and provides an opportunity to employees to do interesting and challenging

work. McDonald's allows employees to express their creative ideas and have responsibility for their assigned work so that they can work cooperatively. Hence, employees can learn from other fields such as people, place, promotion, and production.

Providing opportunities for work progress

McDonald's also provides the opportunity for work progress by supporting the crew members to grow and make progress in their career such as training, further studying, or observing work. Hamburger University is also a great source of knowledge and development for crew members to have knowledge on a world class level according to the company's demands and standards.

Providing opportunity to give opinions or participate with the company

McDonald's has an *Open Door Policy* to offer the crew members opportunities to give opinions and ask for advice when having problems at work. McDonald's organizes a conference every month for crew members to update them with company information as well as to inform them of any news or suggestions. McDonald's also organizes activities annually and invites all crew members to participate and perform their special talents or entertainment. McDonald's has a principle of giving justified incentives to compete in the labor market. Their incentives depend on their transparent and justified performance such as the Outstanding Contribution Award Program, the Team Excellence Award Program, the President's Award Program, and the Circle of Excellence Award Program (McThai, 2008c).

Treating crew members as family members

McDonald's also treats crew members as family, which increases their feelings of belonging to McDonald's. This relationship is part of the achievement that leads McDonald's to be one of the top ten brands in the world. Even though McDonald's is one of the top ten brands, the principle of management and operation might not be enough in business competition; therefore, the company needs to improve administrative problems to have an efficient working system. To be sincere, to put forth great effort, and to give significance to the abilities of crew members in every level in the organization are the important keys for long-term business achievement.

Significance of the Study

In the relationship between customer and company, the business or marketing relationship, the main concept that most scholars are more likely to reference is building trusting relationships with the customers. Based on increasing the organization's competitive advantage and reducing the customer's uncertainty regarding products or services, most organizations are recognized for the significance of creating trust and a sustainable, long-term relationship with their customers. This usually leads to increasing the organization's success and reducing the customers' uncertainty (Han, Wilson, & Dant, 1993).

Many researchers have identified the concept of trust. Zucker (1986) viewed trust in relationships as something that would occur when one party had positive beliefs toward either party. According to Blau's (1964) claim, trust can be produced when people believe that one party can provide the best benefits in order to maintain the relationship. Individuals usually attempt to keep the long-term relationship with

their partners in order to maintain the trustworthiness. It can be argued that building trusting relationships is very important in the business relationship area. This notion is supported by Ganesan (1994), who studied the buyer-seller relationship. The outcomes showed that customers have more trustworthiness in the partner when he/she offers a strong and long-term relationship. The high levels of trust between parties can reduce uncertainty, complexity, and the transaction cost of business relationships. Similarly, Weber, Current, and Benton (1991) postulated that developing, maintaining, and improving relationships were the major concepts to build trusting and long-term relationships in competitive marketing. Moreover, the existence of trust between both parties can be employed in order to judge the further relationship between the relational partners (Bejou & Palmer, 1998). Thus, building trusting relationships is the significant issue of interaction between customer and organization.

Based on the concept of Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), uncertainty can occur in any relationship, such as familial, initial, friendship, professional or romantic. When individuals have an interaction with other people, they might encounter this uncertainty. No matter how long- or short-term the relationship, uncertainty can arise in every stage. Basically, individuals make efforts to reduce the uncertainty to continue the interaction with their partners. If individuals cannot decrease the uncertainty, the relationship between partners is probably undermined by the level of uncertainty (Berger, 1986). Similarly, in the relationship between an organization and its customers, uncertainty can occur. Customers might encounter an organization's products or services that cannot be predicted and cannot

be decided upon, being also uncertain about alternative products and services (Pras & Summers, 1978).

Cox and Rich (1964) believed that customer uncertainty influences purchasing intention. They indicated that it is difficult to make decisions about the alternative brands if customers lack information or knowledge about those brands. They further explained that, when customers are faced with uncertainty, they cannot predict the future of the performance of the product or service and that might cause them to refuse to purchase those products or services. We can observe that uncertainty influences customers' purchase intentions. The organizations should recognize customer uncertainty and attempt to decrease the level of it to maintain the relationship with their customers and prevent the decrease of sales.

Providing adequate information about products or services to customers is one effective approach to decrease uncertainty. Today, especially, the marketing context enters the postmodernism perspective that is rapid, changeable, and frenetic, reflected by their products and services. Also, the variety of products, brands, and businesses that are generated respond to the diversity of customer demands (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002). The organization must improve and create new communication strategies that are appropriate to the marketing context and accessible to customer demands.

According to Goczol and Scoubeau (2003), marketing communication in the traditional perspective is likely to be concerned with sales of particular goods and services, but that marketing from a postmodern perspective focuses on a customer-orientation so the organizations try to integrate communication instruments to create effective communication strategies for their customers.

Caywood (1997) stated that maintaining a long-term relationship with a customer is a significant goal for an organization. The organization attempts to find effective ways to reach their consumers and gain profit from them. Caywood further suggested that, in this day, the organizations must move to effective communication strategies to be consistent with the increasingly competitive forces. Also, effective communication strategies accelerate the organizations' success in creating relationships with their customers and make the customers recognize the organization. For example, some companies create a communication strategy by keeping records of their customers' information. With this strategy, those companies can easily inform customers about their products and services.

Caywood (1997) further demonstrated this with the McDonald's Company as an example. McDonald's launched a promotion in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Big Mac. The company executed various communication strategies to promote and create awareness about its product, the Big Mac, including establishing public relations to recommend the famous sandwich and conducting network interviews with the McDonald's owner-operator who invented the Big Mac. McDonald's research showed that publicity through various communication channels generated awareness and a thirteen percent increase in sales during the three-day publicity period that preceded the anniversary date. This explanation appears to argue that the communication strategies an organization executes to provide information and reduce customer uncertainty are a significant and an interesting topic to explore.

The international economy is one point related to communication strategies. The companies that expand their businesses to international markets ought to adapt their communication strategies to be compatible with different regions, culture, and

customers. Ohmae (1989) suggested that multinational companies should adjust and change their communication strategies to suit local tastes. These companies should create both international and global communication strategies to increase the competitive benefits. This means that the multinational companies have to concentrate on two determinants, internationalization and globalization, that lead to achievement in original and new markets.

Customers encountering uncertainty about products or services are likely to reduce their uncertainty by searching for information from various channels, including impersonal advocate sources such as print media and mass media advertising, popular articles, broadcast programming, and technical reports on the product, and personal advocate sources such as salespersons and store managers (Andreasen, 1968). According to Beales, Mazis, and Staelin (1981), customers can acquire information from external searches of print advertisements, television or radio advertisements, magazine articles, salespeople, point-of purchase displays, and personal acquaintances. McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999), who examined consumers' external search activities in services marketing, confirmed that the information that derives from an external search plays an important role in decreasing customer uncertainty while increasing knowledge and post-purchase satisfaction. McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999) further indicated that the information seeking is not only important for customers but also beneficial for communicators. Communicators can apply the knowledge in this issue to determine communication strategies that are relevant to their customers' demands and creative brand image. The information-seeking strategies significantly help customers reduce uncertainty and

receive adequate information to judge the attributes of a product or service they have experienced.

We can conclude that uncertainty is an important factor that can undermine the relationship between partners. Adequate and effective communication between partners will help them to cope with and reduce their mutual uncertainty to maintain a long-term relationship. Axiom 1, proposed by Berger and Calabrese (1975), supports this notion reasonably. They asserted that when verbal communication increases, the level of uncertainty in the relationship decreases. Additionally, during the interaction, when individuals encounter uncertainty, they attempt to search for information about their partners to reduce the uncertainty. We can observe that uncertainty, communication, and information-seeking are related to one another.

Since the original Uncertainty Reduction Theory emphasized the interaction in a new acquaintance relationship, most subsequent research has focused principally on using this theory to examine the communication processes between partners in the initial stages of a relationship or interactions between strangers (Berger, 1975; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Clatterbuck, 1979; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Subsequently, the concept of this theory refers to communication in interpersonal, intercultural, health care, mass communication, and organizational contexts that are consistent with the notion of Hewes and Planalp (1982). They argued that the uncertainty perspective could help explain the relationship in various communication contexts. Similarly, Berger (1987) suggested that adapting the theory is an essential factor that leads to the existence of the theory.

Previous research has not fully considered Uncertainty Reduction Theory to explain the uncertainty that occurs during the relationship between an organization

and its customers, specifically in the context of the relationship between a quick service restaurant and Thai customers. Besides, the previous research has not addressed using communication strategies to reduce customers' uncertainty in the context of a quick service restaurant.

This study examined trusting relationships and the uncertainty that occurs during the relationship between Thai McDonald's quick service restaurants and their customers. Based on the context of the business relationship, building trusting relationships between the partners is significant in maintaining a continuous relationship. The customers' uncertainty is an important issue in business contexts. If customers have trust in the organizations they interact with, they would not have any doubts about the organization; the level of customers' uncertainty will be decreased. Consequently, the organizations can keep the sustainable long-term relationship with their partners and that leads to increased purchase intentions. Moreover, the marketing competition today is expansive. The communication strategies play a major role in business contexts. The organization which applies effective strategies in communication toward its customers will achieve more in business (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002). Customers have various channels and strategies to access information about the products or services and an understanding of the strategies that customers are more likely to employ to acquire information is a crucial issue, so that the organization can select appropriate communication channels for customers' media exposure. Thus, these significant, interesting issues of this study were investigated to find the results; they are beneficial for improving and developing the communication inquiries that are related to trust, relationship, and uncertainty, and for seeking information in the business area, particularly quick service restaurants.

Statement of the Problem

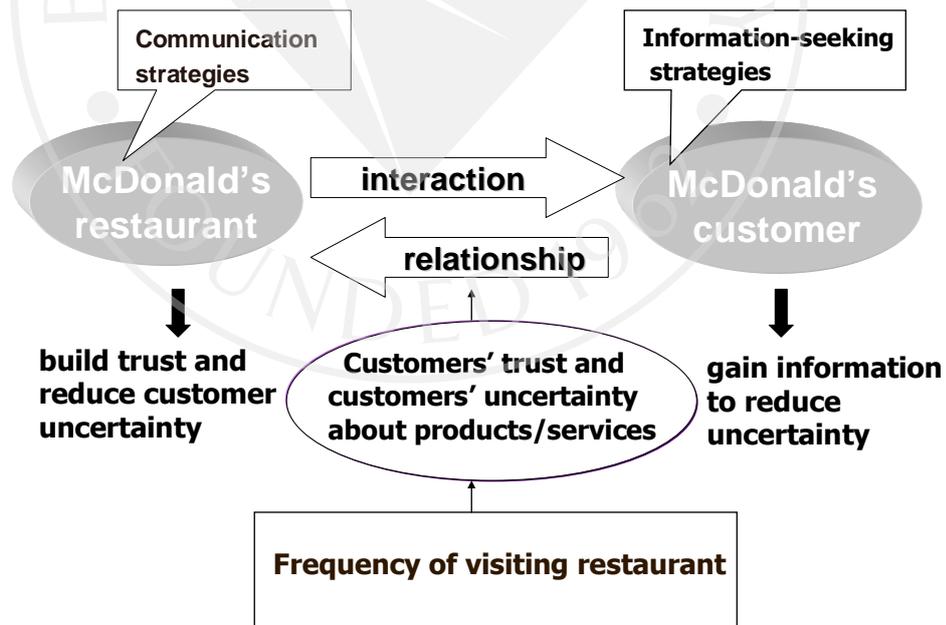
In this research, many interesting and useful problems needed to be answered. From the perspective of the McThai Company, a company is more likely to build up trust in the business relationship as well as decrease the uncertainty of their customers. This study used the concept of building trusting relationships to examine the problem about communication strategies executed by McDonald's to create customers' trust. Furthermore, this research extended the Uncertainty Reduction Theory into the organizational context to explore communication strategies used by McDonald's to provide information and reduce customers' uncertainty. With respect to customers, when an individual interacts with another, the individual is likely to have some uncertainty. The problems investigated in this study were the causes of uncertainty McDonald's customers faced during an interaction episode with McDonald's restaurants. In addition, this study examined the problems involving strategies employed by McDonald's customers to search for information and reduce uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. Finally, this study analyzed the problems about the level of customers' trust and uncertainty in each aspect compared with the frequency of customer visits to McDonalds' restaurants.

Purpose of This Study

There were seven purposes to this study. The first was to investigate the communication strategies that McDonald's used to provide information to its customers. The second was to study the communication strategies that McDonald's used to build trusting relationships toward its customers. The third was to examine the communication strategies that McDonald's used to reduce customer uncertainty. The fourth was to explore the issues that provoke customer uncertainty regarding

McDonald's products or services. The fifth was to investigate the information-seeking strategies that customers executed to reduce their uncertainty. The sixth was to measure the degree of customers' trust regarding McDonald's products or services through the dimensions of caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty. The final purpose was to measure the level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services in the various determinants including price, atmosphere, speed, cleanliness, location, promotional incentives, taste, nutrition, menus, friendliness, facilities, and image that customers encounter in the relationship with McDonald's restaurants.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions:

RQ1: What are the communication strategies McDonald's uses to provide information to the customers?

RQ1a: How does McDonald's use communication strategies to build trusting relationships with the customers?

RQ1b: How does McDonald's express uncertainty regarding how well the communication strategies work to reduce customers' uncertainty?

RQ2: Do McDonald's customers experience uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant?

RQ3: What information-seeking strategies are used by customers in a McDonald's restaurant to reduce their uncertainty?

Hypotheses:

H1: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.

H1a: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the caring dimension than low-frequency customers.

H1b: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the reliability dimension than low-frequency customers.

- H1c: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the dependability dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1d: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the competency dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1e: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the faith dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1f: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the customer loyalty dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H2: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.
- H2a: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in price construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2b: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in promotional incentives construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2c: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in location construct than low-frequency customers.

- H2d: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in cleanliness construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2e: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in friendliness construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2f: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in atmosphere construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2g: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in speed construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2h: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in facilities construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2i: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in taste construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2j: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in menu variety construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2k: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in nutrition construct than low-frequency customers.

H21: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in reputation and image construct than low-frequency customers.

Definition of Terms

Trusting Relationships. Trust is a belief of one party toward one another party. When one party believes that another party can maintain their agreements and benefits, trusting relationships will be produced and preserved (Zucker, 1986).

Dimensionality of trust. Dimensionality of trust refers to an extent of trust that provides the directions for evaluating trust or distrust toward sources (Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2003). In this study, dimensionality of trust included six dimensions: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty.

Communication Strategies. Communication strategies refers to communication that focuses on integrated management of various communication channels in order to convey a clear, consistent, and compelling message about the organization, products, and customer service toward each diverse customer (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Bergh, 2005).

Uncertainty. Uncertainty refers to the situation which may occur when McDonald's customers have a relationship with a McDonald's restaurant but lack information or knowledge about McDonald's products or services so they have doubts or misunderstandings about the performance, products, or services of McDonald's restaurant. The uncertainty means McDonald's customers cannot predict, explain, or make a decision about products or services in which they have experience that has influenced their purchase intention (Mitchell, 1999). Moreover, uncertainty refers to the circumstances in which the outcomes of products or services that customers have

actually experienced are different from the customer's expectation (Kahnemann & Tversky, 1984).

Constructs of Uncertainty. In this study, there were twelve constructs of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or service including price, promotional incentives, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition, and reputation or image. I assumed that these constructs could provoke customers' uncertainty that influenced purchase intention.

Information-Seeking Strategies. Information-seeking strategies are related to techniques that customers are likely to employ to acquire information regarding the attributes of products or services that lead to a reduction of customers' uncertainty and increases their ability to evaluate the outcomes of purchasing those products or services (Mitra, Reiss, & Capella, 1999).

McDonald's Restaurants. McDonald's Restaurants refer to McDonald's quick service restaurants located in Bangkok, Thailand, that are administered by McThai Company Limited. McDonald's Restaurants in Thailand obtained a legal franchise from McDonald's Corporation. The main products of these restaurants include hamburgers, fried chicken, French fries, salads, pies, soft drinks, coffee, or desserts. The golden arches are well-known symbols of McDonald's Restaurants (McThai, 2008a).

McDonald's Customers. McDonald's customers refer to those people interacting and visiting McDonald's quick-service restaurants located in Bangkok.

Frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants. How often do McDonald's customers visit McDonald's restaurants? The frequency of customer visits can

indicate the interaction between McDonald's customers and McDonald's restaurants that is relevant to the levels of intimacy (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Expected Benefits

The results from this study are beneficial in many aspects. For the McThai Company, the findings about information-seeking strategies customers employ to reduce their uncertainty regarding McDonald's products and services are useful. The company will have a greater understanding of the factors that cause customers' uncertainty and illustrate the strategies and channels that customers prefer to employ to search for information to decrease their uncertainty. Also, McDonald's can use these findings to evaluate the forms of communication they currently use and create effective communication strategies for providing information, building trusting relationships, and reducing uncertainty among their customers. For McDonald's customers, the findings from this research will help customers know the information about uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. Also, the findings will generate knowledge about the strategies that customers are more likely to employ to decrease the level of uncertainty. Customers can apply these strategies for searching for information from other businesses apart from quick service restaurants.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Building Trusting Business Relationships

The Conceptualization of Building and Developing Business Relationships

Building and developing the business relationship has been studied over a period of time. There are many studies that mentioned establishing the relationship between a customer-company or a buyer-seller (Anderson, 2001; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Gronross, 1990; Narayandas & Rangan, 2004; Wilson, 1995). Based on increasing an organization's competitive advantage and reducing customer's uncertainty regarding products or services in marketing, most organizations have paid attention to building a sustainable, long-term relationship between parties. Since organizations view that building continuous relationships with customers is an important factor, it leads to an increase in an organization's achievement, reduction of customers' uncertainty, and a decrease of the transaction costs resulting from exchanging relationship (Han et al., 1993). According to Stern (1997), the effective building and development of business relationships that are developed over time will generate security and commitment in the relationship.

The phrase, 'building and developing business relationships', was identified by Morgan and Hunt (1994), who studied commitment and trust in relationship marketing. They argued that building and developing the long-term continuation of relationships refers to all marketing activities created in order to establish, develop, and maintain successful relational exchanges. Weber et al. (1991) pointed out that developing, maintaining, and improving relationships are key concepts to build a

relationship and to maintain long-term relationships in highly competitive markets. The relationship requires continuously evolved exchanges and effectively managed systems in order to gain the value outcomes for all parts of the relationship. Most parties identified building relationship as a main component that helps them attain valuable consequences. Thus, they endeavor to generate and develop ongoing relationships with their partners. Also, Meyer and Allen (1984) indicated that the meaning of building relationships refers to producing the ongoing relationship with one other party that is worthy and that both transaction parties are willing to develop those relationships. Similarly, Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) proposed that building and developing long-term relationships with customers may be defined as the desire and motivation to conduct a continuous relationship that is considered as a valued business relationship between parties.

The Process of Building and Developing Business Relationships

During the evolutionary process, the partners of business relationships have to learn more about activities between the relational partners that are different, depending on the steps of the relationship, so that both partners are able to express appropriate behaviors in correlation with each stage of relationship development. Ford (1980), who studied the evolution process of relationship development, proposed five stages for building and developing business relationships: pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, long-term stage, and the final stage.

Pre-relationship is the first stage. During this stage, people are more likely to seek and gather information about one another, from outside, and inside sources including using cross-checking partners' competency in order to evaluate and select potential partners. However, in this stage, the organization should be careful about

revealing information that might cause the organization to lose the opportunities to interact with potential partners. According to Ng (2009), who studied the existing and improving buyer-seller relationships in Australian regional agribusinesses, interaction, communication, and information sharing between buyers and sellers in this stage were insufficient. Buyers and sellers did not want to convey too much information with their partners. They preferred to be cautious with communicating with one another.

The second stage of relationship development is the early stage. During this phase of the process, the partners are more likely to examine the experiences of one another and provide chances to exchange information with each other in order to evaluate and create an initial relationship (Ford, 1980). Turnbull (1987) demonstrated that the effective relationship during this stage can reduce the buyer's uncertainty and enhance the supplier's credibility. According to Ng (2009), the establishment of rapport with partners, sharing information, and understanding mutual goals were crucial at this early stage. This usually leads to decreased conflicts between partners and increases the relationship to the next level. In contrast, a lack of trust between buyers and sellers can lead to an absence of discussing and sharing of mutual goals.

The third stage is the development stage. Ford (1980) wrote that in this phase, individuals focus on developing a personal relationship and trust with their partners. They attempt to coordinate activities and responsibilities with each other in order to continue the relationship. Moreover, individuals are more likely to adjust and negotiate their agreements through regular contact and socialization in order to create common goals. Similarly, Ng (2009) found that buyers and sellers made efforts to adapt and create joint activities with one another, so that a closer relationship between them can be developed. However, Ng (2009) pointed out that in some cases, joint

activities might be difficult when the degrees of commitment between buyers and sellers are different. Ng (2009) further argued that the individuals who have less power in the relationship have to adapt and adjust themselves to be compatible with partners who have higher power. This imbalance of power might be harmful to relationship development. Although a sustainable long-term relationship with a partner provides the greatest benefit and helps to reduce uncertainty (Oliver, 1990), a long-term relationship should be built based on the rapport and accommodation between the partners rather than pressure and power from one another (Ng, 2009).

The fourth stage is a long-term stage. Ford (1980) and Narayandas and Rangan (2004) proposed that individuals attempt to maintain trading activities with their partners in this stage. Moreover, they enhance trust and commitment in order to achieve mutual benefits through an on-going relationship. Ng (2009) demonstrated that trust is a very crucial factor in developing relationships. The relationship has not attained the mature stage if trust and confidence have not been fully established between the partners. In other words, a lack of trust can lead to the termination of the relationship before any interaction between partners can proceed towards the final phases.

In the final stage, Ford (1980) pointed out that individuals should manage and create effective communication with their partners so that they can reduce uncertainty occurring in this phase. The levels of uncertainty depend on the levels of dissatisfaction between the partners. If individuals cannot decrease uncertainty, the relationship with their partners might be disengaged.

Overall, the five stages of the evolution process can be summarized into the following points:

1. To seek more information and increase the experience of partners.
2. To create an initial relationship through the reduction of uncertainty and the increase of credibility.
3. To adjust and negotiate with partner's activities in order to maintain the relationship.
4. To develop trust and commitment between the partners to gain mutual benefits.
5. To establish effective interaction with partners that leads to uncertainty reduction.

Furthermore, Ford (1980) stated that the process of building and developing relationships between buyer and seller is related to many factors such as experience, uncertainty, co-operation, commitment, and mutual adaptation. According to Nielson's claim (1998), there are many constructs that are related to developing the long-term relationship in the marketing context: trust, commitment, communication, shared values, quality service, reliability, product quality, customer satisfaction, and cooperation. The significance of these constructs will be varied based on the stages of the relationship. Similarly, Morgan and Hunt (1994) proposed that the positive constructs of building relationship marketing includes trust, relationship benefits, shared values, communication, and cooperation; in contrast, the negative constructs consist of opportunistic behavior, relationship termination, increased costs, propensity to leave, functional conflict, and uncertainty.

Trust in Business Relationships

Trust has become an increasing interest in the discipline of business relationships during the last two decades (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Dwyer, Schurr, &

Oh, 1987; Ganesan, 1994). Researchers of trust in business relationships indicated that trust is an important element for the normal flow of social interaction (Tyler & Degoey, 1996). Based on the literature, we can observe that trust and relationship development have been studied as a paired concept (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Recently, rapid changes among competitive businesses have prompted a large number of firms to become interested in building trust and long-term relationships with their customers. The high levels of trust between parties can reduce uncertainty, complexity, and transaction costs of business relationships. For example, in a crisis situation, the trusted organization will easily retain relationships with customers rather than untrusted ones (Schiller, 1992). Furthermore, the existence of trust between both parties can be used to evaluate and further the relationship between relational partners (Bejou & Palmer, 1998).

Other studies have confirmed the benefits and major role of trust in establishing and developing business relationships. Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar (1994), who analyzed sales productivity, suggested that building strong long-term relationships with customers is significant in increasing trust in the marketing relationships. This notion is supported by Ganeson (1994), who studied a long-term orientation in the buyer-seller relationship; the results showed that when suppliers encouraged a strong and long-term relationship, customers believed their partners were more trustworthy. Thus, trust was the outcome of a good relationship between buyers and sellers. The most important issue to create and develop the business relationships is the partners should generate trust based on the genuine feelings of confidence, reliability, and integrity with one another (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The Conceptualization of Trust

In marketing relationships, trust is one factor that many researchers have widely discussed. Although the concept of trust is complex and difficult to measure, there are various studies that have attempted to determine the conceptions of trust within business relationships. For example, Zucker (1986) indicated that trust is a positive belief of one party towards another party. When one party believed that the other party would maintain their agreements and benefits, trust in the relationship will be produced and preserved. Similarly, Blau (1964) demonstrated that trust can occur when individuals believe that they will obtain benefits from preserving relationships with either party; thus, individuals will commit to keep a sustainable long-term relationship and reject contact with other alternatives in order to show their trustworthiness. Also, Wang (2009) observed that trust between partners can be seen as benevolence and honesty toward one another. When both parties gain benefits from keeping the relationship between each other, they tend to trust their transaction partners. Morrow, Hansen, and Pearson (2004) proposed that trust refers to the situation; one person believes that either partner will not be exploited from keeping the relationship between them.

On the one hand, some scholars viewed trust in relation to individual confidence in others. For instance, Mellinger (1956) identified trust as a person's confidence in the intentions, motives, and sincerity of another person. Moorman et al., (1992) viewed trust as confidence. People are willing to rely on either partner who has gained their confidence. Some scholars have defined trust based on an individual's confidence and expectation. Deutsch believed (1960) trust will emerge while maintaining relationships, especially when the individual has confidence in the

intentions and competency of another party. Similarly, Hosmer (1995) argued that trust can be defined as one person having an optimistic expectation about the expression through behaviors of another person. Read (1962) claimed when people feel trust, they will have more confidence in sharing negative personal information with their partners. People expect that their partners will protect the trust relationship between them. Finally, some researchers explained the concept of trust by linking it with vulnerability. Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) described trust as a psychological variable that includes the intention to accept vulnerability. For this concept, trust will occur based on the positive expectations and belief in another's behavior. Correspondingly, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) saw trust as the willingness of the "trustor" to receive vulnerable behavior of either party based on the expectation that either party's acts are beneficial for the "trustor." However, these definitions do not explain the reasons why individuals are willing to accept vulnerability.

The Dimensionality of Trust

Apart from the conceptualization of trust, most researchers have increasingly discussed the extent or dimensions of trust. However, those researchers recognize that theoretical and practical perceptions, regarding the dimension of trust, are complex and multidimensional. Thus, it is important to understand the extent of trust that will provide guidelines for evaluating the feeling of trust or distrust toward the targets (Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2003). In very general terms, Ganesan (1994) indicated that the dimension of trust involves two elements: credibility and benevolence. The first concept is credibility. Trust focuses on the objective credibility of the exchange between two partners. It means that the one partner can rely on the statements of the

other partner. The second concept is benevolence. This concept can refer to dependability. It means that one partner perceives the help and sincerity of the other partner and desires to join in the activities with the other. For example, when customers encounter uncertainty regarding products or services, they tend to contact credible or reliable sellers or organizations to reduce their own uncertainty (credibility) and seek assistance and sincerity in their needs (benevolence) (Williamson, 1993). Another example involves source credibility that is related to trust and purchase intention. Source credibility refers to the degrees of validation and credibility of a source. Also, the senders who have more validation will be considered as more benevolent people (benevolence) than the ones who lack validation. Furthermore, some research explained that interesting and benevolent sources can increase persuasion of the target (Choo, 1964). The firms or salespeople who have more trustworthiness (credible and benevolent) will be considered to have higher credibility and that can enhance the levels of persuasion. We can argue that trusted firms and trusted salespeople will be successful in transactional relationships, rather than firms or salespeople with less trustworthiness. Importantly, highly trusted sources provide more positive attitudes and feelings toward the targets than others that are less trustworthy. Thus, people tend to easily accept information when the sender is assessed as an expert and trustworthy. It can imply that the sender is willing to help and communicate with other partners (Kelman & Hovland, 1953).

Based on the literature on trust, Renn and Levine (1991) determined five core components that contribute to trust. First is perceived competence. This component shows the levels of technical ability of the source. Second is objectivity, which demonstrates a lack of prejudice in analyzing sources. Third is fairness, which reflects

points of view. Fourth is consistency or predictability of performance or outcomes depending on past experiences. Finally, faith represents the goodwill of the source. Similarly, Kasperson, Golding, and Tuler (1992) argued that the extent of trust can be divided in four dimensions: commitment, competence, caring, and predictability, which are very significant for establishing and developing trust with a party. First, commitment manifests some levels of vulnerability. The partner wants to ensure that the other partner can commit to the agreements or goals between them. Second, competence is also a crucial component of trust, since trust occurs when competent sources or targets completely follow their obligations. Third, caring refers to expressions of one partner who is concerned about another relational partner. Finally, predictability involves the expectation of one party toward behaviors or arguments of the other party. Dwyer et al. (1987) observed that ability, reliability, and integrity are the key points that decision makers prefer to use in order to identify the dimension of trust.

Obviously, there are broad notions regarding aspects of trust; however, scholars have commented that it is difficult to clearly distinguish the dimension of trust (Mishra, 1996). For example, there are the dimensions of objectivity and fairness proposed by Renn and Levine (1991), and the aspect of commitment and caring presented by Kasperson et al., (1992). The attributes of these dimensions may not be completely independent. When people perform caring behaviors, they are attempting to preserve the commitment they have promised to their partners.

Recently, Metley (1999) studied the determination of trust wherein he argued that the constructs of trust are not complex and multidimensional. We can identify the aspects of trust based on two categories: trustworthiness and competency.

Trustworthiness is effective when it shows positive emotional beliefs about behaviors of relational partners. For competency, it means competence in the thing that the partner is obligated and responsible to do. There is other theoretical and empirical evidence to explain the elements or dimensions of trust. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) mentioned the dimension of trust in their early work; they saw that the dimension of trust exists as a two-dimensional concept: competence and care or trustworthiness. In the same way, Jungermann, Pfister, and Fischer (1996) studied trust in information sources; they found that the dimension of trust can be represented as honesty and competence. The notion of trust by Jungermann et al., (1996) is rather similar to Metley's idea.

Also, Frewer, Howard, Hedderley, and Shepherd (1996) pointed out the aspects of trust through a two-factor structure that can be used to analyze the factors that make people trust or distrust information sources. The first component is composed of both positive and negative characteristics. The positive characteristics are truthfulness, good track record, trustworthiness, favor, accuracy, fact, public welfare, responsibility, knowledge; and the negative characteristics are distortion, proven wrong in the past, and bias. The second component comprises other characteristics such as accountability, self-protection, and a vested interest versus sensationalism component. Frewer et al., (1996) did not clearly label these two-factor structures; however, we can apply these two structures in terms of the trust dimension. The first component can be explained in terms of the competence and care; the second component can be reflected as accountability.

In the sociology and social psychology literature, the dimensions of trust have been discussed through the aspects of cognitive and affective trust. Cognitive trust in

a business relationship involves the customer's confidence and willingness to believe in the competency and reliability of the service firm or partner. Cognitive trust results from accumulated knowledge as a knowledge-driven component. This knowledge will help a customer to be able to predict the degrees of a partner's confidence. Basically, the individual can enhance his/her knowledge from observing a partner's behaviors and evaluating a partner's reputation (Moorman et al., 1992). Some scholars identify cognitive trust in other terms such as *predictability* (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) and *reliableness* (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982).

Second is affective trust or the emotion-driven component. Since affective trust is based on an emotional bond, it is generated from various feelings of care, concern, security, and strength of the relationship. Reputation has an influence on affective trust as well, especially in the aspect of a service relationship (Rempel et al., 1985). Johnson and Grayson (2005) studied cognitive and affective trust in building relationships at the customer level; arguing that effective trust is a significant part of service and business relationships. The customers are more likely to establish commitment toward a service firm they are impressed with in the customer-service relationship. As emotional connections are closely related to perception, affective trust is considered to be less transparent because of unavailable knowledge (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982).

Johnson and Grayson (2005) further stated that cognitive trust reflects a willingness to rely on partners based on particular circumstances, while affective trust involves a subject's feelings during the interaction with the partner. Likewise, McAllister (1995), who studied the affect-and cognition-based trust in relationships, pointed out that cognitive trust will respect good reasons or rational approaches based

on any circumstances, as the evidence reflects trustworthiness. Cognitive trust holds that a dimension of trust is related to reliability and dependability, while affective trust focuses on using emotional components to develop relationships between partners.

The Process of Building and Developing Trust in Business Relationships

The development of trust depends on people's expectations about the intentions, motivations, and expressions of a partner. Basically, trust can develop in business relationships through five distinct processes (Doney & Cannon, 1997). First is the calculative process. This process involves an individual or firm calculating the costs and/or rewards of another party cheating in the business relationship. For example, if a customer has to pay premium prices for purchasing products or services because of an untrustworthy salesperson, customers will end contact with this salesperson for future purchases.

The second process of developing trust is the prediction process, which refers to the predictions of one party about the other party's behavior. Since trust is associated with evaluating the actions, credibility, reliability, and benevolence of another party, individuals should gather background information and assess the obligations of the other party. Swan and Nolan (1985) stated that the frequency of interaction between the parties has an influence on a party's ability to forecast the previous behaviors of either party. Swan and Nolan further demonstrated that, in business relationships, repeated transactions between customers and the firm will increase the predictability of both parties. Apparently, predictability will enhance trust and confidence in the business relationship. Moreover, Shapiro, Sheppard, and Cheraskin (1992) argued that learning more about one another party also plays a

major role in trust and relationship development. Trust will be enhanced when the two parties recognize mutual exchange in their experiences, which in turn leads to increased predictability between each other.

Third is the capability process that involves determining the competency of another party matched against its obligations. It can be argued that the capability process will focus on the credibility dimension of trust. For example, if a salesperson is able to promptly deliver products to customers even in a period of product shortages, then customers will increase their trust because of the salesperson's actions.

The fourth process of developing trust is a process of intentionality. The development of trust does not emerge only through a prediction of the other party's behaviors but also through interpretation. Individuals will interpret the other party's words and expressions in order to determine if its intentions in the exchange of the business relationship between both parties was seen favorably. Indeed, individuals or groups of people who desire to sincerely help either party will earn more trust than the ones who exploit their parties. Benevolent intentions will arise when the two parties emphasize shared values and norms. This usually leads to a common understanding of parties' objectives (Macneil, 1980).

The final process is called the transference. Strub and Priest (1976) suggested we can develop trust by using a third party. It means that trust can be transferred from one party to another party who does not have a direct experience in that transaction. For example, a new salesman can develop trust with his customers through referring to other customers who have positive experiences with this salesman. Additionally, in some cases the development of trust can be judged as a multiple trust-building

process. For example, in a case that a salesperson and customer have frequent contact, we can view this relationship in terms of the prediction process to increase predictability of customers about a salesperson's behaviors, as well as interpreting the relationship based on the intentionality process that customers attempt to ascertain the salesperson's intentions.

The Key Components of Building Trust in Business Relationships

There are various factors that are relevant to the process of building and developing continuous relationships. This idea is supported by Nielson (1998), who stated that there are many constructs that have an influence on developing long-term relationships in business contexts such as trust, commitment, communication, shared values, quality service, reliability, customer satisfaction, and cooperation.

Organizations and salespersons should pay attention to these constructs so that they can potentially promote trust and business relationships with customers.

Correspondingly, Ford (1980) stated that these constructs (uncertainty, cooperation, commitment, and mutual adaptation) are associated with building and developing relationships between buyers and sellers. If sellers can effectively manage these constructs, they will be successful in creating trust and a lasting business relationship with their customers. The following paragraphs will explain the details of each construct.

Service Quality

Service quality has become a variable of great interest in the area of relationship development. Although organizations provide similar types of services, customers can distinguish between the differences in service quality with their experiences (Lim & Tang, 2000). Thus, service quality is viewed as an important

factor that stimulates corporate marketing and customer management in order to create trust and to build the business relationship (Buttle, 1996). Moreover, today, most service firms tend to open service sectors in order to serve their customers more effectively (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990). In general, the quality of service can be identified as the total attributes or abilities of the product or service provided for customers' needs (Johnson & Winchell, 1988). Service quality and trust are interrelated. Ouyang (2010), who studied a relationship between financial consultants' service quality and consumer trust, found that service quality had a direct and significant effect on trust.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction can measure the gap between a customer's perception, regarding products or services, and a customer's expectation (Ouyang, 2010). Similarly, Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) indicated that customers' satisfaction refers to customers' evaluation about a product or service and whether or not it can match their expectations. Customers will assess the value of products or services from their post-purchase experiences and create perceptions about the overall products or services. Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, and Kumar (1996) stated that the concept of satisfaction can be divided into two perspectives. The first perspective is effective satisfaction that focuses on economic situations, the volume of sales, or profit margins. The second perspective is psychological satisfaction that refers to non-economic conditions; customers feel comfortable maintaining a relationship with another party.

Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar (1994) argued that, since customers' expectations are diverse, customers are more likely to try new products or services in order to

respond to their needs. It is necessary that salespersons be able to assess the actual customers' demands as well as understanding their customers in many aspects: satisfaction, requirements, budget concerns, and communication styles so that a salespersons can adapt a selling strategy to meet individual customer preference. If a salesperson lacks full understanding on the specific customer's requirements, the customer's satisfaction will not occur and will lead to increased uncertainty and the loss of confidence about the products or services. Consequently, satisfaction or dissatisfaction will occur through evaluating a matching or mismatching between expectations and perceived performances of customers (Bitner, 1990). Ratnasingam and Pavlou (2003) studied trust in electronic commerce and reported that customers' satisfaction was likely to be related to trust. Similarly, Chiou, Droge, and Hanvanich (2002) found that perceived trust has a direct and positive impact on overall satisfaction. Kennedy, Ferrell, and LeClair (2001), who studied customers' trust of a salesperson, suggested the attitudes and behaviors of the sellers affect customers' satisfaction on products and trust of distributors. Thus, the companies should encourage their distributors to use low pressure selling and increase their competence to gain customers' trust.

In order to build business relationships, satisfaction is related to continuous relationship preservation as well. For example, Oliver (1999) demonstrated that continuity of satisfaction is necessary when establishing business relationships between the parties. Customers' satisfaction cannot arise in a specific transaction. In the same way, Frazier (1983) articulated that satisfaction provides positive outcomes for the business relationship between transaction partners. Also, Anderson and Narus

(1990) found that satisfaction can lead to a sustainable long-term business relationship.

Communication

Communication is the situation in which an individual or a group of people exchange information, suggestions, or attitudes with one another in order to create common activities or goals (Wang, 2009). According to Deaux, Dane, and Wrighasman's claims (1993), communication is where two parties convey suggestions, attitudes, knowledge, concepts, or feelings to one another through verbal or nonverbal language. Communication can take place between two people, two groups, two organizations, or two societies. Similarly, Duncan and Moriarty (1998) viewed communication as the process of sharing information between two partners. Without this process, people cannot build and extend trust and relationships. Anderson and Narus (1990) believed that communication cannot be broadly defined; however, the main point of communication is sharing meaningful information through formal or informal channels between both parties. This usually leads to increased trust, mutual adjustments, and joint tasks.

There are various studies that indicated the link between communication and trust. For example, Farrelly, Quester, and Mavondo (2003) examined the market orientation and communication cooperation between holders. They found that communication positively affects trust. Also, Anderson and Weitz (1989) described how communication was positively related to trust in channels. Similarly, Anderson and Narus (1990) found that the manufacturer's and distributor's ideas, as well as any past communication, were positively related to trust. Furthermore, Wang (2009) found that communication had a significant positive effect on cognitive and emotional

trust. These results can explain that effective communication, regarding products or services, is necessary to generate a customers' trust.

Shared Value

Shared value is a major component to which theorists studying business relationships have paid particular attention. Shared values help partners to be able to analyze the beliefs, behaviors, policies, or goals of another partner, as either appropriate or inappropriate, right or wrong, and important or unimportant (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Moreover, shared values can promote the development of trust in a relationship between parties. This notion is supported by Mukherjee and Nath (2003), who studied a model of trust in online banking relationships, and found a positive correlation between shared values and commitment and between shared values and trust. The results showed that the hypotheses of shared values affecting trust are significant. Similarly, Fukuyama (1995) explained that shared values, exchanging goals, and benefits to both parties are the foundation to establishing trust. Also, Wang (2009) revealed that shared values have a significant direct, positive, or negative effect on cognitive and emotional trust. In fact, if individuals have different values, it is difficult to clearly understand the norms or values of the other party. This usually leads to increased conflict and uncertainty in interactions, as well as reducing the cooperation and satisfaction between parties (Rokeach, 1973). Importantly, if partners pay attention to an exchange of mutual goals and shared values, they become increasingly trustworthy to each other.

Cooperation

The marketing literature on business relationships has focused on cooperation for decades. Cooperation or coordination has been known as the essential element to

create trust in relationships. The main concept of cooperation means “together.” This refers to circumstances where parties work together to attain common goals (Anderson & Narus, 1990). The potential cooperation will stimulate effective competition and promote trust and enhance a business relationship between parties (Frazier, 1983). Frazier further explained that cooperative expressions can emerge together with conflict behaviors. It can be argued that cooperation does not refer to the absence of conflict. If both parties view that the relationship termination costs are high, they still maintain the relationship between them even if engaging in arguments.

Cooperation is the variable that is influenced directly by trust and the long-term continuation of the relationship. The literature and empirical evidence indicates that trust leads to cooperation. Individuals establish cooperation with another when they want to obtain trust and create a sustainable relationship (Anderson & Narus, 1990). Similarly, Deutsch (1960) argued that in the initial stage of cooperation, trust is crucial. Additionally, Anderson and Narus (1990) further stated that trust will be produced when the firm makes efforts to coordinate joint activities with partners, which lead to potential outcomes and accomplishment of mutual goals.

Adaptation

It is widely acknowledged that adaptation is one of the key factors of relationship development in business contexts. Companies need to adjust their own performances and activities to be compatible with their partners, in such areas as company goals, suppliers, or customers, in order to build and maintain the business relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987). According to Hallen, Johanson, and Seyed-Mohammed (1991), adaptation can be defined as behavioral modification at the individual, group, or corporate level in order to meet the requirements of either party

that leads to the establishment of business relationship development. The key process of adaptation includes negotiation of agreements, commitment, and combined activities. During this process, the partners will exchange information with each other to stimulate negotiation and evaluate the partner's commitment. Importantly, when the partners interact and exchange information based on their experiences, trust and lasting relationships are likely to occur (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992). Adaptations might arise during the initial stages and continue to the development stage of the relationship. This usually leads to a greater understanding and sharing of information with each other (Ford, 1980).

Commitment

Commitment is also viewed as a critical factor in developing a long-term relationship. In general, commitment can be defined as the conditions that both parties require to continuously interact with each other. This notion is supported by other theorists. For example, Byrnes and Mujtaba (2008) studied a sustainable customer marketing relationship. They indicated that commitment refers to a desire of long-term relationship development and creates confidence with each other. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), although the meaning of commitment is complex, we can define commitment as a continuous relationship, which partners view as significant, so they are willing to maintain it. Moorman et al. (1992) noted that commitment will take place in a situation where both parties believe in the importance and usefulness of preserving a relationship.

In the business relationship, relationships will be built based on mutual commitment (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Correspondingly, Garbarino and Johnson (1999) viewed that commitment will be produced when a customer has loyalty,

agreement, and pride toward products, services, or companies. During relationship commitment, the partners will open up their minds to coordinate activities and share information with each other, which leads to the reduction of uncertainty and increases the stable business relationship. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) demonstrated that the relationship commitment will arise when both parties obtain greater benefits and accumulate trust between them. It means commitment cannot occur without trust. Trust and commitment will support companies in building lasting relationships, resisting short-term relationships, through cooperation and exchange between partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Additionally, Geyskens et al. (1996) mentioned effective commitment will emerge based on an outcome of the emotional feeling and closeness between the partners; where both partners agree on retaining a long-term relationship.

According to Stern (1997), effective commitment needs to evolve throughout time in order to generate the positive emotional consequences in a relationship. Furthermore, Roberts, Varki, and Brodie (2003) considered effective commitment as a determinant that supports the long-term relationship with transaction partners. When a customer has high levels of trust toward products or services, the company or supplier is more likely to make an effort to create effective performance and adapt more behaviors in order to maintain the business relationship commitment with their customers. In addition, Rich (2000) proposed that customers tend to use trust and commitment as the mediators to evaluate a future relationship with the company. He concluded that the tendency of the marketplace has shifted from transactional selling to customer relationship management (CRM); thus, the business relationship commitment is the instrument of achievement to gain a competitive advantage. In addition to the process of business relationship commitment, customers become loyal

to specific brands. Wang (2009), who studied trust and business relationships between distributors and customers, found that the customers' trust toward the distributors positively affected customer loyalty toward the distributors. Initially, the concept of loyalty focused on only repurchasing. Later, loyalty was extended to include other certain positive attitudes. Assael (1987) also noted that brand loyalty refers to commitment to a specific brand resulting from accumulating positive attitudes. Organizations should provide better benefits to their customers and create an organization's image through activities and campaigns incorporating social responsibility, which leads to the image establishment as trustworthy organizations.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The Conceptualization of Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Several theoretical perspectives in communicative behavior argue that normally, people who have any interactions with one another are more likely to encounter uncertainty (Heider, 1958). Establishing a relationship is always full of challenges. Berger (1986) stated that, with any face-to-face communication, including first dates, marriage proposals, and connections with foreigners or strangers, uncertainty can occur because communicators cannot perfectly predict how others will react to or interact with them. Besides, both physical and social environments are accelerative and continuously change and the individuals' cognition will adjust and develop over their lifetime (Acredolo & O'Connor, 1991). Therefore, individuals who want to generate or maintain an interaction episode with a partner have to reduce their mutual uncertainties in order to keep the relationship with their partners. This notion is consistent with the concept of Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). Berger and Calabrese (1975) asserted that the original uncertainty perspective focused upon the

influence of uncertainty on interpersonal communication: initial relationships or beginning acquaintances. When individuals have interactions with other people, the level of individuals' uncertainty is likely to depend on the knowledge and understanding of selves and others.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) further argued that Uncertainty Reduction Theory regards two processes: the proactive process and the retroactive process. The proactive process refers to the prediction of future behaviors whereas the retroactive process focuses on explanations of present and past behaviors. Certainly, when the levels of uncertainty rise, people will endeavor to reduce their uncertainty in order to maintain relationships. The prediction and explanation of behaviors of self and others are significant approaches to reducing uncertainty and developing relationships. This assumption is consistent with Heider (1958), who argued that individuals attempt to make sense of the events they encounter in social reality through two senses in order to reduce their uncertainty. The first sense is prediction of the behaviors of other persons. The second sense is explanation of the reasons for the other person's behavior. Thus, uncertainty reduction involves two components: prediction and explanation.

In addition, Berger and Bradac (1982) further organized uncertainty into two broad categories: cognitive uncertainty and behavioral uncertainty. Cognitive uncertainty refers to uncertainty about individuals' own and others' beliefs and attitudes whereas behavioral uncertainty points to the predictability or unpredictability of behaviors. These two types of uncertainty are highly related. Clearly, cognitive uncertainty can lead to uncertainty about how someone will act (behavioral uncertainty) in a situation. Uncertainty Reduction Theory primarily concentrates on

how we come to know other people, a cognitive type of uncertainty; however, this theory is associated with better understanding not only of the other person's beliefs, attitudes, and actions, but also of one's own beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

Moreover, Berger and Bradac (1982) indicated that there are three sources that cause uncertainty. Self-uncertainty arises from the doubt of a person's own perceptions, beliefs, values, abilities, and behaviors. Partner uncertainty derives from the doubt of the other's perceptions, beliefs, values, abilities, attitude and behaviors. Relationship uncertainty comes from the doubt of a relationship status, the quality and durability of relationships. We can observe that there are many factors provoking uncertainty. Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) studied the events that lead to increases in uncertainty in relationships. The results demonstrated that a variety of events, including competing relationships, unexplained loss of contact, sexual behavior, deception, changes in personality and values, and betraying confidence, can cause uncertainty or even result in the termination of the relationship. Although uncertainty can arise in any interaction, the communicators can reduce the level of uncertainty and develop their relationships by learning to communicate more effectively with each other.

Uncertainty and Communication

Communication and uncertainty are extremely intertwined. Continuous and adequate communication between individuals can help them predict and explain the behaviors of their partners and this is central to Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger, 1987). Indeed, when individuals have uncertainty, they are likely to reduce their uncertainty by employing communication to seek more information about their partners and their relationship. This notion is reasonably supported by Parks and

Adelman (1983), who stated that a lack of interaction or communication between relational partners can lead to increased uncertainty and have deleterious effects on the relationship. Thus, the utilization of continuous communication between the partners to increase intimacy and reduce mutual uncertainty has become an important issue in discussing Uncertainty Reduction Theory.

Moreover, communication plays a major role in reducing uncertainty that results from developing relationships between communicators. For example, Berger and Calabrese (1975) explained about the developmental stages in which people have interactions with strangers. These interactions can be labeled in three phases: entry phase, personal phase, and exit phase. In the entry phase, the individuals are likely to communicate based on a set of communication rules or norms. The discussion content is somewhat structured and focuses on demographic issues. In the personal phase, the communication is less restricted. The individual tends to communicate about attitudinal issues, personal problems, and basic values. In the exit phase, the individuals have made a decision about their future interaction: either to continue it or terminate the relationship. It is possible that the relationship moves from the entry phase into the personal phase rapidly if individuals gain adequate communication from their partners that helps them reduce uncertainty during the entry phase. Undoubtedly, communication is a significant instrument for developing relationships and reducing uncertainty between the partners.

In addition, there are data which support the notion that communication and uncertainty are associated. For example, Lalljee and Cook (1973), who studied interaction during the entry phase, found that in the interactions between strangers, the pause rate will decrease when the speech rate increases. The pause rate and speech

rate can indicate the levels of uncertainty. The decrease in pause rate was directly associated with the reduction of anxiety. Berger and Calabrese (1975) developed the empirical evidence from Lalljee and Cook (1973) and proposed axioms that speculated on the reciprocal relationship between uncertainty and communication, including uncertainty and other variables that are related to communication as well. Four of the axioms most applicable to this research are:

Axiom 1: If the amount of verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interactant in the relationship will decrease. During the initial interactions, individuals attempt to seek more information about partners through verbal communication in order to reduce uncertainty.

Axiom 2: As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels will decrease. In an initial interaction situation, nonverbal communication is significant also. Individuals may employ nonverbal communication to seek information from their partners that help them decrease the uncertainty.

Axiom 3: High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information-seeking behavior. The current perspective assumes that in the entry phase, individuals expect to gain information from their partners. They attempt to seek information about their partners by interrogating each other and engaging in self-disclosure that might be instrumental in reduction of uncertainty.

Axiom 4: High levels of uncertainty cause decreases in the level of intimacy. Berger and Calabrese (1975) asserted that when relationships proceed, the level of intimacy will increase. This notion is consistent with Altman and Taylor (1973) who argued that, if individuals continue to communicate with each other, their uncertainty about each other will decrease, which will lead to an increase in intimacy.

Although the relationship between uncertainty and communication seems plausible, Berger and Bradac (1982) indicated there are some cases in which communication increases uncertainty, such as when a person attempts to use communication and acts perfectly in order to mask their true intentions, the receivers should attempt to ascertain the actual intentions. Berger and Calabrese (1975) suggested that the volume of communication alone may not predict the reduction of mutual uncertainty, the quality of information exchange between the partners is much more significant in reducing mutual uncertainty than is the quantity of communication. Consequently, it is reasonable to speculate that communication is necessary for the reduction of uncertainty.

The Application of Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The theoretical perspective of Uncertainty Reduction Theory was specifically focused on uncertainty that occurs during the beginning acquaintance of an interpersonal relationship. Subsequently, the concept of uncertainty reduction has been discussed in several contexts of communication that are related to interaction and relationship development. There are several contexts of uncertainty reduction that are presented in the following parts.

Uncertainty Reduction in Initial Relationships

Since the original Uncertainty Reduction Theory concentrated on studying uncertainty that arose during an initial relationship, most previous research typically used Uncertainty Reduction Theory to examine interaction with strangers (Berger, 1975; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Clatterbuck, 1979; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). When individuals have interaction in the initial phases, their primary goal is reduction of uncertainty to keep the contact with their partners. Thus, they try to predict and

explain behaviors of themselves and others that can help them reduce uncertainty. Neuliep and Grohskopf (2000), who studied uncertainty reduction and communication satisfaction during initial interaction, demonstrated that in initial interaction uncertainty and communication satisfaction were linearly related. They found a positive and statistically significant correlation between uncertainty and communication satisfaction ($r = .51$; $p < .01$). Uncertainty is generally reduced when relationships progress. Even though uncertainty continuously decreases, communication satisfaction remains stable. This result was consistent with Gudykunst and Kim (1997), who argued that a low level of uncertainty may be harmful for the development of relationships because it could decrease individuals' motivation to engage in communication and result in boredom. Moreover, the research on Uncertainty Reduction Theory showed that uncertainty reduction is related to positive communication outcomes, whereas increased uncertainty is associated with negative communication outcomes.

Uncertainty Reduction in Romantic Relationships

Uncertainty Reduction Theory plays an important role in this context as well. For example, Parks and Adelman (1983), who investigated the communication networks and the development of romantic relationships, found that people in romantic relationships who receive frequent communication and more support from their romantic partners will demonstrate a lower level of uncertainty and less chance of termination in their relationship. Specifically, in a crisis or problem situation, the romantic partners want to receive support from each other that leads to a decrease of uncertainty. Furthermore, in the context of long-distance romantic relationships, the romantic partners are apart because of geographic separation. Individuals might feel

uncertain in their partners and the romantic situation; the information from their romantic partners is very important to reduce uncertainty. Even in long-term romantic relationships, uncertainty can occur as well. The level of communication between romantic partners influences their relationships. Inadequate interactions will probably cause rising uncertainty levels and, eventually, terminate the relationship. Obviously, people in romantic relationships struggle to make sense of the relationship by decreasing uncertainty about self, the romantic partner, and the relationship between them. The lack of communication causes rising uncertainty levels. Baxter and Wilmot (1984) argued that no matter how long the relationship between partners, uncertainty can occur and undermine the relationship. Moreover, Berger and Gudykunst (1991) added one more axiom to the original ones. This new axiom is related to romantic relationships. They argued that the romantic partners, who often interact with their partner's family and friends, will face less uncertainty about their partner than do those partners who do not interact within such networks.

Although the original uncertainty perspective focused on the uncertainty reduction in interpersonal communication during the initial stage, the study of this theory has been extended to later relational stages (Berger, 1987). As Berger and Calabrese (1975) pointed out, their original statement of uncertainty theory emphasized initial interactions during the entry phase; however, the existence of uncertainty in relationships with others can develop in later stages as well. This means that we should recognize the transformation or development of relationships beyond the initial stage. As a relationship matures, interactants acquire more information about each other to better understand the other person's attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions. At the same time, this increased knowledge can be a source of increased

questions, doubts, and uncertainty regarding self, other, and the relationship.

Moreover, the examination of uncertainty should extend to other contexts including intercultural contexts, organizational contexts, health communication, and mass communication that also need to reduce uncertainty caused by having interactions or relationships with others in social reality.

Uncertainty Reduction in Intercultural Relationships

In the age of globalization, communication and interactions between people are expanded. People have more opportunities for contact with others who come from different cultures. Moreover, in recent years it has become generally accepted that the topics about cultural differences between communicators are different from communication behavior. This has led many scholars to become interested in studying intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 1983). Uncertainty Reduction Theory is generalizable for exploring phenomena in intercultural communication. This notion is supported by a number of studies (e.g., Gudykunst, 1983; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984; Sanders, Wiseman, & Matz, 1991). Moreover, a number of studies demonstrated that Uncertainty Reduction Theory can be extended to explain communication in initial stages and developmental stages between partners from different cultures (e.g., Gudykunst, 1988, 1995; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1987a, 1987b).

For example, Gudykunst (1983), who studied uncertainty reduction and predictability of behavior in low-and high-context cultures, found that members of high-context cultures (e.g., Japan, China, Korea) are more likely to be cautious and make assumptions about strangers based on their cultural background in order to reduce their uncertainty and increase their confidence, more than members of low-

context cultures (e.g., United States, Germany, France) who need little explanation. This finding is consistent with Hall (1976). He argued that people in high-context cultures tend to use their cultural background to make more assumptions about strangers because strangers are unfamiliar and their behavior is unpredictable.

Uncertainty Reduction in Health Care

Because uncertainty is prevalent in illness experiences, most researchers in health communication have increased attention to study the relevance of uncertainty and illness (Babrow & Kline, 2000; Cohen, 1993; Mishel, 1988) as well as stress and coping (Lazarus, 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982; Taylor, 1983). Normally, people who encounter illness experiences have many questions including their own ability to manage the illness, the effectiveness of treatment, their provider's diagnostic skills, their relationship with the provider, the procedure of the cure, the treatment decision, and the results or effects of treatment. These doubts can indicate uncertainty in patients (Brashers, 2001). The study of people living with illness leads to knowledge and understanding of the patients' uncertainty that results from disease.

Brashers, Neidig, and Goldsmith (2004), who studied social support and the management of uncertainty for people living with HIV or AIDS, reported that people with HIV confront uncertainty because they have tension associated with the disease. Also, they have difficulty in maintaining close relationships with their friends, families, and lovers which makes them lack certainty about the social support from such networks. Some participants in the study, who were stigmatized by the HIV illness because of its connection with homosexuality or injecting drug use, described their uncertainty as being derived from the rejection by families and friends. They

feared disclosure of their HIV status. However, some participants reported that their families supported them with important information that helped them reduce uncertainty. This means that social support is differentially available from their social networks. The patients who were denied support from their social networks may remain uncertain or generate new forms of uncertainty.

Uncertainty Reduction in Organizational Contexts

Most researchers in organizational assimilation have been interested in using the concept of Uncertainty Reduction Theory to examine uncertainty that new employees encounter when they enter a new workplace (e.g., Hughes, 1958; Jablin & Krone, 1987; Louis, 1980; Morrison, 1993). When people are faced with situations in which they do not know how to perform because they do not have any experiences or familiarities with the situation, they are likely to encounter uncertainty. There are many different labels for unfamiliar circumstances: gap (Dervin, 1983), uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), equivocality (Weick, 1979), error or disconfirmation (Argyris & Schon, 1978), ambiguity (Norton, 1975), and situational anxiety (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981).

There are many forms of uncertainty on organizational entry. This notion is supported by Teboul (1994), who studied facing and coping with uncertainty in organizations. He reported that there are three types of uncertainty situations that new employees confront during early tenure: referent uncertainty, appraisal uncertainty, and relational uncertainty.

First, referent uncertainty means uncertainty about how to accomplish tasks. This uncertainty may arise from a lack of task information or unfamiliarity with equipment or operational process. Second, appraisal uncertainty refers to uncertainty

regarding successful performance on the job. This uncertainty can be caused by a lack of feedback from organizational members or negative feedback from others in the organization. Third, relational uncertainty is uncertainty regarding relationships with others in the workplace. This type of uncertainty causes newcomers' doubt about the perception that other members in the organization have about them and how others view them on a personal level. Relational uncertainty may influence the relationship between newcomers and others.

Typically, during early tenure, newcomers have to confront the unfamiliar situations that force them to adjust, both physically and socially. Also, the newcomers will face a discrepancy between their expectations in the organization and organizational reality that leads them to feel disconcerted and stressful (Louis, 1980; Schein, 1968). If new hires cannot effectively cope with uncertainty upon organizational entry, they will encounter a traumatic period in their organizational life (Jablin, 1987).

However, the extent of uncertainty in the organizational context not only influences new employees; the general employees can encounter uncertainty that derives from many sources. Similarly, Babrow, Hines, and Kasch (2000) and Babrow, Kasch, and Ford (1998) indicated that uncertainty can occur in many situations such as when people are faced with ambiguous, complex, unfamiliar, unpredictable, and probabilistic situations; when information is unavailable, unclear, and inconsistent; and when people are unsure of the quality of their knowledge. In a work setting, the uncertainty can be caused by many factors, including inability to perform a task, the supervisor's leadership style, the relationship with other members in the organization, the organizational policies, the organizational rules for tenure (Brashers, 2001).

Galbraith (1977) explained that, in an organizational context, uncertainty will occur when an employee cannot predict the outcomes of an action. Similarly, Weick (1979) stated that uncertainty refers to the ambiguous situation in which an organizational member cannot explain how an outcome was produced. This means that uncertainty in an organization will take place when an employee cannot predict or explain the outcome of a behavior.

Moreover, Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, and Lesniak (1978), who summarized the results of the Organizational Communication Audit Project in 16 organizations, found that the topic of the information that organizations provide employees influences uncertainty and can be linked to organization outcomes. The topics of information that had the highest correlations to organizational outcomes included organizational policies, organizational decisions, work progress, organizational developments, management problems, and organizational mistakes.

Importantly, uncertainty in an organizational context is associated with information because information can help employees reduce their uncertainty. The lack of information causes uncertainty to remain (Galbraith, 1977; Goldhaber, 1983); thus, the provision of an adequate amount of information from the organization is an important topic that has been discussed by scholars. Salem and Williams (1984) developed a scale to measure the uncertainty of organizational members regarding messages. The scale was divided in two parts; the now item which asked about how much information they presently received and the need item which asked about how much information they needed to perform their job well. Uncertainty was measured by subtracting the need items score from the now items score. A negative result will indicate a lack of information which leads to uncertainty. Salem and Williams studied

message uncertainty among hospital employees. Results revealed that hospital employees were receiving some to little information about task, human, and maintenance issues. For example, the maintenance information need mean score was 3.17 whereas the maintenance information now mean score was 2.55, showing uncertainty, or a lack of information.

In contrast, Prakken (2004) argued that the approach of most organizations for coping with uncertainty of employees always focuses on providing information. Fundamentally, we can see that the main cause of uncertainty comes from information demands. If we can manage the needs for information flow, we can reduce uncertainty. We should not determine an exact amount of information production (the supply-side approach); instead, considering ways to reduce needs for information flow (the demand-side approach) is an efficient approach for reducing uncertainty. Typically, large organizations are characterized by hierarchical (vertical) and functional (horizontal) specialization which demonstrates internal complexity. Consequently, to reduce uncertainty, we have to focus on reducing complexity. We should reduce the complexity of organizations via decentralization and integration, which would result in fewer information needs. Hierarchical flows can be diminished via delegation of control to subordinates, while horizontal flows can be diminished via integration of tasks into single units.

Based on the examination of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, I found that the original perspective of this theory specifically concentrates on the influences of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction during initial stages of a relationship. However, Uncertainty Reduction Theory has become effectively extended to many other areas including interpersonal, intercultural, health care, mass communication, and

organizational contexts. Similarly, Hewes and Planalp (1982) asserted that Uncertainty Reduction Theory is useful in many fields of communication inquiry. The researchers ought to deeply investigate and understand this theory in each context in order to enhance knowledge in their area of study. Berger (1987) strongly agreed with this notion; he suggested that the adaptation of theory is essential for survival.

Uncertainty can be both reduced and produced through communication inquiry.

Unfortunately, there is little research that employed Uncertainty Reduction Theory to explain the uncertainty that occurs in the relationship between an organization and its customers, particularly in the context of interaction between customers and the quick service restaurant that provides both products and services. Additionally, most of the previous research on the above-mentioned topic has only concentrated on exploring the perceived risk of customers in the situations that involve purchasing decisions, but overlooked customers' uncertainty manifested in the context of the quick service restaurant. It is imperative to note that, although some marketers have synonymously used similar conceptualizations of perceived risk and uncertainty, these two concepts are different per se.

The Concept of Perceived Risk about Products or Services

Knight's (1948) definition separates the concepts of risk and uncertainty. He proposed that risk refers to probability; whereas uncertainty arises when knowledge or information is inadequate. Correspondingly, Peter and Ryan (1976) asserted that the concept of perceived risk and uncertainty are clearly distinct from each other. Furthermore, Kogan and Wallach (1964) indicated that perceived risk has been defined in two aspects: a chance aspect when focusing on probability and a danger aspect when referring to the severity of negative consequences. In addition,

Cunningham (1967) conceptualized perceived risk in terms of the consequences of an act that is unfavorable or lost. Within the boundary of consumer marketing communication, the concept of perceived risk implies situations that customers encounter when they make purchase decisions about a particular product/brand or service (Murray, 1991). Bettman (1973) argued that perceived risk refers to a two-dimensional construct that consists of purchasing decision and taking an unfavorable action. Additionally, perceived risk has been organized in terms of six dimensions: financial, performance, social, psychological, safety, and time/convenience loss (Brooker, 1984; Roselius, 1971).

The Concept of Uncertainty about Products or Services

Heiman, Williams, and Zilberman (2001), who studied two tools—demonstrations and money-back guarantees that have been used in reducing consumer uncertainty—explained that, normally, uncertainty occurs when consumers are less knowledgeable or possess insufficient information about the products. Thus, consumers tend to seek more information to reduce uncertainty before purchasing the products. The uncertainty about products that customers may encounter can be divided into four groups: technical uncertainty, performance uncertainty, matching uncertainty, and response uncertainty.

1. Technical uncertainty relates to the failure rate and reliability of products.
2. Performance uncertainty refers to a gap between the consumers' perception and the actual level of the products' performance.
3. Matching uncertainty arises from when the products' ability is incompatible with the customers' needs.

4. Response uncertainty indicates the feedback from other people about the products.

Customer uncertainty can occur in terms of objective and subjective components. The two schools of thought have contrasting views. The objective component is concerned with the failure of a product's quality; whereas, the subjective uncertainty deals with the degree to which the product might not meet the consumer's needs.

Within the boundary of consumer behavior literature, uncertainty is seen as resulting from numerous sources that can be organized in six groups.

1. Uncertainty caused by the lack of customers' knowledge in issues including customers' needs, purchase goals, acceptance level, and purpose importance (Cox & Rich, 1964).
2. Uncertainty related to inadequate knowledge about brands' attributes so customers cannot make decisions about alternative brands. This uncertainty is defined as knowledge uncertainty (Pras & Summers, 1978).
3. Uncertainty deals with predicting the future of the product's or service's performance which can be defined in terms of predictive validity (Cox, 1967b).
4. Uncertainty refers to customers' perception of their own ability to accurately judge the outcome levels of products or services that they have experienced. This uncertainty can be explained in terms of confidence value (Bennett & Harrell, 1975).
5. Uncertainty relevant to overall brand evaluation. For example, it is difficult to make the decision that brand A is better than brand B. We can

label this uncertainty about the alternative to choose, choice uncertainty (Cox & Rich, 1964).

6. Uncertainty that comes from the dissonance between the anticipated and the actual experience of the outcomes refers to the situations in which the product or service outcomes are different from the customer's expectation (Kahnemann & Tversky, 1984).

It can be conceptualized that perceived risk and uncertainty are different. This current study explored the uncertainty that McDonald's customers encounter when trying to maintain a relationship with McDonald's restaurants. During the interaction between McDonald's restaurant and its customer, whether short-term or long-term, the customers may encounter uncertainty about products, services, or policies of the company. The reduction of customer uncertainty is the primary task that a company has to recognize and efficiently cope with that leads to increased customer loyalty and indicates achievement. An exact understanding of customer uncertainty will help the company manage and reduce the uncertainty of customers effectively.

The Relationship between Trust and Uncertainty

Levels of trust are related to the degrees of uncertainty. This assertion appears plausible and is supported by various studies previously presented, including the theorists in the business relationship area. For example, Ganeson (1994) speculated that customers have trust in the companies they are involved with; additionally, the levels of uncertainty or risk in this business relationship will be reduced. This usually leads to an increase in the customers' confidence. In the same vein, Morgan and Hunt (1994), who studied relationship marketing, referred to all the marketing activities created to establish, develop, and maintain a successful relationship, a more holistic

approach. They described trust and uncertainty as the major components in relationship marketing. They confirmed that trust can reduce a partner's uncertainty. Based on their work, they found that when one party has trust in another party, the levels of confidence with another party will be increased; the trustworthy party can be relied on. Conversely, the degrees of uncertainty in the relationship will be reduced.

Additionally, Williams and Hammitt (2001) studied the perceived risks of conventional and organic production. They postulated that distrust is related to uncertainty, risk, and fear. Similar to Saba and Messina's claims (2003), they contended that trust in the food industry is negatively related to uncertainty about food safety hazards. They further suggested that the actors and the institutions involved in organic foods should use effective communication in order to build customers' trust and confidence in their foods for customers' consumption and decrease decision-making uncertainty in purchasing foods. Ideally, when customers have trust in their trading partners, the customers will be confident, leading to less uncertainty. Consequently, trust is tightly paired with the concept of risk and uncertainty. The levels of trust depend on the degrees of uncertainty and risk associated with decision making (Josang & Presti, 2004).

Information-Seeking Strategies

The Conceptualization of Information-Seeking Strategies

Given the importance of uncertainty reduction to maintain a relationship with a partner, it is necessary to understand information-seeking strategies that individuals employ to reduce uncertainty. Fundamentally, information-seeking has been studied in the context of individuals' networks of interpersonal relationships. Berger and Calabrese (1975) originally proposed that Uncertainty Reduction Theory can explain

all initial interaction. When individuals have uncertainty that comes from having interactions with other people, they usually want to reduce uncertainty to keep the relationship with their partners. Seeking more information from a partner can help people reduce uncertainty.

Berger and Bradac (1982) postulated that there are three plausible reasons for activating the reduction of uncertainty. First, individuals tend to be involved with uncertainty reduction when they have high incentive; that means they perceive the reward that they will gain from keeping a relationship. Second, when the behaviors of partners deviate from normal behaviors, individuals will engage in uncertainty reduction processes in order to explain the others' behaviors. Third, if individuals perceive the probability of future interaction increases, they will make their efforts to decrease uncertainty. We can observe that the uncertainty-reduction process is important for maintaining the relationship. However, in the original version of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Berger and Calabrese (1975) were not focused on investigating the strategies for reducing uncertainty. Given such deficiency in exploring strategies, the researchers have paid direct attention toward the knowledge regarding information acquisition to reduce uncertainty (Berger, 1979; Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman, & Miller, 1976)

Berger (1986) believed that information-seeking is strategic and supports uncertainty reduction. When people seek more information about their partners, they decrease their personal uncertainty and more readily maintain long-term relationships. Similarly, Kellermann and Berger (1984) claimed that people attempt to acquire as much information as they can through both verbal and nonverbal communication, so that they might display appropriate behaviors and effectively communicate with their

partners, leading to the reduction of uncertainty as well. The strategies that individuals use in order to seek information were proposed by Berger and Bradac (1982). They categorized information-seeking strategies into three types: passive, active, and interactive strategies.

First, passive strategies assume that people have opportunities to observe others, so these strategies focus on observing the target group for information and gathering information through unobtrusive observation without any interaction between the observer and the target.

Second, active strategies assume that people have intimacy with others within a social network that leads the observer to ask questions in order to gather information from a third party (i.e., seeking information about Bill by asking Tom about Bill). The target person can be observed without having to engage in direct interaction with him or her.

Finally, interactive strategies refer to direct interaction between the observer and the target. It holds true that people have more chances to use self-disclosure strategically to contact each other through face-to-face communication in the form of reciprocal disclosure. Moreover, each member of the relationship can observe the other's responses and receive intentionally communicated disclosures from that person. Thus, the target is more likely to engage with information informally. Berger and Kellermann (1983) indicated that interactive strategies can be divided in three strategies, including interrogation of the target through the use of questions, disclosure, and relaxation of the target. They further explained that individuals who want to gain large amounts of information do not necessarily use interrogation

strategies to ask more questions with their partners than people seeking information in a normal conversation.

All three classes of strategies are most effective in acquiring information. For example, the interactive strategies are superior because they recognize face-to-face communication. The information seeker can control and ask additional questions of the target in order to gain more information and understanding. The passive strategies are more effective also because the information seeker can observe the target in a real social situation rather than a solitary situation. It can be argued that in informal social contexts that have fewer social constraints, the target person is more likely to perform informal behaviors than in formal social contexts. For active strategies, information acquisition through third-party channels is more effective and useful. Individuals can gain more information about their partners through the third party. Particularly, in the beginning stages of interaction with the strangers, indirect channels of information acquisition are more prevalent and significant than direct ones. In an organizational setting, a manager may present a positive evaluation to a subordinate but reveal a true, or sometimes negative, evaluation about this subordinate to another person. This event is called information triangles that we can observe in both formal and informal social networks. These triangles are critical for reducing uncertainty.

Nonverbal communication is one strategy that individuals can employ to seek information from their partners. This notion is supported by Kellerman and Berger (1984). They found that people who recognize information acquisition are more likely to use more positive nonverbal behaviors with their partners during mutual interactions rather than those who do not. They further suggested that people should not ignore positive nonverbal behaviors of their partners. To employ both verbal and

nonverbal languages is beneficial to maintain the relationship. Mehrabian and Williams (1969), who studied nonverbal language, found that people attempting to achieve social goals tend to use positive nonverbal behaviors combined with verbal communication. Furthermore, Kellermann and Berger (1984) suggested that when individuals make a decision to select information-seeking strategies, the major consideration is the efficiency of the strategy. Every type of information-seeking strategy has both strength and weakness. For example, interrogation is the most effective, but it is considerably intrusive; whereas, relaxing is the least efficient, yet least threatening. Thus, individuals should recognize the efficiency of the information-seeking strategies they employ.

Normally, during the development stage of a relationship, individuals prefer to know more about their partners to make a decision whether to extend, restrict, or avoid the relational relationship. According to Baxter and Wilmot (1984), who investigated the strategies that people have used to estimate how their relational partners view the relationship, people are more likely to utilize some information-seeking strategies to reduce uncertainty about their relational partners. Besides, based on the level of relationship with their partners, people will receive useful information from their partners differently to make decisions as to whether they should escalate or deescalate relationships.

The Application of Information-Seeking Strategies

Although the original perspective of information-seeking strategies was specifically discussed in the context of initial relationships, subsequently, information-seeking strategies have been extensively applied in various

communication contexts to reduce uncertainty. These contexts are described in the following section.

Information-Seeking in Initial Contexts

The context of initial relationship deals with interaction between partners in the early stages. Individuals in established relationships also need to execute some strategies to seek more information from their partners to help reduce uncertainty and maintain their relational partners (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). In the same vein, Berger (1988) suggested that, in initial interactions, people are more likely to exchange demographic information dealing with hometown, occupation, and family attribution in order to predict communication sequences with their partners. The information in the initial stage is employed to predict concealed attitudes. When the relationship progresses beyond the initial stages, the partners will require more specific information about their partners, including personalities, attitudes, beliefs, and communicative routines to predict and understand a partner's behavior. Accordingly, Berger and Kellermann (1983) suggested that individuals can gain information from their partners through conversation in many ways.

For example, people gain information by interrogating their partner, disclosing their expectations and desires in the relationship, or making their partners feel relaxed so that they feel free to communicate with them. Similarly, Emmers and Canary (1996) indicated that people employ many strategies to repair their relationships after they encounter negative experiences including consulting with third parties, making an explicit commitment to the relationship, engaging in relationship talk, and spending more time with their partners. In addition, Knobloch and Solomon (2002) described the diversity of information acquisition strategies that support individuals in

coping with relational uncertainty. The diversity of strategies that individuals employ depends on the clarity of information needed. These complicated information-seeking strategies have been developed from the passive, active, and interactive strategies in order to decrease the levels of uncertainty with strangers (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984).

Information-Seeking in Romantic Contexts

In the context of romantic relationships, people will have high levels of uncertainty. Employing effective information-seeking strategies in order to gain information about their partners is significant. This information can help them predict their partners' behavior and the status of their relationship. If people cannot predict the feelings or behaviors of their partners in a romantic relationship, their relationship will be undermined by uncertainty. As Berger and Calabrese (1975) noted, people fundamentally make efforts to reduce uncertainty. Decreasing uncertainty corresponds with seeking information from their romantic partners. When people in romantic relationships have conflicts, adequate information exchange between the partners can resolve those conflicts and escalate intimacy. According to Baxter and Wilmot (1984), who studied the information-seeking strategies focusing on platonic, romantic cross-sex relationships, and relationships that were in transition from platonic to romantic, uncertainty that occurs between romantic relationship partners seems especially complicated and elaborate. Thus, people in romantic relationships attempt to use several strategies to gain information from their partners and diminish the levels of uncertainty.

Baxter and Wilmot (1984) identified seven distinct types of information-seeking strategies for opposite-sex relationships included asking third parties, triangles (involving three people), directness tests (asking direct questions), separation

tests (not interacting, physical separation), endurance tests, public presentation (presenting partner to others), and indirect suggestion (joking, hinting). These seven strategies can be classified in terms of passive, active, and interactive strategies. We can argue that uncertainty reduction can enhance the feeling of togetherness within the romantic relationship; however, individuals have techniques to access information from their partners differently depending on the partner's attributes and experiences they have had together.

Information-Seeking in Intercultural Contexts

In the aspect of cross-cultural consumer research, researchers have an interest in studying customers' behavior regarding information-seeking strategies (Anderson & Engledow, 1971; Hampel, 1974; Nagashima, 1970). When business expands overseas, it is necessary to adjust communication strategies to be consonant with the localization of international customers. We cannot conveniently assume that the international market has the same attributes as the original market, and execute the same strategies to seek and provide information to foreign customers (Tan & Dolich, 1983). Today is the age of globalization in which many companies are likely to expand their business to the international market; thus, knowledge about information acquisition in the context of international marketing is very important (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002).

In general, a communicator tends to use mass media as information sources to provide information to customers. Alternatively, personal media or opinion leaders are also effective media for conveying information to customers. This notion is supported by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), who articulated that communications from mass media may not directly convey information to a mass audience. Instead, these

communications first reach out to a small group of opinion leaders, who then pass the information on to a mass audience. This concept defines marketing communication in terms of a two-step flow of communication. Moreover, Tan and Dolich (1983), who studied consumer information-seeking behavior comparing Singapore to the U.S., believed that customers could no longer be perceived as a passive audience; they can select the information source from which they want to acquire information.

Tan and Dolich (1983) found that both American and Singaporean respondents are more likely to seek information about products or services from personal sources: friends, neighbors, and family members rather than mass media: newspapers, magazines, radio, and television commercials. Moreover, both American and Singaporean respondents were less likely to employ independent reviews of products as a source for information. This study concluded that word-of-mouth, one of the personal sources, was an effective and useful strategy for seeking information.

Information-Seeking in Health Care Contexts

Information about health care is very important for patients and their relatives. The patients can seek information about health care from their social support networks of interpersonal relationships which includes family, friends, and health care providers (e.g., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and social workers). People in these social support networks are significant sources of information for people with chronic illness. They can exchange various types of information with each other to reduce patients' uncertainty, for example, exchanging information about a disease, their prognosis, treatment options, and preventing the threat of illness. This information can help patients make sense of medical procedures and treatments that lead them to increase comfort and decrease uncertainty (Brashers, Goldsmith, & Hsieh, 2002).

Mediated sources are additional channels that people with chronic illness can employ in order to seek health information. We can organize media sources into five types. First, the common media sources include television programs, magazines, and newspaper articles which propose contents regarding health topics (Johnson, 1997). Second, a website is a mediated source which is sponsored by individuals or health care organizations. A website is a more convenient source because patients can access health information from the privacy and comfort of their own home (Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001). Third, listservs, newsgroups, and chatrooms provide health information to patients and help them interpret and evaluate that information. The online sources are advantages for people with stigmatized illnesses or people with rare diseases who have difficulty contacting another person face-to-face because they do not want to reveal themselves (Davison, Pennebaker, & Dickinson, 2000). Fourth, is an email source. This mediated source benefits people who want to contact distant friends or relatives or create social networks. The dominant feature of an email is to provide service on demand from health care providers (Spielberg, 1998). Finally, there is telemedicine (e.g., medical consultations by closed-circuit television). This source provides more chances for patients who do not have access to other media technology, but they want to contact and gain information from providers (Mun & Turner, 1999). The information that comes from these mediated sources can help people with chronic illness reduce uncertainty and improve their health status.

Although the traditional study of information management in a health context concentrated on the seeking of information from social support networks or mediated sources, recent research has become interested in studying information avoiding. There are many reasons that cause patients to avoid information. For example, people

who believe they are at risk for disease may avoid information when it is distressing (Brashers et al., 2002; Leydon et al., 2000). Also, some patients may avoid diagnostic information because they want to determine their health status by themselves and remain optimistic. Moreover, healthy people, without symptoms of illness, tend to avoid information to maintain a positive perspective or prevent anxieties that come from the potential disease (Brashers, 2001). We can argue that information-seeking and avoiding play equal roles for people living with disease. The patients tend to seek information when they want to reduce uncertainty and avoid information when they want to maintain their expectations.

In addition, people with illness experiences can use collaborative strategies to seek and provide information. For example, physicians and patients are both seeking and providing information to each other. Physicians investigate the information regarding symptoms and cause of illness from patients, whereas patients elicit information about the meaning of illness, diagnostic information, and treatment options from the physician. In the case of AIDS, information about HIV and its treatments is somewhat inconsistent; people living with HIV who have chances to discuss information or collaborate with others such as friends, family, and health care providers may reduce their uncertainty (Brashers et al., 2002).

Information-Seeking in Organizational Contexts

In organizational contexts, new employees are more likely to encounter uncertainty when engaging a new job in a new organization (Louis, 1980; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Typically, an organization attempts to provide information to support newcomers; however, the organization oftentimes fails to provide adequate information to them. Consequently, newcomers are likely to acquire more information

on their own to compensate for the absence of information and to reduce uncertainty on organizational entry. There were different types of information and diversified strategies and sources that newcomers employ to seek information about a new workplace (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).

For example, new employees tended to use indirect modes of information-seeking, except when they could not gain technical information from observing others' behavior. They were more likely to seek information about job performance from supervisors; whereas they acquired social and normative information from colleagues (Morrison, 1993). Also, new employees expected to receive optimal benefits and spend less effort and lower cost for seeking information. Similarly, Morrison and Vancouver (2000) found that newcomers preferred to seek the types of information that they perceived to be significant or beneficial for developing their job performance. They were more likely to use information acquisition to enhance their knowledge and competencies for mastering the job (Chan & Schmitt, 2000). Correspondingly, Ashford and Black (1996) found that newcomers' information-seeking was positively related to the desire for mastering their new role. In contrast, newcomers were less likely to seek information from the sources which were difficult to access, including the sources that they perceived cost for accessing to seek information (Morrison & Vancouver, 2000).

Information-Seeking about Products or Services

The subject of information acquisition has been discussed in the field of marketing communication. Tan and Dolich (1983) proposed that information acquisition was simply a means of seeking information to make purchase decisions. Similarly, Mitra et al. (1999) asserted that information acquisition was an approach

which consumers used in order to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk. When customers had uncertainty, they wanted to decrease their uncertainty through seeking information (Mitra et al., 1999). This notion was supported by the previous studies in consumer decision marketing. They articulated that information acquisition or information search was an important topic of consumer decision-making. When faced with risk or uncertainty, consumers seek information from a variety of sources that help them reduce uncertainty and perceived risk about products and services (Bauer, 1960; Day, 1970; Hansen, 1972; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Roselius, 1971).

Types of Information Sources

Customers have several sources to seek information about products and services to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk during the purchasing decision process. For example, Andreasen (1968) classified information sources into five categories in which customers can seek information to satisfy a particular need. The five categories consist of impersonal advocate, impersonal independent, personal advocate, personal independent, and direct observation / experience.

1. Impersonal advocate sources are print media and mass media advertising, including reading magazine ads, listening to radio commercials, reading newspaper ads, viewing TV commercials, or looking at point-of-purchase displays.
2. Impersonal independent sources are popular articles and broadcast programming, such as *Consumer Reports* or finding a technical report on the product.
3. Personal advocate sources refers to information received from a salesperson, or a store manager's opinion.

4. Personal independent sources indicate information from asking family members, close friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers.
5. Direct observation/experience is related to information gathered from demonstrations, relying on personal experience, trying the product before purchasing, or reading the information on the package.

Later, Lutz and Reilly (1974) further developed this typology by adding a sixth source of information.

6. Pick a brand is related to a behavior of taking action and picking a brand.

Moreover, Haywood (1989), who studied word-of-mouth communication, argued that consumers prefer to seek information from personal sources (e.g., opinion of friends, opinion of relatives, past experience, third-party reports, and previous customers) rather than impersonal sources (e.g., magazine, radio, newspaper, TV, and pamphlet) for all service categories. In contrast, Cox (1967a) categorized the information sources that customers employ to search or acquire information into three types: consumer dominated, marketer dominated, and neutral sources.

1. Consumer dominated source refers to interpersonal informational channels over which the marketer has less control, such as word-of-mouth.
2. Marketer dominated source is controlled by the marketer, including packaging, promotion, and advertising.
3. Neutral sources emphasize consumer reports and newspapers that are controlled neither by the marketer nor by the consumer.

Also, Tan and Dolich (1983) categorized different types of information sources in three groups.

1. Market sources include the product itself, packaging, displays, personal selling, promotion, and advertising, etc. A customer can easily access these sources. However, most of the content comes from marketers who have an intention to increase sales, so sometimes customers have some doubts about these sources.
2. Personal sources refer to all forms of interpersonal communication on products including family, friends, and neighbors. These sources deal with both forms, verbal communication in terms of word-of-mouth and observation of other products' adopters.
3. Neutral sources are those we can access in terms of articles and write-ups regarding products or services in magazines, newspapers, and other reports. These sources are somewhat independent from appraisal.

In addition, Beales et al. (1981) proposed a general framework of information search which can be categorized as internal and external search. Beales et al. argued that internal information searches concentrate on retrieving information acquisition from memory, without information from any outside sources. According to Lynch and Srull (1982), an internal search can connect with memory and previous experiences. When customers engaged in a purchase decision process, they recalled information or knowledge about those products or services from their memory. The previous experiences created knowledge which customers could elicit, known as internal information search, to support a purchasing decision.

In contrast, external information search refers to the acquisition of information from outside sources including print advertisements, television or radio advertisements, magazine articles, salespeople, point-of purchase displays, personal

acquaintances, etc. (Beales et al., 1981). According to Berning and Jacoby (1974), external information search is related to seeking new information about a product or service from the customers' environments that have many forms including personal, impersonal communication, and mass media. The information from individuals who have previous experience about products/services directly or indirectly is subjective and evaluative.

Likewise, McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999), who examined consumers' external search activities in services marketing, discussed the external search in four forms: reseller information (catalogs, consultants), third party (consumer report), interpersonal sources (friends or acquaintances), and direct inspection of the goods by the consumer (comparison, influence). The external search activities play an important role in the consumer decision because external search decreases perception of risk and uncertainty, while it increases knowledge and post-purchase satisfaction. Moreover, the amount of external search which customers engage in influences whether they retain their brand loyalty or switch brands (Newman, 1977).

Furthermore, McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999) suggested that the knowledge about external search is beneficial for the marketing manager. A manager ought to encourage consumers to search for additional external information by pointing to the importance and interest of content which the manager communicates with consumers. For example, in the exercise club, the managers should promote their business by presenting the advantages of exercise rather than focusing on the enjoyment only. The quality and interest of information can motivate customers to increasingly search information. In addition, Marcella, Baxter, and Davies (2007) evaluated reliability, accuracy, and currency as important qualities of messages

because these attributes may increase information search. Particularly, in the case of complex issues or processed information which had been already analyzed and synthesized, clarity and conciseness are important for searchers. However, external search may result in comparing the services because customers have more information and knowledge about such services.

Information-Seeking Strategies and Reduction of Uncertainty

Information-seeking strategies are associated with uncertainty reduction. We can observe that customers employ various information-seeking strategies to reduce uncertainty. This proposition is supported by these findings. First, when customers encounter risk or uncertainty that is caused by a purchase situation, customers tend to seek information from direct observations, previous experiences, and other information searches to diminish prepurchase uncertainty (Locander & Hermann, 1979). Second, customers prefer to use personal channels or personal influences in situations where uncertainty has not been sufficiently reduced by formal information sources. For example, Perry and Hamm (1969) showed that the higher the level of uncertainty, the higher the utilization of personal channels. According to Lutz and Reilly (1973), word-of-mouth plays the most important role in risk-reducing information and has more influence on consumers than mass media communication. Customers will receive immediate and clear information feedback through word-of-mouth. This means that in high performance uncertainty, customers are more likely to seek information from individuals, i.e., word-of-mouth, rather than from impersonal sources. Third, Lutz and Reilly (1973) observed that, when the levels of uncertainty are low or moderate, customers prefer to use direct observations and/or experiences with a product as a secondary source of seeking product information.

Information-Seeking Strategies and Service Satisfaction

The knowledge in the information-seeking strategies is not only related to uncertainty reduction but also the service satisfaction of customers. Kellogg, Youngdahl, and Bowen (1997), who studied the relationship between customers' behaviors on information search and service satisfaction, found there are four distinct customers' behaviors involved with providing and seeking information to assure service satisfaction.

First, is preparation. Customers prepare for encounters with the service in need through seeking information from referrals, researching competitors, and arriving early. Customers who are less knowledgeable tend to use less product information to evaluate products and employ fewer abilities to process them. In contrast, customers who have more prior knowledge tend to evaluate products' quality and attributes more quickly than customers who have less prior knowledge (Steenkamp, 1990; Sujana, 1985). As a result, customers tend to use strategies to seek information and prior knowledge to prepare them before approaching the service provider.

Second, is building relationships. Customers use different strategies to build relationships with the provider, such as smiling, offering positive words, getting to know the provider, building loyalty in order to receive special treatment, and seeking more information from the provider.

Third, is information exchange. Customers engage in information exchange behaviors through seeking information from the provider to clarify service expectations and service status. This behavior is consistent with the reduction of uncertainty in an organizational context. The newcomers tend to seek information

regarding the organization, work, and supervisors for reducing uncertainty when they enter a new workplace (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

Last, is intervention. Customers provide negative performance feedback to the provider. This feedback involves an intervention that is likely to occur when customers are unsatisfied with the provider's service. Intervention can be expressed in the form of complaining and writing negative comments on customer feedback cards. This feedback is useful for the provider because it can be a signal for service recovery (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990).

However, in an intervention process, customers have opportunities to seek the clarification of information from the provider to eliminate the doubts before purchasing products or services. Interestingly, if the provider facilitates customers' behaviors about preparation, relationship building, and information exchange, customers will receive service satisfaction that leads to the reduction of customers' negative feedback.

The service customer is an important source for seeking information. Customers can gain and provide information with this option. If customers encounter uncertainty or failure about service, they can repeat more in-depth information exchange behaviors or ask additional questions. This would shed light on customers' needs and expectations for better service (Kellogg et al., 1997).

Information-Seeking Strategies in Service and Non-Service Firms

Typically, customers in service and non-service industries have different approaches on information-seeking because the attributions of both industries are different. The pioneer study on information acquisition (i.e., information search) in the services area was conducted by Zeithaml (1981). Scholars subsequently have

attempted to ground their studies based on Zeithaml's propositions (Boze, 1987; Friedman, 1993; Frieden & Goldsmith, 1989; Scott, 1995). Mitra et al. (1999) were interested in studying the information-seeking patterns of consumers in the context of service industries. They distinguished service as three types: search-based, experience-based; and credence-based. First, search-based service refers to the services where customers can evaluate the attributes before purchasing, such as checking accounts and check costs. Second, experience-based service concentrates on the services that customers can discern regarding the services' attributes after purchase and consumption, for example, the evaluation of a haircut service. Third, credence-based service indicates the services of which the attributes can be judged by customers after purchase and consumption, for example, customers can evaluate psychotherapy services after spending considerable time in therapy.

Based on a service classification, we can argue that credence-based services are associated with higher levels of perceived risk arising from lower levels of pre-purchase knowledge that leads to an increase in customers' information acquisition to reduce uncertainty. Similarly, Mitra et al. (1999) found that credence-oriented service purchases are likely to be associated with higher information search (amount of information search time). Correspondingly, the previous research pointed out that information acquisition is a common method that customers use to reduce perceived risk; perceived risk and information acquisition were positively correlated (Murray, 1991; Newman, 1977). Moreover, perceived risk can be reduced through increasing brand loyalty or seeking additional information about the product or service (Lutz & Reilly, 1973).

Young (1981) noted that service customers prefer to use more direct prior knowledge such as internal information sources in appraisal services than appraisal goods. On the other hand, personal independent sources are more effective for services than for goods. Consequently, in the service industry, the prominent strategies for seeking information are opinion leaders and reference group members who have previous knowledge and experiences as service adopters. Generally, service customers prefer to use word-of-mouth information. This is consistent with the notion that word-of-mouth is particularly influential for service firms.

In contrast, for non-service products, when perceived risk of a purchase increases, consumers can engage in risk-reduction through direct observation of the characteristics or objective reality of tangible goods including product trial. For example, consumers can visit a retail location and examine a non-service product directly by buying a small quantity product, termed as trialability (Locander & Hermann, 1979; Lutz & Reilly, 1973). However, this strategy may not work in the service area that requires the direct experience or product observation, which is logically problematic and limited because of intangible purchase. Thus, service customers do not have opportunities for product observation or trial. We can argue that the information-seeking strategies that service and non-service customers employ to seek more purchasing information and reduce uncertainty are different.

Murray (1991) suggested that word-of-mouth is an important and interesting strategy for information acquisition. Thus, managers ought to use this strategy through employees to provide information to customers. More importantly, employees should improve their ability through training programs that increase their knowledge and understanding of the service product and effectiveness in

communication with customers. Service or purchase sites have major roles in providing information to support customer demands. In terms of communication strategy development, providers may create communication strategies that are beyond word-of-mouth to encourage the purchasing decision process of customers. The preference of customers for personal information should be concentrated on experiential rather than technical or objective dimensions. Moreover, the spokespersons and endorsers are carefully chosen so that word-of-mouth from these people can influence the purchase decisions of customers. The information requirements of prospective customers result in various information acquisition strategies and help communicators create special communication strategies that are appropriate to customer demands.

This study examines information-seeking strategies that McDonald's Thai customers used in order to reduce their uncertainty towards products and services of McDonald's restaurants. When customers encounter uncertainty, they attempt to reduce it by searching for more information, usually leading to a reduction of uncertainty and growth of a relationship with McDonald's. The outcome in this study illustrates the strategies that McDonald's customers used to reduce their uncertainty.

Communication Strategies

The next topic is "communication strategies," which have been reviewed in several fields including marketing, communication, education, and psychology (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002). Communication strategies have been particularly important in the organizational context as most companies recognize the significance of communication with customers. Clearly, poor communication will likely lead to

lost opportunities and profits, compelling companies to develop effective strategies over the years (Reardon & Enis, 1990).

One such strategy is to attempt to influence customer attitudes and purchasing behavior. In the information technology age, a large amount of information can be easily and rapidly disseminated to customers in several ways, including the internet, television, radio, and newspaper. Also, customers have more opportunities to derive different information from industry competitors. This information impacts on customer needs and satisfaction. As a consequence, organizations must develop their strategic communication and performance to cope with prospective customers and achieve competitive benefits and sales objectives. A number of important changes in both the organization and the customer lead to the emergence of a new perspective on communication strategies.

The Perspectives of Communication Strategies

The previous research about communication strategies can be categorized into two traditions: the modernism perspective and the postmodernism perspective. Strategies based on the modernism perspective assumed that communication channels have been used independently; thus, messages that are transferred through these communication channels are less attractive for customers/consumers. In contrast, postmodernism focuses on integrating marketing communication (IMC), combining communication instruments, that leads to the effectiveness of communication strategies (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002).

Modern Communication Strategies

Pelsmacker et al. (2005) indicated that the modernism perspective or traditional communication strategies focus on using mass media and conveying

oriented messages. The communication instruments, including advertising, public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing, and personal selling, are managed independently by using each of these tools alone without combining them. However, customers cannot distinguish the subtle differences between these communication tools that organizations execute in order to change customer awareness, attitudes, or behaviors.

Additionally, the message transferred through these channels is less consistent and less attractive, so customers cannot recognize the main points, what the organizations intend to communicate. Furthermore, traditional mass media, which includes television, radio, newspaper, and magazines, is increasingly expensive because most advertisers tend to use time and space to communicate with their customers. Consequently, organizations have to adjust communication strategies by employing mass media in combination with other communication instruments, such as public relations, personal selling, exhibition, and sales promotions, which can more directly influence the behaviors of individual customers.

The creation of new communication strategies has been explored in many studies, which demonstrate that communication practitioners recognize the importance of implementing communication (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Ogilvy, 1990). Rose and Miller (1993), who studied advertising and public relations practitioners, asserted that the capacities of communication strategies need to be enlarged beyond the current execution in order to be consistent with customer needs and marketing in postmodernism, with its rapid, frenetic, volatile, proliferation of brands.

Similarly, Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) argued that communication practitioners should transform traditional communication strategies into the new integration strategies, including a presentation of the communication direction for the brand and service. In the traditional modernist era, communicators preferred to present their product information rather than paying attention to customers' problems or needs. The incompatible messages and similar communication strategies were produced in order to respond to the organization's demands, but they were less effective in persuading customers. The customer was confused and bored and, thus, these messages led to negative effects on brand image as well.

Schultz et al. (1993) suggested that communicators should know their customers as individuals in order to be able to design sharper messages to sell products. For these reasons, communicators attempted to develop new communication strategies that led to the origin of the postmodern perspective.

Postmodern Communication Strategies

Communication in the postmodernism perspective has received attention in a great number of studies in communication (Brown, 1993). These studies concluded that the postmodern perspective may considerably influence organizations and businesses which will need to communicate into the twenty-first century. It is necessary that communicators create and develop new communication strategies or tactics in order to reach consumers needs that are continuously changing and attain competitive advantages over other organizations. Based on postmodernism, marketing is not confined to the extent of profit-making organizations, but organizations can expand their transactions or ideas toward other groups of customers. Proctor and

Kitchen (2002) articulated that the distinguished attributes of communication in postmodernism can be observed on the current marketing that has been shifting from concentrating on the individuality of communication channels toward IMC approaches that recognizes the importance of integration and coordination of various communication instruments in order to send messages about organizations and products toward diversified customers. As Pelsmacker et al. (2005) described, in postmodernism, communication strategies have been changed from concentrating on the individuality of channels, including advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and personal selling, toward integrating these channels in the communication process. Kotler (2000) argued that integrated marketing communication concentrates on the integration of various communication instruments in order to transfer clear and consistent information about an organization and its products.

Although integrated marketing communication stresses combining various communication vehicles, the message transferred through these channels is consistent. Therefore, the customer can recognize the message and brand image of organizations that impact on purchase intentions. The major role of the communication practitioner in postmodernism is to facilitate these integrated communication channels by presenting a set of messages in an integrated way (Pelsmacker et al., 2005).

In accordance with Schultz et al. (1993), it was observed that an integrated message will provide one personality for the brand, one theme, and one selling idea. This appears to explain why the customers feel, believe, and have confidence in the organization and its products, and how that leads to purchase intentions. In the era of integrated marketing communication, customers play a fairly important role in determining communication strategies. Nowadays, it is recognized that customers are

diverse and have many differences; therefore, the communication practitioners should have different segments for their customers in various sub-groups and should reach each group by using different communication strategies and offering each group a distinct competitive advantage. This usually leads to the management of each point of contact between the consumers and the products or organization (Schultz et al., 1993).

Communication Strategies and Organizational Structure

The organizational structure is necessary to achieve the communication strategies. Integrated marketing communication cannot arise automatically; it depends upon the structure of the organization as well. All of the departments in the organization should coordinate to successfully determine the integrated communication plan. Pelsmacker et al. (2005) demonstrated that integrated marketing communication was most effective when all communication activities or departments were integrated into one department. This sounds difficult and complicated, but most organizations have an interest in adjusting their structures to be consistent with the integrated communication strategies.

According to Phelps, Harris, and Johnson (1996), who studied the division of responsibility of developing marketing communication strategies in a company, the majority of companies still assign responsibility for developing communication strategies to an individual and a separate department. However, the heads of various communication channels have increasingly attempted to work together to develop communication strategies. Moreover, this research further demonstrated that integrated marketing communication causes effective group decision-making processes, diminution of separation within a company, and responsible leadership. In addition, Schultz et al. (1993) stated that integrated communication strategies can

reduce the obstacles that separate departments in a company and generate a stronger bond that derives from coordinating departments.

Pelsmacker et al. (2005) referred to the Van de Velde company, a famous supplier in the luxurious lingerie for women. The company succeeded in implementing IMC. The company utilizes many communication channels: websites, print brochures, mailings, posters, and local advertising in order to deliver the consistent message about new collections to its customers as well as building a unique brand image. The Van de Velde company can manage and integrate its communication channels tactically and reach its customers in each group. However, implementing the integrated communication strategies has limitations in some organizations.

Pelsmacker et al. (2005) further explained that most organizations have become familiarized with traditional communication strategies that, for many years, were managed by separating individuals, and highly regarded specialization. Therefore, there are some barriers that an organization will encounter when implementing integrated communication strategies. For example, integrated marketing ideas may be incompatible with the traditional structure which separated the brand management structure from the public relations department. Additionally, the insufficiency of internal communication makes the information exchange and coordination among departments difficult and leads department heads to overlook integrated communication channels. Finally, the integrated marketing plan is complicated and highly dependent upon the coordination of the heads of all departments, and the head of each department may be conservative and reluctant to accept this idea.

Pelsmacker et al. (2005) suggested that the expectations of organizations in developing integrated communication strategies can be achieved even if an organization cannot integrate all communication channels into one department. At least, the flow of information across departments, sharing information, and coordination in communication activities will help the organization to gradually succeed in integrating communication strategies and further developing complete postmodern communication strategies.

Communication Strategies for Customers

Nowadays, many organizations pay attention to the effectiveness of communication with their customers. Building customer loyalty, customer confidence, and long-term relationships with customers are more important than just persuading customers to buy the company's products (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002). In the age of globalization, organizations have begun to enlarge their businesses for the international markets. The customers are more diverse, so different communication strategies are necessary in order to have appropriate contexts. More importantly, the communication with consumers needs consistency in order to reduce confusion and create awareness of organizations' brands and products. However, an organization may need to adapt messages and channels of communication to be suitable for customers who are different in cultures, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Particularly, the organizations that expand their businesses towards many areas should be concerned with communication in localization. Given the transition from modern to postmodern customer communication strategies, I was interested in exploring the communication approaches that McDonald's has used in order to reduce uncertainty among its customers.

Even though the previous research does not directly refer to the communication strategies that are used by quick service restaurants to reduce uncertainty among customers, there are many previous studies of communication strategies that refer to the creation of confidence, trust, commitment, loyalty, or long-term relationships with customers. These determinants usually lead to the reduction of customer's uncertainty that can be observed from purchasing intention as well. From the previous research, I found there are varieties of communication strategies which are based on the postmodern perspective that organizations employ with customers/consumers to attain their objectives.

Brand Strategies

A consumer's confidence is the important determinant to evaluate purchasing intention and image a brand. This notion is supported by Bennett and Harrell (1975), who suggested that confidence is associated with predicting intentions to buy the products. Accordingly, Howard and Sheth (1969) postulated that confidence is positively related to purchasing a particular brand. This means customers have confidence in brand evaluations. From the definition of confidence, we conceive that confidence can identify the degree of a consumer's certainty. For example, Howard (1989) stated that confidence is the level of certainty; customers are able to correctly judge or estimate the quality of the brand. Similarly, Raden (1985) argued that confidence or certainty can explain the extent to which the person has formed an attitude toward a focal object. Day (1970) indicated that the confidence level may demonstrate uncertainty about the accuracy of the brand judgment.

Laroche, Kim, and Zhou (1996) examined the relationships among brand familiarity, confidence in brand evaluation, brand attitudes, and purchase intention of

four brands. The results showed that familiarity with a specific brand significantly affected attitudes toward the brand. Also, a significant positive relationship between attitude toward the focal brand and intention to buy the same brand was found. Moreover, a significant positive relationship between brand familiarity and confidence was found no matter which of the four brands was used as the focal brand. This means that brand familiarity influences a consumer's confidence toward the brand. A consumer's confidence toward a brand may result from his/her familiarity or experience with the brand. If an organization wants to increase a consumer's intention to buy a specific brand, it has to enhance the consumer's confidence in the brand by providing the consumer with more product-related information. This approach is consonant with postmodernism that concentrates on combining communication channels to convey information and create relationships with customers.

In fact, consumer's confidence can be categorized into two genres: knowledge confidence and choice confidence. Knowledge confidence refers to consumer's certainty about information of the brands under consideration, including the attributes, the importance, and the performance of the brands, whereas choice confidence describes a consumer's certainty about the chosen brand. When individuals have the motivation at an equilibrium level, they are more likely to need less product information and take action by purchasing a product. The low levels of knowledge confidence are related to the reduction of the ability to efficiently understand and use new information that derives from the increased search. Thus, the low levels of knowledge confidence lead to the low levels of intention to buy a specific brand. No evidence shows that individuals who have the low degree of knowledge confidence will increasingly search for information regarding a specific

brand (Urbany, Dickson, & Wilkie, 1989). Moreover, based on the exposure effect in preference and attitude formation, Zajonc and Markus (1982) reported that more repeated exposure can create the positive customer's attitude and increase familiarity toward the products. Thus, if organizations want to create positive attitude and familiarity, they should present repeated information to their customers.

Certainly, brand familiarity and brand building are effective communication strategies that postmodern organizations employ to create the customers' certainty or confidence. They also lead to an increase in a person's intention to purchase an organization's product. Pelsmacker et al. (2005) described the branding in the following four aspects. First, is brand awareness: reinforcing the brand by creating awareness about the brand. When consumers need or desire the product, they can recognize the brand. Second, are brand attitudes and brand image: defining the brand by differentiating the brand from competing products and improving consumers' knowledge. Third, is brand attraction: increasing the number of new customers who have never purchased the product before by making the brand appealing to them. Last, is brand loyalty: increasing the levels of satisfaction in, and commitment to, the product. Previous research indicated that the cost of retaining customers is about six times lower than attracting new customers. Moreover, if customers—or more specifically loyal customers—feel bonded with the brand and organization, they will search for more product-related information.

Proctor and Kitchen (2002) argued that the role of branding in postmodernism is different from modernism. Modernism focused on creating the individuality of each brand that causes a brand to gain identity, personality, and image. Conversely, postmodernism concentrated on combining communication channels for building the

brand image, making it unified and easily recognizable and leading to familiarity and confidence with the brand. Consequently, when organizations communicate through branding, the customers have confidence and certainty in the information from the organization as well, reducing customer's uncertainty. The communication practitioners in postmodernism should understand the significance of brand and manage the brand strategically so that customers can discriminate between product choices.

Message Framing Strategies

In the postmodern age, customers are diverse. Messages play an important role in communicating with each group of customers. The message that an organization designs for customers has more influence on their attitude and behavior. Thus, communication practitioners are more likely to use message framing strategies to evoke the positive effect with customers, which leads to the eventual purchase of a product. This is consistent with Chang (2008), who examined why positively framed messages work more effectively than negatively framed messages in product advertising. The result showed that positively framed messages generate higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect than negatively framed messages.

Furthermore, positively framed messages encourage participants to be attentive to, and elaborate on, messages more than negatively framed messages. Chang (2008) further explained that positive affect includes the following eight items: carefree, cheerful, delightful, happy, interested, pleased, satisfied, and warmhearted; but, negative affect includes the following six items: annoyance, boredom, depression, disinterest, sadness, and skepticism. A positively framed message can be observed from the purchase of a product, while a negatively framed message can be marked

without the act of purchasing a product. Smith (1996) noted that positively framed ad messages emphasize positive information that demonstrates the advantages resulting from the purchase intention. On the other hand, negatively framed messages will present information that indicates the lost confidence. The negatively framed messages generate the unpleasant effects—thus, not purchasing a product.

Similarly, Arora (2007) explained that a positive framing is more effective in changing customers' attitudes and intentions. A positively framed message is defined as communications which emphasize a brand's advantages or benefits to consumers, whereas a negatively framed message refers to messages that portray negative consequences of not performing the advocated behavior.

Message framing strategies have been extensively discussed in consumer behavior. Organizations have found the knowledge in message framing strategies to be useful when creating messages toward customers. For example, Adaval (2001) demonstrated that affect-evoked persuasion effects emerge when consumers evaluate their product based on hedonic criteria (enjoy, comfortable), but not when based on utilitarian criteria; thus, we can observe that hedonic criteria are used in many advertising products in order to persuade their customers. On the same note, Levin and Gaeth (1988) studied the food products and the significant influence of positive framing. Based on their suggestion, it is better to present '75 percent lean beef' than '25 percent fat'. Their finding indicated that beef was positively evaluated when being presented as 75 percent lean. This study confirmed that positively framed messages are more persuasive than negatively framed messages.

However, message framing depends on cultural differences. The positive messages in one culture may be negative in another culture; so the organizations

should understand the attitudes, values, and cultural differences of customers in order to produce messages that are consistent with customers in each group. These messages can help an organization reduce customers' uncertainty and create customer attitudes that are useful for organizational operation as well. The concept of message framing strategies that deal with cultural variation is compatible with the postmodern perspective. This approach suggests that the messages transferred through various channels should encourage positively framed ideas that lead to purchase intention because customers are customizers and construct different versions of products in their imaginations. They want to present their self-image through the products they use (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

Corporate Credibility

Corporate credibility, or the reputation of the firm, is one of the important topics in communication strategies. Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) investigated the role of corporate credibility on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. One-hundred undergraduate marketing students participated in this research on a voluntary basis. The results indicated that corporate credibility, as an independent variable, impacts on these dependent variables: attitude-toward-the-ad, attitude-toward-the-brand, and purchase intentions. Specifically, it has a greater influence on attitude-toward-the-brand and on purchase intentions. Their analyses indicated that the subjects tended to have a more positive attitude-toward-the-brand when the company was highly credible than when it had low credibility. This finding supported the hypothesis: subjects will have a more positive attitude-toward-the-brand for high corporate credibility than for low corporate credibility. It confirmed the assumptions that the company is more closely related to the brand and the credibility of the

company appears to play a major role in creating brand perceptions. Additionally, the high corporate credibility condition had a more positive effect on purchase intentions than low corporate credibility. Therefore, the result supported the hypothesis: subjects will have greater purchase intentions when the corporate credibility is high than when the corporate credibility is low. Also, Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) found that a company was perceived as more honest and reliable if it had a positive history than if it had a negative history. Moreover, the positively positioned company was perceived as having more expertise than the negatively positioned company.

Kotler and Armstrong (1996) stated that a company usually attempts to participate in positive environmental and social issues in order to create their reputation and credibility. This leads to an increase in sales as well. Also, Belch and Belch (1993) argued that information from a credible corporation influences opinions, attitudes, and/or behaviors. In addition, Fombrun (1996) confirmed the belief that high corporate credibility is significant in creating a positive attitude-toward-the-ad, attitude-toward-the-brand, and purchase intentions. He further asserted that companies are concerned with their corporate image and their own credibility. It has been estimated that more than 7% of all advertising dollars are spent on corporate advertising; so, the companies should incorporate a strong positive corporate image into their communication strategy.

Laroche et al. (1996) argued that familiarity with a brand appears to influence consumers' confidence in the brand; therefore, affecting their intention to buy the same brand. If consumers lack information about the brand attributes, the reputation of the firm will boost the consumers' confidence; also, if the product is good, consumers are willing to purchase the product of that brand. Likewise, Davis (1994)

found that a great majority of consumers have stated that their product purchase decisions are associated with their views about the parent company's *good citizenship*. That means corporate credibility should have more impact on purchasing intentions. Moreover, Mowen and Minor (1998) reported that, today, most organizations prefer to increasingly execute a communication strategy called corporate social responsibility (CSR). These organizations believe that they ought to have responsibility toward their customers, employees, communities, societies, and environments. Organizations try to create the issues that are relevant to their organizations or products and establish campaigns that present corporate social responsibility. Corporate social responsibility refers to the idea that an organization has an obligation to contribute to the solution of society's problems through establishing projects or campaigns and offering some of business's resources including energy, time, people, money, and knowledge.

Some organizations fail to execute corporate social responsibility as a strategy in order to sustain their businesses. They spend a lot of resources to promote corporate social responsibility activities, but do not relate them to their products or services. For example, Hewlett-Packard (HP) attempted to create commitments in recycling while Dell created clear and consistent messages which promised to plant a number of trees for each unit purchased. Consequently, Dell became known as an environmental company but HP failed in corporate social responsibility. The CSR message is one of the most important components of communication strategies and the communication practitioners ought to manage the message properly. Designing consistent CSR messages and integrating them with the other communication

instruments before sending them both internally and externally influences the success of organizations (Mowen & Minor, 1998).

Today, customers are looking for a relationship with the organizations, not just buying the products. Corporate social responsibility is one component of communication strategy that organizations employ in order to build the organization's image and create the relationship with their customers. Organizations strongly believe that communication with this strategy can assist them in developing a positive image as good corporate citizens that leads to purchase intention (McElhaney, 2009). According to McGuire, Sundgren, and Schneeweis (1988), organizations without social responsibility cannot promote their products and images to customers effectively. On the other hand, the organizations which implement corporate social responsibility tend to reduce business risk and easily promote their products and corporate image to customers, stockholders, and communities.

Chang (2009) studied the relationship among corporate social responsibility, corporate image, and economic performance, and reported that there is a significantly positive correlation among the three variables. The correlation coefficient between CSR and economic performance was 0.65. The correlation coefficient between CSR and corporate image was 0.58. In other words, the organization which has more social responsibilities will obtain more customer satisfaction that leads to a good corporate image. It can be argued that corporate credibility is one effective communication strategy for reducing customers' uncertainty. Certainly, customers are more likely to be exposed to information from sources or corporations that have credibility. This usually leads to a reduction of customers' uncertainty and increases good relationships between the customer and an organization.

In the age of globalization, organizations have more opportunities to expand their businesses toward international markets. Of course, the organizations have to adapt themselves in many aspects in order to reach customers in each local market. The postmodern concept can support organizational growth because it focuses on integrating marketing communication (IMC) rather than disjointed local appeals. Also, it emphasizes generating the coordination and credibility of organizations that helps them become competitive in local and global markets.

Two-Way Communication

The relationship with customers has been discussed for almost two decades. This topic has become more important because of the increasingly competitive marketplace. Trust and relationship commitment are the fundamental concepts of a long-term customer relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). For example, the travel and tourism industry is very competitive and has high levels of uncertainty and physical, emotional, and social risk. The customers are unwilling to commit to providers who lack their trust. Most providers recognize that the relationship with their customers is very crucial. They attempt to develop long-term relationships and trust with their customers that lead them to be resistant to switching providers. Correspondingly, Zillifro and Morais (2004) studied the relationships among information, trust, and relationship commitment in the tourism industry. They collected the data from surveys and found that the information from the customer on the provider significantly influenced the customer's trust in the provider. Also, the information from the provider to the customer significantly influenced the customer's trust in the provider. And, customers' trust in the provider significantly influenced the customers' resistance to change to a different provider.

These results confirmed the idea that providers should recognize the importance of good communication with their customers. The communication flow and exchange of information between provider and customer, two-way communication, can create trust and reduce the levels of uncertainty in providers. When customers trust the provider, they have more resistance to the persuasive effort presented by competitors through various patterns, including advertising, activities, and promotions. In addition, mistrust will occur if the customers think the provider focuses on taking advantage of them. Therefore, the provider should increase the exchange of information between customer and provider through various communication tools, including e-mail messages, websites, newsletters, brochures, and a phone line with skillful and friendly employees.

Based on Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), trust is a key component of relationship commitment. The customer will invest with the trustworthy providers. Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000) distinguished between two strategies to reduce mistrust: signaling and risk-sharing. Signaling consists of informing the customer of the provider's commitments involving quality, facilities, and equipment. Risk sharing refers to the provider being willing to put themselves at risk by offering the customer service center, service guarantees, and price incentives. These two strategies cause customers to be comfortable in developing a committed relationship with the provider.

Postmodernism recognizes the integration of communication tools for communicating with customers; however, each instrument should provide the channels that can receive the customers' feedback or ideas. Then, the organizations can combine this information to analyze and determine the communication strategies.

Actually, this feedback can help the organizations understand the demands or uncertainties of customers that cause reduction of customers' uncertainty.

Customer Relationship Management

The new communication strategy that businesses use in order to create a good relationship and reduce uncertainty with their customers is called Customer Relationship Management (CRM). In postmodernism, customers are diverse and complex, which segments customers into many groups. Management information of customers plays a major role in businesses. Most companies struggle to gather information about their customers and store it systematically. The management strategy of customer relationship has been used in order to efficiently manage and integrate information about their customers. In addition, the companies can use customer relationship management in order to cope with uncertainty when the companies interact with their customers.

For example, company managers who encounter enormous uncertainty from different groups of customers can use knowledge-creation capabilities through customer relationship management in order to increasingly gain information about experiences and expectations of customers. This leads them to collaboratively create the communication strategies in order to reduce customers' and company uncertainty. Moreover, an organization can employ customer relationship management strategies in many aspects, including enhancing customer loyalty, improving data quality, understanding the customer's value, creating a communication strategy, and managing the customer's knowledge (Kellen & Stefanczyk, 2002).

According to Park and Kim (2003), customer relationship management is significant for every business sector. The companies tend to create commitment and

long-term relationship with their customers through communication effectiveness and processing customer profiles to create in-depth understanding of customer's needs. They further suggested that a company should identify its core customers who can help to create appropriate communication strategies and provide feedback ideas. Core customers are typically a small group of customers who create high profit and have loyalty to the firm. Core customers provide high profit contributions, long-term active relationships, and or strong opinion leadership. However, it is not necessary to provide all three determinants. It depends on the attributes of each organization.

There are three stages of customer relationship management. First is the customer acquisition stage. In this stage, the organization demonstrates the significance of customers by collecting and processing the data about them through various communication media. Second is the customer retention stage. This stage refers to developing the customer relationship from ordinary customers turning into core customers who hold commitment and loyalty to the organization. Third is the customer expansion stage. The core customer plays an important role of expanding the customers through using word-of-mouth and participating in interactions with the company. Furthermore, Park and Kim (2003) proposed a strategy that helps organizations to systematically collect, analyze, and manage customers' information, called customer information system (CIS). A CIS consists of a customer database, a communication channel, and relationship management. The firm should employ the CIS strategy, together with the CRM strategy, that causes the firm to retain customers for life and increases the purchase intention of core customers.

In addition, Park and Kim (2003) further categorized the type of customer information into three types: information of the customer, information for the

customer, and information by the customer. First, information of the customer refers to the personal data and the transaction data that includes sale amount, transaction time, place, and buyers. For example, banks and credit card firms prefer to collect information of their customers by using the database systems. Second is information for the customer. A company will provide this type of information through various communication channels such as internet home pages, direct mail, special promotion notices, newsletters, and customized service so that customers can seek more useful information to make their decisions. Today, many firms are more likely to provide information through Web-based homepages. The information is relevant to company, product, and service information. It also supports fully interactive feedback and suggestions from customers. This leads to the third type, which is information by the customer. The information in this type is related to the non-transactional data, including inquires or feedback, complaints or recommendations. In this pattern, customers have a chance to participate with the firm via two-way communication. The feedback from the customers can guide the firm to produce new products and improve business processes that are consistent with customer expectations. Companies should integrate and organize customers' information and develop customer profiles in order to differentiate and assess the attributes of customers in each group effectively.

Also, consistent communication between customers and companies will establish an emotional tie and increase customers' commitment, which leads to a reduction of the customers' uncertainty. The most important part of the communication strategy is to ensure that communication is sufficiently frequent and based on customer-defined expectations. Thus, customer information is the

foundation to maintain and enhance the relationship between customers and organizations.

Obviously, the concept of consumer behaviors in postmodernism and modernism are different. In modernism, the organization views customers as a mass. The organizations are likely to roughly segment customers with demographic criteria including sex, age, education, and occupation. In contrast, postmodernism suggests that customers are faced with a vast variety of choices among a proliferation of products, brands, and businesses; thus, the organizations have to fragment their customers and launch products and services that can reach the customers' demands. Based on postmodernism, the satisfaction and needs of customers are considered rather than solely persuading customers to buy products.

Training Employees

Undoubtedly, the employees play a major role and influence the operation of an organization. They have to directly interact with customers and encounter customer demands, which lead to the emergence of uncertainty as a result of their interactions. Actually, we identify the uncertainty that derives from customer demands as an external factor. If customer demands vary within a predictable range for an organization, it does not affect organizational uncertainty. Normally, however, the nature of demands is more likely to vary based on the customization expected by the customer, which is more unpredictable. Thus, the employees have to create strategies to cope with both organizational uncertainty and customer uncertainty that derives from contact with customers (Skaggs & Huffman, 2003).

Schmenner and Swink (1998) suggested that work teams, employee training, and cross-training will improve employees' ability to manage the uncertainty that is

associated with customer needs. In the same way, Roth and Jackson (1995) articulated that training programs and cross-training will increase the individual competency and knowledge that help to create positive effects on service quality and reduce organizational uncertainty. Moreover, training programs will help employees have effective interaction with their customers which leads to reduction of customers' uncertainty as well.

Similarly, Field, Ritzman, Safizadeh, and Downing (2006), who investigated uncertainty reduction approaches and process performance, found that the implementation of information technology and cross-training facilitate the service quality processes that lead to reduction not only of customer uncertainty but organizational uncertainty, too. Moreover, the organizational policies and processes should encourage and support customer feedback which is very useful for improving the communication strategies of an organization (Easton & Goodale, 2005).

In fact, when organizations have interactions or relationships with their customers, customer interaction is more likely to generate uncertainty in organizations. This notion is supported by Chowdhury and Miles (2006), who examined the level of customer-induced uncertainty that arose in service versus manufacturing firms, and suggested that customer-induced uncertainty develops from an interaction between the organization and the customer. The customer-induced uncertainty has specific influence on adjustments in organizational operations. This research found that customer interaction is one of the most important factors in generating uncertainty in service organizations. It means service organizations are more likely to encounter uncertainty arising from customer interaction, which is called customer-induced uncertainty. Chowdhury and Miles further proposed that

there are three factors that lead to customer-induced uncertainty: customer diversity, customer opportunism, and customer significance.

Customer diversity

The first factor that causes customer-induced uncertainty is customer diversity. A high level of diversity increases the variability of demand which leads to variability in the service organization as well. An organization that has a high level of uncertainty will have difficulty in determining exactly the activities necessary in order to succeed in their business.

Customer opportunism

Opportunism refers to the selfish and deceitful behaviors of the customer. An organization has risk and uncertainty when they confront customer opportunism. The organization's familiarity with its customers and the degree of repeat customers can reduce the uncertainty that occurs from customer opportunism.

Customer significance

The significance of the customer depends on the value of the assets and benefit that the customer gives to the organization. The organization will lose profit if the customer intends to oppose the organizational operation and products.

Field et al. (2006) used hierarchical regression analysis to examine the associations of uncertainty coping approaches, including training, cross-training, use of teams, and use of the information technology with service quality. The findings showed that the set of uncertainty coping approaches is significantly associated with service quality. It means training employees can increase the abilities of employees. This usually leads to service quality and reduction of organizational uncertainty and customers' uncertainty.

Implementing communication strategies through employees will be more effective when employees have enough abilities to cope with the pressures and problems that result from interaction with customers. Traditionally, communication with customers in the modernist perspective is based on mass media, including television, radio, or newspapers rather than personal media. For the postmodernist perspective, communication with customers is likely to be more personalized, customer-oriented, and relationship-based; thus, employees are much more important for communication strategies and play major roles in reducing customers' uncertainty. Interpersonal communication (face-to-face between employee and customer) helps organizations to receive feedback from customers more immediately than mass communication, which has delayed feedback. For these reasons, the organizations attempt to pay attention in training programs for developing employees' competency.

Fast Food Restaurants

The fast food restaurant is the last concept that is very important in this study. Thus, in this part, I reviewed the main topics and attributes that are related to fast food restaurants. The inquiry in this part will lead to an understanding of the characteristics of McDonald's quick service restaurants and be beneficial for analyzing and interpreting the outcomes of the data collection.

The Attributes of Fast Food Restaurants

The attributes of fast food restaurants are an important topic that has been discussed in both Western and Asian contexts. I assumed that there are many attributes that influence on purchasing products or services of fast food restaurants. Park (2004), who studied consumer values of eating-out and consumption in fast food restaurants in Korea, defined consumer behaviors of eating-out at fast food restaurants

in two terms: hedonic value, that is, enjoyment, and utilitarian value. He further explained that the hedonic value had a significant correlation with mood, quick service, cleanliness, location, promotional incentives, taste of food, variance of menu, employee kindness, reputation, and facilities; whereas, the utilitarian value correlated well with price, quick service, and promotional incentives. Interestingly, price, quick service, and promotional incentives including special discounts, events, and sales promotion are more important and appealing attributes of fast food restaurants whatever the value. Indeed, utilitarian value has an influence on purchasing products or services in fast food restaurants. Customers consider fast food restaurants as an economical and convenient place to eat out.

However, cultural differences could be an important factor which causes customers to have different perceptions and satisfaction about fast food restaurants. This notion is supported by several researchers. For example, Park (2004) indicated that Korean fast food restaurants are more likely to be concerned with the hedonic value rather than utilitarian value. It means that fast food restaurants in the Korean perception are not only eating-places but are enjoyable and social places also. Consequently, most young Korean people consider fast food restaurants a place of eating-out and meeting even if the price of fast food is not cheap. In addition, Brady, Robertson, and Cronin (2001), who studied a cross-cultural assessment of the effects of service quality, service value, and satisfaction on American and Ecuadorian fast food customers, found that, in Ecuador, people visit a fast food restaurant because they prefer to spend their money for obtaining a novelty and purchasing products or services from an American franchise fast food restaurant rather than focusing on food options.

The phenomena that occur with Korean and Ecuadorian fast food restaurants are consistent with Hofstede (1980), who argued that Ecuador is a high-power distance country. People in this culture emphasize the emotional gratification of the dining experience rather than the expense for service value. In the same way, Park (2004) observed that the communication strategies that Korean fast food restaurants prefer to execute with Korean customers, who are high- power distance, to increase sales concentrate on mood, various menus, kindness of employees, reputation and image, and facilities rather than price. We can argue that fast food restaurants, which represent global marketing, attempt to adapt their attributes to be compatible with local markets and customers.

Conversely, for American customers, the fast food restaurant is a place that is convenient for purchasing inexpensive food. This means the service value is a significant attribute for American fast food customers (Park, 2004). Knutson (2000), who produced survey research to rate the attributes that influence students' choices among fast food restaurants, found that the first tier, that is an important determinant of fast food restaurants, includes low price, speed of service, consistency, and convenient location. Particularly, for the customers who are younger than 25, price is the most important factor for fast food choices. However, the results of this study showed that, today, customers are more concerned about the cleanliness and friendliness of the fast food restaurants. The second tier of attributes that concern customers includes speed, menu variety, and location. The last tier includes short-term promotions, discount, add-on coupons, promotions for new menu items, atmosphere, and the drive through, respectively.

In addition, Knutson (2000) found that more than two-thirds of this sample of college students viewed McDonald's as a kid-friendly place. Also, Ronald McDonald can create a brand image among college students. McDonald's can establish an image as a cultural icon, giving it a powerful advantage over the competition. This usually allows McDonald's to lead in the quick service segment; whereas, the collegiate sample thought that KFC was not able to create a brand image in the fast food market. The convenience that can be defined in terms of accessibility or nearby locations is one component that fast food restaurants use to expand their service industry and increase sales. This notion was supported by Jekanowski, Binkley, and Eales (2001), who explored accessibility as a convenient characteristic of fast food restaurants and the demand for fast food, found that the fast food industry attempts to make products and services easily available for customers, so it is not necessary to travel far to purchase fast food products. Certainly, the greater availability leads to an increase of quantity consumption for fast food. Moreover, the results of this study indicated that the fast food menu prices increase to compensate for the decrease of traveling costs when the distance to fast food restaurants declines. The result of this study strongly confirmed the fact that the increase in consumer demand for fast food results from an increase in the degree of convenience, which is the number of outlets, rather than a change in the nature of demand.

Jekanowski et al., (2001) further discussed that when we compare inexpensive restaurants which can provide meals that are of equal or higher quality than fast food restaurants given the same retail price, fast food is still considerably cheaper if we compute the time cost of acquiring a meal from inexpensive restaurants. Nevertheless, Jekanowski et al. found that the increase in the number of fast food outlets does not

have an effect on the growth of inexpensive or family-owned restaurants, since the factors that facilitate the expansion of market segmentation between fast food restaurants and inexpensive restaurants are apparently different.

Furthermore, recent studies of fast food restaurants have been increasingly interested in improving health-related behaviors in fast food restaurants. Because several scholars in this area assume that food vendors play an important role in shaping individuals' eating behaviors, invention of some healthy menus and healthy menu promotion in the restaurants are strategies that have been implemented to encourage the purchase of healthy food. Strategies include presenting nutrition information about calories of food items and offering daily specials on healthy menu with promotions. Healthy menu interventions can increase knowledge and create attitudes pertaining to healthy behaviors; however, the effect on behaviors is less mentioned (Richard, O'Loughlin, Masson, & Devost, 1999).

Richard et.al. (1999) studied the feasibility of an intervention of healthy menu options in a fast food restaurant (FFR) and a family-style restaurant (FSR) in low income neighborhoods. There were many important results. First, the FSR provided more healthy menus and variety of healthy selections than the FFR. Second, the FSR customers preferred to order from healthy menus and rate their eating habits more positively than FFR customers. Third, the intervention of some healthy menus and healthy menu promotion can encourage FSR customers to improve their healthy eating behaviors. Finally, presenting healthy menus in terms of "daily specials," that offer economic incentive, can encourage FSR customers to order from healthy menus rather than regular menus. Additionally, these daily specials motivate FSR customers more than FFR customers.

These findings by Richard et al. (1999) also showed differences in the proportion of male and female customers who ordered a healthy menu in each restaurant. In the FSR, the percentages of male and female customers who ordered from the healthy menu are 80 and 74, respectively; whereas the percentages of male and female customers in the FFR who ordered from the healthy menu are 17 and 22, respectively. Furthermore, the results showed that the percentages of customers who have good eating habits in the FSR and FFR are very different, 81 and 19, respectively.

One could speculate that, actually, FFR customers are likely to visit FFRs because of convenience; the restaurant is located near their place of residence or work and saves time. (These are reasons that customers visiting FFRs are not related to food offerings.) Consequently, FFR customers pay less attention to healthy menus. They will be interested in selecting new menu options when they feel dissatisfied or bored with the regular menus. In addition, Regan (1987), who studied nutrition promotion in commercial food service, indicated that not only economic promotion encourages customers to order from healthy menus, but also taste is an important factor in appealing to customers to adopt healthy menus.

Wootan, Osborn, and Malloy (2006), who studied the availability of nutrition information at a fast food restaurant, articulated that, even though fast food restaurants have been requested to provide calorie counts and other nutrition information on menus, it is difficult to access nutrition information at the fast food restaurants. For example, forty percent of McDonald's outlets did not provide nutrition information for the majority of their menu items. Some outlets that provide nutrition information are more likely to inform through tray liners (43%) where it is difficult to observe the

information. The other channels that fast food restaurants used to provide nutrition information are pamphlets (43%), posters (5%), and one-page charts (10%). In the same way for KFC restaurants, the researchers observed that two-thirds of KFC restaurants in Washington, DC, did not provide any nutrition information in the restaurants. The restaurants which did provide this information were more likely to place information behind a large candy machine, on in-store displays, or keep brochures behind the counter in case customers requested information.

After reviewing the literature regarding modern fast food restaurants (Knutson, 2000; Park, 2004; Saowapark, 1996), there are twelve factors that may provoke customers' uncertainty. These constructs also influence the purchasing of products and services at fast food restaurants. The twelve constructs include price, promotional incentives, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition and reputation or image.

In this study, I predicted that these twelve constructs, based on American subjects, will have a similar impact upon Thai customer uncertainty regarding McDonald's products and services. I was interested in examining the degrees of customer uncertainty in each construct compared with the frequency of visits to McDonald's restaurants. Based on my assumption, the frequency of visits is associated with intimacy. It means that high-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of intimacy and trust with McDonald's. Since the customers who visit frequently will have more opportunities to engage with communication, products, and services of the restaurant, they are more trustworthy and intimate with McDonald's. Also, levels of intimacy are associated with levels of trust and uncertainty. When levels of intimacy are high, levels of trust

will increase and degrees of uncertainty will decrease. Berger and Calabrese (1975) supported this notion, having reviewed several studies that support Axiom 4. The main concept of Axiom 4 is that low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy. They further argued that when persons increase communication with one other, the levels of uncertainty between them decreases. Based on the relationship between trust and uncertainty, when the levels of uncertainty decrease, the degrees of trust will increase. In order to measure the degree of trust and uncertainty in each construct compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants, I proposed the following hypotheses:

- H1: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.
- H1a: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the caring dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1b: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the reliability dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1c: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the dependability dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1d: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the competency dimension than low-frequency customers.

- H1e: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the faith dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H1f: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the customer loyalty dimension than low-frequency customers.
- H2: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.
- H2a: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in price construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2b: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in promotional incentives construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2c: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in location construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2d: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in cleanliness construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2e: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in friendliness construct than low-frequency customers.

- H2f: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in atmosphere construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2g: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in speed construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2h: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in facilities construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2i: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in taste construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2j: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in menu variety construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2k: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in nutrition construct than low-frequency customers.
- H2l: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in reputation and image construct than low-frequency customers.

Other interesting issues were also pursued, including the communication strategies that McDonald's tended to use to build trusting relationships and reduce uncertainty among the customers. Additionally, the analysis of the customers'

experiences on uncertainty, which they encountered during the interaction with McDonald's restaurants, was part of the plans, including the investigation of strategies that McDonald's customers employed to acquire more information and reduce their uncertainty. These indicated issues were pursued and presented through these research questions:

RQ1: What are the communication strategies McDonald's uses to provide information to the customers.

RQ1a: How does McDonald's use communication strategies to build trusting relationships with the customers?

RQ1b: How does McDonald's express uncertainty regarding how well the communication strategies work to reduce customers' uncertainty?

RQ2: Do McDonald's customers experience uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant?

RQ3: What information-seeking strategies are used by customers in a McDonald's restaurant to reduce their uncertainty?

The results from answering these research questions led to an increased understanding about providing information and building trustful relationship with customers and executing communication strategies in a postmodernist perspective. Also, the outcomes of this research provided the extensive inquiry about Uncertainty Reduction Theory and information-seeking strategies in the context of relationships between organizations, especially the international quick service restaurants, and their customers. When the knowledge obtained here is integrated, the strategies of the

McDonald's restaurant and the strategies that customers use, this information can enlighten us in the sense that McDonald's restaurants and their customers can maintain the sustainable long-term interaction among them.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I used a mixed methodology, including qualitative and quantitative methods, to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The sequences in this study started from a qualitative approach. I conducted in-depth interviews with the Communications and PR Director and the Communications and PR Consultant of McThai Company, who are responsible for creating and employing the communication strategies to provide information, build trusting relationships, and reduce uncertainty among their customers. Also, I used in-depth interviews to investigate the information-seeking strategies that Thai customers executed to reduce the uncertainty that occurred in their relationship with McDonald's. Finally, I conducted focus group interviews with customers to discuss their information-seeking strategies and their uncertainty. The second phase was driven by the quantitative method in which I used survey research to measure the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty compared with the frequency of visiting a McDonald's restaurant.

Phase One—Qualitative Method

In this phase, I conducted the interviews and focus groups to answer three research questions.

RQ1: What are the communication strategies McDonald's uses to provide information to the customers?

RQ1a: How does McDonald's use communication strategies to build trusting relationships with the customers?

RQ1b: How does McDonald's express uncertainty regarding how well the communication strategies work to reduce customers' uncertainty?

RQ2: Do McDonald's customers experience uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant?

RQ3: What information-seeking strategies are used by customers in a McDonald's restaurant to reduce their uncertainty?

Data Collection Methods

Document Analysis

In order to gain insights into the McDonald's Company, customers' perspectives, and communication strategies in the postmodern perspective, I conducted an extensive information search in three main aspects. First was general information about McDonald's quick service restaurants in Thailand, including history, mission, vision, business policy, management plan, operation and performance of the corporation, products/services, communication strategies and channels, attitudes and values towards customers and customer services, and crises and achievements of the company. The second aspect was information about McDonald's Thai customers' perceptions, doubts, uncertainty, comments/complaints, and suggestions about McDonald's products and services. For the third aspect, I researched the perspective of postmodernism to better understand communication strategies in the marketing contexts that organizations prefer to use to provide information and build trusting relationships as well as reduce the doubts of their customers. I looked for these types of information through various channels, including

websites, newspapers, magazines, brochures, leaflets, McDonald's annual reports, and McDonald's journals. I used the results of my search on these two aspects from document analysis to construct interview protocols and procedures in order to interview the McThai Communications and PR Director and the Communications and PR Consultant and and McDonald's customers.

In-depth Interviews of McDonald's Director and Consultant

Participant Recruitment

I had the intention to interview the Communications and PR Director and the Communications and PR Consultant in the Communication and Public Relation Department of McThai Company, McDonald's in Thailand, in order to gain knowledge and information about communication strategies that McDonald's executes for its Thai customers to provide information and build trusting relationships as well as reduce uncertainty among its customers. After conducting the document analysis of the organizational structure of McDonald's, I found that McThai Company Limited is a franchise restaurant owner and operator from McDonald's Corporation. It bought the franchise to operate McDonald's restaurants in Thailand.

I recruited the Communications and PR Director and the Communications and PR Consultant as my participants through the Communications and Public Relations Department of McThai Company that is responsible for creating communication strategies with McDonald's customers. I informally contacted the officers in this department in order to introduce myself, briefly explain my dissertation, inform them of the purpose of the interview, and ask for cooperation. The officers coordinated with their head and made appointments for interviews after they had obtained formal letters from Bangkok University and Ohio University to confirm this plan.

These participants were adequate samples because they have direct authority and responsibility to determine the communication strategies of McDonald's quick service restaurants in Thailand. I gained the knowledge, information, and experiences of the communication strategies that the McThai Company executed to manage McDonald's restaurants in Thailand as appropriate for Thai customers and society. I reached data saturation, meaning the information from additional data collection was redundant, and no new information was created from responses (Schensul et al., 1999).

Interview Procedures

Based on the suggestion of Lindlof and Taylor (2002), I created the interview procedures in this way. The interview procedure started from the time I contacted the Communication Department of McThai Company by myself to submit a formal letter of intent. In the letter, I introduced myself and informed them of the importance of this study. Furthermore, I described the details of the interview process, including the purpose of the interview, the direction of questions, and the benefits the McThai Company would gain from participating in this interview.

The interview process took place at the head office of McThai Company, which was a convenient place for participants. Face-to-face communication was conducted because I could observe more information while interviewing. I introduced myself before interviewing and tried to create a relationship with participants. I intended to use semi-structured questions to collect the data and probe for other questions, useful for answering the main research questions relating to McDonald's communication strategies (see Appendix A for the protocol). The participants were flexible in sharing the ideas relating to the research questions as well.

In addition, I explored the participants' perspectives about implementing integrated marketing communications in the business of quick service restaurants. Thus, I gained a broader perspective of communication strategies which McDonald's restaurants used to provide information and build trusting relationships, as well as reduce uncertainty among their customers. However, I confirmed the participants' rights so that they could refuse to answer some questions that were confidential. I took notes of the important things and events that I observed from the interviews and recorded my general impression of the interview; how it enhanced my understanding and vision of communication strategies in quick service restaurants. I spent 120 minutes interviewing the CPRD and the CPRC.

In-depth Interviews of McDonald's Customers

Participant Recruitment

I set up interviews to obtain information about the information-seeking strategies that McDonald's customers executed to reduce their uncertainty because I predicted that, in the relationship between McDonald's restaurants and their customers, the customers would probably encounter uncertainty about the products, services, or performance of McDonald's restaurants that might lead to negative responses such as decreased purchase intentions. I recruited twelve McDonald's customers as my participants until I reached theoretical saturation in participant responses and no new themes emerged from the additional participants. I approached my participants by contacting them in front of the McDonald's restaurants in Bangkok. I created a good relationship with customers whom I wanted to interview and clearly introduced myself, my purpose, and the process of the interviews, including the benefits that customers gained as participants. After that, I made

appointments with participants for interviews. All appointments were conducted at the time and place convenient for participants. When I approached an individual who declined to be interviewed, I just connected with other customers who had the characteristics consistent with the criteria of my dissertation and the time to share the information.

Identifying Participants

For this phase, I chose twelve participants: six males and six females. All of them were gained through a purposive sampling frame. They were aged between 20 and 59 years old. Also, they must have personal experiences visiting McDonald's restaurants, purchasing the products, or using other services of the restaurants for at least six months. I determined this period based on the literature reviewed that studied service quality, service value, and satisfaction for American and Ecuadorian fast food customers (Brady et al., 2001). There are three reasons supporting my decision to determine people in this group as my participants.

First, McDonald's restaurants targets people in this group. Based on document analysis, I found that McDonald's restaurants are attempting to expand their customer base by providing specialized products and services to support customers in each time segment. McDonald's believes that today's customers are more diversified; it is necessary to segment customers and focus on their demands in order to provide different products to support customers in each segment. McDonald's segments their customers into six groups based on time periods within a day. McDonald's serves a morning menu between 5 a.m. to 11 a.m., a lunch menu between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., snack teatime between 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.; night snacks from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., and night and easy menus after midnight to 5 a.m. Obviously, McDonald's targets their

customers in many groups, including adolescents, young adults, adult persons, and families (GotoKnow, 2008).

Second, I specifically chose people in this age group because they are adults; people who have the potential to buy the products and services of McDonald's restaurants. Moreover, I observed that people in this group were more likely to engage in various activities in McDonald's restaurants apart from eating their meals by themselves. They were also eating with their families, meeting with friends, using computers to study or work, or talking business with their partners. Based on their experiences about products and services of McDonald's restaurants, people in this group could share their information and experiences about customers' uncertainty and information-seeking strategies they used to reduce uncertainty.

Finally, adults are concerned about uncertainty. They could describe the uncertainty that they had while interacting with quick service restaurants and shared the strategies that they employed to reduce their uncertainty. I did not select the customers who were younger than 20 years old because customers in this group were adolescents and not as concerned with uncertainty. According to Saowapark (1996), who studied the influence of market communications that affect fast food consumption behavior, people who are younger than 20 years old are adolescents. Normally, adolescents do not recognize uncertainty. They are more likely to try new things or brands, so they cannot explain any experiences which are related to uncertainty.

Interview Procedures

Based on the suggestion of Lindlof and Taylor (2002), I created the interview procedures in this way. The interview process occurred at the place and time that I

arranged with participants. I began the interview by introducing myself. The participants could consider the interview protocol before the discussion. Also, I explained to them about the participants' right to refuse to answer any questions. Because I used semi-structured questions that were flexible, my participants and I could discuss and probe into the issues of customers' uncertainty, the information-seeking strategies that customers employed, and the customers' perspectives, regarding McDonald's products and services (see Appendix B for the protocol). For example, questions included what information customers wanted McDonald's restaurants to provide to them, what information McDonald's restaurants did not provide for them, but they expected to receive, how customers employed information-seeking strategies about McDonald's restaurants, and whether they received adequate information from McDonald's restaurants.

Sometimes, I used the probing questions with participants to collect subsequent, and more descriptive, data. In addition, I asked participants to describe the important events that ultimately contributed to the richness of the data. I strongly believed that I could explore the issues concerning customers' uncertainty and information-seeking strategies from these participants to answer my research questions. Since these were face-to-face interviews, I could also observe interview context and facial expression of the participants.

I took note of the important stories, accompanied with tape recording. I spent 40 to 60 minutes interviewing each participant.

Focus Group Interviews

Participant Recruitment

In the next step of data collection, I conducted the focus group or group interviews which have been employed in academic social science research for decades (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I conducted the focus groups with McDonald's customers to discuss with them about their uncertainty and information-seeking strategies that they employed to reduce their uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. The focus group provided opportunities for discussion among participants. Thus, the issues that participants did not want to share in the interview process would hopefully emerge. I picked up on interesting issues from the in-depth interviews with the McDonald's customers and used them in the extensive discussion to gain detailed information.

Similarly, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated that the focus group is a tool for people's responses and an opportunity for sharing experiences about products, services, and candidates. Moreover, the customers' uncertainty is a somewhat sensitive and complex issue that needs to be analyzed. The focus group method provided participants with more opportunities and more comfort to express their ideas and experiences with each other. The ideas of members in the group stimulated other members to share their ideas, including interesting and useful anecdotes, and helped me completely answer the research questions about customers' uncertainty and customers' strategies to acquire information to reduce their uncertainty. The focus group helped the researcher access more and deeper information from groups of people.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) further stated that the interaction within the group encourages people to share broad ideas and add their observations as they collaborate on a project. The people in the group can produce argumentative interactions which make researchers gain more knowledge and information for analyzing the potentially important phenomenon. I set up two focus groups for McDonald's customers until I reached the data saturation regarding customers' uncertainty and information-seeking strategies that customers employed to reduce uncertainty. In each focus group, I selected six to twelve participants, both males and females, aged between 20 and 59 years old. The number of persons in each group was determined based on Lindlof and Taylor (2002), who argued that the optimal size for a focus group is from six to twelve persons. If there are fewer six people in the group, the researcher will gain less diverse information whereas, if there are more than twelve persons, some in the group may lose the focus on the specific topic.

I contacted, and created good relationships with, the McDonald's customers I met in the restaurants. I introduced myself and clearly explained to them the purpose of this study. The next procedure was to make appointments with McDonald's customers and set a place and time for the focus group interview. When some participants did not engage in this process, I invited other customers, again at least six people per focus group. Based on my experiences with conducting group interviews, I believed that a good relationship and the incentives I offered participants facilitated the process of approaching McDonald's customers and also made them willing to participate and cooperate.

Identifying Participants

The characteristics of participants whom I recruited for the focus group interviews were the same characteristics of the participants that I recruited for in-depth interviews with McDonald's customers, based on the same reasons.

Interview Procedures

Based on the suggestion of Lindlof and Taylor (2002), I created the interview procedures in this way. The focus group interviews were conducted at the place and time that were agreed upon with participants. I started this process by introducing myself and referring to the purpose of this study. The interview protocol and semi-structured questions were used to collect the data so that the participants could discuss and share their ideas and experiences throughout (see Appendix C for the protocol).

Moreover, participants were given the option of examining the direction of the questions from the interview protocol before beginning. I informed them about their right to refuse to answer any questions. I began the interview with general questions, then asked the questions and began the sharing of experiences that focused specifically on customers' uncertainty. I incorporated interesting issues that I found from the in-depth interviews to the focus group interviews to discuss and share additional ideas. For example, if the data from an in-depth interview showed that most customers had uncertainty about the nutrition of McDonald's products, I would discuss the nutrition issue in the focus group interviews. While the focus group process was going on, I observed the focus group context and facial expressions of participants, taking note of the important anecdotes accompanying the tape recording. The interview range for each focus group was from 60 to 90 minutes.

I recognized one point when conducting the focus group interviews called the group effect. Morgan (1988) indicated that the group effect results from interactions within a group. The researcher will gain some explicit data from the group effect that stimulates a discussion of ideas or experiences. Kitzinger (1994) proposed that there are two kinds of group effect: complementary interactions and argumentative interactions. Complementary interactions means the participants can broadly present their ideas, observations, and sensitive topics in terms of anecdotes, songs, and slang; argumentative interactions refers to a combination of people that leads to a cleavage of opinion or split views among participants. The focus group process provides chances to explore the interpretations, perceptions, and personal experiences of participants that relate to the social component.

Interpretive Interviews

The type of interview that I employed in this study is the interpretive interview. Many researchers have employed the interpretive interview. For example, Burrell and Morgan (1979) argued that an interpretive interview demonstrates the reality constructed from the participants' experiences and perspectives. According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), one of the purposes of an interpretive interview is to ask questions with participants about stories that the researcher wants to explore and different perspectives that he or she wants to receive from different participants' experiences. Similarly, Van Manen (1990) stated that an interpretive interview examines the important and interesting experiences of participants rather than to solve specific problems. This means that, in the process of interpretive interviews, the participants are asked to reflect on their experiences, opinions, and comments about the topic that the researcher wants to pursue. Based on this interview technique, the

researcher considers the differences of participants' experiences that lead to interpretation of the circumstances and constructions of the realities in different ways.

For this study, I used the interpretive interview to collect the data from the participants. I believed that this interview technique was appropriate for this study because the participants I recruited had experiences and perspectives in consistent with the issues that I wanted to examine in this study. Moreover, an interpretive interview provided me with more opportunities to read opinions and obtain both participant knowledge and experience. In other words, to utilize the interpretive interview, participants not only told their stories, but also interpreted the events based on their experiences and perspectives. For example, in the in-depth interview and focus group with McDonald's customers, the interpretive interview constructed and sketched the reality of customers' uncertainty and customers' strategies for seeking information to decrease their uncertainty. I explored with the participants what strategies they used in seeking information from McDonald's restaurants to reduce uncertainty and how they were concerned with uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. Hence, in using the interpretive interview technique, the data that I obtained would not be superficial but were sufficiently elaborated in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2008).

Data Analysis Methods

After finishing the qualitative part of my research, I analyzed the three groups of data that I gained from each method: in-depth interviews with executives, in-depth interviews with customers, and focus group interviews with customers. Although I used information I heard in the first two types of interviews to help structure questions for the focus groups, the formal analysis started with transcribing the interview tape.

Then, I examined and re-examined the data several times, so I could connect with the ideas and gain more details. Primarily, the many particular codes were produced from the data. I identified the names of these tentative codes. To continue the process, the codes which seemed to overlap with others were merged into one category. In other words, I found a different way of sorting them. I analyzed these categories and connected them. Again, the categories which seemed similar with others were collapsed into one theme. I attempted to extract the new theme, thematizing, to explain and answer my research questions. I produced the themes that were elicited from the data rather than imposing a set of themes upon the data. In addition, I reviewed the previous research and extracted the former themes in association with the research questions in the current study.

I ensured theoretical saturation. I analyzed and interpreted the data with elaborate and extensive quotations rather than employing surface narration (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Phase Two—Quantitative Method

At this point, I proposed the two main hypotheses. The first is high-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than the low-frequency customers. The second is high-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty, regarding McDonald's products or services than the low-frequency customers. In other words, the hypotheses had to be tested and measured for the level of customers' trust in six dimensions: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty. Also, the levels of customers' uncertainty in twelve constructs including price, promotional incentives, location,

cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition, and reputation or image were tested. I believed that the quantitative data from this phase helped me gain additional information on my topic. This would certainly shed light on my research and provided a substantial explanation of the issue of customers' trust and uncertainty.

The Main Concept of Questionnaire Creation

There were four main concepts from the literature review that I employed to create the questionnaire in this study.

First is the conceptualization of building trusting relationships. Hosmer (1995) revealed that trust can be identified when one person has optimistic expectations about the behaviors of another person. When individuals have trust, they will be confident in one another. This usually leads to exchanging negative personal information between the partners. Similarly, Morrow et al. (2004) pointed out that trust means people believe they will not be exploited in maintaining relational ties.

The dimensionality of trust was another significant issue in creating the questionnaire in this study. Based on the literature on trust, the dimension of trust can be interpreted in many aspects. For example, Renn and Levine (1991) determined the five core components of trust. First, competence presents the levels of technical ability of the source. Second, objectivity refers to the lack of prejudice on information. Third, fairness shows points of view and the attitude of the source. Fourth, consistency or predictability mentions about the trustworthiness of the source. If a person can predict the expressions of another partner, it means the partner is consistent and trustworthy. Last, faith represents the good will of the source. Similarly, Kasperson et al. (1992) argued that the dimension of trust can be explained

based on the four dimensions: commitment, competence, caring, and predictability. Correspondingly, Dwyer et al. (1987) viewed that ability, reliability, and integrity are the main ideas for analyzing the aspects of trust.

Furthermore, McAllister (1995) pointed out that the dimensionality of trust can be categorized into cognitive and affective trust. Cognitive trust is related to reliability and dependability, while affective trust concerns using emotional dimensions to develop a relationship with the partner. Johnson and Grayson (2005) commented that the customers are more likely to establish commitment toward their impressive company and trust in the customer-service relationship.

In the aspect of building business relationships, Weber et al. (1991) demonstrated that developing, maintaining, and improving relationships are the key concepts to building business relationships in highly competitive marketing. Most parties believed that building relationships was a key factor that led to valuable consequences; thus, they make efforts to continually generate and encourage relational relationships with their partners.

The second is the conceptualization of Uncertainty Reduction Theory proposed by Berger and Calabrese (1975). Berger and Calabrese articulated that individuals tend to reduce their uncertainty in order to maintain the relationship with their partners when they have uncertainty. Adequate communication is the main factor that leads to the reduction of uncertainty levels. Thus, the levels of uncertainty tend to depend on the knowledge and understanding of selves and others. According to Parks and Adelman (1983), the lack of communication between partners increases the uncertainty that has deleterious effects on interaction. Berger and Calabrese (1975) further argued that uncertainty reduction involves two components: prediction and

explanation. The prediction and explanation of behaviors of self and others are crucial issues to decreasing uncertainty and developing relationships. Berger and Bradac (1982) explained that there are three situations that provoke uncertainty: doubt of a person's own behaviors, doubt of the other's behaviors, and doubt of a relationship with a partner. Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) studied the factors that increase uncertainty in relationships. They found that unexplainability and unpredictability of behaviors, doubt, loss of contact, and betraying a confidence can cause uncertainty that leads to the termination of the interaction. Although uncertainty can occur in any pattern of interaction, the individuals can reduce uncertainty and maintain the relationships with their partners by creating effective communication with each other.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) initially developed seven axioms to illustrate the associations among the levels of uncertainty and other variables such as communication, information-seeking behavior, intimacy, reciprocity, similarity, and liking. Since the current study specifically focused on examining the connections among uncertainty, communication, information-seeking behavior, and intimacy, Axioms 1 to 4 were explained in this study. Axioms 5 to 7 focused on reciprocity, similarity, and linking are not issues that this study pursued, hence they are not mentioned in this study.

Axioms 1 to 4 are reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Axiom 1: If the amount of verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interactant in the relationship will decrease. During the initial interactions, individuals attempt to seek more information about partners through verbal communication in order to reduce uncertainty.

Axiom 2: As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels will decrease. In an initial interaction situation, nonverbal communication is significant also. Individuals may employ nonverbal communication to seek information from their partners that help them decrease the uncertainty.

Axiom 3: High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information-seeking behavior. The current perspective assumes that in the entry phrase, individuals expect to gain information from their partners. They attempt to seek information about their partners by interrogating each other and self-disclosure that might be instrumental in the reduction of uncertainty.

Axiom 4: High levels of uncertainty cause decreases in the level of intimacy. If individuals continue to interact and communicate with their partners, the level of uncertainty will decrease and that will lead to an increase in intimacy. In other words, when relationships between the partners proceed, the level of intimacy will increase.

Based on the examination on Axiom 4 of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, it can be observed that the interaction with partners, intimacy, and levels of uncertainty are related. Individuals, who continuously interact and communicate with their partners, can see an increase in intimacy that leads to a reduction of uncertainty.

In this study, I assumed that the McDonald's customers who frequently visit McDonald's restaurants tend to have a high level of intimacy and a low level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. Since high-frequency customers have more chances to continuously interact and communicate with McDonald's restaurants, they are more intimate with McDonald's products or services compared with low-frequency customers. Thus, I conducted survey research

to study the degree of customers' uncertainty, regarding McDonald's products or services compare with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants.

Moreover, based on the previous studies of the relationship between trust and uncertainty, when customers reduce their uncertainty, regarding products or services, the level of customers' trust will increase (Ganeson, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Hence, the levels of customers' trust, regarding McDonald's products or services, were also pursued in this survey research.

The third area of study was the conceptualization of uncertainty about products or services (Bennett & Harrell, 1975; Cox & Rich, 1964; Heiman et al., 2001; Kahnemann & Tversky, 1984). For example, Mitchell (1999) found that, when customers lack information or knowledge about companies' products or services, uncertainty can occur in the relationship. According to Knight (1948), the uncertainty arises when knowledge or information is inadequate. Moreover, Heiman et al. (2001) explained that uncertainty arises from when the products' ability is incompatible with the customers' needs. Furthermore, the customers' uncertainty can be analyzed in terms of objective and subjective components. The objective component is related to product failure; whereas, the subjective component is related to the customers' demands that are not consistent with the outcome of the product or service. In addition, Bennett and Harrell (1975) reported that uncertainty refers to customers' ability to accurately judge the performance of products or services that they have experienced. According to Kahnemann and Tversky (1984), the customers' uncertainty can be measured from the situations in which the customers' expectations are different from the actual customers' experiences. Besides, Cox and Rich (1964) demonstrated that uncertainty is relevant to product evaluation. When uncertainty

occurs, it is difficult to make the decision about products or services in which customers have experiences.

The final area of study is the conceptualization of fast food restaurants (Knutson, 2000; Park, 2004; Saowapark, 1996). After having reviewed the previous research associated with fast food restaurants, I found there were twelve constructs related to customers' uncertainty: price, promotional incentives, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition, and reputation or image. Additionally, these constructs influenced the purchase intention regarding products and services of fast food restaurants. According to Knutson (2000), the most important determinants of fast food restaurants include low price, speed of service, consistency, and convenient location. Today, customers are also concerned about the cleanliness and friendliness of the fast food restaurant as well. The second determinants of fast food restaurants are speed, menu variety, and location. The last determinants include short-term promotions, discount and promotions for new menu items, atmosphere, and whether there is a drive through option. For this study, I assumed that the twelve constructs could provoke customers' uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. Thus, a questionnaire was created to examine the level of customers' uncertainty about the twelve constructs compared with the frequency of customers visiting McDonald's restaurants. The information in these concepts helped create a clear understanding on the attributes, dimensions, and measurement of customers' trust and uncertainty regarding products and services of fast food restaurants. Also, these concepts provided knowledge about the association among trust, uncertainty, communication, and intimacy or frequency. Thus, I used information from these concepts for questionnaire creation.

The Procedure of Questionnaire Creation

I created a questionnaire to answer the hypotheses through these following steps:

First, I integrated the information I gained from the literature review: the building of trusting relationships, the axioms in the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, the uncertainty about products or services, and the concept of fast food restaurants.

Second, previous studies that measured the level of customers' trust through dimensionality of trust were reviewed (Ouyang, 2010). Ouyang's study was used as a guideline for developing twenty items to reflect customers' trust regarding McDonald's products or services. Based on the previous studies, we can evaluate trust or distrust from the sources on dimensional trust. Thus, the degree of customers' trust, regarding McDonald's products or services, was measured through these dimensions: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty. I used a Likert-type scale that had four points: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree to reflect the degree of customers' trust.

Third, I reviewed the previous research that described the scale for measuring the customer perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) as a guideline for creating items of the questionnaire that measured customers' uncertainty. I created four items to measure the uncertainty of McDonald's customers for each of the constructs. Consequently, there were forty-eight items that reflected the customers' uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services in each of the twelve constructs: price, promotional incentives, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition, and reputation or image. The levels of customers' uncertainty in these constructs were measured through a

Likert-type scale with four points: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Finally, the instrument was reviewed by my advisor to consider the accuracy and precision of content and language.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was the instrument that I used to collect the data about the level of customers' trust and uncertainty. The questionnaire had three sections. The first section dealt with respondents' demographic characteristics such as sex, age, education, occupation, and income. Moreover, this section has one item concerning how often respondents visited McDonald's fast food restaurants.

The second part included twenty items measuring the level of customers' trust, regarding McDonald's products or services, in six dimensions: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer. Measurement was on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The third section included twenty items, four items in each construct, measuring the levels of customers' uncertainty compared with the frequency of customer visiting McDonald's restaurant. Measurement was on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Based on the document analysis and literature review, I predicted that there were twelve sub-constructs of uncertainty: price, promotional incentives, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition, and reputation or image. I did not know exactly how many constructs of uncertainty, regarding McDonald's products or services, McDonald's Thai customers encountered; therefore, I created an uncertainty instrument consisting of twelve

constructs in 48 items (four items in each construct). The in-depth interviews revealed there were only five constructs: price, promotional incentives, facilities, taste, and nutrition about which Thai customers had uncertainty. As a result, I removed the seven constructs that were not relevant to customers' uncertainty and tested the hypothesis in five constructs. The data from the qualitative methods was used to refine the uncertainty instrument.

The Criteria for the Weighted Score

I measured the level of customers' trust and uncertainty through a Likert-type scale with a four-point scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. I determined the criteria for weighted scores of each scale in these following items:

Customers' trust

Strongly Agree	scores	4
Agree	scores	3
Disagree	scores	2
Strongly Disagree	scores	1

If the respondents had scores from 1.00 to 2.50, it indicated low levels of customers' trust. While the respondents who had scores from 2.51 to 4.00 represented high levels of customers' trust.

Customers' uncertainty

Strongly Agree	scores	4
Agree	scores	3
Disagree	scores	2
Strongly Disagree	scores	1

If the respondents had scores from 1.00 to 2.50, it indicated high levels of customers' uncertainty. While the respondents who had scores from 2.51 to 4.00 represented low levels of customers' uncertainty (Onketphol, 2005).

Pilot Study

I used the back-translation technique to develop my questionnaire before conducting the pretest. The questionnaires were pretested with sixty respondents from my primary group to check the accuracy of questions. When some questions were not completed, I revised them before doing further data collection.

Quantitative Data Collection Methods

Identifying the Sample

The sample in this study would be categorized as two types: McDonald's restaurants and McDonald's customers. For McDonald's restaurants, I randomly selected McDonald's restaurants located in Bangkok as my representative samples. For McDonald's customers, I used purposive sampling to select McDonald's customers who were between 20 and 59 years old and had personal experiences visiting McDonald's restaurants to purchase the products or use the services in the past six months.

Sampling Procedure

Based on document analysis, there were 90 McDonald's restaurants in Bangkok (McThai, 2008b). I used simple random sampling to select the McDonald's restaurants. The previous study of quick service restaurants in the Thai context used 25% of the total number of quick service restaurants as criteria for randomizing the representative fast food restaurants (Saowapark, 1996).

This number was adequate for collecting the data. Thus, I randomly selected 25 percent of the total number of McDonald's restaurants, 23 representative samples of McDonald's restaurants. For McDonald's customers, I collected the data from the McDonald's customers by distributing 414 questionnaires ($n = 414$). I determined this number based on Corty's (2007) suggestion that the replicable factor tends to be estimated when the sample size is at least 300. Thus, I believed that a sample of this size could reach the data saturation. I contacted McDonald's customers at the restaurants in order to collect the data. I collected data from 18 customers in each of the 23 McDonald's restaurants.

Questionnaire Distribution

I contacted the McDonald's customers at the 23 representative restaurants. I created relationships with the customers whom I asked for cooperation as my respondents and informed them about the purpose of this study. Also, I indicated the participants' rights and benefits that customers would gain as the participants such as coupons for McDonald's products or movie tickets. I asked the customers some basic questions to ensure that his/her qualifications were consistent with the criteria determined for this study. If the customers had the qualifications consistent with the participants that I wanted to recruit, I would ask the customers to participate. On the other hand, if the customer's qualifications were not associated with the criteria that this study required, it was probable that he/she would recommend other customers as participants.

I distributed 18 questionnaires in six groups to diversify the data collection. The six time segments corresponded to the time divisions used by McDonald's to plan its menu offerings. Thus, I distributed approximately 3 questionnaires in each group. I

recognized that it might be difficult to distribute questionnaires in the quick service restaurants. In case I could not distribute the questionnaires in the McDonald's restaurants, I would request my respondents to fill-out a questionnaire at a convenient place nearby. I also asked several trained researchers to help me manage the process of filling out questionnaires and pay close attention to the participants. If some customers wished not to complete the questionnaires, I would ask other customers until receiving the exact number of surveys I needed.

Data Analysis Methods

Statistical Analysis

I used SPSS for Windows to analyze the data and descriptive statistics were used for an analysis of the data. There are two main hypotheses in this study.

- H1: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.
- H2: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.

The independent variable was the frequency of customers visiting McDonald's restaurants and was divided into two groups: high-frequency customers and low-frequency customers. The dependent variables were the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. The data were collected with an interval scale; thus, the statistic used to test two hypotheses was a t-test.

There are sources that confirm that a Likert-type scale is often treated as an interval scale. For example, Creswell (2008), referencing Blaikie (2003), stated:

The popular Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) illustrates a scale with theoretically equal intervals among responses. It has become common practice to treat this scale as a rating scale and assume that the equal intervals hold between the response categories. However, we have no guarantee that we have equal intervals. Hence, often the Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) is treated as both ordinal and interval data in educational research. (p. 176)

Furthermore, “although Likert scales are really ordinal scales (definition of ordinal scale), they are often treated as interval scales. By treating this type of agreement scale or attitudinal measurement as interval, researchers can calculate mean scores which can then be compared” (Likert Scales, 2011, p 176).

Reliability

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha. The reliability of the trust instrument and the uncertainty instrument were 0.901 and 0.929, respectively. Based on previous research on fast food restaurants (Lee & Ulgado, 1997), most studies reported a Cronbach’s alpha that exceeded the 0.70 standard recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Table 3.1: Summary of Data Collection and Data Analysis

Research Question / Hypothesis	Statement	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ1	<p>What are the communication strategies McDonald's uses to provide information to the customers?</p> <p>RQ1a: How does McDonald's use communication strategies to build trusting relationships with the customers?</p> <p>RQ1b: How does McDonald's express uncertainty regarding how well the communication strategies work to reduce customers' uncertainty?</p>	<p>Qualitative method</p> <p>In-depth interview</p> <p>McDonald's director and consultant , N=2</p>	<p>Codes, Categories, and Thematizing</p>
RQ2	<p>Do McDonald's customers experience uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant?</p>	<p>Qualitative methods</p> <p>In-depth interviews</p> <p>McDonald's customers, N=12 until reach data saturation and</p>	<p>Codes, Categories, and Thematizing</p>
RQ3	<p>What information-seeking strategies are used by customers in a McDonald's restaurant to reduce their uncertainty?</p>	<p>Two focus groups with McDonald's customers, six persons per each group</p>	<p>Codes, Categories, and Thematizing</p>
Hypotheses	<p>H1: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.</p> <p>H2: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.</p>	<p>Quantitative method</p> <p>Survey Research N = 414</p>	<p>Descriptive Statistics such as frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation, and t-test</p>

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter is divided into two sections to present the results of the current study. The first section presents the results derived from the in-depth and focus group interviews. The qualitative data are presented in accordance with the research questions regarding the communication strategies of McDonald's, McDonald's customers' uncertainty, and information-seeking strategies of McDonald's customers. The second section reports the results of the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire. The quantitative data are presented as the demographics of the respondents, descriptive statistics, and testing of the hypotheses regarding the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty in McDonald's products or services.

Qualitative Results

RQ1: What are the communication strategies McDonald's uses to provide information to the customers?

RQ1a: How does McDonald's use communication strategies to build trusting relationships with the customers?

RQ1b: How does McDonald's express uncertainty regarding how well the communication strategies work to reduce customers' uncertainty?

In order to pursue these research questions, in-depth interviews with the Communications and PR Director (CPRD) and the Communications and PR Consultant (CPRC) of the McThai Company were conducted (CPRD and CPRC, personal communication, June 18, 2510).

Results of RQ1: Communication Strategies to Provide Information to Customers

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

Since the CPRD of the McThai Company has direct authority to provide information to McDonald's customers, she gave detailed information about this issue. The findings from the in-depth interview are also related to the communication strategies executed by McDonald's including integrating marketing communication (IMC), and combining communication channels and instruments. However, McDonald's employs different communication strategies, depending on the situations, products, markets, and targets in order to efficiently provide information to the customers. As the CPRD narrated:

McDonald emphasizes the IMC communication both above the line and below the line. The responsible agents are categorized into two divisions, which are: 1) Marketing Division is the principle sector to communicate with customers using IMC communicative device completely; and 2) PR Communication Division. Normally, PR Division is the supportive center whereas Marketing Division will work on marketing such as designing advertising movie, publicizing on newspaper, using out of home media and having activation ... Sometimes this activation can be noticeable when there is a troop of pompom girls along the Bangkok Transit System (BTS); this can be another instrument of integrated marketing communication depending on campaign, products, target, and market.

The CPRD further explained through these examples:

For example, in the case that McDonald's offers a breakfast day-part menu, our target group is the people who work in the city having rush lifestyles and

catching BTS to work in the offices. When we use our product as a lead, Marketing Division knows exactly which IMC instrument should be used ... For breakfast day-part, we use advertising media through a short movie on TV, radio broadcast, coupon, and girls' youth group to attract and promote people's interest. McDonald's breakfast can fulfill your morning ... When our customers drop by [a] McDonald's restaurant, they can grab and go right away. Hence, the communicative instrument will be mainly looked at the product itself.

For the PR Division, the CPRD recounted:

While Marketing Division uses different media instrument, PR Division will support and work cooperatively altogether with activities organized by the Marketing Division. For example, we invited journalists and did peer-briefing at the same time in the morning ... It is quite irrelevant and useless to publicize our breakfast day-part in the afternoon. It can be noticed that the thinking strategy of our PR will cooperatively work with the Marketing Division.

The CPRD continued:

Another example is when [a] McDonald's restaurant [is] open for 24 hours service. The Marketing Division organizes a group at midnight on Silom Road because our target group is the people, who don't go to sleep until very late at night ... To sum up, during the normal situation McDonald's restaurant usually let the Marketing Division take a lead for the communicative strategy and [the] PR Division will support it ... The information that PR Division proposes will show credibility.

In a crisis situation, the communication strategies that McDonald's used will change.

As the CPRD reflected on this matter:

Nevertheless, during the critical crisis, the role of PR Division will not only back up but also take a lead in some parts ... The role of Marketing Division will be reduced. The communicative strategy during crisis should be the PR communicative instrument because it is more reliable and trustworthy.

Moreover, PR Division will manage for the Third Party to be part of communication ... For example, in the case of H1N1 Flu, McDonald's organized a meeting among groups of certified suppliers, media, and PR Division as the third party to share accurate information and knowledge. Then, the media further convey this particular message to our customers to create understanding ... This is simply a talk from farm to table so that the message sounds more reliable, strong, and valid.

From the interview, it seems reasonable to argue that McDonald's pays attention to carefully selecting the communication instruments used to provide information to the customers.

Results of RQ1a: Communication Strategies to Build Trust Relationships

Based on RQ1a, asking about communication strategies that McDonald's uses to build trusting relationships with McDonald's customers, the CPRD described that McDonald's intention to build trust began when McDonald's was established by Raymond Albert Kroc. The CPRD views building trust as the most significant issue in operating the business. For using communication to build trusting relationships with the customers, the CPRD has broad and interesting ideas. She said that the meaning of "communication" is not restricted only to talking. We can communicate through

products, services, or images that the customers perceive. Subsequently, McDonald's systematically executes various communication strategies to build of trusting relationships with its customers. These are the QSC and V, supplier, and community strategies.

Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value Strategies

The first strategy is QSC and V which stands for Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value. McDonald's decided on QSC and V as a philosophy or main policy for operating a business. McDonald's attempts to communicate and manage these four aspects effectively so that the customers believe the products and services of McDonald's are trustworthy. The CPRD narrated:

In order to create trusting relationships to the McDonald's customers, this can be accomplished in several dimensions. As the first dimension is tangible for customers, McDonald's has used it as the philosophy for business operation; this dimension is QSC and V: Quality, Service, Cleanliness and Value ...

These four aspects are maintained and translated in a form of questionnaires so that the restaurant can check these aspects every day inside the McDonald's around the world and receive feedback from customers. How to check these four aspects can be implemented by using Mystery Shoppers ... In other words, these mystery shoppers are the disguised shoppers who check services based on QSC and V.

Moreover, the Communications and PR Consultant (CPRC) said: "The process of using Mystery Shoppers occurs every month as McDonald's sends these mystery shoppers into the restaurant as other regular customers in order to check the completion of all four aspects of QSC and V." The CPRC continued:

For example, as a matter of quality, we will have questions to check these following aspects such as how the shape of burger is, whether a burger disperses after opening it, how the food temperature is, whether the meat is too dry, burned or not, how [the] French fries are, whether [the] French fries are straight, too salty, or other matters ... Therefore, when the customers enter McDonald's restaurant, they can ensure to receive our premium quality. If they cannot receive them, we can prove and test back from our farm.

The CPRD gave some examples:

For instance, bacteria are found, we can trace back from each producing process of where it comes from either from planting or products transit or from transportation. In terms of transporting fresh products, the truck needs to be air conditioned with appropriate temperature and checked by officers concerned ... After transporting into McDonald's, the temperature needs to be checked again and again before transferring the products inside the cool room and the freezer room, in case that there is black out and the products are left inside there.

The CPRC added:

This is the quality that customers can trust; everything is certified and checked every year. McDonald's products are on the standard in order that customers are confident in McDonald's products and ensure not to cause diarrhea or any abnormality. These are the quality that we give to our customers to build of trusting relationship.

The CPRD further explained:

In term of service, mystery shoppers will notice whether the workers say welcome or smile cheerfully to the customers or not. They also check the cleanliness from a floor, counter until the restroom as a customer ... The results received from the questionnaire are evaluated in measurable scores and transcribed them into international, national, and regional, including Southeast Asian, Asia Pacific and Middle East with the total results of 37 countries ... The results will be looked at the global level and turned into graphs as to look how the trend of the graph in one particular region is and what needed to be corrected.

For the value aspect, the CPRD articulated:

Taking about value, McDonald's has a value menu as another dimension that customers can trust. The value meals arranged here are called EVM, Extra Value Meal, as to guarantee that every time you visit McDonald's, you will receive value; value for money plus sitting in the comfortable environment, without mopping floors to chase customers away ... Customers can comfortably sit and use WiFi service ... Therefore, we guarantee that customers can trust us when they walk in. To sum up, the methods to create trusting relationships can be considered based on these four important aspects mentioned earlier.

From the interview, I found that QSC and V are very important strategies that McDonald's implements to create trust for the customers and operate its business successfully. McDonald's attempts to cultivate this idea with its partners, including customers, employees, and suppliers; however, the most important thing that

McDonald's strongly holds is that McDonald's will not put the business as the first priority in any dimensions.

Supplier Strategy

The second topic is supplier strategy. The CPRD expressed that McDonald's does not build trusting relationships with the customers superficially, but it creates customers' trust from the foundation in every dimension. McDonald's believes that the quality of its suppliers is a significant issue. Since quality suppliers will provide quality food, materials, and equipment to McDonald's, McDonald's can produce quality products and services for its customers as well. When customers receive quality products and services from McDonald's, they build trusting relationships with McDonald's. Consequently, McDonald's attempts to develop and improve the quality of its suppliers.

The CPRD confirmed this by offering the following story:

The trust of supplier is the most important factor that can lead to create trust among customers. McDonald's restaurant not only perceives food safety but also not to buy any product from the suppliers who abuse child labor ...

McDonald's will enter to audit supplier before doing business transaction not only auditing food quality but also talking with HR Director for backtracking six-month documents such as working shift hours of employees, working condition of employees, the safety of employees as fire escape or atmosphere of the organization, including cesspool, restrooms, and canteen for employees ... If there are problems occurred in either case, we decide not to buy products from them. Except that their products are really on the standard, we will give back our comment for them to improve ... If they do not improve this

indicated point, they will not pass our standard and their products will not eventually be purchased even with reasonable price; this is the global policy, not just only in Thailand.

She further explained:

If the suppliers want to be [in a] trading alliance with McDonald's, they need to improve everything; McDonald will then get involved to improve the products as well, such as using soil to improve the surface not to destroy it ... McDonald's company is accused of destroying Amazon Forest. The reasons are that McDonald's is the greatest consumer [of] French fries in the world ... We buy patty beef and hamburger as the biggest company in the world. We buy apples the most and have fish burger as a signature or McDonald's fish burger. Hence, we are the company to buy certain species of fish the most in the world. McDonald then in cooperation with fishermen preserves the water resources and fish species as they are part of our products. Besides, consuming a lot of chickens demand a lot of corn and corn planting for animal food ... With several repetitive planting with the same crop, the soil quality is deteriorated. Therefore, McDonald's in cooperation with Green Peace and other activists suspend to use some areas in the Amazon Valley in order to preserve the land and soil, which is called Open Door Policy ... We work in cooperation as to renovate this world such as improving forests, water resources and agricultural and agriculturist development ... Finally, we will receive good things in return and be able to pass them onto customers.

Community Strategy

Third is the community strategy. McDonald's contributes help and support to the community through the Ronald McDonald's House Charities Foundation. The main point that McDonald's concentrates on in this strategy, is the engagement of McDonald's managers and employees who have worked in that community. Also, the CPRD explained that this strategy is another example of corporate social responsibility (CSR), leading to the creation of permanent, trusting relationships with the customers. As the CPRD recounted the community strategies that McDonald's employs to build trust, she said:

In terms of community, people usually think of giving scholarship, distribute blankets or football, which is only called cosmetic community. In fact, we did things more special than that ... We believed that wherever McDonald's restaurants are, there will be our communities. A branch manager needs to be responsible to get acquainted with community around trade zone within 3 to 5 kilometers; he or she needs to know everything ... Hence, community begins with staffs and branch managers first of all, not from the PR at the head quarter, because we may sometimes too distance.

She continued:

The strategy that we used to reach the community is called Local Store Marketing. The two principle objectives are: 1) To organize small promotion in the trade zone in order to create target selling; 2) To build relationships; for example, McDonald's Future Park Rangsit Mall organized a special event on Mother's Day by setting a Mother and Child Contest. The branch manager needs to make decision that he or she has to participate in this event for this

particular community ... This is another form of sustainable below the line communication because a branch manager will stay in one branch so many years ... Thus, he or she needs to know the neighborhood very well and another layer will be added up as a whole organization as McDonald's.

The CPRC proudly narrated about their community activities:

In term of community, McDonald's usually organized charity to help community and society through Ronald McDonald's House Charities Foundation established by Raymond Albert Kroc. The mission of our foundation is to improve the health and well-being of the children around the world ... We focus on children because children are the future of our nation.

The CPRD described the activities of the foundation:

Nowadays, our foundation consists of more than 300 charters in 52 countries. Thailand is one of the charters following the same mission all over the world. We believed that doing things without following the same rule and disciplinary, we cannot become the principle organization. The foundation registered as the non-profit charitable organization ... Therefore, the strategies of administration and operation will explicitly be separated from McDonald's restaurant. McDonald's will only be the main donators ... Every year McDonald's will celebrate Children Day on 22 November. On the international Children Day, McDonald's will organize an individual campaign in each country. This short campaign takes approximately 4 to 6 weeks to raise fund for the foundation ... For example, every purchase that customers make, including purchasing Happy Meal or anything during this time, will be informed to the customers; this meal is for children ... As soon as customers

purchase, their 1 baht already helps children. McThai then donates another baht, which will be summed up with the total of 2 million baht for the foundation. This particular part is called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which is unlike cosmetic communication.

The CPRC commented:

In Thailand, now we organize 2 main events which are 1) the recreation room for children in the public hospitals with the total of 19 rooms; and 2) the Medicare automobile, including optical service and physical check-up with the total of 39 coaches as of the total ... What we did for it is that this is the 33rd coach of the world and the first coach in Asia. When we enter the community, we start from the McDonald's restaurant in the community first. For instance, we asked McDonald's restaurant staffs in Ayudhya to search for the area and do the survey of which hospital needs a recreation room ... Then we send our team to observe and talk to physicians and nurses.

The CPRD elaborated:

Because of the great foundation, everything has trademark. When some countries organize any event, they will follow the same format ... As to ensure that we will not be out of track and to create the overall image of communication, this sends a single message to create not only memorable image and strong brand but also to show power of creating trust for the overall picture called Speaking One Voice One Message ... Every step needs strategy not just only cosmetic. When McDonald's organizes things for community, we need McDonald's restaurant in the community has the participation and engagement to take responsibility and care about McDonald's activities in that

community as well ... With this reason, McDonald's employees can say that our organization helps this community.

The CPRC stated:

For the Medicare automobiles that enter into each province, we asked our staffs in the system to voluntarily work. Because we are not expert in every field, we then have the main partner who is expertise in the field coming with us for the Medicare automobile ... For example, we are not expert in the optic, our main partner is Top Charoen and Children Welfare Foundation by Red Cross in corporate with this project. When we work for the community, Mr. Ronald will go with us too ... Without talking about burger or selling any of our products, he instead talks with the children to create positive attitudes ... The future project of our foundation that is going to happen is to build foster home as the first foster home in Thailand ... This foster home will be temporary home for parents of any children who are sick of cancer. Sometimes their parents have nowhere to stay while taking care of their sick children, they then can come to stay at our home as to relieve their suffering ... In the morning, they go to take care of their children, and in the evening they can come back here to take a bath, have dinner and rest ... We also ask for some rice and some canned food donation ... Our staffs are contacting the hospitals of what they need, which one they need and how they need this project to come out.

We can observe that McDonald's executes many strategies to build trusting relationships with its customers. McDonald's creates these strategies from the ground up; it is not a superficial strategy like cosmetic communication that focuses on

creating the reputation of the organization without considering the real advantages for customers. Based on the interview, I found that McDonald's tries to create customers' trust through providing quality products, valued services, and good images. Thus, McDonald's believed that QSC and V, supplier, and community are the important strategies that it has to recognize in order to create customers' trust. Moreover, under the same trademark, McDonald's has to produce communications and activities that are consistent and unique. However, in the local marketing aspect, McDonald's should produce products, service, and activities that are compatible with the requirements of the community in which they are located.

Results of RQ1b: McDonald's Expression about Customers' Uncertainty and Communication Strategies to Reduce Customers' Uncertainty

Based on the interview with the CPRD and the CPRC, I found that McDonald's perceives customers are uncertain about taste, price, facilities, and nutrition. Thus, McDonald's has concentrated on controlling and developing the quality of foods and services in order to effectively respond to the customers' uncertainty. For the uncertainty issues, McDonald's prefers to communicate with the customers through its quality products and services. The McDonald's CPRD believed that providing quality foods and services were effective strategies for communicating with the customers. Although McDonald's makes a lot of effort to control the quality and standard of foods and services, it is possible that McDonald's customers may encounter uncertainty. I shared the information about the taste of some McDonald's foods with the CPRD and the CPRC. The CPRD responded to the uncertainty in McDonald's taste as follows:

If customers eat in the same restaurant without having the same taste as it is used to be, they can feedback us right away ... By doing this, we can check what happens in the kitchen, perhaps during the cooking process rather than from the raw materials. McDonald will not change but maintain qualified standard ... On the other hand, cooking process is from man-made so called our staffs. For example, we train our staffs to put chicken into water just for a second; however, they may put it longer than it supposed to be ... We also teach our staffs to mix chicken with flour 4 times each side, but our staffs may do more than that. Hence, the taste may sometimes be different. At one point, human is not a machine. Even machine can still make any mistake ... Therefore, sometimes the staffs may not follow the working process as they are trained; the taste of the food may be different from the original because of their incautiousness.

The CPRD commented further:

However, we can control our raw materials without any changes. Every chicken menu that is sold everywhere can be recalled for the whole batch when anything happens. As a result, when any branch informs the head quarter, we will have QA (Quality Assurance) ... This division will suspend the whole batch of the total system if there are problems occurred with the raw materials ... Then the example will be sent to the lab for checking. While this process will be on hold, the new lot of the total system will be implemented ... We then ensure that McDonald uses the raw material with high quality and stable standard.

Moreover, the CPRD explained that McDonald's attempts to manage the QSC and V philosophy of McDonald's efficiently so that McDonald's customers experience a consistent and standard product taste. Also, McDonald's is willing to receive feedback from the customers to help McDonald's to recheck the operation process of McDonald's restaurant.

Furthermore, I had opportunities to discuss with the CPRD about customers' uncertainty with the price issue. The CPRD explained that McDonald's recognized the importance of the "V" (value) that customers deserve when visiting McDonald's restaurants. Thus, McDonald's offers various promotional menus called EVM, Extra Value Meal, in order that the customers will obtain value for their money. McDonald's also provides good ambience and services, so the customers can expect everything to be convenient and comfortable when coming to a McDonald's restaurant.

For the facility issue, the customers' uncertainty in a McDonald's facility involves the use of paper plates and plastic knives and forks. The CPRD explained that it is global policy to use paper plates and plastic knives and forks. However, she agreed that customers' experiences and requirements are the significant issues to which businesses should pay attention. Thus, it is possible that McDonald's may change the eating equipment to be more appropriate with the expectations of Thai customers. The McDonald's CPRD reflected on her ideas about McDonald's eating tools:

In term of operation, McDonald's restaurants have been operating using the same pattern all over the world ... McDonald's restaurants around the world still use a plastic folk and knife due to the nature of our food. Starting with a

burger, we emphasize “Grab and Go.” After that, McDonald’s restaurants add various menus with chicken.

The CPRC explained further:

In America, there are not as many chicken menus as in Asia, so the use of the paper plate is still maintained. In terms of familiarity or deliciousness, the experience of eating with a paper plate may be different from the real plate.

The CPRD stated:

We have discussed this particular issue in Thailand because McDonald’s wants to give good experiences to the customers ... We start customizing our group of customers increasingly with our own unique style, not only depending on the global trend ... Hence, it is possible in the future that McDonald’s in Thailand will start serving with an actual plate with stainless fork and spoon.

Also, the CPRD and the CPRC recognized the customers’ uncertainty in nutrition. They paid attention to the customers’ recommendations about nutrition and accepted the customer’s ideas. The customers suggested ways to make nutrition information more interesting and less serious by using graphic designs to enable them to understand and accept the information. Then, the customers can reduce their uncertainty in nutrition of McDonald’s products. The CPRD responded to the uncertainty about nutrition as follows:

McDonald’s still has salad menu as another alternative choice for people who need balanced diet ... We also take your point on proposing nutrition information through graphic design because we communicate with our customers in wording in term of calorie comparison between McDonald’s

menus and popular menus of the Thai people such as stir fired noodle with creamy sauce, oily mixed rice with boiled chicken, stir fried noodle with pork ... Actually, our nugget is made from white meat (lean without fat) with much lower calories than some popular Thai food.

The CPRC further discussed the nutrition of the items on the menus in the future: “In the near future, McDonald’s restaurant will offer delicious porridge for customers and more kinds of beverages on milk with natural taste. In fact, when customers order coffee, they can choose to add low-fat milk at McCafé.”

Based on the in-depth interviews with the McDonald’s customers, I found that most customers had uncertainty about McDonald’s promotions because they lacked promotion information. The customers would like McDonald’s to distribute leaflets to their houses so that they received adequate promotion information from McDonald’s. I also had opportunities to discuss this uncertainty with the CPRD and she clearly explained:

When distributing leaflets, we would clarify that our leaflets will be on both household and all corporate areas in Bangkok area and all branches in the country sides ... We distribute our leaflets not over than our trade zone.

Furthermore, when we offer home delivery, our restaurants will observe whether our customers living out of the trade zone or not ... If they live out of the trade zone, it will take more than 15 minutes from McDonald restaurant to our customer’s home ... Thus, we cannot deliver our food or even leaflets to customers living out of our trade zone due to the time and food without standard quality.

The CPRD further described the strategies that work to reduce uncertainty among customers. These strategies can be categorized into two types:

Appropriate Amount of Communication Strategy

The CPRD believed that, when communicating about customers' uncertainty, the communicator should provide appropriate amounts of communication to the customers, not convey too much or too little communication. This is because it may lead to an increase in customers' uncertainty for that issue.

The CPRD said:

When our customers with uncertainty raise any questions or issues on our products or services, for the best strategies, we should not over communicate ... It shows that we have something unusual or something wrong with a lot of excuses. At the same time, we should not under communicate as well ... We should provide adequate information to the customer ... For example, in the case of customer's uncertainty about nutrition, McDonald's will pass on nutrition information through website, so it is available and accessible for our customers; when we compare the calories between McDonald's food and favorite food of the Thai people, the results show that McDonald's food is not as bad as many customers think.

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

Another strategy that works to convey information to reduce uncertainty to customers is integrated marketing communication (IMC) that includes above-the-line and below-the-line communication. The CPRD further explained that the IMC strategy focuses on using various instruments to communicate with the customer thoroughly, three-hundred and sixty degrees of communication. The CPRD thought

that integrated marketing communication helps McDonald's communicate effectively with its customers. Adequate information from the organization can relieve the customer's uncertainty about products or services of the organization. As the CPRD stated:

We use integrated marketing communication, including below the line, above the line, and social media to convey information to customers ... Also, we need to communicate with our customers consistently; if our organization has any problem, our customers can help protect us.

Apart from conveying information to reduce customers' uncertainty through various media, McDonald's prefers to communicate with the customers through quality products and services. As the CPRD said, "We do not need to make our customers believe our organization by perceiving any news from the advertisement; we can create their beliefs based on our customers' experience with our brand, products and services."

In order to answer RQ2 and RQ3, in-depth and focus group interviews were conducted. The participants were McDonald's customers, males and females, aged 20 to 59 years old. The customers must have had personal experiences visiting McDonald's restaurants, purchasing the products, or using other services of the restaurants for at least six months. The participants described their uncertainty, regarding McDonald's products or services, when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant. Also, McDonald's customers talked about the information-seeking strategies that they preferred to employ while seeking McDonald's information that led to a reduction of their uncertainty. Data were collected through the interviewing

process with twelve interviewees: six males and six females. The tapes were transcribed, thematically analyzed, and interpreted.

Another method used was focus group interviews. The two focus groups had six participants each, McDonald's customers who had the same characteristics with the in-depth interviewees. The data from each of these methods were analyzed to answer these research questions:

RQ2: Do McDonald's customers experience uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant?

RQ3: What information-seeking strategies are used by customers in a McDonald's restaurant to reduce their uncertainty?

Results of RQ2: Uncertainty in McDonald's Products or Services

Normally, uncertainty can occur in every pattern and stage of relationships. Also, during the interaction between the customers and the company, the customers may encounter uncertainty regarding the company's products or services. The customers' uncertainty is a significant issue for maintaining the relationship between the customers and the company. If the company does not know about, or understand, the uncertainty of customers, it cannot maintain good relationships with the customers; this can lead to a decrease of purchase intention and failure in business. After analyzing the data, I coded and categorized it to identify any common themes. There were five themes: price, promotion, taste, nutrition, and facilities that caused customers' uncertainty about McDonald's products or services.

Uncertainty about McDonald's Prices

From the in-depth interviews, eight out of the twelve participants, both male and female, had uncertainty about the prices of McDonald's products. Interestingly, these participants had uncertainty in McDonald's prices in many aspects. Mostly, they thought that the prices of McDonald's products were rather expensive. In other words, McDonald's did not offer reasonable prices for its products. For example, Prawanporn (personal communication, July 2, 2010) [all names are pseudonyms], a female who works as a lecturer in a private university, reported that the prices of McDonald's products were expensive and not consistent with her expectations. Moreover, she thought that McDonald's promotions did not help customers to save money but persuaded customers to purchase more. As Prawanporn commented:

I have uncertainty about the price of McDonald's products. I think that the price of McDonald's products is rather expensive such as burger, fried chickens, or coffee. I viewed that the price is not compatible with my expectation. McDonald's should offer reasonable prices for its products. Although McDonald's offers promotion, it seems to promote the product consumption too much, rather than saving customers' money ...

Conclusively, I expected that McDonald's will reduce the price of the products which can lead to increase more new customers, who prefer the McDonald's taste.

Also, Tariga (personal communication, July 2, 2010) a female who is a computer systems specialist, viewed the prices of McDonald's products as expensive. From her suggestion, if McDonald's could not reduce its prices, McDonald's should offer products with the variety of prices. Tariga shared her suggestions:

I have uncertainty about the price of McDonald's products. I think McDonald's products are somewhat expensive ... McDonald's should reduce its prices or offer variety of prices such as nineteen, twenty-nine, and thirty-nine baht so that the customers have more choices to order the products in the price and size they want. Thus, McDonald's should offer prices of products in various ranges.

Furthermore, the same participant thought that the quality standard of McDonald's was an important issue that McDonald's had to recognize. McDonald's should not reduce its product quality in order to decrease the prices of products because it could negatively influence McDonald's image. She further commented:

Importantly, McDonald's will not decrease quality or standard of products. It means that McDonald's can decrease quantity or size of products based on the different prices, but McDonald's should not drop its product quality; having decreased product quality can affect McDonald's image. Actually, McDonald's has advantages in many aspects in terms of location, speed, atmosphere, and image. If McDonald's can reduce customers' uncertainty about price aspect, I believed that McDonald's can maintain long relationship with the previous and new customers.

Similarly, Jirasak (personal communication, July 4, 2010) a male who works as a tutor for primary students (his house was near the McDonald's restaurant so he always visited there), described his experiences about the prices of McDonald's products. He stated that the products of McDonald's, especially burgers, were expensive. Although McDonald's provided rather cheap burgers, nineteen or twenty-nine baht on the alternative menu, the taste and quality of these burgers were different

from the expensive burgers. He interpreted this as McDonald's insulting him, so he felt uncertain about McDonald's prices. Jirasak confirmed his thought by offering this story:

I think McDonald's products rather expensive. The price of burger that has good taste is about sixty-five baht, which is rather expensive. If I eat burger at a price about nineteen baht, the product's taste is bad, not delicious, in bad quality, and the bread is rough. The burger at the price about sixty-five baht with softer bread is better. I understand that I should not have high expectation with the product only nineteen baht, but McDonald's still seems to insult its customers ... The customers visit McDonald's restaurants because they are confident in McDonald's products that are delicious and standard. If McDonald's offers burger at nineteen baht with bad quality, I think McDonald' should not produce burger in this price; it makes me lose confidence in McDonald's products ... I have doubt why McDonald's does not sell burger which has standard of taste with the medium price?

Accordingly, Udomluk (personal communication, July 4, 2010) a female who is a magazine art director, worked near McDonald's so she usually had lunch there. She reflected her uncertainty in McDonald's prices. She thought that McDonald's lacked sincerity in offering prices for the products. She observed that McDonald's offered a product, fried chicken, at the same price but decreased the size of the product to save money. She reported that clear information about the price of McDonald's products was necessary. Udomluk shared her experience:

I observed that the size of McDonald's fried chicken is rather smaller than the previous ones, but McDonald's sells it in the same price. Previously, I

purchased McDonald's fried chicken in this price, I gain enough food. Now, I have to add more money to get McDonald's fried chicken with the same quantity. I have a doubt about price of McDonald's products. For me, the McDonald's price does not reach my expectation.

She continued:

Since McDonald's does not give clear information about price and quantity of products, I do not have confidence in McDonald's price ... Although McDonald's informs its price through the big board behind the food counter or the leaflet. In fact, the image of products that McDonald's presents in advertising is dissonant with the reality. The image of product is bigger than the real size ... I feel that the price of McDonald's product is unreasonable, and McDonald's is not sincere to inform its price. McDonald should provide more information about its price ... For example, McDonald's should exactly identify the weight and price of fried chicken in each piece, determine the standard price and product quantity clearly.

I observed that when this participant recounted her suggestions, she looked serious. She looked at the food pictures in the leaflet and glanced at the products in her dish. I thought she was comparing information that she gained from advertising and her actual experiences.

According to Temakorn (personal communication, July 4, 2010) a male participant who was a retired senior government official from the Foreign Trade Department, preferred to spend his leisure time to meet with his friends or rest with his family at a McDonald's restaurant. He thought that McDonald's prices were expensive as well. He said that the price of McDonald's products was not compatible

with the income of the working-class people. Also, he made assumptions about the reason the prices of McDonald's products were expensive:

I think McDonald's products are somewhat expensive for fast food products. McDonald's provides fast food products that the price is not cheap. Only the people in middle class or upper-middle class can purchase McDonald's products ... The working-class people who get less income cannot pay for purchasing McDonald's products ... I assumed that McDonald's may order raw materials from foreign land, so the prices of McDonald's products are expensive. I viewed that McDonald's can decrease its price by using raw materials in Thailand to save cost in logistic ... I believed that Thailand can support raw materials to McDonald's that leads to decrease of product price.

In contrast, Kwanmanee (personal communication, July 7, 2010) a female student at a public university, usually visited the McDonald's restaurant located near her house and university to have meals and do homework with her friends. She did not have uncertainty about the prices at McDonald's. She thought the prices of McDonald's products were not expensive because McDonald's provided many benefits to her such as a relaxing atmosphere, convenient locations, and comfortable facilities. She could spend a long time at the McDonald's restaurant to do other activities apart from having her meals. Thus, she thought there were reasonable prices for the McDonald's products; however, she had uncertainty about the prices of McCafé products. She said that prices of McCafé products were expensive.

The prices of beverages and bakery of McCafé are rather expensive. McCafé attempts to promote that McCafé uses excellent ingredients for creating delicious products. I viewed that McCafé can reduce its prices. The taste of

McCafé beverage is not much more different from the beverages of McDonald's ... For example, I viewed that the taste of McCafé iced chocolate is not much more different from the taste of the McDonald's iced ovaltine, but the price that McCafé offers is more expensive than McDonald's ... I prefer to purchase McDonald's menus that are not expensive when comparing with many benefits that McDonald's provides.

I observed that most of the participants who had uncertainty about McDonald's prices were office workers. Although they had the financial resources to purchase McDonald's products, they were still concerned about the prices they paid for having meals at McDonald's restaurants. They expected to meet with reasonable prices for purchasing the McDonald's products. Furthermore, receiving inadequate information was an important factor that led to customers' uncertainty. In the price construct, the participants expected that McDonald's would provide more, and clearer, information about prices for the products in order to decrease their uncertainty about McDonald's pricing structure.

I found that most participants of both focus groups had uncertainty with the prices of McDonald's products as well. They believed that McDonald's provided products that were somewhat expensive. It was better if McDonald's could reduce the prices of its products. For example, Udom (personal communication, July 15, 2010) a male participant in the first group who works as administrative officer in an insurance company narrated, "The main point of my uncertainty about McDonald's is price. I viewed that McDonald's products have high prices both beverages and promotional sets."

Similarly, Tumnipa (personal communication, July 18, 2010) a female participant in the second group who works as a project coordinator in a children's charity, described her uncertainty about the prices of McDonald's products, she commented:

I have uncertainty about price of McDonald's products. I viewed that this issue is one main factor that customers consider when patronizing the fast food products. McDonald's price is rather expensive when comparing with the other kinds of food that I eat in every day ... I viewed that McDonald's has potential for ordering a large amount of food materials, so the prices of products should be reduced more than this price.

Since Tumnipa works for a children's charity, she paid attention to the benefits that McDonald's contributed to society. She further shared information with other participants:

Moreover, I would like McDonald's to create more social or community activities. I would like to see that McDonald's return the benefits from operating business to support Thai community or society. I knew that McDonald's has established foundation; however, I expected that I will perceive more social activities that McDonald's contribute ... Furthermore, I viewed that most people have not received information about community activities that McDonald's created. Therefore, McDonald's should provide more information focusing on this point. This can lead to decrease the uncertainty about the price of McDonald's products.

Uncertainty about McDonald's Promotions

McDonald's promotions are one construct that provoked customers' uncertainty. In the in-depth interviews, five of twelve participants explained that they

had uncertainty about McDonald's promotions since they lacked information about the promotions. These participants reported that adequate information about McDonald's promotions could increase their purchase intention. As Tula (personal communication, July 10, 2010) a male who works as human resources officer for a Thai food restaurant, described:

I want McDonald's increasingly provides information about promotion.

McDonald's can publicize this information through SMS and leaflets.

McDonald's should directly distribute these leaflets toward the customers' accommodations to inform about promotion in each period ... I expected that I receive more information about McDonald's promotion. This information is significant, it can persuade me to purchase more products.

In addition, Jirasak offered, "I insufficiently receive promotion information. I want to gain more information about McDonald's promotion in each period. Promotion information can persuade me to purchase products, so McDonald's should provide this information increasingly." Furthermore,

I expected that McDonald's publicize promotion information through SMS.

This channel is very convenient ... Today, most people have mobile phone, so it is easy to contact customers through SMS. Moreover, I think that McDonald's should increase promotion information through leaflets, especially leaflets that attach discount coupons ... McDonald's should distribute these leaflets toward the customers' accommodations. This usually makes me be able to sufficiently obtain the promotion information from McDonald's.

From the interviews, I observed that these two participants, Tula and Jirasak, did not work in big office buildings. They believed they had fewer opportunities to receive promotional information through a leaflet that McDonald's prefers to distribute at the big office buildings. They expected McDonald's to provide them with more promotional information through SMS or leaflets that were sent to their house directly in order to increase their chances to gain promotional information and receive discount coupons from McDonald's.

Also, Udumluk reflected on her experiences about McDonald's promotions. She commented that McDonald's was likely to distribute leaflets with discount coupons attached. After using these coupons to purchase products, she did not have the leaflets to see about McDonald's promotion in the next time periods. She stated:

I have uncertainty in McDonald's promotion. McDonald's is likely to distribute leaflets that attach discount coupons. When I used these coupons for purchasing products, I do not have any information about promotion in the next period. If McDonald's wants to publicize promotion information through leaflets, these leaflets are not necessary to attach any discount coupons ... I can keep this McDonald's leaflet and see it when I want to order the products of McDonald's.

Similarly, Tariga suggested that McDonald's should communicate promotion information through posters and billboards both inside and outside the restaurants, not just inform customers at the food counter only.

Tariga recounted specifically:

It would be better if McDonald's provides more channels, posters and boards, to inform about promotions and place these channels in many points of the

restaurant, both inside and outside the restaurant, not only provide these channels in front of the food counter. By doing this, I usually gain more promotion information from the restaurant and persuade my purchase intention; it includes reducing of queues and times to select and order food.

Furthermore, Prawanporn presented her uncertainty about promotional sets that McDonald's offers. Since she teaches marketing in a private university, she has interesting ideas about McDonald's promotions. She reported:

For the promotion issue, I would like McDonald's to provide various promotional sets so that customers have more alternatives for selecting promotional sets that are suitable with their demands. Also, I prefer McDonald's offers promotions that focus on discounting the prices of products rather than adding more products ... For instance, when I order any McDonald's products, I prefer McDonald's decreases the price that helps me can save the money rather than adds more products that make me gain over amount of food for having a meal.

From the two focus group interviews, I found that the participants had uncertainty about McDonald's promotions in two issues: promotion information and promotional sets. They opined that McDonald's should increasingly convey promotional information to its customers to decrease customers' uncertainty. Moreover, some participants advised that McDonald's should provide more information about promotions through events or activities. As Neviga (personal communication, July 15, 2010) a female who works in public relations in an event organizing agency, reflected:

In my opinion, McDonald's can provide promotion information through creating the interesting events or activities ... For instance, McDonald's might set up Walk

Rally and persuade customers in the community to engage in this activity. I thought that this activity can be compatible with various group of customers ... Also, the customers can receive promotion information through this activity that leads to decrease of customers' uncertainty.

Additionally, Panyavat (personal communication, July 18, 2010) a male who works as a media planning officer, suggested that McDonald's should provide more information about promotions through mass media: television and radio. He recounted:

For me, I have uncertainty in McDonald's promotion because I receive inadequate information on this issue ... I want McDonald's to convey more promotion information through television that I can expose easily. I thought that if I gain enough promotion information, I can use the benefits from the McDonald's promotion effectively. By doing this, I can reduce my uncertainty on McDonald's promotion.

The same participant further said:

Besides, I prefer McDonald's to provide more promotion information through Facebook or Twister that is interactive media so that I can seek for information about promotion and contact with the McDonald's immediately ... This usually leads to diminish of uncertainty in McDonald's promotion.

Some participants in the second group shared their ideas about uncertainty in the promotion sets offered by McDonald's. As Tumnipa noted:

I have uncertainty about promotional set that McDonald's offers. I prefer McDonald's to reduce the prices of the products rather than increasing more products or adding other products that are gaining over the amount of products.

Many times that I cannot use the promotion set offered by McDonald's because they are not suitable with my demands.

Uncertainty about McDonald's Taste

Taste plays a major role in the success of a fast food restaurant. Two of the twelve participants in the in-depth interviews had uncertainty about the taste of McDonald's products. They observed that the tastes of some McDonald's menus were not standard. This usually made them lose confidence in the taste of McDonald's products. When they visited McDonald's restaurants, they could not predict whether they would enjoy the taste of the products. Udomluk described her experience about the taste of McDonald's products:

Actually, I love the taste of McDonald's burgers, particularly the pork burger. Nevertheless, now I have uncertainty in McDonald's taste. I observed that the taste of pork burger is different from the previous ones ... This is the change that makes me lose confidences in this menu ... I am not sure whether McDonald's changes some ingredient, approach, process, raw material, or not. Consequently, I prefer to order other menus and avoid purchasing pork burger.

Similarly, Tula, who had uncertainty about McDonald's taste, expressed:

I have uncertainty about taste of McDonald's products, especially, fried chicken. I doubt whether McDonald's has consistent and standard food recipe or not. Based on my observation, I found that the taste of fried chicken is changed and inconsistent. Even though the fried chickens are put in the same dish, the taste of each piece is different. It seems that sometimes McDonald's uses fresh chicken to make McDonald's fried chicken; however, sometimes

McDonald's uses boiled chicken. Thus, the product taste is inconsistent. This usually leads to uncertainty in standard of McDonald's taste.

Since Tula works for a Thai food restaurant, he has experienced the tastes of food. I found that when he described his uncertainty about McDonald's taste, he had an unsatisfied look on his face. He further explained:

Similarly, in the case of French fries, I have uncertainty about the taste of McDonald's French fries as well. Its taste is inconsistent. The quantity of salt that is put on French fries each time is inconsistent ... thus, the taste of product is changed, not standard. Sometimes, the taste of McDonald's French fries is very salty as the salt bottle broken in French fries. I want McDonald's to concern about this issue because it can reflect the quality control and food standards of McDonald's.

Monai (personal communication, July 15, 2010) a male participant in the first focus group who is working as a customer service agent in a travel and tour agency, reflected on his experiences about uncertainty in McDonald's taste. He described:

I have uncertainty in taste of products and beverage of McDonald's. I thought that some tastes of McDonald's products do not meet my expectations, especially the taste of McDonald's fried chicken and French fries ... It seems that the tastes of these products are not consistent, changeable ... For example, sometimes the French fries is tasty, crisp and slightly salted, but sometimes it un-crispy and so salty. I do not understand the real cause of inconsistency, but I can perceive it. I expected that McDonald's should control the standard of its tastes ... Since McDonald's is the global brand, so I expected to receive the consistent taste when

visiting McDonald's restaurant ... For the beverage, it seems that Pepsi's taste from McDonald's provides less tingling.

Similarly, Panupong (personal communication, July 18, 2010) a male pharmacist in a clinic, commented about the taste of McDonald's products. He thought the tastes of McDonald's products were inconsistent, particularly the French fries. He said as follows:

I have uncertainty in taste of McDonald's products. I viewed that McDonald's taste is changeable; particularly the taste of McDonald's French fries and fried chicken ... Even though I love McDonald's products, I will enjoy with McDonald's taste when I ensure that I will meet with the consistent taste when eating McDonald's foods ... The McDonald's brand is famous and broad; I want to see that McDonald's has standard in a taste of its products that lead to reduction of my uncertainty.

He continued:

McDonald's should increase two-way communication with its customers to reduce customers' uncertainty in the taste of McDonald's products ... For instance, McDonald's manager or employee should ask the customers in the restaurant about McDonald's taste in order to examine the customers' feedback ... I viewed that this approach will help customers reduce their uncertainty in McDonald's taste because they have chances to communicate and share their comments ... Also, the customers feel that McDonald's pays attention in their uncertainty.

I found that the consistent taste of food is very crucial for the customers. In a global brand restaurant, controlling the taste of its products should be recognized as critical to its success.

Uncertainty about McDonald's Nutrition

Ten of the twelve participants in the in-depth interviews had uncertainty about the nutrition of McDonald's products. The uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition occurred because the participants expected that McDonald's should provide more nutritious menus. Also, they thought that McDonald's provided insufficient nutrition information to its customers.

Even though the main McDonald's products are fried chicken, burgers, and French fries, most participants thought that McDonald's could offer more choices of nutritious products for the customers who were concerned with healthy eating. Thus, it is better if McDonald's offers nutrition information on its menus to respond to the customers' requirements. In the in-depth interview, ten out of the twelve participants reflected on their experiences about uncertainty with McDonald's nutrition differently

For example, Tariga, who is more concerned about her health because she is fifty-three years old, believed customers were more likely to be concerned about health information. McDonald's should provide more nutritious menus to respond to customers' demand and reduce criticisms about the nutrition of McDonald's products. She analyzed McDonald's nutritious menus as follows:

I have uncertainty about nutrition of McDonald's products. I viewed that today most people are more likely to recognize about health concerns. So, McDonald's should increase menus that are proper with nutrition rules. Today, McDonald's provides nutritious menus insufficiently. I viewed that this is the weakness point that makes McDonald's has been continuously criticized from most people. If McDonald's can add more nutritious products to give more

choices for its customers, McDonald's will obtain the new groups of customers.

I found that this participant was rather careful when eating food. She ordered one McDonald's apple pie, McCafé orange juice, and salad, and sat at the sofa zone near the glass window. There were many documents on her table. She worked while having meals. Tariga further said, "I expected that McDonald's provides more information about nutrition to the customers. This information can help customers make better purchase decisions."

Similarly, Temakorn was concerned about his health condition as well. He is fifty-nine years old. He came with his family, a wife and two daughters. His daughters ordered many foods, but he selected to eat only one fish burger. He argued that McDonald's could not offer nutritious menus that were consistent with his expectations.

I have uncertainty about nutrition of McDonald's products. I am an old man, so I have to be careful about my weight and cholesterols. I viewed that McDonald's should increasingly recognize the nutrition values by offering more nutrition menus ... I expected that McDonald's pays attention to nutrition of the customers, particularly old customers. Even teenager customers, if they consume more fast food products, they may encounter with health problems as well ... Thus, McDonald' should promote nutrition products that makes McDonald's can access various customers ... For instance, McDonald's should offer low-fat salad oil. I observed that some customers tend to come to McDonald's restaurant with their families that include people in various generations: children, teenagers, adults, and old

people. McDonald's should offer the menus that can respond to various customers.

For the nutrition information, Temakorn said that McDonald's should show nutrition information of menu items through the purchasing slip.

I think McDonald's should increase nutrition information to its customers. The customers should know about McDonald's calories in each menu through purchasing slip ... If I gain adequate nutrition information about McDonald's menus, I will make purchasing decisions that leads to decrease any doubts about McDonald's nutrition.

Interestingly, Temakorn could share value ideas about using media to convey information. He commented, "McDonald's can publicize more nutrition information through many channels such as purchasing slip of customers, newsletter, or fact sheet ... These channels can access McDonald's customers easily ... McDonald's may provide these channels in the restaurants."

Not only do older adult customers have uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition, but other adult customers also have doubts about McDonald's menus and nutrition information. Prawanporn expected McDonald's to provide more nutritious menus. She thought McDonald's lacked sincerity for promoting nutritious menus. She recounted her expectations about McDonald's nutrition:

Sometimes McDonald's seems to recognize the nutrition issue. However, I viewed that McDonald's is more likely to create nutrition issue when social trends are about nutritious food or public against fast food products ... McDonald's is not sincere to promote nutritious menus seriously and continuously. Thus, I have uncertainty with McDonald's in this point.

Receiving inadequate nutrition information was one factor that provoked her uncertainty; thus, she wanted to gain more nutrition information about McDonald's products. She stated:

McDonald's should give enough nutrition information to the customers; McDonald's calories in each menu items comparing with the calories that people need per day. This usually leads to reduction of my uncertainty in McDonald's nutrition and enlargement of new customers who are concerned about their health problem ... Also, the McDonald's image will be more acceptable from the customers in many groups.

Similarly, Apavee (personal communication, July 11, 2010) a female who is a marketing officer in a famous food industrial organization, said, "I have uncertainty in nutrition of McDonald's restaurant ... I viewed that McDonald's offers unhealthy products. Most of the products are fried, oily food, with less vegetable ... It seems like the only good thing about McDonald's is convenience." Apavee argued that nutrition was a weakness of McDonald's. McDonald's could reduce the negative effects of this weakness if it offers enough nutritious menus and nutrition information.

It would be nice if McDonald's could increasingly provide nutrition information to the customers ... I think McDonald's publicizes less information about nutrition, so I have doubts about nutrition of McDonald's ... I am not sure that my comment is practical in quick service restaurant, which the nutrition facts are the weakness point. However, if McDonald's can prove to offer products which recognize healthy food better than other competitors and provide enough nutrition information, McDonald's will obtain good image from people loving to eat McDonald's ... Moreover,

McDonald's could turn this weakness to be its selling point by providing nutrition facts for each item on the receipt ... My suggestion is based on the assumption that nutrition offered by McDonald's is acceptable.

Another participant expressed the viewpoint that she did not have uncertainty about the nutrition of McDonald's menu items because she loves to eat McDonald's products. However, she believed she gained less nutrition information from McDonald's. This participant suggested that nutrition information is important for her and other customers who are concerned about healthiness; therefore, McDonald's should provide enough nutrition information to the customers in order to reduce any doubts or anxiety caused from receiving inadequate nutrition information. For instance, Jerawan (personal communication, July 11, 2010) who works as a sales manager, preferred to do many activities at the McDonald's restaurants apart from having her meals. She opined:

I love McDonald's products, so I do not have any uncertainty in nutrition of McDonald's menus. Nevertheless, I think McDonald's insufficiently provide information about nutrition ... It is better if McDonald's provides a chart of McDonalds' menus with a list of calories to shows sincerity and cares of McDonald's toward the customers ... Consequently, McDonald's can decrease any doubts of customers in nutrition and get more customers who are concerned about healthiness.

Similarly, Kittichai (personal communication, July 12, 2010) a male who has worked in graphic design, expressed his expectation on McDonald's giving more information about nutrition. He thought this information was useful for McDonald's customers.

He suggested that McDonald's might use graphic design to present more interesting nutrition information. He commented:

Actually, I do not have uncertainty in nutritious menus of McDonald's. I understand the menu items of fast food products ... However, I expected McDonald's to provide more information about nutrition. McDonald's might present this information using graphic design to create a chart or a graph that is more interesting than being presented in numeric ... I believed that most customers are concerned about nutrition. Hence, if McDonald's can provide enough nutrition information; amount of calories, fat, and sugar.

Consequently, the customers can evaluate the amount of McDonald's products that they should consume. This leads to reduction of doubts about nutrition information of McDonald's.

The results from the two focus group interviews were relevant to the in-depth interviews. Most participants expected that McDonald's would provide more nutrition information and nutritious menus. For instance, Katsara (personal communication, July 15, 2010) a female who owns a publishing house, had health problems, so she attempted to control her weight. She stated:

I have uncertainty in nutrition of McDonald's products. I viewed that McDonald's should provide more information about nutrition and show the amount of calories and fat in each McDonald's product ... I have diabetes, so this information is very useful and important for me ... If I know nutrition information, I will determine the amount of having McDonald's products properly ... A lack of nutrition information is the main point that I feel anxious in McDonald's products.

In addition, Sudatip (personal communication, July 18, 2010) a female who was retired from a trust and finance company, was an older adult who preferred to limit number of calories in each of her meals. She said:

I expected that McDonald's can offer more nutritious menus, various kinds of fruit and vegetable salad that are more interesting nutritious menus. Today, salad menu in McDonald's restaurants is simple and expensive ... Most of McDonald's products are fried that I try to restrict on eating. Thus, I would like McDonald's to provide more healthy foods that are good choices for me and other customers who are concerned about their health ... If McDonald's can respond my requirements in nutrition menus, my uncertainty in McDonald's nutrition will be decreased.

Sumatip further commented, "For example, McDonald's French fries is the very popular menu. Thus, I want McDonald's to provide nutrition information of this product so that I can evaluate the nutrition fact that I gain from eating McDonald's French fries."

Moreover, Neviga shared her uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition: "If McDonald's offers more nutrition information and nutritious menus to the customers, it can not only delete the comments on McDonald's but also decrease my nutrition uncertainty."

Panupong suggested, "In my opinion, McDonald's can reduce my uncertainty in nutrition if McDonald's provides more nutrition information ... McDonald's may recommend the nutritious menus by promoting the nutrition-food sets to increase more choices to the customers."

Uncertainty about McDonald's Facilities

Based on the interaction between McDonald's and its customers, facilities in the restaurant are a major construct McDonald's uses to create a good image and optimum satisfaction for the customers. Facilities, in this study, refers to service and

everything, such as the tables and chairs, soft sofas, hand wash sinks, doors, stairs, sauce containers, trash cans, and eating tools that McDonald's provides in order to help customers obtain more convenience, comfort, and safety when visiting one of its restaurants. From the interviews, I found that most customers were satisfied with the quality of the facilities McDonald's offered. However, there were some aspects of the facilities which the participants had uncertainty. In the in-depth interviews, four of the twelve participants had uncertainty with the eating tools that McDonald's provided. They viewed that the eating tools—paper plate, plastic spoon, fork, and knife—which McDonald's provided were not convenient when having their meals.

As Jerawan commented:

I have doubted about McDonald's, why McDonald's uses paper plate and plastic knife, fork, and spoon. I feel inconvenient when I eat and cut the chicken. I have doubted why McDonald's do not offer convenient eating tools to the customers. I want McDonald's to change food containers to be stronger than using a paper plate. For a knife, McDonald's should use stainless knife to be more convenient when cutting the chicken ... Furthermore, it is not appetizing when eating fried chicken with a paper plate. In my opinion, I think eating tools are very significant. If the customers obtain more conveniences for having meals, it leads to good benefits for McDonald's operation.

In addition, another participant, Udomluk, expressed her opinion:

McDonald's offers eating tools that are not consistent with my expectations. I want McDonald's to use plastic plate and stainless spoon, fork, and knife instead of a paper plate and plastic knife, spoon, and fork that are not convenient when having a meal. Particularly, when I eat oily food, fried

chicken, paper plate makes food seem unappetizing and the plastic knife cannot cut fried chicken effectively. Importantly, using paper plate is a waste of material and causes global warming.

Furthermore, these four participants had uncertainty that McDonald's wanted its customers to drop their eating tools, such as paper plates, plastic knife, spoon, and fork, as well as all other trash, in the provided bin. These participants thought that it was not convenient to walk to the bin to drop their food trays, eating tools, and all trash by themselves after finishing their meals. They would be impressed if McDonald's staffs cleared the table for customers after they finished their meals.

Moreover, some participants viewed that McDonald's quick service restaurant model came from a Western culture, where dropping eating tools and trash in the bin by customers might be appropriate with Western customers. On the contrary, it might be unsuitable with Thai customers who expected to receive full services when visiting a service restaurant.

As Jirasak stated:

When I finish my meal, McDonald's expects me to drop the eating tools and all trashes in the bin. I hate to do like this. I feel uncomfortable ... I viewed that McDonald's attempt to adjust its menus to be appropriate with the Thai customers. However, dropping customer's food tray in the bin by themselves is the Western culture; this is not compatible with the Thai customers' behaviors that prefer convenience and comfortable services.

In a similar vein, Tula shared his experiences:

After finishing a meal, McDonald's wants its customers drop their eating tools, paper plate, plastic spoons and forks as well as the rest of the foods in

the bin that McDonald's provide. I have uncertainty in this point. I viewed that I am not comfortable to do like this. I expect McDonald's staffs serve me in this point ... Also, I viewed that customers drop eating tools in the bin by themselves is not appropriate with the Thai customers' behavior; they expect to gain good services from the service restaurant.

I found that some of the participants in the second focus group had uncertainty about the eating tools that McDonald's provides as well. As Panupong explained:

I would like McDonald's to use eating tools that are not made from paper and plastic. This usually not only reduces the global-warming problem but also decreases my uncertainty in eating tools. I viewed that the eating tools that McDonald's uses are waste materials that can affect global warming ... Furthermore, these materials are not compatible with my requirements ... I expected McDonald's to offer convenient facilities for having meals that I can enjoy more.

One of the participants in this group argued that, although McDonald's is a global brand focusing on establishing consistency across the brand, it could adapt some issues to be consistent with cultural differences. As Sivakorn (personal communication, July 18, 2010) a male who has studied for the master's degree in science, commented on his experiences about uncertainty with the eating tools offered by McDonald's:

I feel happy in everything that McDonald's offers such as taste, promotion, atmosphere, and location, except for the equipments that McDonald's serves for eating ... I am not convenient using these equipments: paper plate and plastic knife and folk. Actually, I prefer to eat McDonald's fried chicken. This

kind of food is oily, so it is not convenient to use paper plate and plastic knife to cut the pieces of chicken ... Thus, I viewed that plastic plate and stainless knife and folk are more appropriate with McDonald's foods ... I understand that McDonald's in other regions uses paper and plastic equipments, and McDonald's prefers to create the unique pattern. However, in the global marketing aspect, McDonald's can adjust some issues to match the requirements of the customers in different cultures and lead to reduction of customers' uncertainty.

Additionally, some participants in the two focus group interviews argued that they had uncertainty because they did not want to drop their eating tools and trash in the bin by themselves. For instance, Katsara said, "After finishing my meal, I expect McDonald's staff who serves me to clear the table, keep my food tray, and drop my eating tools and any trashes in the bin. As a service restaurant, McDonald's should offer these things."

Even though these participants reported some uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services in some of the constructs, all of them asserted that they were willing to reduce their uncertainty and continue the interaction with McDonald's. They will do so because they have obtained advantages from McDonald's in some aspects: available locations, convenient and comfortable ambience, tasty food, and quick and quality service. They believed that if they maintain the relationship with McDonald's, they will receive some rewards. Consequently, they prefer to reduce their uncertainty to maintain the mutual relationship.

Results of RQ3: Information-Seeking Strategies to Reduce Customers' Uncertainty

Based on the interviews, all participants were satisfied in their relationships with McDonald's. Although they had some uncertainty, regarding McDonald's products or services, they were able to effectively employ strategies to reduce their uncertainty, which usually led to the maintenance of the relationship. In this study, I found that the participants employed different information-seeking strategies to reduce their uncertainty. Eleven strategies for reducing uncertainty emerged from the in-depth and focus group interviews.

Information-Seeking Strategy 1—Discount Coupons

Most participants in the in-depth interviews sought information from the discount coupons to reduce uncertainty about McDonald's price. As Udomluk recounted:

I received McDonald's discount coupons from the leaflet that McDonald's usually distributes in front of my office building. These discount coupons can help me reduce the uncertainty in McDonald's expensive price. Discount coupon is the effective strategy of seeking for information about prices on the McDonald's products ... Since I frequently eat McDonald's products, discount coupons help me purchase more products and save my money. Then I can reduce uncertainty in McDonald's price.

Similarly, Jirasak discussed his strategy to reduce price uncertainty, "I tend to use discount coupons that attached on the leaflet that McDonald's distributes at the department store to decrease my price uncertainty. These coupons can reduce the price."

Apavee also preferred to employ discount coupons as a strategy to reduce her uncertainty. She said, “I receive more promotion information from McDonald’s through the discount coupons. It helps me be able to diminish uncertainty in McDonald’s promotion.”

In the case of the two focus group interviews, some participants of both groups used discount coupons as the strategy to reduce uncertainty in McDonald’s price as well. As Tumluksa (personal communication, July 15, 2010) a female account officer in a business software company, stated:

I have uncertainty in McDonald’s price. I viewed that McDonald’s should decrease the prices of products ... I prefer to use McDonald’s discount coupons to reduce my uncertainty. The discount coupons help me save more money ... I should consider these coupons and properly use them in order to really save my money.

The results showed that most participants were more likely to use discount coupons to search for information about McDonald’s prices and promotions to reduce uncertainty. It is better if McDonald’s promotes its discount coupons strategy to decrease customers’ uncertainty about prices and increase the amount of information on promotions to be more accessible for McDonald’s customers.

Information-Seeking Strategy 2—Communication Technology

Most participants employed information-seeking strategies through communication technology to exchange information with McDonald’s and reduce their uncertainty about McDonald’s prices, promotions, taste, and nutrition. There were various types of communication technologies that these participants employed, such as McDonald’s website, other websites, Facebook, e-mail, Google search engine,

and TV commercials. In the in-depth interviews, Apavee said, “My friend usually sends the e-mail to me for printable online coupons of McDonald’s. By doing this, I can reduce my uncertainty about price because I can purchase McDonald’s products at a cheaper price than regular price.” She further talked about acquiring information through other forms of communication technology:

I prefer to look for McDonald’s news on the internet through many websites. I usually seek for information about McDonald’s promotion ... As a customer, I update information about products and services. Online is an important approach that I often use. I have more opportunities to follow McDonald’s information from both McDonald’s website and others. Regularly, I use the Google search engine by typing keywords to search for McDonald’s promotion. Also, I am looking for customer reviews or comments about McDonald’s ... I think internet is the convenient tool to search for more information ... TV commercial through the internet system is also another channel that I prefer to expose since I am interested in television advertising; it is accessible through the internet ... When I update McDonald’s advertising, I will gain more information about McDonald’s promotion ... Also, I can decrease my uncertainty.

Apavee is a marketing officer, so she tended to employ many communication strategies to update and search for information about products and services. The students also preferred to use communication technologies to search for more information as well. Kwanmanee reflected on her experiences about executing communication technologies as follows:

Based on the online media, I see information of McDonald's continuously through the internet. Some websites have advertising about McDonald's promotion menus. Today, teenagers tend to use Facebook, I see information of McDonald's through Facebook as well. Sometimes McDonald's requests customer's comments about its products or services through Facebook and McDonald's will give the reward to the customers ... Of course, I sent my comments to the McDonald's. Occasionally, I communicate with the McDonald's officer immediately through Facebook ... I prefer to participate with the McDonald's activities through online. For example, I upload my pictures that I visit McDonald's in Facebook to compete McDonald's reward ... Also, I always discuss about the new menus or promotion of McDonald's with my friends through Facebook ... These channels can help me reduce my uncertainty about price and promotion of McDonald's.

Similarly, Auraisak (personal communication, July 12, 2010) a male student in a private university, engaged with McDonald's activities through the internet to gain special promotions from McDonald's. He reported, "I use internet to search for more McDonald's promotion information. I use this channel because of its convenient and easy for me. Sometimes, I receive promotion information or special promotion from McDonald's through the MSN Messenger program or McDonald's Twitter."

McDonald's website is one source the participants accessed to reduce their uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. As Tula elaborated:

When I want to order McDonald's through delivery. I access to the McDonald's website to see the promotions offered in that period. However, I

expected that McDonald's provides more channels to convey information about McDonald's promotion to reduce my uncertainty.

Additionally, Udomluk discussed using communication technology to seek more information about the taste of McDonald's products, which led to a reduction of taste uncertainty.

I search information about McDonald's taste through posing the comments on the web board to exchange the ideas among McDonald's customers about the taste of McDonald's product, pork burger, which I have uncertainty ... The various customers' viewpoint can reduce my uncertainty in McDonald's taste.

Moreover, Apavee used communication technology to acquire more information about nutrition to decrease her uncertainty. She shared experiences about using communication technology to reduce nutrition uncertainty:

I am concerned about healthy condition, so I prefer to control calories that I gain from consuming McDonald's food. I search for nutrition information through McDonald's website directly. This strategy reduces my uncertainty in nutrition because I can make purchasing decisions properly. However, I viewed that McDonald's should give more information on this issue.

Most of the focus group participants were likely to use communication technology because it is convenient and quick. Moreover, in the age of information technology, communication technology is another interactive channel that communicators can use to respond to their partners immediately. Some of the focus group participants tended to search for more information about McDonald's promotions through McDonald's websites and others. As Montri (personal communication, July 15, 2010) a male student in a private university, said:

Frequently, I search promotion information from websites and Facebook.

These channels can help me reduce uncertainty in McDonald's promotion ... I always update the promotion information with my friends through Facebook.

Also, when I search for information through internet, I always receive information about McDonald's promotion.

Information-Seeking Strategy 3—Mass Media

Using mass media is the most common information-seeking strategy. Many participants preferred to employ it to reduce their uncertainty because mass media are attractive media and can be accessible immediately to large numbers of consumers.

Participants used mass media to decrease their uncertainty on McDonald's prices and promotions. There are various types of mass media that participants accessed:

television, magazines, and newspapers. For example, Kittichai commented:

“Sometimes I obtain information about McDonald's price and promotion through television and newspapers. These channels can send the messages to me promptly. I can reduce my uncertainty through using these strategies.” Apavee usually found information from the marketing newspapers to update her on products and services.

I often search for the price of McDonald's products from the marketing newspapers. Also, the update information provides campaigns and activities that McDonald's creates to society ... I gain the information about the price and the marketing strategies that McDonald's uses to increase its target sales.

When I receive more information, I can diminish my uncertainty in McDonald's.

Furthermore, Tula recounted:

I usually observe McDonald's information from the True vision magazine. This strategy is very convenient for me to access McDonald's information because this magazine will be sent to my house every month. I know about McDonald's promotion through this magazine, so I can reduce my uncertainty in McDonald's promotion.

From the focus group interviews, I found that some participants employed mass media to reduce their uncertainty. Moreover, they believed that McDonald's should provide more information through television because it is the most powerful and interesting media to reduce the customers' uncertainty. As Montri recounted:

Normally, I prefer to expose television to update McDonald's promotion and reduce my uncertainty in McDonald's promotion because this strategy can be easily accessible and interesting ... I thought that McDonald's should convey more promotion information through this media since this media is powerful and accessible to most customers ... McDonald's can execute television to diminish customers' uncertainty and create the retention and image toward McDonald's.

Some participants, from both the in-depth and focus group interviews, knew that McDonald's was known and recognized by most people, but McDonald's should increasingly convey information through mass media, which are powerful and attractive to create retention and loyalty to the customers.

Information-Seeking Strategy 4—Point of Purchase Materials

All of the participants were likely to seek McDonald's information to reduce their uncertainty through sources at the restaurant, both inside and in front of the restaurant, such as the food counter, menu boards, billboards, posters, leaflets, and

displays. When participants visit the restaurants, they access various sources that McDonald's creates to convey information and stimulate purchases. Thus, it is easy and convenient for customers to search for more information from these sources to reduce their uncertainty about prices and promotions. As Aekkarat (personal communication, July 12, 2010) a male participant in one of the in-depth interviews who owns a media management business, described, "Frequently, I receive McDonald's information from food counter ... I often observe billboards installation in front of the restaurant. Also, I read the product posters so that I can diminish my uncertainty about price and promotion through these sources." Similarly, Auraisak, who searched for information via sources at the restaurant, stated, "Principally, I seek information from food counter and billboard located in front of the restaurants. Sometimes, I employ a leaflet that comes with the food tray to acquire information. This usually leads to reduction of uncertainty." In addition, Tariga shared her experiences:

Restaurant food counter is one source that I usually employ to decrease my uncertainty about price or promotion ... Many times, I search for McDonald's information by myself through the menu boards that are installed behind the food counter, including the big board placed in front of the restaurant. I viewed that these channels are important and are accessible for customers ... I believed that most customers prefer to use these sources as well.

According to the information from the focus group interviews, most participants, in both the first and second groups, preferred to search for information from McDonald's restaurant to diminish their uncertainty. As Udom reported:

It is easy for me to search for McDonald's information at the McDonald's restaurant. When I come to McDonald's restaurant, I can gain information from the menu board, poster stand, or leaflet that put on the counter ... For me, the method that I prefer to employ to reduce my uncertainty is searching information through McDonald's restaurant.

Information-Seeking Strategy 5—Direct Asking

Direct asking is an effective strategy to seek information to reduce customers' uncertainty. Based on this strategy, the individual can directly disclose his or her expectations, feelings, or doubts toward another partner through interrogation. In other words, the individuals have direct interaction with their partners. I found that some McDonald's customers executed the direct asking strategy when they encountered uncertainty in McDonald's prices and promotions. The customers asked direct questions of McDonald's employees or managers that usually led to a decrease in the degrees of uncertainty. Tariga commented, "If I have any doubts about McDonald's products, I will talk with the managers or employees of restaurant to explain my requirements. This strategy helps me gain correct answers, so I can reduce my uncertainty."

In the same way, Apavee elaborated:

The McDonald's employees are nice. They have service minds. I ask them when I want to know more information to reduce my doubts. However, I do not complain anything with them. I think they do not have authority to make decision about customers' complaint.

In one of the focus group interviews, Monai reported that he preferred to discuss his doubts or problems with the employees or managers of McDonald's. He thought that employees and managers played the major roles reducing customers' uncertainty.

I am more likely to directly talk with employee or manager of McDonald's to reduce my uncertainty about the taste of McDonald's products. It is possible that sometimes I encounter with products or services that do not resonate with my requirement. If I have a chance to communicate my uncertainty to McDonald's employee or manager, I can relieve my anxiety after receiving attention from McDonald's.

He further commented:

I viewed that customers' uncertainty is the crucial issue for successful business. If customers' uncertainty is not managed effectively, the continuous relationships with customers will be diminished ... Thus, I expected that McDonald's employee and manager have more interaction with the customers ... Even if I feel impressed with McDonald's in some aspects, such as comfortable atmosphere and convenient location, I would like to see that McDonald's can create the consistent and standard taste of foods.

Additionally, Panyavat said, "I prefer to comment employee or manager when facing uncertainty about taste of foods or beverages. I viewed that this method can help me decrease the degree of uncertainty." However, this participant agreed that asking direct questions with the partners was not consistent with the Thai culture. So, most Thai customers were less likely to directly express their negative feelings.

Although direct asking is an effective strategy for seeking information to reduce customers' uncertainty, the participants in both the in-depth and focus group

interviews were less likely to use the direct asking strategy. In my opinion, Thai customers, living in a high context culture, prefer to keep their doubts undisclosed rather than expressing their requirements. Temakorn reflected on his idea about asking direct questions with McDonald's employees, "I rarely ask any information with employees because I do not want to disturb them. I understand that they are very busy. I want them to concentrate on serving customers."

Information-Seeking Strategy 6—Direct Observation

Some participants used this strategy, direct observation, to seek information to reduce their uncertainty. Based on this strategy, it was not necessary for the participants to interact with McDonald's management or staff. The participant entered into the field, a McDonald's restaurant, to gain more information. Customers employed the direct observation strategy when they had uncertainty about the facilities (customers dropping eating tools and all trash in the bin) or the nutrition of McDonald's products.

As Jirasak recounted:

I have uncertainty why McDonald's wants the customers to keep the food trays and drop their eating tools and all trashes in the bin after finishing their meals. I feel uncomfortable to do like that. I attempt to gain more information in this issue, but I have never asked anyone. I prefer to observe other customer's behaviors ... I found that less customers are likely to keep their food trays on the trash bin before leaving from the restaurant ... Now, I am more approved with this idea. I am not serious to do it. I can reduce my uncertainty in this point because of observing other customer's behaviors without asking direct questions.

Tula stated:

From my observation, some customers consent to drop their food trays on the trash can that McDonald's provides after having meals. I gain more information, so I can reduce my uncertainty in this point. Also, I make efforts to follow this behavior.

Some of the participants in the focus group interviews used observation to seek nutrition information and nutritious menu items. They did not want to ask employees about this issue. They observed that this issue was the weakness of a quick service restaurant, so they preferred to observe it by themselves. Sudatip recounted her experiences about observing:

I use observation to seek information about McDonald's nutrition. I have uncertainty in nutritious menus of McDonald's. I do not discuss this issue with McDonald's employees or manager. I prefer to observe the menu boards or posters to find nutritious menus or nutrition information ... Although I still gain less information on this aspect from the McDonald's, the observation can help me reduce uncertainty in nutrition. After observing, I attempt to order healthy menus.

Information-Seeking Strategy 7—Previous Experience

When other participants shared their ideas about acquiring information, they thought that customers' experience or customers' memory about McDonald's restaurants were important sources of information. In the case that customers are unable to find information from external sources, internal sources (past experiences) can help customers have more information in order to reduce their uncertainty. In this study, all of the participants who encountered uncertainty in price, promotion, taste,

facilities, or nutrition of McDonald's products or services tended to use this strategy to cope with their uncertainty.

Udomluk, a participant who had uncertainty about McDonald's taste, used her previous experience to diminish uncertainty. She reported:

I have uncertainty in the taste of McDonald's pork burger. My previous experiences make me know on which menus I should and should not order. From my experiences, I know that pork burger menu cannot respond to my expectation ... Today, when I visit McDonald's restaurant, I avoid purchasing this menu ... Yes, I still keep the relationship with McDonald's.

In addition, Jirasak reflected on his uncertainty reduction strategy:

I have uncertainty in McDonald's price. Based on my experiences, I learn that the cheap burger, cost only nineteen or twenty-nine baht, offered by McDonald's contains less quality and standard; it is not delicious. Thus, when I visit McDonald's restaurant next time, I always order burger at a regular price about sixty-five baht even if there are more expensive ... My past experiences make me know which menus have value for bargain ... For me, the past experience is the valuable sources for seeking information.

One of the focus group participants, Sivakorn said, "If my experiences indicate which menus are tasty, I tend to order that menus." Similarly, Neviga had uncertainty about the prices and nutrition of McDonald's products and searched for information from her experiences. This usually enabled her to reduce uncertainty. She commented:

My previous experiences provide information about the amount of McDonald's foods that I should consume at once in order to be appropriate

with price that I have to pay and calories that I will get. When I can control the prices and calories, my uncertainty in price and nutrition can be declined.

I found that most customers preferred to order the same menu items when they visited McDonald's restaurant. It indicated that their past experiences were one of the main strategies that customers executed to gain information. They believed in their past experiences. This usually helped participants decrease the degrees of uncertainty.

Information-Seeking Strategy 8—Third-Party Discussion

Third-party discussion is another strategy for seeking information from personal sources such as family, relatives, friends, colleagues, or neighbors. When customers encountered uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services, information from discussions with a third party helped them decrease their levels of uncertainty. Udomluk shared her experiences:

I prefer to discuss with my colleagues who usually visit McDonald's with me. I discuss with them about price and taste issues that I have uncertainty ... After the discussion, I gain more information that are both agreeable and disagreeable with me. These ideas help me feel better about my uncertainty. I can reduce it.

Udomluk further shared this experience:

Sometimes, I have uncertainty about products or services of McDonald's, and I require more information. I tend to discuss my problem to my friends who are McDonald's customers as well. They usually express their ideas or points with the different reasons to broaden my perspectives and ideas ... Even if my problems or uncertainty remain, I gain different perspectives to help me be

able to reduce uncertainty. The discussion with other people is the important sources for me.

Also, Tula reported:

I decrease my uncertainty in price and promotion by discussing with my girlfriend or my colleagues. After discussing with them, I obtain more information and ideas. I feel better. I think my uncertainty with McDonald's is not a serious issue; I can reduce it.

Consistently, for both focus group interviews, some participants explained that they employed discussion with other people as an important strategy to reduce their uncertainty. They argued that this strategy was uncomplicated and effective. For instance, Udom mentioned this strategy:

Normally, I tend to visit McDonald's restaurant with my friends or my colleagues. I have never come alone. So, I always share the ideas about my uncertainty with other people who come with me. Although my uncertainty still exists after discussing with other people, I can definitely reduce the levels of uncertainty.

Some participants explained that occasionally they gained information from discussion with personal sources. They further explained that they visited McDonald's restaurants with other people such as family, friends, or colleagues; these people always discussed interesting promotions or tasty menu items. So, they gained more information based on the conversations with these people. Moreover, the participants pointed out that the personal sources were more reliable and accessible than the impersonal sources of the mass media.

Information-Seeking Strategy 9—Word-of-Mouth Communication

Temakorn, a participant with uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition, searched for information from his daughter. He recounted, "My daughter usually advises me to try the new menu or healthy menu, so I gain nutrition information, which helps me decrease uncertainty."

Similarly, Jerawan commented:

I gain inadequate information about McDonald's promotion, so I have uncertainty on this issue. My friend is another source that I use for seeking promotion information. When I come to the McDonald's restaurant with my friend, she often recommends interesting promotion to me. I can reduce my uncertainty in promotion ... If my friends do not come with me, I use my previous experiences to make decision about ordering food.

And Jirasak reflected:

Also, I seek information from my neighbors, my friends, or my elder sister. Many times I talk with them about McDonald's promotion and price ... When these people give the information or suggestions to me, I viewed that these recommendations are more reliable than the information that I gain from advertising ... Since advertising information tends to decorate pictures and messages to use for persuasion.

In addition, Kwanmanee narrated her story about acquiring information from her close friend:

Frequently, I have appointment with my close friend at McDonald's restaurant before going to the university together. We prefer to talk and recommend about ordering food. My friend advises me that McCafe beverages are

expensive. I should not purchase them. Instead, I should order McDonald's beverage that provides the same taste as well.

In this study, participants were more likely to seek for information through word-of-mouth communication when they visit McDonald's restaurants with other people. However, most participants preferred to order menu items that they had experience with to ensure everything would suit them.

Information-Seeking Strategy 10—Competitive Brands

In this study, some of the participants sought information comparing McDonald's with other competitive brands such as KFC, Burger King, Chester Grill, and Starbucks Coffee. Participants believed that McDonald's provided more advantages on many aspects than other competitive brands. For example, Udomluk expressed her ideas with uncertainty about McDonald's prices:

I have uncertainty in McDonald's price. I seek for information about McDonald's price by comparing McDonald's price with the price of other brands ... For instance, the Starbuck Coffee, a cup of coffee at Starbuck is more expensive than McDonald's while the atmosphere in McDonald's restaurant is friendlier. I feel that the atmosphere in the Starbuck looks more individually; customers do not have any interaction with each other.

Similarly, Jerawan said:

Although McDonald's provides paper plate and plastic knife for the customers, this makes me have uncertainty. I still patronize McDonald's restaurant. I like the taste of McDonald's products ... McDonald's provides an intensive taste, particularly fried chicken and French fries, than the other ones.

When I compare McDonald's with other brands, I can decrease the degrees of uncertainty.

In the focus group interviews, Tumluksa recounted her ideas about McDonald's and other competitive brands. She observed:

McDonald's has good image with the international reputation when comparing with other fast food brands. McDonald's is the most famous and outstanding fast food restaurant when comparing with the others ... Also, most people acknowledge it ... McDonald's brand is known very long time because it has many strong points. McDonald' should continuously maintain its standard and quality control ... I have some uncertainty in price of McDonald's. I search for information from other fast food products; I found that McDonald's serve many advantages rather than the others. When I compare McDonald's with other brands, I can reduce my uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services.

Information-Seeking Strategy 11—Perceived Reward

All of the participants in this study maintained their interaction with McDonald's even though they had uncertainty or doubts regarding some McDonald's products or services. They argued that the degrees of uncertainty they encountered would be diminished when they were reminded of the benefits that McDonald's offers to customers. They indicated that this approach could help them cope effectively with uncertainty. These participants were satisfied with McDonald's in many constructs: atmosphere, location, cleanliness, and speed. Udomluk, who was working near a McDonald's restaurant, shared her story about McDonald's benefits:

When I have uncertainty with McDonald's, the strategy that I use to reduce my uncertainty is recalling the benefits obtained as the McDonald's customers. McDonald's has attractive atmosphere that is full of convenience, comfort, friendliness, and cleanliness. The employees are polite and friendly. Even the other McDonald's customers, they look friendly as well. When I come, I feel comfortable and relaxed ... Moreover, I come to this restaurant because of rush hour. When I hurry and I feel hungry, having only one burger is enough ... Also, there are many branches of McDonald's restaurants that I feel convenient to visit. We can say that McDonald's can access the lifestyle of the customers ... When I recognize the advantages of McDonald's, I feel happy. I can reduce my uncertainty.

Also, Jerawan recounted that she did not expect more from McDonald's. If McDonald's could not solve her uncertainty, she could decrease her uncertainty by recalling the advantages she gained from McDonald's.

I attempt to consider the advantages based on many aspects that I receive from McDonald's to reduce the issue that I have uncertainty ... For me, this strategy is effective. I can decrease the levels of my uncertainty ... McDonald's provides many good things. For instance, McDonald's has good atmosphere. I can sit at the restaurant for a long time to do my work, to read books or to chat with my friends as much as I can in the restaurant. Also, McDonald's has coffee counter, so I can drink tasty coffee ... In my case, I do not expect more from the McDonald's. I expect only McDonald's to be able to provide foods that I like with good taste, good atmosphere, in a convenient location, and offers friendly employees ... With these issues, I satisfy.

Accordingly, Temakorn reflected on the advantages of McDonald's:

Even though I have uncertainty in McDonald's nutrition, I try to pay attention to the strong points of McDonald's. Thus, I can diminish my uncertainty ... For instance, in term of location, McDonald's tends to be located in the commercial zone and other services such as big department stores, shopping centers, schools, car parks, or gas stations, so it is easy to visit McDonald's ... Besides, I can use McDonald's restaurant to meet my alumni or have a meal with my family ... I satisfy many constructs of McDonald's; the taste, facilities, location, and cleanliness that leads to keep connection with this restaurant.

Similarly, Apavee described the taste, speed, and convenient location of McDonald's:

I still keep relationship with McDonald's even if I have uncertainty in nutrition and price ... I have a strategy to manage uncertainty by reminding the benefits that McDonald's provides. McDonald's offers quality and tasty products. Moreover, I can rely on McDonald's every time that I am running out of time. McDonald's serves "grab and go" meals, serve meal to me quickly ... Furthermore, McDonald's is convenient in terms of location availability and ready to eat meal served in a packaged form. It seems to me that McDonald's is the leader in Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) as I could easily find their locations especially in the prime areas.

Furthermore, Kwanmanee described McDonald's advantages:

I try to keep interaction with McDonald's even though I have uncertainty. I decrease my uncertainty when I consider the interests that McDonald's serves to me ... McDonald's provides good service and opens 24 hours. At the night

time, I can come to McDonald's. Also, the McDonald's employees are nice. I observed that they have service mind and work hard ... For the McDonald's location, McDonald's is convenient for visiting ... Importantly, I like the taste of McDonald's fast food ... I can do many activities at McDonald's because McDonald's is a convenient place that provides soft sofa, air condition, and foods ... When I think of these issues, I can reduce my uncertainty and keep a long-term interaction with McDonald's.

From the two focus group interviews, Katsara recalled the advantages that McDonald's provided to reduce her uncertainty about nutrition. She reported:

Because McDonald's has many advantages such as relaxing and modern atmosphere, available location, and cleanliness. Thus, I still maintain the relationship with the McDonald's even if I have uncertainty in nutrition ... I recall the benefits that McDonald's serves, and I feel happy to reduce my uncertainty ... I believed that McDonald's wants to create customers' satisfactions in every aspect, but it is difficult to do like that.

In addition, Sivakorn (personal communication, July 18, 2010) agreed with this strategy. He recounted by specifically outlining his opinions:

I viewed that McDonald's customers have both satisfactions and dissatisfactions toward McDonald's. However, they still patronize McDonald's because they recognize the benefits served by McDonald's ... For me, I cannot refuse that McDonald's provides many advantages such as speed, location, and various menus. I evaluate that these advantages are much more important for me than the issue about price that I have uncertainty. Thus, I still keep the relationship with the McDonald's.

Interestingly, some participants preferred to reject information that was not consistent with their attitudes in order to reduce their uncertainty, thereby achieving cognitive consistency. These participants had uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition information; however, because they liked McDonald's taste, they wanted to maintain the relationship with McDonald's. For example, Kwanmanee shared her thoughts:

I have uncertainty in McDonald's nutrition menus; however, I still eat McDonald's food because of its good taste. I have a strategy to reduce my anxiety by ignoring information about nutrition fact ... If I want to eat McDonald's products with the anxiety about calories, cholesterol, or fat, I do not have chances to eat foods that I want ... I feel happy to eat McDonald's food because I like it, even when the physician suggested to me to lose weight ... Today, I do not want to worry about calories or fat when I enjoy eating McDonald'. I am more likely to reject the information about calories or fat so that I do not have any uncertainty when I eat McDonald's food ... I think I should reject nutrition information if that information makes me feel unhappy or anxious that destroys my health as well.

In the same vein, Aurasak shared his experiences about reducing uncertainty:

I try to ignore nutrition information to be happy when having McDonald's products. I know that McDonald's products have a lot of fats and calories, but I like its taste. Thus, I do not want to receive McDonald's nutrition information to create my anxiety.

According to the information from the focus group interviews, some participants explained that they did not want to pay attention to any nutrition information even if they had uncertainty about nutrition issues. They attempted to

overlook the information about nutrition of McDonald's products. They strongly believed that they would be worried when receiving information about McDonald's nutrition, so they preferred to avoid this information. Montri shared his experiences:

I have uncertainty in McDonald's nutrition; however, I enjoy the taste of McDonald's products. Thus, I tend to neglect the nutrition information to reduce my uncertainty. When I make decision to eat fast food products, I do not want to pay attention to the nutrition information.

Similarly, Panupong shared his strategy for reducing customers' uncertainty:

Even though I have uncertainty in McDonald's nutrition, I do not want to know the nutrition information. If I know this information, surely I will refuse to eat McDonald's products ... Actually, most customers perceive that fast foods have high calories. However they still consume this kind of foods and attempt to avoid the nutrition information ... I understand the reasons that McDonald's provides nutrition information inadequately.

Based on the qualitative data, this research clearly illustrates the information about the communication strategies that McDonald's executed to provide information and build trusting relationships with its customers as well as reduce customers' uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. Also, the qualitative study helped to identify the causes that provoked customers' uncertainty and the information-seeking strategies that McDonald's customers employed to reduce their uncertainty about McDonald's products or services.

Subsequently, this study used a quantitative approach to investigate the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty when compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants.

Quantitative Findings

The purpose of this section was to measure the level of customers' trust and uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services compared with the frequency of customers visiting McDonald's restaurants. Data were collected from the customers by distributing eighteen self-administered questionnaires in each of twenty-three randomly selected McDonald's restaurants, resulting in four-hundred and fourteen responses.

As presented in chapter three, this study formulated two main hypotheses. Hypothesis one (H1) was that high-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants were more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers. The hypothesis was divided in six sub-hypotheses (H1a – H1f) based on the six dimensions of trust: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty. Hypothesis two (H2) asserted that high-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants were more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers. This hypothesis was divided in five sub-hypotheses (H2a – H2e) that depended on the five constructs of Thai customers' uncertainty: price, promotion, facilities, taste, and nutrition.

Based on the two main hypotheses, this study analyzed the differences in means between two groups, high-frequency customers and low-frequency customers, using t-tests (Fitz-Gibbon & Morris, 1987). The respondents were divided into two groups, high-frequency customers and low-frequency customers, using percentile rank. The cut point of these two groups was the 50th percentile. The customers who visited McDonald's more than three times per month were considered high-frequency

customers. The customers who visited McDonald's three or fewer times per month were considered low-frequency customers.

Reliability Analysis of the Instruments

Reliability tests were conducted to examine the internal consistency of the trust and uncertainty scales. The reliability coefficients of the 20-item trust instrument showed a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.901 (see Table 4.1). For the uncertainty instrument, the reliability coefficients of the 20-item instrument showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.929 (see Table 4.2). These figures exceeded the 0.70 that is recommended in the literature (Nunnally, 1978); therefore, these two instruments had stability and reliability.

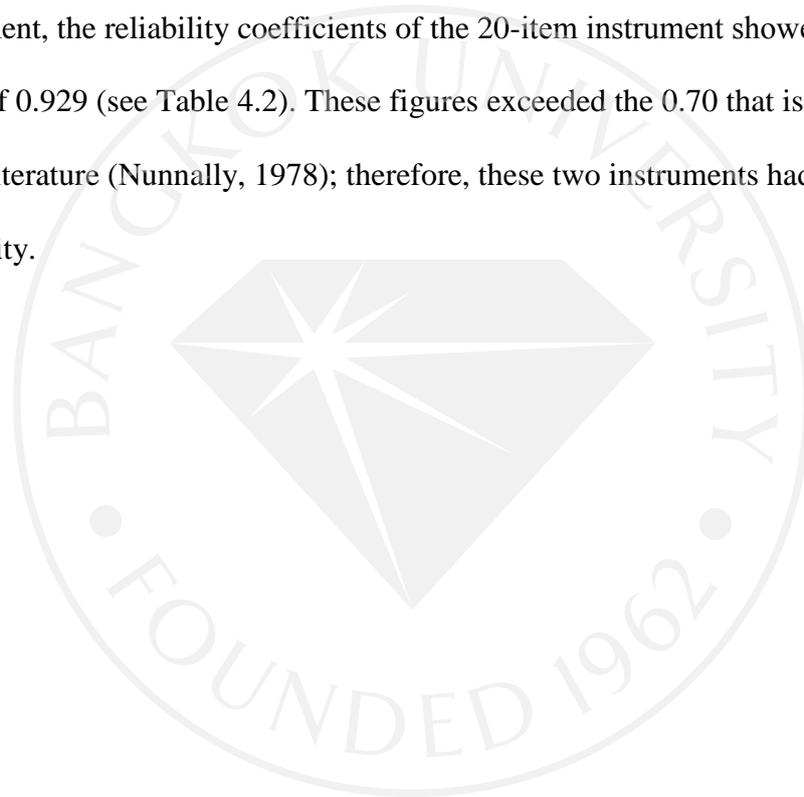


Table 4.1: Reliability Analysis of Customers' Trust Instrument

The statement of measuring trust	Mean	S.D	N	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1. McDonald's pays attention to the comments of its customers.	3.05	.502	60	.870
2. McDonald's puts benefits to the customers as the first priority.	2.72	.613	60	.876
3. McDonald's endeavors to understand the requirements of its customers.	3.03	.610	60	.871
4. McDonald's attempts to meet its customers' requirements.	3.05	.534	60	.873
5. McDonald's can correctly respond to what the customers ask.	2.93	.548	60	.875
6. McDonald's products and services are trustworthy.	3.18	.537	60	.873
7. McDonald's is honest.	3.20	.480	60	.878
8. McDonald's is reliable.	3.22	.454	60	.874
9. McDonald's can immediately respond to customers' complaints.	2.92	.561	60	.873
10. McDonald's staffs are pleasant when serving customers.	3.03	.610	60	.869
11. McDonald's can manage all the needs of its customers.	3.03	.486	60	.868

(Continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): Reliability Analysis of Customers' Trust Instrument

The statement of measuring trust	Mean	S.D	N	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
12. McDonald's has the capability to clearly describe the attributes of its products and services.	3.02	.537	60	.872
13. McDonald's offers sincere recommendations to its customers, even if the customers do not buy its products.	2.90	.511	60	.871
14. McDonald's considers the benefits to the customers from the customers' viewpoint.	2.80	.546	60	.868
15. McDonald's treats the customers honestly.	3.13	.430	60	.875
16. Even if something is not the responsibility of the restaurant, McDonald's still tries to solve the customer's problems.	2.60	.669	60	.872
17. When I intend to purchase fast food products, McDonald's is my first choice.	2.78	.783	60	.879
18. I recommend McDonald's to other people.	2.88	.640	60	.866
19. I praise McDonald's by word-of-mouth to other people.	2.80	.684	60	.870
20. Though other fast food restaurants might offer better choices, I still buy McDonald's products and services.	2.75	.795	60	.872

Cronbach's Alpha 20 items = 0.901

Table 4.2: Reliability Analysis of Customers' Uncertainty Instrument

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Mean	S.D	N	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1. McDonald's offers products at a price that encourages you to purchase the products.	2.77	.673	60	.867
2. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with reasonable prices for the products.	2.83	.642	60	.863
3. McDonald's offers prices for products that are consistent with your expectations.	2.85	.659	60	.861
4. McDonald's provides adequate information about the prices of the products.	3.03	.663	60	.863
5. McDonald's offers sales promotion that encourage you to purchase the products.	2.92	.671	60	.865
6. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with attractive sales promotion.	2.80	.632	60	.860
7. McDonald's offers sales promotion that are consistent with your expectations.	2.80	.576	60	.861
8. McDonald's provides adequate information about sales promotion.	2.75	.704	60	.861
9. McDonald's offers products with quality facilities that encourage you to visit the restaurants.	3.05	.467	60	.870
10. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will obtain the benefits from convenient facilities.	3.15	.481	60	.868

(Continued)

Table 4.2 (continued): Reliability Analysis of Customers' Uncertainty Instrument

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Mean	S.D	N	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
11. McDonald's offers facilities that are consistent with your expectations.	3.12	.524	60	.864
12. McDonald's offers facilities that make you feel more confident in the convenience and comfort of visiting its restaurants.	3.15	.606	60	.862
13. McDonald's offers tasty products that encourage you to visit the restaurants.	3.17	.557	60	.865
14. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will enjoy the taste of fast food products.	3.13	.566	60	.862
15. McDonald's offers fast food tastes that are consistent with your expectations.	3.03	.663	60	.864
16. McDonald's provides adequate information about how its products taste.	2.77	.722	60	.866
17. McDonald's offers products with recognized nutrition that encourage you to be more confident in purchasing the products.	2.65	.777	60	.862
18. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will find nutritious menus.	2.47	.769	60	.863
19. McDonald's offers nutritious menus that are consistent with your expectations.	2.57	.789	60	.862
20. McDonald's provides adequate nutrition information about its menu items.	2.42	.696	60	.863

Cronbach's Alpha 20 items = 0.929

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Tables 4.3-4.8. The majority of the respondents were female (69.6%), between 20 and 29 years of age (56%), held a bachelor's degree (72.9%), the occupation was company officer (41.1%), the salary between 10,001 and 25,000 baht (43.5%). In terms of the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants, slightly more than one-half were low-frequency customers (55.8%). The study involved a total of 414 respondents, 126 or almost one-third were males and 288 or more than two-thirds were females (see Table 4.3)

Table 4.3: Sex of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	126	30.4
Female	288	69.6

In terms of age, most of the respondents or more than one-half were between 20 and 29 years, 111 or more than one-fourth were between 30 and 39 years, and 55 or less than one-fourth were between 40-49 (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
20-29	232	56.0
30-39	111	26.8
40-49	55	13.3
50-59	16	3.9

The education level of respondents revealed most of the respondents or more than three-fourth had a graduate degree, and less than one-fourth had an undergraduate degree (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Educational Level of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Primary level	2	0.5
Secondary level	26	6.3
Diploma	30	7.2
Bachelor's	302	72.9
Master's or Higher	54	13.0

The occupations of the respondents revealed most of the respondents or more than one-half were working persons, company officers, government officers, and business owners and approximately one-fourth were students (see Table 4.6)

Table 4.6: Occupation of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Student	115	27.8
Company officer	170	41.1
Government officer	37	8.9
Business owner	36	8.7
Housewife/Househusband	18	4.3
Others	38	9.2

In term of salary, 180 or most of the respondents had a salary between 10,001 and 25,000 Baht/month, 120 or more than one-fourth had a salary below 10,000 Baht/month (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Salary Range of Respondents

Baht/month	Frequency	Percent
Below 10,000	120	29.0
10,001-25,000	180	43.5
25,001-40,000	72	17.4
40,001-55,000	18	4.3
Above 55,001	24	5.8

The frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants showed that 213 or more than one-half of respondents were low-frequency customers and 183 or less than two-fourth were high-frequency customers (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: The Frequency of Visiting McDonald's Restaurants

	Frequency	Percent
High-frequency customers	183	44.2
Low-frequency customers	213	55.8

Descriptive Analyses

The descriptive analyses of the responses focused on the mean and standard deviation in order to explain the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty in each construct. Based on criteria for weighted scores, the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty were measured following these two regulations. Participants responded on a four-point Likert-type scale, with 1 as "strongly disagree" and 4 as "strongly agree." First, if the respondents had scores from 1.00 to 2.50, it demonstrated low levels of customers' trust. Respondents with scores between 2.51 to 4.00 would present high levels of trust. Second, if the respondents had scores 1.00 to 2.50, it indicated high levels of customers' uncertainty. Meanwhile, the respondents who had scores 2.51 to 4.00 would present low levels of customers' uncertainty.

Descriptive Analyses of Customers' Trust

Based on the analysis, the overall mean of customers' trust in McDonald's restaurants was 2.90, and the standard deviation was 0.34. The level of customers'

trust in the reliability of McDonald's products or services showed the highest mean score, 3.06, and the standard deviation was 0.42. The mean scores of trust in the dependability and the competency of McDonald's products or services showed a mean score of 2.96, and the standard deviations were 0.41 and 0.48, respectively. The mean score of trust in the customer loyalty to McDonald's restaurants showed the lowest mean score, 2.70, and the standard deviation was 0.61 (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9: Summary of Means and Standard Deviation Values for Trust

Constructs of Trust	Mean	S.D.	Levels of Customers' Trust
Trust	2.90	0.34	High
in the caring	2.95	0.39	High
in the reliability	3.06	0.42	High
in the dependability	2.96	0.41	High
in the competency	2.96	0.48	High
in the faith	2.86	0.45	High
in the customer loyalty	2.70	0.61	High

Descriptive Analyses of Customers' Uncertainty

For the levels of customers' uncertainty in McDonald's products or services, the findings revealed the overall mean as 2.77, and the standard deviation was 0.43. When considering customers' uncertainty in each construct, the uncertainty in taste of McDonald's products had the highest mean score, 2.87, and the standard deviation

was 0.53. The mean score of facilities of McDonald's services was 2.86, and the standard deviation was 0.50. For uncertainty about the nutrition of McDonald's products, the mean score as 2.55, with a standard deviation of 0.64 (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10: Summary of Means and Standard Deviation Values for Uncertainty

Constructs of Uncertainty	Mean	S.D.	Levels of Customers' Uncertainty
Uncertainty	2.77	0.43	Low
in price	2.75	0.51	Low
in promotion	2.81	0.51	Low
in facilities	2.86	0.50	Low
in taste	2.87	0.53	Low
in nutrition	2.55	0.64	Low

Testing the Hypotheses

Two main hypotheses were tested to measure the degree of trust and uncertainty in each construct compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants.

H1: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.

This hypothesis measured the levels of customers' trust regarding McDonald's products or services compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants. The levels of customers' trust were measured through six dimensions: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty

Results of Hypothesis 1a – Hypothesis 1f

H1a: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the caring dimension than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of trust in the caring of McDonald's when compared with the frequency of the customer visiting McDonald's restaurants. The caring dimension refers to the expressions of McDonald's concerning problems and requirements of its customers.

The variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for trust in the caring since the p value of Levene's test was .781, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05 (see Table 4.11). Based on assumed equal variances, the non-significant difference in the means of trust in the caring between high-frequency and low-frequency customers ($t_{1,2} = 0.466, p > 0.05$) resulted in a failure to support H1a.

Table 4.11: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Trust in the Caring)

Group Statistics

Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
trust in the caring	High	183	11.8251	1.53	0.11
	Low	231	11.7532	1.58	0.10

Independent Sample Test

Trust		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
trust in the caring	Equal variances assumed	.077	.781	.466	412	.321	.072	.154

H1b: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the reliability dimension than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of trust in the reliability of McDonald's when compared with the frequency of the customer visiting McDonald's restaurants. The reliability dimension refers to the degree which customers can rely on the statements or expressions of McDonald's.

Trust in the reliability dimension was tested by using a t-test with independent samples (see Table 4.12). It was revealed that the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers was not statistically different for trust in the reliability

since the p value of Levene's test was equal to .336. The t value, based on equal variances assumed, showed a significant difference in the means for trust in the reliability between different frequency of visiting restaurants ($t_{1,2}=2.119$, $p < 0.05$), leading to support for H1b.

Table 4.12: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Trust in the Reliability)

Group Statistics

Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
trust in the reliability	High	183	9.34	1.15	0.08
	Low	231	9.07	1.35	0.09

Independent Sample Test

Trust		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
trust in the reliability	Equal variances assumed	.929	.336	2.119	412	.018	.265	.125

H1c: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the dependability dimension than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of trust in the dependability of McDonald's when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's

restaurants. The dependability dimension means the customer could perceive the assistance of McDonald's.

As Table 4.13 indicates, the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for trust in the dependability since the p value of Levene's test was .508, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the result, based on equal variances assumed, showed a significant difference in the means of trust in the dependability between high-frequency and low-frequency customers ($t_{1,2} = 1.972$, $p < 0.05$), leading to support for H1c.

Table 4.13: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Trust in the Dependability)

Group Statistics

Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
trust in the dependability	High	183	9.01	1.23	0.09
	Low	231	8.77	1.23	0.08

Independent Sample Test

Trust		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
trust in the dependability	Equal variances assumed	.440	.508	1.972	412	.025	.240	.122

H1d: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the competency dimension than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of trust in the competency of McDonald's when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants. The competency dimension refers to the abilities of McDonald's to completely follow its obligations and responsibilities to its customers.

Trust in the competency was tested using a t-test with independent samples (see Table 4.14). It was revealed that the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers was not statistically different for trust in the competency since the p value of Levene's test was equal to .121. The t value, based on equal variances assumed, showed a non-significant difference in the means for trust in the competency between different frequency of visiting restaurants ($t_{1,2}=1.213$, $p > 0.05$); thus, a failure to find support for H1d.

Table 4.14: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Trust in the Competency)

Group Statistics

Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
trust in the competency	High	183	5.99	0.90	0.07
	Low	231	5.87	0.99	0.07

(Continued)

Table 4.14 (continued): Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus

Trust in the Competency)

Independent Sample Test

Trust		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
trust in the competency	Equal variances assumed	2.414	.121	1.213	412	.113	.115	.094

H1e: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the faith dimension than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of trust in the faith of McDonald's when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants. The faith dimension refers to the goodwill of McDonald's in the viewpoint of its customers.

The variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for trust in the faith since the p value of Levene's test was .248, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05 (see Table 4.15). The result, based on equal variances assumed, showed a significant difference in means of trust in the faith between high-frequency and low-frequency customers ($t_{1,2} = 2.852, p < 0.05$), and supported H1e.

Table 4.15: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Trust in the Faith)

Group Statistics

Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
trust in the faith	High	183	11.71	1.68	0.12
	Low	231	11.21	1.83	0.12

Independent Sample Test

Trust		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
trust in the faith	Equal variances assumed	1.338	.248	2.852	412	.002	.498	.175

H1f: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a higher level of trust in the customer loyalty dimension than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of trust in the customer loyalty when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants. The customer loyalty dimension referred to commitment or repeated purchases by customers of McDonald's products or services.

The customer loyalty was tested by using a t-test with independent samples (see Table 4.16). It was reported that the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers was not statistically different for trust in the customer loyalty

since the p value of Levene's test was equal to .138. The t value, based on equal variances assumed, showed a significant difference in the means for the trust in the customer loyalty between different frequency of visiting restaurants ($t_{1,2} = 3.772$, $p < 0.05$), leading to support for H1f.

Table 4.16: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Trust in the Customer Loyalty)

Group Statistics

Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
trust in the customer loyalty	High	183	11.30	2.31	0.17
	Low	231	10.42	2.48	0.16

Independent Sample Test

Trust		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
trust in the customer loyalty	Equal variances assumed	2.203	.138	3.722	412	.000	.885	.238

Hypothesis two measured the degrees of customers' uncertainty about McDonald's products or services compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants.

H2: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services than low-frequency customers.

Five constructs from the qualitative research, demonstrated that McDonald's Thai customers have uncertainty in price, promotional incentives, facilities, taste, and nutrition. The t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

Results of the Hypothesis 2a – Hypothesis 2e

H2a: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in price construct than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of uncertainty in McDonald's prices when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants.

The variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for uncertainty in the prices since the p value of Levene's test was .992, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05 (see Table 4.17). The result, based on equal variances assumed, showed a significant difference in the means of the level of uncertainty in price between high-frequency and low-frequency customers ($t_{1,2} = 2.363, p < 0.05$), finding support for H2a.

Table 4.17: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Uncertainty in Price)

Group Statistics

Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in price	High	183	11.26	2.02	0.149
	Low	231	10.78	2.07	0.136

Independent Sample Test

Uncertainty		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in price	Equal variances assumed	.000	.992	2.363	412	.009	.479	.202

H2b: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in promotional incentives construct than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of uncertainty in McDonald's promotion when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants.

As shown in Table 4.18, the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for uncertainty in the promotion incentives since the p value of Levene's test was 0.092, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05. The result, based on equal

variances assumed, showed a significant difference in the means of uncertainty in promotional incentives between high-frequency and low-frequency customers ($t_{1,2} = 2.291, p < 0.05$), leading to support for H2b.

Table 4.18: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Uncertainty in Promotional Incentives)

Group Statistics

Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in promotional incentives	High	183	12.54	1.51	0.111
	Low	231	12.18	1.63	0.107

Independent Sample Test

Uncertainty		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in promotional incentives	Equal variances assumed	2.845	.092	2.291	412	.011	.358	.156

H2c: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in facilities construct than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of uncertainty in McDonald's facilities when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants.

Uncertainty in facilities was tested by using a t-test with independent samples (see Table 4.19). It was revealed that the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers was not statistically different for uncertainty in the facilities since the p value of Levene's test is equal to .109. The t value, based on equal variance assumed, also showed a non-significant difference in the means for uncertainty in facilities ($t_{1,2}=1.569$, $p > 0.05$), resulting in a failure to find support for H2c.

Table 4.19: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Uncertainty in Facilities)

Group Statistics

Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in facilities	High	183	11.80	1.60	0.12
	Low	231	11.54	1.76	0.12

Independent Sample Test

Uncertainty		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in facilities	Equal variances assumed	2.587	.109	1.569	412	.058	.262	.167

H2d: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in taste construct than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of uncertainty in McDonald's taste when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants.

The variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for uncertainty in taste since the p value of Levene's test was 0.115, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05 (see Table 4.20). Therefore, the result, based on equal variance assumed, showed a significant difference in means of uncertainty in taste between different frequency of visiting restaurants ($t_{1,2} = 1.923$, $p < 0.05$), with support for H2d.

Table 4.20: Analysis of Independent Samples Test (Frequency versus Uncertainty in Taste)

Group Statistics

Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in taste	High	183	11.71	1.94	0.14
	Low	231	11.31	2.21	0.15

Independent Sample Test

Uncertainty		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in taste	Equal variances assumed	2.494	.115	1.923	412	.027	.399	.207

H2e: High-frequency customers of McDonald's restaurants are more likely to have a lower level of uncertainty in nutrition construct than low-frequency customers.

This sub-hypothesis measured the levels of uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition when compared with the frequency of a customer visiting McDonald's restaurants.

As Table 4.21 indicates, the variance between high-frequency and low-frequency customers using a t-test for independent samples was not statistically different for uncertainty in nutrition since the p value of Levene's test was .672, which exceeded the significance level of 0.05. The result, based on equal variance assumed, showed a significant difference in means of uncertainty in nutrition between high-frequency and low-frequency customers ($t_{1,2} = 1.896$, $p < 0.05$), leading to support for H2e.

Table 4.21: Analysis of Independent Sample Test (Frequency versus Uncertainty in Nutrition)

Group Statistics

Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in nutrition	High	183	10.46	2.52	0.19
	Low	231	9.98	2.60	0.17

(Continued)

Table 4.21 (continued): Analysis of Independent Sample Test (Frequency versus
Uncertainty in Nutrition)

Independent Sample Test

Uncertainty		Levene's Test (F)	Sig	t	df	1-Tail Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Mean
uncertainty in nutrition	Equal variances assumed	.180	.672	1.896	412	.029	.481	.253

The final tables, 4.22 and 4.23, summarize the results of the hypothesis testing.

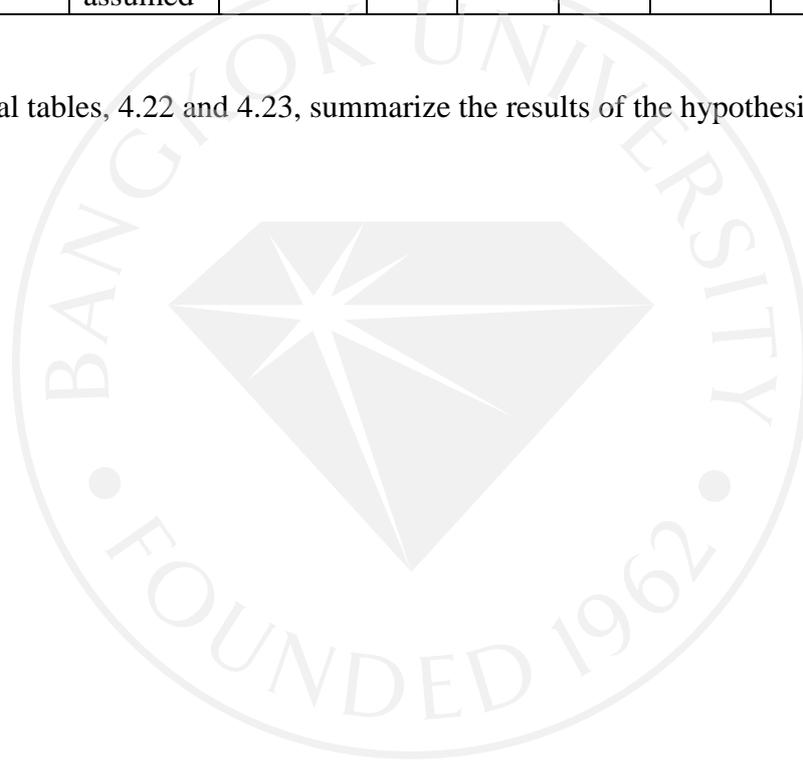


Table 4.22: Summary Results for Analysis of Independent Sample Test in the Levels
of Customers' Trust

Dimensions of Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>p</i> value of Levene's test	t	1-Tail Sig	Sig																																																												
Caring (H1a)	High	183	11.8251	1.53	.781	.466	.321	No																																																												
	Low	231	11.7532	1.58					Reliability (H1b)	High	183	9.34	1.15	.336	2.119	.018	Yes	Low	231	9.07	1.35	Dependability (H1c)	High	183	9.01	1.23	.508	1.972	.025	Yes	Low	231	8.77	1.23	Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No	Low	231	5.87	0.99	Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000
Reliability (H1b)	High	183	9.34	1.15	.336	2.119	.018	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	9.07	1.35					Dependability (H1c)	High	183	9.01	1.23	.508	1.972	.025	Yes	Low	231	8.77	1.23	Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No	Low	231	5.87	0.99	Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48								
Dependability (H1c)	High	183	9.01	1.23	.508	1.972	.025	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	8.77	1.23					Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No	Low	231	5.87	0.99	Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48																					
Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No																																																												
	Low	231	5.87	0.99					Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48																																		
Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	11.21	1.83					Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48																																															
Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	10.42	2.48																																																																

Table 4.23: Summary Results for Analysis of Independent Sample Test in the Levels of Customers' Uncertainty

Constructs of Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>p</i> value of Levene's test	<i>t</i>	1-Tail Sig	Sig
Price (H2a)	High	183	11.26	2.02	.992	2.363	.009	Yes
	Low	231	10.78	2.07				
Promotion (H2b)	High	183	12.54	1.51	.092	2.291	.011	Yes
	Low	231	12.18	1.63				
Facilities (H2c)	High	183	11.80	1.60	.109	1.569	.058	No
	Low	231	11.54	1.76				
Taste (H2d)	High	183	11.71	1.94	.115	1.923	.027	Yes
	Low	231	11.31	2.21				
Nutrition (H2e)	High	183	10.46	2.52	.672	1.896	.029	Yes
	Low	231	9.98	2.60				

Based on the analysis of the quantitative data, the hypotheses about the level of customers' trust in six dimensions of trust: caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty, and the level of customers' uncertainty in the five constructs: price, promotion, facilities, taste, and nutrition, were tested by

using a t-test for independent samples. The results from this step provided more information about the degree of customers' trust and uncertainty when comparing high-frequency and low-frequency customers. Subsequently, the discussion section in Chapter Five will give extended explanations that are supported by the previous research and the ideas of the researcher.



CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a critical examination of the communication strategies that McDonald's uses to provide information, build customers' trust, and reduce customers' uncertainty. This chapter also discusses the issues that provoke customers' uncertainty and information-seeking strategies that are relevant to decreasing customers' uncertainty regarding products or services of McDonald's quick service restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. The levels of customers' trust and uncertainty, when compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants, are discussed as well. The discussion presents the interpretation of both the qualitative and quantitative findings based on the reviews of relevant literature and the perspectives of the researcher.

Qualitative Discussion

Discussion of RQ1: Communication Strategies to Provide Information to Customers

The first research question in this study asked what communication strategies McDonald's used to provide information to its customers. Based on the results from the in-depth interview with the Communications and PR Director (CPRD) and the Communications and PR Consultant (CPRC), the principal communication strategies that McDonald's executes are Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), including above-the-line and below-the-line strategies. The CPRD explained that McDonald's attempts to use different communication channels, such as advertising media through a short movie on TV, radio broadcasts, coupons, sales promotions, newspaper ads, and other activities, depending on the situation, product, market, and

target in order to provide information to the customers and thoroughly and effectively promote the products. The results of the first research question are relevant to previous research concerning the management of communication strategies.

Previous research has categorized communication strategies into two traditions: the modern perspective and the postmodern perspective. The modern perspective argued that communication instruments should be employed independently. Whereas, a postmodern perspective argued that combining communication instruments, as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), is an effective communication strategy to provide clear and consistent messages to customers (Proctor & Kitchen, 2002). Additionally, Pelsmacker et al. (2005) explained that a modern perspective focuses on using traditional mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers, which are rather expensive and have the limitation in time and space. Subsequently, IMC became more prevalent within all types of business. Most organizations use mass media in combination with other communication channels such as public relations, personal selling, exhibitions, and sales promotions that bring effective communication strategies into the marketing contexts.

Various definitions of IMC have been discussed to develop and extend this knowledge. For example, Schultz and Schultz (1998) proposed that IMC refers to a strategic marketing plan determined to implement, evaluate, develop, and coordinate communication media that a marketer executes with the customers and other targets. Similarly, Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991) indicated that IMC is a concept of marketing communication planning that focuses on integrating and evaluating a variety of communication disciplines such as general advertising, direct responses,

sales promotion, and public relations; these disciplines are integrated to convey clear and consistent messages to the customers.

The concept of IMC is related to above-the-line and below-the-line communication. Smith and Taylor (2004) studied marketing communication and claimed that above-the-line (ATL) is the communication tool which concentrates on using traditional media or mass media (television, radio, print advertising, newspaper, magazine, and banner advertising) to effect contact with the customers and other targets. These media are impersonal to customers, so are less influential on customers' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Differently, below-the-line (BTL) are the communication tools that stress employing specific channels such as direct mail, e-mail, sales promotions, point of purchase, public relations, and special events to activate and promote products or services to the customers. Below-the-line communications are more directly accessible to customers than above-the-line, so they are more influential on customers' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. Normally, organizations are more likely to execute both above-the-line and below-the-line strategies depending on the situations, products, and audiences. Furthermore, the answer of the CPRD and the CPRC on managing communication strategies showed that McDonald's prefers to analyze its products, customers, markets, and situations before using communication tools to provide information to the customers. This result appears plausible and consonant with the idea of postmodern marketing where competitiveness is high, the marketing situations are complicated, and customers' demands are diverse. Thus, it is necessary that the capacities of communication strategies should be enhanced in order to effectively communicate with the customers. In the age of globalization, organizations are expanding their

businesses toward international markets, toward a global brand. At the same time, those organizations have to create messages and communication tools to be compatible with customers, who are different in cultures, attitudes, values, and beliefs. It can be argued that the organizations should place more importance on adapting communication to each locale.

Additionally, the results revealed that the departments that are responsible for communication are categorized into two divisions: Marketing Division and PR Communication Division. These two divisions always coordinately work and share information between them. In the regular situation, McDonald's uses marketing tools as the lead, and public relations as the support. On the other hand, during a crisis situation, the credible and reliable sources are important, so public relations will take the lead instead of using marketing in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the information and the company. This finding is in accordance with Pelsmacker et al. (2005), who articulated that, apart from combining the channels, IMC is most effective when departments in the organization are integrated, especially the departments that are responsible for implementing the communication. This usually increases the flow of information across departments, sharing information, and coordination in determining the communication activities. Consequently, organizations need to gradually develop IMC to provide information and successfully promote products or services.

McDonald's/McThai pay attention to effective management of information during a crisis situation. McDonald's prefers to set up the third party discussions among McDonald's, suppliers, and media, to explain and share ideas about the crisis situation. It shows that the messages from a person with comprehensive information

seems credible to customers. This finding is congruent with previous research.

Ashcroft (1997) argued that effective management of information at a time of crisis is significant. In crisis management, the spokespersons have to be trained to communicate fully with the audience. Importantly, the spokespersons should have accurate and precise information before speaking and be familiar and comfortable with the information they will present. Through this, the crisis situation will be managed effectively.

Discussion of RQ1a: Communication Strategies to Build Trust Relationships

RQ1a focused on examining the communication strategies that the CPRD and the CPRC used to build trusting relationships with its customers. The results from this study revealed there are three strategies McDonald's executed to build those relationships: 1) QSC and V strategy; 2) supplier strategy; and 3) community strategy. QSC and V refer to Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value that McDonald's holds as a philosophy or principle policy for operating a business. McDonald's strongly believes that offering product quality will create trusting relationships with customers. Thus, McDonald's puts a lot of effort into quality control and standards for the products. Prior theoretical and empirical research about trust and product quality support this idea as Anderson and Sullivan (1993) identified a positive effect of product quality on customers' satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and future purchase intentions of the customers.

In the aspect of service, I found that McDonald's attempts to provide service quality for the customers to build trusting relationships as well. Johnson and Winchell (1988) proposed that service quality means the total attributes or abilities of the product or service that respond to the needs of customers. Also, service quality has

been referred to as a service that can suit and fulfill customers' requirements or expectations (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990). The results of this study are consistent with the previous research; it demonstrated that high quality service can create customers' satisfaction and customers' trust in order to bring customer loyalty (Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Similarly, Ouyang (2010) argued that service quality and trust are interrelated. Service quality had a direct and significant effect on trust. Obviously, nowadays, most service companies attempt to promote service sectors in order to create trust to the customers (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990). It seems reasonable to argue that customers' trust can be produced when customers believe that a company will provide quality service. Besides, when analyzing the dimensions of service quality, we can see that the dimensions are related to the dimensions of trust. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) measured service quality through five dimensions: 1) tangibles-physical facilities, equipments, and personal appearance 2) empathy-caring and attention regarding services 3) assurance-knowledge and capability of service to build up trust and confidence 4) reliability-dependability to offer promised service and 5) responsiveness-willingness to assist and provide prompt service.

In terms of value, the research results revealed that McDonald's provides the EVM, Extra Value Meal, to help the customers obtain value for their money. Moreover, the value that McDonald's provides includes comfortable ambience, restaurant cleanliness, and good facilities. McDonald's provides these things to generate trusting relationships with the customers. This finding is congruent with the previous research (Zeithaml, 1988). Typically, the value means the benefits related to the costs. In consumer goods, the meaning of benefits is broad and is not restricted to

only economic savings such as a discount or special pricing or treatment. The benefits can refer to product quality, product features, and a convenient environment that customers will obtain from the company. When customers receive these benefits, it can reduce uncertainty and increase predictability and the trust relationship with the company. Consequently, the customers do not want to switch the service providers. From this finding, we can observe that McDonald's attempts to offer various promotional incentives, a relaxed and convenient atmosphere, and benefits from convenient facilities. Consequently, most Thai customers prefer to visit McDonald's restaurants to do other activities such as meeting with their friends, doing homework, talking about business, and waiting for their children, separate from having a meal.

The results also revealed that McDonald's executes a supplier strategy to build trusting relationships with the customers since the CPRD and the CPRC observed that the suppliers are significant partners to help McDonald's produce quality products or services for the customers. As a result, McDonald's has a strong intention to develop and improve the suppliers' standards in order to meet the McDonald's achievement requirements. Also, if customers have uncertainty about food safety, McDonald's will set up a third-party discussion and share correct information among McDonald's, suppliers, and customers to build customers' trust and confidence. According to the previous research, a climate of trust will be generated when sharing the exact information. In the marketing context, when customers encounter uncertainty, the supplier has a major role to communicate and explain the technical and sensitive information to the customers to prevent unsatisfactory relationships. All of these actions enhance the atmosphere of customers' trust (Langfield-Smith & Greenwood, 1998).

The final strategy that McDonald's executed to create trusting relationships with the customers is a community strategy, contributing help and support to the community through the Ronald McDonald's House Charities Foundation. The principle of the community strategy is related to corporate social responsibility (CSR). This strategy is supported by Mowen and Minor (1998), who indicated that customers tend to trust the companies which promote CSR because these companies seem to have moral behavior. Correspondingly, Godfrey (2005) argued that CSR is associated with building moral perceptions and trust relationships that usually increases purchase intention. In contrast, Carrigan and Attala (2001) found that customers continue to purchase the products or services from unethical firms if these firms can still provide good economic benefits to the customers. Moreover, the CPRD confirmed that McDonald's implements these strategies from the foundation, not just focusing on only doing cosmetic communication marketing. It seems reasonable to argue that McDonald's builds trusting relationships with its customers through providing quality and standard products, beneficial services, and a good image.

Discussion of RQ1b: Communication Strategies to Reduce Customers' Uncertainty

For the RQ1b, the CPRD and the CPRC expressed uncertainty regarding how well the strategies work to reduce customers' uncertainty. The results showed that McDonald's perceives the customers' uncertainty in taste, price, facilities, and nutrition. McDonald's attempts to prevent these uncertainty issues through the systematic managing of the production process to provide quality products and services to the customers. However, the CPRD and the CPRC articulated that there are many possible causes of the customers' uncertainty, such as employee acts during

the cooking process, global policies that McDonald's has to follow, or a lack of information among customers, which McDonald's cannot easily change.

Obviously, McDonald's pays attention to the customers' uncertainty issues and agrees to consider some things to be compatible with Thai customers' requirements. For instance, the CPRD agreed to consider providing more nutrition information in graphic design form to further reduce customers' uncertainty about the nutritional value of McDonald's food items. The CPRD thought that McDonald's could create customers' beliefs based on the customers' experience with the McDonald's brand, products, and services. The CPRD's notion is related to the idea of Proctor and Kitchen (2002), who proposed that the postmodern consumers are diverse and do not present uniqueness. They want to experience several themes, not to be fixed with a single pattern. It is necessary that marketing in postmodern times recognizes customization and segmentation of markets in micro-groups as fragmentation in order to reach different styles, forms, types, situations, and locations of the customers.

The present study demonstrated that the CPRD and the CPRC used two strategies to reduce uncertainty among customers. The first strategy was giving the appropriate amount of communication. McDonald's director observed that McDonald's should not over- or under-communicate with the customers about uncertainty issues. Also, McDonald's should provide available and accessible information so that the customers can acquire sufficient information to diminish their uncertainty. The answer to RQ 1b supports the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) proposed by Berger and Calabrese (1975). Berger and Calabrese stated that, during any relationship with other people, the individuals might encounter uncertainty. When

individuals have uncertainty from interaction with the partner, they are more likely to reduce uncertainty and maintain the relationship with their partners by acquiring more information about the issues on which they have uncertainty. Receiving adequate information from the partner is the most effective method that helps individuals decrease uncertainty.

Additionally, Berger (1987) asserted that communication and uncertainty are intertwined. Continuous and sufficient communication between the partners can help them explain and predict the perceptions, beliefs, values, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors of their partners that lead to the reduction of uncertainty. Similarly, Parks and Adelman (1983) described how a lack of communication between partners can lead to increases in the levels of uncertainty and have deleterious effects on the relationship. Thus, the benefits of continuous and adequate communication between the partners, to increase intimacy and decrease uncertainty, are the significant issues that have been discussed in the Uncertainty Reduction Theory. It seems reasonable to argue that a lack of communication can increase the degrees of uncertainty.

Equally important, Berger and Bradac (1982) indicated that we cannot concentrate on only the amount of communication in reducing uncertainty. In some cases, the amount of communication or interaction with the partners might provoke uncertainty. For instance, some people intend to over-communicate and act in order to conceal their actual behaviors and beliefs; thus, the receivers should ascertain the actual intentions of the sender. Additionally, Berger and Calabrese (1975) commented that the amount of communication might not predict or explain the occurrence of uncertainty. The quality of communication between the partners and accessible and available information is more crucial to reducing uncertainty than the quantity of

communication. There is one possible explanation for this finding when McDonald's perceives that, today, Thai people pay more attention to health concerns. They attempt to carefully control the number of calories they ingest. While some McDonald's foods are fried, and have flour as the main ingredient, McDonald's does not want to communicate too much regarding the product nutrition information. At the same time, McDonald's does not want to under-communicate, so McDonald's communicates about this issue through its website that customers can access.

The second strategy that the CPRD and the CPRC used to reduce uncertainty of customers was Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), including below-the-line and above-the-line communication. The director further explained that the IMC strategy stresses using various channels to communicate with the customers, 360 degrees of communication. IMC helps McDonald's convey information to customers to effectively diminish customers' uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services. The findings were consistent with several studies of IMC. For instance, Proctor and Kitchen (2002) articulated that the attributes of communication in the current marketing environment have shifted from the individuality of communication channels toward IMC. The organizations are more likely to integrate various communication channels into their marketing plans in order to convey information about the products and services of organizations to the customers. When customers receive sufficient information about a brand's attributes, customers have enough knowledge and confidence to make decisions about the brand; this can lead to a reduction of uncertainty (Pras & Summers, 1978).

I considered the information from several sources to cross-check the strategies that the CPRD and the CPRC referred to in the in-depth interview. I found that

McDonald's had actually executed the communication strategies as the CPRD and the CPRC mentioned in the qualitative interview. For instance, in the aspect of building trust relationship with customers, I reviewed the brochure McDonald's provided in the restaurants to inform customers of the activities organized by the Ronald McDonald House Charities. Those activities were consonant with the "community strategies" that the CPRD and the CPRC addressed when being interviewed about building customers' trust. In another example, I accessed the company website to cross-check information about the nutrition of McDonald's products. I found that McDonald's provided nutrition information in each menu item through its website. Also, McDonald's provided nutrition information through leaflets on the food tray. This was consistent with "appropriate amount of communication strategy," not over- or under-communicating, that the CPRD and the CPRC mentioned when being interviewed about communication strategies to reduce customers' uncertainty. Moreover, I had opportunities to observe channels McDonald's employed to provide information regarding its products and services. The results indicated that McDonald's communicates with its customers through various channels: television, magazine, social media, activities, and point of purchase. It meant McDonald's used the IMC strategy, both above-the-line and below-the-line, to convey information to its customers. This observation was related to the qualitative interview data gained from the CPRD and the CPRC as well.

Discussion of RQ2: Uncertainty in McDonald's Products or Services

The second research question asked how McDonald's customers experienced uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services when interacting with a McDonald's restaurant. From the in-depth and focus group interviews, the results

demonstrated that McDonald's customers experienced uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services in five constructs: price, promotion, taste, nutrition, and facilities. Especially, in terms of the nutrition construct, the results indicated that ten out of the twelve participants, both males and females, had uncertainty about the nutritional value of McDonald's menu items. It can be argued that the customers today are more likely to pay attention to health concerns; thus, nutrition is one of the main constructs on which McDonald's has to develop both nutritious products and information on nutrition to be compatible with customers' requirements. This result is consonant with Proctor and Kitchen (2002) who indicated that successful businesses find it necessary to shed light on the following issues: consumers' health, environmental turbulence, escalating internationalization and globalization, interconnected economies, and pollution of the resources.

Furthermore, the second research question revealed that all of the participants preferred to reduce their uncertainty and maintain the relationship with McDonald's because they believed that McDonald's could provide some beneficial rewards to them such as convenient locations, relaxed and convenient atmosphere, tasty foods, and quick and quality services. The findings supported the previous studies of Berger and Bradac (1982), who postulated that there are three plausible reasons for activating the reduction of uncertainty. First, individuals prefer to decrease uncertainty when they perceive a high incentive; this reflects that they will receive the certainty from maintaining a relationship. Second, when a partner's expressions or attitudes change from normal cases, individuals will implement an uncertainty reduction process in order to explain the change in the partner's behaviors. Third, when individuals want

to keep continuous and mutual interaction with their partners into the future, individuals will make a lot of effort to reduce uncertainty.

Additionally, cultural difference is one of the significant factors that results in customers having different perceptions and levels of uncertainty toward fast food restaurants. According to Hofstede (1980), people in a high-power distance culture emphasize the emotional gratification of the dining experience rather than the expense for service value. For instance, Park (2004) found that Korean customers, who are in a high- power distance culture, viewed fast food restaurants as not only the place for having meals but also a sociable place. Not surprisingly, Korean customers prefer to visit fast food restaurants for eating and meeting with their friends, even if they think the price of fast food is rather expensive. Similarly, Brady et al. (2001) studied a cross-cultural assessment of the effects regarding service quality, service value, and satisfaction on American and Ecuadorian fast food customers. They found that Ecuadorian customers, who are high- power distance, went to a fast food restaurant because they enjoyed the modern and novel ambience of the restaurant. On the other hand, American customers, who are low-power distance, viewed price as the important attribute of fast food restaurants. They viewed fast food restaurants as places that serve fast and inexpensive food.

Thai culture is a high-context culture where community is the dominant value (Hall, 1976). Thai people are more likely to spend their time with family and friends, so they want to find comfortable places to support their activities such as talking, reading, playing on the internet, making appointments, and doing homework. McDonald's restaurants in Thailand can support Thai customers in these activities. McDonald's attempts to use localization strategies in order to adjust their services and

products to be more appropriate with the lifestyle, identity, and culture of the Thai customers in order to increase the relationship between McDonald's and its Thai customers. Obviously, even Ronald McDonald, McDonald's mascot, expresses the Thai famous gesture, called "Wai," at the door of McDonald's restaurants to greet Thai customers. The explanation is that McDonald's attempts to understand the cultural difference and adjust its performance to be compatible with the different customers in many localities.

Discussion of RQ3: Information-Seeking Strategies to Reduce Customers'

Uncertainty

The third research question of this study examined the information-seeking strategies used by McDonald's customers to reduce their uncertainty. The results from the in-depth interviews with twelve customers and two focus groups totaling twelve customers, revealed that McDonald's customers, encountering uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services, tried to reduce their uncertainty through employing information-seeking strategies to maintain the relationship with McDonald's.

Eleven information-seeking strategies that McDonald's customers employ were extracted from the interviews. The eleven strategies were: Discount Coupons, Communication Technology, Mass Media, Point of Purchase, Direct Asking, Direct Observation, Previous Experience, Third-Party Discussion, Word-of-Mouth Communication, Competitive Brands, and Perceived Reward. The participants confirmed that these strategies could help them receive more information regarding McDonald's products or services, leading to a reduction in uncertainty. The answers from the third research question confirmed the conceptualization of information-seeking strategies. Berger (1986) reported that information-seeking can support

uncertainty reduction. When individuals receive adequate information from their partners, the degrees of uncertainty will be diminished and help individuals maintain interaction with the partners. Moreover, Berger and Bradac(1982) proposed that information-seeking strategies can be categorized into three types: passive, active, and interactive strategies.

First, passive strategies concentrate on unobtrusive observation, without any interaction between the observer and the partner. Second, active strategies focus on asking questions from a third party such as colleagues, neighbors, family members, or friends, in order to gather information about the target person. This strategy assumes that within social networks, people have proximity with other people, so they can acquire information from others. Also, the target person will be observed without direct interaction with observers in this strategy. Finally, interactive strategies are related to direct interaction between the people and the partner. It means that people will receive intentionally communicated disclosures from the partner through face-to-face interaction. Thus, people can observe the partner's response through this strategy.

The studies of information acquisition have been discussed in the discipline of marketing communication as well. When uncertainty arises, consumers prefer to acquire more information from many sources such as direct observations, previous experiences, and other information searches to reduce uncertainty about products and services (Howard & Sheth, 1969).Furthermore, when formal information sources are insufficient, customers prefer to use personal channels or personal influence.

According to Perry and Hamm (1969), the higher the level of uncertainty, the greater the use of personal channels in an attempt to reduce the uncertainty. Similarly, Lutz and Reilly (1973) revealed that word-of-mouth plays an important role in

seeking marketing information and has more influence on consumers than mass media. It can be argued that customers are more likely to seek information from individual sources, such as word-of-mouth, rather than from impersonal sources, such as the mass media, when having high degrees of uncertainty. Conversely, when the levels of uncertainty are low or moderate, customers tend to employ direct observations to acquire product or service information (Lutz & Reilly, 1973).

Interestingly, the results of this study also indicated that some participants preferred to ignore rather than seek information. In the case of nutrition uncertainty, although some customers had uncertainty about McDonald's nutrition, they avoided finding nutrition information. They thought that nutrition information about McDonald's products might cause them distress; therefore, they were more comfortable ignoring the nutrition information when eating McDonald's products. The concept of information avoidance is consonant with this result. Information avoidance refers to the escape from receiving information that is overwhelming and distressing. In some cases, people are more likely to protect their feelings, hopes, and optimism by maintaining uncertainty. They prefer to avoid information so that they can manipulate uncertainty to be suitable with their expectations (Brashers et al., 2002).

Quantitative Discussion

Discussion of Hypothesis 1a – Hypothesis 1f

The results of the levels of customers' trust in the six constructs including caring, reliability, dependability, competency, faith, and customer loyalty, revealed that high-frequency and low-frequency customers have significant differences in the means of the level of their trust in the reliability, dependability, faith, and customer

loyalty. It seems reasonable to argue that the frequency of visiting or interacting between McDonald's restaurants and customers produced the degrees of customers' trust in these four dimensions. Consequently, high-frequency customers, visiting McDonald's restaurants more than three times per month, were more likely to have a higher level of trust in the reliability, dependability, faith, and customer loyalty than low-frequency customers visiting McDonald's equal to or less than three times per month.

In terms of customers' trust in the reliability dimension, it seems reasonable to argue that the customers who visited McDonald's restaurants more than three times per month, the high-frequency customers, had more chances to accumulate the knowledge and observations regarding McDonald's products and services than the customers who visited McDonald's three or fewer times per month, the low-frequency customers. Thus, high-frequency customers tended to have a higher level of customers' trust in the reliability dimension with McDonald's restaurant than low-frequency customers

Moorman et al. (1992) explained that reliability reflects customer's confidence and willingness to rely on statements or expressions of the service provider. Also, Johnson-George and Swap (1982) pointed out that trust in the reliability is created from an accumulated observation about partner's behaviors. The observations help individuals perceive the responsibility and behavior of their partners. This usually leads to confidence to rely on the partner's behaviors.

In terms of customers' trust in the dependability dimension, this study found that the frequency of McDonald's restaurant visits affected the level of customers' trust. This conclusion was drawn from a significant difference in the means of the

level of customers' trust in the dependability dimension between high-frequency and low-frequency customers. It means high-frequency customers, who visited McDonald's restaurants more than three times per month, were more likely to have a higher level of trust in the dependability dimension of McDonald's than low-frequency customers, who visited McDonald's restaurants no more than three times per month. Since high-frequency customers had more chances to interact with McDonald's restaurants, they tended to view that McDonald's had sincerity and willingness to assist and respond to the customers' need.

This result seems congruent with previous research. Ganesan (1994) indicated that dependability is one dimension of trust that refers to individuals' recognizing the willing assistance of their partners. Also, individuals thought their partners could help them solve problems and respond to their needs. Moreover, McAllister (1995) found that trust in the reliability and dependability dimensions are cognitive forms of trust that focus on using knowledge, observation, rational thinking, and experience from interaction with the target to generate trust. For this study, the high-frequency customers had more opportunities to interact and observe McDonald's performances and statements, so they tended to have a higher level of trust in the dependability dimension than low-frequency customers who had fewer experiences and interactions with McDonald's performance and statements.

In terms of customers' trust in the faith dimension, a significant difference was found in the mean of the level of customers' trust between high-frequency and low-frequency customers. It means high-frequency customers, who visited McDonald's restaurants more than three times per month, were more likely to have a higher level of trust in the faith dimension with McDonald's restaurant than low-frequency

customers who visited McDonald's restaurant equal to no more than three times per month. When customers visited McDonald's restaurants more frequently, they had more chances to receive help, suggestions, and benefits from McDonald's products or services than the customers who had a lower frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants. The previous research was congruent with the finding in this study. Renn and Levine (1991) argued that trust in the faith dimension will be generated when one party has good will toward another party. Furthermore, Ouyang (2010), who studied service quality and customers' trust, viewed trust in the faith dimension as cognitive trust; it can be produced from sincere suggestions or assistance as well as value benefits that service workers honestly provide to their customers. In the aspect of customers' trust in the customer loyalty, the t-test analysis revealed that high-frequency customers tended to have a higher level of trust in customer loyalty than low-frequency customers. In other words, McDonald's customers who had a higher frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurant had more opportunities to keep a continuous relationship and increase the mutual benefits between McDonald's restaurants. This usually brought about a feeling of loyalty toward the McDonald's products or services than customers who had a lower frequency of visiting or interacting with the restaurants.

The findings about customers' trust in the customer loyalty dimension were supported by several studies. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) pointed out that customer loyalty is the feeling of mutual commitment between the transaction partners; with both party's making efforts to maintain the continuous relationship between them. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) further argued that customer loyalty and commitment will be produced when both parties accumulate trust and cooperate in their benefits.

These benefits help promote loyalty and the intention of improving the continuous relationship. Similarly, Morgan and Hunt (1994) articulated that the customers will create loyalty or commitment with their partners in the marketing context when they recognize the importance and benefits of maintaining the continuous relationship; hence, the customers are willing to make efforts to keep the interaction with the partners. It can be said that the loyalty will be established and promoted when individuals have continuous interaction and cooperation with their partners to gain mutual benefits.

Conversely, the results of the statistical analysis showed non-significant differences in the means of trust between high-frequency and low-frequency customers in two dimensions: caring and competency. It can be argued that the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants did not affect the level of customers' trust concerning caring and competency dimensions.

In terms of customers' trust in the caring dimension, McDonald's customers preferred to create levels of customers' trust in the caring dimension from their feelings rather than the opportunities of interacting with the McDonald's restaurants. As most customer participants noted, in the qualitative interviews, the fast food restaurant was supposed to provide good service and facilities; therefore, they trusted McDonald's in the caring dimension since the first time they visited the place. This indicates that the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurant did not significantly affect the level of customers' trust in the caring dimension.

This finding is congruent with previous research. Kasperson et al. (1992) identified caring as a customers' perception that service providers attempt to present in a way of care and concern for their customers such as paying attention to the

customers' comments and trying to meet the customers' requirements. Johnson-George and Swap (1982) proposed that caring is affective trust concentrating on the individual's feeling or emotion of caring and concerning. In other words, affective trust is emotion-driven whereas cognitive trust is knowledge-driven. Not surprisingly, the results in this study showed a non-significant difference in the mean of the level of customers' trust in the caring between high-frequency and low-frequency customers. Since caring is affective trust, McDonald's customers preferred to generate trust in the caring dimension based on their previous feelings and emotions. Thus, the frequency of visiting restaurant did not involve the levels of customers' trust in the caring dimension with McDonald's restaurant.

Similarly, in the aspect of customers' trust in McDonald's competency, the results of this study showed that the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants did not affect the level of customers' trust in the competency dimension. For the previous studies, Renn and Levine (1991) defined competency as the levels of technical expertise of the target. Also, Busch and Wilson (1976) argued that competency is cognitive trust; this is relevant to the expertise, knowledge, and experiences of service providers that can be perceived by customers. Although competency is associated with cognitive trust, focusing on observing and accumulating knowledge regarding partners' behaviors, the results of this study showed that the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants did not affect the level of trust in the competency dimension. The information from the in-depth interviews with the McDonald's customers can explain this result. All twelve participants of the in-depth interviews had more confidence in the reputation of McDonald's. Some of them perceived that McDonald's has a lot of knowledge and professional experience in the quick service

restaurant since the early times that they visited McDonald's restaurants. McDonald's knowledge and professional experiences made customers had confidence in McDonald's reputation. Moreover, the customers frequently referred to McDonald's reputation as the famous quick service restaurant in Thailand. It can be argued that the customers created trust in the McDonald's competency from McDonald's reputation. Therefore, frequency of visiting or interacting with the McDonald's restaurant was not significant to generate customers' trust in the competency. This notion is reasonably supported by Johnson and Grayson (2005) who found that, when the reputation of a service provider is strong, the customers do not need to use high interaction with the service provider to confirm its competency.

Moreover, the descriptive statistics in this study found that the levels of customers' trust in the six dimensions were high. It means that most customers trust the products and services of McDonald's. However, the mean score of trust in customer loyalty was somewhat low (2.70); so McDonald's should pay attention to improving trust in this aspect in order that McDonald's maintains sustainable relationships with its customers.

In summary, the levels of customers' trust in the reliability, dependability, customer loyalty, and faith dimensions all depended on the frequency of visiting or interacting with McDonald's restaurants. However, levels of customers' trust in the caring and competency tended to depend on the previous perception of customers and reputation of the company rather than the frequency of visiting. See Table 5.1 for the results of the analyses of the first hypothesis.

Table 5.1: Summary Results for Analysis of Independent Sample Test in the Levels of Customers' Trust

Dimensions of Trust	Frequency	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>p</i> value of Levene's test	t	1-Tail Sig	Sig																																																												
Caring (H1a)	High	183	11.8251	1.53	.781	.466	.321	No																																																												
	Low	231	11.7532	1.58					Reliability (H1b)	High	183	9.34	1.15	.336	2.119	.018	Yes	Low	231	9.07	1.35	Dependability (H1c)	High	183	9.01	1.23	.508	1.972	.025	Yes	Low	231	8.77	1.23	Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No	Low	231	5.87	0.99	Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000
Reliability (H1b)	High	183	9.34	1.15	.336	2.119	.018	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	9.07	1.35					Dependability (H1c)	High	183	9.01	1.23	.508	1.972	.025	Yes	Low	231	8.77	1.23	Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No	Low	231	5.87	0.99	Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48								
Dependability (H1c)	High	183	9.01	1.23	.508	1.972	.025	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	8.77	1.23					Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No	Low	231	5.87	0.99	Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48																					
Competency (H1d)	High	183	5.99	0.90	.121	1.213	.113	No																																																												
	Low	231	5.87	0.99					Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes	Low	231	11.21	1.83	Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48																																		
Faith (H1e)	High	183	11.71	1.68	.248	2.852	.002	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	11.21	1.83					Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes	Low	231	10.42	2.48																																															
Customer Loyalty (H1f)	High	183	11.30	2.31	.138	3.722	.000	Yes																																																												
	Low	231	10.42	2.48																																																																

Discussion of Hypothesis 2a – Hypothesis 2e

The results about the levels of customers' uncertainty in the five constructs regarding McDonald's products or services: price, promotional incentives, facilities, taste, and nutrition showed that there were significant differences for four of the constructs: price, promotional incentives, taste, and nutrition, between high-frequency and low-frequency customers. It can be argued that the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurant affected the levels of customers' uncertainty in price, promotional incentives, taste, and nutrition.

The prior theoretical and empirical research about uncertainty and communication lends support to the results of this study. Berger and Calabrese (1975) originally proposed Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), in which they explained that uncertainty might arise in the relationship or interaction between individuals and their partners. Indeed, individuals prefer to use continuous communication to increase intimacy as well as reduce uncertainty between their partners. According to Parks and Adelman (1983), a lack of interaction or communication between partners is more likely to increase uncertainty and terminate the relationship. Undoubtedly, communication or interaction between the partners is an important factor in decreasing uncertainty and increasing intimacy. The results from the t-test analyses in this study were consistent with previous research. The findings showed a significant difference in the mean of the level of uncertainty in price, promotion, taste, and nutrition between high-frequency and low-frequency customers. There was no significant difference in the level of uncertainty for facilities.

Definitely, high-frequency customers had more opportunities to communicate or interact with McDonald's through verbal and non-verbal communication. When the

levels of communication between the customers and McDonald's were increased, the levels of intimacy increased as well. This led to a reduction of the levels of uncertainty. Thus, high-frequency customers tended to have a lower level of uncertainty in price, promotion, taste, and nutrition than low-frequency customers. McDonald's facilities, in this study, refers to services and equipment in the restaurant, such as tables and chairs, soft sofas, hand wash sinks, doors, stairs, sauce containers, trash cans, and eating tools. The finding from the t-test analysis about uncertainty about McDonald's facilities disagreed with the previous research. The results showed a non-significant difference in the mean for levels of uncertainty about facilities between high-frequency and low-frequency customers. The results from the in-depth interviews with the customers might explain the non-significant difference.

Based on the interviews, most McDonald's customers still have confidence in facilities of McDonald's. They observed that McDonald's had standards for providing quality and convenient facilities to suit the customers' demand. Also, most customers could predict that, when they visited a McDonald's restaurant, they would benefit from McDonald's convenient facilities. However, there were two issues that made customers have uncertainty in facilities. First, the customers thought that McDonald's should not use eating tools that were made from paper and plastic; they are not convenient for having meals. Second, the customers disagreed with the notion that customers should drop their food trays in the bin after finishing their meals. The customers said this idea was not consistent with the Thai custom. Furthermore, they saw this as a lack of service provision by McDonald's, leading to uncertainty in McDonald's facilities. Obviously, the issues that provoked customers' uncertainty in facilities were directly relevant to McDonald's policy for operating a restaurant.

According to the interview with the CPRD, she commented that McDonald's is the global brand that holds the same policy of using paper plates and plastic forks and knives in the restaurants and dropping the food tray in the bin by customers. We can observe that the issues about customers' uncertainty about facilities were not related to the intimacy or communication between McDonald's and its customers. As a consequence, the frequency of visiting a McDonald's restaurant did not affect the levels of uncertainty in the facilities constructs.

Furthermore, the results from the descriptive statistics showed that the levels of customers' uncertainty in five constructs were low; the mean score fell between 2.51 and 4.00. The uncertainty in taste had the highest mean score as 2.87; this means that customers had the lowest levels of uncertainty in taste. This finding was consistent with the results from interviewing the customers. Most customers reported that McDonald's provided tasty products that were different from the competitive brands. Interestingly, although uncertainty in nutrition had the lowest mean score, 2.55, that showed low levels of uncertainty in nutrition it approached 2.50, the high level of uncertainty in nutrition. Thus, McDonald's should pay attention to manage the nutrition information in order to prevent customers' uncertainty in this construct. Table 5.2 provides a summary of the analytic results for hypothesis two.

Table 5.2: Summary Results for Analysis of Independent Sample Test in the Levels of Customers' Uncertainty

Constructs of Uncertainty	Frequency	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>p</i> value of Levene's test	<i>t</i>	1-Tail Sig	Sig
Price (H2a)	High	183	11.26	2.02	.992	2.363	.009	Yes
	Low	231	10.78	2.07				
Promotion (H2b)	High	183	12.54	1.51	.092	2.291	.011	Yes
	Low	231	12.18	1.63				
Facilities (H2c)	High	183	11.80	1.60	.109	1.569	.058	No
	Low	231	11.54	1.76				
Taste (H2d)	High	183	11.71	1.94	.115	1.923	.027	Yes
	Low	231	11.31	2.21				
Nutrition (H2e)	High	183	10.46	2.52	.672	1.896	.029	Yes
	Low	231	9.98	2.60				

Limitations of the Research

Like any other research, this research also had some limitations. The limitations of this research are explained in the following items:

1. The respondents for the quantitative and quantitative research samples were drawn from McDonald's customers who live in Bangkok; therefore, the generalizability of this study is limited. Due to differences in the areas, the customers in other areas in Thailand might have different perspectives, attitudes, values, and beliefs about uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services and have different strategies for seeking information to reduce their uncertainty. Thus, the homogeneity of the participants limits generalizations to only McDonald's Thai customers living in Bangkok, not to the other areas.

2. In the data collection process, this study determined the characteristics of participants, McDonald's customers aged between 20-59 years old, because customers in this group, called adult customers, can reflect and share their uncertainty about products or services about which they have experiences. However, collecting the data from customers who are aged between 50-59 years old was rather limited. The reason is that customers in this group seemed to be less likely to visit McDonald's restaurants. I attempted to reduce this limitation by using a referral network (also called the snowball approach) requesting participants to recommend others aged between 50-59 years old.

3. Previously, I had planned to interview three McDonald's managers who were responsible for creating and managing the communication of McDonald's quick service restaurants. However, based on the strict and systematic policy of McDonald's about conveying information to the public, McDonald's did not allow the interview

with other managers or employees other than the Communications and PR Director and the Communications and PR Consultant. Fortunately, both the CPRD and the CPRC were very willing to present information and share opinions about the communication strategies McDonald's has used with the customers. Also, both the CPRD and the CPRC have direct authority to plan and manage the communication of McDonald's. Thus, this study can ensure that the information from the CPRD and the CPRC can reach data saturation.

4. In the process of questionnaire distribution with the McDonald's customers, McDonald's did not allow the distribution of the questionnaires in the restaurants. It was rather difficult to distribute questionnaires in front of the McDonald's restaurants or request respondents to fill-out a questionnaire at a nearby convenient place. Due to time-constraints, some respondents seemed to hurry and be inconvenienced to fill-out the questionnaires. I was aware of this behavior and made efforts to control it by arranging for trained researchers to help in the process of distributing questionnaires and paying close attention to the respondents.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research may want to explore communication phenomenon in other contexts through the lens of Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) in order to expand the communication enquiry. Most of the previous studies concentrated on using URT to examine initial or romantic relationships. However, Hewes and Planalp (1982) asserted that URT can be applicable to many fields of communication apart from interpersonal communication such as intercultural, health care, mass communication, and organizational contexts. In an age of globalization, when the competition among businesses is high, the relationship with the customers and the reduction of customers'

uncertainty are very significant issues. Therefore, it would be interesting to apply URT in order to conduct further studies focusing on creating relationships and reducing uncertainty between the company and customers; it can expand to the other lines of business apart from quick service restaurants.

As mentioned earlier, this study has been conducted in Thailand, specifically in the Bangkok area; thus, it would be beneficial in the future research to collect the data in other provinces of Thailand where McDonald's restaurants are located. The interesting issues that further studies should be examine include how customers employ strategies to search for more information and decrease their uncertainty and communication strategies, which are appropriate for customers to create trusting relationships and reduce customers' uncertainty. Due to the customers living in different areas, they are likely to have different experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and interests in selecting media. Thus, studying in other areas will expand knowledge in the discipline of marketing communication and customer relationship management.

The hypotheses of this study measured the levels of customers' trust and uncertainty when compared with the frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants. Future research may pursue more sophisticated independent variables apart from frequency of visiting McDonald's restaurants. The interesting independent variables that further studies might explore include customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer cooperation, and customer adaptation. Based on previous studies, these variables are also associated with trust and uncertainty. In future research, it would be beneficial to examine the relationship of these variables and trust as well as uncertainty in the various phenomena. Also, the statistical tools should be advanced,

including ANOVA, MANOVA, Correlation, or Multiple Regression; they are suitable with the hypotheses.

In the era of globalization, the study of communication strategies and the relationship between companies and customers, as well as information-seeking strategies, are very beneficial issues for operating successful companies and expanding knowledge in the field of marketing communication and customer relationship management strategies. Consequently, future research might track this current research as a guideline and continuously develop the understanding about these issues. This knowledge can contribute to communication scholars, communication practitioners, executives, and the public at large.

Conclusion

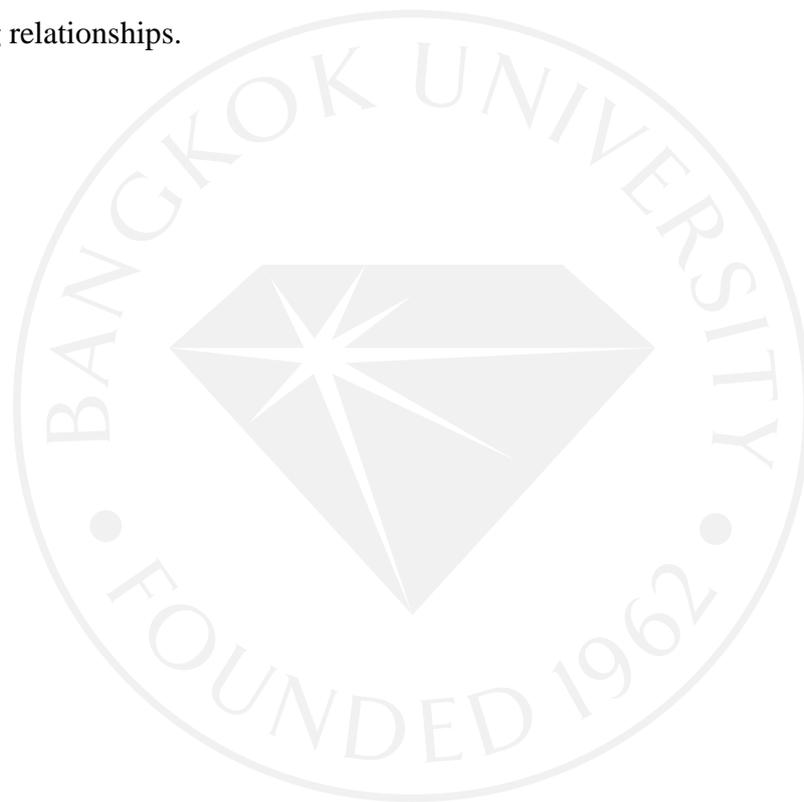
This research specifically focused on analyzing the phenomenon of interaction between the McDonald's organization and its customers through the lenses of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, information-seeking strategies, communication perspective, and building trusting relationships with the customers. Even though previous studies in the communication discipline were more likely to apply URT to analyze interpersonal relationships, they did not concentrate on addressing URT in an organizational context particularly in the aspect of the relationships between organization and its customers. Instead, the concept of URT has been mentioned in the variety of communication contexts such as romantic relationships, intercultural relationships, and health care. Thus, this study intended to enlarge the knowledge about URT by exploring the customers' uncertainty regarding an organization's products or services, specifically McDonald's products or services. Additionally, information-seeking strategies are but one concept which is interrelated with URT.

This study also extended the knowledge about information-seeking strategies into the marketing aspect by investigating the strategies that customers preferred using to reduce their uncertainty in McDonald's products or services.

The analysis of the customers' uncertainty showed that McDonald's customers had uncertainty in McDonald's price, promotion, taste, facilities, and nutrition. The main cause that provoked their uncertainty was the lack of information about McDonald's products or services. Consequently, McDonald's customers attempted to use several strategies such as discount coupons, communication technology, mass media, point of purchase, direct asking, and direct observation, to search for more information about McDonald's products or services in order to diminish their uncertainty.

Furthermore, this research employed the postmodern perspective of communication strategies to identify those strategies used by McDonald's to provide information and create relationships with its customers as well as decrease customers' uncertainty. The results indicated that McDonald's executed IMC both above-the-line and below-the-line as the primary strategies to provide information toward its customers and reduce customers' uncertainty. Moreover, McDonald's preferred using an appropriate amount of communication, not over- or under-communicate, with its customers. When customers received adequate information from various channels, they reduced their uncertainty and increased trusting relationships with McDonald's. Obviously, based on this study, uncertainty was associated with developing the trust relationship. When levels of customers' uncertainty decrease, the levels of customers' trust will increase.

Definitely, the organization is more likely to increase trusting relationship and decrease uncertainty to maintain the sustainable relationship with its customers. This research used the conceptualization of building trusting relationships and the dimensionality of trust to examine the strategies executed by McDonald's to create trust relationships with its customers. The results indicated that QSC&V, supplier, and community strategies were the main strategies that McDonald's employed to create trusting relationships.



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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol: The Communications and PR Director/Consultant

1. What are the most and least important demographics that McDonald's focuses on?
2. Does McDonald's use the communication strategies to provide information and create understanding about McDonald's products and services to the customer?
3. What forms of communication strategies that McDonald's executes to provide information to the customers?
4. What forms of communication strategies that McDonald's executes to build trustful relationship with the customers?
5. What forms of communication strategies that McDonald's executes when the customers have uncertainty regarding McDonald's products or services?
6. What is McDonald's point of view towards providing information to the customers, building trustful relationship with customers, and reducing the customers' uncertainty?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol: McDonald's Customer

1. I would like to begin by understanding your background and experiences with McDonald's fast food restaurants.

1. How long have you been eating McDonald's fast food?
2. Had you ever heard about McDonald's before consuming it?

If yes – What types of media exposed McDonald's information?

3. How often in a typical month would you visit McDonald's restaurants?
4. Normally, do you prefer to eat McDonald's fast food at the restaurant or take it home?
5. When was the last time you ate McDonald's?
6. What is the most important reason that you have spent money at McDonald's for?
7. When you enter a McDonald's restaurant, whom do you often come with?
8. How many people come with you?
9. Which branch of McDonald's restaurants do you prefer to visit?

Why? (Please explain)

10. Have you ever gone to other branches of McDonald's restaurants?

Where and why? (Please explain)

11. At what time do you usually visit McDonald's restaurants?
12. What kinds of McDonald's food, beverages, or desserts do you prefer to order?
13. Would you kindly explain some other activities, if any, that you usually pursue in a McDonald's restaurant?

14. Why do you pursue these activities at McDonald's?
15. This restaurant has other services apart from selling food, such as Internet, newspapers and magazines, sale of VCDs and exchanging toys. Have you ever used these services?

If yes – Which services do you like most?

Why? (Please explain)

16. Around how much money do you spend per each visit to McDonald's?
17. How long do you normally spend per each visit to McDonald's?

2. As a customer, you have a relationship with McDonald's. I would like you share your information, experiences and opinions about this relationship including your problems, doubts, uncertainties, expectations and satisfactions, which you have experienced during your interaction with McDonald's.

1. When we talk about "McDonald's Restaurants", what is the first thing that comes to mind?
2. What do you like most in the restaurants themselves? Please describe the impression your visit to this restaurant makes?
3. Have you ever encountered a factor or event that provoked uncertainty during your relationship with McDonald's?

If yes – Please describe that event.

How do you manage those doubts or uncertainty?

4. There are twelve aspects that are related to the operation of McDonald's restaurants: price, sales promotions, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition and reputation or

image. Which aspects make you uncertain towards McDonald's? (You can cite more than one aspect.)

5. Based on these twelve aspects, which aspects do you receive inadequate information from McDonald's?
6. How do you satisfy the relationship between you as a customer and McDonald's which offers products and services?
7. Do you think that you use your own efforts to maintain the relationship with McDonald's?
If yes – How do you use your own efforts (please explain)?
8. Do you think that McDonald's attempts to maintain its relationship with you as a customer?
If yes – How?
9. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 meaning "we barely know each other", 10 meaning "I feel intimate with McDonald's"), how would you rate this relationship?
10. What do you see in the future of your relationship with McDonald's?
11. Will you recommend McDonald's products or services to other people and why?
12. Based on your experiences, what is the image of McDonald's restaurants in Thai society?
13. In what other ways might McDonald's improve?

3. Normally, when people share a relationship, they seek for information about their partner to reduce uncertainty and strengthen their relationship. Similarly, customers seek information about McDonald's to strengthen the relationship between customer and company. I would like to talk with you about the strategies that you use to acquire this sort of information.

1. Have you ever exposed information about McDonald's?
2. How often do you expose McDonald's information?
3. What topics do you usually expose from McDonald's?
4. What is the most important reason for which you have exposed McDonald's information?
5. Do you think you receive enough information from and about McDonald's restaurants?

If yes – Why do you think McDonald's gives you enough information? Can you give me some examples?

If no – Concerning which topics do you want McDonald's to communicate with you more?

What channels do you want McDonald's to increase?

6. Do you think the channels that McDonald's uses to communicate with its customers are interesting?
7. Do you think you employ strategies to acquire information about McDonald's?

If yes – What strategies do you use to seek for information about McDonald's?

- How do you employ the information-seeking strategies to gain information about McDonald's?

8. Are there any topics that you want to inform McDonald's about but did not?

Demographic Information:

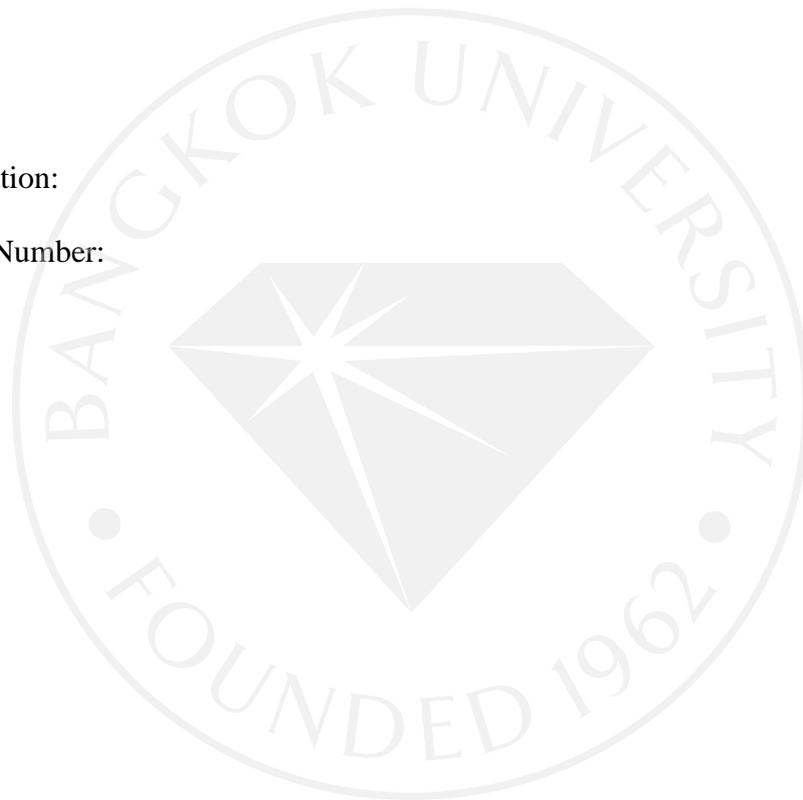
Name:

Sex:

Age:

Occupation:

Phone Number:



APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview: McDonald's Customers

1. What is the main factor or event that provokes customers' uncertainty towards McDonald's products or services?
2. There are twelve aspects that relate to the operation of McDonald's restaurants: price, promotional incentives, location, cleanliness, friendliness, atmosphere, speed, facilities, taste, menu variety, nutrition and reputation or image. In your opinion, which aspects that are likely to cause customers' uncertainty?
3. How do customers manage their uncertainty about McDonald's products or services?
4. What strategies do customers prefer to employ to seek for information about McDonald's, helping to reduce their uncertainty and why?
5. How do customers employ information-seeking strategies to reduce their uncertainty and maintain their relationship with McDonald's?
6. What do you think about the effectiveness of communication strategies that McDonald's employ to reduce customers' uncertainty?
7. What do you think about the importance of seeking information regarding products or services?
8. What comments or suggestions do you have to help McDonald's reduce customers' uncertainty?

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire

Part1 Please place a check mark by your answer in the space provided

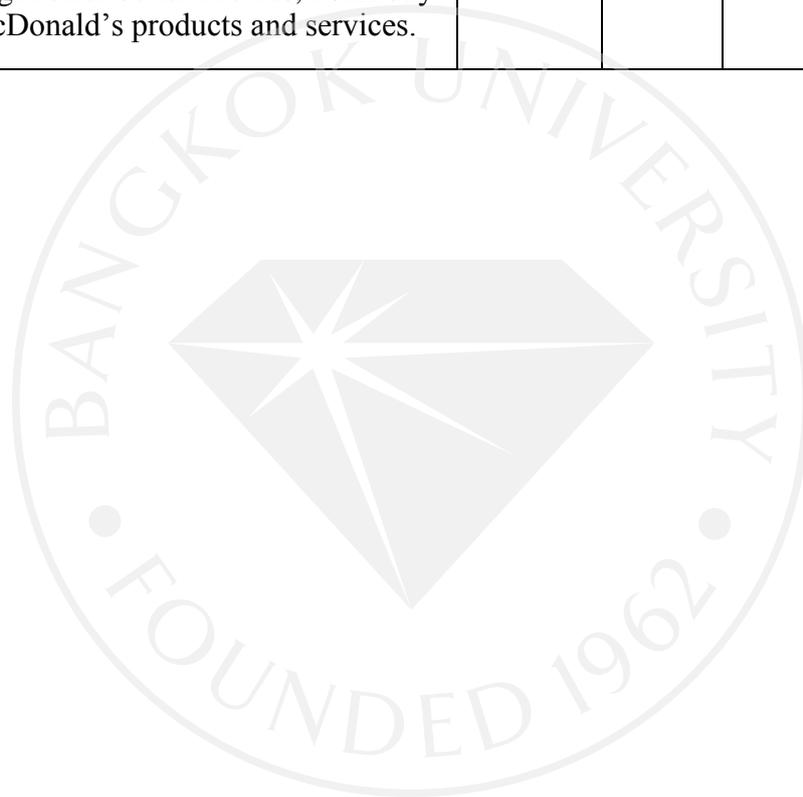
1. Gender: Female Male
2. Age: 20-29 years 30-39 years
 40-49 years 50-59 years
3. Education level: Primary level Secondary level
 Diploma Bachelor's degree
 Master's degree or higher
4. Occupation: Student Company officer
 Government officer Business owner
 Housewife/Househusband Others
5. Income level per month: Below 10,000 Baht
 10,001 Baht – 25,000 Baht
 25,001 – 40,000 Baht
 40,001 – 55,000 Baht
 Above 55,001 Baht
6. You visit a McDonald's restaurant an average of ____ time/s a month.

Part 2 Please place a check mark by your answer in the space provided

The statement of measuring trust	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Caring				
1. McDonald's pays attention to the comments of its customers.				
2. McDonald's puts benefits to the customers as the first priority.				
3. McDonald's endeavors to understand the requirements of its customers.				
4. McDonald's attempts to meet its customers' requirements.				
Reliability				
5. McDonald's can correctly respond to what the customers ask.				
6. McDonald's products and services are trustworthy.				
7. McDonald's is honest.				
Dependability				
8. McDonald's is reliable.				
9. McDonald's can immediately respond to customers' complaints.				
10. McDonald's staffs are pleasant when serving customers.				

The statement of measuring trust	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Competency				
11. McDonald's can manage all the needs of its customers.				
12. McDonald's has the capability to clearly describe the attributes of its products and services.				
Faith				
13. McDonald's offers sincere recommendations to its customers, even if the customers do not buy its products.				
14. McDonald's considers the benefits to the customers from the customers' viewpoint.				
15. McDonald's treats the customers honestly.				
16. Even if something is not the responsibility of the restaurant, McDonald's still tries to solve the customer's problems.				
Customer Loyalty				
17. When I intend to purchase fast food products, McDonald's is my first choice.				
18. I recommend McDonald's to other people.				

The statement of measuring trust	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
19. I praise McDonald's by word-of-mouth to other people.				
20. Though other fast food restaurants might offer better choices, I still buy McDonald's products and services.				



Part 3 Please place a check mark by your answer in the space provided

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
<p>Price</p> <p>1. McDonald's offers products at a price that encourages you to purchase the products.</p>				
<p>2. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with reasonable prices for the products.</p>				
<p>3. McDonald's offers prices for products that are consistent with your expectations.</p>				
<p>4. McDonald's provides adequate information about the prices of the products.</p>				
<p>Sales Promotion</p> <p>5. McDonald's offers sales promotion that encourage you to purchase the products.</p>				
<p>6. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with attractive sales promotion.</p>				
<p>7. McDonald's offers sales promotion that are consistent with your expectations.</p>				
<p>8. McDonald's provides adequate information about sales promotion.</p>				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Facilities 9. McDonald's offers products with quality facilities that encourage you to visit the restaurants.				
10. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will obtain the benefits from convenient facilities.				
11. McDonald's offers facilities that are consistent with your expectations.				
12. McDonald's offers facilities that make you feel more confident in the convenience and comfort of visiting its restaurants.				
Taste 13. McDonald's offers tasty products that encourage you to visit the restaurants.				
14. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will enjoy the taste of fast food products.				
15. McDonald's offers fast food tastes that are consistent with your expectations.				
16. McDonald's provides adequate information about how its products taste.				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Nutrition 17. McDonald's offers products with recognized nutrition that encourage you to be more confident in purchasing the products.				
18. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will find nutritious menus.				
19. McDonald's offers nutritious menus that are consistent with your expectations.				
20. McDonald's provides adequate nutrition information about its menu items.				

APPENDIX E

Original Questionnaire of Customers' Uncertainty

Part 3 Please place a check mark by your answer in the space provided

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Price				
1. McDonald's offers products at a price that encourages you to purchase the products.				
2. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with reasonable prices for the products.				
3. McDonald's offers prices for products that are consistent with your expectations.				
4. McDonald's provides adequate information about the prices of the products.				
Sales Promotion				
5. McDonald's offers sales promotion that encourage you to purchase the products.				
6. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with attractive sales promotion.				
7. McDonald's offers sales promotion that are consistent with your expectations.				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
8. McDonald's provides adequate information about sales promotion.				
Location 9. McDonald's offers products that help you spend a short time for traveling to the restaurant.				
10. McDonald's restaurants are more likely to be located in convenient locations for your visit.				
11. McDonald's restaurants are more likely to be located in the places that you meet your expectations.				
12. McDonald's adequately provides information about locations of its restaurants.				
Cleanliness 13. McDonald's offers products that help you enjoy your meals in the clean environment.				
14. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, everything in these restaurants is clean.				
15. The cleanliness of the McDonald's restaurants match your expectations.				

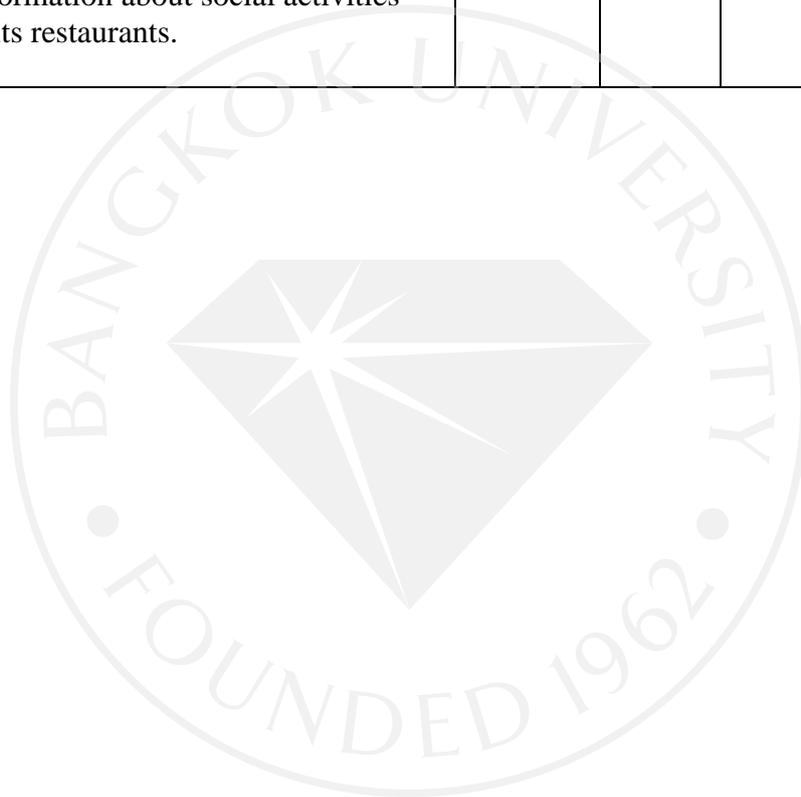
The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
16. McDonald's provides adequate information about cleanliness that make you feel more confident in the hygiene of their restaurants.				
Friendliness				
17. McDonald's offers products in a friendly atmosphere.				
18. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with employees who are willing to serve you.				
19. McDonald's employees offer services that are consistent with your expectations.				
20. McDonald's employees provide adequate information about products and services.				
Atmosphere				
21. McDonald's offers the atmospheres that encourages you to visit the restaurants.				
22. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will find a relaxed and convenient atmosphere.				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
23. McDonald's creates an atmosphere that is consistent with your expectations.				
24. McDonald's provides adequate information about the atmosphere in its restaurants.				
Speed 25. McDonald's offers products that can help you meet your needs in a limited time.				
26. You can predict that when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will receive prompt service.				
27. McDonald's speed of service is consistent with your expectations.				
28. McDonald's speed of service makes you feel more confident to purchase products during rush hours.				
Facilities 29. McDonald's offers products with quality facilities that encourage you to visit the restaurants.				
30. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will obtain the benefits from convenient facilities.				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
31. McDonald's offers facilities that are consistent with your expectations.				
32. McDonald's offers facilities that make you feel more confident in the convenience and comfort of visiting its restaurants.				
Taste				
33. McDonald's offers tasty products that encourage you to visit the restaurants.				
34. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will enjoy the taste of fast food products.				
35. McDonald's offers fast food tastes that are consistent with your expectations.				
36. McDonald's provides adequate information about how its products taste.				
Menu variety				
37. McDonald's offers a variety of menu choices that encourage you to purchase the products.				
38. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will meet with variety of menu choices that tempt you to try them.				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
39. McDonald's offers a variety of menu choices that are consistent with your expectations.				
40. McDonald's provides adequate information about the variety of menu choices.				
Nutrition				
41. McDonald's offers products with recognized nutrition that encourage you to be more confident in purchasing the products.				
42. You can predict that, when you visit McDonald's restaurants, you will find nutritious menus.				
43. McDonald's offers nutritious menus that are consistent with your expectations.				
44. McDonald's provides adequate nutrition information about its menu items.				
Reputation or Image				
45. McDonald's offers products with good image that make you feel more confident to purchase the products.				
46. McDonald's image encourages you to visit their restaurants.				

The statement of measuring uncertainty	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
47. McDonald's image is consistent with your expectations.				
48. McDonald's provides adequate information about social activities at its restaurants.				



APPENDIX F

แบบสอบถาม

ส่วนที่ 1 โปรดเขียนเครื่องหมาย / หน้าข้อที่ท่านเห็นว่าสอดคล้องกับความเป็นจริง

1. เพศ: หญิง ชาย
2. อายุ: 20-29 ปี 30-39 ปี
 40-49 ปี 50-59 ปี
3. ระดับการศึกษา: ประถมศึกษา มัธยมศึกษา
 อนุปริญญา ปริญญาตรี
 ปริญญาโทหรือสูงกว่า
4. อาชีพ: นักศึกษา พนักงานบริษัท
 พนักงานรัฐวิสาหกิจ / ข้าราชการ เจ้าของกิจการ
 แม่บ้าน / พ่อบ้าน อื่นๆ
5. รายได้ ต่อ เดือน: ต่ำกว่า 10,000 บาท 10,001 – 25,000 บาท
 25,001 – 40,000 บาท 40,001 – 55,000 บาท
 มากกว่า 55,000 บาท
6. คุณมาที่ร้านแมคโดนัลด์โดยเฉลี่ย _____ ครั้ง ต่อ เดือน

ส่วนที่ 2 โปรดเขียนเครื่องหมาย หน้าข้อที่ท่านเห็นว่าสอดคล้องกับความคิดเห็นของท่าน

ข้อความ	เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (4)	เห็นด้วย (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (1)
ห่วงใยผู้อื่น				
1. แมคโดนัลด์เอาใจใส่กับความเห็นของลูกค้า				
2. แมคโดนัลด์คำนึงถึงผลประโยชน์ของลูกค้า เป็นอันดับหนึ่ง				
3. แมคโดนัลด์พยายามที่จะเข้าใจความต้องการ ของลูกค้า				
4. แมคโดนัลด์พยายามที่จะเข้าถึงความต้องการ ของลูกค้า				
ความน่าเชื่อถือ				
5. แมคโดนัลด์สามารถตอบคำถามของลูกค้า ได้อย่างถูกต้อง				
6. สินค้าและบริการของแมคโดนัลด์ ไว้วางใจได้				
7. แมคโดนัลด์มีความซื่อสัตย์				
ความสามารถในการพึ่งพาได้				
8. แมคโดนัลด์มีความเชื่อถือได้				
9. แมคโดนัลด์สามารถตอบสนองต่อคำตำหนิ ของลูกค้าได้อย่างทันท่วงที				
10. พนักงานของแมคโดนัลด์รู้สึกยินดี เมื่อได้ ให้บริการแก่ลูกค้า				

ข้อความ	เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (4)	เห็นด้วย (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (1)
ความสามารถ				
11. แมคโดนัลด์สามารถที่จะบริหารจัดการกับความต้องการของลูกค้าได้อย่างครอบคลุม				
12. แมคโดนัลด์มีความสามารถที่จะอธิบายลักษณะของสินค้าและบริการได้อย่างชัดเจน				
ความเลื่อมใสศรัทธา				
13. แมคโดนัลด์ให้คำแนะนำที่จริงใจแก่ลูกค้า แม้ว่าลูกค้าจะไม่ซื้อสินค้าของแมคโดนัลด์				
14. แมคโดนัลด์ยึดถือผลประโยชน์ของลูกค้า โดยพิจารณาจากความเห็นของลูกค้า				
15. แมคโดนัลด์ปฏิบัติต่อลูกค้าอย่างซื่อสัตย์				
16. แม้ว่างานบางอย่างจะอยู่นอกเหนือความรับผิดชอบของแมคโดนัลด์ แต่แมคโดนัลด์ยังคงพยายามที่จะแก้ไขปัญหาของลูกค้า				
ความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้า				
17. เมื่อฉันต้องการซื้ออาหารจานด่วน แมคโดนัลด์ คือทางเลือกอันดับแรกของฉัน				
18. ฉันจะแนะนำแมคโดนัลด์ให้แก่บุคคลอื่น				
19. ฉันกล่าวชื่นชมแมคโดนัลด์โดยการบอกต่อไปยังบุคคลอื่น				

ข้อความ	เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (4)	เห็นด้วย (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (1)
20. แม้ว่าร้านอาหารจวนตัวร้านอื่นๆ จะเสนอทางเลือกอื่นที่ดีกว่า ฉันยังคงซื้อสินค้าและบริการของแมคโดนัลด์				



ส่วนที่ 3 โปรดเขียนเครื่องหมาย หน้าข้อที่ท่านเห็นว่าสอดคล้องกับความคิดเห็นของท่าน

ข้อความ	เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (4)	เห็นด้วย (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (1)
ราคา				
1. แมคโดนัลด์ขายสินค้าในราคาที่กระตุ้น ชวนให้คุณซื้อสินค้า				
2. คุณสามารถคาดการณ์ล่วงหน้าได้ว่า เมื่อคุณมาที่ร้านแมคโดนัลด์ คุณจะ พบกับสินค้าที่ราคาสมเหตุสมผล				
3. แมคโดนัลด์ขายสินค้าในราคาที่ตรงกับ ความคาดหวังของคุณ				
4. แมคโดนัลด์เผยแพร่ข้อมูลข่าวสารเกี่ยวกับ ราคาสินค้าได้อย่างเพียงพอ				
การส่งเสริมการขาย				
5. แมคโดนัลด์จัดการส่งเสริมการขายที่กระตุ้น ชวนให้คุณซื้อสินค้า				
6. คุณสามารถคาดการณ์ล่วงหน้าได้ว่า เมื่อคุณมาที่ร้านแมคโดนัลด์ คุณจะ พบกับส่งเสริมการขายที่ดึงดูดใจ				
7. แมคโดนัลด์จัดการส่งเสริมการขายที่ตรงกับ ความต้องการของคุณ				
8. แมคโดนัลด์เผยแพร่ข้อมูลข่าวสารเกี่ยวกับ การส่งเสริมการขายได้อย่างเพียงพอ				

ข้อความ	เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (4)	เห็นด้วย (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (1)
สิ่งอำนวยความสะดวก 9. แมคโดนัลด์ขายสินค้าพร้อมเสนอสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกที่มีคุณภาพ เพื่อกระตุ้นชวนให้คุณมาที่ร้าน				
10. คุณสามารถคาดการณ์ล่วงหน้าได้ว่าเมื่อคุณมาที่ร้านแมคโดนัลด์ คุณจะได้รับประโยชน์จากสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกต่างๆ				
11. แมคโดนัลด์เสนอสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกที่ตรงกับความต้องการของคุณ				
12. แมคโดนัลด์เสนอสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกทำให้คุณรู้สึกมั่นใจมากขึ้นในเรื่องความสะดวกสบาย				
รสชาติ 13. แมคโดนัลด์ขายสินค้าที่มีรสชาติอร่อย กระตุ้นชวนให้คุณมาที่ร้าน				
14. คุณสามารถคาดการณ์ล่วงหน้าได้ว่าเมื่อมาที่ร้านแมคโดนัลด์ คุณจะได้เพลิดเพลินกับรสชาติของอาหารจานด่วน				
15. แมคโดนัลด์เสนอรสชาติอาหารจานด่วนได้ตรงความต้องการของคุณ				
16. แมคโดนัลด์เผยแพร่ข้อมูลข่าวสารเกี่ยวกับเรื่องรสชาติของอาหารได้อย่างเพียงพอ				

ข้อความ	เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (4)	เห็นด้วย (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง (1)
หลักโภชนาการ 17. แมคโดนัลด์ขายสินค้าพร้อมใส่ใจในเรื่อง โภชนาการ ทำให้คุณมั่นใจมากขึ้น ในการซื้อสินค้า				
18. คุณสามารถคาดการณ์ล่วงหน้าได้ว่า เมื่อคุณมาที่ร้านแมคโดนัลด์ คุณจะ ได้พบกับรายการอาหารที่ตรงตามหลัก โภชนาการ				
19. แมคโดนัลด์เสนอรายการอาหารที่ตรงตาม หลักโภชนาการ สอดคล้องกับความ คาดหวังของคุณ				
20. แมคโดนัลด์เผยแพร่ข้อมูลข่าวสารเกี่ยวกับ รายการอาหารตามหลักโภชนาการ ได้อย่างเพียงพอ				

BIODATA

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Bachelor of Arts in History

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Professional Experience

1994 - 1995 Grand President Hotel

Position: Public Relations Officer

1995 - 1996 N.T.S. Steel Group Public Company Limited

Position: Communication and PR officer

1996 - 1997 Landy Home (THAILAND) Company Limited

Position: Marketing Communication Officer

1997 - 2006 OP-SIAM Education Institute

Position: Public Relations Manager and Lecturer in Communication Arts

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Publication

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The Conceptualization and Influences of Mass Media

Media Relations: A Key Instrument in the Age of Information

Public Relations Campaign

Article in Journal of Asian Congress for Media & Communication

The Expansion of McDonald's Business in Thailand

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Building and Developing Trust in Business Relationships

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Teaching Specialization

Public Relations Policy and Planning

Theories of Communication

Marketing Communication Strategies

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