



Service Marketing Mix Strategies of Hairdressing Industry During COVID-19 Pandemic

Chayuth Vichitwongkun* and Nakamol Chansom

Faculty of Business Administration, Rangsit University

52/347 Muang-Ake, Phaholyothin Road, Lak-Hok, Muang, Pathumthani 12000 Thailand.

Email : samekub@gmail.com

Abstract

This research objects were to study the Service Marketing Mix strategies of the hairdressing industry during COVID-19 and to study entrepreneurs in the hairdressing industry during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they dealt with the crisis through Service Marketing Mix and Marketing Strategy. This study used an in-depth interview of 15 Thai entrepreneurs of the small and medium-sized businesses in the hairdressing industry in the Facebook group, using Snowball and Convenience sampling methods. The tool used was the in-depth interviews in a semi-structured.

The results revealed that the entrepreneurs in the industry utilized; "Online Marketing Strategy," "Word of Mouth," "Customer Loyalty Strategy," "Personalization Strategy," and "Continuous Improvement" before COVID-19. They utilized Products, Promotion, Process, and Physical Evidence to gain competitive advantages. The marketing strategies included "Online Marketing Strategy," "Line Extension Strategy," "Promotion Strategy," "Cost Cutting Strategy," and "Delivery Strategy." As to the pandemic, the entrepreneurs used "Online Marketing Strategy," "Line Extension Strategy," "Promotion Strategy," "Cost Cutting Strategy," and "Delivery Strategy." All of the marketing factors were affected by the pandemic, which contributed to a cash-flow shortage, shortage of customers, the process of providing services from the government to the shops, and physical evidence added to the customers' safety.

Keywords : Entrepreneurs, Service Marketing, Hairdressing Industry, Thailand, COVID-19, SME, Pandemic



Introduction

In 2020, the world faced a pandemic called "COVID-19" the pandemic took over the population and infected people around the world. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak a Global Public Health Emergency (World Health Organization, 2020). When the researcher wrote this study on 30 March 2021, over 128 million cases were reported worldwide, bringing death to over 2.8 million citizens worldwide (Worldometer, 2021).

The World Bank, an international financial institution, hoped the economy would expand by 4% in 2021 but will remain more than 5% below pre-pandemic forecasts from the damage caused by the pandemic. Investment and human capital impact have worsened Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) growth. (Kirby & Wheeler, 2021) One of the EMDEs in particular, Thailand, suffered the hardest despite improvements in the last quarter. Thailand's GDP fell 6.1% in 2020 from a decline in export demand and a slower recovery in overseas tourism. Tourism, the primary source of Thailand's economic growth, was one of the areas most hit by the crisis. Despite the STV (Special Tourist Visa) system and vaccinations in many countries, foreign tourists expect to reach 4 million in 2021. Also, it can take at least a couple of years to return to pre-epidemic levels. Global growth will support Thailand's economic recovery with significant fiscal stimulus and improved vaccine progression (Deloitte, 2021).

Although the lockdown prevention had compromised slowly, there was still quite some discomfort for the salon owners regarding rules to follow accordingly. For example, they limited the service to no more than 2 hours per case, both male and female, which generally took 2 hours to finish. Second, there must be no customers waiting in the store. The store must provide a temperature measuring point, alcohol gel service, and sign before entering. Third, the store needs to sterilize every haircut before serving customers. Mr. Siripoj Tumsiri, Advisor to the Hairdressers Association of Thailand and owner of POJ Hair World in Samut Prakan province, stated through Thai PBS in 2021 that "more than 80 percent of his income decreased, although the outbreak of the second wave of the Pandemic in Thai did not order to close the store." Due to strict measures, such as no sit and wait in the store or a time-limited service causing, operators have to adjust queuing methods. POJ Hair World's case decided to accept reservations by phone instead of walking into general services.



Because there are several threats to the law, economy, Etc, business owners must focus on marketing. Nowadays, the competition between big and small companies is fiercely competitive in almost every industry, so marketing strategies have become crucial for executing a profitable business. Among those marketing tactics and strategies, "marketing mix" was known for using four main components in every business-like product, price, place, and promotion (The Economic Times, 2021) into consideration and crafting marketing strategy based on those components. However, in recent times, using only four components seems not fully to wrap up the idea of marketing completely, so three more components were added, including process, physical evidence, and people (Juneja, 2021). These additions brought new light to the business, especially for the service-based business like the hairdressing industry, where it was known to provide hairdressing as its product. Price, place, and promotion are all different case by case. With all those components combined, the Service Marketing Mix would become a plan for the marketing strategy for the hairdressing industry.

The objective of the study

1. To study Marketing Mix strategies of the hairdressing industry during COVID-19.
2. To study entrepreneurs in the hairdressing industry during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they dealt with the crisis through Service Marketing Mix and Marketing Strategy.

Literature Review

Service Marketing Mix Model

The marketing mix was a critical business tool to plan, develop, and implement regarding the market's targeted customers. Its element was classified into three-phase responses to the sophistication of business development and change in the economy, 4'Ps, 5'Ps, and 7'Ps; the theory develops respectively. The recent theory of Service Marketing Mix 7'Ps consisted of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence. Another vital strategy for SMEs is showing off their uniqueness.

Hairdressing Industry

The hairdressing industry is one of the most fundamental industries in society since humans require essential hair grooming, ranging from hair cutting, coloring and styling, and facial hair grooming (The Australian Industry and Skills Committee [AISC], 2020). According to



the research conducted by Euromonitor International in 2020, The value of the cosmetics market in Thailand was \$6.8billions accounted for almost 1-fourth of the total sales of ASEAN countries. Even though the sector that gained the highest revenue is skincare (38 %), haircare products also made a significant amount (14%) (Mahanakorn Partner Group, 2022). Before the study, the researcher found that there had been steady growth in the industry. Moreover, new generations of business owners who decided to work in this industry are starting to shape the industry into a modernized version in recent years.

According to The National Statistical Office of Thailand, there are more than 120,000 beauty salons or hair salons nationwide, with a market value of more than 60,000 million baht. The competition has been steadily getting more challenging in recent years. Business owners always have to improve their marketing strategy and adapt their business to survive in the competitive nature of the industry. The recent pandemic caused the biggest challenge for this industry. The government limited the service to no more than two hours per case, both male and female, while the service that generates 70% of the primary revenue for beauty salons came from hair coloring and perm (Department of Business Development, 2019). This incident affected the marketing strategy because many marketing-related factors need to be changed to find a solution and cope with new social standards. It impacts the marketing side of the business, such as the marketing strategy and Service Marketing Mix, which consists of Products, Place, Price, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence (Juneja, 2021). Making the entrepreneurs in the business had to be heavily reconsidered and adapted to the situation to survive and maintain the company in a profitable status.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Hairdressing Industry in Thailand

The government closed the Barber/beauty shops during the lockdown and then allowed the shops to open, instructing them to avoid providing services with prolonged exposure, such as perming, dyeing, straightening, and steaming. This instruction from the government was a significant threat to the hairdressing industry, especially their essential income stream, considering that 70% of the revenue came from providing those services to their customers.

The second emerging event in Thailand happened in Samut Sakhon province. At high risk of contracting COVID-19 resulted in officials and the governor of Samut Sakhon announcing the "lockdown" of the province from the night of 19 December 2020 (Bangkok Business Online, 2020). The difference between the first and second lockdown was that the second lockdown



happened exclusively in Samut Sakhon. Even though it did some damage in Samut Sakhon province, the hairdressing industry in the country did not get damaged as a whole. The rest of the country still functioned and practiced wearing masks, and most businesses still opened socially distantly.

The third emerging event was still spreading and had been the toughest Thailand had ever faced. The researcher wrote this part on 19 April 2021, when there were 43,742 cases found nationwide, and 14,851 were active cases. More cases were found recently, 1,390 cases on that day alone (Department of Disease Control, 2021). This time the impact of the pandemic happened nationwide, similar to the first lockdown. Even though there was no lockdown, the country still suffered an absurd amount of damage, especially to the country's economy. Due to the pandemic's uncertainty, citizens stopped going out in many countries, especially in Bangkok, where the third outbreak happened. This time the hairdressing industry suffered a significant amount again due to the social distancing manner that the government recommended to the citizens, unlike the first lockdown. The government compensated the people and business owners around the country through various campaigns. This time, the situation was unpredictable, which worried the citizens and business owners in every industry, including the hairdressing industry.

The vaccine also became mandatory, the government adjusted the doses imported to Thailand, seeking 150-200 million doses of vaccines aimed at injecting 50 million Thai citizens. However, the vaccines were still limited in the country. Moreover, there are not many people who got the vaccines at the moment. With an uncertain situation in this global pandemic, it was hard to predict the outcome or the results of the damage to the economy—specifically, the hairdressing industry solely relied on face-to-face services. The industry needed to find ways to adapt to the situation for their businesses to thrive and survive the pandemic.

Research Design and Methodology

The data were obtained directly from the in-depth interviews for this qualitative research. The prospective audiences were asked 19 questions in total through the in-depth interviews.

Sample and Data Collection

the population is Thai entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses in the hairdressing industry. The Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP). In 2019, they prescribed the



characteristics of small and medium enterprises, stating that "any service-based business with 0 to 5 employees would fall into the small-sized business and 5 to 30 employees would fall into the medium-sized category." (The Office of SMEs Promotion, 2019), In the Facebook group called "หางานเสริมสวย ช่างหางาน เจ้าของร้านหาช่าง."¹ was where the researcher found the population with over 16,000 members who worked in the hairdressing industry. Through snowball and convenience sampling, 15 people were selected as samples. The researcher would gather the Sampling-based on 15 Thai entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses in the hairdressing industry to conduct the interview. During the interview, the researcher asked each audience questions directly. Which provided the data from interviews to be further analyzed through the Service Marketing Mix model and their views and experiences articulated in words. The information gathered will be further analyzed and categorized by the researcher.

Results

This list showed the salon's names of 15 respondents the researcher interviewed. The researcher would define the respondents as numbers to avoid confusion, such as "Respondent 1", "Respondent 2", and so forth. The list below would represent the businesses' names to avoid confusion for the readers and promote the respondents' businesses.

TABLE 1 Respondent's and Their Businesses' Names

Respondent Number	Name of Respondent's Hair Salon
Respondent 1	Happening Spa,
Respondent 2	30Shine Men's Hair Salon
Respondent 3	Super Hair Style
Respondent 4	Grandhair Ayutthaya
Respondent 5	Guitar Beauty Salon
Respondent 6	65 Hair Station
Respondent 7	Psp Studio Station

¹ The Facebook group name is Haanganseamsuay Changhangan Jaokongraanhaachang. It can find by access to this link <https://www.facebook.com/groups/455857788161171>



TABLE 1 Respondent's and Their Businesses' Names (cont.)

Respondent Number	Name of Respondent's Hair Salon
Respondent 8	ร้านเสริมสวยศิริพร (Ran Serm Suay Siriporn)
Respondent 9	ร้านทำผมเมowa (Ran Tum Pome Ava)
Respondent 10	Happy Beauty
Respondent 11	The Beauty Bar
Respondent 12	ร้านเสริมสวยพรบิวตี้ (Ran Serm Suay Porn Beauty)
Respondent 13	August Salon & Spa
Respondent 14	Hair Design
Respondent 15	พิศ ซาลอน (Pit Salon)

The Service Marketing Mix results are as follows:

Products - The hairdressing service was the leading service in the industry, but that was not necessarily the only product/service among the salons and barbershops; some also chose to sell hair care products, manicures, waxing, eyebrow tattoo, lips tattoo, and facial treatments to provide their clients variety of services to choose. Depending on their capacity, some did choose to provide hairdressing exclusively in their stores.

Price – Justifying the actual price for each service can be challenging due to the client's natural hair texture and the look they were going. So, the researcher decided to focus on the starting price of three primary services: Haircut, Hair coloring, and hair perming. The researcher found that haircut starting prices could range from 100-900 Baths. Hair coloring prices started can range from 500-3,500 Baths. Moreover last but not least, hair perming prices can range from 500-6,000 Baths.

Place – The location found in this study was that most salons and barbershops locate around the central part of Thailand, including Bangkok, Samut Prakan, Nakhon Pathom, Pathum Thani, Nonthaburi, and Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. A few salons were in Chonburi, the eastern area of Thailand.

Promotion – There were many promotions found among salons and barbershops; the researcher found many promotions in the industry at the time. A discount on various services was among the most famous and utilized in many salons and barbershops. Membership promotion is another strategy for the customers to become members of the salons and barbershops. Some entrepreneurs decided not to provide any promotions at the moment.



during the pandemic. Moreover, some went a step further and did not make any promotion as part of their strategies.

Process – Similar to the normal situation, the hairdressing industry gave the same services to the customers. The process of each hairdresser usually starts with reserving a spot for a client or greeting a walk-in client. Then the service would begin with consulting about their service on which chemical treatments or haircut they would like to receive, and the time spent on the process will be determined case by case based on their hair type, color, hair texture, and also their hair goal. However, to prevent the virus from spreading, all salons and barbers followed the protocol given to them by the government for reopening a beauty salon and barbershop, such as wearing masks, face shields, and gloves—salons and barbers in the Bangkok area, which were ordered not to provide any chemical services.

People – Some salon entrepreneurs worked alone, meaning they decided to provide service while running their business alone instead of hiring employees. 1-16 employees were the number of employees found in the study.

Physical Evidence – Other than shampoo beds and barber chairs that all salons and barbers had to accommodate to provide services to the customers, new equipment was added into the space, such as thermometers and alcohol gel bottles to provide all the customers. As for the decorations, each saloon and barber had their unique style. Some lean toward more modern design; some prefer a "local salon vibe," meaning the vintage salon found throughout Thailand.

Before the pandemic, each respondent mainly experienced a somewhat positive experience. The business was going so well that one of the respondents decided to branch out and extend the services, but the effect of this pandemic seemed to reach far beyond what many people imagined. Some kind of services, such as the chemical service, was not permitted, so the number of customers was reduced. Also, the guideline provided by the government for reopening a beauty salon and a barbershop, such as masks, face shields, and gloves to avoid contamination. Moreover, there was a national lockdown in the first emergence starting from 26 March to 3 May 2020. The lockdown forced all of the citizens in Thailand to stay at home and temporarily close their businesses to avoid spreading the virus. Salons and barbers were not one of those exceptions. All the respondents lost their income. Many respondents decided to use delivery tactics to bring some profit to the business. The Second emerged, and the situation was slightly different. The case report dropped significantly.



Due to the lockdown from the first emerging, the government needed to bring the economy back before the covid-19 pandemic. There were a few campaigns dedicated to giving away free money for a citizen like Rao-Cha-Na(ราชนา), Khon La-Kreung(คนละครึ่ง), and Mor33 Rao-Rak-Gun(ม. 33 เรารักกัน) which greatly benefit the SMEs.

Furthermore, the third emerging started around April 2021 and continues as the researcher conducting this research. The specific situation was that the pandemic was found everywhere in the country, and the financial campaign was running short, unlike the first one, where everyone stayed home. The government suggested that people stay home while not many find it necessary to get their hair done, especially with social distancing and virtual meetings. Because of that, they were selling hair salon equipment online, one way the respondents gained income.

For the marketing strategy, before the pandemic, each respondent used various strategies to execute the strategy for their business. There were a few strategies worth mentioning. First, "Online Marketing Strategy" was no surprise that digital disruption was getting into every business, and the pandemic pushed those disruptions into a much quicker stage than expected. Fortunately, many respondents started it before the pandemic. Second, the "Word of Mouth" this strategy had been used by many respondents as well because it was all about giving the best experience to the customers in the hope that they would recommend the service back to their peers. To achieve word of mouth, many respondents had to provide the best services possible to all the clients. Third, "Customer Loyalty Strategy" was dedicated to making a customer loyal to your business by making the customers repeatedly purchase the product or service. By doing so, "Personalization Strategy" was also used to provide the customers with the best experience. Not to mention, "Continuous Improvement" was also the strategy focused on improving the business in every aspect; Respondent4 used this strategy as the core strategy for their business.

After the pandemic spread, the respondent found that factors such as national law and behavior change led to one of the last century's hairdressing industry's most significant challenges. Rather than mandatory cleanliness, "Online Marketing Strategy" was among the new strategies that many respondents decided to utilize to use the new online tool to sell products and inform the customers about their services. "Line Extension Strategy" was also used more than it used to; before the pandemic, selling products was not the priority of the salons and barbers. However, the law prevents the customer from getting their haircut or



color. Selling products was one of the best ways to bring profit into the business through line extensions such as expanding the hairdresser's service into a product seller and selling products related to hair. Other strategies that the researcher found that many respondents were currently using include "Promotion Strategy," which could bring the customers into the business to take advantage of those promotions.

Moreover, "Cost Cutting Strategy," even though this strategy was not necessarily a marketing strategy. However, the researcher found that almost every single response agreed to be using this strategy at one point to keep the business going as well as potentially keep the business from going bankrupt, not to mention this strategy could potentially be another factor that impacts each marketing strategy that the respondents could execute. Last but not least, "Delivery Strategy" did not happen in the hairdressing industry before the pandemic. The researcher found a new strategy to fight the pandemic and social distancing measures. This strategy brought convenience and also provided services for the consumers.

Conclusion

The results of a study on marketing strategy entrepreneurs in the hair industry used to manage their business before COVID-19 included "Online Marketing Strategy," "Word Of Mouth," "Customer Loyalty Strategy," "Personalization Strategy," and "Continuous Improvement" Meaning through the Service Marketing Mix consisted of Products, Place, Price, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. The entrepreneurs' utilized Products, Promotion, Processes, and Physical Evidence by using the marketing strategies that went into those factors to gain competitive advantages over their competitors in the hairdressing industry.

During the pandemic, it was very challenging for the entrepreneurs and the hairdressing industry. The pandemic created problems such as cash flow shortage and shortage of customers in the industry. There had been many adaptations to survive this pandemic. The marketing strategies found during those times include "Online Marketing Strategy," "Line Extension Strategy," "Promotion Strategy," "Cost Cutting Strategy," and "Delivery Strategy," which were utilized by the entrepreneurs for the business to survive in this crisis. The researcher would recommend that the entrepreneurs utilize the strategies found in the study as guidelines to manage businesses during crises, similar to COVID-19. The researchers found that all the marketing factors such as Products, Place, Price, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence all suffered from the negative impact of the pandemic, especially People,



Process, and Physical Evidence. The process of hairdressing service altered due to the guideline provided by the government for reopening a beauty salon and a barbershop. People in the hairdressing service, specifically employees, were laid off from the profit margin losses and the shortage of money and liquidity. Moreover, Physical Evidence of the hairdressing service added new equipment into the space, such as thermometers and alcohol gel bottles to provide all the customers.

The research results revealed that the factors of the Service Marketing Mix in terms of products, prices, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence in the hairdressing industry were lacking in academic information and study, especially in the crisis event such as a pandemic. This study could potentially bring light to the academic world regarding how the Thai hairdressing industry and the entrepreneurs manage their businesses. It also brought some light to specific marketing strategies used in the industry.

Discussions and Suggestions

The research results revealed that the factors of the Service Marketing Mix in terms of products, prices, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence in the hairdressing industry were lacking in academic information and study, especially in the crisis event such as a pandemic. This study could potentially bring light to the academic world regarding how the Thai hairdressing industry and the entrepreneurs manage their businesses. It also brought some light to specific marketing strategies used in the industry.

The pandemic became such a threat to every industry, including the hairdressing industry. One of the business's significant threats was the cash flow shortage and customers, especially on the SMEs scale. With that in mind utilizing various strategies in the marketing department should be highly considered to improve the awareness of the customers toward the business. Cutting unnecessary costs would always be a great strategy when dealing with business during a challenging time. Also, online marketing was crucial for the business, with its more affordable and accessible advantages than traditional media. The idea of provided promotion remains a great way to introduce customers to the business and purchase the services provided by the Entrepreneur. Another strategy the researcher would like to point out was the delivery strategy; the pandemic situation remained unclear when the researcher conducted this study.



The Entrepreneur should consider the delivery strategy for services when planning the business in the future. The researcher hopes this study brought light to any entrepreneurs in the hairdressing industry who started or looked for ways to improve their business during challenging times through Service Marketing Mix strategies. This study gathered information through the business owners or representatives who kindly gave insight into their business and industry. It could be a valuable lesson for any future or present entrepreneurs to use the information in this study as guidelines to adapt and survive any future challenges found in the business. Hopefully, the information will be used in the marketing aspect by entrepreneurs when planning the future marketing strategy for the hairdressing industry. Furthermore, last but not least, the researcher would like to point out that the business needed to keep thriving as an entrepreneur. Continuing to improve the business will always be necessary for the business no matter what industry the Entrepreneur implies.

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Interview Consent Form

Research proposal: Service Marketing Mix Strategies of Hairdressing Industry During COVID-19 Pandemic

Name of Researcher:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Interview guidance for participants Service Marketing Mix Strategies of Hairdressing Industry During COVID-19 Pandemic
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that the notes may be looked at by the researcher
4. I give permission for anonymized data to be presented in research report and/or publications

I agree to take part in the above study.

.....
Participant

.....
Date

.....
Signature

Please return it to the researcher.