

The Selection of the Service Marketing Mix 7Ps in Thai Massage Services: from the Perspectives of Thai Consumers

การเลือกใช้กลยุทธ์ส่วนประสมของการตลาดบริการในธุรกิจนวดแผนไทยจากทัศนคติของ ผู้บริโภคชาวไทย

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Abstract

Thai massage, also known as Nuat Boran in its traditional medical form, is a type of Asian therapy based on the treatment of the human body, mind, and spirit. It is regarded as a service industry. The purpose of the Thai massage business is to provide relaxation and to cure muscular symptoms. The aims of this study were firstly to define the service marketing mix factors 7Ps influencing the buyers' decision in Thai massage services namely product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence factors, and secondly, to provide recommendations to Thai massage owners for service improvement. Data was collected from 415 consumers through questionnaire, and analysed by using descriptive statistics, which were the percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results indicated that the most important factor of the buyers' decision was "People", which received the highest mean score. It can be explained that "People" is considered as "the skill of the therapists" that most consumers need and expect to receive the best massage. Therapists must be good at the massage skill with an issued certification. In addition, the efficiency depended on the experience of the therapists in which good therapists must be polite, friendly, and service-minded. Hence, it could be concluded that "people" was the greatest factor for developing the services, which would probably affect the buyers' decision. The second important factor was "Physical", which was considered as "hygiene of clothing". Next, the important factor was "Process" which was considered as "follow consumers as requested". The fourth important factor was "Product" which was considered as "hygiene of beds and chairs". Fifth, "Price" was considered as

“reasonable prices”. The sixth important factor was “Promotion” which was considered as “collect 10 stamps to get a free massage”. Lastly, the important factor was “Place” which was considered as “easy access and parking”. The recommendations to Thai massage owners for service improvement is to give training to all therapists for good manners in order to create and maintain customer loyalty. Consequently, Thai massage owners should offer therapists special training to be knowledgeable, have more skills, and be able to provide prompt service with good quality to all consumers.

Keywords: Buyer Decision Service Marketing Mix Thai Massage

บทคัดย่อ

การนวดแผนไทย หรือเรียกอีกอย่างหนึ่งว่า นวดโบราณ ในรูปแบบดั้งเดิมในการรักษาสุขภาพร่างกายและจิตใจ การนวดแผนไทยเป็นอุตสาหกรรมบริการ จุดประสงค์ของธุรกิจนวดแผนไทยเพื่อให้ความผ่อนคลายและรักษาอาการกล้ามเนื้อ จุดประสงค์ของงานวิจัยครั้งนี้ เพื่อหาปัจจัยส่วนผสมของการตลาดบริการ ได้แก่ สินค้า ราคา สถานที่ การส่งเสริมการขาย บุคลากร กระบวนการ และปัจจัยทางกายภาพ ที่มีผลต่อการเลือกใช้บริการในร้านนวดแผนไทยของลูกค้าชาวไทย และงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ยังให้คำข้อเสนอแนะต่อผู้ประกอบการกิจการนวดแผนไทยในการปรับปรุงบริการเพื่อให้ตรงกับความต้องการของลูกค้าเพื่อให้ลูกค้าพึงพอใจสูงสุด ข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์โดยสถิติเชิงพรรณนา ได้แก่ ร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน โดยเก็บข้อมูลจากลูกค้า 415 คน ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่า ปัจจัยด้านคนหรือพนักงานนวดแผนไทยมีความสำคัญต่อการเลือกใช้บริการร้านนวดแผนไทยมากที่สุด พนักงานนวดแผนไทยต้องมีทักษะที่ชำนาญในการนวดแผนไทยที่ดีและมีใบรับรองอาชีพอย่างถูกต้อง นอกจากนี้ต้องมีใจรักบริการและมีความสุขในการให้บริการ ดังนั้นปัจจัยด้านพนักงานจึงสำคัญที่สุดต่อผู้บริโภคในการตัดสินใจเลือกใช้บริการร้านนวดแผนไทย ปัจจัยลำดับที่สองคือ ปัจจัยด้านกายภาพ ซึ่งผู้บริโภคให้ความสำคัญเรื่องความสะดวกของเสื้อผ้าที่ใช้ในการบริการ กระบวนการเป็นปัจจัยที่สำคัญลำดับที่สามซึ่งผู้บริโภคใส่ใจเรื่องพนักงานสามารถทำตามคำสั่งของผู้บริโภคตามต้องการในขณะที่ใช้บริการ ปัจจัยความสำคัญลำดับที่สี่ คือ สินค้า ซึ่งเกี่ยวข้องกับความสะดวกของเตียงและเก้าอี้ที่ให้บริการ ราคาเป็นปัจจัยที่สำคัญในลำดับที่ห้า ซึ่งราคาสัมเหตุสมผลกับการบริการ ปัจจัยที่สำคัญลำดับที่สี่คือ การส่งเสริมการขาย ซึ่งเกี่ยวข้องกับการสะสมแต้มให้ครบตามจำนวนครั้งที่ผู้ประกอบการกำหนดเพื่อได้รับการบริการครั้งต่อไปโดยไม่ต้องชำระเงิน ปัจจัยส่วนผสมทางการตลาดลำดับสุดท้าย คือ สถานที่ ซึ่งเกี่ยวข้องกับสถานที่และที่จอดรถ ข้อเสนอแนะต่อผู้ประกอบการร้านนวดแผนไทย คือ การฝึกฝนทักษะเพิ่มเติมให้แก่พนักงานนวดแผนไทยให้มีความพร้อมในด้านมารยาทและชำนาญในเรื่องการบริการที่มีคุณภาพอย่างมืออาชีพต่อลูกค้าเพื่อที่จะสร้างความประทับใจให้กับลูกค้ากลับมาใช้บริการใน

ครั้งต่อไป ดังนั้น ผู้ประกอบการร้านนวดแผนไทย ควรเน้นฝึกพนักงานเพิ่มเติมเพื่อให้มีทักษะในการนวดและฝึกด้านคุณภาพของการบริการ

คำสำคัญ : การตัดสินใจของผู้ซื้อ ปัจจัยส่วนผสมกับการตลาดบริการ นวดแผนไทย

Introduction

According to the Department of Trade Negotiations, (B), (2011), “The Thai government has announced Thailand to be the capital of international health and supports the Thai massage business for Thailand to be a world-class healthcare destination. Nowadays, the Thai massage business is continuously expanding and making more income”. At present, the Thai people are paying more attention in taking care of their health. This is because the Thai economic situation has caused the Thai people to become more stressed (Matichon Online, 2017). According to Nitipinyadech (2012), “Currently, the Thai economic crisis and many personal problems have happened in humans’ daily lives. This can cause people stress and pain in their body, especially elderly people. These reasons make people decide to take care of their health. A health-related business that is very popular is called Thai massage”.

Mostly, all kinds of massage are used for relaxation and for curing all muscular pains (Thaiarcheep, 2012). Thus, Thai massage has become popular because it gives more benefits to humans’ health and relaxation from tired muscles. The benefits of foot massage can be seen and felt after a couple of weeks (Dimitrijevic, 2005). Thai massage is advantageous for humans’ sexual activity, improves circulation, helps to prevent foot and ankle injuries, reduces the effect of depression and anxiety (ibid, 2005). Besides, Thai massage is one of the oldest healing techniques that can release emotional and physical tension, as well as improve sleep, mind awareness, and blood circulation (Wong, 2015). From the Bangkok Post, “The Thai spa and healthcare business has an encouraging outlook, with a projection of 7-10% growth to generate up to 15 billion Baht of revenue this year” (Fernquest, 2011). “The Thai massage and spa business has been recognised as one of the top five services in the world, while the Thai hermit yoga postures at Wat Pho in Bangkok have been registered in UNESCO’s Memory of the World”. “Phattiaporn Khiewsanun, Vice-president of the Thai Spa Association, says concern for overall health is a global trend, so more and more foreigners are visiting Thailand as a spa destination for seven to 10 days” (ibid, 2011). As of February 2011, “there were 1,463 registered shops, health shops and beauty outlets holding certificates from the Ministry of Public Health”.

Objective

The main objective of this research is to study consumers' decision of Thai massage services based on seven elements of the service marketing mix.

1. To define the service marketing mix factors influencing buyers' decisions in Thai massage services.
2. To provide recommendations to Thai massage owners for service improvement.

Scope of the Content

The study focuses on the service marketing mix, which is the 7Ps - product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence - to measure the level of importance for consumers' selection. According to Sereerat (1998), "The service mix concept by Philip Kotler is the service business concept, which applies the marketing mix of the 7Ps to specify market strategy. The 7Ps marketing mix consists of product (tangible and intangible), price (value price and reasonable), place (location and channels), promotion (how to convince consumers), people (employee), process (how to service step by step accurately), and physical (interior and exterior of the service)". According to Ormpinngern (2012), "In reference to the previous research topic "Factors affecting the consumers buying decision of foreign tourists on Thai traditional massage service", the service marketing mix of the 7Ps is mentioned in the context". Additionally, according to Wongkrom (2015), "Referring to the previous research topic "Marketing mixes that affect consumers; decision to use Thai traditional massage in Chachoengsao", the 7Ps service marketing mix was also used as a tool to research and find out the results in the context". Thus, the 7Ps service marketing mix is selected as an indicator to find the results for the consumers' decision based on previous research as support.

Scope of the Area of Study

According to the Department of Business Development, Ministry of Commerce (2009), "Bangkok is the centre of Thailand in which there is an abundance of tourist attractions and overcrowded Thai population living around Bangkok. Moreover, there are many Thai massage shops operating to service the people. The statistics in 2009 of registered Thai massage entrepreneurs show that there were 330 shops in Bangkok, 229 shops in the Central Region, 229 shops in the Northern Region, 190 shops in the Western Region, 203 shops in the Eastern Region, 146 shops in the Northeast Region, and 109 shops in the Southern Region. There were a total of 1,436 shops in Thailand".

The Siam Media News (2016) reported, “... to maintain and to control Thai massage shops in Thailand with the same standard, the Ministry of Public Health has issued a law and announced to all business owners to officially register to eradicate the problem of prostitution and unqualified standards to service consumers. Nowadays, there are approximately 10,000 Thai massage shops in Thailand, but only 1,700 shops registered in the system as a legal business in 2016. Significantly, 344 Thai massage shops in the Bangkok area are already registered and the rest of the registered shops are shown in other provinces”. Thus, Bangkok is the best area to conduct the research because there are many shops open in the city. As such, the statistics show that the number of Thai massage businesses are increasing.

According to the United Nations Thailand, (2017), “... there are 5.7 million people living in Bangkok, which the number of people is more than other provinces”. Importantly, Bangkokians prefer to stay in their home around a suburban zone (WordPress Theme by MH Themes, 2017). According to WordPress Theme by MH Themes (2017), “Outside Bangkok is certainly calm without commotion. The quality of life is abundantly convenient and better than in the city. Also, staying outside Bangkok is easy to travel and drive to other nearby province for weekend relaxation. Significantly, the price of a house is cheaper than in the city”. According to Jareonsook (2017), “Living outside Bangkok is the best because of four reasons; such as, smaller population, no traffic, access of technology with 4G, and fresh environment”. According to the Department of Strategy and Evaluation (2017), “From the updated statistics in 2016, the most overcrowded area with the highest number of population as 192,413 people is Bang Khae district, which is located in Thon Buri in the west of Bangkok. Thus, Bang Khae, Bang Bon, Thon Buri, Jomthong, Phasi Charoen, Talingchan districts are all located in Thon Buri and the location of Thai people’s residences not tourists’ residences”. Therefore, these areas in Bangkok were selected to do the research because of the population.

Scope of Sampling

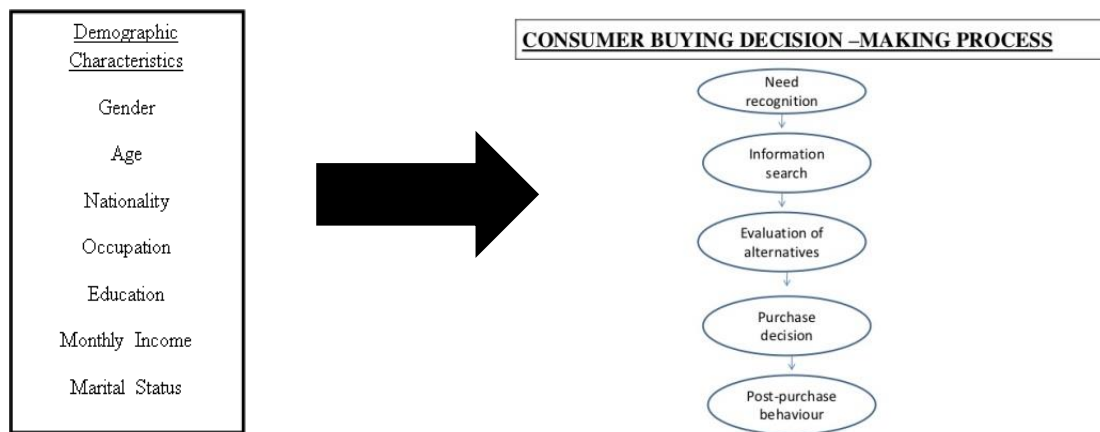
From this research, non-probability sampling, convenience or accidental sampling will be applied in the method of collecting information from questionnaires. This is because respondents can be a consumer who bought Thai massage services in a suburban area of Bangkok. The researcher conducted face-to-face surveys by collecting data in front of Thai massage shops in the specific areas. According to Suwannawong (1995), “Convenience or accidental sampling is convenient, easy and saves time for collecting data. For example, to

inquire opinions from a canteen's service in a university, the researcher can stand, interview and collect data in front of the canteen from a random 50 respondents". Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) state that, "Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population respondents who are conveniently available to join in the research". Moreover, this study used a quantitative rather than qualitative research method by calculating numbers, ranking the level of importance in consumers' selection, and collecting numerical data to be evaluated by using the result of the mean, standard deviation. According to Dudovskiy (2011), "Quantitative research methods measure the basis of numbers and calculations. Moreover, the questions of "how many?" and "how often?" are regularly asked in quantitative studies. The most popular research methods from this category are closed-ended questionnaires". In addition, Diffen (n.d) mentions, "... quantitative research, the purpose is to explain through focused collection of numerical data and the approach to inquiry is focused on outcome-oriented. Random sampling is to intently select a large sample for results to a population. Data collection can be observations (non-participant) and questionnaires (close-ended). Data analysis is raw data as numbers to come to a conclusion. Data interpretation, conclusions are formulated at the end of the study and stated with a predetermined degree of certainty". On the contrary, according to Diffen (n.d) "... qualitative research, the purpose is to explain through collection of spoken narrative data and the approach to inquiry is focused on process-oriented. Purposive sampling is to intently select a small sample for getting an in-depth understanding. Data collection can be a document or something observed (participant and non-participant) and questionnaires (open-ended). Data analysis is raw data as words and comments to come to a conclusion. Data interpretation, conclusions can change with the validity and be reviewed on an ongoing basis".

Conceptual Framework

This research paper studied buyers' decision towards Thai massage services via the 7Ps service marketing mix, which is a tool used by business to help determine strategies.

Consumers make a decision to buy a Thai massage based on the marketing stimuli from the price, place, promotion, product, etc. Additionally, general demographic factors are really important, as they affect the consumers' decisions. This results in consumers making a decision on how they select Thai massage services.



Buyers Decision-making Process

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010), “A well-developed and tested model of buyers’ behaviour is known as the stimulus-response model. Marketing and other stimuli come to the customers “black box” and produce responses. The buyers’ characteristics influence how consumers perceive the stimulus; the decision-making process decides what buying behavior is.” Sod-Ngam (2015) stated, “The best research process of the consumer behavior model is the stimulus-response model (SR model). This model can apply to any product or services industry to clearly recognise the buyers’ behaviour and decision-making process.” Therefore, the SR model was applied in this research context to find out the buyers’ response to the Thai massage service industry.” This is summarised in the diagram below:

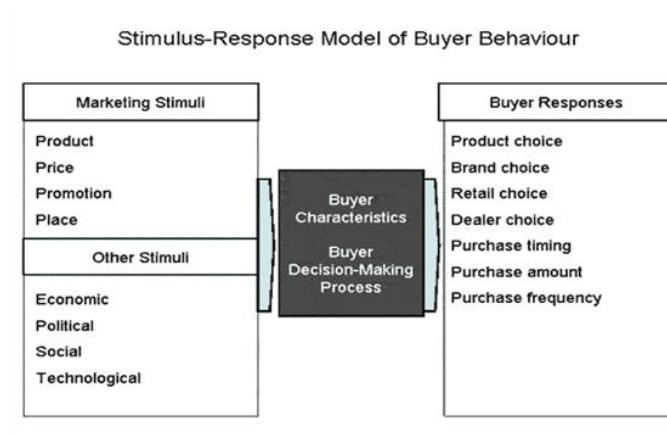


Figure 2. Source: Sod-Ngam (2015)

From the above model, Sod-Ngam (2015) pointed out that, “Marketing stimuli refers to the 4Ps and other stimuli are called PEST; namely, political, economic, social and technological. In the black box, buyers’ characteristics refer to 6W1H and the buyers’ decision-making process shows

five stages to evaluate the process. The black box model considers the buyers' response as a result of a decision-making process." MbASkool (2011) states, "The Black Box Model of Buyers' Behaviour identifies the process in which consumers will undertake when deciding whether to purchase a product or service. The first part of this model shows how consumers will begin by identifying the marketing stimuli, which are Product, Place, Price and Promotion."

In the Thai massage context, the marketing stimuli has already been mentioned in Item 2.2 7Ps service marketing mix. For buyers' characteristics, according to Sopimpa (2015), "The 6W1H Consumer behavior analysis model is an efficient question analysis for an entrepreneur to study how consumers purchase products or services in order to efficiently or accurately operate or improve a business." The 6W1H analysis model refers to the following:

Who: Who is a buyer by age, gender, education, salary, occupation, lifestyle based on demography, geography, behavioral science, etc. In the Thai massage context, the demographic characteristic is applied to study items; such as, age, gender, education, salary, occupation, etc.

What: What an entrepreneur wants to sell and what a consumer wants to purchase by analysing the strong points of the products to attract targeted consumers. In the Thai massage context, massage is a product. Thai massage is provided by the quality of the skilled therapists, as well as various kinds of Thai massage on offer to consumers.

When: When a consumer wants to purchase a product or service, or the period of time by analysing the frequency and the chance to buy; such as, morning, noon, night, special festivals, etc. In the Thai massage context, the period of time for a massage can be on a weekend, Monday to Friday, 10.00-12.00, or 14.00-16.00, etc.

Where: Where to buy a product or get a service as a distribution channel. In the Thai massage context, the service place can be in a shopping mall, standalone, etc.

Whom: Who is the influence to buy a product or service; such as, users, buyers, friends, relatives, parents, doctors, etc. In the Thai massage context, the influencer could be friends, families, alone, etc.

Why: Why a consumer needs to buy a product or service. In the Thai massage context, consumers may need to relax, treat muscles, etc.

How: How a consumer makes a decision by analysing the five stages to evaluate the customers' buying decision process as follows:

1. Problem/Needs Recognition;
2. Information Search;
3. Evaluation of Alternatives;
4. Purchase Decision;
5. Post Purchase Behavior.

According to Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968), “The buying decision process is the decision-making process used by consumers regarding the market relations before, during, and after the purchase of a product or service”. Dewey (2007) further states, “The stages of the buyers’ decision process were first introduced by Engel, Blackwell and Kollat in 1968”. These five stages are a framework to evaluate the customers' buying decision process.

1. Problem/Needs Recognition - Recognise what the problem or need is and identify the product or type of product, which is required (Kotler, 2013). In the Thai massage context, consumers need a massage for body relaxation. They consider what kind of massages to buy; such as, Thai massage, foot massage, aromatherapy oil massage, etc.

2. Information Search - The consumer researches the product, which would satisfy the recognised need (Kotler, 2013). In the Thai massage context, consumers search for the best qualified place to go for body and muscle relaxation via the Internet or experienced friends.

3. Evaluation of Alternatives - The consumer evaluates the searched alternatives. Generally, the information search reveals multiple products for the consumer to evaluate and understand which product would be appropriate (Kotler, 2013). In the Thai massage context, consumers search for alternative places, which can provide massage directly to their needs. Well-known Thai massage places or the nearest one to consumers’ residences can be an alternative choice.

4. Purchase Decision - After the consumer has evaluated all the options and has the intention to buy the product, there could only be two things which might change the decision of the consumer of buying the product that is what other peers of the consumer think of the product and any unforeseen circumstances (Kotler, 2013). In the Thai massage context, consumers may ask from their experienced friends how good or bad the services and skilled therapists are towards alternative places. In addition, an unexpected situation can be one thing

to change consumers' decision; such as, traffic, mistaken queue management, the closing of a Thai massage shop, unexpected appointment, etc.

5. Post Purchase Behavior - After the purchase, the consumer may experience a feeling of post purchase dissonance that buying another product would have been better. Addressing post purchase dissonance spreads good word for the product and increases the chance of frequent repurchase (Kotler, 2013). In the Thai massage context, after the purchase of a Thai massage, consumers may have expectations towards the Thai massage services and skill of the therapists. If the overall services are very impressive, this can create positive word-of-mouth publicity and brand loyalty to repurchase. On the other hand, if the services are not good and cannot respond to consumers' needs, this can also create negative word-of-mouth publicity; thus, consumers may find new places for future services.

Moreover, according to Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, and Best (2007), "Consumer behavior is to study buyers' needs individual or in groups. The 6W1H analysis is the question model to search for consumer behaviour, which consists of Who?, What?, Why?, Who?, When?, Where? and How? in order to find out the exact accurate answers from the 7 O features. 7 Os consist of Occupant, Objects, Objectives, Organisations, Occasions, Outlets and Operations." The Business directory.com (n.d.) states, "To understand the consumers in the target market, the 7 Os are the answer to key questions in the market place. The 7 Os help a business to identify basic customer needs and help to segment the market, target and position the product or service in order to achieve a competitive advantage. The 7 Os consist of the following:"

Occupants - Understand a summary of the customer's demographic, psychographic and geographic profiles. (The quantity is when a customer buys, price, and brand of the product.)

Object - The customer's choice on a product or service.

Occasions - When/At what time the customer seeks for the product or service (lunch, evening, night, etc.)

Organizations - The key players in the decision-making process (users, buyers, decision-makers, and competitors).

Objectives - The reason the customer tends to buy the product (brand image, price, packaging, and availability).

Operations - How the consumer gathers information before buying the product (media, word of mouth, and Internet).

Outlets - From where the consumers buy the product (retail shops, supermarkets, etc.)

The 6W1H analysis is the question model to search for consumer behaviour in order to find the exact accurate answers from the 7 O's features.

6W 1H	7 O's
Who: Who to buy?	Occupants: Target market.
What: What to buy?	Objects: What kinds of product?
Why: A reason to buy.	Objectives: A reason to buy.
Whom: Who is involved?	Organisations: Who influences to buy?
When: When to buy?	Occasions: What times to buy?
Where: Where to buy?	Outlets: Where is the specific place?
How: How to buy?	Operations: The decision-making process.

Definition of Operational Terms/Research Terms

1. Thai Massage

Thai massage is similarly known as Nuat Boran in its traditional medical method. It is a type of Asian therapy that is based on the treatment of the human body and mind. Thai massage has the ability to clear the energy pathways, create body relaxation and reduce muscular pain.

2. 7Ps Service Marketing Mix

The service marketing mix in this study refers to a set of marketing factors, which Thai, people, process massage operators create to respond to the market consisting of product, price, place, promotion, and physical evidence.

3. Buyers' Decision

These five stages are a framework to evaluate the customers' buying decision process.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Problem/Needs Recognition | 2. Information Search |
| 3. Evaluation of Alternatives | 4. Purchase Decision |
| 5. Post Purchase Behavior | |

Literature Review

1. 7Ps Service Marketing Mix

McCarthy (1960) stated, "The 7Ps are generally used in the service industries. The marketing mix is associated with the 4Ps of marketing, but the 7Ps are used for service marketing". Thai massage business is a service industry; therefore, the service marketing mix in

the Thai massage context refers to a set of marketing factors, which Thai massage operators create to respond to the market consisting of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence.

Product

The product should be what the consumers are expecting to obtain (Hutchins, 2002). In this research, product refers to intangible products in Thai massage services; such as, types of massage, etc. Thai massage is an intangible item that a buyer considers from the last result and receives the benefits from getting better health after the service. Customers do not expect only the product, but also to receive the best quality and benefits from Thai massage services. Furthermore, the products of Thai massage can be served in many formats; such as, foot massage, body massage, body scrub, aromatherapy massage, etc.

Price

The product should always be seen as representing good value for money (Hutchins, 2002). In the Thai massage context, pricing is how business owners set the prices to attract buyers. If the price is high, consumers definitely expect to get high service quality. Thus, the price must be reasonable.

Place

Place refers to the right location. In this research, place refers to the location of the Thai massage shops where customers can easily access such as, available parking or close to public transportation; such as, buses, taxi or the BTS. More importantly, Thai massage shops are located close to consumers' residence or workplace.

Promotion

Promotion refers to the activities to make the product or service known to the user. This can include advertising and word of mouth (Coleman, 2015). In this research promotion is presented as follows advertising, sales promotion, and word of mouth comes from customer loyalty.

People

Having the right people is essential because they are as much a part of the business offering as the products/services being offered (Hutchins, 2002). In the Thai massage context, people refer to service therapists who provide and deliver the service to consumers. Therapists must be well-trained with good manners. Skilled therapists must also have valid certification.

These will relate to how therapists perform as a professional resulting in word-of-mouth promotion for the business.

Process

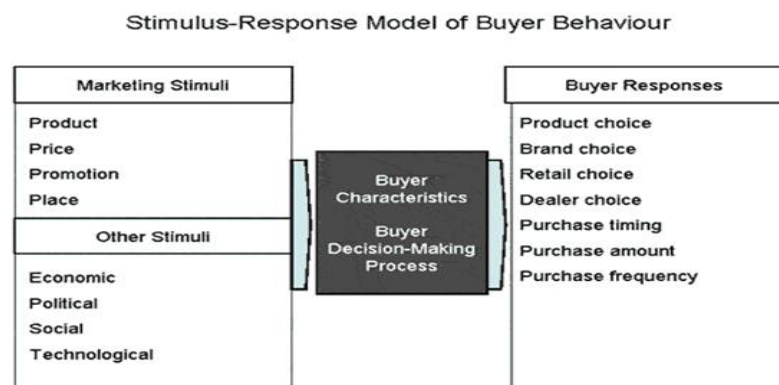
The delivery of the service is usually done with the customer present so how the service is delivered is once again part of what the consumer is paying for (Hutchins, 2002). In this research, process refers to any procedures of service delivered to the consumers. Thai massage is an intangible service that provides convenience, quick service, and pleasure.

Physical Evidence

The level of comfort and attractiveness of a service location may make a lot of difference to the user's experience. In this research, physical evidence refers to the surroundings in which the service operation is taking place like music, decoration, and hygiene that can produce a positive impact to the consumers' experience.

2. Buyers Decision-making Process

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010), "A well-developed and tested model of buyers' behaviour is known as the stimulus-response model. Marketing and other stimuli come to the customers "black box" and produce responses. The buyers' characteristics influence how consumers perceive the stimulus; the decision-making process decides what buying behavior is." Sod-Ngam (2015) stated, "The best research process of the consumer behavior model is the stimulus-response model (SR model). This model can apply to any product or services industry to clearly recognise the buyers' behaviour and decision-making process." Therefore, the SR model was applied in this research context to find out the buyers' response to the Thai massage service industry."



From the above model, Sod-Ngam (2015) pointed out that, “Marketing stimuli refers to the 4Ps and other stimuli are called PEST; namely, political, economic, social and technological. In the black box, buyers’ characteristics refer to 6W1H and the buyers’ decision-making process shows five stages to evaluate the process. The black box model considers the buyers’ response as a result of a decision-making process.” MbASkool (2011) states, “The Black Box Model of Buyers’ Behaviour identifies the process in which consumers will undertake when deciding whether to purchase a product or service. The first part of this model shows how consumers will begin by identifying the marketing stimuli, which are Product, Place, Price and Promotion.”

3. Thai Massage Attributes and Service

Thai massage attributes consist of service quality, skilled therapists, tools and equipment, and ambience (Wongprawmas, 2007).

Service Quality

According to Z. and B. (2003), “Service quality reflects the consumer's perception. Consumers are satisfied when actual service offerings are beyond what they expect”. In the Thai massage context, “the service must be served as professional. Before the massage, therapists must wear the proper uniforms and wash their hands. Consumers must also change their clothing and wash their feet. After the massage, warm herbal drinks will be served to the consumers” (Business Opportunity Centre, n.d.). Furthermore, therapists must be friendly and well-groomed. Significantly, therapists must have a good personality and neat appearance. Massage rooms and equipment must be cleaned with good quality. Services are delivered promptly. Prices must be reasonable with the service quality.

Skilled Therapists

According to Webster, (1828), “Skill requires workers with the training in a particular occupation”. “Skilled labor requires a specific skill, education, training and experience” (LLC, 2016). In the Thai massage context, “therapists are certified by a Thai massage training school. The qualified therapists must be polite, friendly and experienced in Thai massage” (Business Opportunity Centre, n.d.). There will also be several diverse criteria that support being a professional therapist; namely, empathy, listening skills, as well as social and communication skills (Goodtherapy, 2007). In the Thai massage context, there are as follows:

Empathy: Therapists have to understand what customers need, what kinds of massage and which parts of the customer’s body is experiencing pain.

Listening Skills: Therapists must be good at listening to respond to the customer's needs and symptoms.

Social and Communication Skills: Therapists must learn how to communicate well towards the customers and colleagues.

Tools and Equipment

Collins (2003) states, "A tool is any instrument or simple piece of equipment that is used to do a particular kind of work". In the Thai massage context, Thai massage equipment is based on the following categories; such as, massage rooms, massage equipment, aromatherapy oil, music, and clothing (Polak, 2015).

Ambience

According to Merriam-webster., (1828), "Ambience is a feeling or mood associated with a particular place, person, or thing". In the Thai massage context, Thai massage areas must be tidy. The interior decoration should not be colourful. The played music should reduce the volume level. More importantly, the equipment including clothing, pillows and blankets must be clean, as well as a good service must be performed in order step by step and politely to be professional.

4. Demographic Characteristics

In the Thai massage context, the demographic segmentation divides customers into segments based on demographics; such as, gender, age, income, occupation, education, and frequency of buying a Thai massage service. Consequently, demographic factors offer the benefit of learning about a customer's potential purchasing behaviour towards Thai massage and affects the buyers' response towards the 7Ps service marketing mix.

Research Method/Research Methodology

Sampling Design and Sample Size

For this research, convenience sampling was applied in the method of collecting the information from the questionnaires. The respondents were a consumer who bought Thai massage services in the suburban area of Bangkok. The questionnaires conducted face-to-face surveys. The researcher collected data in front of the Thai massage shops in the specific areas. Moreover, this study used a quantitative research method by calculating the numbers, ranking the level of importance in the consumers' selection, and collecting numerical data to evaluate

by using the result of the mean, standard deviation. Data analysis is raw data in the form of numbers that comes to a conclusion.

Sullivan (2001) went onto to state, “In the study where the plan is to estimate the proportion of successes in a dichotomous outcome variable (yes/no) in a single population, the formula for determining sample size is:”

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Where } n &= \pi(1 - \pi)\left(\frac{Z}{E}\right)^2 \\ &= (0.50)(1-0.50) \left[\frac{1.96^2}{0.05^2} \right] \\ &= 384 \text{ sample size} \end{aligned}$$

n = the size of the sample

π = the population proportion

E = the maximum allowable error

Z = the standard normal value to the desired level of confidence ($Z=1.96$)

The researcher took sample size determination; sample size for estimating a population proportion. The result for the sample size required a total of 384 participants, so the researcher added an extra 16 sample participants to have a total of 400 participants to collect the sampling data. The target respondents of this study were Thai customers, who bought Thai massage services.

Selection of the Study Area and Target Population

The Department of Strategy and Evaluation (2017) also concurred, “From the updated statistics in 2016, the most overcrowded area with the highest number of population of 192,413 people is Bang Khae district, which is located in Thon Buri. Thus, Bang Khae, Bang Bon, Thon Buri, Jomthong, Phasi Charoen, and Talingchan districts are all located in Thon Buri, and are the location of Thai people’s residences not tourists’ residences”. Therefore, these areas in Bangkok were selected for the research because of the population.

Data Collection Methods

For this research, the questionnaires were conducted face-to-face surveys and in front of the Thai massage shops in specific areas, which were convenient and saved time for collecting data. The questionnaire survey was divided into four sections: 1. general demographics, 2. general data of Thai massage services, 3. ranking by using a 5-level Likert scale

of the level of importance via the service marketing mix factor, and 4. the last section was open-ended questions.

Results

Findings: The data analysis of the Thai consumers' demographic characteristics was discussed as below:

Gender: Among the 415 respondents, the majority were 217 male respondents (52.3%) and the rest were 198 females (47.7%).

Age: The majority of respondents ranged between the age group of 31-40 years (57.3%) followed by the age group of 18-30 years (29.9%). The third range of percentage was the age group of 41-50 years (9.9%). The remaining respondents were in the age group of 51-60 and above 60 years (1.4% and 1.4% equally), respectively.

Nationality: Among the 415 respondents, the majority were Thai respondents 415 (100%).

Education: Most respondents had graduated with a Bachelor's degree (70.8%), followed by Master's degree (28.7%), Doctoral degree (0.5%) and less than a Bachelor's degree (0.0%), respectively.

Occupation: In terms of occupation, the majority of respondents were private company employees (45.3%) which was logical followed by business owners (30.4%), students (11.8%), and government officials (9.4%). The minorities of respondents were unemployed (2.2%) and retired (1.0%).

Monthly Income: The table shows the highest percentage (44.1%) of respondents had an income of between 30,001-60,000 Baht followed by customers who had an income below 30,000 Baht (23.4%). Customers who earned income between 60,001-90,000 Baht were ranked third (16.1%) followed by customers who earned between 90,001-150,000 Baht (10.1%). On the other hand, the smallest percentage (6.3%) of respondents were customers who had the highest income of more than 150,001 Baht.

Marital Status: The majority of respondents were single (69.9%) followed by married (29.4%) and widowed (0.7%).

Frequency of Buying a Thai Massage Service: Most customers preferred to have a massage less than once a week (39.0%). However, there was a group of customers who liked to have a massage once a month (32.5%) followed by customers who had a massage 2-3 times

per month (17.3%), 2-3 times per week (6.0%), 4-5 times per month (4.1%), and the smallest groups of respondents preferred to have a massage 4-5 times per week (0.5%) and everyday (0.5%).

Purpose of the Massage: Most customers preferred to relax, which was the main objective (91.1%) and the second reason was to get better health (5.3%). Thirdly, was the percentage about the purpose of skin nourishment (3.6%).

The Most Favourite Type of Massage: The highest percentage which most respondents enjoyed massaging was body relaxation at 46.0%. This could be related to occupation in which most respondents worked hard and needed time to relax with a massage and then followed by energy line massage to release pain and relieve the muscles (15.7%). Furthermore, the third group of customers desired a head and shoulders massage (14.5%). Another popular massage was aroma oil, but this type of massage made customers feel sticky and have moisture on their skin (9.9%). The smallest percentage of respondents had a foot massage, body scrub, herbal ball Thai massage as per the following percentages (8.9%), (4.1%), (1.0%), respectively.

Who Normally Goes Together with You: The most respondents went for a massage alone, which was the highest percentage (59.8%) followed by friends (19.0%), couples (11.6%) and family (9.6%).

Average Price per Hour: Most respondents preferred to pay for a massage per hour at 201-300 Baht (47.7%) followed by 101-200 Baht per hour (37.8%), more than 301 Baht (13.5%) and less than 100 Baht (1.0%), respectively.

Preferred Location for a Massage: The highest percentage was 39.0% at a massage shop close to the respondents' residence. This showed the respondents' wanted convenience. The second preferred location chosen by respondents (23.1%) was a regular massage place where they normally visited for loyalty. Another well-known massage venue was Health Land Spa that was close to respondents' residence (21.2%). The smallest groups chose shopping malls (14.9%) and hotels (1.7%).

Preferred Day for a Massage: Most respondents ordinarily went for a massage when they were available (55.9%). This could be any day whenever they had free time. Another popular time period was Saturday to Sunday (Weekend) that had 23.4% of respondents attending. This was followed by Monday to Friday (Weekdays) at (19.5%) and public holidays (1.2%).

Convenient Time for a Massage: The majority of respondents preferred to have a massage between 18.01-20.00 Hrs (26.7%). This showed that this activity was related to the respondents' occupation and time after work as a private company employee could have time for a massage. The second highest percentage was having a massage during 14.01-16.00 Hrs. (26.5%); this aligned with the occupation of business owners, who run their own businesses and could certainly have a massage at this period of time. Interestingly, the third highest percentage was at 16.01-18.00 Hrs (18.8%), which aligned with the occupation of government officials, who would be available at this time. The remaining groups were able to have a massage during 10.00-12.00 Hrs. (11.3%), 20.01-22.00 Hrs. (10.8%), and 12.01-14.00 Hrs. (5.8%), respectively.

Finding

Findings of the Product Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.1 below, the level of importance of *Product* was examined by taking 6 components into consideration. The findings indicated that the condition of the hygiene beds and chairs was the highest mean, which received 'Strongly Important' ($\bar{x} = 4.73$), while the second mean score of product components received 'Important' ($\bar{x} = 4.16$) as various types of Thai massage choices. Thirdly, the quality of products used for services showed the mean of 'Important' at ($\bar{x} = 4.14$). $\bar{x} = 4.13$ indicated 'Important' in the fourth mean score as design; easy, hygiene and plain colours. Finally, the fifth and the sixth mean score showed the 'Important' level as fast and efficient problem-solving and well-known massage location ($\bar{x} = 4.12$, $\bar{x} = 3.65$). The mean score of the overall product factors was ($\bar{x} = 4.15$).

Findings of the Price Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.2 below, the level of importance of *Price* was examined by taking 2 components into consideration. The findings indicated that the highest mean score of the price factor was ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) as a reasonable price for the Thai massage fee and the smallest mean score was ($\bar{x} = 3.87$) as the reasonable price of massage products in the shops. The mean score of the overall price factor was ($\bar{x} = 4.14$).

Findings of the Place Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.3 above, the level of importance of *Place* was examined by taking 5 components into consideration. The findings indicated that convenient access and available parking were the highest mean, which received "Strongly Important" ($\bar{x} = 4.55$), while the second mean score of the place component that received "Important" ($\bar{x} = 4.18$) was location near the respondent's residence or workplace. Thirdly,

close to the community and shopping malls showed a mean of “Important” at ($\bar{x} = 3.54$). $\bar{x} = 3.44$ “Important” indicated the fourth mean score as close to public transportation, taxi and bus. Finally, the fifth mean score showed as visible signboards or a guide to the way ($\bar{x} = 3.40$) as “Important”. The mean score of the overall place factors was ($\bar{x} = 3.82$).

Findings of the Promotion Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.4 above, the level of importance of *Promotion* was examined by taking 5 components into consideration. The findings indicated that collect 10 stamps to get one free massage was the highest mean, which received “Important” ($\bar{x} = 4.07$), while the second mean score of the promotion component received “Important” ($\bar{x} = 3.99$) that offered a special discount coupon package. Thirdly, offering a discount for credit card points showed a mean of “Important” at ($\bar{x} = 3.91$). $\bar{x} = 3.84$ was indicated “Important” in the fourth mean score that offered discounts on special occasions. Finally, the smallest mean score showed as following advertisements and PR; e.g., Line, FB, etc. at “Important” ($\bar{x} = 3.60$). The findings indicated that the importance of the buyers’ decision showed all levels of “Important”. These clearly showed that *promotion* was not the first priority in terms of the buyers’ decision.

Findings of the People Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.5 above, the level of importance of *People* was examined by taking 5 components into consideration. The findings indicated that the staff were well trained with professional and skilled therapists being knowledgeable as the highest mean, which received the same mean of “Strongly Important” at ($\bar{x} = 4.79$), while the second mean score of the people component received the same mean of “Strongly Important” at ($\bar{x} = 4.78$) as the staff were polite and well-mannered plus the staff had a service mind and good attitude. Lastly, the smallest mean score showed the staff as being well-groomed and hygienic of “Strongly Important” at ($\bar{x} = 4.73$). From the table, all elements showed “Strongly Important”. These showed that the people factor was very important in terms of the buyers’ decision.

Findings of the Process Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.6 below, the level of importance of *Process* was examined by taking 8 components into consideration. The findings indicated that following customers’ request was the highest mean, which received “Strongly Important” ($\bar{x} = 4.65$), while the second mean score of the process component received ($\bar{x} = 4.49$) was the staff escorted customers to wash their feet and change their clothing. Thirdly, being fast to arrange a queue showed a mean score at ($\bar{x} = 4.48$). $\bar{x} = 4.45$ indicated the fourth mean score

as the accurate payment process. The fifth mean score was convenient reservation at (\bar{x} = 4.42). Sixth, the mean score was shown as the warm welcome with a greeting and drink at (\bar{x} = 4.35). The seventh mean score resulted in asking the customers' conditions before providing the services at (\bar{x} = 4.29). Lastly, the smallest mean score of the process factor was (\bar{x} = 4.28) as receiving a farewell when the consumers were leaving. From the table, all elements showed "Strongly Important". These showed that the process factor was very important in terms of the buyers' decision.

Findings of the Physical Evidence Factor: As shown in Table 4.2.7 below, the importance level of *Physical Evidence* was examined by taking 9 components into consideration. The findings indicated that the hygiene of clothing was the highest mean which received "Strongly Important" (\bar{x} = 4.79), while the second mean score of the physical evidence component received "Strongly Important" (\bar{x} = 4.77) that was the hygiene of the bed sheets, blankets, and pillow. Thirdly, the hygiene of towels showed a mean score of "Strongly Important" (\bar{x} = 4.75). \bar{x} = 4.72 indicated "Strongly Important" as the fourth mean score of the hygiene of the massage areas. The fifth mean score was the air ventilation flow within the massage location as "Strongly Important" (\bar{x} = 4.62). Sixth, the mean score was shown as the hygiene of the counter service as "Strongly Important" (\bar{x} = 4.43). The seventh mean score resulted as "Strongly Important" for the comfortable interior decoration at (\bar{x} = 4.38). Eighth, comfortable light within the massage rooms received a mean score of "Strongly Important" at (\bar{x} = 4.36). Lastly, the smallest mean score of the physical evidence factor was (\bar{x} = 4.13) "Important" that was the music opened and suitable for comfort.

Conclusion

1. To define the service marketing mix factors influencing buyers' decisions in Thai massage services, the results indicated that the most important factor of the buyers' decision was "People", which received the highest mean score. It can be explained that "People" is considered as "the skill of the therapists" that most consumers expect to receive the best massage. Therapists must be good at the massage skill with an issued certification. In addition, the efficiency depended on the experience of the therapists in which good therapists must be polite and service-minded. Hence, it could be concluded that "people" was the greatest factor for developing the services, which would probably affect the buyers' decision. Consequently,

Thai massage owners should offer therapists special training and be able to provide prompt service with good quality to all consumers.

2. To provide recommendations to Thai massage owners for service improvement, Thai massage owners could take the results to adapt by focusing on, the People, Process and Physical Evidence factors, the owners must recruit certified therapists and train them in the best performance from the beginning to the end. However, most consumers decided to purchase a Thai massage from skilled therapists. To improve the service quality by focusing on the People, the Process and the Physical Evidence factors, these can create customer loyalty to the business.

2.1 Focus on recruiting only certified and skilled therapists and provide proper training occasionally for therapists

With regard to the findings of the study, “Therapists who are knowledgeable and skillful” in Thai massage received the highest ranking mean score. This result indicated that therapists were the key person who certainly had an impact on the buyers’ decision. According to the summary comments of the problems in Chapter 4, most consumers are concerned about the skill of therapists since they expect therapists to be more professional and polite. Some consumers complained about the manner of the therapists, and some complained about the therapists lack of experience. Therefore, improvement should be provided to therapists with proper effective training.

2.2 Focus on how to improve the hygienic concept especially the hygiene of clothing

Regarding the findings of the study, “the hygiene of clothing”, received the highest ranking mean score in the Physical Evidence factor. This result indicated that the hygiene issue is very important to this business and effects directly on the buyers’ decisions. More importantly, the hygiene issue means thorough hygiene of clothing, bed sheets, pillows, blankets, chairs, towels, massage areas, dressing rooms, lavatories etc.

Discussion

The importance level towards the 7Ps service marketing mix for the buyers' decision (People)

People Factor	Level of Importance n = 415 (100%)					\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low			
Skilled therapists; knowledgeable	346	54	13	1	1	4.79	0.5219	Strongly Important
	83.4	13.0	3.1	0.2	0.2			
Well trained; professional	346	54	11	3	1	4.79	0.5427	Strongly Important
	83.4	13.0	2.7	0.7	0.2			
Service mind; good attitude	339	66	7	2	1	4.78	0.5119	Strongly Important
	81.7	15.9	1.7	0.5	0.2			
Be polite; good manners	342	60	10	2	1	4.78	0.5259	Strongly Important
	82.4	14.5	2.4	0.5	0.2			
Well-groomed; hygienic	326	72	14	1	2	4.73	0.5801	Strongly Important
	78.6	17.3	3.4	0.2	0.5			
Overall	1699	306	55	9	6	4.77	0.5369	Strongly Important
	409.4	73.7	13.3	2.2	1.4			

Findings and discussions of the People Factor: As shown from the table above, the findings indicated that the staff were well trained with professional and skilled therapists being knowledgeable as the highest mean, which received the same mean of “Strongly Important” at ($\bar{x} = 4.79$), while the second mean score of the people component received the same mean of “Strongly Important” at ($\bar{x} = 4.78$) as the staff were polite and well-mannered plus the staff had a service mind and good attitude. Lastly, the smallest mean score showed the staff as being well-groomed and hygienic of “Strongly Important” at ($\bar{x} = 4.73$).

From the table, all elements showed “Strongly Important”. These showed that the people factor was very important in terms of the buyers’ decision.

Discussion

Each factor’s results stated that the Product factor of the condition of hygienic beds is very strongly important. For the Price factor, a reasonable price of the Thai massage fee is very strongly important. Place factor requires easy access and available parking to be very strongly important. For Promotion, customers must collect 10 stamps to get one free massage as customer loyalty is important, and the People factor, knowledgeable and skilled therapists are very strongly important. The Process factor requires therapists to provide customers with the instructions as requested, which is very strongly important. Finally, the Physical Evidence factor focuses on the hygiene of clothing that is very strongly important. However, in conclusion, there was only one service marketing mix factor that received the highest overall score of ‘Strongly important’, which was the ‘People’ factor. Therefore, the People factor is a very significant factor for the buyers’ decision in selecting a Thai massage.

All of the 7Ps service marketing mix factors are important for the buyers’ decision. However, from the total overall result, there were only three service marketing mix factors that received ‘Strongly important’, which were ‘People, Process, and Physical Evidence’ while, the Product, Price, Place and Promotion factors were only ‘important’ for the total overall. However, in conclusion, there was only one service marketing mix factor that received the highest overall score of ‘Strongly important’, which was ‘People’. Therefore, the People factor is a very significant factor for the buyers’ decision in selecting a Thai massage.

Recommendation for Future Research

The research was conducted in the large picture of Thai massage in Bangkok. Further study could conduct research in a particular province since it is possible that different regions of Thailand have different market needs and consumers’ behaviour. In Thailand, there are several Thai massage places such as, Old Town Phuket, Samui Island, etc. These destinations could be potential areas for future studies because they are tourist attractions. Furthermore, due to the large number of foreign consumers visiting Thailand, the study could be more adaptable. The researcher could study from experienced Chinese consumers or conduct a comparison between Thai and foreign consumers, so that the owners could know the exact target market.

However, a future topic could be “An Investigation into the Service Marketing Mix in Thai Massage Services: From the Perspectives of Foreign Consumers.”

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