



The marketing factors influencing consumer decisions to use the services of sports and exercise centers in Thailand

Suriyan Somphong*
Faculty of Science and Technology
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University
Bangkok, Thailand
E-Mail: suriyan.so@ssru.ac.th

Issadee Kutintara
Faculty of Sports Science
Kasetsart University
Nakhon Pathom, Thailand,
E-Mail: issadee@gmail.com

&

Komkrit Rattamanee
Faculty of Science and Technology
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University
Bangkok, Thailand
E-Mail: komkrit.ra@ssru.ac.th

Corresponding author*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate consumer's behavior in using the services provided by an exercise unit, sports and exercise center in Thailand, and the marketing factors affecting their decisions to use the services. Use was made of a research framework or marketing mix strategic theory (7 P's of marketing) in order to use the findings as the guidelines for creating effective marketing mix strategies for exercise centers. The researcher purposively sampled 400 customers and three managers of a Sports and Exercise Center. The research instruments were questionnaires and constructive interviews checked by calculating the construct validity with the index of item objective congruence (IOC) from expert's considerations and the reliability with data triangulation. According to the findings, it was found that the majority of the customers of the Sports and Exercise Center were males and between 20 – 30 years of age. The important component for creating efficient marketing strategies for exercise centers is clearly the focus on the customers by generally considering their demands, needs and wants, then creating and developing appropriate services, examining price rates which are considered to be affordable and acceptable for them, and using good communication processes between service providers and their customers in order to provide publication channels and improve services. Importantly, it is evident that the service providers have to find ways to provide convenient services for their customers in all respects in order to meet their demands and provide worthwhile services. Therefore management must endeavour to strengthen service quality, comprising facilities and skilled instructors, in order to grow customer loyalty, as well as to increase the desire to exercise.

Keywords: Marketing factors, exercise, sports club, sport marketing, gyms.

Introduction

Currently, socioeconomic, scientific, and technological developments are likely to increase. Thus, humans are still important resources for developing countries. These are consistent with the future situations and trends of life quality developments of the global community. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the importance of life quality and used the



Ottawa Charter (1986) in order to develop the qualities of people in various aspects, especially fitness. The charter focuses on new public health policies complying with the National Sport Development Plan V (2012 - 2016), which aims to develop and achieve quality of life and increased health in people, and covers exercises and sports for health and integrated organizational management by asking all sectors to participate in it by using exercises and sports as tools for developing the quality of life of people. It also promotes sportsmanship as an important value or culture for future generations. Therefore, quality of life is a significant issue and mechanism driving economic and social developments.

One way to promote good life qualities is to exercise for both physical and mental health. When people have both physical and mental strengths, then can efficiently learn, work, or live. Many people are opting to visit exercise centers to help them cope with burnout, and so these places become very important for general well-being (Allen, 2019). Researches find that the reason for both men and women not exercising is the lack of time. Another possible reason is that there are not enough places and facilities in which people can exercise. Hence, the demands for places and facilities are motivations for improving people's exercise behaviors. Accordingly, people should be encouraged and correctly informed about exercise by professional trainers. Even though growths and dysfunctions of organs are caused by natural laws, exercise is a natural way to efficiently, completely, and healthily develop organs including their shapes and functions. On the other hand, wrong and inappropriate uses of organs will slowly, incompletely, and unhealthily develop organs leading to illness. They may thus also cause a high possibility of having dysfunctions and diseases.

Thus, specially developed places and exercise facilities are considered as important factors for promoting health care behaviors. Presently, the growth and competition rates of health care product and the service industry are high, as can be observed from widely provided health products and services including foods for health or health service providers such as sport clubs, fitness centers, and spas. As people are now more concerned about health care, product brands take this opportunity to conduct more business. One of business types is fitness centers that are increasing in popularity. Consequently, the number of exercise centers in Thailand is on the increase. Consumers have more options. This situation leads to greater market competition. There are many related factors (e.g. service patterns, costs, and locations) affecting the consumer decisions to use the services. When making marketing decisions about health related facilities like sports and exercise centers, organizations focus on achieving the company profits and often ignore consumer needs and community interests which are vital in the long-term (Nicolaidis, 2011a).

There is an increase in the variety of services and information on products, and these influence the growing interest of institutions in studying consumers as a basis for the design of a suitable marketing strategy (Keller & Kotler, 2016). There is emergent global trend of increased health related and medical tourism which is expected to gain momentum in the coming decades as travelers seek destinations abroad that are associated with wellness and affordable medical care, including the availability of use of exercise centers (Nicolaidis, 2011b).

Accordingly, service providers have to use marketing strategies in order to persuade consumers to become their members and use their services. There should be an approach to advertising in which hotels strive to reach consumers in an honest way without subjectively embellishing and making blatant untruths about their offerings. Marketing is intrinsically linked to a variety of ethical issues that require serious consideration and a sense of moral idealism in which universal consumer rights are not flouted, and utilitarianism in which consequences of actions are carefully mapped out so that 'the greatest good for the greatest number' can be realized after assessment of the costs and benefits of the desired ethical marketing (Nicolaidis, 2018). According to this, the researcher wants to investigate and focus on the consumers' behaviors of using services provided by an exercise center as well as marketing



factors influencing their decisions to choose the exercise centers in Thailand by applying the framework of a marketing mix principle (7 P's of marketing) to the study in order to use findings as the criteria for planning marketing mix strategies for exercise centers in Thailand, supporting service providers and persons wanting to conduct this type of business to efficiently handle strong competition, and provide guidelines for persons interested in this issue to use as they wish.

Objective

1. To investigate the consumer behaviors of using the services provided the Sports and Exercise Center;
2. To examine the marketing factors influencing the consumer decisions to use the services provided by the sports and exercise center according to the study framework, and the 7 P's of marketing;
3. To use the findings as the guidelines for creating marketing mix strategies for sports and exercise centers.

Methodology

The population comprised 14,500 customers of the Sports and Exercise Center in Thailand who were members of the center during January – December 2018. The sample was 400 customers and three managers of the centers who were purposively sampled. The instruments were questionnaires and constructive interviews prepared by the researcher and checked by calculating the construct validity with the index of item objective congruence (IOC) from expert's considerations and the reliability with data triangulation. The procedures are listed below.

1. Theoretically analyze the definitions and components of marketing factors with the marketing mix strategy (7 P's of marketing) from relevant literature resulting in measurable behaviors.
2. Separate the components that represent the consumer behaviors of using exercise centers and the marketing mix factors affecting the decisions by summarizing the analysis results of relevant literatures.
3. Design questionnaire items that cover the consumer behaviors of using sports and exercise centers and the marketing mix factors affecting the decisions.
4. Ask the thesis advisory committees and ethics committee to check the questionnaire items.
5. Ask marketing and sport managing experts to check the contents regarding the decisions to use the services provided by the exercise center.
6. Modify the questionnaire items according to experts' recommendations and calculate the index of item objective congruence: IOC in order to check the construct validity of the questionnaire items (refer to Boontam)
7. Do a pilot study of the questionnaires with 30 customers of exercise centers.
8. Calculate the reliability of the questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha reliability.
9. Collect data from the samples by using 400 sets of questionnaires according to the research framework.
10. Analyze the collected data with the descriptive statistics such as means (\bar{X}) and standard deviations (SD).
11. Summarize and discuss the analysis results in order to produce the guidelines for creating marketing mix strategies for exercise centers.



12. Present the findings to knowledgeable persons and the research advisor in order to receive their opinions for improving the study.
13. Modify the study according to their opinions and prepare reports. Also, summarize the study for publishing in relevant journals.

Results

The study, “the marketing factors influencing the consumer decisions to use the services sports and exercise center in Thailand”, aimed to investigate the consumers’ behaviors and marketing factors affecting their decisions to use the services provided by the exercise center in order to craft an appropriate marketing mix strategy. According to the research objectives, the findings, conclusion, and discussion are provided below.

1.The General Information of the Consumers of the Sports and Exercise Center in Thailand.

Most respondents were male and between 20 – 30 years of age. They were all employees and students. Their highest graduation level was at a Bachelor’s degree level. Their incomes were 10,001 – 20,000 baht/month. (300-600 USD/month)

2.Behavior Analysis of the Customers of the Sports and Exercise Center

The customers of the Sports and Exercise Center who answered the questionnaire had experience in using the services provided by exercise centers both inside and outside Thailand. Most of them used the services provided by complete exercise centers. The reason for using the services was physical fitness improvement. They used the services during their weekends. The appropriate duration for using the services was for a 2 hour period. The frequency of using the services was 1 – 2 times per week.

The most popular time for using the services was 18.00 – 21.00. They also had co-decision makers involved in using the services. To use the services by themselves, they used the reservation services provided by the exercise centers, mainly via telephone. They also received information about the exercise centers by word of mouth. Regarding their opinions about the trend of using the services provided by the exercise centers in Thailand, the number of customers will likely tend to increase.

3. The Analysis of the Marketing Mix Factors Influencing the Decisions to Use the Services Provided by Sports and Exercise Centers in Thailand

3.1 Products and Services: It was found that the significance level of exercise centers providing variety of activities was high.

3.2 Prices: It was found that the significance level of exercise centers reducing the costs of group membership registration was also considered to be high.

3.3 Places (distribution channels) : It was found that the significance level of exercise centers providing convenient and various payment systems was at a high level.

3.4 Marketing Promotions: It was found that the significance level of exercise centers conducting various activities for their members was at the highest level.

3.5 Personnel: It was found that the significance level of the active service staff of exercise centers was considered to be high.

3.6 Service Procedures: It was found that the significance level of safe services was at the highest level.

3.7 Physical Environments: It was found that the significance level of the cleanliness of stadiums and fitness centers was highest factor.



3.8 General Marketing Mix Factors: In various aspects, it was found that the significance level of general marketing mix factors was high. The aspect that had the highest significance level was physical environment. Other significant aspects were price, procedures, distribution channels, products and services, personnel, and marketing promotions respectively.

4. Marketing Mix Strategies (7 P's of marketing)

4.1 Products: The exercise center, the Sports and Exercise Center, applied product or service design principles to its service preparations and selections by basing these carefully on consumer demands. In other words, the exercise center recognized the demands of the consumers in its area for exercise facilities and services. The exercise center provided various sized stadiums and other exercise facilities.

4.2 Prices: Pricing might not always be done according to the intentions of businesspersons. That is, prices had to be affordable and acceptable for consumers. This was the solution for the prices as the Inter Sports Company Limited observed markets and the purchasing powers of the consumers in its area and other surrounding areas. Then, the prices were appropriately set according to desired service quality and customer willingness to be involved.

4.3 Places: The consumers might not consider the location of the exercise center, but they considered their conveniences. Even though it might take time to go to the exercise center, consumers might not consider distances as an issue if the consumers could access convenient mass transit systems, express ways, or use passenger vehicles provided by companies and receive convenient and satisfactory services from a well designed exercise center. Importantly, the security, quality, and visual aspects of stadiums and exercise facilities certified by well-known institutions such as FIFA were the components that tended to promote the exercise centers. The main objective is for the place to be creating customer value and it is important to then strive to provide a better place than competitors so as to achieve and maintain customer satisfaction (Schiffman & Lazar, 2004).

4.4 Promotion: Communication was more important than other aspects. Therefore, the best way to conduct marketing activities was to efficiently communicate with the consumers. Word of mouth communication between the customers and their friends, relatives, or acquaintances after using services would be the best way that did not have any real expenses attached, but it could make them aware of and know exercise centers very well. Moreover, if the locations of stadiums were in areas having many shopping centers, then service providers could conduct marketing and publicizing activities with sales promotions at shopping centers, or people in developed housing, apartments, factories, and industrial estates could be involved by conducting direct sales promotion activities such as road shows. If businesspersons mainly focused on their customers, then the 7 P's of marketing could be efficiently applied to marketing planning and reach more customers by setting prices of products or services which are affordable for them. Additionally, marketing and business locations had to be easily and conveniently accessed by the customers. Good communication channels between service providers and their customers could also be the mediums for more efficient and effective indirect marketing.

4.5 People: The Sports and Exercise Center mainly relied on its personnel. The exercise center hired suitably skilled persons for the right positions. This was important for promoting efficient services and making differences apparent when compared to the competitors. The values of services would be immediately evaluated from staff behaviors while they were providing services for the consumers. Thus, the staff needed skills and knowledge in order to professionally provide the services. The staff was also the front-line and thus the image of the organization as expected by the consumers. In terms of marketing, the persons having important roles in the customers purchasing processes were 1) the consumers (i.e. persons paying for the services), 2) persons participating in the purchasing processes (i.e. stimuli), 3)



producers (i.e. organizations, sellers, or service providers), 4) staff (i.e. servers), and 5) business shareholders (i.e. the persons that organizations have to care about).

4.6 Processes: These are considered as activities related to service providing methods and practices in order to quickly provide desired services to the consumers and satisfying their needs. Now, good products and appropriate locations for selling those products may not be enough for competing with many competitors because, for example, the question of “Where did you buy this?” is not enough. It requires value addition to products by developing relationships between sellers and their customers in order to create interactive experiences for them. This is because long term relationships can result from services, information, and supports when the consumers’ needs are met.

4.7 Physical evidences: Physical image presentations of the Sports and Exercise Center to the consumers and general quality creations in terms of physical and service patterns for adding values to the services by wearing good looking and clean uniforms, politely communicating with the consumers, and providing fast services or other benefits that they should receive, were all the components that the consumers can experience before receiving services. These were considered as the environmental components of service providing processes. That is, if the question is “Where are the service(s) provided?”, then the answer would be “Physical environment(s)”. The “Physical environment is important in the creation of customer satisfaction. When customers feel satisfied, it will support the customer to determine the choice for the fitness center. Hence, important for managers to know what is desired by the customer and which are not” (Vania Suwono & Oktaria, 2016).

The important component for creating efficient marketing strategies for exercise centers is the focus on the customers by generally considering their demands, then creating and developing demanded services, examining price rates affordable and acceptable for them, and using good communication processes between service providers and their customers in order to provide publication channels and improve services. Importantly, service providers have to find suitable ways to provide convenient services for their customers in all aspects in order to meet their demands and provide worthy services. To strengthen the competitiveness of an exercise center, the core idea of the marketing should be to develop and maintain long lasting relationships with all customers by meeting their needs and wants (Nguyen et. al., 2013).

Conclusion and future work

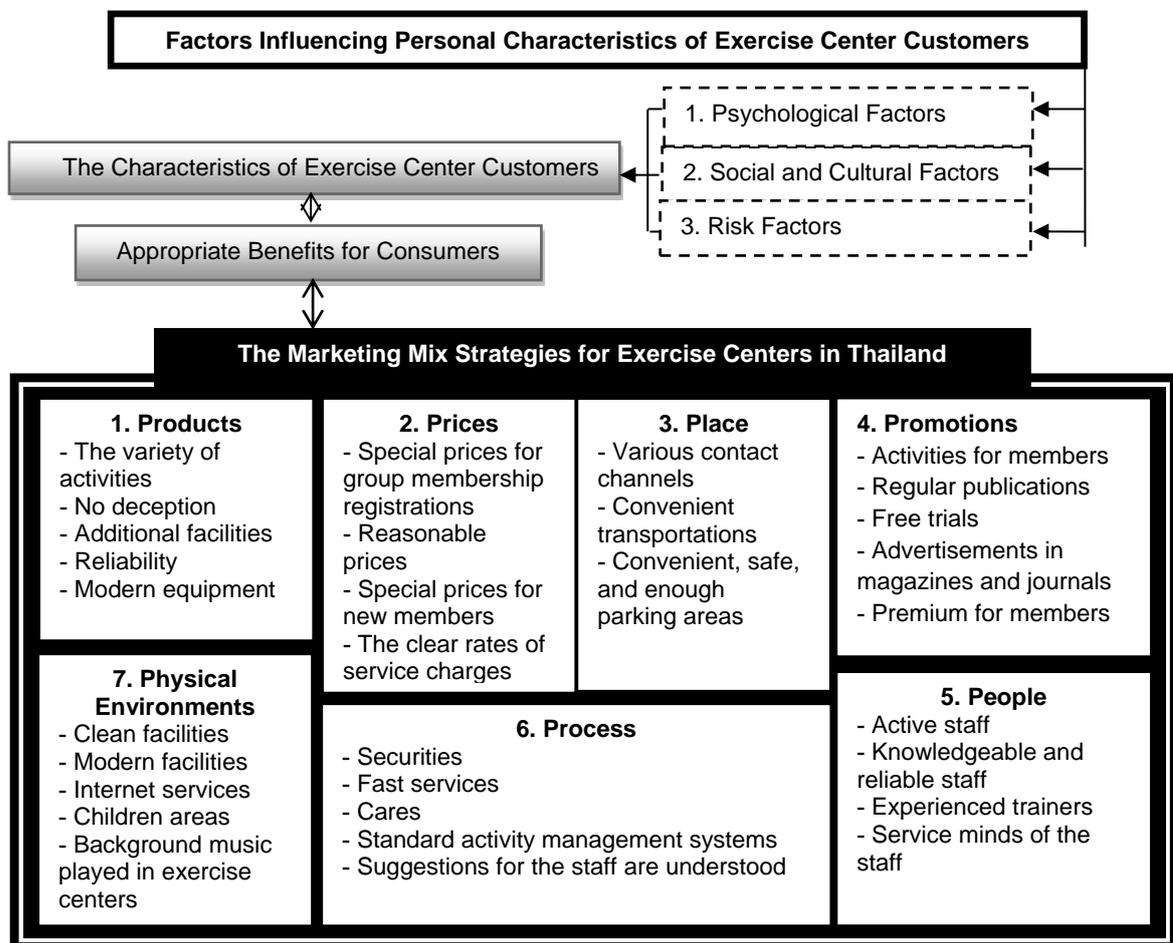
According to research findings and the information from books, articles, literature, and research studies relevant to exercise centers, it was determined that the customers of the exercise centers who have different occupations, have different external factors influencing their decisions to use the services provided by the exercise centers; for example, 1) psychological factors (i.e. motivations, personalities, recognition/learning, values/beliefs/attitudes, and life styles), 2) service business factors or 7 P’s of marketing (i.e. products and services, prices, distribution channels, sales promotions, personnel, processes, and physical evidences), 3) social and cultural factors (i.e. influential persons, reference groups, families, cultures, and social classes) and 4) risk factors (i.e. performance risks, financial risks, social risks, physical risks, and mental risks) affecting their decisions.

After-sale evaluations are the duties of the service providers, their personnel, and also involved government officers, in order to receive feedback and use the results of behavior investigations for developing the businesses. They should pay greater attention to the marketing mix strategies of exercise centers in Thailand by considering the effects of the strategies on customer satisfaction, that can promote customer loyalty and add to positive word of mouth. The guidelines for developing the exercise center business in Thailand are summarized by the researcher as shown below. The urgency of a sports and exercise center is intensified in order to set up examples for business corporations and the successful role out of PPP is anchored on the clarification of the role to be played by the PPP arrangements

and agreements which are crafted in this regard. The success of PPP depends on levels of trust between the host community and the stakeholders (Thobile, 2018).

However, testing mass media communicative efficiency in environmental motivation development is the important thing to do regarding the requirements which are to supposed to be put forward as to contents, structure and the process of video information distribution, all of which are aimed at the development of environmental awareness among the consumers. Pongpeng, (2018) consistent with (Suriyan, 2019) stated that an impact had been made if the alumni and alumnae experienced personal changes and/or, were motivated to initiate or take part in activities that promoted the Olympic Movement and its ideals as a result of their participation at the TOA. The results indicate that the TOA has made an impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand.

The Chart of the Guidelines for Developing Exercise Center Business in Thailand (Suriyan et al, 2018)



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