

The Decision Making of Outpatients in Using the Medical Service at Sunandha Clinic, Bangkok, Thailand

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This Research aims to study the influence of service marketing mix on the outpatients' decision to use the service of Sunandha Clinic, Bangkok, Thailand and how the patients' demographic background affected their decision. This study employed a quantitative research methodology. The period of study was between September and October 2017. The research sample consisted 400 outpatients of Sunandha Clinic, obtained by systematic sampling. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The data were then analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics including percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test and F-test. The research result showed that the overall service marketing mix had an important role in the decision of the patient. When considering each factor, personnel represented the most influential factor, followed by service, process, place, physical attributes, price, and promotion respectively. In terms of the influence of the patients' demographic factors, it was found that patients with different gender, education background and income differed in their decision - male patients were more likely to use the service of the clinic than female patients, those who graduated with diploma, high vocational certificate, and postgraduate were likely to use the service than those with other educational background, and the patients who had salary between 10,001-20,000 baht were more likely to use the service than those having salary more than 20,001 baht. Additionally, it was found that age, marital status, and occupation did not affect the patients' decision.

Keywords: Decision; Outpatients; Service; Service marketing mix; Demographic factors

Field of research: Marketing

1. Research Background and Significances

Sunandha clinic provides the services for both general diseases and specific diseases. It has employed doctors who are experts in providing medical care and treatment in all fields. According to the annual report, it was found that the number of individuals who come to use the medical services in the outpatient department of the clinic has deceased in every year. This may be a result of changes in terms of economic, social, and political and environment occurred in the society, together with competition with other private clinics and hospitals. As for the latter factor, it was found that nowadays, these private clinics and public hospitals realize the significance of the quality of medical services and other services and care provided for the patients, medical advices and advices on health from doctors and other staff members, medical fees and discounts given to the patients, facilities and environment, marketing strategies, promotion, public relations, performance and qualification of personnel, sufficient medical equipment, and service process. The factors have been improved and used as strategies to attract patients to use their services.

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The decision-making process of the patients and factors influencing their decision has been considered as important factors for the success of the clinics and hospitals. Any individuals have complete rights and freedom to make a decision. Therefore, the clinics and hospitals need to understand how the individuals decide on their needs for medical services and treatment. Previous studies report that the patients who come to use medical service from clinics or hospitals normally give a special attention on various factors including the quality of service, the efficient of medical care and treatment, good relationship and hospitality from doctors, nurses, and other related personnel, modern medical equipment, clean and attractive place of service and environment, reception process, assigning queues for patients to receive medical service from doctors, safe and efficient protection system provided for the patients while waiting, provision of both general diseases and specific diseases, efficient system for giving information on medical service for outpatients and their relatives, provision of on-going advice and consultation for patients about health problem and how to take care of themselves while they are at home, and appropriate medical fees (Pollawat Atthasing, 2009; SanJai Sangvichien, Vasan Srisurin, & Veera Watthanayingsakul, 1985).

When considering the above-mention factors, it can be seen that these factors are related to the seven aspects of service marketing mix which include services, price, place or channel of distribution, promotion, personnel or staff, physical attributes, and process. Therefore, we can conclude that these marketing mix has an influence on the decision-making process of the patients in using medical services of the clinic or hospitals. Moreover, it is interesting that according to the annual report of Sunandha clinic, the number of the inpatients has increased, but the number of the outpatients has decreased. This research aimed to examine. This study aimed to examine the influence of service marketing mix on the outpatients' decision to use the service of Sunandha Clinic, Bangkok, Thailand and how the patients' demographic background affected their decision.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theories on Customers' Decision-Making

Sereerat, S & et al. (2003) explains that the customers' decision-making in buying products or using services is a process. This process is called a buying decision process which consists of five main steps: need recognition; information search; evaluation of alternatives; purchase decision; and post-purchase feeling. In this process, the precedent steps have an effect on the following steps. The details of the each step in the buying decision process is as follows:

1. Need recognition: the buying decision process begins once the customer is aware of problems or needs which are aroused by stimuli. The stimuli are inner needs such as hunger, thirst, and needs of sex. When such inner needs occurred at a certain level, they become the stimuli. An individual normally learns how to manage these stimuli from his previous experiences.

2. Information search: Once the individual's inner needs are sufficiently aroused and he can find things that can respond to his inner needs nearby, he will act immediately by using that thing to respond to such inner needs. For example, if an individual is hungry, and there is a nearby restaurant, he will go to buy food to respond to his hunger. However, the inner needs may not be able to respond immediately. In this case, such inner needs will be stored and remembered and will be responded later. Once the inner needs are accumulated at a certain level, they will lead a person to act by searching information on

how to respond to such inner needs. Marketer have to pay attention to the availability and easy access of information on products/services and prices.

3. Evaluation of alternatives: Once the customer gained information on the products/services, he will be likely to have more than one choice of products that can respond to his inner needs. At this step, he has to evaluate each choice of products. Marketers have to know how customers evaluate and what criteria they used to evaluate the products/services. Marketer also have to be aware that not every customer use the same way to evaluate the products/services.

4. Purchase decision: Generally, a customer is likely to buy a product/service which he like the most. However, there may be factors that obstruct the customer's decision to buy that product/service. These factors are attitudes of others and anticipated situational factors.

5. Post-purchase feeling: After buying a product/service, a customer may or may not be satisfied with that product/service. Therefore, marketers should not end their action once the customer bought the product/service, but they need to continue to work in order to ensure that the customers are satisfied with that product/service. Normally, customers' satisfaction on the purchased product occurs when the customers' expectation on the product was met or was responded by the perceived performance of the product. In other words, the customers will compare between their expectation on the product and the real performance of the product. The customers' feeling after purchasing the products can be disappointed, satisfied, or delighted. Marketers must do everything to ensure that the customers' expectation is met.

2.2 Theory of Service Marketing Mix

Adul Jaturongkakul (2000) explains that service marketing mix consists of 7 aspects as follows:

1. Products: Products are things that are produced and offered to the market. Products are tangible. Some organizations do not sell products, but they sell services which is intangible. For the service, there are two groups of service, main service or core services, and auxiliary service or extra service. The offer of services have to focus on the needs/wants, and perceptions of customers on its quality, both in terms of its performance in interacting with the customers, and its related techniques. Moreover, marketers have to be aware of facilities or equipment used to provide the service, warranty of service, brands, and the on-going development of service.

2. Price: Price pays an important role in the customers' perception on the value of the service, and brand image of the service. The customers' evaluation of price of the service is different from that of tangible products because for the service, customer do not have knowledge of reference price. Price of service is an indicator for its quality. Issues that marketers have to be concerned about price include the level of price, payment conditions, differences in price offered by competitors, and price for promotion.

3. Place or channel of service delivery: Service delivery represents a special characteristic of service, of which production of service and consumption of service cannot be separated. This is because both activities happen at the same time. Moreover, customers take parts in the process of production and service offering. The quality of service is based on interactions between a service provider and a customer at the point of

service exchange. Issues that marketers have to be concerned include accessibility of service, place of service, and promptness of service.

4. Promotion: In the past, customers had limited sources of information on the service, but at present, with the changes in marketing environments as a result of changes in customer behavior and advances in technology, customers have access to more sources of information. Therefore, promotion of service has to be adjusted to these changes. Marketers have to ensure cooperation among promotional tools including advertisement, sales promotions, sale persons, attributes of the place of service, atmosphere, and facilities.

5. Personnel or staff: As mentioned earlier that the production and consumption of service occurs at the same time, therefore, we cannot separate a service provider from the customer. With this reason, personnel or service providers have to be involved in the process of service delivery. For this aspect, marketers have to be concerned about personality, costumes, attitudes, and behavior of the service providers because these factors have an influence on the customers' perception. Moreover, they have to pay an attention on how the service providers treat other customers, and interactions between customers.

6. Physical attributes: As service is intangible, marketers have to try to transform related factors into tangible for customers. Physical attributes including a place of service and facilities (i.e. equipment, tools, leaflets, signboards, envelops, transportation etc.,) have to represent the quality of the service clearly.

7. Process: Process refers to procedures, mechanisms, and flows of activities for service delivery and offering. These need to consist of easy steps to follow. Moreover, marketers have to be concerned whether and to what extend customers have to be involved in the process, how to make the process smooth, and how to respond to the needs, wants and expectations of customers.

This study employed the theory of 7P's to examine how they influence the outpatients' decision to use the medical service of Sunandha clinic.

3. Research Methodology

This research employed a quantitative methodology. The study was carried out over a two-month period between September and October 2017. The population of the study were outpatients who had experiences of using the medical service of Sunandha clinic. According to the record of the clinic, there were 120,142 outpatients. The researchers calculated the size of the research sample by using Yamane formula (Yamane, 19) with statistics significance of .05. As a result, 400 outpatients were selected by systematic sampling.

The main objective of this research were to study the influence of service marketing mix on the outpatients' decision to use the medical service of Sunandha Clinic, Bangkok, Thailand and how the patients' demographic background affected their decision. Therefore, it aimed to examine the relationship between two groups of independent variables including service marketing mix (i.e. service, price, place of service, promotion, staff or personnel, environment, and service process) and demographic factors of the outpatients (i.e. gender, age, occupation, marital status, educational background, and average income per month). The dependent variables was the outpatients' decision to use the medical service.

A self-administered questionnaire developed by a researcher was used to collect the data. This questionnaire consists of three main parts; the first part displays six questions concerning the demographic background of the respondents; the second part consists of questions on the decision of the outpatients in using medical service of Sunandha clinic based on each of the seven aspects of service marketing mix. In this part, the respondents were asked to rate the significance of each item in Likert scale questions (consisting of five scales). The total number of questions is 35. The last part shows open-ended questions in which the respondents can express their opinion and suggestions concerning the medical service of the clinic freely.

A questionnaire was assessed for its validity and reliability before being used in the main study. Its validity was assessed by three experts whereas its reliability was assessed by conducting a try-out with a similar group of respondents consisting of 30 individuals. The result of the questionnaire reliability was .9502.

The data gathered by questionnaires were then analyzed with descriptive statistics and inferential statistics with the use of a packaged computer program. Descriptive statistics used to analyze the data on the respondents' demographic included frequency, percentage, maximum, and minimum, whereas mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the decision of the respondents in using medical service. Inferential statistics including t-test, one way analysis of variance or one way ANOVA were used to test the research hypothesis.

4. The Findings

The data analysis showed that out of the total number of sample, the majority of the respondents were female, graduated with a bachelor's degree, single, government officers or state enterprise officers, aged less than 30 years old, and had an average income of higher than 20,001 Baht per month. In terms of the influence of the service marketing mix on the respondents' decision in using the medical service of Sunandha clinic, it was found that the overall influence of the service marketing mix was rated at a high level. When considering at each aspect of the marketing mix, every aspect was also rated at a high level as well, with the aspect of staff/personnel ranking at the highest, followed by service of the clinic, service process, place of service, environment, price, and promotion respectively. The details of mean and standard deviation of these scores were shown in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the outpatients' decision in using medical service at Sunandha clinic based on each of the service marketing mix

Service marketing mix	Level of significance on the patients' decision		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Service	3.94	.498	High
2. Price	3.79	.556	High
3. Place of service	3.90	.554	High
4. Promotion	3.62	.769	High
5. Staff/personnel	3.95	.541	High
6. Environment	3.87	.551	High
7. Process of service	3.91	.520	High
Overall	3.85	.425	High

In terms of the influence of demographic factors (i.e. gender, age, education level, marital status, occupation, and average income per month) on the decision of the outpatients in using the medical service, the findings showed that the outpatients with different age, occupation, and marital status had no different in their decision. On the other hand, those with different gender, education background, and average income per month were likely to be different in their decision. The details are shown in table 2.

Table 2: The decision of the outpatients based on their demographic background

Factors	Service		Price of service		Place of service		Promotion	
	Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value
Gender	t=2.011*	.045	t=2.420*	.016	t=.900	.369	t=2.121*	.035
Age	F=3.291	.589	F=1.972	.141	F=.321	.726	F=.548	.579
Education level	F=3.232*	.013	F=4.288*	.002	F=.899	.464	F=3.340*	.013
Marital status	F=1.060	.347	F=2.477	.085	F=.351	.706	F=.839	.433
Occupation	F=.273	.845	F=1.499	.214	F=1.462	.224	F=1.524	.210
Income	F=2.913	.056	F=.435	.648	F=1.196	.304	F=1.769	.172

* Statistics significance of .05

Table 2: The decision of the outpatients based on their demographic background (continued)

Factors	Staff/Personnel		Environment		Process		Overall	
	Statistics	p-value	Statistic s	p-value	Statisti cs	p-value	Statistics	p-value
Gender	t=1.935	.054	t=1.480	.140	t=.311	.756	t=2.184*	.030
Age	F=.551	.577	F=.183	.833	F=.165	.848	F=.311	.733
Education al level	F=1.397	.234	F=1.760	.136	F=.641	.634	F=2.787*	.026
Marital status	F=1.590	.205	F=1.638	.196	F=.233	.793	F=.247	.782
Occupati on	F=.534	.659	F=1.912	.127	F=.141	.935	F=1.237	.297
Income	F=1.281	.279	F=3.398	.034	F=.261	.770	F=.957	.385

* Statistics significance of 0.05

5. Summary and Conclusions

The overall influence of the service marketing mix on the decision of the outpatients in using the medical service was rated at a high level. Similarly, when considering each aspect of the service marketing mix, each one was also rated at a high level. This result showed that the outpatients made a decision based on their perception on the overall quality of the service provided by the clinic as well as on the quality of each related aspect of the service such as the performance of doctors and staff, appropriateness of the price of the service, convenience in travelling the clinic, and facilities offered to the patients. This finding supports the concepts and theories of service marketing mix or 7P's which argue that everything offered by the business to the customers is aimed to respond to the customers' needs/wants and to make maximum satisfaction for them. For example, people or staff are hired and train in order to provide good service to customers, places are decorated and strategically located in order to motivate customers to come to use the

service, and good process is created and designed in order to deliver fast and reliable service to the customers. The finding of this study is also consistent with the study of Tanyatorn Supatanasub (2009) which found that the customers' decision in using the service at the skin care clinic was at a high level and depended on the factors including process, products, personnel, physical attributes, place or channel of distribution, promotion and price.

The study showed that the factors that had the highest influence on the outpatients' decision was personnel or staff. This finding suggests that the clinic has to give a special attention to performance of its personnel and staff. They should be trained and acquire appropriate qualifications including being enthusiastic, polite, and courteous, providing correct and clear information to the patients, providing services with fast and reliable performance, and having knowledge and abilities in their duty. This finding is consistent with the marketing concept which argues that the provision of service and consumption of service occur at the same time and cannot be separated. This means that the service receivers and service providers cannot be separated and the service providers plays an important role in the provision of the serve. Without them, service cannot occur and cannot be delivered to the service receivers. This finding is consistent with the study of Suwaree Poorahong (2008) which reports that the patients' decision in using service of physical therapy depends highly on the performance and qualification of the personnel.

The results of the hypotheses testing showed that demographic background of the outpatients including gender, education background, and income had an influence on their decision in using medical service at Sunandha clinic.

In terms of gender, it was found that male outpatients made a decision upon considering the aspects of service, price, and promotion, as compared to female outpatients who paid less attention on these aspects. This finding is consistent with the argument of Siriwan Sereerat, (1996, cited in Taweesak Netwong, 2008) who said that gender had an influence on the customer behavior in purchasing products/services.

As for the education background, it was found that the decision of the outpatients who had education background higher than bachelor's degree highly depended on price, as compared to other groups of outpatients who were likely to pay less attention to this aspect. This is consistent with the view Herbert (1979) who said that when individuals have to choose one choice among two choices, those who have high positions at work and educational level tend to consider with reasons and are likely to make the best choice. The means that position at work and educational level have an influence on the individuals' decision.

In terms of income, it was found that those outpatients who had earned around 10,001-20,000 Baht per month was likely to make their decision to use the medical service at the clinic upon physical attributes, as compare to other groups of patients who paid less attention to this aspect. This finding is consistent with the argument of Rungrot Roeirenu (2009) who said that income of the customers have an influence on the needs or the customers.

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