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Marketing Mix and Customer Satisfaction of Gyms and Fitness Clubs in Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

Customer satisfaction is a major concern in every organization, including fitness. The fitness industry has grown steadily as consumers seek a healthier lifestyle and a more productive workout environment. The 7Ps marketing mix is considered a crucial determinant of consumer satisfaction. Understanding what influences customer satisfaction is critical to measuring and managing it in gyms and fitness clubs. This study focuses on the 7Ps marketing mix: product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process. The conceptual framework includes theoretical framework and hypotheses development, research methodology, research implication, conclusion, as well as limitation and further research. Through the understanding of these factors, the researchers aim to show a better understanding of the 7Ps marketing mix concept and the factors that affect the customer satisfaction of gyms and fitness clubs in Malaysia.

Keywords: 7Ps Marketing Mix, Customer Satisfaction, Gyms, Fitness Clubs, Malaysia.

Introduction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most difficult challenges in any industry, including the fitness industry. The fitness industry has been steadily expanding as a result of consumers' increasing pursuit of a healthy lifestyle and increased demand for a more productive workout environment (Yap & Ong, 2017). To attract new customers and retain existing members, gym and fitness club owners and managers must ensure that they can provide added value services to differentiate themselves from competitors. Gyms and fitness clubs, for example, should have better equipment and more workout space than their customers have at home. Providing a personal coach to new customers who are looking for one is another added value service that gyms and fitness clubs can consider nowadays. According to the literature, one of the most important factors for the survival of any business organization is customer satisfaction (Do & Vu, 2020; Foroughi et al., 2019). Previous research by Chen and Liu (2019) used the 7Ps marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical

evidence) to measure customer satisfaction in the Taiwan mobile market. The data is evaluated and analyzed using 620 valid questionnaires obtained through face-to-face interviews with subscribers of five operators. The findings show that all aspects of the marketing mix have an impact on customer satisfaction in Taiwan's mobile market. Do and Vu (2020) conduct an innovative study that employs the 7Ps marketing mix to assess customer satisfaction with railway transportation services in Vietnam. To investigate the relationship between marketing mix elements and consumer satisfaction, the collected data are analyzed using the multiple regression approach and SPSS software. The findings show a substantial association between all seven aspects of the marketing mix (7Ps) and consumer satisfaction with railway transportation services in Vietnam. Sawmong (2020), on the other hand, investigated the level of satisfaction with a new rice mill equipment for family usage in Thailand. The researcher collected 302 household users in Thailand using a random sampling approach, who evaluated the system and analyzed the data using SPSS and SmartPls 3.2.7. Sawmong (2020) discovered a significant and positive association between customer satisfaction and each of the marketing mix variables (price, process, product, place, people, process, and physical evidence). Despite the fact that these studies discovered a significant association between the 7Ps marketing mix and consumer satisfaction, they were limited to the mobile market, railway transportation service, and rice mill machines. Thus, using the same 7Ps marketing mix to measure customer satisfaction levels of gyms and fitness clubs in Malaysia is an attempt to cover more topics that are still underrepresented in the literature. This study contributes to the strategy formulation and the justification of relationship built based on 7Ps towards the customer satisfaction level of gyms and fitness clubs in Malaysia. On the practical standpoint, the study outcomes can benefit marketers and businesses to understand the aspirations of gym users and prior to devising effective service marketing strategies that able to increase the satisfaction level of customers toward the gym services. The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows: It starts with a brief literature on 7Ps Marketing Mix, and then, the hypotheses development is generated and discussed. Next, the proposed framework is presented based on the theoretical foundation. Moving on, the research methodology was explained in brief and followed by the conclusion part to summaries the study. The final section addresses the limitation of study and portrays some recommendations for future studies.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

7ps of Marketing Mix

Marketing is a continually evolving discipline and as such can be one that businesses identify their position among their competitors. Along the ways, this concept was able to identifying how a certain business can deploy its resources in a market to achieve its long-term goals or short term also and able to organize its activities in executing this strategy (West et al, 2015). In an early stage, this strategy curved with 4 Ps to explain the mix. Apparently, In the late 70's it was widely acknowledged by Marketers that the Marketing Mix should be updated. This led to the creation of the Extended Marketing Mix in 1981 by Booms and Bitner which added 3 new elements to the 4 Ps Principle (Dei et al., 2021). This evolution has been the fundamental changes to the basic Marketing mix. In fact, the extended 7Ps is more commonly accepted to explain products that are services and not just a physical thing (Asamoah et al., 2021). Thus, 7Ps will be replicate as antecedents that will influences customer satisfaction in gyms and fitness clubs. The fitness industry has grown steadily as consumers seek a healthier lifestyle and a more productive workout environment.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is regarded as one of the most essential outcomes of any marketing effort (Law et al., 2022; Sobari et al., 2022). According to Jeanpert et al (2021), dissatisfaction stems from unfulfilled or disappointed expectations, insufficient, doubtful, or poor-quality products, or complaints that are not taken into account. It is critical to avoid dissatisfaction and promote customer satisfaction because when customers are satisfied with the services provided by their service providers, the relationship strengthens, which leads to positive word-of-mouth (Kumar & Mokha, 2022). The obvious necessity for customer satisfaction is to grow the business, create a strong reputation, and gain loyalty because a organization's reputation in uncertain marketplaces is heavily reliant on customer satisfaction (R. U. Khan et al., 2022). Many academics have recently measured consumer satisfaction using the 7Ps marketing mix (e.g., Chen & Liu, 2019; Do & Vu, 2020; and Sawmong, 2020). McCarthy (1960) defined marketing mix as "the choice of instruments that the corporation intends to combine in order to satisfy [a] target group." Booms and Bitner (1980) add three Ps (participants or people, physical proof, and process) to the original four Ps of the McCarthy marketing mix to apply the marketing mix concept to service. In the theoretical framework of this study, customer satisfaction has been proposed as the dependent variable (refer to Figure 1). The following sections of this paper will explain the effects of product, price, promotion, place, people, physical evidence, and process on customer satisfaction.

Product and Customer Satisfaction

A product is defined as a physical product or service that the consumer is willing to pay for (Singh, 2012; Thabit & Raewf, 2018). In this study, tangible products are gym or fitness club equipment and facilities that customers can physically touch and use, such as a treadmill, rowing machine, stationary bicycle, dumbbell, bench, elliptical trainer, and so on. An intangible product is the second half of a service, such as the quality of equipment, the gym's room, and the adaptation of services by gyms and fitness clubs' expectations. Wantara and Tambrin (2019) conducted an empirical study on the effect of price and product quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty in Madura Batik. This study's sample size is 200 people, and the sampling strategy employed was purposive sampling. SEM analysis was used as the analytical approach in this study. According to the findings of this study, product quality has a considerable and beneficial impact on consumer satisfaction. This discovery is backed by a large number of other authors and researchers (e.g., Chen & Liu, 2019; Do & Vu, 2020; Sawmong, 2020). As a result, it is expected that the product will have an impact on consumer satisfaction in Malaysian gyms and fitness clubs. The following assertion is proposed:

Proposition 1: Product is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

Price and Product Satisfaction

The price of a product or service is the amount of money charged for it or the overall value that consumers exchange for the benefits of owning or utilizing the product or service (Razak et al., 2016). In a nutshell, pricing represents the overall cost of the product to the customer (Ryca & Ziaean, 2021). Price is the second component of the marketing mix, and it plays a critical part in illustrating the income of gyms and fitness clubs, as well as the most essential customer satisfaction and loyalty aspect. Price, on the other hand, includes the price of intangible (i.e., services) as well as pricing modifications and payment alternatives, allowing gyms and fitness clubs to offer a competitive price. Organizations must match the pricing with the quality and quantity of their products in addition to offering a competitive price (Sudari

et al., 2019). A few research have shown that there is a link between price and consumer satisfaction (e.g., Hasan & Islam, 2020; Kadhim et al., 2016). Hasan and Islam (2020) investigate the impact of the marketing mix (7Ps) aspects on tourist satisfaction in Bangladesh. The data for this research were gathered through the use of a structured questionnaire from a sample of 50 people in the Cumilla district. The researchers discovered a substantial relationship between pricing and tourist satisfaction. This study was consistent with the findings of Kadhim et al. (2016), who discovered a substantial positive link between pricing and customer satisfaction in Malaysia's tourism business. Based on the findings and discussions above, this study also believes that price will positively affect customer satisfaction of gyms and fitness clubs in Malaysia. Therefore, this study proposes:

Proposition 2: Price is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

Promotion and Product Satisfaction

Personal selling, advertising, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion, and sponsorship are all examples of promotion (Khan, 2014). Free membership registration, a free bonus, a free upgrade, a free day or week trial, and discounts can result in significant changes in the income of gyms and fitness clubs. Personal selling, direct mail, and sales promotion are all ways of communication that gyms and fitness clubs can use to transmit promotional information about their services to other parties. Malelak et al (2021) investigated the effect of the marketing mix on local product customer satisfaction. This study had 140 participants, and the data were analyzed using SEM-WarPLS. The findings revealed that the marketing mix (varying products, price, place, and promotion) has a direct and significant impact on changeable consumer satisfaction. This study matched previous findings (Chen & Liu, 2019; Do & Vu, 2020; Sawmong, 2020). Based on past data, this study proposes that:

Proposition 3: Promotion is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

Place and Product Satisfaction

The place is a term that relates to the ease with which a potential consumer associates a service, such as its location and distribution. In simple terms, location also implies that the product is easily accessible to the consumer (Jain & Jain, 2022; Khan, 2014). In this study, the term "location" refers to the physical locations of gyms and fitness clubs throughout Malaysia. Inconvenient locations or palaces for consumers result in customer dissatisfaction, which has a negative effect on the organization (Bawa et al., 2013; Kadhim et al., 2016). Many factors must be considered when choosing a strategic location for a business, including market research, trade region, access road, competition, and cleanliness (Anjelika & Sinaga, 2022). Malelak et al (2021) examined the effect of the marketing mix on consumer satisfaction with local products. This investigation was conducted at Ibu Soekiran's Center for Souvenirs. The findings of this study indicate that the four Ps of marketing (product, pricing, place, and promotion) have a direct and significant effect on consumer satisfaction. Budiyo et al. (2021) conducted an innovative study to determine the level of customer satisfaction and priority client categories at BNI Syariah Bank in Surakarta using the marketing mix. The findings of this study indicate that customers at BNI Syariah Bank in Surakarta were satisfied with marketing mix attributes such as products, locations, promotions, people, procedures, and quality in the form of physical evidence. People in Malaysia think that having a good place to go to when they go to a gym or a fitness club could make them more satisfied with their service.

Proposition 4: Place is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

People and Product Satisfaction

In the extended marketing mix, the people dimension refers to the human resources involved in developing and delivering the good or service (Muala & Qurneh, 2012; Zeithaml et al., 2010). Employees in gyms and fitness clubs include operations staff, front desk personnel, fitness coaches, personal trainers, and accounts officers. All human resources involved in the delivery of gyms' and fitness clubs' services and products, as well as the attitudes and behaviors these individuals exhibit toward customers, contribute significantly to customer satisfaction. Do and Vu (2020) conducted an empirical study to determine the influence of each aspect in the 7Ps marketing mix framework on customer satisfaction and freight owners for RT service in Vietnam. The data collected is analyzed using the multiple regression approach and SPSS software to determine the association between marketing mix factors and consumer satisfaction. The outcomes of the data analysis support the existence of a relationship between people (referred to as employees or staff) and customer satisfaction. Novela et al (2018) conducted a unique study in which they examined the effect of a green marketing mix strategy on customer satisfaction with eco-friendly items in Jakarta, Indonesia. To accomplish the research aims, eight hypotheses were constructed and tested using multiple linear regression on data collected from 101 respondents in Jakarta via a questionnaire approach. The findings of this study indicated that the human aspect was highly associated with consumer satisfaction. Thus, based on the discussion and facts presented above, this study suggests that:

Proposition 5: People is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

Physical Evidence and Product Satisfaction

Physical evidence refers to the elements that are incorporated into a service to make it tangible and measurable (Do & Vu, 2020). Physical evidence is required because customers frequently have "nothing against which to measure the physical product's quality" and will consequently rely on any tangible aspects of the service (Zeithaml et al., 2010). Physical evidence in this study refers to the structure of gyms and fitness clubs, their furniture, training benches, dumbbell sets, treadmills, stationary bicycles, and barbell sets, as well as the looks of service employees. In a nutshell, it refers to the physical resources of all available gyms and fitness clubs. Kadhim et al (2016) researched the impact of the 7Ps marketing mix element on customer satisfaction in the tourist business in Malaysia. This study was conducted using a survey questionnaire and a sample of 123 tourism businesses. Physical evidence was found to be positively associated with consumer satisfaction with tourism services in Malaysia. Another study conducted by Do and Vu (2020) examined the customer satisfaction level for railway transportation (RT) services in the setting of Vietnam. The researchers hypothesized that the stronger the physical evidence, the higher the sense of satisfaction. The data collected is analyzed using the multiple regression approach and SPSS software to determine the association between marketing mix factors and consumer satisfaction. The findings of this study indicate that physical evidence is a significant component in determining consumer satisfaction. Thus, based on the aforementioned facts, this study suggests that

Proposition 6: Physical evidence is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

Process and Product Satisfaction

The term "process(es)" refers to a process in which the service will be delivered and includes internal organizational processes such as operating systems, procedures, and policies, as well

as the flow of activities involved in delivering the service to the consumer (Zeithaml et al., 2010). According to Saidani and Sudiarditha (2019), the process is the primary component of the marketing mix for making consumers happy and satisfied so that they will return someday. The term "process(es)" refers to a collection of gyms and fitness clubs' procedures, operating systems, policies, activity schedules, and routine tasks. Saidani and Sudiarditha (2019) used the 7Ps marketing mix to assess consumer satisfaction in Jakarta's Special Capital Region. The researchers acquire data through survey questionnaires and a simple random sampling technique. Multiple regression studies revealed that products, prices, distribution, and promotions, as well as processes, all had a substantial impact on customer satisfaction. Sopasoap et al (2020) examined the impact of service marketing mix tactics (7Ps) on customer satisfaction at 7-Eleven convenience stores in Bangkok and the surrounding metropolitan area. 400 samples were taken from customers at 7-Eleven convenience stores in Bangkok and the surrounding metropolitan area. The study established that the process had an effect on the level of customer satisfaction. Other researchers support this finding (Do & Vu, 2020; Kadhim et al., 2016). Additionally, this study believes that process will positively correlate with gym and fitness club customer satisfaction in Malaysia. As a result, this proposed that: Proposition 7: Process is positively related to the customer satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

There is relatively little empirical research on gyms and fitness clubs' customer satisfaction levels, particularly in Malaysia. Numerous elements affecting consumer satisfaction have been examined in past research, including product, price, promotion, place, people, physical evidence, and process (es). However, they were limited to the mobile market, railway transportation service, rice mill machines, and others. This has created a literature gap and needs further attention from other researchers and scholars. The purpose of this study is to close the existing literature gaps and to assess customer satisfaction with gyms and fitness clubs in Malaysia using the whole 7Ps marketing mix. Each element's definition has been covered previously. A theoretical framework has been created to show the effects of product, price, promotion, place, people, physical evidence, and process on customer satisfaction. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework.

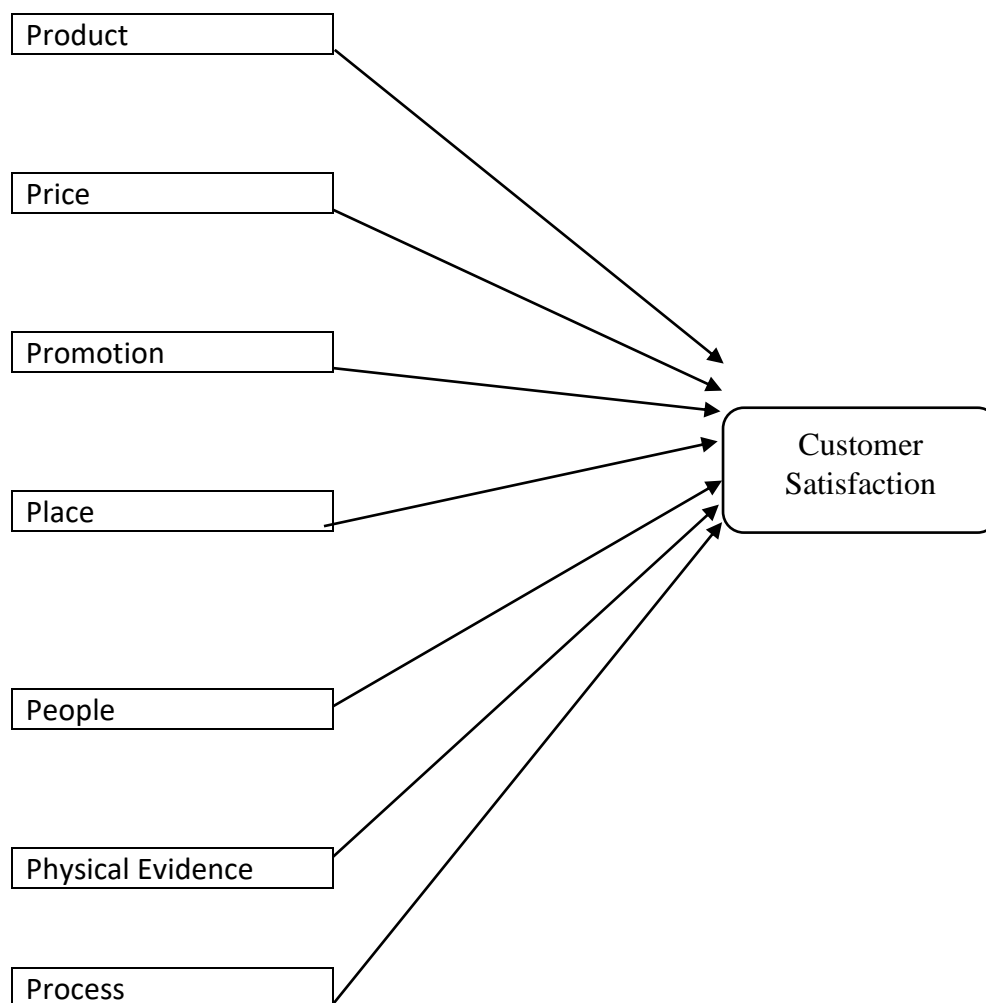


Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework

Research Methodology

This study will adopt the quantitative research approach by distributing online and face-to-face survey questionnaires to 200 respondents. The respondents will consist of the user of gyms and fitness clubs in Malaysia. For data analysis, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) will be employed to test the study hypotheses.

Research Implication

With the increased demand for fitness centres, Malaysia's fitness industry is becoming more competitive, and a deeper knowledge of members' interests is required as the government continues to push for a healthier lifestyle goal (Teik, 2015; Teik & Yap, 2017). Customer satisfaction is becoming increasingly crucial as gyms and a healthier lifestyle becomes more popular in Malaysia. To promote a better lifestyle and encourage more people to visit gyms and fitness clubs, they must first clearly provide the necessary resources, equipment, and value-added to their current products and services to attract and satisfy new and existing consumers. Proper marketing strategies will assist gyms and fitness clubs in better understanding how to create appropriate products and services, provide attractive prices (fees) and discounts/promotions, provide a convenient location, train employees/staff to provide quality service to customers, prepare a safe environment, and proper process so that customers are happy and satisfied with the overall performance of the gyms and fitness clubs.

This article investigates customer satisfaction as one of the critical aspects influencing client loyalty. Gyms and fitness clubs can improve their reputation and gain customer loyalty if they can boost customer satisfaction while decreasing negative complaints. The researchers are hoping to demonstrate a better grasp of the idea of the 7Ps marketing mix as well as factors that are positively related to customer satisfaction such as product, price, promotion, place, people, physical evidence, and procedure in this study. In terms of practical implications, there is no substantive guidance illustrating how the parts of the 7Ps marketing mix should be employed to measure the level of customer satisfaction in gyms and fitness clubs. As a result, human resources, including gym and fitness club owners, managers, and employees, are encouraged to strengthen their marketing approach to maximize customer satisfaction. It is advised that they fully give what their clients require to maintain current customers and attract new customers, which will help them boost the revenue of their gyms and fitness clubs. Again, understanding the 7Ps marketing mix is critical for enhancing customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

Customer satisfaction is measured by an increase in the number of customers and revenues. Customer satisfaction is regarded as one of the most essential outcomes of any marketing activity. As a result, a better understanding of the concept of the 7Ps marketing mix and the factors that are positively related to customer satisfaction is critical for all researchers, organizations, and industries. A deeper grasp of the 7Ps marketing mix factors will help gyms and fitness clubs improve client satisfaction, develop a positive reputation, increase revenues, and foster loyalty.

Limitation and Further Research

As with any study, this study has several limitations. First, the sample of the respondents that expected to be involve is too broad and general which comprise of Malaysian. It is suggested for the future researchers to specifically focus on certain generation this study for instances Generation Z. Second, the inclusion of third variables (moderator or mediator) is recommended to assess another factor that can build a strong relationship between the antecedent with the satisfaction level of gym users in Malaysia.

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