

Factors Contributing to Customer's Buying Behaviour at Pharmacy? Does The Brand Image Mediate the Customer's Buying Behaviour in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The present exploratory research was induced on the basis of analyzing the commonly identified factors that influence customer's buying behaviour at the pharmacy located in highly populated urban areas of Thailand. The dependent variable was customer buying behaviour while the independent variables were customer care, customer service, sales promotional tools and qualification and experience of pharmacist. A total number of 1000 questionnaires were sent to different household consumers residing in urban areas of Thailand out of which 914 questionnaires were responded back with full accuracy of responses which indicates a response rate of 91% approximately. The pharmacy branding was the mediating variable. The analysis of the includes the estimations of the outer model, outer loadings, construct validity and reliability analysis, discriminant validity analysis, inner model and estimation of Structural equation modelling. For this purpose, SmartPLS 3.0 software was used to analyze the structural equation modelling using the variance-based approach. It is found that only customer care enhances the customer buying at the pharmacy shops in the major cities of Thailand while the remaining factors like customer service, sales & promotional tools, pharmacist qualification and experience showing insignificant and negative effects

on customer buying behaviour of pharmacy. The branding insignificantly enhances the buying at pharmacy in terms of customer care, customer service and pharmacist qualification and experience. It concludes that most of the pharmacy consumer make their pharmacy buying decision on the basis of customer care of pharmacy shops in Thailand rather than other factors. The policymakers in the pharmacy sector of Thailand should focus more on customer care in order to enhance buying at the pharmacy shops in Thailand. Future research may include other factors that may enhance customer's buying behaviour.

Keywords: Buying behaviour, customer care, customer service, sales promotional tools, pharmacist education and experience, pharmacy brandings, pharmacy store.

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INTRODUCTION

The pharmaceutical sector of Thailand is considered as the best performing industry as compared to other sectors of the Thai region Chetthamrongchai and Jermstittiparsert [1]. The growth of Thailand pharmaceutical sector is expected in a positive line due to the fact that this industry is attracting a significant amount of investment from foreign countries to promote their domestic pharmaceutical sector due to which the market share of this industry is highest in Thailand region. Conversely, the high growth in terms of revenue and market share of the pharmaceutical sector of Thailand has made most of the drug items unaffordable for the consumers in this society that has created a class difference in the customer buying behaviour in terms of their affordability. Ghattas and Al-Abdallah [2] highlighted some of the factors like customer convenience, the physical environment of pharmacy, sales promotion, pharmacist qualification and experience that significantly plays role in the customer buying decision for the pharmacy shops in different urban area of Amman. The present exploratory research was the enhanced version of [2] with the addition of some new latent factors with the pharmaceutical sector of Thailand.

The present exploratory research requires to investigate the effect of different factors on customer buying behaviour of pharmacy in different areas of Thailand with the interaction of pharmacy branding as the mediator. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To investigate the role of customer care, customer service, sales and promotional tolls and pharmacist qualification and experience for customer buying behaviour at the pharmacy shops of Thailand.

- To examine the interaction role of pharmacy branding as the mediator for the above-said relationships of independent variables (customer care, customer service, sales and promotional tools and pharmacist qualification and experience) with the dependent variable (customer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops) in Thailand.
- To conclude the practical implication for the pharmacy sector of Thailand in order to enhance the buying behaviour of their customers.

For achieving the aims of this exploratory research, the systematic investigation of the study requires the scientific answers of the following research questions:

- What is the role of customer care, customer service, sales and promotional tools, pharmacist qualification and experience in determining the buying behaviour of customers at the pharmacy shops in a different area of Thailand?
- Do the brands of pharmacy play any significant role in mediating the relationship between the independent variables like customer care, customer service, sales & promotional tools, pharmacist qualification and experience with the dependent variable like customer buying behaviour at the pharmacy shops in different areas of Thailand?
- What is the conclusive implication of this exploratory research for the policymakers in the pharmacy sector of Thailand?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of past literature discussed a number of factors that impact the customer buying behaviour of pharmacy items.

These factors vary according to the country environment, culture and income level of the countries and societies at large. The previous studies did 'not confirmed about the factors that uniformly affect the buying behaviour of pharmacy customers in all societies of the world. The literature in this domain gives different results in different countries and societies as follows:

Mangano [3] conducted a study of the community pharmacist in the urban area. He concluded that there is an unbalance of distribution of pharmacists in the urban area. In addition, the unbalance spread of community pharmacist in the urban area has attracted the unbranded pharmacists to take advantage of operating their outlets and fill the gap. Smith, et al. [4] stated that it is the duty of every pharmacist to perform a complete review of self-care and prescribed medication's therapy in order to solve the problems related to medication, enhance multifarious treatments, plan programs related to faithfulness along with the endorsement of therapies which are cost-effective. Kandhare, et al. [5] carried research on the shopping behaviour of customers from branded and unbranded pharmacy shop along with their level of satisfaction. They concluded that brand perception and image of pharmacy has the strongest link with the buying behaviour of customer's satisfaction. Eades, et al. [6] concluded that community pharmacists require adequate level of training in order to enhance their confidence to provide better services for public health that positively impacts the public health and attitude. El Hajj, et al. [7] conducted their study with the same domain. They concluded that pharmacist of community pharmacy has an important role in understanding customer's need in terms of executing screening test of health and pharmacy information disclosure according to patient's requirements. They also recommended that proper training is required to pharmacist to enhance their performance. Wel, et al. [8] concluded in the similar domain of the study that a lot of factor significantly controls the consumers buying behavior with the special reference of retail product selection. The decision is also influenced with the type and need of the product according to customer's need. Cagirici, et al. [9] explored in their empirical research study that for some pharmacists the internal atmosphere of the pharmacy store is more important while some pharmacists pay attention on the outer look. They concluded that the atmosphere of the pharmacy includes wall color, decoration equipment, physical sites and its colour. They argued that the atmosphere of the pharmacy depicts the social values of the pharmacy that can positively affect the customer buying decision.

Kareem and Farid [10] concluded that pharmacy consumers choose to visit those pharmacy stores that fulfil their requirements. The consumer prefers to visit the branded or chain pharmacy retail store for health-related products. Al-Abdallah and Abo-Rumman [11] found that customer loyalty is significantly and positively associated with their pharmacy brand. Pangemanan, et al. [12] explored a study on the basis of marketing promotion strategies to retain customers and increase sales. They explored that the buying behaviour of consumers can be enhanced strongly by the marketing promotions through a coupon, discount in price

and one-free with buy-one types incentives. They could not find any significant link with the physical atmosphere of retail store with the buying behaviour of customers. Merks, et al. [20] found that a pharmacy is considered careful regarding its customers when its customers have the positive feelings towards the discussion of personal concerns as well as receiving a good piece of advice from their pharmacist regarding the healthcare products they use or required to use. Lostakova and Horakova [17] explored that the buying behaviour of pharmacy customer is determined mainly through the counselling provided by the pharmacist on personal grounds. In addition, the loyalty of customers can be obtained and retained by offering different types of price cuts and discount offers for regular customers. Shahrudin, et al. [15] conducted a study as the comparison between the preference buying behaviour for pharmacy consumer through an online order and through chain store. They explored that majority of the patients preferred to visit branded pharmacy stores for the purpose of test kits for screening as well as to purchase health supplements rather than going for them online. Malewski, et al. [16] found that there is a significant difference of buying behaviour of customers in city and village area in terms of pharmacist/customer relationship trust issues, customer service and pharmacy service. Bataineh, et al. [17] concluded that relationship marketing significantly enhances the retention of retail customer and positively affect the buying behavior of customer when his/her trust with the seller is enhanced.

Pujari, et al. [18] revealed that the majority of the customer/patients buy pharmacy according to their doctor's prescription with a one-fifth number of customer buy branded pharmacy. In the case of some common diseases, the patients bypass the doctor's advice and prefer to take medicine according to pharmacist advice. Shamout [19] explored that sales promotional tools like coupon system do not affect the customer's buying behaviour significantly while the tools like price-cuts, giving free samples and giving one free if the customer buys one item have significantly and positively influenced the customer buying behaviour. Iskandar, et al. [20] found that the buying behaviour of pharmacy customer is significantly and positively linked with the effective customer services provided by the pharmacist in terms of empathy, respect, staff friendly behaviour, carefully listening to the customers' queries, quality time, responding the customer's need quickly and maintaining the customer's privacy. Elayeh, et al. [21] explored in their research study that pharmacist is willing to implement actual practices of pharmacy at a limited level in chain stores due to little acceptability by the physicians and little training of pharmacist in this regard. Srivastava and Wagh [22] discovered that over the counter buying behaviour of pharmacy is strongly depends upon a number of factors like sales promotional tools, the brand image of the pharmacy chain, awareness, reliability as well as aesthetics on the medical grounds. These results are also verified by another exploratory research in the same domain by [23]. Wang, et al. [24] concluded with the findings that buying behaviour of the customer is greatly influenced by the process of product delivery and their price. The

customers are more concerned to the price of the product and the delivered medicine according to their need to make their buying decision at the pharmacy. Another research study based on exploratory approach found the similar findings with the same domain by [25].

Shekhar, et al. [26] found that most of the pharmacy users prefer to buy pharmacy over the counter and are well aware of the medicine before purchasing it. The factor of price sensitivity is the major determinant that dominates the consumer's buying behaviour of pharmacy. Abu Hammour, et al. [27] conducted a study for the drive-thru buying behaviour of pharmacy customers. They explored that the married and with children, customers normally prefer to use this service due to their busy schedule. The drive-thru service has a drawback of communication-gap between the consumer and the pharmacist that lead to poor awareness of

actual benefit of the required medicine at the end-consumer level. Ben Said, et al. [28] discovered in their exploratory primary data research that the sales and marketing promotional techniques like price-cuts, discounts, buy-one and free-get-one and internal atmosphere of the pharmacy strongly enhance the buying behavior of end user of pharmacy. Ghattas and Al-Abdallah [2] explored that the pharmacy buying behaviour of the customer is greatly influenced by a number of factors like customer service, customer's convenience, qualification and experience of the pharmacists, physical environment, sales promotional tools. The brand of pharmacy has the mediating effect on the buying behavior while the demography does not moderate the relationship between buying behavior of customer with its determining factors.

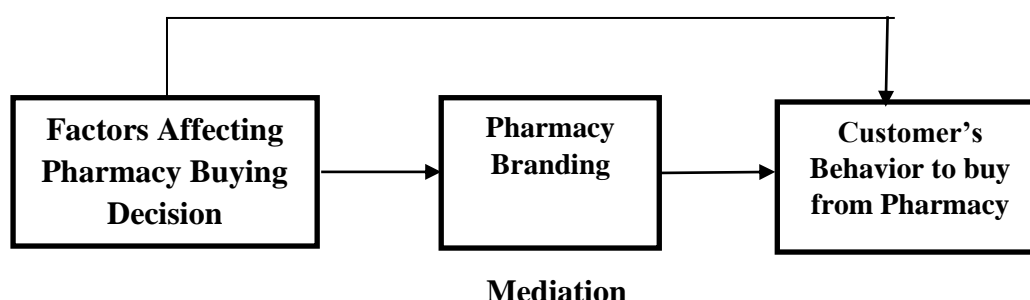


FIGURE 1: Theoretical Model

STUDY HYPOTHESIS

H₁: The behaviour of the customer to buy from a pharmacy is significantly determined by a number of selected factors.

H₂: The behaviour of the customer to buy from a pharmacy is significantly mediated by pharmacy branding.

H₃: The behaviour of the customer to buy from a pharmacy is significantly moderated by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of that customer.

DATA STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

The motive for analyzing the present exploratory research is to determine the customer's buying behaviour at pharmacy shops in urban areas of Thailand based on a number of factors. The data for this purpose was collected through a questionnaire designed with the self-administrative approach of the researchers using cluster-based random sampling technique on the basis of high population density urban areas in Thailand. A total number of 1000 questionnaires were sent to different household consumers residing in urban areas of Thailand out of which 914 questionnaires were responded back with full accuracy of responses. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part of it covers the demographic and socio-economic dimensions of the respondent like; gender, age, marital status, number of family members in a house, family income and pharmacy visit frequency. The second part of questionnaire covers different factors that may or may not

influence the pharmacy buying behaviour like customer's service, customer's convenience, sale's promotional tools, the physical look of a store along with qualification and experience of the pharmacist. The third part covers the dimensions of pharmacy branding including the customer's buying behaviour at the pharmacy. The details of the variables of the study, their measurements and scaling are explained as follows:

- The outcome variable of this exploratory research study is the customer's buying behaviour at the pharmacy (CBBP). It is measured by the dimensions like; pharmacy with prescription (CBBP1), pharmacy without a prescription (CBBP2), pharmacy for regular minor diseases (CBBP3), cosmetic products (CBBP4), food supplements (CBBP5) and baby care products (CBBP6). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).
- The first latent variable of the study includes customer's service (CS) which is measured by the dimensions like; ensuring customer's need (CS1), ensuring customer's satisfaction (CS2), positive word of mouth by staff (CS3), staff patience (CS4), Timely delivery of service (CS5) and Staff Sincerity with the customer (CS6). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).

- The second latent variable of the study includes Customer's convenience (CC) which is measured by the dimensions like; public transport availability (CC1), proximity and accessibility (CC2), parking space (CC3), customer-friendly environment (CC4), trading hours of pharmacy (CC5) and ease of movement (CC6). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).
- The third latent variable of the study is sales promotional tools (SP) which are measured by the dimensions like; price discount (SP1), buy-one and get-one-free (SP2) and free samples (SP3). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).
- The fourth latent variable of the study is physical look of pharmacy store (PL) which is measured by the dimensions like; decoration of store (PL1), product packaging and shape (PL2), product display (PL3), store colour and lightening (PL4), Store ventilation (PL5) and Staff dressing and attitude (PL6). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).
- The fifth and the final latent variable of the study is qualification and experience of pharmacist (QE) which is measured by the dimensions like; adequate qualification (QE1), adequate experience (QE2), advice and counselling (QE3), helpful and courteous (QE4), responsible (QE5) and professionalism (QE6). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).
- The mediating variable like branding (B) includes the dimensions like; specific brand (B1), any brand (B2), local store (B3) and no preference (B4). A five-point Likert scale was used for the measurement of these dimension (strongly disagree – strongly agree).

ESTIMATION AND RESULTS

The present exploratory investigation esteemed to examine the factors that determine pharmacy buying behaviour of different age group customers residing in different location of Thailand. In addition, the research also investigates the mediating role of pharmacy branding for the above-said relationship. The analysis of this exploratory research created the need for using structural equation modelling to analyze the direct as well as mediating relationship simultaneously. For this purpose, SmartPLS 3.0 software was used to analyze the structural equation modelling using the variance-based approach. The analysis of the present exploratory research requires the estimations of the outer model, outer loadings, construct validity and reliability analysis, discriminant validity analysis, inner model and estimation of SEM using figure 2, table 1, table 2, table 3, figure 3 and table 4 respectively.

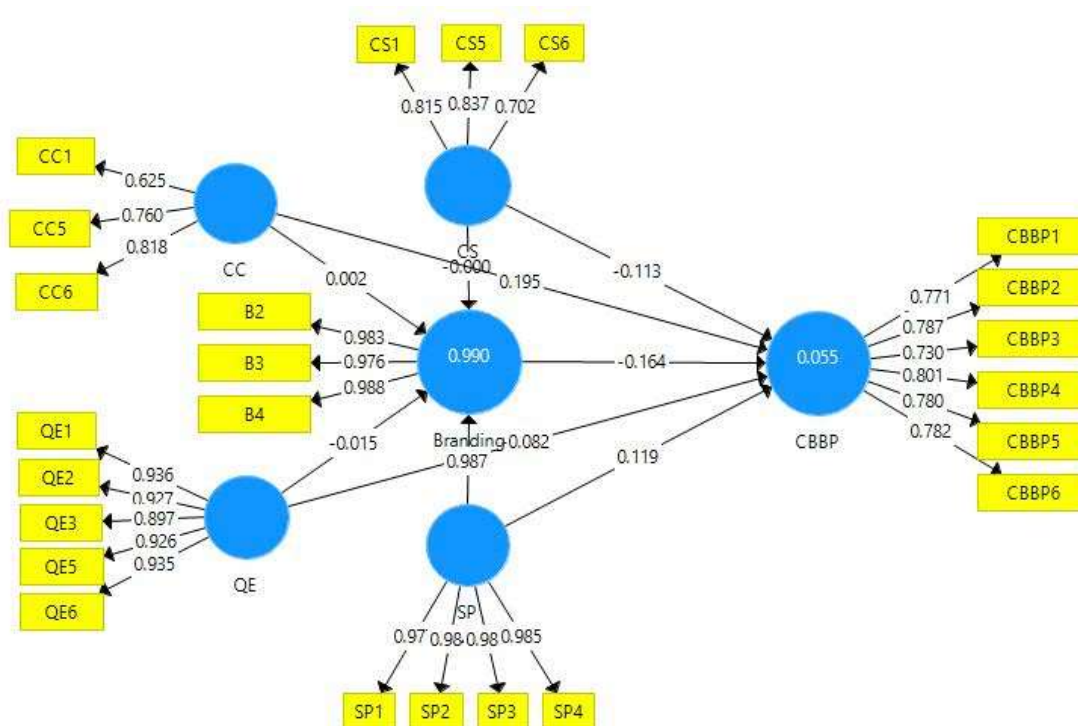


FIGURE 2: Outer Model

Figure 1 indicates the outer model of the study which shows how the latent variables are linked and measured by their observed variables. The figure indicates that the final set of observed variables that are significantly linked with their

latent variable are the part of ongoing process of SEM modelling the remaining observed variable were excluded due to their less significant effect on their relevant latent variables.

TABLE 1: Outer Loadings

| | Branding | CBBP | CC | CS | QE | SP |
|-------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| B2 | 0.983 | | | | | |
| B3 | 0.976 | | | | | |
| B4 | 0.988 | | | | | |
| CBBP1 | | 0.771 | | | | |
| CBBP2 | | 0.787 | | | | |
| CBBP3 | | 0.730 | | | | |
| CBBP4 | | 0.801 | | | | |
| CBBP5 | | 0.780 | | | | |
| CBBP6 | | 0.782 | | | | |
| CC1 | | | 0.625 | | | |
| CC5 | | | 0.760 | | | |
| CC6 | | | 0.818 | | | |
| CS1 | | | | 0.815 | | |
| CS5 | | | | 0.837 | | |
| CS6 | | | | 0.702 | | |
| QE1 | | | | | 0.936 | |
| QE2 | | | | | 0.927 | |
| QE3 | | | | | 0.897 | |
| QE5 | | | | | 0.926 | |
| QE6 | | | | | 0.935 | |
| SP1 | | | | | | 0.977 |
| SP2 | | | | | | 0.984 |
| SP3 | | | | | | 0.980 |
| SP4 | | | | | | 0.985 |

Table 1 indicates the outer loading values for each latent variables and their observed variables. In order to be a reliably observed variable, the value must be greater than

0.70 with a positive sign. The table shows the final set of observed variables that actually measure the relevant latent variables of the study.

TABLE 2: Analysis of construct validity and reliability

| | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|----------|------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Branding | 0.982 | 0.982 | 0.988 | 0.965 |
| CBBP | 0.875 | 0.896 | 0.900 | 0.601 |
| CC | 0.774 | 0.772 | 0.981 | 0.746 |
| CS | 0.707 | 0.754 | 0.829 | 0.619 |
| QE | 0.957 | 0.961 | 0.967 | 0.855 |
| SP | 0.987 | 0.987 | 0.991 | 0.963 |

Table 2 indicates the construct reliability and validity of the latent variables used in this exploratory study. For a latent variable to be reliable, the Cronbach's alpha value must be greater than 0.70. The table indicates that all the latent variables of the study are reliable as the Cronbach's alpha values are greater than 0.70. In addition, for a latent variable

to be valid, the composite reliability and AVE values must be greater than 0.70 and 0.50 respectively. The table indicates that all the latent variables are strictly valid as the value of composite reliability are greater than 0.70 and values for average variance extracted are also greater than 0.50

TABLE 3: Analysis of Discriminant Validity

| | Branding | CBBP | CC | CS | QE | SP |
|----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|-------|----|
| Branding | 0.782 | | | | | |
| CBBP | 0.019 | 0.775 | | | | |
| CC | 0.051 | 0.202 | 0.739 | | | |
| CS | -0.103 | -0.110 | -0.059 | 0.787 | | |
| QE | -0.527 | -0.051 | -0.041 | -0.123 | 0.725 | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| SP | 0.995 | 0.020 | 0.049 | -0.106 | -0.519 | 0.781 |
|----|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|

Table 3 reports the discriminant validity for the latent variables of the study. The discriminant validity indicates the external validity of the latent variables that are finalized for further analysis. For a latent variable to be externally consistent and valid, the value of correlation should be less

than 0.80. As the values of correlations for the latent variables like branding, CBBP, CC, CS, QE and SP are less than 0.80 so it is confirmed that all the latent variables are externally valid and consistent.

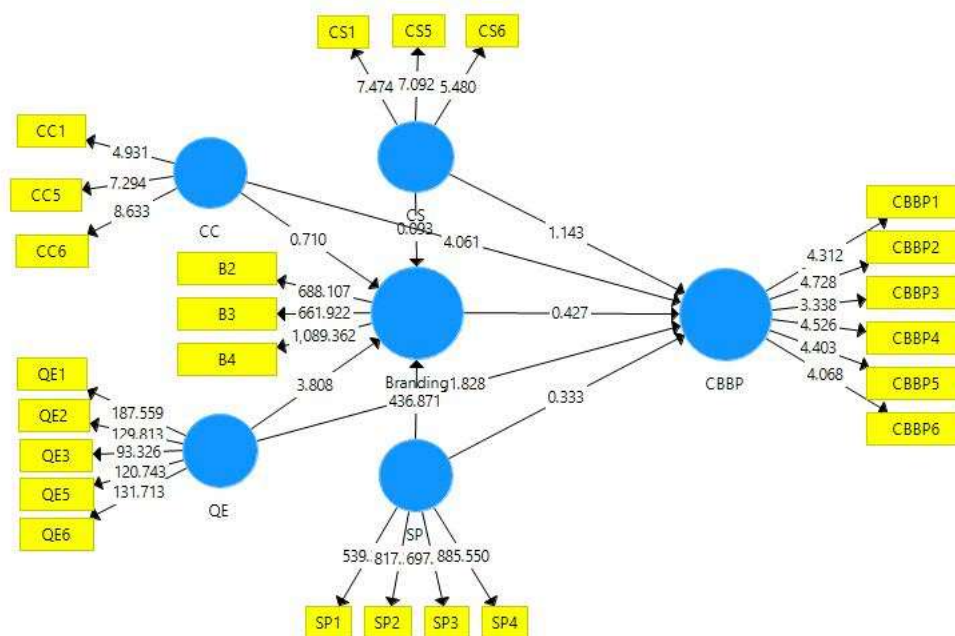


FIGURE 3: Inner Model

Figure 3 reports the inner model and sometimes it is called a structural model. It indicates the relationship between all the latent variables of the study along with their t-values.

For a variable to be significant, the t-value must be greater than 1.96 which is evident from figure 3 that the majority of the latent variables are significance due to higher t-values.

TABLE 4: Estimation structural equation model

| Total Effect | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | STDEV | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | Prob. |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| Branding -> CBBP | -0.164 | -0.207 | 0.395 | 0.416 | 0.677 |
| CC -> Branding | 0.002 | 0.002 | 0.003 | 0.709 | 0.479 |
| CC -> CBBP | 0.195 | 0.193 | 0.049 | 3.949 | 0.000 |
| CS -> Branding | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.003 | 0.095 | 0.924 |
| CS -> CBBP | -0.113 | -0.098 | 0.100 | 1.132 | 0.258 |
| QE -> Branding | -0.015 | -0.015 | 0.004 | 3.516 | 0.000 |
| QE -> CBBP | -0.080 | -0.072 | 0.044 | 1.802 | 0.072 |
| SP -> Branding | 0.987 | 0.987 | 0.002 | 407.949 | 0.000 |
| SP -> CBBP | -0.043 | -0.046 | 0.055 | 0.791 | 0.429 |
| Specific Indirect Effect | | | | | |
| CC -> Branding -> CBBP | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.233 | 0.816 |
| CS -> Branding -> CBBP | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.035 | 0.972 |
| QE -> Branding -> CBBP | 0.002 | 0.003 | 0.006 | 0.385 | 0.700 |
| SP -> Branding -> CBBP | -0.162 | -0.204 | 0.390 | 0.416 | 0.677 |
| R-square | 0.370 | | | | |
| Adjusted R-square | 0.365 | | | | |

Table 4 indicates the structural equation modelling results of using bootstrapping process with the help of SmartPLS 3 software. The latent variable CBBP is the dependent variable of the study that refers to the customer buying behaviour at the pharmacy store. The first independent variable is measured by the latent variable CC which refers to customer care. The second independent variable is measured by the latent variable CS which refers to customer service. The third independent variable is measured by the latent variable QE which refers to qualification and experience of pharmacist. The fourth independent variable is measured by the latent variable SP which refers to sales promotional tools. The only mediating variable is measured by the latent variable branding which refers to the branding pharmacy shops. The analysis of this exploratory research was based on the hypothesis testing procedure based on direct relationship estimation and mediating/indirect relationship estimation. The direct estimation procedure using the bootstrap technique indicates that only customer care is positively and significantly affecting consumer buying behaviour at the pharmacy shops. The remaining latent variables like customer service, sales promotional tools and qualification and experience of pharmacist negatively and insignificantly affecting the customer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops.

The specific indirect effect using the latent variable branding as the mediator indicates insignificant and positive interaction for customer care, customer service and qualification and experience of pharmacist with customer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops while the interaction of branding with sales promotional tools negatively and insignificantly affect the consumer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops. The R-square and adjusted R-square are very low as 39% and 37% which indicates that a lower number of independent variables explains variation in the dependent variable of the study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory research investigated the impact of customer care, customer service and sales promotional tools and qualification & experience of pharmacist in determining the customer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops in Thailand with the interaction of pharmacy branding as the mediator. The dependent variable was customer buying behaviour while the independent variables were customer care, customer service, sales promotional tools and qualification and experience of pharmacist. The pharmacy branding was the mediating variable. The analysis of the present exploratory research required the estimations of the outer model, outer loadings, construct validity and reliability analysis, discriminant validity analysis, inner model and estimation of Structural equation modelling. For this purpose, SmartPLS 3.0 software was used to analyze the structural equation modelling using the variance-based approach. The findings of direct estimation revealed that only customer care is positively and significantly affecting consumer buying behaviour at the pharmacy shops. The remaining latent variables like customer service, sales promotional tools and qualification and experience of pharmacist negatively and insignificantly affecting the

customer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops. The findings of specific indirect effect reported that the latent variable branding shows an insignificant and positive interaction for customer care, customer service and qualification and experience of pharmacist with customer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops while the interaction of branding with sales promotional tools negatively and insignificantly affected the consumer buying behaviour at pharmacy shops. It is concluded that customer care at the pharmacy shops of Thailand enhances the customer buying at the pharmacy shops. The branding insignificantly enhances the buying at pharmacy in terms of customer care, customer service and pharmacist qualification and experience. The policymakers in the pharmacy sector of Thailand should focus more on customer care in order to enhance buying at the pharmacy shops in Thailand. Future research may include other factors that may enhance customer's buying behaviour.

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