

# Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty towards Cosmetic Products: A Case Study on Bangkok's Boots Drug Stores

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## ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the effects of customer satisfaction and loyalty at a well-known cosmetics store chain in Bangkok, Thailand: Boots stores. Questionnaires were distributed to collect information from 400 respondents who had received the services from the cosmetics departments of Boots stores. The results show that there is a relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. Every dimension of service quality namely responsiveness, tangibility, empathy, assurance and reliability has an impact on customer satisfaction, which can therefore be increased through creating loyalty through every dimension. In addition, there is a relationship between customer satisfaction and relative attitude. If the customers are satisfied with service, they will develop a favorable and positive attitude and this will create repurchase intention in the future, which is customer loyalty.

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty, Cosmetics

## INTRODUCTION

Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, also known as the land of smiles, is known for its abundance of natural beauty. Therefore, it is only natural, that its people are also beauty conscious; there are plenty of retail cosmetics stores in Thailand especially in the capital city of Bangkok, where, half of them are actually small kiosk like shops, often run by young well decked up girls, who themselves are their own brand's ambassadors. The huge malls and department stores dotted all over Bangkok, are also lined up with small kiosks which seem to have overwhelming cosmetics sales during the weekends, in particular. Cosmetics are products, which have a high profit margin, which is, therefore a reason to attract people to run this business.

There are two kinds of retail cosmetics stores in Thailand. The first is those located in the malls and shopping malls, which sell brand name products, and the second is the one run by chain stores. Both types of businesses need to find out the factors, which influence consumer behavior such as satisfaction and loyalty, along with repeat purchase intention, as these variables will lead to survival in the long term.

This research primarily focuses on the effects of customer satisfaction (through perceived service quality) and loyalty at a well-known cosmetics store chain in Bangkok: Boots stores. However, other variables such as relative attitude, recommendations and repurchase intention will also be examined as they are indicated by marketing and retailing literature that they can affect loyalty. The results of this research will help us better understand factors that influence loyalty towards cosmetic products, and help drug retailers improving and developing their service quality such as product knowledge training and environment, in order to create greater customer

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satisfaction and increase customer loyalty in terms of, their attitude, create more word of mouth publicity and enhance repurchase intention.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Expansion of Boots Thailand**

As a pioneer in the Health & Beauty business in the market, Boots has been successful by providing tremendous efforts in providing the best shopping experience to its customers. Its rebranding in 2007 has brought a vibrant image to attract customers in its global operating markets with friendly, caring and professional service, contributing the success of Boots as No.1 Pharmacy/Drugstore brand in Asia for five consecutive years.

In Thailand, Boot stores are owned by the Retail Pharmacy International Division of Walgreens Boots Alliance. The stores can be found in almost all the big department stores of the country. Boots' store expansion accelerated in 2012-2013 (see, e.g., "Boots Thailand," 2012). The momentum has kept going with the expansion gathering pace and keeping pace in 2014 as well as 2016, despite the political chaos and subsequent imposition of martial law and followed by a military government which is still in place.

### **Comparing the Two Market Leaders: Boots and Watsons**

Bangkok has hundreds of small standalone drug stores; it also has a few large chain stores like Fascino, Save Drug, Pharmax, besides the government run GPO. Among the international drug store chains, only Watsons and Boots are prominent; both of them are basically cosmetics oriented, with a collection of drugs too, having hundreds of branches across the country with a larger concentration of stores in Bangkok alone as well as offering thousands of products, including most basic drugs, which are both prescription as well as over the counter.

**Selection of Items.** Generally speaking, even without asking the customers for a rating on the size, it is more than evident that Watsons stores in Bangkok are larger than those of Boots, which effectively means, that because of a larger store format than its nearest global competitor, Watsons is able to sell more than Boots. When a customer is looking for something like a soap, shampoo, cream or lotion, there is no real difference, perhaps price; whereas, when one looks for something more specific, like a particular brand's shade, color or fragrance, there is a higher possibility to find it in a Watsons rather than Boots, which however, can be vice versa, depending the brand in question.

**Average Prices.** For most items, Watsons is cheaper than Boots. Most likely because their stores are bigger, they can buy in larger bulk, or maybe because Watsons is far more popular than Boots, they sell more things. Either way, for most products, Watsons tends to be at least 10 percent cheaper than Boots. It is also possible that since Watsons has its head office in Hong Kong, they are able to source most of their products from China and that transportation is not very expensive too.

**Sales.** Both Watsons and Boots have sales often. Whereas Watsons will have large sales on many items, Boots may only have sales on specific items. However, both Watsons and Boots drug stores have their positives and negatives, the majority of Thais prefer to go to Watson's as they usually offer great bargains and also often have a "sale" with buy one and take the second one at just one baht, which seems to attract a lot of customers as they had stated the main objective of their revisit intention.

**English Ability of Staff.** The researcher has found the English ability of the Thai staff members at Boots stores is higher than that of Watsons. In Boots stores, the chemist or pharmacist, is usually found to speak in fluent English and so do many of the sales staff, whereas at a Watsons store, the staff are not at all comfortable with the English language and barely speak more than in monosyllables. Boots is, therefore, your best bet when you need advice on medication or have questions, as you can get the answers in English.

**Locations.** Both Boots and Watsons have stores all over Bangkok and in excellent locations. Usually, if a shopping mall has a Boots store, it will also have a Watsons and vice versa, so no need to worry about which store has the most locations. They both do.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Since there are many drug stores in Thailand including numerous new drug stores which have just opened, it is a cause of different standards for services in each store. However, satisfaction is a key of success for several businesses. Tuu and Olsen (2009) found that customer satisfaction has affected customer loyalty. Drug store retailing is a type of business which also depends on that variable. It may affect loyalty which influences business survival. Boots is the leader of beauty and health retailers in Thailand. Executives at Boots want to know how to find new customers and maintain their existing customers as much as possible. There are many factors that affect customer loyalty for the pharmacy department at Boots. Thus, this research will help Boots in Thailand to understand and find out the relationship of many variables that affect customer loyalty, and also prove which independent factor has a relationship between the dimensions of perceived service quality (SERVPERF model) which are tangible, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy (Jamali, 2007), related with customer satisfaction, which affect improving relative attitude, customer feedback as word of mouth, and repurchase intention which is customer loyalty (Sivadas & Baker-Pewitt, 2000). Particularly, this study tries to answer the following questions.

1. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality in terms of responsiveness and customer satisfaction?
2. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality in terms of tangibles and customer satisfaction?
3. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality in terms of empathy and customer satisfaction?
4. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality in terms of assurance and customer satisfaction?
5. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality in terms of reliability and customer satisfaction?
6. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction?
7. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality and relative attitude?
8. Is there a relationship between perceived service quality and recommendations?
9. Is there a relationship between customer satisfaction and relative attitude?
10. Is there a relationship between customer satisfaction and recommendations?
11. Is there a relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intention?
12. Is there a relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty?

## FRAMEWORK

Kotler (2000) described satisfaction as a personal feeling, which either satisfies or dissatisfies depending on the gap between the expectation and the perception after the service has been received. Satisfaction is an interesting area of study for many researchers, since they believe that it will be a part of improving the firm's performance.

A number of research has shown a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality. Oliver (1997) indicated satisfaction as being an intermediate in the post purchase behavior, which was used to link service quality and customers' repurchase loyalty. Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi, and Katircioglu (2005) mentioned that the effect of service quality perceptions towards customer satisfaction. Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann (1994) indicated that service quality will certainly have an impact upon customer satisfaction, one way or another.

This research studies the relationship between perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty towards the cosmetics department of Boots' stores. Perceived service quality is an independent variable. Customer satisfaction is an intervening variable. Customer loyalty is a dependent variable. For perceived service quality, we used five terms to test customer satisfaction, which are: (1) tangibility, (2) responsiveness, (3) reliability, (4) assurance, and (5) empathy. The research instrument used in this study has been adapted from many previous studies; perceived service quality was applied from SERPERV, which was developed based on the SERVQUAL model, created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), in which there are five sub variables as mentioned above.

We also study the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. However, there are many factors, which are mediators, linking customer satisfaction and loyalty, namely relative attitude, recommendations and repurchase intention in this research.

**Relative Attitude.** Dick and Basu (1994) described attitude as a combination of attitudinal differentiation and attitudinal strength; when the customer cannot differentiate a product or service with the other, it means that there is low brand parity.

**Recommendations (Word of Mouth).** Helm and Schlei (1998) described that word of mouth (WOM) is a verbal form of communication between consumers to other people about the product or service provider. Recommendations, through WOM, is an oral form of communication that can be either positive or negative, depending on the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which has been received by the customer in question. Negative WOM, will of course, leads to a loss of customers for a brand. Roselius (1971) suggested that WOM will reduce perceived risk from the service provider. On the other hand, WOM will support the customer to have more informed choices for them, as customers.

**Brand Loyalty.** Gates and Hoyer (1986), stated that strong attitudinal commitment to the brand will lead to higher levels of loyalty. Carauna (2002) defined that service loyalty is measured by considering the repeat purchase from a particular service provider and, also when customers have a positive attitude to the brand. The company is more powerful in terms of creating loyalty, as it will increase its profits from those customers who engage in repurchase, as it will enhance loyalty, thereby creating a better competitive advantage. Affective loyalty refers to the relative attitude and level of customer satisfaction which influences decision making.

**Repurchase Intention.** Fang, Chiu, and Wang (2011) mentioned repurchase intention as representing customers with a possibility related to repurchase behavior in the future. Oliver (1980) stated that the result of satisfaction will lead to a higher

repurchase intention in healthcare services. Additionally, customer satisfaction will result in repurchase intention, over a period of time (Rust and Williams, 1994).

## DATA

The target population of this study were people who had experience in purchasing from the cosmetics departments of Boots' stores, from the four branches, which were located at the Nine Huamark, the Mall III at Ramkhamhaeng road, the Mall Bangkapi and at Seacon Square. The researcher chose these branches, which are in crowded areas. Moreover, the selected Boots stores are big branches and branches located in stores, which are having a lot of customer traffic throughout the day, every day because there are many events such as launching of new products and exhibitions at those branches, on a regular basis, which draw a huge number of customers, hunting for bargains.

We used questionnaires (in Thai language) to collect data from 400 respondents who had received the service from the four branches of Boots stores (100 respondents for each branch) from January to March 2016. The questionnaire consisted of eight parts:

1. **Screening Question.** The first "yes-no" question is to screen every respondent to ascertain whether he or she had used the service from the cosmetics department of Boots stores or not.
2. **Service Quality.** The customers were asked about the perception of service quality from the cosmetics department of Boots stores. The questions were divided into five categories: responsiveness, tangibles, empathy, assurance and reliability.
3. **Customer Satisfaction.** The customers were asked about their level of customer satisfaction after receiving the service from the cosmetics department of Boots stores.
4. **Relative Attitude.** Customers were asked about their attitude towards the cosmetics department of Boots stores when compared to other stores and also based on their experience.
5. **Recommendation.** Customers were asked about their opinion to recommend the cosmetics department of Boots stores to their relatives or friends.
6. **Repurchase Intention.** The customers were asked about their intention to repeat purchase the cosmetics from Boots stores in the future.
7. **Loyalty.** This part was designed to measure the level of customer loyalty towards the cosmetics department of Boots stores.
8. **Personal Data/Demographics.** Demographic information of each respondent was collected in order to gather individual characteristics.
  - Gender: (1) male; (2) female.
  - Age: (1) below 15 years old; (2) 16 – 25 years old; (3) 26 – 35 years old; (4) 36 – 45 years old; (5) 46 – 55 years old; (5) more than 55 years old.
  - Marital status: (1) single; (2) married; (3) divorced.
  - Education: (1) those who had completed secondary education, but had not completed a Bachelor's degree; (2) those who had completed Bachelor's degree; (3) those who had completed Master's degree; (4) those who had finished a doctoral degree; (5) others which included diplomas and vocational college degrees.

- Occupation: (1) students; (2) government employees; (3) state enterprise employees; (4) those who were having their own businesses including small, medium enterprises; (5) those who were working as employees in private and or small firms; (6) others, which included housewives.
- Monthly income: (1) less than 10,000 baht per month; (2) between 10,000 – 25,000 baht; (3) between 25,001 – 40,000 baht; (4) between 40,001 – 60,000 baht; (5) more than 60,000 baht.

A five-point Likert scale (where 1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 2 = “Disagree”, 3 = “Neutral”, 4 = “Agree”, 5 = “Strongly Agree”) is used in parts 2 – 7 to evaluate perceived service quality, customer satisfaction, relative attitude, recommendation, repurchase intention and loyalty. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and Cronbach’s alpha for each factor.

**TABLE 1**  
Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach’s Alpha for Each Factor

	Mean	S.D.	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Perceived Service Quality</b>			<b>0.903</b>
Responsiveness			0.814
Pharmacists are available at Boots.	3.41	0.750	
Pharmacists at Boots are willing to offer service.	3.77	0.735	
Pharmacists at Boots spend time with each question	3.85	0.756	
Pharmacists respond quickly.	3.43	0.736	
Tangibles			0.732
Boots has a comfortable environment.	3.66	0.682	
Boots is clean.	3.75	0.788	
Boots has up-to-date medicines.	3.75	0.792	
Empathy			0.834
Pharmacists understand customer needs at Boots.	3.53	0.718	
Pharmacists show sincere customer interest at Boots.	3.66	0.772	
Pharmacists listen to customer’s problem with respect at Boots.	3.66	0.775	
Assurance			0.780
Pharmacists have knowledge and experience at Boots	3.57	0.672	
Pharmacists are friendly to customers at Boots	3.60	0.704	
Pharmacists give recommendations with respect at Boots	3.70	0.765	
Pharmacists clearly explain the medical condition at Boots.	3.71	0.772	
Reliability			0.833
Pharmacy department at Boots is reliable.	3.53	0.625	
Pharmacists at Boots provide service as promised.	3.60	0.700	
Pharmacists provide service at Boots without mistakes.	3.67	0.697	
<b>Customer Satisfaction</b>			<b>0.879</b>
I satisfied with the pharmacy department at Boots	3.57	0.629	
Compared to other drug stores, Boots provided me with more satisfaction.	3.66	0.761	
Pharmacy department at Boots offered satisfactory service.	3.71	0.774	
I did the right thing in buying medicines at Boots.	3.70	0.813	

TABLE 1 (continued)

<b>Relative Attitude</b>			<b>0.752</b>
Service quality of the pharmacy department at Boots is very good.	3.32	0.645	
Compared to other stores, the service quality at Boots is better.	3.42	0.674	
Boots is different from other drug stores	3.35	0.680	
<b>Recommendation (WOM)</b>			<b>0.892</b>
I communicate positive things related to the pharmacy at Boots	3.17	0.777	
I recommend the pharmacy at Boots to a	3.26	0.833	
I admire the pharmacy at, Boots	3.16	0.850	
<b>Repurchase Intention</b>			<b>0.781</b>
I intend to continue to buy medicines at the pharmacy of Boots.	3.17	0.777	
I will buy at pharmacy store, Boots.	3.26	0.833	
If I use any medicine, I will buy it at Boots.	3.16	0.850	
<b>Customer Loyalty</b>			<b>0.824</b>
Even if the same medicine is sold at other pharmacies, I would still purchase at Boots.	3.12	0.818	
I always visit the pharmacy at Boots to consult regarding the needed medicines.	3.25	0.847	
I seldom consider switching away from the pharmacy of Boots.	3.26	0.850	

Note:  $N = 400$  for each question.

## DISCUSSION

The results suggest a “yes” answer to all the 12 research questions discussed earlier. That is, there is a positive relationship among perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Every dimension of service quality namely responsiveness, tangibility, empathy, assurance and reliability has an impact on customer satisfaction. Correlation shows that perceived service quality has a moderate to low positive relationship with relative attitude and recommendation consequently. In addition, satisfaction influences relative attitude, recommendation, repurchase intention and loyalty. Besides, there is a strong positive relationship between relative attitude and recommendation; recommendation and repurchase intention; repurchase intention and loyalty; while there is a moderate positive relationship between relative attitude and repurchase intention; relative attitude and loyalty; recommendation and loyalty.

As the results from this study show a relationship among perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty, the pharmacy department of Boots should improve perceived service quality especially for the services provided by the pharmacist. Doing so will increase customer satisfaction and finally will also lead to more loyalty. From previous studies, Caruana (2002) showed that customer satisfaction is the intermediate agent for linking service quality and customer loyalty. LaBarbera and Mazursky (1983) mentioned that if the customer has a strong level of satisfaction, they will have lower occasion to switch the brand. The outcome of this research can be interpreted to mean that every dimension of service quality has influenced customer satisfaction; therefore, developing each of its dimensions will be a cause to create greater satisfaction.

We would like to offer a few recommendations to act as a guideline for the improvement of Boots. For example, in terms of assurance and reliability, Boots should set a training program for pharmacists on the knowledge of medicine continuously in order to review and update the product information which is a method to create confidence for customers in the pharmacists who give them service. It will help to create acceptability and reliability for pharmacists at Boots stores. In terms of responsiveness and empathy, Boots should set a training program on selling skills because it will help to improve service quality in the view of service standard to maintain a positive relative attitude. It means every branch of Boots will provide the same standard in which the customer can have confidence in the correction and quality. In addition, another dimension which is very important for the health care service quality is empathy. It was supported from previous studies, such as Ioannis and Chaniotakis (2009), which showed that empathy is the major dimension of service quality which impacts customer satisfaction while other dimensions namely responsiveness, assurance and tangibles will roundabout influence satisfaction. If the customers are satisfied with empathy, they will also be satisfied with responsiveness, assurance and tangibles. According to this study, empathy has an effect on perceived service quality; thus Boots should emphasize on this dimension by understanding the customers' mind. However, another dimension that can impact service quality is tangibility. Boots should be up to date with medicines and create a comfortable environment such as the arrangement of over the counter medicines, to be easy to locate for customers which will make customers feel that it is easy to shop for whatever they need, which was ascertained by the researcher during the face to face conversation with the store's regular customers.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the survey data of 400 respondents who were customers of four Bangkok Boots stores, this study finds a relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. All five dimensions of service quality – responsiveness, tangibility, empathy, assurance and reliability – each has an impact on customer satisfaction, which can therefore be increased through creating loyalty through every dimension. There is also a relationship between customer satisfaction and relative attitude. If the customers are satisfied with service, they will develop a favorable and positive attitude and this will create repurchase intention in the future, which is customer loyalty.

Nonetheless, there are limitations in this study, as is to be expected in any research endeavor. Firstly, this research focused on the cosmetics departments of Boots stores in Bangkok, Thailand, in four areas only, which were at: the Nine Huamark, the Mall III at Ramkhamhaeng road, the Mall Bangkapi and at Seacon Square. The research was conducted, on existing customers of Boots stores in Bangkok only. Therefore, the results may not be applied to all of the 77 provinces in Thailand, or even to all of the stores in Bangkok. This research was also conducted during January to March 2016. The results therefore, do not cover the variations in sales that can happen during different periods of time, particularly since it did not factor in the sales during the rainy season, which is usually the period July and August in Thailand. Future research can also be conducted to include the sales during the rainy season, which might provide more insight into the buying habits and preferences of those loyal Boots customers in Thailand.



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