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Determinants of customers loyalty for Thailand's pharmaceutical business

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Abstract---During the last few years, it can be seen that many sectors and businesses adopt significant sales promotion (SP) tools to stimulate and motivate their customers towards products purchasing. The main objective behind the development of this study is to evaluate the loyalty of customers of pharmaceutical firms in Thailand through the use of tools of sales promotion. This research also aims to access the mediating role of the utilitarian benefits of SP and the hedonic benefits of SP in analyzing the relationship between the tools of SP and customer loyalty. This study used a sample of different consumers of pharmaceutical firms of Thailand and the SEM technique and method are applied to identify the research questions. Furthermore, the mediating effect of the utilitarian benefits of SP and the hedonic benefits of SP was analyzed by using the MGA technique. Study results and findings suggest that the role of using SP tools significantly enhance the loyalty of customers, and results also revealed that the utilitarian benefits of SP also positively mediates the relationship between SP tools and customer loyalty. This study also found that the utilitarian benefits of SP have more significance in the relationship between SP and customer loyalty than the hedonic benefits of SP.

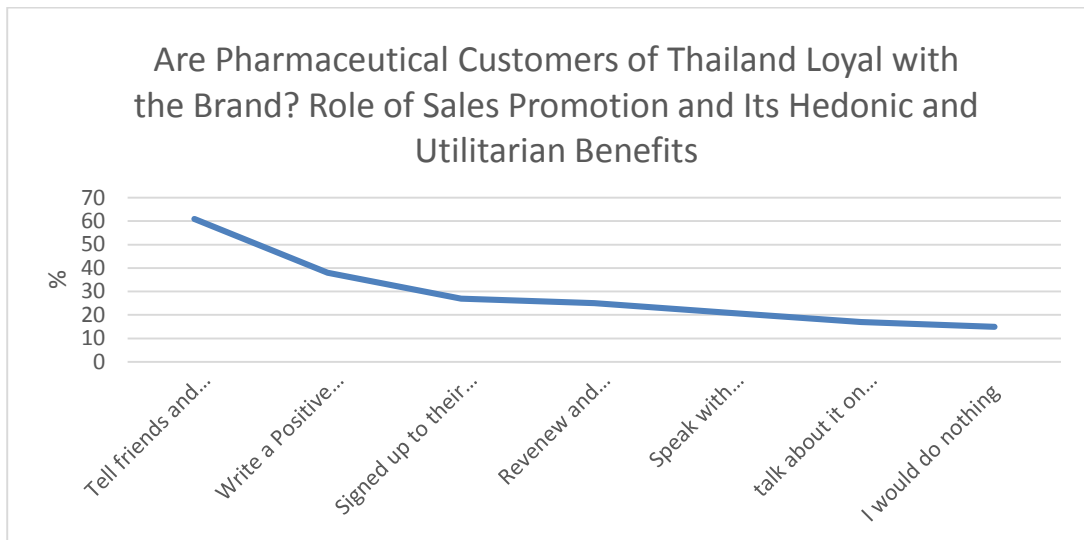
Keywords---sales promotion, utilitarian benefits, hedonic benefits, customer loyalty, drug product.

Introduction

In today, environment of competitive business, the most important and critical task is the ability of the firms to maintain and built the successful relationships for long term along with share in market (Hegner-Kakar, Richter, & Ringle, 2018). Any firm which maintains its status as oriented towards profit, it becomes very costly to lose its customers. Loyal customers show their high willingness for purchasing, which offer by firms and act as advocate of their firms in front of other consumers (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2018). Tools of sales promotion become a base of marketing practice. In modern practices of marketing, the tools of sales promotion start to flourishing for the reason that they get attention from consumers and then stimulate consumers towards positive decisions on purchasing. Consumers respond to offer of sales promotion to get advantages through the tools of sales promotion which impact the psychological evaluation of consumers. Customers evaluate the offer of sales promotion and then conclude its opinions about profitability. Evaluation practices of customers also influence by its feelings of intrinsic and emotional (Aydinli, Bertini, & Lambrecht, 2014). Hence, tools of sales promotion along with benefits which effects the loyalty of customers offering in two types. Some studies argued that category of products make customers loyal (Luong & Slegh, 2014). Following graph and table show percentage of customers which remain loyal to their firms. A study was conducted in which following figures were collected which give detail about the customers loyalty.

Table 1 Are Pharmaceutical Customers of Thailand Loyal with the Brand? Role of Sales Promotion and Its Hedonic and Utilitarian Benefits

Are Pharmaceutical Customers of Thailand Loyal with the Brand? Role of Sales Promotion and Its Hedonic and Utilitarian Benefits	
Tell friends and family about the experience	61
Write a Positive Review	38
Signed up to their loyalty scheme	27
Revenue and upgrade Products/services even it was not cheapest option	25
Speak with company more frequently e.g. providing customer feedback	21
talk about it on social media	17
I would do nothing	15



Graph 1 Are Pharmaceutical Customers of Thailand Loyal with the Brand? Role of Sales Promotion and Its Hedonic and Utilitarian Benefits

Products become close to their good experience, such benefits generally link with functional aspects and gave ability to satisfy the customers regarding purchasing motive of products can be term as benefits of utilitarian for sales promotion. Above the approaches of traditional, customers also have behavior in buying related to facets of multi-sensory and emotional which categorized as hedonic benefits. These benefits are associated with attributes of products and sensory (Sinha & Verma, 2020). Following objectives were formulate to carry out the study

1. To analyze the impacts of sales promotion on customer loyalty
2. To analyze the impacts of Sales Promotion with Mediating Role if Utilitarian Benefits of Sales Promotion on Customer Loyalty
3. To analyze the impacts of Sales Promotion with Mediating Role of Hedonic Benefits of Sales Promotion on Customer Loyalty

This study constitute the utilitarian and hedonic aspect in behavior of customers along with identify their benefits in sales promotion that automatically influence the loyalty of customers.(Sinha & Verma, 2020). Next section of the study include literature review of relevant studies. After that, section three include methodology which opted for this study. After that, analysis will be performed. At last, discussion and limitation of the study will be explained in this study.

Literature Review

Theory

This study based on the theory of stimulus - organisms – response (S-O-R). Sales promotions in this study, considered as stimulus while the customers loyalty can be term as response while the organism term define the benefits of utilitarian and hedonic. According to this theory, perception of customers either it is in the form if hedonic and utilitarian mediate the impacts of stimulus (sales promotion) on

response (customers loyalty) (Wu & Li, 2018; Kerdpitak, 2020). Therefore, main propositions is that the customer loyalty is begin with efficient and effective strategies of sales promotion which followed by delivery accurate to customers and finally gave the results of output that is customer loyalty (response). In the case of integrated marketing communications (IMC) which centered, in recent time, on customer that are essence of any firms, the disciplines of marketing communications integrate to inform and persuade the customers to give priority to their company along with its services and products. Furthermore, process of whole marketing can be seen in the view of customers which ensure the discipline of marketing communications and stimulus the benefits not only for forms but also for its customers (Agus, 2019; Begum, 2016; Priporas, Stylos, Vedanthachari, & Santiwatana, 2017; Kerdpitak, 2021). similarly, Oluwafemi and Adebisi (2018) said that firms coordinate and integrate carefully their channels of sale which delivers, compelling, consistent and clear message about products to customers. Firma maximize their promotion of sale which further enhance through utilitarian and hedonic benefits. As a whole and ultimately improve the effectiveness of customers loyalty (Csikósová, Antošová, & Čulková, 2014).

Sales Promotion and Customer Loyalty

In communication of marketing, the promotion of sales consider as exciting tool. This technique grasp as well as facilitate the attention of customers' towards purchasing the products with encouraging through various incentives. Customers loyalty can be divided in two kinds, the first one is hard core while the second d are brand switcher. Customers in hard core loyal category does not impacted by the changing of price and perform all repeated purchase on normal prices. Such customers remain less prone to discount or prices. Loyalty of customers highlighted the greatest level of commitment and also make purchasing again and again of sake products even in case of premium price (Dimiyati, 2018; Monferrer Tirado et al., 2019; Zhang, Zhao, & Gupta, 2018; Kerdpitak, 2022). While brand switcher in customer loyalty remain within one or sometimes in two brand for the satisfaction of needs (Chang & Yeh, 2017; Marchand, Paul, Hennig-Thurau, & Puchner, 2016). Sales promotion is an effective technique for brand switcher to attract the (Saeed, Nisar, Lodhi, Ahmad, & Arshad, 2013). According to theory, main propositions is that the customer loyalty is begin with efficient and effective strategies of sales promotion which followed by delivery accurate to customers and finally gave the results of output that is customer loyalty (response). Here is a gap to study the relation and impacts of sales promotion on loyalty of customers in pharmaceutical firms of Thailand.

H1: sales promotion have significant impact on customer loyalty

Sales Promotion with Mediating Role if Utilitarian Benefits of Sales Promotion on Customer Loyalty

Utilitarian benefits explained as those benefits which relate with functional ability and aspects to satisfy the motive of intention related to purchasing of products. The behavior of consumers depends on the ability of products in which it satisfy the rational requirements of customers. It rely on the functional ability of products which named as utilitarian benefits (Sinha & Verma, 2017). In

utilitarian benefits, price of products gain promotion of discount, which gave saving to customers or minimize the pain due to which customer purchase that products to remain economically benefit (Lee, Tang, Yip, & Sharma, 2018; Liu, Lee, & Hung, 2017; Tweneboah-Koduah & Farley, 2016). Consumer of for price conscious consider saving as important factor due to which they remain more oriented towards utilitarian benefits (Ivanova, 2012). Sinha and Verma (2020) elaborated that such benefits gave not only savings monetary but also informed about perceived convenience and quality. Hence, promotions of sales enhance with utilitarian benefits which help and gave promotion to customers for maximizing the utility of purchase. As a result, customers remain loyal to that brand (Ivanova, 2012). Following hypothesis can be made from above discussion;

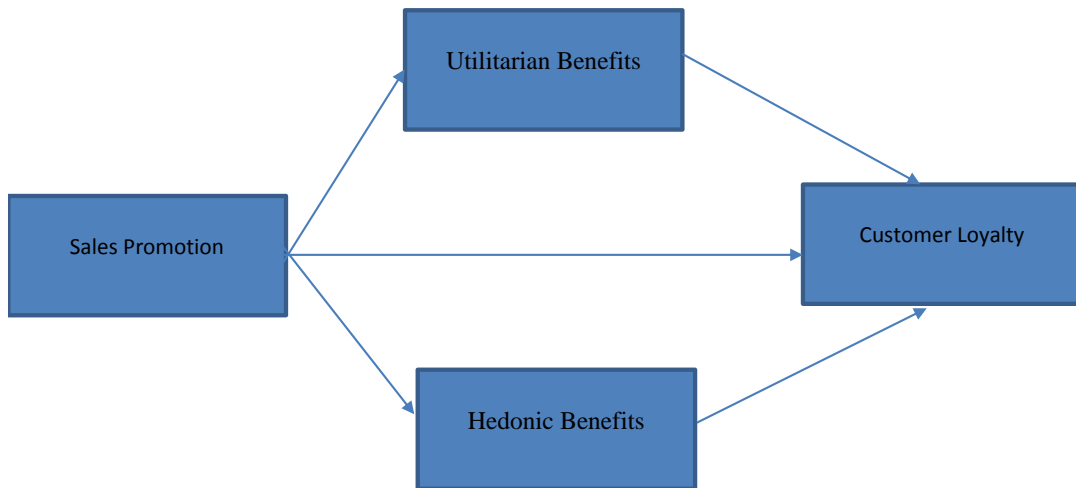
H2: Sales Promotion with Mediating Role if Utilitarian Benefits have significant impacts on Customer Loyalty

Sales Promotion with Mediating Role of Hedonic Benefits of Sales Promotion has significant impact on Customer Loyalty

Organization create benefits which customers repeat and maintain business of purchasing with organizations and gave results of customers' loyalty. Benefits can be created through proper implementation of marketing dimensions which gave mutual benefits for firms or customers. In addition, Van Vuuren, Roberts-Lombard, and Van Tonder (2012) explained that customers become loyal to firms when they become satisfied with promotion of brand consistently, due to which they become passionate about the firms (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2018). Hedonic benefits in promotion consider as intrinsic, aesthetic, experiential, affective and non-instrumental (Foroudi, Jin, Gupta, Melewar, & Foroudi, 2016; Skowronek, Dewan, Knowles, & Kiefer, 2018; Tseng, Cheng, Li, & Teng, 2017). They appreciate the promotion of firms regardless. They operationalized as separate constructs, promotion further enhance with self-esteem benefits of Hedonic which established loyalty among customers (Ivanova, 2012). According to this theory, perception of customers either it is in the form if hedonic and utilitarian mediate the impacts of stimulus (sales promotion) on response (customers loyalty) (Wu & Li, 2018). Thus; following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3: Sales Promotion with Mediating Role of Hedonic Benefits has significant impacts on Customer Loyalty.

Theoretical Model



Methodology

Data collection

In order to empirically test the research assumption and hypotheses, the survey is conducted to get responses on four constructs such as sale promotion, hedonic sale promotion, utilitarian sale promotion, and customers brand loyalty. For this, the researcher design questionnaire for field of survey that contain section on demographic of participants, sale promotions, and brand loyalty. All the items in survey are recorded on five point likert scale. The reliability of those items are also tested to ensure the validity of construct. The data has been collected from the customers through convenience sampling methodology. In order to assure the diversity of respondents in terms of their demographic factors, the study conduct survey from both make and female of different ages groups. In total, 500 questionnaires were initially distributed among customers but few refuse participation in survey and few quitted in middle. Therefore, the responses of 305 respondents made valid data to analyze the hypothesized framework

Measures

The construct employed in this study are developed from the review of extant literature and past studies on customers loyalty. The total construct included in the study are four such as: sale promotion, Utilitarian sale promotion, Hedonic sale promotion, and customers loyalty. The sale promotion is based on two sub-construct such as monetary and non-monetary sale promotion, which are based on total 9 survey items (two for each). The sale promotion construct is developed by emulating the scale of Akaichi, Nayga Jr, and Gil (2015) for monetary sale promotion, and Buil, De Chernatony, and Martinez (2013) for non-monetary sale promotion. Moreover, the construct of utilitarian and hedonic benefit of sales promotion are formulated with three and twelve items respectively, which is taken from the extant literature on hedonic sale promotion (Palazon & Delgado-

Ballester, 2013; Palazon & Delgado-Ballester, 2013). The utilitarian sale promotion constructs get responses on value of money and quality of product from customers, where the hedonic sale promotion constructs elicit responses on customer's expectation, experience and feeling. The scale of dependent variable such as customer loyalty has four items and is adapted from the study of Bhardwaj, Kumar, and Kim (2010), however the items are edited to fit into context of pharmaceutical sector of Thailand.

Empirical analysis

To analyze the responses of respondents on four constructs used in conceptual framework, the study adopted statistical tools. In order to estimate the frequency distribution of respondents in terms of gender, education and age; the descriptive analysis of data to examine the characteristics of constructs, and the reliability factor to ensure the validity and reliability of latent construct, SPSS is used. Besides, this the study also performed confirmatory factor analyses to check the adequacy of sample, validity of construct, and factor loading analysis of measures. In order to estimate the regression coefficient of latent construct and causal relation among variables, the structural equation model is run on AMOS. Moreover, the model fitness test is also employed in study to check the strength and validity of model.

Data Analysis

Demographics

Information regarding age, gender and educational status of the respondents was collected. The sample was constituted on a total of 326 people out of which 52.1 percent were male and 47.9 were female. The educational background of more than half of the sample was post-graduation and masters. And the age distribution of 59.2 percent of the sample was between 31 and 50. The sample represents customers who make purchases from pharmaceutical firms, the age and education variants show that the sample was educated and mature, therefore they navigated through the questionnaire with a considerable ease.

Descriptive Analysis

SPSS was used to construct the frequency distributions from the average values of the variables. The skewness values represent normality of the data. The mean values of all the constructs show that majority of the respondents were in agreement with statements presented in the questionnaire. As the maximum and minimum values of the construct items are in accordance with the Likert scale endpoints (1-5), therefore no outliers were found.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
					Std. Error

SalPro	326	1.00	5.00	3.4440	1.19535	-.825	.135
UBSP	326	1.00	5.00	3.5969	1.06611	-.680	.135
HBSP	326	1.00	5.00	3.5415	1.19299	-.618	.135
CustLoy	326	1.00	5.00	3.4521	1.21250	-.772	.135
Valid N (listwise)	326						

Factor Loading and Convergent Validity

The individual loading values of construct items are above the threshold of 0.7, thus they are acceptable. The CV is judged on the basis of CR and AVE values. CR is above the threshold of 0.7 and AVE is also above the threshold of 0.5. Thus convergent validity is present as represented by results of table 2.

Table 2: Factor Loading and Convergent Validity

	1	2	3	4	CR	AVE
SP1		.697			0.962	0.741
SP2		.771				
SP3		.832				
SP4		.858				
SP5		.822				
SP6		.826				
SP7		.823				
SP8		.846				
SP9		.836				
UB1				.801	0.921	0.778
UB2				.824		
UB3				.821		
HB1	.837				0.927	0.768
HB2	.863					
HB3	.876					
HB4	.891					
HB5	.886					
HB6	.886					
HB7	.845					
HB8	.831					
HB9	.821					
HB10	.855					
HB11	.817					
HB12	.847					
CL1			.822		0.935	0.781
CL2			.851			
CL3			.875			
CL4			.815			

Discriminant Validity

The criterion for discriminant validity is that the square of the AVE (Hassan, Hameed, Basheer, & Ali, 2020; Iqbal & Hameed, 2020) for each construct be

greater than the correlation among variables. As table 3 represents this criterion is being fulfilled thus DV is present.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	HB	SP	UB	CL
HB	0.878			
SP	0.510	0.861		
UB	0.368	0.610	0.892	
CL	0.421	0.537	0.581	0.882

Model fitness

Model fitness is decided upon the threshold criteria defined in table 4. As the results showcase CMIN is 2.551, CFI is 0.948, IFI is 0.951, GFI is 0.838 and RMSEA is 0.068. The criteria is being fulfilled therefore model is fit. The sample adequacy is proclaimed on the basis of a significant KMO value, the KMO factor is near 1 and acceptable.

Table 4: Confirmatory Factors Analysis and KMO

CFA Indicators	CMIN/DF	GFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	KMO
Threshold Value	≤ 3	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≤ 0.08	0.6 – 1.0
Observed Value	2.551	0.838	0.951	0.948	0.068	0.946

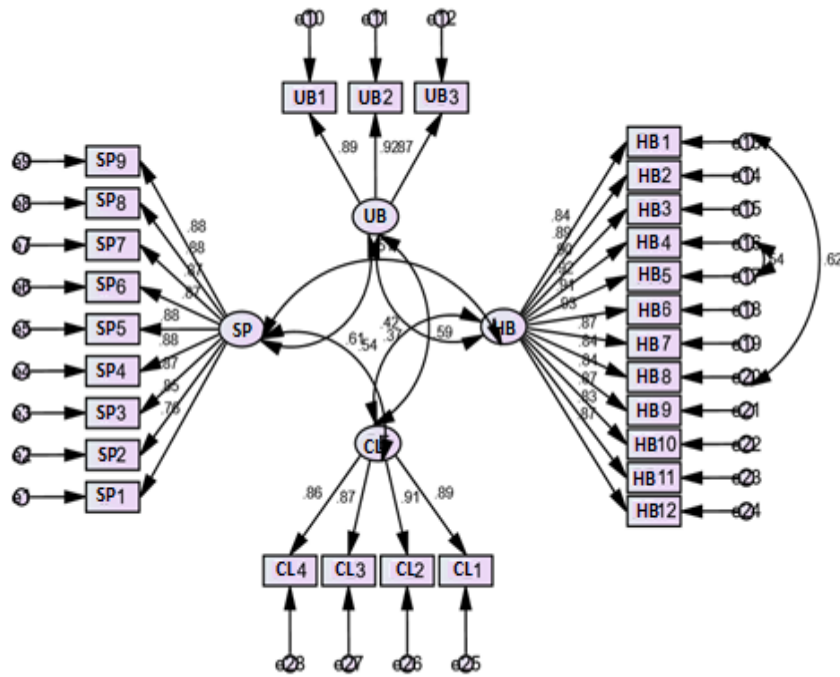


Figure 1: CFA

SEM

The structural model and the path coefficients are represented in figure 2. A unit change in SalPro produces a change of 22.2 percent in CustLoy, the relationship is significant and therefore hypothesis 1 is accepted. The mediation of UBSP has significant effects and produces a variation of 36.4 percent in CustLoy through SalPro. Therefore hypothesis 2 is also accepted. The mediation of HBSP produces a variation of 16.8 percent in CustLoy through SalPro. The relationship is significant and hypothesis 3 is also accepted.

Table 5: Structural Equation Modeling

Hypothesis	B-Value	SE	P-Value	Decision
SalPro→CustLoy	.222	.061	.000	Accepted
SalPro→UBSP→CustLoy	.364	.050	.000	Accepted
SalPro→HBSP→CustLoy	.168	.052	.000	Accepted

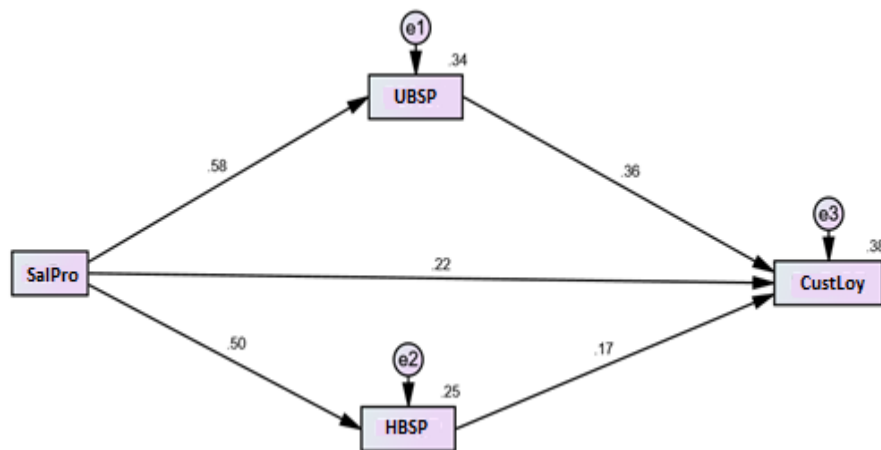


Figure 2: SEM

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Modern businesses and firm's practices significantly rely on using tools and techniques of sales promotion (SP) to enhance the loyalty of their customers. Tools of sales promotion are favorably enhancing the loyalty of customers because of effective strategies of SP and they also catch the attention of customers (ur Rehman, Yusoff, Zabri, & Ismail, 2017). Tools of SP used by today's businesses motivate customers towards significant purchase decisions which positively enhance the loyalty of customers. The findings of the study also indicate that the impact of tools of sales promotion has been significant in improving the loyalty of customers with brands and products. The tool of sales promotion used by different organizations can create a reason for customers to buy products with a positive degree of loyalty. Some results and findings of the study also suggest that the mediating variable of utilitarian benefits of SP plays a positive role in enhancing the relationship between SP and customer loyalty. Research by Wang (2017) illustrates that utilitarian benefits are those benefits that are mainly related to the functional approach of buying the brands and it also refers to the ability to ensure the initial motive of buying. Therefore, the hypotheses related to the mediating role of utilitarian benefits of SP has been accepted and supported to results. The results of this research also indicate that the mediating variable of the hedonic benefits of SP also positively mediates the relationship between SP and customer loyalty.

Conclusion

Beyond the traditional approaches of sales and Promotions of the products, the modern approach of the utilitarian benefits and hedonics are the key points to attract the customers in the industry and creating an approach of competence in the market to make a high rate of the product. This study concludes that it is

rather modern yet successful in the businesses and the promotion tool to be adopted by the customers and implemented by the industries or the organization.

Implications and Limitations

This study has a positive impact and it must be utilized by the customers and the companies to build a strong chain or link between the customers and the industries. This approach must be adopted by the pharmaceutical sector of Thailand. Despite their applications, several limitations of this research paper must be admitted and accepted. First, experimental evaluations of this research are mainly based on some specific products of the pharmaceutical sector of Thailand, thus, future analysts are expected to cover and add other products and brands of pharmaceutical firms of Thailand. Second, the evaluations and results of this study mainly based on a small sample of fast-moving customers from Thailand; hence, future studies should address this gap to go with large samples.

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