

**ASSESSING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
IMPROVEMENT IN THE SPORT
PHYSIOTHERAPY INDUSTRY IN PENANG,
MALAYSIA**

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ASSESSING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IMPROVEMENT IN THE
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ABSTRACT

The dissertation aims to look at the elements that influence client loyalty to sports physiotherapy service providers throughout Penang, Malaysia. A mixed research strategy, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, was used. The Expectancy Value Model (EVM) led to the study's aims, which attempted to discover the factors of customer loyalty among athletes needing sports injury rehabilitation treatments. The study design included a detailed review of peer-reviewed literature to identify evidence-based determinants influencing customer satisfaction. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized to get data from 101 athletes on characteristics like familiarity with the service provider (FAM), trust (TRST), satisfaction (SAT), as well as attitudinal loyalty (AL), all of which contribute to customer loyalty (CL). The acquired data was subjected to evaluations of central tendency, correlational analysis, and hypothesis testing. According to the findings, trust, contentment, and attitudinal loyalty all positively and substantially influenced consumer loyalty. However, familiarity did not. Trust appeared as a critical component, stressing its importance in establishing and maintaining consumer loyalty. Satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty were critical, emphasizing the importance of individualized and high-quality services in fostering loyalty. The research summary showed the need to take a comprehensive strategy to encourage customer loyalty by concentrating on trustworthiness, athlete happiness, and delivering great emotional experiences. The study's impact size, measured by an R-squared value of 0.419, revealed that the combined influence of the factors made up 41.9% of the variance within customer loyalty. This investigation adds to the sports physiotherapy knowledge by presenting a novel model for analyzing customer loyalty in Penang, Malaysia, also to recommending possibilities for future studies and consequences for industry stakeholders.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, healthcare marketing, customer service, brand loyalty

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

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28 November 2023

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the Doctor of Business Administration degree is my own work and all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AeU	Asia e University
AL	Attitudinal Loyalty
CL	Customer Loyalty
CMB	Common Method Bias
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EVM	Expectancy Value Model
FAM	Familiarity
HRM	Human Resource Management
IFSPT	The International Federation of Sports Physical Therapy
PCCC	Patient Centered Care Coordination
SAT	Satisfaction
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TRST	Trust
VIF	Variance Inflation Factors

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Malaysia is a higher middle-income nation still struggling with double disease burdens associated with infectious and non-communicable diseases (Lee et al., 2022). A dual public-private healthcare system supports it. It is noted that there is a significant rise in the cases of cardiovascular diseases and cancer, which require more advanced health care services. Nevertheless, most chronic conditions requiring patient-centered and evidence-based care are managed by the public sector, which is adequately subsidized, lack of staff and overworked. Besides that, the private sector is noted to be well equipped and staffed. Still, it is associated with considerable costs and is only affordable to those in the higher economic groups. This circumstance is a significant representation of the physiotherapy sector in the nations, which is primarily affordable for the higher income economic groups as it requires adequate consultations with competent healthcare providers, often available in the private sector.

Physiotherapy clinics in Malaysia have experienced significant growth in recent years. The better demand now for physiotherapy services has led to the establishment of new clinics across the country (Hai, Ong, & Heaw, 2023) and Penang is no exception here. These clinics provide various physiotherapy services such as assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of various musculoskeletal, neurological, and respiratory conditions. Among the factors contributing to the growth of physiotherapy clinics in Malaysia is the increasing belief of the benefits of physiotherapy for the management of various health conditions. People are becoming more health-conscious and participating in sports, and they are more inclined to seek

non-invasive and drug-free treatments to manage their health conditions. Physiotherapy, with its focus on restoring physical function and mobility, provides an effective alternative to medication or surgery.

Malaysian Culture and language also play a major role in the health sector. Lee et al. (2022) note that Malaysia is a multicultural nation with three major ethnic groups (50 percent Malays, 20 percent of Chinese, 10 percent of Indians, and 10 percent others). Each of these communities speaks its language, with Malay serving as the national tongue. People researching in Malaysia did also identify five cultural component that are crucial mediators in the work of evidence-based health care: paternalism within healthcare-professional-patient relationship; language issues in information exchange and negotiation; religious beliefs about health inpatient values; a lot of family dealings in health deciding factor; and complementary medicine as an option for treatment (Lee et al., 2022). Although not exhaustive, these themes may help physiotherapists engage patients based on the cultural setting of the practice. The study will therefore try to comprehend how physiotherapists survive in this environment and the various measures they have put in place to ensure that customers satisfaction despite the severe conditions.

The study will also show the significance of evidence-based practices in contemporary sports physiotherapy among practitioners in Penang. This evidence-based discipline has grown in popularity in Penang in recent years for various reasons, including a rising proportion of sedentary office employees engaging in recreational activities. According to the number of people walking into clinics in Penang, this appears to be on the rise. These individuals present with various presenting ailments that necessitate various therapeutic techniques based on the injury. Some heal in a few

days, but many require weekly or bi-weekly follow-up sessions and may take up to a few months to heal conservatively in sports injuries. Clients that require follow-up treatment sessions for various reasons form the primary basis for this research, which is to understand why clients choose what they choose and then improve on the positives and negatives of the outcomes produced. The study will also highlight the relationship between applying evidence-based practices and the perceived quality of physiotherapy services amongst athletes in Penang.

Given the growing importance of physiotherapy in Penang, the research seeks to determine factors that improve customer satisfaction to elevate sustainability and relevance to sport physiotherapy clinics in Penang. Finding out these factors forms a vital starting point toward ensuring this industry continues to grow according to the local community's needs. In this regard, the researcher aims to comprehend why athletes maybe are more willing to retain a given physiotherapy service provider or why they might drop them and look for alternatives.

Finally, the study aims to provide solutions to help physiotherapists create a more effective strategy that can help improve customer satisfaction. It will outline approaches to enhance the quality of service, pricing of the services, ethical issues, client satisfaction, and the rehabilitation's overall outcomes. Thus, through such growth, the attitude and demand for physiotherapy services in the Penang region have been positive.

1.1 Background of the Study

Over the last few decades, the demand for patient-centered care has increased considerably in developed and emerging nations such as Malaysia (see e.g., McCarron et al., 2019). It is described as a collaboration between the clinicians, patients, also

respective families to guarantee that the decisions made during the care process respect the patients' needs as well as priorities and also the patient possess the required knowledge and assistance to make key decisions and take part in their care (Otero et al., 2015). In other words, it is systematic activities established to satisfy patients' needs for their wellness and good health. According to Otero et al. (2015), it also means making the resources available, which allows them to make this decision and may include information, therapies, and medical technologies. Thus, the major agenda of this method is to elevate patient satisfaction, better quality and health outcomes, equality, and reduced costs. However, in developing nations, such practices are yet to be fully realized and are affected by specific situations ranging from political stability to literacy (Otero et al., 2015). Knowing that developing nations face numerous challenges in ensuring that everyone has access to health care, considering the disparities in access to health care including the standard of services, and taking into account the challenges in developing patient-centered programs, their families, and the coordination and integration with the health care providers, models like Patient Centered Care Coordination (PCCC), which concentrate on the efficient use of resources, the promotion of patient right, and high quality healthcare, could help solve, a part, some of these issues (Otero et al., 2015). The demand for patients in nations such as Malaysia is changing, and people no longer accept substandard care, affecting loyalty to a care provider.

A key factor related to quality of health care is patient satisfaction with the services provided. According to Karaca and Durna (2019), patient satisfaction is the benchmark to which they perceive that healthcare providers have met their needs and expectations. Patients require assurance that their health outcomes align with their preferences and values. To rate their level of satisfaction, patients often use various

constructs such as finances (i.e., capability to pay for the services), accessibility and convenience, the way to take care, quality of care, physical environment, and outcome of care. Moreover, according to Otero et al. (2015), this aspect is influenced by mediating variables such as gender, age, reported health status, beliefs, ethnicity, and engagement with respective system.

Another study by Boisvert et al. (2017) notes that over the last few decades, the healthcare delivery models have shifted away from the traditional practitioner-centered framework, in which all the decisions were made unilaterally. Currently, practices are moving towards a more patient-centered approach, emphasizing shared decision-making and patient engagement (see e.g., Catalyst, 2017). Other studies have also highlighted elements such as patient preferences, involvement of relatives and acquaintances, emotional support, continuation and transitioning, personal comfort, empathy, and individualised therapy could also affect customer satisfaction. Comprehension of these key elements has been key in developing patient-centered approaches to care. In addition, according to Boisvert et al. (2017), patients who are favourable towards the standard of care are likelier to look for medical assistance in hospital, follow a treatment regimen, maintain a continuing rapport with the hospital, introduce the clinic to circle of friends, make informed decisions about the healthcare professionals, and encourage a consistent quality improvement performance in the hospital.

The above elements are critical to the general healthcare system and are now important in all the sub-branches of healthcare, including physiotherapy (Shakya & Shakya 2019). Globally, there has been a considerable increase in musculoskeletal health problems, which have imposed negative social and economic impacts on the affected populations (Odumodu et al., 2020). The rise in the demand for physiotherapy

services from healthcare providers is concomitant with the increasing aging population and the increased prevalence of chronic diseases such as cancer (Odumodu et al., 2020). Physiotherapists utilize their in-depth knowledge in pathophysiology and expertise in exercise and movement to help treat individuals suffering from acute and chronic diseases and those affected by injuries or disabilities (Odumodu et al., 2020). According to The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (2018), a physiotherapist's role is to assist individuals going through injuries, illnesses, or disabilities with movement therapy, manual treatment, education, and advising. They provide health services to people of wide age group and help them improve pain and reduce risk of diseases. Moreover, they also help encourage development and recovery, eventually allowing people to return to their everyday lives and remain independent as long as possible. The knowledge and skills employed in physiotherapy are used to treat sicknesses and conditions associated with various parts and systems within the human body, such as brain conditions, neuromusculoskeletal, cardiovascular, and respiratory.

Physiotherapy aims to identify the problem impacting the human body, be it a nerve, muscle, joint, or structural issue. The next step is to solve the problem with a long-term objective, which will require treatment, follow-up therapy sessions, and education to ensure that the patient is well-informed about their recovery journey and future issues. Most therapy sessions are performed manually and physically, without using simple modalities and technology. This method is part of a larger scheme encompassing the emotional client's overall well-being. Furthermore, different physiotherapy specializations, such as musculoskeletal, cardiorespiratory, pediatric, and sports injuries, have contributed to these practitioners' marketability. Physiotherapy's role in rehabilitating medical conditions back to health has gained growing attention of the researcher particularly in developed nations. However, in

Malaysia, physiotherapy could not attract to much attention of the researchers (Yahui, & Swaminathan, 2017).

Despite a significant number of studies highlighting the importance of physiotherapy in the healthcare system and treating chronic diseases and pain, literature on the application of these practices in sports rehabilitation is limited in the context of Malaysia (see e.g., Yahui, & Swaminathan, 2017). According to Dhillon et al. (2017), sports have continuously been growing in popularity over the years, ensuring exponential growth in the sports industry. There has been a significant increase in competitiveness and lucrativeness of sports, with many people aiming to achieve elite professionalism. However, the considerable growth observed in the sector has also increased sports' physical and emotional burden. Individuals are required to train harder and follow certain practice regiments, which exposes them to a higher risk of injury. Dhillon et al. (2017) also highlight that because of the competitive nature of sports, most injured athletes are often under pressure to get back into competitions as soon as possible. Athletes are also prone to losing their places in each team because of the availability of skilled athletes, which naturally burdens them to return as quickly as possible (Dhillon et al., 2017). As a result, sports injury rehabilitation has become even more complex, requiring professionals in the field to develop highly structured and sports-specific approaches that tackle the physical and psychological demands of a sports injury.

Sports injuries often occur during organized sports, training, competitions, or even planned fitness activities. According to Quartey et al. (2019), athletes involved in sports such as football or soccer, cricket, basketball, skiing, volleyball, and tennis are the most prone to injuries. The author also highlights that sports injuries may result from repetitive stress or trauma associated with a given sports activity and can affect

soft tissues such as ligaments, muscles, tendons, bones, and other organs. Quartey et al. (2019) classify sports injuries as sprains, strains, fractures, concussions, and spinal cord, head, and internal organ injuries. When such injuries occur, athletes not only undergo physical harm but may also affect mentally, resulting in a major growth in the psychosocial factors in injury rehabilitation. Over the years, career-ending injuries have been reported, which has caused many athletes to hold back or fail to give 100% effort to be cautious from causing a re-injury (Quartey et al., 2019). Thus, forcing the recovery process to tackle not only the physical injury but also the mental aspect to help the sportsperson to regain the previous levels of physical performance.

The dealings of sports injuries, therefore, includes several specialists and processes. According to Odole et al. (2021), a group of health experts, including coach, sports doctorss, sports trainer, sports psychologist, sports nutritionist, and sports team manager, are involved in the process. Sports physiotherapists have proven advanced abilities in encouraging safe involvement in physical activity, offering guidance, and to adapt rehabilitating and training therapy to reduce risk of injuries, encourage proper function, and improve sports performance. These professionals employ methods such as Cryotherapy, exercise treatment, massages, joint mobilizations, manipulations, ultrasound therapies, electrical stimulation, and exercise educations.

Given the above requirements, there exist specific expectations for physiotherapy. As noted, the main aim of the process is to perform treatment and improve an athlete post-injury or even after an operation to prevent injury recurrence and ensure that they return to the sports at the same level of performance as before in the shortest time possible. In this regard, Quartey et al. (2019) argue that most athletes expect their therapists to provide them with the required informational support and

assist them in shaping the goals of injury rehabilitation. Additionally, most sportspersons have shown high expectations that their physiotherapists can realize and fulfill their motivational needs and comprehension (Quartey et al., 2019). These expectations are connected to the ability of the athletes to return to sports, as those with positive expectations have higher chances of returning than those with negative. The injured sportspersons, therefore, expect directiveness, genuineness, and openness in antedating information and direction from the physiotherapist and establishing rehabilitation goals. They also expect the recovery process to be successful and ensure they return to the field.

In most developed countries, sports rehabilitation services are well developed. According to Odole et al. (2021), physiotherapists are often the first and most frequent athletes' contact within the health network. Most athletes are also fully aware of physiotherapy; in most cases, every team is provided with its physiotherapy services. Thus, in such countries, athletes have the knowledge and positive perceptions of physiotherapy, which impacts their overall attitudes towards these services and their willingness to engage with specialists to help them rehabilitate after an injury. However, a growing literature shows that physiotherapists often fail to meet the excitations of athletes, and many are left dissatisfied with the rehabilitation process. Nevertheless, in most developing nations such as Malaysia, many clubs lack physiotherapy services attached to them and a significant lack of knowledge about these services by athletes, which affects their cooperation with a specialist in the area. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate Malaysian athletes' ability and perception regarding physio in managing sports injury.

Another study by Thiyagarajan (2022) notes that most athletes favor quick, short recovery therapies since they are anxious to return to play despite their ailment.

There is a great deal of stress from coach to parent throughout the injury treatment phase, which causes psychological suffering for the athlete. Because of this pressure, an athlete must return to sports as soon as possible. From the athletes' point of view, the primary priority is to return to sport without adequate awareness of their ailment (Thiyagarajan, 2022). It is estimated that approximately 82% of athletes do not comprehend the rehabilitation procedure, and therapists are also unable to give appropriate patient education tactics due to time restrictions (Thiyagarajan, 2022). A few studies show that a lack of multidisciplinary sports medicine or scientific approaches is a major factor in inappropriate athlete injury management (Thiyagarajan, 2022). Load monitoring is critical in the rehabilitation process, and a misunderstanding of corresponding professionals concerning components of strength and conditioning and game-specific coaching leads to a bad rehabilitation phase. There is a lack of awareness about sports medicine and science, which needs to be addressed. Thus, there is a need for a solution to improve the services offered. According to Thiyagarajan (2022), best results can be obtained through evidence-based practices, which allow athletes to access initial consultation sessions that provide sufficient patient education strategies, preparation time, implementation of periodization plans, goal-based treatment strategies, working on effective pain management practices, and proper exercise therapy-based methods.

This evidence-based discipline has grown in popularity in Malaysia, especially in Penang, for various reasons, including an increase in sedentary office workers participating in sports for recreation. Sports have gained significant importance in Malaysia. According to Visit Southeast Asia (2021), the sports activities noted in the country include both Western and traditional games. However, football with badminton have become the most famous sport in the nation. The other common games

include cycling, tennis, hiking, and water sport, such as kayaking, yachting, swimming, diving, and water polo.

On the other hand, the traditional games include gasing silat, Taekwondo, and sepak takraw. Moreover, several Malaysian athletes have achieved excellence on the international stage (Visit South East Asia, 2021). For instance, the nation's top badminton player Lee Chong Wei has been ranked the best in the world, and he was a winner of at least four gold medals at the last two Commonwealth Games in 2006 and 2010. However, he was forced to retire because of an injury. There have also been athletes such as Nicol Ann David. She has represented the nation internationally in squash games and has held the title since 2006, winning several Commonwealth Games (Visit SouthEast Asia, 2021). There are also many local teams in most of these sports, including football. For instance, Penang Football Club, Malaysian professional football club situated within Georgetown, Penang, participates in Malaysia Super League. Thus, there is no doubt that sport in Malaysia have gained significant growth at the international and local levels, showing a considerable demand for physiotherapy services.

Since the physiotherapy discipline is a fast-growing profession (see e.g., Shakya & Shakya 2019) and the number of people participation in supports, it is plausible to investigate the determinants of customer satisfaction from sport physiotherapy in Malaysia. Understanding these determinants is crucial for improving the quality of sport physiotherapy services and enhancing the overall customer experience. This study will identify the key factors that affect customer satisfaction. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for healthcare providers and policymakers in Malaysia therefore contributing to betterment of workable blueprint for improving customer satisfaction in the sport physiotherapy sector.

1.2 Problem Statement

The sport physiotherapy industry in Malaysia has experienced tremendous rise in the amount of clinics, driven by the growing number of people participating in sports. Actually, not much is known regarding the determinants of customer satisfaction in this industry. To make sure the qualities of service provided and improve the over-all customer experiences, it is important to comprehend the issues that influences customer satisfaction in sport physiotherapy. However, not so much is known regarding the determinants of customer satisfaction in this industry. Previous research has extensively investigated the determinants of patient satisfaction, focusing on areas such as the caring processes (including wait duration, amount of session, continuation of cares, and patient's involvements in the decision-making), treatment result, organisation (including accessible and finance), interpersonal relations (including clinician attitude and humane), patient expectation, and communications (see e.g., Ampiah, Ahenkorah, & Karikari, 2019; Hills & Kitchen, 2007; Layzell, 2001; May, 2001; Sheppard, Anaf, & Gordon, 2010). However, there is still a gap in understanding how these various determinants interact to influence overall patient satisfaction, as well as how other factors, such as quality of services, pricing, demand and supply of services, and ethical considerations, may also impact patient satisfaction with healthcare delivery. Therefore, there is a need for further research to investigate these additional determinants and provide a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of the complex nature of patient satisfaction with healthcare delivery. Therefore, the reason for this doctoral proposal is to investigate the deciding factors of customer satisfaction from sport physiotherapy in Malaysia, with a focus on the standard of care, pricing, demand and supply of services, and ethical considerations. By examining these factors, this study aims to identify the key determinants of