

The Effect of Service Marketing Mix (7Ps) on Word of Mouth of Fashion Designers in Aizawl

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Abstract— This study investigates the significant influence of the service marketing mix on word-of-mouth marketing within the context of fashion designers in Aizawl. Recognizing the rapidly evolving nature of the fashion industry and the local reliance on WOM in Aizawl, the research specifically examines the effect of the 7Ps on WOM. Data were collected from 384 customers of three prominent fashion designers in Aizawl using a questionnaire with a Likert scale, and analyzed via multiple linear regression. The findings indicate that Product, Price, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process all have a positive and significant effect on WOM. However, contrary to expectations, Place was found not to have a significant effect on WOM in this particular context. These results highlight the critical importance of optimizing these six marketing mix elements to drive positive consumer discourse and referrals, while suggesting that the role of physical location in generating WOM may vary by context. This study contributes valuable insights for service providers in Aizawl and similar markets on effective marketing strategies to foster WOM

IndexTerms—WOM, Fashion, Marketing, Service.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND:

Fashion marketing is increasingly recognized as a crucial area, necessitating exploration of how marketing and fashion merge into an academic research theme (Hines & Bruce, 2007). Consequently, fashion designers can gain insights for enhanced competitiveness by engaging more closely with customers and other relevant parties (Benedetto, 2013). The fashion industry stands as a significant global economic force, contributing \$1.3 trillion in global trade and employing over 300 million people (Hamdan et al., 2021). Indeed, fashion marketing operates at all levels of the fashion system and is very important (Purwar, 2019). Given the fashion industry's fast-changing trends, manufacturers and retailers must meet strict deadlines, highlighting the importance of marketing and promotions (Chavan, 2018). For this reason, digital marketing, including email, websites, social networks, and mobile communications, is essential for connecting buyers and sellers in this dynamic industry (Purwar, 2019). The main goals of marketing are to spread awareness, impart information, and encourage interaction with the brand, ultimately boosting sales (Purwar, 2019).

So for Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, recorded a population of 400,309 in the 2011 census. With a predominantly Christian population of over 87.16%, church attendance is a regular Sunday activity. Women in Aizawl commonly wear "puan" with formal tops, often created by local fashion designers. Moreover, Northeast India is known for its strong fashion sense, with Aizawl distinguished by its unique style influenced by its church-going culture (Renthlei, 2019). While flea markets offer a variety of fashion items, they lack the personalized service of designers. Considering the rapidly evolving nature of the fashion industry, designers require effective marketing strategies to maintain competitiveness and boost sales. (Chavan, 2018) Furthermore, due to Aizawl's tendency to form homophilic groups, residents often share their opinions on products or services with close contacts, affecting perceived value through word-of-mouth (Doyle, 2007). Consumers depend on WOM to mitigate perceived risk and uncertainty in service purchase decisions. Murray's research indicates that service purchasers rely more on personal information sources compared to goods purchasers, highlighting the significant influence of these sources (Murray, 1991). Therefore, the researchers posit that word-of-mouth marketing offers a solution to the marketing challenges faced by designers. This study proposes a significant effect of the service marketing mix—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process—as developed by Philip Kotler, on word-of-mouth marketing (Abdullah et al., 2023). It further examines the viability of word-of-mouth as a marketing strategy for fashion designers.

Literature review and hypotheses development

2. SERVICES MARKETING MIX

The concept of the marketing mix was coined by Neil Borden in 1953 and then formalised in his article 'The concept of the Marketing mix' (Borden, 1964). McCarthy (1960) then summed up 12 elements of Borden's marketing mix into '4Ps' - product, price, place, and promotion. Around the same time, alternative marketing mix models were proposed. However, McCarthy's 4Ps model has become dominant, especially in goods marketing (McCarthy, 1960). The traditional marketing mix was deemed inadequate for service industries because it was initially designed for manufacturing. Service sector marketers realized that the marketing mix did not meet their specific needs, as services possess unique characteristics with marketing implications. For instance, standardization issues can hinder quality maintenance, and services cannot be inventoried, patented, or transferred (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2014). Given these fundamental differences between services and physical products, marketing models and concepts have evolved to better suit the service sector. Consequently, the marketing mix has expanded beyond the 4Ps to include three additional elements—people, physical evidence, and process—to address the unique challenges presented by the characteristics of services (Goi, 2009; Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2014). Numerous marketing research studies support the relevance of each of the '7Ps' in the services marketing mix.

2.2.1 PRODUCT

A product encompasses anything offered to the market for exchange or consumption. Goods marketing integrates tangible elements with intangible aspects like style, after-sales service, and credit. In contrast, services possess minimal tangible components (Yuniarso et al., 2021). A service comprises a bundle of features and benefits tailored to a specific target market (Saha, 2020). Consequently, developing a service product requires a customer-centric approach to the benefits package. Aligning these benefits with customer expectations directly influences their satisfaction and subsequent word-of-mouth advocacy, as positive experiences encourage sharing views with others (Yapanto et al., 2021). Hence, in the same direction our first hypothesis states that:

H1. Product has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

2.2.2. PRICE

Price can be considered an attribute that must be sacrificed to obtain certain products or services. In the banking industry, price includes fees, bank charges, and interest rates (Rofiq & Suyono, 2019). Unfair or uncompetitive pricing can trigger immediate customer switching in banking and other financial services, indicating that price perceptions directly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty (Varki & Colgate, 2001).

Pricing is a crucial variable in the marketing mix. Service pricing should provide value and indicate quality to customers (Putra & Mega, 2023). Customers view price as a key part of the costs for obtaining desired benefits (Putra & Mega, 2023). They assess not only the monetary cost but also the time and effort involved. With numerous alternatives available, customers can easily switch to service providers offering better goods/services at lower prices (Burnham et al., 2003). As customers become more price-sensitive and less loyal, customer attrition is a pressing concern. Therefore, service marketers must set prices that target customers are willing and able to pay, while also conveying the message that the product or service offers greater value (Luo & Paulino, 2023). Research indicates that pricing is a key driver for customer attraction, satisfaction, retention, and loyalty. (Rofiq & Suyono, 2019; Satti et al., 2020) Thus, effective pricing strategies can lead to positive word-of-mouth marketing, as satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the service to others. Therefore, it is expected that:

H2. Price has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

2.2.3. PLACE

Research indicates that services differ from products due to characteristics like intangibility, inseparability, perishability, and interactivity (Indriana et al., 2021). Consequently, conventional distribution channels used in product marketing are unsuitable for services marketing, affecting the potential for positive word-of-mouth referrals often generated through convenient access and availability (Renaghan, 1981). Services cannot be separated from their sale, requiring simultaneous creation and delivery (Mill,

1987). The field of logistics, encompassing strategic decisions like site selection for establishments such as bank branches, educational institutions, and other service business has been underexplored as a critical area of consideration for ensuring the effective distribution of services; convenient and accessible service locations can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and, consequently, word-of-mouth marketing.(Bellintani et al., 2019; Miliotis et al., 2002).

H3. Place has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

2.2.4. PROMOTION

Promotion encompasses the various communication methods marketers employ in the marketplace, including advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotions(Doyle, 2007). However, certain service industries may find it challenging to effectively utilize conventional promotion tools(Yapa et al., 2020). For instance, smaller banks may struggle to allocate substantial promotional budgets due to limited operational scale. It is suggested that service businesses should consider alternative ways to promote their services, like public relations and publicity(Yi, 2017).Consequently, promotional activities like community relations, event management, media engagement, and corporate identity programs become relevant and should be implemented creatively and effectively. These strategies enhance customer engagement and foster positive perceptions, driving favorable word-of-mouth referrals (Harahap et al., 2023). Therefore, it is expected that promotional activities have a positive and significant effect on word of mouth (Hochreiter & Waldhauser, 2014).

H4. Promotion has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

2.2.5. PEOPLE

According to (Judd et al., 1987), another 'P,' People, was introduced, with the recommendation that people power be formalized, institutionalized, and managed as a distinct component of the marketing mix, akin to the other 4Ps. Judd posited that an organization's employees represent the organization to its customers. Should these employees lack adequate training in face-to-face customer interaction, the entire marketing endeavor may prove ineffective. (Berry et al., 1988) suggested that a service firm is only as effective as its personnel. Given that service constitutes a performance, it is often challenging to distinguish the performance from the individuals delivering it. The manner in which service is provided by employees can serve as a significant source of differentiation and competitive advantage(Kvasić et al., 2021). Consequently, the 'People' element constitutes a pivotal component of the 7Ps of services marketing mix. The marketing mix is thus expanded to include people, thereby acknowledging their central role in service delivery and customer interaction(Hosseini et al., 2016). The human element in service encounters directly shapes customer perceptions and loyalty (Xia, 2023). Positive interactions and personalized attention from employees can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and drive positive word-of-mouth referrals (Xia, 2023)(Chen, 2024).

H5. People have a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

2.6. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Given the intangible nature of services, customers often struggle to evaluate their quality directly(Soleimani & Einolahzadeh, 2018). Consequently, the service environment serves as a crucial indicator of quality(Atef & Al-Balushi, 2024). Service environments, also known as servicescapes or physical evidence, encompass the physical surroundings' style and appearance, along with other experiential elements encountered by customers at service delivery locations(Agnihotri & Chaturvedi, 2018). Service firms must carefully manage physical evidence due to its profound influence on customer impressions (Zahran et al., 2022). Tangible cues, such as the appearance of buildings, landscaping, interior furnishings, equipment, staff uniforms, signage, and communication materials, provide evidence of a firm's service quality (Zahran et al., 2022). The design and layout of the service environment, including atmosphere and essential evidence, significantly impact customer perceptions (Hultén, 2011; Zahran et al., 2022). Strategic management of physical evidence enables service providers to shape customer perceptions and encourage positive word-of-mouth.

H6. Physical evidence has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

2.2.7. PROCESS

Processes constitute the structural framework of services, outlining the methodologies and sequences that deliver the value proposition promised to customers (Williams & Buttle, 2011). In service contexts characterized by high customer interaction, clients become integral to the operational process, shaping their overall experience. Inefficiently designed processes can frustrate customers, leading to slow, cumbersome, and substandard service delivery (Zeng et al., 2023). Conversely, well-designed processes ensure service availability, consistent quality, and enhanced convenience for customers. Given the non-inventory nature of services, establishing a robust process management system is crucial for effectively balancing service demand with supply during peak periods (Pérez et al., 2021). Effective processes are essential for service availability, consistent quality, and customer convenience, directly impacting satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth (Aviyanti et al., 2022). By optimizing these processes, organizations can ensure customer satisfaction and promote positive referrals (Berry et al., 2006). Service providers often use sophisticated service designs to create memorable customer experiences and establish emotional connections that promote loyalty (Terres et al., 2020). Service quality perceptions are influenced by the tangible elements that customers encounter, and physical evidence plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions (Agnihotri & Chaturvedi, 2018).

H7. Process has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth

3. MEASURES:

A total of 384 respondents were randomly selected and from the customers 3 famous designers in Aizawl.

Primary data was collected from them through questionnaire and For each of the 7 P's a question based on (Sreenivas et al., 2013) suggestions was used and measured in Likerts scale with a range of strongly disagree – strongly agree. For word of mouth a question was asked using single item (i.e yes or no).

Multiple linear regression is used to analyse the data collected, Altogether three assumptions are tested for hypotheses 1 to 7 (Osborne and Waters, 2002). It was found that normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows significance value is >0.05 which indicates that the variable is normally distributed. Further a Q-Q scatterplot is plotted to analyse the existence of a linear relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables. Reliability tests of each variable using Cronbach's Alpha also shows that scores of each variable is > 0.700 . Model summary shows a value of 0.946 for R indicates a good value for prediction of satisfaction by the independent variables, Furthermore, 88.9 percent of the variability is explained by the independent variables, ANOVA test shows the independent variables significantly predict the dependent variables [$F(5,166) = 286.754, P < 0.05$], thus proving that the model is good fit of data.

Table 1 Hypothesis testing

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
	Hypothesis	(Constant)	-0.243	0.15		-1.613	0.109
	H1	Price	0.183	0.046	0.186	3.987	0.00
	H2	Product	0.262	0.06	0.255	4.384	0.00
	H3	Place	0.029	0.049	0.029	0.599	0.55
	H4	Promotion	0.202	0.046	0.198	4.44	0.00
	H5	People	0.375	0.06	0.362	6.241	0.00
	H6	Physical evidence	0.245	0.06	0.238	4.275	0.00
	H7	Process	0.364	0.06	0.354	6.041	0.00

Dependent Variable: WOM

(Source: Author's calculation)

From the results of hypothesis tests in Table 1, it can be concluded that hypotheses H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, and H7 can be accepted, while H3 has to be rejected. This indicates that Price, Product, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process have a significant effect on Word Of Mouth, while Place does not have a significant effect on word of mouth.

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4. FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the drivers of word-of-mouth in the context of Fashion designers in Aizawl. The research confirms that Price, Product, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process significantly influence WOM, highlighting their importance in shaping customer perceptions and encouraging positive referrals. However, the study also reveals that Place does not have a significant effect on WOM in this particular context

These findings suggest that service providers in Fashion industry should prioritize strategies that enhance customer value through competitive pricing, well-designed products, effective promotion, skilled personnel, appealing physical environments, and streamlined processes. While location and distribution channels remain important for accessibility, they may not be as critical in driving customer conversations and recommendations in this setting.

Further research could explore the reasons why Place did not have a significant effect in this particular context, or examine the relative importance of each of the significant factors. There could be several reasons why "Place" (distribution channels, location) did not significantly affect word-of-mouth in such as (Alexander, 2009). If the customers you surveyed generally experience the service in similar locations or through the same distribution channels, "Place" may not be a differentiating factor (Wambua & Mwanzia, 2020). If everyone has the same level of convenience or inconvenience, it won't stand out in their conversations such as These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of word-of-mouth, influenced by individual perceptions, contextual factors, and the intricate interplay of marketing elements (Türk, 2021; Zhu et al., 2011). Word-of-mouth marketing is undeniably influenced by several factors (Aqmala & Putra, 2021).

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