

**EXPLORING THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS TOWARDS
FITNESS CENTRE OF THAI FEMALE CONSUMERS
AGED 25 TO 35 AND 40 TO 60**



**THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MANAGEMENT
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2015**

COPYRIGHT OF MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY

Thematic Paper
Entitled
**EXPLORING THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS TOWARDS
FITNESS CENTRE OF THAI FEMALE CONSUMERS
AGED 25 TO 35 AND 40 TO 60**

was submitted to the College of Management, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Management

on
December 13, 2015



Miss Jirah Krittayapong
Candidate

Asst. Prof. Kannika Leelapanyalert,
Ph.D.
Advisor

Asst. Prof. Nareerat Taechapiroontong,
Ph.D.
Chairperson

Assoc. Prof. Annop Tanlamai,
Ph.D.
Dean
College of Management
Mahidol University

Asst. Prof. Pornkasem Kantamara,
Ed.D.
Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my thematic advisor, Asst. Prof. Kannika Leelapanyalert, Ph.D. for her encouragement and the knowledge she has provided throughout the course of this thematic paper. I am very grateful for her teaching and advising. This thematic paper would not have been completed without the support that I have received from her.

Additionally, I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to all other faculty members of CMMU who have provided me valuable knowledge and kindly supports since I started joining the Master's degree program here two years ago until the last day of my academic life at CMMU. Also, many thanks to Khun Prasit Chuensirikulchai, the program coordinator, who is eager to help in any matter that I have asked for.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my research participants who were voluntarily engaged in this study. Without them, absolutely, this thematic paper would not have been completed.

Jirah Krittayapong

**EXPLORING THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS TOWARDS FITNESS
CENTRE OF THAI FEMALE CONSUMERS AGED 25 TO 35 AND 40 TO 60**

JIRAH KRITTAYAPONG 5649301

M.M. (MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT)

THEMATIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE: ASST. PROF. KANNIKA LEELAPAN-
YALERT, Ph.D., ASST. PROF. NAREERAT TAECHAPIROONTONG, Ph.D., ASST.
PROF. PORNKASEM KANTAMARA, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

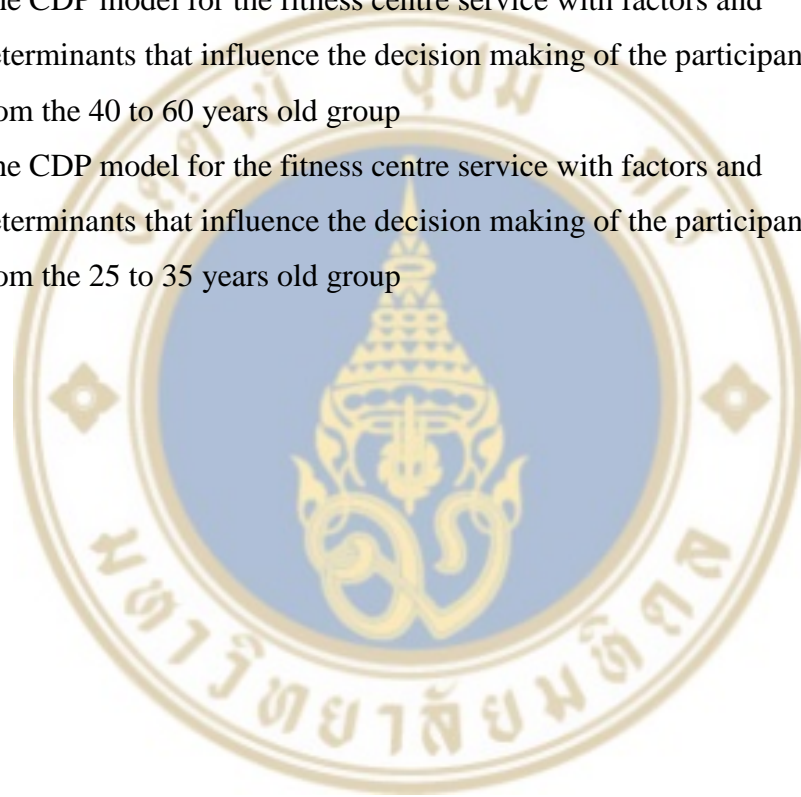
The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain an insight into the decision making of Thai female consumers towards fitness centre and the determinants that influence each stage of their decision making process. Fourteen participants from two aged groups, 25 to 35 and 40 to 60, were recruited to participate in this study. Utilizing the in-depth interview to collect the data, the researcher discovered four major themes that illustrated the major variables that affected the participants' decision making process: Health Consciousness, Nice Body, Convenient Location, and Great Facility. Through the use of Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model as the framework, the researcher further discovered that the participants from both age groups have gone through six stages of the decision making process. Both groups, however, were influenced by different factors at each stage of their decision making process. While the older group was significantly influenced by "Individual Differences" such as motivation, attitude, values and personality in a high degree, the younger group was influenced by "Individual Differences" as much as "Environmental Influences," which included personal influences and family. In addition to generating the new knowledge that would enhance the generality of theories regarding the decision making process towards products/ services related to health and exercise, this study also suggested the knowledge that the marketers can use for developing or improving the competitive position for their brands as well as the marketing communication campaigns that could effectively communicate their brands to the target consumers.

**KEY WORDS: FITNESS CENTRE / DECISION MAKING / CONSUMER
BEHAVIOR**

53 PAGES

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
2.1 The CDP model with factors and determinants that influence each stage of consumers' decision making	7
4.1 The CDP model for the fitness centre service with factors and determinants that influence the decision making of the participants from the 40 to 60 years old group	36
4.2 The CDP model for the fitness centre service with factors and determinants that influence the decision making of the participants from the 25 to 35 years old group	37



CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1 Consumer Behavior and the Decision Making Process	5
2.2 Previous Studies on Consumer Behavior in Relation to Fitness Centre in Thailand	10
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	13
3.1 Research Participants	13
3.2 Data Gathering and Analysis	14
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS	18
4.1 Key Themes	18
4.2 Decision Making Process	26
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	38
5.1 Managerial Implication	39
5.2 Theoretical Implication	40
5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research	40
REFERENCES	42
APPENDICES	45
APPENDIX A: Interview Guide	46
APPENDIX B: Profile of Research Participants	47
BIOGRAPHY	53

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Consumers' decision making process is considered a central part of consumer behavior. How consumers make consumption decisions has continued to interest scholars because of the complexity and dynamic nature of the process. Over the years a number of studies have already been conducted to gain an understanding of the consumers' decision making process towards different types of products and services and to explore how individual differences as well as environmental influences can shape the decision process of consumers.

As more and more people have become health conscious nowadays, and healthy products have entered the global markets with force and rapidly gained the market share, many scholars around the world have particularly been interested in conducting research to gain an understanding of how consumers make their consumption decisions towards products and services related to health and wellness (see Brennan, Dahl & Eagle, 2010; Çabuk, Tanrikulu & Gelibolu, 2014; Ferrand, Robinson & Valette-Florence, 2010; Kriwy & Mecking, 2012; MacIntosh & Law, 2015; Royne, Fox, Deitz & Gibson, 2014; Talukdar & Lindsey, 2013). In Thailand, health and wellness issues have earned Thai scholars' interest as well. Among many existing studies that focused on Thais' consumer behavior on products/services related to health and wellness, fitness centre has been popularly used as a case (see Ausawa-r-rak, 2006; Chareonchaivanich, 2005; Kanson, 2008; Panittumrong, 2004)

According to the previous research, exercise is personally important in most Thais' points of view. Over the years, Thai people have become more concerned with their figure and health. Nevertheless, there are several barriers that prevent Thai consumers from being actively engaged in doing exercise to the extent that they want to spend their money on fitness centre membership. In 2012, INTAGE (Thailand) Co., Ltd. conducted a survey among 200 male and female residents in Bangkok to gain an understanding of real need and attitude of consumers towards fitness centre. The survey

results indicated that 25% of the respondents felt that they had problems with their weight or figure. Most of these individuals also thought that exercise was important personally. Nevertheless, only 15% of them did exercise more than 3 times a week, and more than a half (55%) did not exercise at that time (INTAGE, 2012). The INTAGE survey results also suggested that consumers preferred an exercise venue with no cost, such as a public park or in their own homes, over the paid one. This was in line with the barriers they mentioned about the hassle of cost and traveling to the facility.

Despite the fact that the number of fitness centers' registered members in Thailand is surprisingly low, the marketers of fitness centre have still seen the big room for their brands to grow here. According to Angel Chan, Chief Operating Officer of We Fitness Company, a chain of well-known fitness centre in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand, before she opened the first We Fitness Society in Thailand, only 1% of Thai population were fitness centre members, which was a lot lower than in Hong Kong. In her view, however, this implied that there was not enough centre to meet the fitness demand of Thais (Rungfapaisarn, 2013). In 2013, Angel Chan opened the first We Fitness Society at Major Cineplex Ratchayothin followed by the other three branches within the Bangkok area at a total cost of 600 million baht. Even Sir Richard Branson, Founder of British multinational conglomerate Virgin Group, has recognized a tremendous business opportunity for fitness segment in Thailand. Since last year, Virgin Group has opened three fitness centers in Thailand, and Mr. Branson said that he would open four more Virgin Active Thailand next year, to add to the three that have already existed (Parnsoonthorn, 2015)

Based on their survey results, INTAGE (Thailand) Co., Ltd. suggested that an opportunity remains high for fitness centre business in Thailand as the non-exercise group proved to be huge and significant if only they could be converted via proper methods (INTAGE, 2012). To jump on such opportunity, however, it is critical for the marketers to first understand the decision making process of the Thai consumers intensively. Although several studies have already been conducted in Thailand and other countries on the topics related to factors that influence consumers' satisfactions towards fitness centre, consumers' attitudes toward brands, and their consumption behavior in general, there is still a lack of research regarding the decision making process of either those who are currently the fitness centre members or those who are interested to

become ones. Moreover, most existing research revolved around fitness centre and exercise issues has usually been done through the quantitative approach. The findings suggested by those existing quantitative studies might be insufficient to illuminate the psychological aspects of consumer decision making process.

The objective of this current study is to examine the decision making process of Thai female consumers towards fitness centre. In particular, it seeks to explore the similarities as well as the differences in the decision making process of female consumers from two different age ranges—25-35 and 40-60. This study also focuses on how environmental influences as well as individual differences play their roles in each stage of the decision making process of the participants from these two age ranges. Generally, Thai women, despite of their ages—are greatly concerned about their appearance, and, as the INTAGE’s most recent survey shows, most of Thai female respondents preferred exercise as a means of maintaining their beauty (INTAGE, 2015). Women are also identified to be the majority of members of the brand name fitness centre in Thailand (Chareonchaivanich, 2005). The global brand like “Curves” fitness centre for women, which has two branches in Thailand, was also arguably the most successful fitness franchise in the world with more than 10,000 locations and 4 million members around the globe in 2008. Although there are some franchise closings over the years, the Wall Street Journal attributed this decline not so much to the waning interest of female clientele but more so the inflexible business strategies (Fusion, 2015). Additionally, by counting the number of the survey respondents who voluntarily participated in many studies regarding fitness centre business in Thailand, one can see that the number of the female participants is apparently greater than the male participants (see Ausawa-r-rak, 2006; Chareonchaivanich, 2005; Panittumrong, 2004; Pattamadilok, 2011). Based on such evidences, women can be considered the target customers of the fitness centre business in Thailand. Yet, there is still a lack of research that aims for examining the decision making process of Thai female consumers towards exercise in general and fitness centre in particular. It is also necessary to employ a qualitative methodology as a means of collecting rich and insightful data that can help enhance a better understanding of consumers’ insights and also fill the gap that still exists in the area of consumer behavior research. For this current study, therefore, the researcher used the individual, in-depth interview as the primary method for collecting

data. Fourteen research participants were recruited to participate in this research. Each of them needed to be a current member of fitness centre in order to be qualified to participate in this research.

This current study has shed light on the issue regarding consumer behavior and decision making towards a trendy activity like exercise, which has still insufficiently investigated through the qualitative approach. As being mentioned previously, the existing studies regarding the fitness center business either in Thailand or overseas have revolved around the factors that influence consumers' satisfactions towards fitness centre, customers' attitudes toward brands, and their consumption behavior in general. But there is still the lack of research regarding the decision making process of the fitness center consumers and how internal as well as external variables play their roles in each stage of the consumers' decision making process. This current study, thus, can help filling the gap that has still existed in the academic discipline. In addition, the results of this study have also offered a practical application for those who work in the fitness segment as they could apply new knowledge generated by this study to develop or improve competitive positions for their brands as well as the marketing communication campaigns that could effectively communicate their brands to the target consumers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this current research, the theoretical concepts regarding consumer behavior and the decision making process were used as the major analytical frameworks to gain an insight into Thai female consumers' decision making towards fitness centre. In addition, the results suggested by the previous studies that have been conducted on the area of exercise and fitness centre in Thailand were also been used to compare with the results emerged from this current study

2.1 Consumer Behavior and the Decision Making Process

Consumer behavior can be defined as “the process and activities people engage in searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires” (Belch & Belch, 2012, p 17). Schiffman and his colleagues define consumer behavior as “the behavior that consumers display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing products and services that they expect to satisfy their needs” (Schiffman et al., 2010, p. 15). Literally, consumer behavior focuses on how individual consumers and families or households make decisions to spend their available resources (e.g., time, money, effort) on consumption-related items.

Consumers' decision making process is considered a central part of consumer behavior. The concepts of the consumer's decision-making process assume that the consumer's purchase decision process consists of steps through which each consumer passes in purchasing a product or service. Generally, as each individual consumer passed through all these stages when making a decision to purchase, his or her decision making was influenced and shaped by several factors and determinants. To be successful in influencing target customers' purchase behavior, it is essential for marketers to recognize specific needs customers are attempting to satisfy as well as how they translate into purchase criteria. Marketers also need to understand how customers gather information regarding various alternatives and use such information to select among competing brands, and how they make purchase decisions. Furthermore,

marketers need to understand how the consumer decision process and reasons for purchase vary among different types of customers. According to Blackwell and his colleagues (Blackwell et al., 2012), people will not buy products unless they have a problem, a need, or a want. Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model, thus, helps us to understand how people solve the everyday problems that cause them to buy and use products of all kinds (Blackwell et al., 2012). The CDP model was originally developed by Professor Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, and has been known as the EKB model. The CDP model, a simplified version of the EKB model, includes 7 stages: (1) Need Recognition; (2) Search for Information; (3) Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives; (4) Purchase; (5) Consumption; (6) Post-Consumption Evaluation; and (7) Divestment (Blackwell et al., 2012). All these seven stages are generally influenced and shaped by factors and determinants, which can be divided into two main categories: Individual Differences and Environmental Influences (Blackwell et al., 2012). Each category also consists of several sub categories as being shown in Figure 2.1.

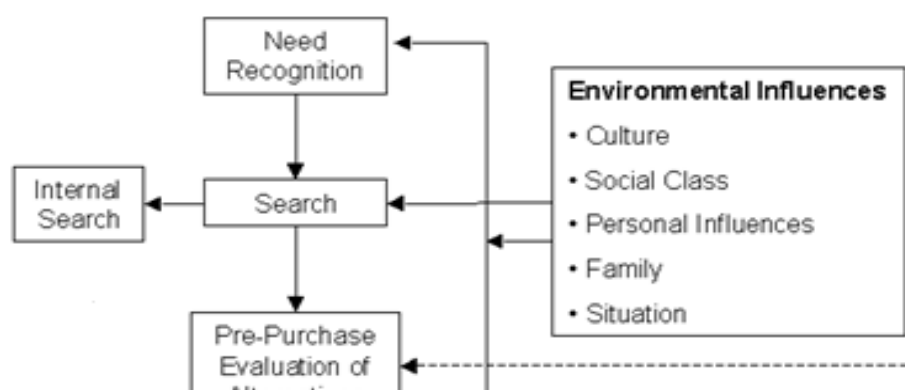
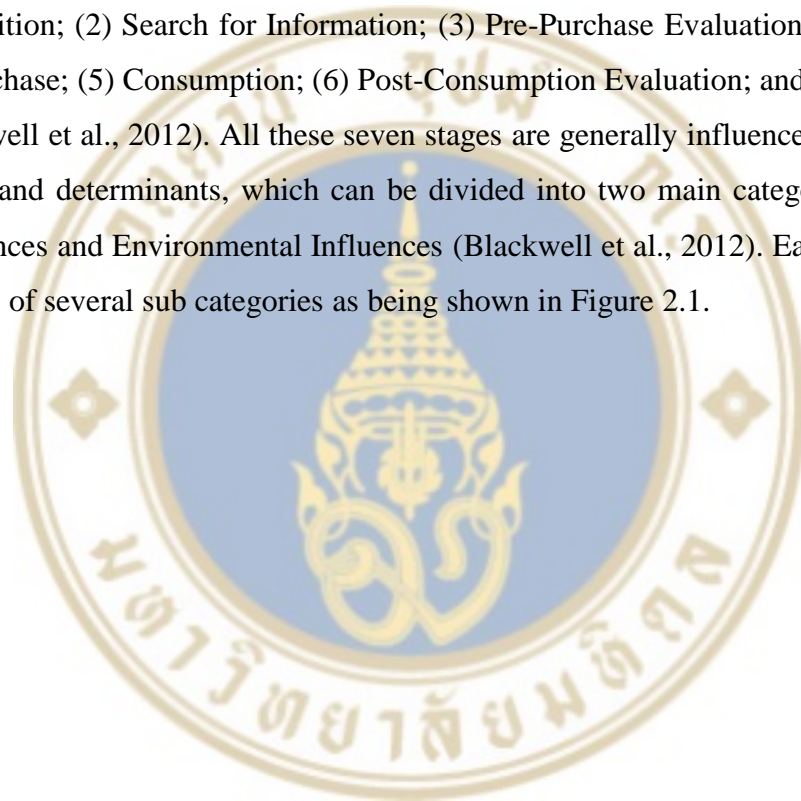


Figure 2.1 The CDP model with factors and determinants that influence each stage of consumers' decision making (Blackwell et al., 2012).

By understanding these seven stages, marketers could discover why consumers purchase or do not purchase products/services and what could be done in order to encourage them to buy. The details of each stage and the determinants revolved around the consumers' decision making process are as followed:

Stage 1: Problem Recognition or Need Recognition

Problem recognition occurs when consumers experience a significance difference between their current state of affairs and some state they desire (Solomon, 2011; Blackwell et al., 2012; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2014). Consumers' desired and actual states change for a variety of reasons. Both environmental influences (e.g., culture, social class, family) and individual differences (e.g., motivation, attitudes, personality) also have an influence on consumers' problem recognition. Problem recognition often occurs for reasons outside a company's control; however, this does

not preclude the possibility for marketers to influence problem recognition. As Belch and Belch (2012) argued, sources of problem recognition include out of stock, dissatisfaction, new needs/wants, related products/purchases, marketer induced problem recognition, and new products.

Stage 2: Information Search

Once consumers recognize problems, they will engage in information search; the process by which they survey the environment for appropriate data to make a reasonable decision (Solomon, 2011). Consumers usually begin with “internal search”—they attempt to scan information stored in memory to recall past experiences and/or knowledge regarding various purchase alternatives. If the internal search does not yield enough information, consumers will seek additional information by engaging in “external search” (Belch & Belch, 2012). The external sources of information include:

- (1) Personal sources such as friends or colleagues
- (2) Marketer-controlled (commercial) sources such as advertising or point-of-purchase displays
- (3) Public source including articles in magazines or newspaper and reports on television and so on
- (4) Personal experience such as examining actual products or testing them

Stage 3: Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives

In this stage, consumers compare the various brands or products and services they have identified as being capable of solving the consumption problems and satisfying their needs. Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2014) stated that in general, there are five groupings of alternatives. First is the set of all possible alternatives that could solve a consumer’s problem. Within this first set, there are four categories of decision alternatives: the awareness set, the inert set, the inept set, and the evoked set. The awareness set is composed of those brands consumers are aware of. The inert set is composed of all brands consumers are aware of and view in a neutral manner. These brands would be seen as acceptable by consumers if their favorite alternative is not

available. The inept set is composed of those brands consumers are aware of and view negatively. The evoked set (or the consideration set) is composed of those brands or products one will evaluate for the solution of a particular consumer's problem.

Stage 4: Purchase

Blackwell and his colleagues (Blackwell et al., 2012) pointed out that there is a question answered in Stage 4 of the CDP model—to buy or not to buy? In this stage, the consumers will decide:

- (1) Whether to buy?
- (2) When to buy?
- (3) What to buy?
- (4) Where to buy?
- (5) How to pay?

After deciding whether or not to purchase, consumers move through two phrases. First, consumers will choose one retailer (or some other forms of retailing) over the others. Then, at the second phrase, consumers will face in-store choices influenced by salespersons, product displays, POP advertising and so on (Blackwell et al., 2012).

Stage 5: Consumption

After the purchase is made and the consumers take possession of the products, consumption can occur. Yet it can either occur immediately or be delayed. Blackwell and his colleagues pointed out that how consumers use products also affects how satisfied they are with the purchases and how likely they are to repurchase those particular products or brands in the future (Blackwell et al., 2012).

Stage 6: Post-Consumption Evaluation

After using products/services, the consumer usually compares the level of performance with expectations. Positive performance means the brand is likely to be retained in the “evoked set” and increase the likelihood it will be purchased again. According to Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2014), purchase is usually followed by a

number of process including use, evaluation, and in some cases satisfaction. Consumers' responses to satisfaction include repurchase, positive word of mouth, and loyalty. Evaluation can also lead to dissatisfaction, which is sometimes associated with complaining, erosion of loyalty, brand switching, and negative word of mouth.

At the stage of post-purchase evaluation, sometimes the consumers may be engaged in "post-purchase dissonance," which refers to doubt and anxiety happened to them after making a difficult, relatively permanent decision (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2014)

Stage 7: Divestment

At this final stage, consumers have several options including outright disposal, recycling, or remarketing.

2.2 Previous Studies on Consumer Behavior in Relation to Fitness Centre in Thailand

There are several studies that have already been conducted with Thai consumers to examine their consumption behavior and what factors had influenced their purchase intentions toward fitness centre. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, these studies had revolved around the factors that influence consumers' satisfactions towards fitness centre, customers' attitudes toward brands, and their consumption behavior in general. Such studies include, for example, the survey study of Kanson (2008) which aimed to explore behaviors exhibited in selecting locations for engaging in exercise. By using California Wow Experience as the case, Kanson discovered that the factor that most strongly affected the consumers' selection of the fitness facility was the service being offered at the site. The demographical characteristics including age, occupation, and the level of education also affected the numbers of time such service was used for each month and the patterns of exercise in which the research respondents were engaged.

Chareonchaiwanich (2005) conducted a survey to investigate consumers' satisfaction that influenced their consumption behavior and intention to use the service of Fitness First Thailand. Her major findings suggested that both personal factors such as health and weight concerns and the marketing mix factor affected the consumption

behavior of those who used the service of Fitness First. Similar to Kanson (2008), Chareonchaiwanich (2005) discovered that the difference in age, career, and the level of education had an impact on consumption behavior in terms of frequency and length of using the service. Yet the other demographical characteristics like average income, weight, illness, type of membership, and marital status also affected the frequency of using the service as well.

Panittumrong (2004) studied the consumers' opinions towards another brand name fitness centre in Thailand—Clarke Hatch Fitness Centre. Using questionnaires to collect data from 405 respondents, Panittumrong discovered that among five aspects she investigated—physical evidence, people, price, place, promotion—the first four were rated by the respondents as the aspects they highly satisfied, while promotion of Clarke Hatch offered to their customers only moderately satisfied those individuals.

Ausawa-r-rak (2006) investigated factors that affected the decision making of GMM Fitness members focusing on the same five aspects as Panittumrong (2004) did with Clarke Hatch Fitness Centre. Ausawa-r-rak's survey results, however, suggested something different as her respondents had positive attitudes towards product and service aspect of GMM Fitness at the high level, whereas their positive attitudes toward price, place, promotion, people, and physical evidence aspect were only at the moderate level.

Utilizing the mix method to collect quantitative as well as qualitative data from the members of ABC Fitness Centre, Pattamadilok (2011) discovered that this particular fitness centre had been complained by their customers regarding three main issues: inadequate numbers of the machines, no discount offered, and not teaching the customers how to use the machines. Based on such findings, the researcher then recommended the business strategies that the business could adopt in order to resolve the management problem they were facing.

Although there are many existing studies regarding the consumer behavior of those who use the fitness centre service and the factors involved, there is still the lack of research regarding the decision making process of the fitness center consumers and how internal as well as external variables play their roles in each stage of the consumers' decision making process. The aim of this current study is, thus, to further investigate the

area that have still insufficiently examined as a means of generating new knowledge being useful for scholars in the consumer behavior field as well as practitioners who involve in the fitness segment.



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This current study is a qualitative research that aims to gain an understanding of the decision making process of Thai female consumers towards fitness centre. According to Ritchie and her colleagues, the purpose of qualitative research is “to gain an understanding of the nature and form of phenomena, to unpack meanings, to develop explanations or to generate ideas, concepts and theories” (Ritchie, 2013, p. 116). In order to gain an understanding of the nature and form of the decision making process of Thai female consumers towards fitness centre, the researcher used the in-depth interview as a primary method in collecting data. To be more specific, the researcher used the semi-structured approach to collect qualitative data in the narrative form through the open-ended interviews. The researcher also utilized the method of phenomenological study as she obtained the verbal descriptions based on the participants’ perceptions of their own consumption experiences as a means of finding the common themes or the elements that comprised the consumption phenomenon. According to Creswell (1998), a phenomenological study describes the individuals’ meaning of the lived experiences regarding the phenomenon, and the researcher is considered “an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (p. 14). Fourteen participants were recruited to share their lived experiences regarding the use of fitness centre service in this research. The details regarding the research participants and the data collection and analysis are illustrated below.

3.1 Research Participants

Fourteen female participants were recruited to participate in this research through the purposive sampling method based on their ages and their current status as the registered members of the fitness centers. Ritchie and her colleagues described the purposive sampling method used in qualitative research as the sampling method that relies on the use of prescribed selection criteria. The purposive sampling in qualitative research uses samples that are small in scale and allows “the opportunity to add to or supplement the composition as the research progresses” (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 115). The method of snowball sampling was also employed when recruiting research

participants for this study. Snowball sampling is the participant recruit process whereby the researcher recruits participants through the process of referrals (Warren, 2002). The researcher used the age range to divide research participants into two groups—25 to 35 and 40 to 60—with seven participants for each group. The researcher used these two age ranges based on the study conducted by SCB Economic Intelligence Center (EIC). According to the EIC's survey study, 24% of Thais whose age between 15-35 (Generation Y), are health conscious and pay attention to what they eat, while 17% go to the gyms regularly (SCB Economic Intelligence Centre, 2014a). The results from another EIC's survey studies also suggested that middle-aged people (40 to 60 years old) are potential customers of the fitness centre business in Thailand, since 77% of the respondents from this age group mentioned their willingness in changing their lifestyle to be more active in exercising (SCB Economic Intelligence Centre, 2014b). Accordingly, these two age groups became the central interest of this current study as they are considered the target consumers of the fitness centre business. The researcher then used age as the major determinant in this comparison study by dividing the participants into two groups using age range suggested by the studies of EIC as the guideline. However, since most previous studies on the fitness centre business in Thailand suggested that the target consumers of fitness centre in Thailand were above 25 years old, the researcher used the age range of 25 to 35 years old for the younger age group and 40 to 60 years old for the older age group. The profiles of all 14 participants are shown in Appendix B.

3.2 Data Gathering and Analysis

The primary method used in collecting data for this qualitative research is individual, in depth interviewing. As Kvale (1996) suggests, interviewing is the method that is particularly suited for studying how individuals understand the meanings in their lived world, how they describe their experiences and self-understanding, and how they clarify and elaborate their own perspectives regarding events in their lives.

Each research participant of this study was asked to participate in an individual interview session. The approximated length of interview for each person was 45 minutes. The researcher used the semi-structured approach to collect qualitative data

in the narrative form through open-ended interviews. Patton (2002) calls this particular approach “the general interview guide approach.” According to Patton, when conducting this type of interview, the interviewers typically prepare the interview guide before entering interview settings in order to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each respondent interviewed. The interview guide indicates topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. It also indicates the sequence of the topics the researchers seek to explore. Patton (2002) claims that the advantage of an interview guide is that it helps a researcher to ensure that he or she has already decided how best to use the limited time available when conducting an interview. Although the interview guide/protocol is prepared to be a guideline for asking questions in the most efficient ways, the researcher/interviewer still remains free to build conversations within a particular subject that has been predetermined. Generally, in designing the questions for the semi-structured interview, the researcher needs to realize that her prepared questions need to be sufficiently open for the possible subsequent questions that have not been preplanned. Since most of the respondents’ answers cannot be predicted in advance, the interviewers have to improvise probably half, or maybe more, of their own responses to what the respondents say in regards to the interviewers’ initial prepared questions.

To utilize the semi-structured approach in collecting data for this research, the researcher started with developing the interview guide (interview protocol) that included a set of questions covering a wide range of issues to obtain detailed information on various circumstances surrounding research participants’ experience and their decisions in using the fitness centre service. The researcher prepared the interview guide in advance to make sure that all issues that she proposed to investigate would be covered within the limited time available. However, she recognized that during the interviews she might have discovered new issues to probe or found redundancy and repetition embedded in the original questions. The researcher, thus, tried to remain flexible and adaptive as much as possible during the course of interviews.

All the interviews were digitally recorded and field notes were also taken during the course of interviews. The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Then, all of the interview transcripts were analyzed through the

method of thematic analysis. According to Ezzy (2002), thematic analysis is an inductive tool used for identifying themes embedded within the data. Riessman (2008) states that thematic analysis is an intuitive and straightforward approach that is suited to various kinds of data. It can be used to analyze a wide range of narrative texts including data from interviews, conversations in group meetings, and texts in written documents. In conducting thematic analysis, Ezzy (2002) suggests that the categories into which themes will be sorted are not decided prior to coding the data. These categories are “induced” from the data. While the general issues of interest are determined prior to the analysis and are in fact a part of the semi-structured interview protocol, the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined.

To conduct the thematic analysis for this study, the researcher followed Madison’s (2005) model that draws from a combination of various coding procedures. At the first stage of coding the researcher read through the transcripts and fieldnotes several times to get a sense of overall themes. After familiarizing herself with the data, the researcher generated the initial list of ideas about what was in the data and what was interesting. Then, she did the “open coding” as she carefully examined every sentence in the transcripts and fieldnotes and then highlighted and coded each “code clump”—a paragraph representing a small theme. The central theme of each clump was noted in the margins.

After the open coding is done, the researcher identified relationships among the codes. She also created the memos to reflect her thoughts on theoretical concepts and questions or concerns corresponding to the codes. Then, she compared and contrasted the particular topics within each clump. Some overlapped topics were merged. Some topics were moved to another clump, while some were eliminated from the study completely.

In the final stage of coding, the researcher examined topics within each clump again before making adjustments for comparison and contrast across coding clumps. She created the thematic map to organize clumps and codes that fall into each clump, which helped her to clearly see the connections between the clumps. At this final stage, linkages and themes were created. The researcher constructed a hierarchy of themes and subthemes that she had discovered and then wrote the final report for each

discovered theme. It is important to note that in reporting the data, the researcher has assigned a pseudonym for each research participant in order to protect their identities.



CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

By conducting the individual interviews with 14 participants from two age groups, the researcher discovered four major themes that emerged. All four themes being discovered will be reported in the first section of this chapter. The researcher will

discuss each theme by making a comparison between two age groups. The second section of this chapter will be the discussions of the discovered themes in relation to the concept of consumers' decision making process and the factors and determinants being involved.

4.1 Key Themes

There are four major themes emerged from the interview data: Health Consciousness, Nice Body, Convenient Location, and Great Facility. The detailed discussions are as followed:

Theme 1: Health Consciousness

Health consciousness was indicated by the older participants as the major reason that made them apply for the fitness centre membership. All seven participants from the 40 to 60 years old group said that they started exercise regularly because they realized that exercise is good for their health. Most participants from this older group did not mention about their underlying disease. They only said that they exercised because they want to be healthy. Only one participant—Lin, the 48-year-old housewife, mentioned that she got one of her knee injured several months ago after kicking the truck's wheel. After having been under the medical care for more than six months, she realized that she should have started exercising, since she believed that exercising could help her make recovery from her injury faster:

“I had never known much about exercise. I did a bit of this...a bit of that at home ... Until I got injured, I realized I should have exercised ... I decided to do this on my own...haven't talked to my doctor yet.”

(Lin, 48-year-old participant)

All participants from the 40 to 60 years old group realized by themselves about the necessity of exercise as it could provide a great benefit towards their health. Most of them decided to apply for the fitness centre membership on their own. Only one participant said that despite the fact that she recognized the benefits of exercise towards health, she had never considered applying for the fitness centre membership until she got convinced by her siblings:

“My sisters wanted me to come here. They said let’s go there. You should have started taking care of your health now.”

(Nee, 60-year-old participant)

Lin, the participant who got her knee injured said that she was interested in exercising as she wanted to get her injury recovered, but she had no idea about the fitness centre. Until one day, one of her best friends who lived in the same area invited her to visit the new fitness centre where her friend had already been the member. She registered for the three days trial and really enjoyed exercising there. Accordingly, after trying it only for two days, she decided to sign the one-year-contract.

The participants from the 25 to 35 years old group also recognized the benefit of exercise towards health. Nonetheless, these younger individuals seemed to be more concerned about their bodies rather than health. Generally, the findings of this current study were in accordance with Chareonchaiwanich’s (2005) study’s results which indicated that personal factors such as health and weight concerns affected the consumption behavior of those who used the service of Fitness First. These similar findings may be used to make a consumption that consumers of any fitness brand have the same goals in using the fitness centre service—either for better health or for better shape.

Although all of the participants from both age groups recognized the benefits of exercise towards health, all of them had not exercised regularly until they applied to be the members of the fitness centers. Some participants said that they had the exercise machines like treadmills at homes, yet; they had rarely used those machines. But when they became the members of the fitness centers, they started to have self-discipline as they came to the fitness centers several days a week. The major reason that forced these individuals to have a discipline in going to the fitness centers regularly was about the money that they had already paid for the membership fee:

“You have already paid for the membership, and it’s not cheap. If you don’t come here, you will feel bad about yourself. You will think...what a waste!”

(Kate, 42-year-old participant)

“My Mom paid the membership fee for me. If I don’t come here, she would be disappointed and complain about that ... Sometimes I felt very lazy, but when I thought of the money we had already spent on it, I forced myself to be here.”

(May, 31-year-old participant)

Most participants who said that they started exercising regularly because they recognized the benefits of exercise towards health mentioned that to some extents they had already accomplished their goals. They felt that they became healthier than before after being engaged in exercise regularly. Generally, none of the participants felt that they wasted their times in being the fitness centre members and even mentioned that they would continue exercising regularly at the fitness centers as long as they could.

Theme 2: Nice Body

The interview data indicated that the participants from the younger age group were more concerned about their body and weight rather than health. As such, the reason that made them applied to be the members of the fitness centers was because they wanted to have nice bodies. Among seven participants of this group, there were five who said that they were overweight and their goal in becoming the members of the fitness centers was to lose weight. As Pam, a 26-year-old participant, who was sponsored by her father to be the member of the brand name fitness centre pointed out:

“[B]ecause I am fat, I want to be slimmer ... Now, I have a lot of free time; thus, my dad feels like...boring...you are fat. You have been fat since you were very young. Anything that could make you slimmer, just do it! And he told me to come to the fitness centre ... I’m OK with that. I want to be slimmer.”

(Pam, 26-year-old participant)

Like Pam, Ann, the 33-year-old participant, concerned about her body so that she decided to apply for the fitness centre membership. Yet, for Ann, to look fit and firm seemed to be more important than losing weight. Additionally, Ann did not go to fitness centre because somebody put the pressure on her like Pam’s father did with Pam. Ann, like most participants, made the decision on her own and also paid the membership fee with the money from her own pocket:

“I exercise because I want to lose my weight...to get in shape. To lose the body weight is the by-product. In fact, weight is not a problem. But I look fat ... [My weight] goes up and down. But my weight is around this. I only feel that my body is not

firm. I am getting old and my body seems to be not firm ... My best friend will get married next year, so I want to be a bit more beautiful.”

(Ann, 33-year-old participant)

Two participants from the 25 to 35 years old group who did not have any problem about their weight mentioned nice body as their ultimate goal in becoming the members of the fitness centers. Both of them also stated that having “six packs” was the thing they were dreaming about. As Mam, the 27-year-old model pointed out:

“I want to have six packs like other people...like my friends who are also the models ... I have a bit of them now. I bought a [six packs building] machine...I do everything.”

(Mam, 27-year-old-participant)

“I want to have six packs ... I think that you will look beautiful when you have them.”

(On, 28-year-old participant)

The above comments can be used to confirm the results of the latest study of INTAGE (2015) which suggests that female individuals aged 19 to 32 are much concerned about their look as they want to gain social acceptance.

For the participants who were in the older age group, most of these individuals did not mention “having a nice body” as their main goal in exercising. Even those who were overweight said that losing weight was only the by-product for them. Only one participant from this group admitted that she went to fitness centre because she wanted to lose weight as much as to stay healthy. The way these older individuals had become health conscious and started engaging in exercise regularly was in line with the study’s results of EIC’s that described about Thai middle-aged individuals’ willing in changing their lifestyle to become more active in exercising (SCB Economic Intelligence Centre, 2014b).

Theme 3: Convenient Location

Most Participants, no matter how old they were, chose to become the members of the particular fitness centers that were close to their places. Convenient location was important for these individuals. Many of them moved from the others fitness centers to the new one that was just opened near their houses because they got

bored of spending too much time on the road. Some of them also mentioned how they could save money from going to the new fitness center nearby instead of traveling to the old ones that were far from their houses. One participant even mentioned that since going to fitness centre near her house helped to reduce her travelling cost, she did not care about the large amount of money she had to pay for the membership fee:

“As it is close to my house, the price doesn’t matter. I’ve already saved a lot of money since I don’t have to travel very far like before.”

(Tik, 46-year-old participant)

“Since it is close to my house, I am not concerned about the price. It is convenient. I cannot have an excuse like...it’s far. It’s difficult to get there.”

(Ann, 33-year-old participant)

Four participants from the 40 to 60 years old group and two participants from the younger group had been the members of the other fitness centers before they moved to the current places. Some of them did not renew the membership with the old places because they found the new fitness centers that were much closer to their houses. These individuals decided to move to the new ones since they preferred the places that were easier to get there. These individuals did not mention other reasons that made them decide not to renew the membership with the old ones. Although some of them said that they did not like the “hard sell strategy” of the one they just quit being the members, they did not mention that as the reason that made them move to the new workout places at all.

Among 14 participants, there are only two who chose to become the members of the fitness center that was far from their houses. Yet, it was still convenient for them to travel to such location since the road was clear—no problem regarding traffic jam. The reason for these two individuals in selecting this particular fitness center for their workout place was because they liked the facility, and this point will be discussed later under “Great Facility”—the final theme,

As the interview data indicated, somehow the convenient location seemed to overcome the high cost membership. Most participants said that in their views the membership fee of each fitness centre brand was quite similar. As such, price, especially for those from the 40 to 60 years old group, was not a major criterion they used to make the decision when selecting the workout facility. For those who were from the younger

age group seemed to be more concerned about the membership cost as one participant mentioned “the cheaper, the better.” Another participant from the group also mentioned price as the major factor involved in her decision making towards fitness centre. Yet, she considered the quality of machines, classes, and customer service as the important factors as well.

How the price could be the main concern of the fitness centre member had been illustrated by the study of Pattamadilok (2011). In her study with the ABC Fitness Centre’s members, Pattamadilok found out that her research respondents were not happy as ABC Fitness Centre had never offered the discount to its customers. However, there was no evidence of the individual factors being discussed in that study as the variables that may have affected the respondents’ satisfaction towards the membership cost. In this study, when talking about the membership cost, age seemed to play its part in some degrees in the participants’ decision making as the younger participants mentioned their preference over the cheaper price whereas the older participants did not mention about that at all.

Interestingly, none of the participants of this current study mentioned the brand as the major criterion in their decision making towards fitness centers. These individuals did not pay attention to the brand but chose to be the members of the ones that located near their places or were easy to get there.

Theme 4: Great Facility

In addition to the convenient locations, most participants from both age groups pointed out that for them the facility of the fitness centers was quite important. However, “great facility” was perceived differently by each individual. The participants from the older age group mentioned the nice environment as well as a variety of exercise classes as the important parts of great facility, while the ones from the younger age group were also concerned about the quality of machines in addition to the variety of exercise programs.

“[I liked here because] it’s not crowded...had a wide space...also looked modern.”

(Dao, 52 -year-old participant)

“It has many classes. Although the rooms here are smaller than [the one I was once its member], I like it better since it’s has the reservation system while [the one I was once its member] use the first comes first served basis and it’s always very crowded.”

(Jeab, 41-year-old participant)

“[The current one] is better. It is more developed in every aspect. All machines are workable, while the machines at [the one I was once its member] sometimes did not work ... they broke ... I look at the facility and price. It needs to have everything ... it needs to have something for me to lift...everything...yoga...a variety of activities.”

(Mam, 27-year-old participant)

“Machines are modern ... I like the classes here. There are many classes that I can join. It also has boxing class and I like this particular class a lot”

(Took, 41-year-old participant)

According to Panitthamrong’s (2004) study’s results, place as well as gears and facilities were rated by her respondents as the aspects they highly satisfied when using the service of Clark Hatch Fitness Centre. This current study suggested the similar results as the participants mentioned great place and facility as the important aspects of the fitness centers and were the things they feel satisfied most with their current workout places. This finding is also in line with the results of Kanson’s (2008) study which being conducted with the members of California Wow Experience. Kanson discovered that the factor that most strongly affected the consumers’ selection of the fitness facility was the service being offered at the site. For this current study, however, in addition to the variety of services the fitness centers were supposed to provide, quality of the machines was also considered an important aspect that influenced the participants’ selection of the workout facility. Even the study from abroad like the one conducted by Ferrand, Robinson, and Valette-Florence (2010) showed how the services offered by the fitness centers could positively impact the customers’ satisfaction, and this was occurred in the case of Thai fitness centre customers as well.

Another previous study that suggests similar key findings on the issue regarding the facility of fitness centre is the study of Pattamadilok (2011). In her study

with ABC Fitness Centre's members, Pattamadilok's found out that her respondents were largely concerned about the inadequate number of the machines at ABC Fitness Centre, which means that to some extent those individuals put the priority on the machines just like the way the participants of this study did.

In this current study, the two participants who chose to be the members of the fitness centre that was far from their houses said that they liked the facility of this particular fitness centre; thus, they did not care about how far it was from their houses. Both of them said that this particular fitness centre had a great facility as it was spacious, modern, and not too crowded:

"I don't care about the brand as long as the facility looks better in terms of newness...cleanliness...and a lot of spaces. The local one is fine for me too as long as the facility looks nice. The brand name ones usually have better facilities, but they might be too crowded ... Having too many people destroys the environment. So for me, a better facility also includes not having too many people."

(Kate, 42-year-old participant)

One participant needed to drive 30 minutes to get to her current workout place. Before she chose to be the member there, she went to visit few places near her house. Yet she did not like the facility of those places. When she had a chance to visit the new department store where her current fitness centre is located, she saw the facility of this particular fitness centre and really liked the way it looked from outside. Therefore, she went inside and even became more satisfied with everything she saw:

"Everything inside looked even much better. Nice place...nice environment. I really liked it so I decided to apply for the three days trial."

(Took, 41-year-old participant)

For these two individuals, like most participants, did not care about the brand as long as the facility looked nice (e.g., spacious, not too crowded). Yet, as Kate suggested, the brand can guarantee the quality of the facility and that was totally agreed by Jan, the participants who moved from the stand alone fitness centre to the brand name one:

"The brand name fitness centers have the better facilities...bigger...more trendy. The name can guarantee the service quality in some degrees. Yet, most of the brand name ones have problem about their hard sell strategy...like they pressure you to

hire personal trainers, for example. Luckily, the one I am the member currently doesn't have that kind of problem."

(Jan, 34 year-old-participant)

Most participants also mentioned facility as a major criterion they would utilize in choosing between two fitness centers that located in the same distance from their houses. Only two participants from the younger age group who were price sensitive said that they would prefer the one that was cheaper.

The next section of this report will be the discussions of the key findings in relation to the decision making process conceptual framework. All four themes that were already discussed will also be linked to Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model as the parts of determinants that affected the decision making of the research participants.

4.2 Decision Making Process

According to the CDP model, there are seven stages of the decision making process that consumers need to go through when they make a purchase of products (Blackwell et al., 2012). However, for this current study, the final stage cannot be applied to the case of fitness centre being used since it only focuses on the disposal of the product and not related to the service. As the research participants of this study had gone through all six stages of the decision making process when they purchased the service of fitness centre, each individual was motivated by different factors and determinants at each stage of their decision making process. The key factors and determinants involved in each stage of these individuals' decision making will be discussed in details as followed.

Stage 1: Problem Recognition or Need Recognition

Problem recognition occurs when consumers experience a significant difference between their current state of affairs and some states they desire (Solomon, 2011; Blackwell et al., 2012; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2014). In this current study, the interview data indicated that the current state of affairs of most participants was their dissatisfaction towards health status (for the older age group) and body (for the younger age group). Although most participants from the older age group did not mention about

their health problem, they chose to exercise at the fitness centers because they wanted to be healthier, and this was in line with the results suggested by EIC's survey study which is about how Thai middle-aged individuals were willing to change their lifestyle to become more active in exercising (SCB Economic Intelligence Centre, 2014b). Being healthier was thus considered the desired state of these individuals.

For the participants from the younger age group, their dissatisfaction towards their body and/or weight was their current state of affair and all of them admitted that they craved for a nicer body or weight lost, which is in accordance with the study conducted by INTAGE (2015). Blackwell and his colleagues suggested that both Environmental Influences and Individual Differences could affect consumers' problem recognition (Blackwell et al., 2012). Yet, in this study, the interview data indicated that "Environmental Influences" like family members and friends had more influence on the younger participants' problem recognition, while "Individual Differences" like motivation and involvement, as well as personality and lifestyle had more influence on the older participants' problem recognition. Most younger participants recognized the problem about their weight and/or body after hearing their family members or friends' complaints/comments:

"My husband said that my belly was ugly, and I felt very upset."

(May, 31-year-old participant)

"[M]y dad feels like...boring...you are fat. You have been fat since you were very young. Anything that could make you slimmer, just do it!"

(Pam, 26-year-old-participant)

For Mam, despite the fact that none of her friend complained about her body, she got pressured as she looked at her friends' nice bodies:

"I want to have six packs like other people...like my friends who are also the models."

(Mam, 27-year-old participant)

The older participants, in contrast, had been more influenced by "Individual Differences" as they have their own motivations in being healthy. Each individual's personality and lifestyle also played a key role here as most participants from the 40 to 60 years old group did not have the routine jobs. They had a lot of free times and looked for something fun to do: As Jeab, who loved to socialize with others, pointed out:

“I don’t have to go to work. Staying at home is boring. I like to be outside ... Coming to fitness is more fun than exercising at home. You meet a lot of people and having fun as we exercise together.”

(Jeab, 41-year-old participant)

Lin and Nee, who were talkative and friendly, made a similar comment about their preference in being socialized with others in the fitness centers:

“I have a treadmill at home, but I have rarely used it. Coming here is much better. It’s more enjoyable when you join the class with other people”

(Lin, 48-year-old participant)

“It’s fun. You meet a lot of people. You can relax here...better than staying at home.”

(Nee, 60-year-old participant)

As the participants from both groups experienced a significant difference between their current state of affairs and the state they desired, they thought of something that could help them solve their problems. Most of them considered exercising as the best way to help them solve their problems. Yet, not all of them started to engage in information search—the next stage of the decision making process—in order to find the good places for exercising right away. There was a time delay between Stage one and Stage two of the decision making process as these individuals did not consider their current state of affair as the critical problem that needed to be solved immediately. Especially for those in the 40 to 60 years old group whose goal was to be healthy, these individuals were not likely to be actively engaged in the process of information search about the fitness centers. Most of them were engaged in “incidental search,” and this point shall be discussed as a key finding that relates to Stage 2 of the decision making process—“Information Search.”

Stage 2: Information Search

The data from the interviews indicated that “Environmental Influences” still played a key role in younger consumer’s decision making towards fitness centre. These younger individual tended to be engaged in external search as they relied on the personal sources of information such as friends and colleagues who provide them the information regarding fitness centers. Some of them sought information about fitness centers from

public sources like the articles on the Internet. But neither those from the younger age group nor those from the older age group mentioned advertising—a type of the marketer controlled sources—as the information source from which they learned about the fitness centers. Most participants said that they just walked pass by the fitness centers they were their current members or former members and then decided to get inside to take a look:

“It looked nice from the outside, so I came in to take a look. I really liked the environment here.”

(Took, 41- year-old participant)

“I went to shopping with my friends and saw that place. I decided to get inside. It was huge...very interesting, so I talked to the sales person and decided to become their member ... I heard from someone that the new fitness was opened here, so when I came here for shopping, I stopped by to see how it looked”

(Dao, 52-year-old participant)

As Belch and Belch (2012) pointed out, not all information would be searched rationally by the consumers. In fact, the incidental search might have occurred in many situations during the stage of information search. The excerpts above illustrate how incidental search occurred in the case of fitness centre as the participants did not actively search for information regarding the fitness centers until they accidentally walked pass by the places. Those excerpts also illustrate how the place as the form of point-of-purchase displays and the personal experience could become the important sources of information for individuals who were interested in purchasing the fitness center service. The participants from both age groups were influenced by “Environmental Influences” as the situations (e.g., accidentally passing by the facility) and family/friends affected their search of information. Yet, their curiosity represented by the way they got inside the fitness facility to take a look indicated “Individual Influences” that affected their decision making in searching for information as well. For those who had been the members of the other fitness centers before they moved to the current one may have also been influenced by “Individual Differences” as they had more knowledge about fitness centers and were likely to begin with internal search (e.g., recalling past experiences they had with the ones they were once their members) before engaging in external search.

Stage 3: Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives

Interestingly, most participants said that they only had one brand in their minds after they went through Stage 2 of the decision making process. These individuals gave the priority to the convenient location as they looked for the workout places. And after they saw the real facility, they were likely to make the decision right away to become the members of those particular places. Accordingly, these individuals did not search information about the other brands to compare.

Few participants decided not to renew their memberships with the old ones and moved to the new one as soon as their memberships at the old ones expired. For these individuals, they had two alternatives in their evoked sets—the old one and the new one. However, as the new one located at the more convenient location, these individual did not take time for so long in making up their minds:

“[The old one] is far from my house. Well...I am used to that place because I had been their members for several years, but I am too lazy to travel.”

(Dao, 52-year-old participant)

At Stage 3 of the decision making process, “Individual Differences” were playing the key role on the decision making process of the participants from both groups as their personality, lifestyle, values as well as motivation, affected their decisions in choosing the alternative choices of fitness centre for their evoked sets. These individuals wanted to make their lives easier. They loved conveniences and comfort. As such, they were motivated to select the choice that offered them more convenience.

Stage 4: Purchase

According to Belch and Belch (2012), there is a time delay between the formation of a purchase intention and the actual purchase as the additional decisions might be needed, especially for the case of highly involved and complex purchase. Interview data suggested that in the case of fitness centre, however, after making the decision regarding the particular fitness centers they wanted to purchase the service, the participants had not spent much time with the additional decisions. For participants from both age groups, fitness center service was not considered the case of complex purchase. All participants stated that they did their actual purchase of the fitness center membership within few months after they made up their minds about the place. At this

stage, “Environmental Influences” like family and friends played a key role on the younger participants’ purchase decision, but played only little part in the older participants’ purchase decision. The older participants were more influenced by “Individual Differences” such as attitudes (e.g., exercise is a fun thing to do) and personality (e.g., socialized person, social chameleon) to make a purchase decision:

“My mom asked me every day...when will you apply for the fitness center membership? I could not stand for that anymore, so I decided...okay...let’s do it.”

(May, 31-year-old-participant)

“I decided to be the member here because my sister told me to do so ... But I would not be here if I did not feel fun with exercising.”

(Nee, 60-year-old participant)

After going through Stage 4 of the decision making process, the consumers will did their actual purchase and then go to “Consumptions”— Stage 5 of the decision making process—which will be discussed next.

Stage 5: Consumption

As Blackwell and his colleagues argued (Blackwell et al., 2012) the process of consumptions can occur immediately after the consumers take possession of the products or be delayed. In the case of fitness centre, all participants said that they started using the service within the few days after paying for the membership fee:

“The sales person told me to go back home to grab my cloths and came back to exercise on that day. I didn’t do so even though I wanted to. I don’t want her to think that I was crazy about it.”

(Jan, 34-year-old participant)

“Nobody brought the gym cloth to the fitness centre on the day you applied to be their member. But I think most people want to start exercising there as soon as you can, especially the ones who wanted to lose weight like me.”

(Kate, 42-year-old participant)

Most participants said that they came to the fitness centers at least 3 or 4 times a week. How much time they had spent there largely depended on “Individual Differences.” Those who were more concerned about their health and body were likely to be motivated to spend more time at the fitness centers. Yet it also depends on what kind of job they were doing. The retired participant and the ones who did not have the

routine jobs were able to go to the fitness centers more often and also able to spend more time there. For younger participants, however, many of them came to exercise with their friends. Accordingly, these individuals were influenced by “Environmental Influences” as they used the fitness centre service as well.

According to Kanson’s study (2008), the demographical characteristics including age, occupation, and the level of education affected the numbers of time the fitness service was used for each month as well as the patterns of exercise in which his research respondents were engaged. In this study, however, age and the level of education did not play their parts here. Only occupation had a great effect on the time length each individual spent at the fitness centers. For the exercise patterns, the participants from both age groups stated that they liked to join the exercise classes as much as to use the machines, and the occupation as well as the education level did not show any effect on these individuals’ preferences towards the type of exercises.

Stage 6: Post-Purchase Evaluation

After using products/services, the consumer usually compares the level of performance with expectations. If they are satisfied with the products/services, their responses to such satisfaction will include repurchase, positive word of mouth, and loyalty (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2014). In this study, none of the participants mentioned that they were not satisfied the fitness centers where they were the current members. Nevertheless, not all of them said that they were willing to continue being the members there despite the fact that they were really satisfied with their current workout places. Few participants said that they might have changed to other brands if those brands had better things to offer:

“If there is a better place, I will go there. [But now I’m satisfied with this current place]. After being with them for one year, I might move to exercise in the condominium. I don’t stick with the brand. I went there because I want to gain knowledge [about exercise].”

(Mam, 27-year-old participant)

All individuals who said that they were willing to try the better places were from the younger age group. This finding suggested that the older participants were more likely to be loyal to the brand than the younger ones. Although some of the older

participants moved from the other fitness centers to another, they did so because they liked the location of the new one better:

“If [the old one] opened their new branch here, I will move to be the member at the new branch ... In fact, I don't have any problem with them, except they were far from my house.”

(Dao, 52-year-old participant)

According to the results of Avourdiadou and Theodorakis's (2014) study which being conducted with the members of the fitness centers in Greece, service quality was a major driver of loyalty only for novice customers, while overall satisfaction had a greater impact on experienced customers. For Thai people, as being suggested by the findings of this current study, age seems to play a more vital role on customers' loyalty than the experience in fitness centre service

Although the participants of this study were satisfied with the current place where they were the members, only few of them indicated their attempts in convincing their acquaintances to apply for the membership there. There was the evidence of the positive word-of-mouth that occurred after these individuals felt satisfied with the service as most of the participants said that they told their friends and families about how nice to exercise there and how good the facility was. However, these individuals had never convinced their acquaintances to become the members of those fitness centers as they recognized the differences in their life style and preferences:

“Almost all of my friends don't like exercise. I told them how good that place was. They seemed to be excited, but I knew they didn't want to be the members there.”

(Emmy, 31 year-old-participant)

The interview data indicated that “Individual Differences” had a greater influence on how each participant evaluated the brands. Having positive attitude towards exercise as well as the facility of fitness centre enhanced the participants' likeliness to be satisfied with their current workout place and wanted to share their positive thoughts with others. Personality, lifestyle, and values also had a great effect upon the participants' post-consumption evaluation. For example, those who were variety seekers or preferred excitement could become bored if their current workout place had stuck with the same old exercise class for too long, and that would affect the way they evaluate the quality of exercise class at fitness centre:

“[This fitness center] is good because they will have something new every two month. I love to try something different and it would be so boring if they have stuck with the old programs for more than two months.”

(On, 28-year-old participant)

The younger participants were more likely to share their experiences in using the fitness centre service with their peers than the older participants. Accordingly, these individuals were also influenced by “Environmental Influences” as they wanted their acquaintances to listen to the story they were sharing.

After the consumers being engaged in the stage of post-consumption evaluation, they will usually go through the stage of “Divestment,” which is the final stage of the decision making process. However, this final stage does not apply to the fitness centre case as it mainly focused on the disposal of products. Accordingly, there will be no discussion about the final stage of the decision making process in this paper.

To summarize, all four key themes being discovered through the method of thematic analysis illustrated the major factors involved in the consumers’ decision making process towards fitness centre. The researchers also used the decision making process framework to gain a better understanding of how those themes got involved in each stage of the decision making process of those who are the current members of the fitness centers. By comparing between two age groups of female participants, which are considered the potential target consumers of the fitness centre business in Thailand, the researcher discovered that mostly, both groups had been influenced by different determinants at each stage of their decision making process. While the participants from the 25 to 35 years old group were more likely to be influenced by “Environmental Influences,” the ones from the older age group were mostly influenced by “Individual Differences.” All key findings were summarized and presented in the form of diagram on the next page, and the implications of this study will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

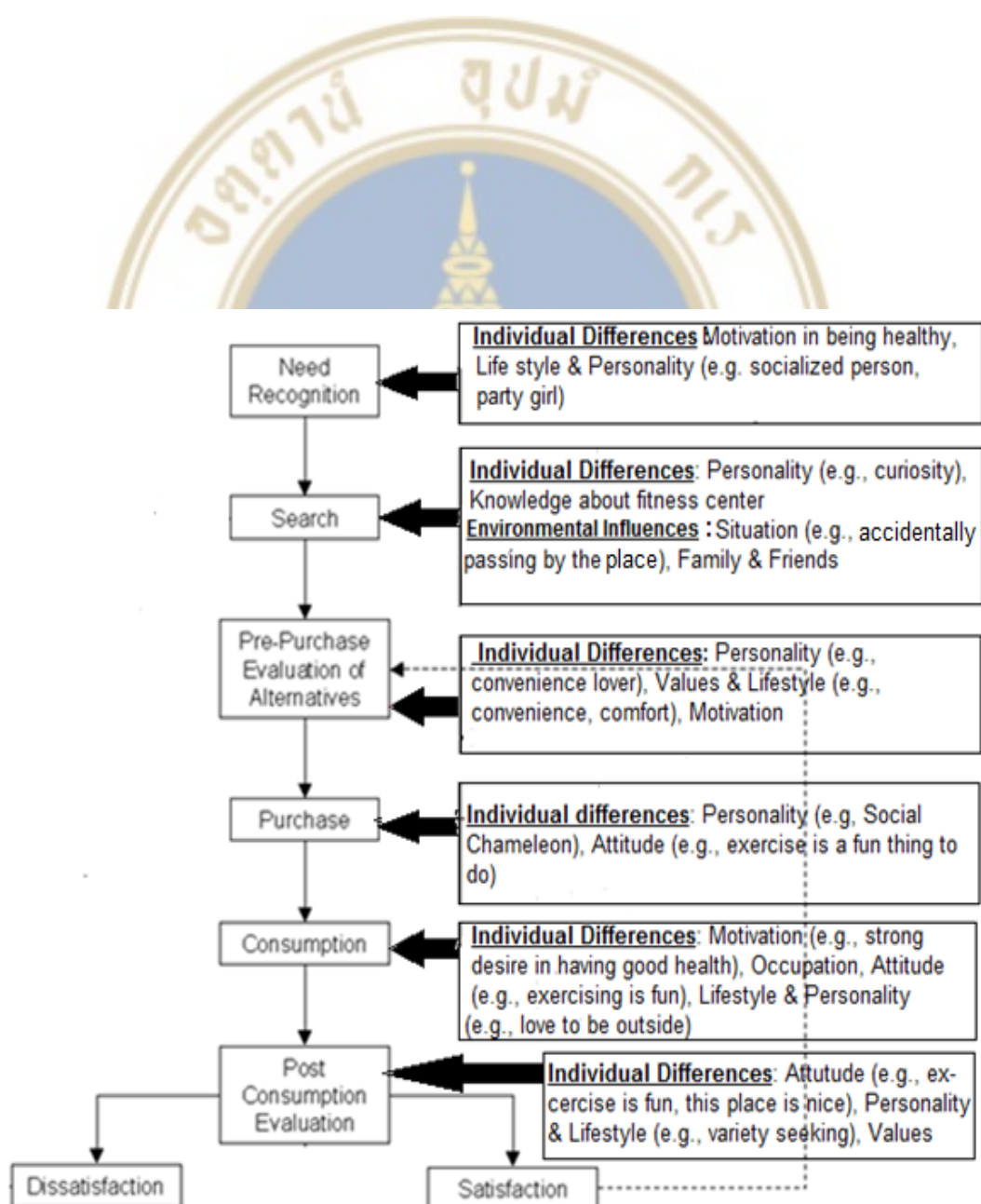


Figure 4.1 The CDP model for the fitness centre service with factors and determinants that influence the decision making of the participants from the 40 to 60 years old group (Note: Developed by the researcher of this study)

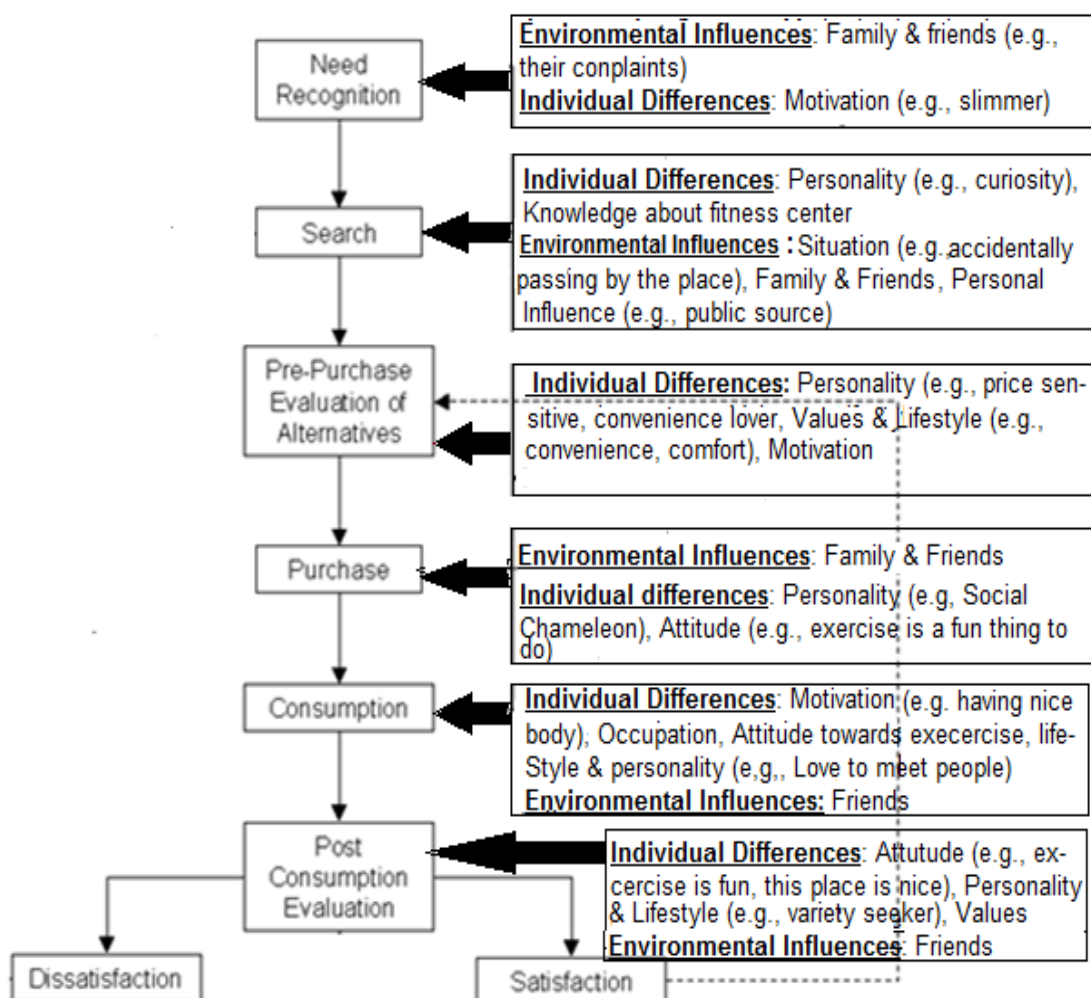


Figure 4.2 The CDP model for the fitness centre service with factors and determinants that influence the decision making of the participants from the 25 to 35 years old group (Note: Developed by the researcher of this study).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Exercise is generally perceived by Thais as a trendy activity, and over the years its popularity has not yet declined. Several studies have already been conducted to gain an understanding of the factors revolved around consumers' decision making process towards the brand name fitness center in Thailand. This current study, however, did not focus on the particular brand but aimed for gaining an insight into the decision making process of those who are the current members of either brand name fitness centre or the stand alone ones and the determinants that affected their decision making. In particular, it seeks to explore the similarities as well as the differences in the decision making process of female consumers from two different age ranges—25 to 35 and 40 to 60—and how environmental influences as well as individual differences play their roles in each stage of their decision making process.

By conducting the qualitative study with fourteen participants from two different age groups, the researcher discovered four major themes that illustrated the participants' motivation in using the fitness centre service and the determinants that greatly impacted their decision making. Those four themes include Health Consciousness, Nice Body, Convenient Location, and Great Facility. By linking all four themes to Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model, the researcher further explored how those themes played their parts in each stage of the decision making process of the individuals from two age ranges who were the current members of the fitness centers. The findings suggested that as these two groups went through each stage of the decision

making process, they were influenced by the different types of factors and determinants. While the younger participants were influenced by the external factors or “Environmental Influences” like family and friends, they were also influenced by the internal factor or “Individual Differences” such as motivation, attitude, values, personality and lifestyle. For the older participants, however, these individual were more likely to be influenced by “Individual differences” rather than “Environmental Influences.”

5.1 Managerial Implication

The knowledge suggested by this research can be applied by the practitioners who involve in the fitness segment or those who work in the businesses related to health and exercise as they plan to develop or improve the competitive positions for their brands. If they want to target the younger age group of consumers, they should pay attention to the role of personal influence in the younger consumers’ decision making. The message that the marketers use in order to communicate with this particular group of consumers about their brands needs to take group reference into account. In contrast, if the marketers want to target the group of older consumers, they need to focus on the psychological factors and create the message that fits their motivations, attitudes, values, personality, and lifestyle in order to motivate them to make a purchase.

Interestingly, in the case of fitness center service, the information being sent through the marketer controlled sources do not gain much attention from either the older consumers or the younger ones. These individual relied more on the personal sources of information and the personal experiences. Consequently, investing a large amount of money on a big marketing communication campaign might not be necessary. Focusing on improving the places and facilities as well as giving away “samplings” and using word-of-mouth to promote the brand can be considered the better strategies in motivating the target consumers from both age groups to purchase the fitness centre service.

In order to create brand loyalty, the research findings suggested that there were three important aspects being perceived by the target consumers from both age

groups as critical: location, facility, and the variety of service. The location was given the priority over the other two. If the location is satisfied, the other two will be evaluated respectively. Interestingly, the membership cost was considered less important than these three aspects by most research participants. Thus, it means that if any fitness center is excellent in terms of location, facility, and the variety of service, it would be able to gain customer's loyalty despite the fact that their membership cost might be higher than its competitors.

5.2 Theoretical Implication

The findings of this study have brought into light how female consumers in Thailand make their decisions toward fitness centre, which is a type of business that relates to a trendy activity like exercise. The existing studies regarding the fitness center business either in Thailand or overseas have revolved around the factors that influence consumers' satisfactions toward fitness centre, customers' attitudes toward brands, and their consumption behavior in general. Yet, there is still the lack of research regarding the decision making process of the fitness center consumers and how internal as well as external variables play their roles in each stage of the consumers' decision making process. Furthermore, most studies in this area have done through the quantitative approach and neglected the psychological factors that underpinned the consumers' decision making. This current study, thus, helps filling the gap that has still existed in the academic discipline as its results illustrated in details what internal and external factors influenced the consumers' decision making process at each stage. Psychological factors that influenced consumers' decision making were also the central focus of this study as the researcher used the qualitative approach to gain an insightful data from the research participants. By exploring each variable in details, the researcher was able to suggest the key factors that largely impacted the decision making of the consumers from two different age ranges and compare what similar and what different between them. These findings can also be used to develop the model for effective marketing communications as they offer the intensive knowledge regarding the factors and determinants that motivate consumers to purchase products/services which also relate to their preferred sources of information and communication channels.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study was conducted with the female participants who have lived and exercised at the places located in Bangkok and its vicinity. Since different genders as well as geographic might somehow affect the way people make their decisions and consume products or services, the results of this current research cannot be generalized across gender as well as the regions. Additionally, the researcher does not bring in to account other demographic factors besides gender and age when recruiting the research participants. Therefore, the research results might not be able to answer the question of how other demographic factors such as education level, income, or marital status could affect the decision making process of the fitness centers' consumers.

In order to gain an insight into the consumers' decision making process towards fitness centre, the future study should bring into account the other demographic factors to see if each of them could have different impacts on the consumers' decision making. Furthermore, since this current research was conducted with only 14 participants--seven for each age range--the future research should be conducted with the larger number of research participants to ensure the validity of the final results. In addition, the mix method (the quantitative survey combined with the in-depth interviews) should also be used in collecting data as it could help to provide a depth of understanding of the participants' consumption experiences as well as to provide an insight into a breadth of the phenomenon under study

REFERENCES

- Ausawa-r-rak, U. (2006). *Factors affecting decision behavior trend in GMM FITNESS*. Master Project, M.B.A. (Management). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University.
- Belch, G. E., & Belch, M. A. (2012). *Advertising and promotion: An integrated marketing communications perspective* (9th ed.). Singapore: McGraw-Hill.
- Blackwell, R. D., Miniard, P. W., & Engel, J. F. (2012). *Consumer behavior*. Singapore: Cengage Learning.
- Brennan, R., Dahl, S., & Eagle, L. (2010). Persuading young consumers to make healthy nutritional decisions. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(7/8), 635-655.
- Çabuk, S., Tanrikulu, C., & Gelibolu, L. (2014). Understanding organic food consumption: Attitude as a mediator. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 38(4), 337-345.
- Chareonchaivanich, S. (2005). *Consumers' satisfaction of consumer behavior and trend of using Fitness First Thailand*. Master Project, M.B.A. (Marketing). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Ferrand, A., Robinson, L., & Valette-Florence, P. (2010). The intention-to-repurchase paradox: A case of the health and fitness industry. *Journal of Sport Management*, 24(1), 83-105.

- Fusion, J. (n.d.). What is the target market for fitness gyms? Retrieved from <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/target-market-fitness-gyms-3354.html>
- Hawkins, D. I., & Mothersbaugh, D. L. (2014). *Consumer behavior: Building marketing strategy* (12th ed.). Singapore: McGraw-Hill.
- INTAGE (2012). The Rosey or Bumpy: Road of fitness in Thailand. *Flash*, 6, 1-3.
- INTAGE (2014). Theory of being in the spotlight: “Beautiful, Handsome... Fabulous!.” *Flash*, 29, 1-3.
- Kanson, C. (2008). *Behaviors exhibited in selecting locations for engaging in exercise: A case study of California Wow Experience Public Company Limited*. Master Project, M.E. (Economics). Bangkok: Graduate School, Ramkhamhaeng University.
- Kriwy, P. , & Mecking, R. (2012). Health and environmental consciousness, costs of behaviour and the purchase of organic food. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 36(1), 30-37.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- MacIntosh, E., & Law, B. (2015). Should I stay or should I go? Exploring the decision to join, maintain, or cancel a fitness membership. *Managing Leisure*, 20(3), 191-210.
- Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Panittumrong, P. (2004). *The consumer's opinion towards Clark Hatch Fitness Center*. Master Project, M.B.A. (Management). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University.
- Parnsoonthorn , K (2015, September 14). Branson's Virgin has eyes on Thai skies. *Bangkok Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/news/691548/branson-virgin-has-eyes-on-thai-skies>
- Pattamadilok, L. (2011). *Business and marketing strategy of the fitness center business: A case of ABC fitness center*. Master Project, MBA (Marketing). Bangkok: Graduate School, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Riessman, C. H. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Royne, M. B., Fox, A. K., Deitz, G. D., & Gibson, T. (2014). The effects of health consciousness and familiarity with DTCA on perceptions of dietary supplements. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 48(3), 515-534.
- Rungfapaisarn, K. (2013, July 17). We Fitness set for Thai debut. *The Nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/We-Fitness-set-for-Thai-debut-30210590.html>
- SCB Economic Intelligence Center (2015a). *Insight: Thai aging*. Bangkok: SCB.
- SCB Economic Intelligence Center (2015b). *Insight: Gen Y*. Bangkok: SCB.
- Schiffman, L. G., Kanuk, L. L., & Wisenblit, J. (2010). *Consumer behavior* (10th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Solomon, M. R. (2011). *Consumer behavior: buying, having, and being* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Talukdar, D., & Lindsey, C. (2013). To buy or not to buy: Consumers' demand response patterns for healthy versus unhealthy food. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(2), 124-138.
- Theodorakis, N. D., Howat, G., Ko, Y. J., & Avourdiadou, S. (2014). A comparison of service evaluation models in the context of sport and fitness centres in Greece. *Managing Leisure*, 19(1), 18-35.
- Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and meaning* (pp. 83-101). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

Demographic data

Pseudonym:

Age:

Career:

Education level:

Marital status:

I. The reasons to engage in exercise and apply for fitness membership

1. How long have you been engaged in exercise regularly?
Probe 1: What kind of exercise/physical activities have you been engaged in?
2. How long have you been the member of fitness centre?
Probe 1: Is this the first fitness center you registered to be the member?
Probe 2: How many fitness centers have you ever been the member?
3. Why did you start exercise regularly in the first place? What is the most important reason for you to exercise regularly?
4. Did you make a decision on your own to exercise regularly? Did anyone recommend you to exercise?
5. Why did you choose to become a member of the fitness centre?
6. Did you make a decision on your own to apply for fitness membership? Did anyone recommend you to do that?
7. What is your expectation in exercising?

II Information sources and evaluation criteria

8. Where did you find the information about fitness centre?
9. With whom you usually consult about exercise and using the fitness centre service?
10. What is the most important thing that you are looking for from fitness centre (e.g., price, facility, variety of service)
11. What aspects have you used to compare your alternative choices of fitness centre?

III Consumption behavior and satisfaction

12. How often do you exercise? How often do you come to the fitness centre?
13. What kind of exercise you normally do at the fitness centre? Why do you choose this type of exercise?
14. Are you satisfied with the fitness centre that you are their current member?
Why or why not?
Probe 1: What is the thing you like best about this fitness centre?
Probe 2: What is the thing you like least about this fitness centre?
15. Are you satisfied with your current state (e.g., weight, body, or health) now?
Please explain.

VI Post-purchase behavior

16. Are you willing to continue exercising regularly? Why or Why not?
17. Do you plan to continue to be the member of this fitness centre? Why or why not?
18. Have you ever talked about the fitness center where you are their current member
with anyone? What was the thing that you usually talked about them?

Additional questions

1. Is there anything about your experiences in exercising and using the fitness centre service that you would like to tell me which I have not asked?
2. Would you like to ask me any question?

APPENDIX B: Profile of the Research Participants

25-35 years old group

Participant #1

Pseudonym: May

Age: 31

Career: Translator

Education level: Master's Degree

Marital status: Married

Experience with fitness centre: 6 months member at a large stand alone fitness club before moving to the brand name one. She has exercised regularly for 2 years now and gone to the fitness centre 3-5 times a week.

Participant #2

Pseudonym: Jan

Age: 34

Career: Graduate student, Freelancer

Education level: Master's Degree

Marital status: Divorce

Experience with fitness centre: Once a member of the fitness club close to her house (for 2 years). She stopped exercising for a year after the one she was its member was out of business. She is a current member of the brand name one and goes to her workout place almost every day.

Participant #3

Pseudonym: Mam

Age: 27

Career: Graduate student and model

Education level: Bachelor's Degree

Marital status: Single

Experience with fitness centre: Being a member of few places before sticking with the current one for a year now. She goes to her workout place 3-4 times a week in attempt to build a strong and nice body shape

Participant #4

Pseudonym: On

Age: 28

Career: Office worker

Education level: Bachelor's Degree

Marital status: Single

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. She has been a member of the brand name fitness centre for 4 months now and goes to exercise there 3-4 times a week.

Participant #5

Pseudonym: Pam

Age: 26

Career: Newly graduate

Education level: Master's Degree

Marital status: Single

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. She has been a member of the brand name fitness centre for 6 months now and tried to exercise there everyday if possible.

Participant #6

Pseudonym: Ann

Age: 33

Career: Help parents run the family's business

Education level: Master's Degree

Marital status: Single

Experience with fitness centre: Being a member of a famous fitness centre for few years before going to study abroad. After coming back, she was looking for the new workout place that might have had some better promotions to offer. Then she decided to choose the new one close to her house. She goes to exercise at the fitness center 3-4 times a week before going to work.

Participant #7

Pseudonym: Emmy

Age: 31

Career: Office worker

Education level: Master's Degree

Marital status: Single

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. Have been a member of the brand name fitness centre for 7 months now and go to exercise there approximately 3 times a week.

40-60 years old group

Participant #1

Pseudonym: Kate

Age: 42

Career: University lecturer

Education level: Doctoral Degree

Marital status: Divorce

Experience with fitness centre: Being a member of few stand-alone fitness centers for almost two years and then quitting exercise regularly for several years. She just started exercise regularly again at a new brand name fitness centre where she has been the member there for almost 6 months.

Participant #2

Pseudonym: Jeab

Age: 41

Career: Business owner

Education level: Bachelor's Degree

Marital status: Married

Experience with fitness centre: Once a member of a famous fitness centre for several years and then moved to the new one that just opened close to her house. She goes to exercise 3-4 times a week.

Participant #3

Pseudonym: Dao

Age: 52

Career: Housewife

Education level: Diploma

Marital status: Married

Experience with fitness centre: Once a member of a famous fitness centre for several years and then moved to the new one that just opened close to her house. She goes to exercise 3-4 times a week.

Participant #4

Pseudonym: Took

Age: 41

Career: Office worker

Education level: bachelor's Degree

Marital status: Married

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. She goes to exercise at her workout place approximately 3 times a week.

Participant #5

Pseudonym: Tik

Age: 46

Career: Housewife

Education level: Diploma

Marital status: Married

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. She goes to exercise at her workout place approximately 4 times a week.

Participant #6

Pseudonym: Nee

Age: 60

Career: Retire

Education level: Diploma

Marital status: Single

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. She goes to exercise at her workout place almost everyday.

Participant #7

Pseudonym: Lin

Age: 46

Career: Housewife

Education level: Bachelor's Degree

Marital status: Married

Experience with fitness centre: First time being a member of the fitness centre. She goes to exercise at her workout place approximately 4 times a week as she hopes that exercising could help her recover from her knee injury.