# THE PERSPECTIVE OF STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS THE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF HEALTH PRODUCTS AVAILABLE THROUGH SOCIAL COMMERCE IN THAILAND

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**Abstract -** Social commerce has grown rapidly in the past few years and occupies the highest online market share in Thailand. Presently, health products are one of the online problematic product groups. Although various solutions have been used for health product problems on social commerce in Thailand, the problems still continue and intensify. Therefore, this study aims to gather information related to the problems in the perspective of stakeholders and to summarize the problem-solving concepts that are suitable for the context of Thai society. There are 3 groups of key informants including consumers, government officials and entrepreneurs. All 13 key informants were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The data was then analyzed by 3 researchers. The findings of the 3 issues were summarized from the interviews. Firstly, stakeholders have a different perspective on health product problems and current problem management issues. Beauty products are the most problematic health product group through social commerce. Expected results from using health products are the most important for consumers. Some of them accept the risks in exchange for the results they desire. Government officials pay attention to false advertising and health effects on consumers that cannot be treated. Entrepreneurs focus on sales and reputation. Each stakeholder recognizes that problem-solving is the responsibility of other stakeholders. Secondly, stakeholders perceive the risks of the problems with different recognition methods, such as consumer experience, word of mouth, various public media and survey data. Thirdly, consumers manage the risks with different approaches. They deal with the risks based on the information they can access without knowing that the information is true or false. They try to protect themselves by learning from their own personal experiences. Moreover, consumers do not succumb to the limitations that make them far from being safe. Therefore, from the context of the problems it can be concluded that the development of consumer potential to protect themselves from unsafe health products consumption is a suitable problem-solving concept for the current situation of Thailand.

**Index Terms -** Consumers, health products, perspective, social commerce.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Technology has been developed to encourage human beings. Familiarity with the use of technology influences human lifestyle. People do not like to do things that are difficult and time-consuming. Entrepreneurs realize business opportunities from consumer behavior. So, online trading systems were developed to meet the needs of consumers. The developed systems have been well received and have grown rapidly in the past few years [1].

The most popular online trading model in Thailand, which was the number one market share in 2018 (137.3 billion baht), is trading via social media or social commerce [2]. Not only the increase in popularity and market proportion, but also the problems from social commerce have been increasing. There are several problems encountered such as advertising problems, problems from the trading processes, consumer dissatisfaction with products or services, and the physical effects that occur to consumers after using products or receiving services. The effects range from not severe to severe with causing a serious impact on the lives of consumers [3]. A group of products on social commerce, which has a lot of problems, are health products [4] because this group of products directly affects the health of consumers. [5] The severity of the problems can be seen from the information provided by the Ministry of Public Health. [6] The statistics of complaints about health products and the reports of health impacts that occur to consumers are increasing continuously [7].

Although many remedies have been used for health product problems on social commerce in Thailand, the problems still continue and intensify [8]. Hence, effective problem-solving can occur if the relevant information is thoroughly studied. Therefore, this study was started.

This study is intended to identify the perspective of stakeholders on health products available through social commerce in Thailand, to identify the perspective of stakeholders on the strategies to solve health product problems that are being implemented and to summarize the concepts of problem-solving that are suitable for the current Thai society.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee for Human Research, Faculty of Pharmacy, Silpakorn University (certificate no. 3/2017).

The key informants, who are involved in the problems of health products available through social commerce were invited in the study. In order for them to represent the real population, they were selected using purposive sampling by a variety of gender, age, education, occupation and income. All 13 key informants are divided into 3 groups as follows.

- 9 consumers, which included the 4 following groups.

**1st group:** consumers who do not purchase any products via social commerce.

**2nd group:** consumers who purchase other products via social commerce but not health products.

**3rd group:** consumers who purchase health products via social commerce but they have never been affected by the use of them.

**4th group:** consumers who have been affected by the use of health products purchased from social commerce.

- 2 government officials from the Health Product Surveillance and Complaint Center and the Provincial Public Health Office.
- 2 entrepreneurs who sell health products through social commerce.

The key informants were given detailed explanations about the research and they responded voluntarily to the study. They were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 4 main questions as follows.

- The key informant basic information.
- The perspective on health products available through social commerce in Thailand. This consisted of 2 sub-questions as follows.

1. What is a problematic product group?
2. What are the top priorities for stakeholders?

- The perspective on the strategies to solve the health product problems that are being implemented.
- The concepts of problem-solving that are suitable for the current Thai society.

Data collection occurred between May and June, 2018. The interview took approximately an hour per individual key informant. All interviews were recorded. The audio files were then converted into verbatim conversations. Then the conversations were analyzed by Typological analysis. The results were considered and summarized by 3 researchers.

## III. RESULTS

Key informants have the characteristics as follows. Consumers have both male, female and alternative sexes. Their age is between 18-48 years old. Most of them have a high school education and a bachelor's degree. They have an average income of about 20,000 baht per month. They have no expertise in health products, but more than half of them have direct experience in purchasing health products through social commerce.

Government officials have a higher education level than a bachelor's degree. They have expertise in health products and have more than 15 years of working experience in this field.

Entrepreneurs graduated from high school and a bachelor's degree. They sell all types of health products both external and oral products via social commerce, such as Facebook, Line, Instagram, LAZADA, Shopee and others. They have experience in selling health products for over 3 years. They have an average income of more than 30,000 baht per month.

The findings from the interviews can be grouped into 3 issues. Firstly, stakeholders have a different perspective on health product problems. They have a variety of opinions about problem-solving and who should be responsible. Secondly, all stakeholders perceive the risks of health product problems with different recognition methods. Thirdly, consumers have different approaches to manage risks.

### 1. Stakeholders have a different perspective on health product problems

Stakeholders have consistent opinions about problematic health products. However, they have an absolutely different attitude towards priorities about the problems and current problem-solving. The perspective of the stakeholders towards health products via social commerce in Thailand is summarized into 3 points as follows.

#### 1.1 Problematic product group

Consumers provided information that the popularity of health products consumption can be summarized respectively as follows: beauty products, health promotion products and sexual enhancement products. They mostly prefer to consume beauty products and have high expectations from using them such as weight loss, good shape, light skin, smooth skin etc. From consumer interviews, the beauty product group is the only group that has found direct suffering experiences from consumers. One consumer stated the following.

“I used a weight loss product. It caused me to not be able to breathe normally. At that time, I felt like I was dying.”

Government officials categorize problematic health products into 3 groups, which are composed of beauty products, illness treatment products and sexual enhancement products. From their experience, it was

found that beauty products are the most problematic group, which has the highest number of complaints and the biggest proportion of severe health effects as well.

Entrepreneurs provide consistent information that the demand for beauty products is higher than others and consumers have high purchasing power as well. One entrepreneur stated the following.

"Everyone wants to have a nice look. So, beauty products always have good sales."

All stakeholders agree that beauty products are the most problematic product group through social commerce in Thailand, which is expanding in both the number and severity of the problems.

### 1.2 Priorities for the problems of stakeholders

The stakeholders have different priorities for health product problems. Expected results from using health products are the most important for consumers. They acknowledge that products are both good and bad. Consumers have to search for information or have to try those products on their own, before they can determine whether products meet their needs or not. In consequence, they have the risk of using these health products. But some consumers are willing to accept the risks in exchange for the results they desire. Consumers stated the following.

"If you never try you'll never know."

"If I'm not beautiful, it would be better to die."

Government officials pay attention to various illegal acts and health effects that occur to consumers after using health products. Solving the problem of false advertising is a top priority of the government sector. They realized that advertising influenced the purchasing decision of consumers. Health effects that cannot be treated, such as disfigurement, disabilities or fatalities are what the government gives priority to. These severe consequences have caused people to lose their life potential and it is the responsibility of the state to provide assistance to them.

Entrepreneurs focus on sales and reputation. They try to select good products and provide the best services. However, the problems arising from the consumption of health products are unavoidable.

Each group of stakeholders has focused on the problems in different perspectives according to their needs and roles. Consumers focus on expected results from using health products. Government officials prioritize to false advertising and health effects on consumers that cannot be treated. Entrepreneurs give the utmost importance to sales and reputation.

### 1.3 Current problem-solving

Each stakeholder recognizes that problem-solving is the responsibility of other stakeholders. Consumers want the state to work seriously to protect their safety. They know that the government works for safety consumption of health products. However, they think those results are delayed and indecisive. They have an opinion that the government greatly focuses on prevention which is not an effective strategy. Problem-solving requires proactive measures. Consumers stated the following.

"Prohibition of buying and selling is not possible. The state must control all products that are sold safely for people."

"The government only provides knowledge, but they do not suppress dangerous products. How can we be safe?"

Whereas, government officials show that they have limitations in their work; the number of staff is not enough, information on social media is difficult to access due to data security systems and some actions that are necessary to solve the problems have no direct power to be able to do. For all those reasons, government officials are not able to deal with the problems that occur thoroughly. Therefore, they expect that consumers should have a safe consumption behavior.

Entrepreneurs expressed ideas that providing safety in health product consumption should be the responsibility of the government and consumer because the state is obliged by law to monitor the safety of health products. Consumers are the best person to know which products they will use safely or not. One entrepreneur stated the following.

"If the state controls the quality of all products well, both sellers and consumers will be safe."

## 2. Stakeholders perceive the risks with different recognition methods

The second finding from the interviews was that stakeholders perceive the risks with different recognition methods. Although they are also fully aware of the risks, they give priority to different channels of information. The channels of information acquisition include consumer experience, word of mouth, various public media and survey data.

The perception of the risks that affect the most to consumers is a direct experience. Consumers who are affected by purchasing or using health products tend to tell their own experiences with others. Nevertheless, they will complain only when they are affected by severe consequences, such as disfigurement, disability, fatality or high damage value. They believe that complaining is complicated, time-consuming and the issue may not be resolved. Word of mouth and information on various public media has greatly affected the risk perception of consumers as well.

Government officials give priority to the risk data from surveys and research studies first. They use that

information to determine their work goals. They also perceive the risks from consumer experience through complaints. Risk perception by tracking information through various public media is difficult because government officials lack advanced technology skills to access information that is under social security systems. Therefore, the perceived risk of the government sector comes from limited sources.

Entrepreneurs pay attention to searching for information about health products in various public media before selling. They recognize the risks of health product problems from consumer experience through product reviews. However, reviews are only part of the information because most consumers said that if the problems are not severe, they usually do not have any replies back from the seller. After that, they will look for new products.

**3. Consumers manage the risks with different approaches**

The third finding from the interviews is consumers manage the risks with different approaches. Consumers are the direct recipient of health products risks. They are aware of the dangers that may arise and decide to deal with the risks based on the information they can access. The most popular source of information that consumers are searching for is on the internet. Nevertheless, information on the internet is both true and deceptive. Therefore, consumers make decisions based on uncertain data. Consumers try to protect themselves by learning from their own personal experiences. They can be divided into 2 groups according to the risk management strategy. The first group is comprised of consumers who cannot assume the risks, so they do not purchase any health products via social commerce. One consumer stated the following.

"Online products are both good and bad. If I'm not sure that I will get a good thing, it's better not to buy it."

The second group are consumers who seek for safe consumption strategies themselves. This consumer group believes that they can use various health products if they considered it carefully. One consumer stated the following.

"I have the right to try out any products that I believe they are good for me."

Consumers have a variety of approaches to protect their safety. Such as, searching for product information from various sources. Information from acquaintances is the first thing that consumers think about when they have to decide on a new health product. Reviews on social media about products they are interested in also greatly influence the purchase decision. One consumer stated the following.

"Recommended products from friends or online products with good reviews, those I would like to try out."

Consumers learn to reduce the risks of using health products. They try to use a new product gradually to observe whether the allergic reaction will occur or not. Consumers who have been affected by the use of health products stated the following.

"Items that I have never used must be tested gradually. If allergic reactions occur, it will not be severe and can be treated in time."

Consumers have their own self-care methods when they face the effects of using health products. These methods can be summarized in the following steps. Firstly, consumers stop using that product immediately. Then, they try to treat the symptoms on their own. Eventually, if the symptoms cannot be treated, they decide to accept medical services. One consumer provided the following information.

"I had a palpitation after using a weight loss product. At that time, I tried to drink a lot of water and thought that if the symptoms do not subside, I will go to the hospital."

Consumers do not succumb to the limitations that make them far from being safe. They try to protect their own safety as much as they can. One consumer stated the following.

"The state is not serious to solve the problems. Sellers also do not have knowledge different from us. So, we have to choose products safely by ourselves."

Moreover, consumers demonstrated their ability to protect themselves. This can be developed if appropriate supports are provided. One consumer stated the following.

"I'm not medical staff. I don't know which one is dangerous or not. If you tell me how to be safe, I will definitely do it."

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The health product problems grew due to the government sector not working thoroughly. The public sector has a high demand for consumption and marketing competition. This information is consistent with the study of health product consumption behavior of Thai consumers by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University in 2016 [4]. Problematic health products on social commerce are divided into 3 groups according to the purpose of use composing of beauty products, illness treatment

products and sexual enhancement products. This information corresponds to the interview with the government officials who have a lot of expertise about the problems. All key informants have agreed that products for beauty are the most problematic product group, which encountered the highest proportion of complaints and serious health effects as well.

Each group of stakeholders has focused on the problems in different perspectives according to their needs and roles. Consumers are interested in the desired results from using health products more than anything else. Government officials pay attention to actions that affect the safety of society because it is their responsibility. Stakeholders recognize that problem-solving is the responsibility of other stakeholders. Different perspectives of stakeholders make the operations of them not meet the needs of others. This is also the cause of negative attitudes towards each other. However, the group of consumers is the hope of all stakeholders that they should have the ability to consume health product safely on their own.

Risk perception channels include consumer experience, word of mouth, various public media and survey data. Stakeholders have different recognition methods to perceive the risks. Nevertheless, they have the same realization of the problems as well. The direct experience of consumers reflects best to the risks of the problems. However, most consumers only reveal their experiences with acquaintances. A few consumers review the problems through public media and they will complain after they are severely affected. From the behavior of consumers mentioned above, entrepreneurs may not recognize all the problems. They perceived the risks but may be ignored because it does not affect them. The government does not receive comprehensive information, so they cannot manage the risks effectively.

Consumers have strategies to manage risks by learning from their own experiences. They try to make a safe decision based on uncertain data. Consumers' efforts to protect themselves in the consumption of health products shows that they do not succumb to the limitations that make them far from being safe. They have the potential to develop habits to protect themselves. Nowadays, most of the consumer potential development is the responsibility of the government. From a report by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency in 2017, they found that education by the state is not thoroughly public, the methods of providing knowledge are not interesting and the contents cannot be applied in real situations as well [1].

The development of consumer potential to protect themselves from health product consumption through social commerce is still a suitable problem-solving concept for the current situation in Thailand. However, the methods of providing knowledge that attracts people's attention along with content that can be applied in real situations absolutely need to be developed. From this study, innovation development with consumers as the target is one of the concepts to support effective problem-solving.

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