

# FACTORS AFFECTING CONSUMERS SELECTION OF LOCAL PHARMACIES IN MALAYSIA

Lai Jeh Wei<sup>1</sup>, Pang Lee Ping<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Operational and Audit Department

<sup>1,2</sup>Alpro Pharmacy Sdn Bhd, Seremban, Malaysia

---

**Abstract:** This research aims to identify different factors influencing consumers selection and buying behaviour in local pharmacies in Malaysia. The four main influence factors consist of customer services, staff professionalism, sales promotion and the location and environment of the pharmacy itself. This research study is designed in a way by using mysterious shopper survey. From January to May 2021, 115 mysterious shoppers were sent out to Alpro Pharmacy located in different state in Malaysia. The data obtained was purely based on rating and percentage from the rating scale of 4 and 5 only. The image and the professionalism of the community pharmacist and staffs are improving and results in better satisfaction and appreciation of their role and position in the health care industry. Despite this, community pharmacists and staffs need to be able to reach out to their patients, assess to the patients' requirements and should play a pro-active role in becoming an effective and indispensable part of health care industry.

**Keywords:** Community Pharmacy, Buying Behaviour, Alpro Pharmacy, Healthy and Vibrant World, Malaysia.

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, community pharmacy is considered as one of the easiest access of health professionals to the public, as it is available to provide personalized advice about health and medication on a walk-in basis without the need for an appointment like hospital or clinic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the walk-in rate of the public to the community pharmacy was found to be increased as consumers were stocking up on facemasks, hand sanitisers, supplements as well as Over the Counter (OTC) medication. Alpro Pharmacy was first established on 1st February 2002. In year 2021, it has more than 135 outlets across Malaysia and the number is still increasing to serve the community.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is essential for pharmacies in Malaysia to understand their consumer buying behaviour. This action will help them to understand what consumers needs and indirectly increase the sales of pharmacies. "Consumer buying behaviour is the study of how the individuals, groups, and organizations select, purchase, utilise, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs" [1]. Thus, it is important to know and understand what are the main factors that are affecting consumer buying behaviour and the selection of community pharmacy in Malaysia.

### A. Customer Service

Customer service is the act of taking care of the consumers' needs by providing them with a professional, helpful, quality service and assistance before, during, and after the customers' requirements are fulfilled. Customer service is part of the retailer activities that increase the value received by consumers when a transaction is made. Offering an amazing customer service is essential to retain customers as well as expand the business. "Professional customer service should include the attention, smile, enthusiasm, courteous words, warmth, patience, understanding, sincerity, consideration, and appreciation" [2]. Although it is hard to develop a customer service plan and it might take effort and time, but once the

effort is well spent it will build up positive word of mouth and retain the customers. Developing customer service strategy to ensure delivering a unique service to customers to revisit from the outlet due to the intimate touch associated with this customer service approach. Customer service in retail stores must be tailored to meet customers' expectations and ensure their satisfaction [3].

### ***B. Staff Professionalism***

Professionalism refers to a person's attitude to, behaviour on, and capabilities in their daily job or task [4]. In the past, the term "profession" was used to specific an occupation such as teaching, engineering, or medicine. An important and significant characteristic of these professions was that it requires a high degree of skills and expertise knowledge to fulfil a person needs. This expertise makes a person informative and knowledgeable about that profession. These expertise or skills are not attained in one or two days, but these are attained over a significant period. Practice and high standard association with other people help in increase skills and knowledge of the individual and make them expert and skilful in that field. It gives license to an individual to work and operate in specific field in most authentic manner [5].

### ***C. Sales Promotion***

Sales promotion has been defined as a diverse collection of incentive tool, mostly short-term, designed to stimulate quicker and greater purchase of a particular products or services by consumers [6]. In other words, sales promotion has emphasized on the short term, stronger stimuli, and the motivational strategy to increase the purchasing behaviour as well as to encourage the consumer to switch from competing brands to others [7]. Medicine or Poison prices are controlled in most developing countries including Malaysia. Pharmacies are banned from offering any sales promotions above the line to control the competition between pharmacies, there are some regulations violations by many pharmacies both independent and chains, and clear manipulation of such regulations without the need to directly provide prices discounts, nevertheless, there will always be a limit to the extent that sales promotion can be used in community pharmacies, which also opens the door for some creativity [8].

### ***D. Location and Environment of the Pharmacy***

The location of a community pharmacy should be doorstep away from homes and convenience to the public. Convenience is perceived as easily accessible by the public, having enough parking lot and a friendly environment, which is instrumental attribute in pharmacy retail success since convenience dimensions have significant importance in retailing and play an important role in customer store choice. Convenience can be further identified by different dimensions such as, business hours, accessibility, parking, and ease of movement. Time and effort, used as dimensions of convenience remain consistent. In this research, store location, availability of parking facilities and extended business hours used to define convenience factor. Environment of a pharmacy include store decoration, product shapes or packages, products display on planogram, colours, lightening, odours, music played, the appearances of pharmacist and health advisor and their attitudes, other customers, and any other stimuli that may affect the customers experience in some way. The store environment is a good way to gain a competitive advantage for retailers [9]. In addition, it is one of the most important factors affecting customers' store selection, as it has positive effect on consumers purchasing attitude and their commitment.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted in Alpro Pharmacy Malaysia, from 1<sup>st</sup> Jan to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. A total of 115 mysterious shopper was recruited in this research. Mysterious shopper is seen as one of the efficient instruments to gain in-depth knowledge of the customer's perception and the feeling of the services deliver [10]. During the research process, observation on the seller's behaviour and the time spent waiting, outlet interior & atmosphere, visage and the neatness of seller and other features which can influence the success of the selling process were conducted [11]. The population of this research consist of mysterious shopper who make the purchase decision from pharmacies, on behalf of themselves or for their family members. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019, a family use 5.1% from the total monthly expenditure for healthcare spending [12].

A Five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was adopted in this research in Alpro Pharmacy. The mysterious shoppers were requested to record their observations in a form prepared specifically for this purpose. A Likert-type scale requires an individual to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether he or she

‘Strongly Agrees’, ‘Agrees’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Disagrees’, or ‘Strongly Disagrees’ [13]. Each response is assigned a point value, and an individual’s score is determined by adding the point values of all the statements [14]. A Likert rating scale measurement can be a useful and reliable instrument for measuring self-efficacy [15].

Table 1 show the characteristics including age, gender, marital status, monthly income, state subjects was conducted, and the types of products bought. Majority are female with the income from RM1501 to RM2500 and age 30 and below. The subjects are at 12 different states in Malaysia. There is only one outlet located in Perak and Kelantan, therefore only one outlet data was collected from each of the state during this research. Meanwhile for Johor, there are 2 samples collected. This is due to the increase in COVID-19 cases from 112 new cases reported daily on 1<sup>st</sup> January to 489 new cases on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021 [10]. More roadblocks and stricter rules make the mysterious shopper having limit on travelling. Lastly, different types of products were purchased during the visit varies between 4 categories. Majority of the product bought over the counter (OTC) items and followed by prescribed medicine.

**TABLE 1: Mysterious shopper details**

Variable	Category	Counts	Percentage	Variable	Category	Counts	Percentage
Age	≤30	41	35.65	State of pharmacies visited	Negeri Sembilan	30	26.09
	31-40	38	33.04		Kuala Lumpur	9	7.83
	41-50	36	31.30		Selangor	13	11.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100.00</b>	Pahang		12	10.43	
Gender	Males	51	44.35		Terengganu	7	6.09
	Females	64	55.65		Johor	5	4.35
	<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100.00</b>		Melaka	9	7.83
Marital Status	Single	25	21.74		Penang	10	8.70
	Married	76	66.09		Kelantan	7	6.09
	Others	14	12.17		Kedah	1	0.87
	<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100.00</b>		Perak	1	0.87
Types of products bought	OTC	59	51.30		Sarawak (EM)	11	9.57
	Personal care	15	13.04	<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
	Supplement	17	14.78	Monthly Income	≤RM1500	36	31.30
	Baby products	5	4.35		RM1501 – RM2500	53	46.09
	Prescribed medicine	19	16.52		≥RM2501	26	22.61
	<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

#### IV. ANALYSE FINDINGS

##### *A. The Level of Customer Services and Information Given by Alpro Pharmacy is Better – Be Involved and Considerate.*

A good customer service is anticipating and satisfying the needs of the customers in a professional, consistent, and dependable way. Excellent customer service perform by Alpro Pharmacy’s staff is essential in terms of building the trust and relationship with the patients or customers for a better and healthy environment. Refer to the National Health & Morbidity Survey (NHMS), 20% of people in Malaysia reported to have been sick in every two weeks, among those who were sick, 50.5% did not seek any advice from any professional healthcare advisor, in fact they are self-medicated, sought advice from family and friends or from the media (social media, newspaper & tv/radio) [16]. To be involved and considerate, Minute Consult service was launched in year 2020 in Alpro Pharmacy to encourage citizens, at an affordable price, to sought care or advice from the Minor Illness Service (MIS) certified pharmacist on any common minor illnesses. The uniqueness of the Minute Consult is said to be “Fast, Affordable, Safe & Private” [17]. Besides that, Silvercare, a one stop solution for elderly care and post-discharge services was introduced to bring more convenience to the public especially to the elderly citizen. Rental services for rehabilitation

equipment like hospital bed, wheelchair as well as oxygen concentrator are available in any Alpro Pharmacy's outlet throughout Malaysia. From these services and conveniences, over 77.63% of the mysterious shopper from the research are agreed that the level of service and information given by Alpro Pharmacy is better than other pharmacies in Malaysia. (Figure 1)

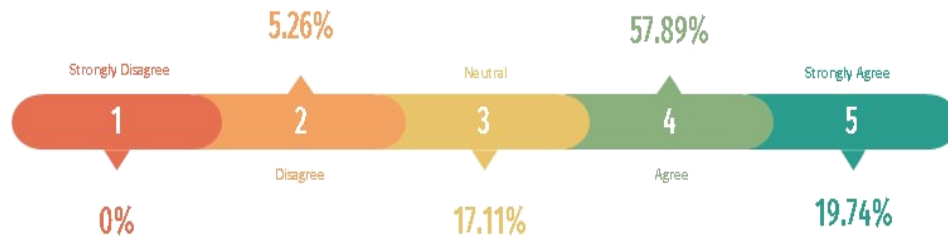


Figure 1: The level of customer service and information given by Alpro Pharmacy is better

### B. Alpro Pharmacy Staff's Professionalism and Rapport Building Skills – Be Welcoming.

Professionalism of a staff should include a proper dress code, grooming, mannerisms, politeness as well as deliver the knowledge of a product or services [18]. Staff in Alpro Pharmacy showing welcoming by giving a quick connect – saying “hello, welcome to Alpro Pharmacy” when the customer stepping into the pharmacy. This action is essential as it look professional and convey a helpful attitude. Besides that, a regular on the job training is the key for every staff in Alpro Pharmacy to be professional. Training on new product or services knowledge, and communication skills makes all the staff are ready to give their best to serve, no matter during customer purchase or after sales consultation. Therefore, 78.95% of the mysterious shopper from the research agreed in Alpro Pharmacy staff's professionalism. (Figure 2) These attitude and action build a good rapport and build customer's confidence and trust. The rapport between outlet's staff and customers represents a particular salient issue in retail businesses characterized by significant interpersonal interactions [19]. Although rapport relates to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication, the behaviours of employees use to develop rapport receive minimal attention in marketing and management literature. As a result, 68.42% from the mysterious shopper recognised this as a valuable act. (Figure 3)

The rapport between employees and customers represents a particularly salient issue in retail businesses characterized by significant interpersonal interactions. Although rapport relates significantly to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication, the behaviours employees use to develop rapport receive minimal attention in marketing and management literature. The rapport between employees and customers represents a particularly salient issue in retail businesses characterized by significant interpersonal interactions. Although rapport relates significantly to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication, the behaviours employees use to develop rapport receive minimal attention in marketing and management literature.

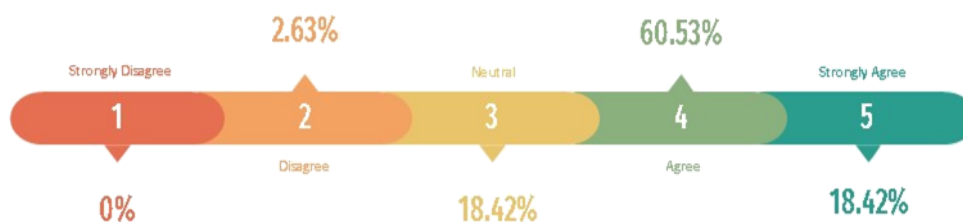


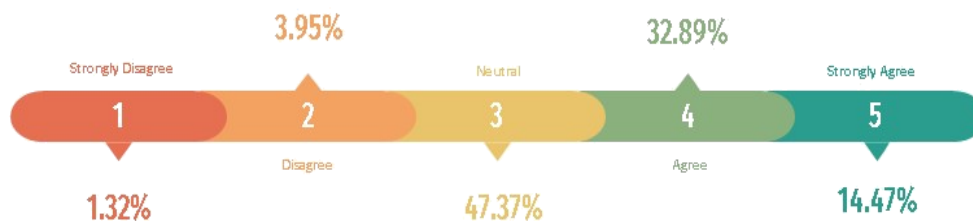
Figure 2: Alpro Pharmacy staff's professionalism during purchase & after sales consultation.



**Figure 3:** Rapport building skills of Alpro Pharmacy's staff and being trustworthy enough to have my best interest at hand.

### C. Availability of Health Screenings in Alpro Pharmacy – Be Genuine.

Health screening is a part of the prevention strategy that seek to identify and limit the disability associated with chronic diseases by early detection and with a proper treatment [20]. Screening may not only save lives but also improve quality of life by reducing complications of chronic disease [21]. With a genuine heart and the vision of “For a Healthy and Vibrant World” [22], Alpro Pharmacy provide a free service for high blood pressure measurement in every outlet. All staffs are given education and training on the use of the equipment, the interpretation of results and the procedures to be followed in carrying out tests for health screening and medication management purposes. Therefore, this makes consumers select Alpro Pharmacy as their preferable community pharmacy compared to others. Refer infographic 4, 47.36% of the mysterious shopper agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, 47.37% rated as “Neutral” due to the raise in COVID-19 cases and implement certain stage of MCO from January to May 2021 by the Malaysian Government [23]. Therefore, the Ministry of Health of Malaysia had restrictions and tightening certain outlets’ standard operation procedures like physical distancing and limit the number of customers entering the outlet at one time [24].



**Figure 4:** Availability of Health Screenings in Alpro Pharmacy.

### D. Extension Array of Selections of Products and Having the Latest Products to Recommend and Share with Customer – Be Knowledgeable.

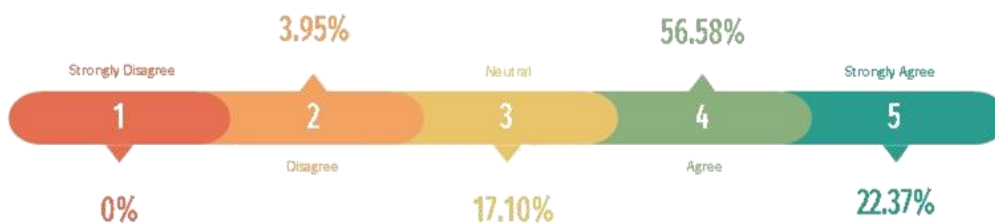
Selection of products shared and introduced are profoundly done where retail’s staffs can provide a wide range of knowledge gained towards things available in the pharmacy and deliver it to customers. At the same time promotions and updated news are consistently carried out at all subjects. The information provided are valid in conjunction with trainings and discussions carry out via online to all Alpro Pharmacy staff. To be knowledgeable, MAXHUB training (online training) were conducted by pharmacist and dietitian was carry out 3 days per week, 2 session per day for staff to gain extra knowledge on job. Topic covers may include new product/services knowledge and retail skills. Retail skills are skills that involve selling products or services to consumers. These skills are required for many different retail jobs, which include cashier, sales associate, retail associate, retail buyer, retail manager, retail sales merchandiser, buyer, and more [25]. With these training and skills learned, staff able to serve customer better and makes customer felt trustworthy in Alpro’s product. Meanwhile, latest promotion which including updates on any Member’s Day or Warehouse Sales are given during outlet morning briefing 15 minutes before business hour. A total of 65.79% from the mysterious shopper agreed with this statement.



**Figure 5:** Extension array of selections of products and having the latest products to recommend and share with customer

### E. Location and Environment in Alpro Pharmacy.

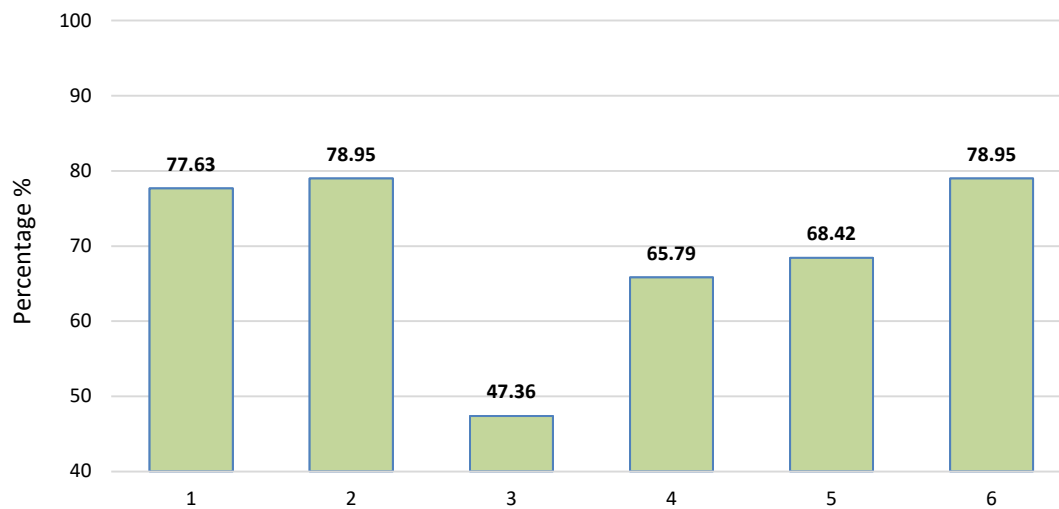
It is important to choose where to locate the retail business as it would have a huge impact on public presence, walk-in traffic, the potential for growth and future income [26]. Choosing a location that does not take into consideration on mentioned factors may limit the business's ability to succeed and grow. With an emphasis on individualized pharmaceutical care and superior customer service, Alpro Pharmacy prospered and expanded, now rooted at more than 135 outlets throughout Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Penang, Johor, Terengganu, Kelantan, Melaka, and Sarawak. With the support from the strong management team and people with relevant knowledge & experiences, Alpro Pharmacy managed to open more than 20 outlets in year 2020 and achieved the revenue growth more than 300% [22]. The convenience and the easy access of the outlets makes 78.95% of the mysterious shopper support with this statement.



**Figure 6:** Location and Environment at Alpro Pharmacy.

## V. CONCLUSION

After identifying the factors affecting customer selection of local pharmacy in Malaysia, graph 1 below shown a conclusion of the research that staff professionalism, location and environment of Alpro Pharmacy have the highest impact on customer's pharmacy selection among all other examined factors. These followed by customer services and rapport building skills. Through customer satisfaction and loyal feedbacks, the managing level of a business can ensure a way of knowing what the customer thinks about their service and what needs to be Kaizen to gain positive customer satisfaction. Kaizen, a Japanese term which define "change for the better" or "continuous improvement" [27]. It is a business philosophy regarding the processes that continuously improve operations which involve all employees by making the working environment more efficient. With all these positive attitude and behaviour, building a healthy and vibrant world is just one step away.



**Graph 1: Factors affecting consumer to select Alpro Pharmacy.**

1. The level of customer service and information given by Alpro Pharmacy is better.
2. Alpro Pharmacy staff’s professionalism during purchase & after sales consultation
3. Rapport building skills of Alpro Pharmacy’s staff and being trustworthy enough to have my best interest at hand.
4. Availability of Health Screenings in Alpro Pharmacy.
5. Extension array of selections of products and having the latest products to recommend and share with customer.
6. Location and Environment at Alpro Pharmacy.

Remark

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Kotler, P., & Keller, K. (2016). Marketing Management. Pearson Education, England: United Kingdom, p197.
- [2] Wreden, N. (2004), How to Recover Lost Customers, Available at: <http://www.smartbiz.com/article/articleview/112/1/7/>, Retrieved January 5/2018.
- [3] Musasa, T. (2014). Customer Service and Its Impact on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour at Supermarkets in the Greater Area of Ethekwini. Unpublished Thesis, Durban University of Technology, Durban: South Africa.
- [4] Smith, H. A., & McKeen, J. D. (2003). Developments in practice XI: Developing IT professionalism. Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 12(1), 20.
- [5] May, T., & Buck, M. (1998) Power, professionalism, and organisational transformation. Sociological Research Online 3(2). Available from: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/2/5.html>
- [6] Kotler, P. (1988) Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation and Control (6th ed). Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ
- [7] Shimp, T. A. (2003). Advertising, Promotion, and Supplemental Aspects of Intergrated Marketing Communications (6th ed). Thomson South-Western, Boston, MA
- [8] Aboumoghli, A. & Al-Abdallah, Gh., (2018), Evaluating the association between corporate entrepreneurship and firm performance. International Journal of Entrepreneurship, 22(4), 1-10
- [9] Al-Abdallah, G. M., & Abo-Rumman, A. H. (2013). The effect of brand associations on customer loyalty: Empirical study on mobile devices in Jordan. American Academic & Scholarly Research Journal, 5(1), 122.

- [10] Finn, A. (2001), "Mystery Shopper Benchmarking of Durables Goods Chains and Stores", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 3 No. 4, pp310-320
- [11] HEINZ, V. AKADEMIE Dr. Orality, s.r.o.: Mystery shopping - Tajny nakup [online]. Praha: c2002-2005 [7.9.2003] [cit. 1.9.2005]. DostupnyzWWW: <http://www.orlita.cz/novwwiny.php?start=1>
- [12] <http://covid-19.livephotos123.com/state/view?id=Johor>
- [13] Bernstein, I. (2005), *Likert Scale Analysis*, Encyclopedia of Social Measurement, Vol 2.
- [14] Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2009). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. Columbus, OH: Merrill. , pp. 150- 151
- [15] Maurer, T. J., & Pierce, H. R. (1998). A comparison of Likert scale and traditional measures of selfefficacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(2), 324-329.
- [16] [http://iptk.moh.gov.my/images/technical\\_report/2020/4\\_Infographic\\_Booklet\\_NHMS\\_2019\\_-\\_English.pdf](http://iptk.moh.gov.my/images/technical_report/2020/4_Infographic_Booklet_NHMS_2019_-_English.pdf)
- [17] <https://www.alpropharmacy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/health-matter-vol16-2020-sept-.pdf>
- [18] Neil Kokemuller (2013), Things to Know as an Employee in Retail, Available at: <https://work.chron.com/typical-hiring-processes-retail-jobs-16087.html>
- [19] Dwayne D. Gremier & Kevin P. Gwinner (2008), *Rapport-Building Behaviour Used by Retail Employees*, Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228412637\\_Rapport-Building\\_Behaviors\\_Used\\_by\\_Retail\\_Employees](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228412637_Rapport-Building_Behaviors_Used_by_Retail_Employees)
- [20] Thomas R, Parikh R, Paul P, Muliyl J. Population-based screening versus case detection. *Indian J Ophthalmol*. 2002; 50:233–237. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]
- [21] National Health Priority Action Council (NHPAC) *National Chronic Disease Strategy*, Australian department of health and ageing, 2006. Online ISBN: 0642828695. <http://www.health.gov.au/chronicdiseasestrategy> (Accessed June142013).
- [22] <https://www.alpropharmacy.com/about-us/>
- [23] <http://covid-19.moh.gov.my/>
- [24] [http://covid-19.moh.gov.my/garis-panduan/garis-panduan-kkm/ANNEX\\_25\\_COVID-19\\_MANAGEMENT\\_GUIDELINES\\_FOR\\_WORKPLACES.pdf](http://covid-19.moh.gov.my/garis-panduan/garis-panduan-kkm/ANNEX_25_COVID-19_MANAGEMENT_GUIDELINES_FOR_WORKPLACES.pdf)
- [25] Alison Doyle (2019), Top Skills for Retail Jobs, Available at: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/list-of-retail-skills-2062476>
- [26] Shari Waters (2021), Choosing A Retail Store Location: Important Location Factors When Opening A Store, Available at: <https://www.thebalancesmb.com/choosing-a-retail-store-location-2890245>
- [27] Marshall Hargrave (2021), Kaizen, Available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/k/kaizen.asp#:~:text=Kaizen%20is%20a%20Japanese%20term,operations%20and%20involve%20all%20employees.>