

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE DECISIONS OF CUSTOMERS
TO DINE AT SELECTED RESTAURANTS IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Master of Science Degree

in

Hospitality and Tourism

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

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August, 2003

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ABSTRACT

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Factors that influenced the decisions of customers to dine
at selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand

Hospitality and Tourism

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August/2003

80 Pages

American Psychological Association, 5th edition

Although the restaurant industry was one of the biggest businesses in Bangkok-Thailand, there was only a small number of research studies that had been conducted in order to determine customer wants and needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the determinant factors that influenced the decisions of customers who dined out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok-Thailand. The sample population of this study included customers of three selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. The total number of the sample was 150 with almost an equal number of male and female respondents. There were 50 people in each restaurant. The data was collected

through the use of surveys from December 2002 to January 2003. Permission had been obtained from the three restaurant owners prior to the survey. A questionnaire using a 5-point Likert Scale and some open-ended questions was administered to customers who volunteered to participate in the study.

Factors of customer importance when dining out were: (1) Hygiene and cleanliness, (2) Quality of the food, (3) Taste of the food, (4) Freshness of the ingredients, (5) Value for the money, (6) Price, (7) Service, and (8) Atmosphere of the restaurants. The results of this research study generally concurred with the National Restaurant Association's research about consumer expectations with regard to dining at family restaurant (1983).

In conclusion, recommendations included: the restaurant owners should view hygiene and cleanliness as their major concerns. They should keep their dining area, kitchen area, and restroom area clean. The quality of the food, including the taste of the food and freshness of the ingredients, should be maintained at the highest standard. In addition, price of the food should be reasonable and discounts may be used in order to promote the restaurants to a new customer market while also encouraging the loyalty of current customers. Restaurant operators should also train their staff for the most efficient service as well as being friendly and attentive. Furthermore,

the restaurants should provide a warm, relaxing, and welcoming atmosphere. The restaurant owners should consider consulting with professional interior designers for the right decoration. Moreover, the restaurant operators should also continuously conduct surveys to determine the needs and expectations of their customers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my thesis advisor, Dr. Sharon Giroux for her advice and guidance throughout the development of this thesis.

Many thanks go to Miss Puttithorn Udomphong and Miss Nawaporn Inkaew for their concern and assistance. Thank you for all your time and kindness.

Special thanks to Lee, who is always beside me, and has faith in me. Thank you for your love and support. You are the best.

I am most thankful to my beloved family, especially my mom and dad for their love and encouragement. I am so fortunate to be your daughter. I would like to extend my love to my two sisters, p'Aor and p'Tik. I appreciate your love and caring. I love you all.

Sarinee Threemitaya

July 2003

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

This study discusses the factors that influenced the decisions of customers when they chose to dine out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. Chapter one begins with an introduction of the study. Chapter one consists of (1) an introduction to the study, (2) need for the study, (3) a statement of the problem, (4) research objectives, (5) definition of terms, and concludes with (6) limitations of the study. A literature review is presented in Chapter two. Chapter two focuses on the relevant theories and information associated with this study. The methodology that was applied in this study is contained in Chapter three. The methodology provides an explanation of the data collection and sampling processes that were utilized in the study. Chapter four discusses the results of the investigation. Each chapter begins with a short statement of the research objective. Chapter five contains the findings and overall conclusions of the study. Recommendations for further study are also presented.

History of Food Service

The restaurant service in the United States first started in 1634 when Samuel Cole had opened the American tavern in Massachusetts (Lattin, 1989). However, the food service

industry actually emerged as a result of World War II. This was because Americans went to war and work and ate meals provided at the workplace or in the military dining facility (Lundberg, 1994). Therefore, the eating habits changed, and more and more people were choosing to consume food outside the home (Cetron et al., 1996). The National Restaurant Association (1983) states that people dine out for two primary reasons: convenience and enjoyment. According to Hooker (1981);

By the last decades of the century there were eating places everywhere, so diverse that the country's dining habits and tastes were displayed with all that they revealed of mediocrity or excellence, of variety or monotony. There were restaurants to fit or strain any purse, to provide the familiar "home cooking" or the strange, to give fast service to the hurried or measured service to the leisured. In the largest cities those of every class, every nationality, every region, and every taste could discover places to dine that at least approximated their desires (p. 252).

The NRA indicates that consumers nowadays are constantly seeking bolder, more exotic tastes from a variety of cultures and cuisines. However, while younger consumers continually frequent a variety of restaurants, older singles or married seniors tend not to frequent ethnic establishments (Nolt & Foulkes, 2000).

The Restaurant Business

Restaurants play a significant role in people's lifestyle, and dining out is a favorite social activity. Everyone needs to eat so to enjoy good food and drink in a pleasant atmosphere

with friendly service is one of life's pleasures (Lundberg & Walker, 1993). According to the National Restaurant Association (NRA) the restaurant business is the third largest business in the United States. One-third of all meals consumed in the United States is eaten away from home (Lundberg, 1994). Food service is a basic part of the North American way of life. Powers (1995) states that American people spend almost fifty percent of their food budget (43.5 percent) on food that is eaten outside the home. Comprised of both commercial and institutional types of dining establishments, the majority of consumer expenditures for dining out are spent in commercial restaurants. The institutional part of the food service business accounts for 26 percent of total food sales and includes catering operations in offices, factories, hospitals, and colleges (Mill, 1998).

Consumer behavior

People eat out for many reasons: to satisfy hunger, social needs and ego and self-fulfillment needs. According to the popular theory of motivation by A.H. Maslow, human beings are wanting animals: as soon as one need is satisfied, another appears to take its place (Lundberg, 1994). It is important to understand consumer behavior in order to achieve a successful business. Because of the changes that have taken place in the restaurant business, such as high competition that has increased

customer expectations, the need for a better understanding of how to maintain and gain customer satisfaction and loyalty is growing (Sundaram et al., 1997). Consumer behavior is defined as the study of the buying units and the exchange processes involved in acquiring, consuming, and disposing of goods, services, experiences, and ideas (Mowen, 1995). As mentioned earlier, today the restaurant arena has become very highly competitive and it is crucial for the restaurant operators to understand customers and their consumption process.

Need for the Study

According to Brymer (1991), the food service business is the most expansive and diverse of the hospitality industries. It is the largest single segment in the hospitality industry and one of the largest businesses in the United States. Thus, there have been many studies focusing on customer needs and expectations as they pertain to the restaurants in the United States. However, in Thailand, research on factors that influence the decisions of customers to dine out at restaurants has received only little attention. Therefore, in Thailand there is a growing need for a better understanding of how to meet the customers' wants and needs and how to satisfy the customers well enough to create customer loyalty and continued repeat business.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to identify the determinant factors that influenced the decisions of customers who dined out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. The sample population of this study included customers of selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. Data was collected through the use of surveys from December 2002 to January 2003.

Research Objectives

In conducting this research, the researcher had the following objectives:

1. To identify the factors that influenced the decisions of customers who dined out at selected family restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand.
2. To identify the most important factors that customers in Bangkok, Thailand considered when making their decisions to dine out at selected family restaurants.
3. To determine the demographic profiles of customers who dined out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand.

Definition of Terms and Abbreviations

The following is a list of terms used in this paper:

Cluster Sample: Cluster sample is when the population of the study was subdivided by known criteria. Then, choose one of the subgroups and use all members within that subgroup for the sample of the research (Crowl, 1993).

Family restaurants: Family restaurants are table service restaurants that compete principally with Quick Service Restaurant operations and have more in common with these lower priced operations than with upscale units. Family restaurants usually offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner but have the largest amount of business during lunch and dinner hours (Powers, 1995).

QSR: Quick service restaurant.

NRS: National Restaurant Association. The National Restaurant Association, founded in 1919, is the business association for the restaurant industry in America.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study would be the following:

1. The survey was limited to customers who dined out at three different family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand during a specific time period. Therefore, the results of this study can only be generalized to customers who had dining experiences in those restaurants during the time of this research study.
2. The survey was conducted in only a few selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand.
3. This study was conducted by selecting a sample population of approximately 50 customers from each of the three restaurants. This provided a clustered sample.

4. The data was collected during the month of December 2002 to January 2003 over the period of three weeks. Thus, seasonality (i.e., the time of year of data collection) may present a variable that has not been accounted for within this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Lattin (1989) stated that food service could be divided into many categories depending upon their markets. However, there are three major categories in food service; commercial, institutional, and military. These three types of food service were determined by the economic objective of their operations. Commercial food service is mainly for making a profit on the sale of food and beverage. Institutional food service is a food service for schools, health care, universities, etc. (Brymer, 1998) . For military food service, the main objective is to stay within the budget given by Congress.

According to the National Restaurant Association or NRA, the restaurant business is the third largest of all the businesses in the United States of America (Lundberg & Walker, 1993). In America, people spent almost half of their food budget on food eating out; that represents nearly 43.5 percent. The food that had been purchased in restaurants, cafeterias, and taverns is nearly 69 percent (Powers, 1995). The latest CREST (Consumer Reports on Eating Share Trends) report stated that during spring of 2002, the restaurant industry had grown 1 percent and the average checks per-person had also increased 2 percent. An overall average check size was \$5.85 (Ebbin, 2002).

Food trends in the United States of America

Panitz (2000) stated that the total population of the nation has increased 10.34 percent from 248 million in 1990 to 274 million in 2000. It was suggested that one-third of the growth is coming from increased immigration and thus makes the general population more diversified ethnically than ever before. Brymer (1998) also mentioned that for more than fifty years many immigrants who entered the United States had brought along with them their own cuisines. This phenomenon had a positive effect on the food service industry. According to Mills (2000), in the 1990s, the market for ethnic restaurants and cuisines grew continuously, especially Mexican, Italian, and Chinese-Cantonese food. According to Ethnic Cuisine II, which is an analysis of the NRA's second nationwide survey asking American consumers about their ethnic-food experiences, right now there are six cuisines that have been the center of attention in the restaurant industry. They are; Italian, Mexican, Japanese (sushi), Thai, Caribbean and Middle Eastern. Consumers are seeking new dining experiences more and more.

The study reveals a number of reasons for the changes in American cuisine tastes. Old European cuisines such as French, German, Greek and Scandinavian have long been familiar to American diners; however, many younger consumers are actively seeking spicy foods. Consequently, this important age group has

played an important role in the rising popularity of various ethnic cuisines (Nolt & Foulkes, 2000, n.p.).

Another trend that becomes fashionable is eating healthier food (Brymer, 1998). People are more aware of what they eat. Today consumers are interested in healthful and flavorful ethnic cuisines, such as Asian and Mediterranean foods. With an emphasis on ingredients such as fresh vegetables, grains and seafood, those cuisines appeal to health-minded consumers (Panitz, 2000). There is an emergence of food that is considered good for health, and of course, some ethnic cuisine such as Asian is brought to our attention. New groups of immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America bring their homeland cuisine along with their journey to America. America was introduced to the new dining experience (Gabaccia, 1998). Moreover, Nolt and Foulkes (2000) mentioned that:

Ethnic cuisines from America's newest immigrants are gaining a foothold on the American restaurant scene. Spicier foods such as Cajun/Creole, Indian, Thai and Vietnamese are grabbing the attention of American diners. Both Thai and Vietnamese cuisines are growing in popularity with 68 percent of American adults aware of them, an increase of eight percentage points from the 1994 report. Awareness of Cajun/Creole and Indian cuisines increased to 86 and 74 percent respectively (n.p.).

Consumer behavior

A successful restaurant is dependent on customers. In addition, the study of consumers helps restaurants improve their

marketing strategies. According to Perner (2002, n.p.), the study of consumer behavior helps to understand more about:

- The psychology of how consumers think, feel, reason, and select between different alternatives (e.g., brands, products).
- The psychology of how the consumer is influenced by his or her environment (e.g., culture, family, signs, media).
- The behavior of consumers while shopping or making other marketing decisions.
- The limitations in consumer knowledge or information processing abilities that influence decisions and marketing outcomes.
- How consumer motivation and decision strategies differ between products that differ in their level of importance or interest that they entail for the consumer.
- How marketers can adapt and improve their marketing campaigns and marketing strategies to more effectively reach the consumer.

A study of the National Restaurant Association shows that there are 14 frequent reasons for customers to dine out. Those fourteen factors are: (1) nobody has to cook or clean up, (2) for a change of pace, (3) for a treat, (4) good way to celebrate special occasions, (5) it's convenient, (6) going out is a special occasion, (7) for food not usually available at home,

(8) it's a good way to relax, (9) the whole family enjoys themselves, (10) spouse requests to eat out, (11) to enjoy good food, (12) it's a good way to entertain guests, (13) restaurant prices are reasonable, and (14) business requires it (Reid, 1983, p.132-134).

Motivation in consumer behavior

Consumers or customers are individuals or groups of people who depend on a suppliers' performance for the success of their own efforts or the satisfaction of specific requirements. To understand customers' behavior, it is very important to study consumers' motivation. Motivation is a blend of wants, needs, and drives within the individual that seek contentment through acquisition of some experience or object (Rice, 1993). Mowen (1995) mentioned that motivation could be referred to as an activated state within a person that led to goal-directed behavior. Motivation starts from the existence of a stimulus that is processed by the individual. Then, it goes through the information-processing stage of exposure, attention, and comprehension. The stimulus can be from either inside (e.g., from physical needs) or outside (e.g., from seeing the product) the consumers. In addition, customers are also influenced by experience, personality and self-image, and perceptions and attitudes (Reid, 1983). Figure 1 shows the role of needs in consumer behavior.

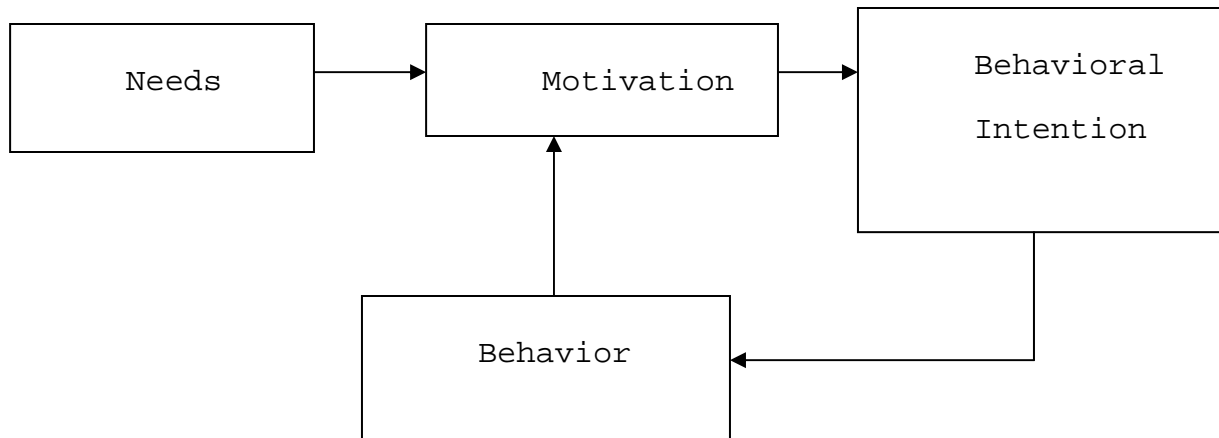


Figure 1. Needs Related to Consumer Behavior (Reid, 1983, p.149)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the most famous theories that is used to explain the needs of the consumers. The theory tries to explain why human beings are driven by particular needs at particular times. The hierarchy is normally shown as a pyramid or triangle shape, as in Figure 2. Maslow's hierarchy of Needs was introduced in the late 1960's. Maslow posited a hierarchy of human needs based on two groupings: deficiency needs and growth needs. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once each of these needs has been satisfied, if at some future time a deficiency is detected, the individual will act to remove the deficiency (Best et al ., 1983). The first four levels are: (1) physiological needs, (2) safety/security needs,

(3) belonging needs, (4) esteem needs, and the second level is (5) self-actualization.

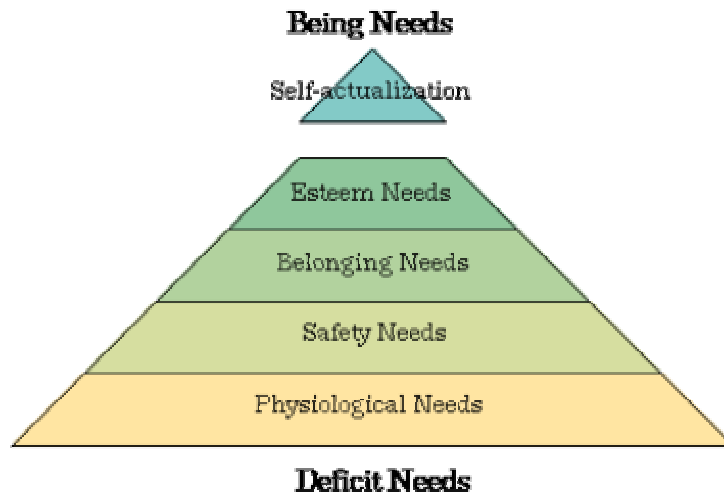


Figure 2. Maslow's Hierachy of Needs (Boeree, 1998)

Murray's Theory of Human Personality

Henry Murray's Theory was focused on 2 types of needs, which are physical needs and psychological needs. Physical needs aim to reach a satisfaction of basic physical processes, such as need for food, air, water, or sex. Psychological needs focus on emotional and mental satisfaction, for example, the need for social interaction or to achieve difficult goals (Kelly & Rogers, 2003). After researching this area, Murray narrowed all the psychological needs down to twenty seven areas. However, some of the list and names depends on the time frame and the author. The next section presents the list of 27 needs.

Psychological Needs	Description of Needs
Abasement	To surrender and accept punishment
Achievement	To overcome obstacles and succeed
Acquisition	To obtain possessions
Affiliation	To make associations and friendships
Aggression	To injure others
Autonomy	To resist others and stand strong
Blameavoidance	To avoid blame and obey the rules
Construction	To build or create
Contrariance	To be unique
Counteraction	To defend honor
Defendance	To justify actions
Deference	To follow a superior, to serve
Dominance	To control and lead others
Exhibition	To attract attention
Exposition	To provide information, educate
Harmavoidance	To avoid pain
Infavoidance	To avoid failure, shame, or to conceal a weakness
Nurturance	To protect the helpless
Order	To arrange, organize, and be precise
Play	To relieve tension, have fun, or relax
Recognition	To gain approval and social status
Rejection	To exclude another
Sentience	To enjoy sensuous impressions
Sex	To form and enjoy an erotic relationship
Similance	To empathize
Succorance	To seek protection or sympathy
Understanding	To analyze and experience, to seek knowledge

Figure 3. Murray's Theory of Human Personality (Kelly & Rogers, 2003)

The need concept is one of the most useful concepts proposed by Murray. A need stands for a force in the brain. It organizes and directs perception, memory, thought, and action in such a way as to reduce dissatisfaction and increase satisfaction.

Needs may be aroused by internal states, such as hunger, or they

may be set in action by external stimulation, such as the sight of food (Murray's theory of human personality, 1997).

Today's restaurant guests dine out to satisfy a variety of needs. Smith (1988, p. 12-13) explained that these needs can be classified in five basic categories.

- Hunger Driven - Convenience is these guests' priority, so this need is most easily satisfied at a convenient, fast-service facility.
- Work Avoidance - Guests seek to avoid the work involved in shopping, food preparation, and cleaning-up. They seek a family restaurant, such as a coffee shop, or avail themselves of the growing number of home-delivered food services.
- Socially Driven - Guests seek friendly "Meeting, eating, and drinking places." These usually include cocktail/action lounges or casual restaurants.
- Experience Driven - An entertainment-type operation, such as a bistro or one-of-a-kind establishment, is used to meet these guests' needs through a unique food and beverage experience. These facilities are entrepreneurial in style and have a range of prices.
- Investment Driven - Guests also need a place to conduct business or engage in a "Courtship" for some future investment benefit. These restaurants often feature

prestige and include hotel facilities, fine-dining establishments, and private clubs.

Family restaurants

Brymer (1998) defined the term 'family restaurant' as a restaurant that often stands alone, and offers various styles of food to attract all the family members. The price of the food is an average level. Most of the time the restaurants are located in a residential area; it also often has a parking space available. The National Restaurant Association (1983) reported that most of the customers are singles, upper income individuals, and 45 to 54 years old.

The secondary group of customers are men, senior citizens, and two person households. In many cases, family restaurant patrons strongly believe that such establishments should accommodate children.

The National Restaurant Association (1982) reported that the reasons that customers chose to eat out at family restaurants deal with both necessary and discretionary factors. Many customers choose this type of restaurant because of its convenience, others do so when they would like to celebrate their special occasion.

Restaurant marketing

A successful restaurant is dependent on customers. Therefore, it is important for the restaurant operators to see

the restaurant as their patrons see it in order to understand the needs of the customers. The National Restaurant Association (1981) suggested that market research is valuable for getting to know more about the customers, and it also helps to identify possible changes which the restaurant owners might consider in order to improve the business.

The information that the restaurateurs collect on their customers will likely fall into three categories (1) Demographic, (2) Behavioral, and (3) Attitudinal (National Restaurant Association, 1981). In a large foodservice organization, a marketing plan is performed by marketing managers. However, in most foodservice organizations, the marketing responsibility belongs to managers who must take care of other functions as well. The activities of management in marketing a foodservice operation can be categorized into three major areas (1) Marketing planning, (2) Marketing execution, and (3) Marketing evaluation.

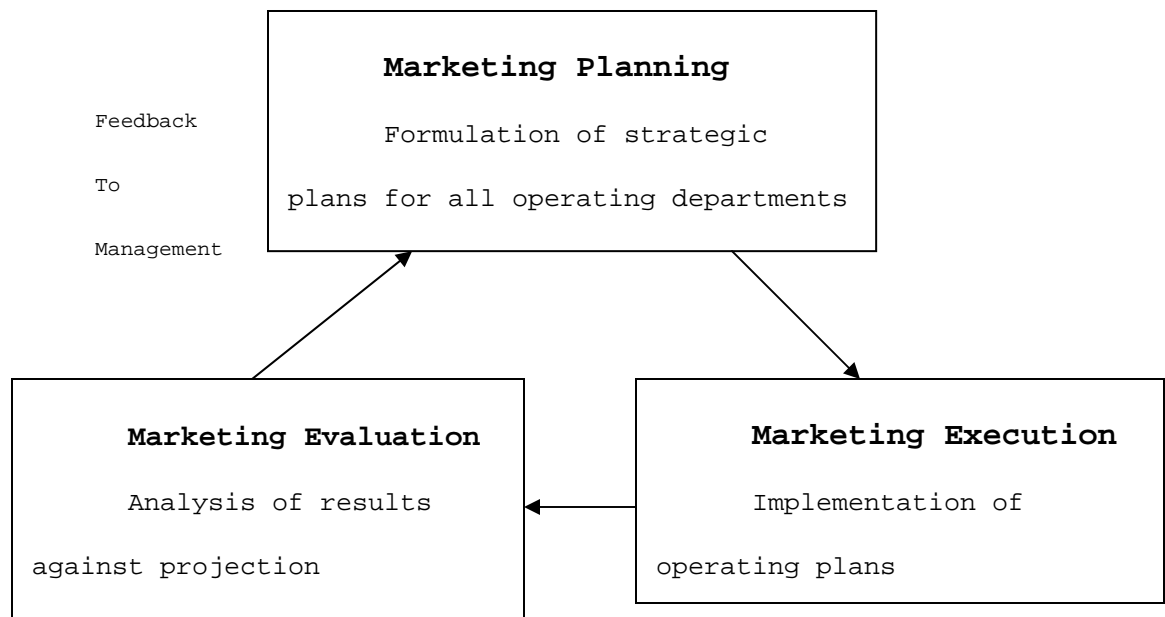


Figure 4. Marketing Management Cycle (Reid, 1983)

In short, it is the customer perceptions of quality that count to managers. For managers to understand how customers perceive the quality they offer, they must measure customer satisfaction. They need to really understand what brings guest satisfaction, therefore they must have an understanding of the psychology of customers (Keiningham & Vavra, 2001).

In addition, one of most powerful techniques that is utilized in the restaurant industry today is "Service marketing". In the United States, services currently account for more than seventy-five percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), which is a popular measure of an economy's productivity. Most new jobs are created in the service sector, and the growth

in the hospitality is a major contributor (Bojanic & Reid, 2001, p. 33).

Bojanic and Reid (2001, p.39) also mentioned that: Service quality is a perception resulting from attitudes formed by customers' long-term, overall evaluations of performance. Service quality is affected by all of the individuals who have contact with customers. If one employee provides service that is below standard or fails to satisfy the customer, a negative experience could result. Therefore, it is important to understand the entire process of service delivery that leads to the customer perceptions of quality.

According to Bojanic and Reid (2001), the service quality process is the product of the expectations and perceptions of an organization's management. The gaps between service providers and consumers that occur from the miscommunication might happen in this process. One of the major gaps is service gap; this gap happens when there is a different between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the actual service. This problem can occur because the management's perception of what clients expect is different from the clients' actual expectations. It often brings negative feedback to the company. Therefore, the managers should be able to understand the customer expectations clearly and be able to design the service that meet those expectations. The providers can perceive the customers expectations via feedback from both customers and employees.

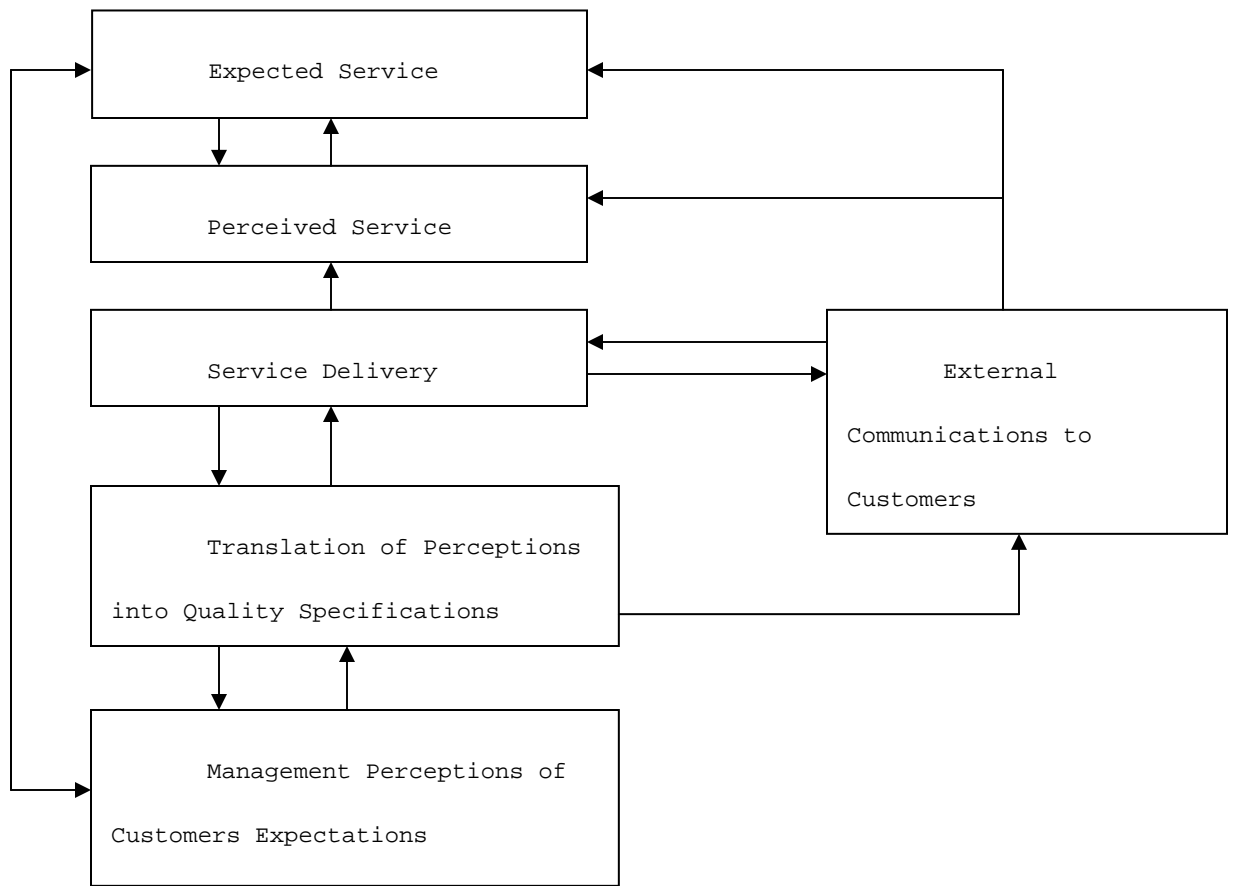


Figure 5. Service Quality Process (Bojanic & Reid, 2001)

It is very important for the restaurants to understand that guests have high expectations for both courtesy and overall service. Smith (1988, p. 74) divided guests' courtesy and service expectations into five categories.

- Efficiency - Guests expect speed and the filling of requests accurately despite any difficulties an operation may be having at particular time.
- Timeliness - Guests want convenient operating hours, quick service, and appropriate delivery. How guests perceived

timing is what counts. Quick service of an entrée immediately after the appetizer is finished may be desirable to some guests, but annoying to those who want to relax between courses.

- Handling requests - Guests assume managers and appropriate staff will handle special requests quickly and effectively. When their requests cannot be accommodated, guests expect to be informed and given a plausible explanation.
- Friendly staff - Guests expect employees to have positive behavior, be knowledgeable about products and services, and be helpful.
- Managers and supervisors - Guests prefer that managers have a pleasing appearance and are visible to them during service times. Guests appreciate when managers have positive attitudes and are available for guest interaction and feedback.

In short, service quality is one of the most important keys that causes a restaurant business to succeed. When the customers receive good service, this can increase the frequency of their visits. This also creates a good reputation or word-of-mouth advertisement for a restaurant.

What do customers prefer in terms of service and dining experiences in restaurants overseas? This study examined those factors in three restaurants in Bangkok-Thailand.

Bangkok-Thailand

As part of the continent of Asia, Thailand is divided into four distinct areas (1) the mountainous North, (2) the fertile Central Plains, (3) the semi-arid plateau of the Northeast, and (4) the many beautiful tropical beaches & offshore islands of the Southern peninsula (Tourist Authority of Thailand, 2000). Thailand shares borders with 4 neighboring countries: (1) Myanmar - west and north, (2) Lao P.D.R. - north and northeast, (3) Cambodia - southeast and (4) Malaysia - south. Thailand is considered quite a diverse country. From a population perspective, there are 80% Thai, 10% Chinese, 3% Malay, and the rest are minorities (Mons, Khmers, and hilltribes). The major religion of the country is Buddhism (95%), followed by Muslim (4%), and others (1%). The capital of Thailand is Bangkok.

Bangkok is one of Asia's most cosmopolitan cities. The city was created as the Thai capital in 1782 by the first monarch of the present Chakri dynasty. The name "Bangkok" or "Krung Thep" means city of angels. Bangkok exceeds 1,500 square kilometers in area and is home to one-tenth of the country's population. Major tourist attractions include Emerald Buddha temples, Royal palaces, floating market and river scenes, classical dance extravaganzas, and numerous shopping centers.

According to the statistics that the Tourist Authority of

Thailand (2003) provided (please see appendix A and B), the tourist industry is one of the biggest industries in the country. The majority of the travelers are males at the age of 35-44. The main reason for visits to Thailand is to celebrate holidays.

History of Thai cuisine

Thai cuisine is essentially a combination of Eastern and Western influences. The characteristics of Thai food depends on who cooks it, for whom it is cooked, for what occasion, and where it is cooked to suit all palates. Originally, Thai cooking reflected the characteristics of a waterborne lifestyle. Aquatic animals, plants and herbs were major ingredients.

With a Buddhist background, Thais tried to avoid the use of large animals in big chunks. Big cuts of meat were shredded and laced with herbs and spices. Traditional Thai cooking methods were stewing and baking, or grilling. Chinese influences saw the introduction of frying, stir frying and deep-frying. Culinary influences from the 17th century onwards included Portuguese, Dutch, French and Japanese. Chilies were introduced to Thai cooking during the late 1600s by Portuguese missionaries who had acquired a taste for them while serving in South America (Columbia Education, 1998).

Thais were very adept at foreign cooking methods, and substituting ingredients. Examples include;

- o The ghee used in Indian cooking was replaced by coconut oil, and coconut milk substituted for other daily products.
- o Overpowering pure spices were toned down and enhanced by fresh herbs such as lemon grass and galangal (it belongs to the same family as ginger). Eventually, fewer and less spices were used in Thai curries, while the use of fresh herbs increased. It is generally acknowledged that Thai curries burn intensely, but briefly, whereas other curries, with strong pices, burn for longer periods.

Whether at home or in a restaurant, Thai meals are always served in family style, that is from common serving platters. Instead of serving dishes in courses, a Thai meal is served all at once, permitting diners to enjoy complementary combinations of different tastes. However, there must be a harmony of tastes and textures within individual dishes and the entire meal.

Conclusion

In today's competitive market, it is crucial for restaurant operators to understand the needs and expectations of the customers, so that they can provide the service that meet the needs of their customers. The goal is to achieve customer loyalty and to have repeat visits.

The next chapter presents the methods and procedures that were utilized to conduct this research. The explanation for the sample selection, survey instrument, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study is also provided.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The researcher investigated the factors that influenced the decisions of customers who dined at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. This chapter presents the methods and procedures used in this study, as follows: (1) sample selection, (2) survey instrument and pilot test, (3) data collection, (4) data analysis, and (5) limitations.

Sample Selection

The population that was selected for this study included customers who dined at family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. A cluster sample was chosen by selecting a convenient sample of customers who frequented three family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. The researcher decided that the sample size would consist of 50 persons at each of the three restaurants for a total of 150 surveys.

Survey Instrument and Pilot Test

A questionnaire was used for this study to determine the factors that influenced the decisions of customers who dined at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. The sample of the survey from the National Restaurant Association 'Customer Attitude Questionnaire' (Reid, 1983, p.93), and "Factors that influenced the decisions of patrons who dined at selected Indian restaurants in the Twin Cities" (Monteiro, 2000) were used to

meet the objective of this research. The survey was comprised of nine sections:

1. Frequency of dining experience at sit-down restaurants.
2. The importance of various characteristics when making a decision to dine out.
3. The factors that influence the decisions of the patrons when deciding to dine out at restaurants.
4. Consumer reasons for dining out.
5. The total average restaurant check price range for lunch per person per meal.
6. The total average restaurant check price range for dinner per person per meal.
7. The average number of persons in a group when dining out.
8. Optional open-ended questions invited personal opinion from the participants regarding their dining experience and what may have been omitted in the study.
9. Optional demographic data relating to the population sample in terms of gender, age, education, occupation, and total annual income.

To increase the reliability and validity of this study, a pilot test was conducted with ten customers at restaurant A, located in Bangkok, Thailand on Thursday, January 16, 2003. The survey was approved by the thesis advisor prior to pilot

testing. In addition, the protection of human subjects form was submitted to the Graduate College for the appropriate approval prior to administering the survey.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the use of a survey from December 2002 to January 2003. The researcher visited three restaurants and talked to the restaurant owners or managers, to present a proposal and obtain consent to carry out the surveys one week before starting the collection of data. The three restaurants that the researcher decided to conduct the surveys in were referred to as Restaurant A, Restaurant B, and Restaurant C. These restaurants were chosen because of their similarities in size of the restaurant, location, type of food, and price range of 70-150 Baht (\$1.63-3.49) per person per meal.

The surveys were given to the customers who dined at the restaurants during the lunch and dinner hours. The researcher surveyed the customers at each restaurant until the required number of surveys for that restaurant had been met.

The researcher introduced herself to the participants before explaining the purpose of the study. Then, the participants were informed that the survey was voluntary. The researcher assured them that their identity would not be revealed and everything in the questionnaire would remain confidential. The questionnaire was left at the table for the

customers to complete at their convenience, and was later collected after the customers had finished their dining experience and had left the table.

Data Analysis

For a statistical analysis, Likert scales were used to assess the perceptions assigned to each scale and were analyzed by the researcher with the help of a statistical research assistant at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Weights were assigned to each scale. Weights of one through five were assigned to the five-point scales, moving from the right to the left on each scale. Frequency counts and percentages for all responses of the surveys were tabulated, and a mean was calculated for the final result. The data were entered and analyzed through the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software package, with the exception of the open-ended questions.

Limitations

The following limitations were noted by this research study:

1. The sample was selected from three restaurants; therefore, the results cannot be an adequate representative of the whole population.

2. The survey was conducted from December 2002 to January 2003 over the period of three weeks. Thus, seasonality may present a variable that has not been accounted for within this study.

3. The survey was limited to customers who dined out at three different family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand during a specific time period. Therefore, the results of this study can only be generalized to customers who had dining experiences in those restaurants during the time of this research study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this research endeavor.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter was devoted to analysis of the data collected by the methods described in Chapter 3. The objectives of the study were to indentify the factors that influenced the decisions of patrons who dined out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand and to identify the most important factors that the customers considered when making a decision. In addition, the objective of this study was also to determine the demographic profiles of the customers. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire primarily consisted of various possible factors that contributed to the dining-out decisions of customers at selected restaurants in Bagkok-Thailand. The questionnaire was divided into three sections that included questions which utilized a Likert scale, six open-ended questions, and demographic data.

Findings were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) with the exception of the open-ended questions. The findings are discussed individually in the following order:

1. Demographic profile of the participants.
2. The factors that influenced the decisions of the patrons when they decided to dine out at selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand.
3. The most important factors that customers in Bangkok considered when making their decisions to dine at selected restaurants.
4. Analysis of open-ended questions.

Demographic profile

Participants in this study were asked about their demographic data in questions 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. The questions in this section generated demographic profiles relating to gender (Q16), age range (Q17), level of education (Q18), occupation (Q19), and annual household income (Q20). The data of each item was computed, tabulated, and presented as follows:

Gender

From the total of 150 customers, there were 76 females (50.7%), 62 males (41.3%), and 12 customers that were classified as non-responsive (8%) who participated in this study, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Respondents	%
Male	62	41.3
Female	76	50.7
Non-responsive	12	8

N = 150

Age

From 150 respondents, the age of respondents as per the four age groups is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Respondents by Age

Age Categories	Respondents	%
18-24	22	14.7
25-34	88	58.7
35-44	24	16
45 or older	4	2.7
Non-responsive	12	8

N = 150

Level of Education

From a total of 150 respondents, 38.7 percent (58 respondents) had Master's degrees or higher, and 51.3 percent (77 respondents) had bachelor degrees, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Respondents by Level of Education

Level of education	Respondents	%
Up to high school	1	0.7
Bachelor's degree	77	51.3
Master's degree or higher	58	38.7
Non-responsive	14	9.3

N = 150

Occupation

From a total of 150 respondents, the highest number of occupations represented included service/clerical (92 respondents) at 61.3 percent, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Demographic Profile of Respondents by Occupation

Occupation	Respondents	%
Own business	13	8.7
Professional	3	2
Managerial	2	1.3
Service/ Clerical	92	61.3
homemaker	2	1.3
student	17	11.3
other	6	4
Non-responsive	15	10

N = 150

Total annual household income

From the total of 150 participants, 14.7% (22 respondents) reported up to 299,999 Baht (\$6,976.72) average annual household

income. In addition, 35.3% (53 respondents) reported that their annual household income was between 300,000-699,999 Baht (\$6,976.74-16,279.05), while 34% (51 respondents) reported their annual household income at 700,000 Baht (\$16,279.07) or higher. The tabulation of annual household income is presented in Table 5.

* Note: 1 U.S. Dollar = 43 Baht

Table 5

Demographic Profile of Respondents by Level of Total Annual Household Income

Total annual household income (Baht)	(U.S. Dollars)	Respondents	%
Up to 149,999	Up to 3,488.35	7	4.7
150,000-299,999	3,488.37-6,976.72	15	10
300,000-499,999	6,976.74-11,627.88	27	18
500,000-699,999	11,627.91-16,279.05	26	17.3
700,000-899,999	16,279.07-20,930.21	13	8.7
900,000 or more	20,930.23 or more	38	25.3
Non-responsive		24	16

N = 150

* Note: 1 U.S. Dollar = 43 Baht

The frequency of customers who dined out at sit-down restaurants

In Table 6, the frequency of customers who dined out at sit-down restaurants in the price range of approximately 70-150 Baht (\$1.63-3.49) per person per meal is shown. From a total of 150 respondents, 52.7 percent (79 respondents) dined out 2-4 times per week, and 22.0 percent (33 respondents) dined out once a week. The remainder of the respondents dined out less frequently.

Table 6

Number of Respondents by Frequency Visits at Sit-Down

Restaurants

Frequency of dining out	Respondents	%
Never	2	1.3
Once/few months	8	5.3
Once/ month	7	4.7
Once/ 2-3 weeks	20	13.3
Once/ week	33	22
2-4 times/ week	79	52.7
Non-responsive	1	0.7

N = 150

Summary

The number of females and males was almost equal. There were 76 females (50.7 percent) and 62 males (41.3 percent). The average respondent was 25-34 years old (58.7 percent). Most of the respondents had Bachelor's degrees (51.3 percent), and

Master's degrees or higher (38.7 percent). The occupation most frequently selected by respondents was Service or Clerical (61.3 percent). Total household income was in two group ranges which were between 300,000-699,999 Baht (\$6,976.74-16,279.05) or 35.3 percent and 700,000 (\$16,279.07) or higher Baht (34 percent).

The factors that influenced the decisions of patrons to dine at selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand

In the survey, there were two questions that supported the factors that influenced the decisions of customers to dine at selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. The first question presented 15 characteristics that described the attributes of a dining experience at a restaurant. Respondents were required to choose the appropriate level of importance of each of the 15 characteristics. The 15 characteristics were as follows: (1) Speed & attentiveness of service, (2) efficient service, (3) employee friendliness, (4) hygiene and cleanliness, (5) quality of the food, (6) menu variety offered, (7) availability of new items, (8) vegetarian choices, (9) portion size, (10) value for the money, (11) atmosphere/ambiance, (12) décor, (13) unable to prepare at home, (14) convenient location, and (15) reputation/word-of-mouth.

Respondents were asked to choose the level of importance, of each of the characteristics, when they decided to dine at a selected restaurant, utilizing the following scale:

1 = Unimportant; 2 = Somewhat important; 3 = Important;
4 = More/very important; and 5 = Extremely important.

The mean was calculated by averaging the responses numbered 1 to 5 on the Likert Scale.

Table 7.

Mean Scores of Importance of Restaurant Characteristics from the Respondents' Perception

Restaurant Characteristics	Mean of Total Sample
Speed & attentiveness of service	3.94
Efficient service	3.91
Employee friendliness	3.11
Hygiene and cleanliness	4.63
Quality of food	4.51
Menu variety offered	3.42
Availability of new items	2.85
Vegetarian choices	1.69
Portion size	2.77
Value for the money	3.88
Atmosphere/Ambiance	3.98
Décor	3.47
Unable to prepare at home	2.73
Convenient location	3.53
Reputation/Word-of-mouth	3.13

Hygiene and cleanliness was rated the most important factor in this study, with a mean of 4.63 which indicates that respondents tended to feel that it was Extremely Important.

Quality of the food was rated the second most important factor of all the 15 characteristics with a mean of 4.51, which can refer to a level higher than Very Important.

Vegetarian choices was ranked the least important with a mean of 1.69, which is closer to Somewhat important than Unimportant.

Efficient service had a mean of 3.91 which demonstrated that it was Very Important to respondents. Atmosphere/Ambiance received a mean of 3.98, followed by Speed & attentiveness of service which had a mean of 3.94. Both of these factors were marginally more important to respondents than Efficient service, with a mean of 3.91. Understood in the context of the designated Likert Scale, this suggests that these characteristics were extremely important to respondents.

The second question asked respondents to rate the level of influence of various factors, which described the food, when they decided to dine at selected restaurants. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of influence of the following six factors - taste of the food, spiciness of the food, appearance of the food, aroma/smell of the food, freshness of the ingredients, and price, against a 5-point Likert Scale as follows:

1 = Unimportant; 2 = Somewhat important; 3 = Important;
4 = More/very important; and 5 = Extremely important.

See Table 8.

Taste of the food had a mean value of 4.52 suggesting that it was Extremely Important to most participants. Freshness of the ingredients was the second most important with a mean value of 4.47, indicating that it was also Extremely Important to the majority of the respondents. The least important was Spiciness of the food, with a mean score of 2.37. This demonstrates that most of the respondents felt that spiciness of the food did not have much of an influence in their decision to dine at selected restaurants.

Table 8

Mean Scores of Importance of Various Influences on Respondents

Food attributes	Mean of total sample
Taste of the food	4.52
Spiciness of the food	2.37
Appearance of the food	3.18
Aroma/smell of the food	3.42
Freshness of the ingredients	4.47
Price	3.78

Summary

By analyzing the results of Tables 7 & 8, the factors that were most important to respondents were: (1) Hygiene and cleanliness, (2) Quality of the food, (3) Taste of the food, and (4) Freshness of the ingredients. The factors that were the least important included: (1) Vegetarian choices, (2) Spiciness of the food, and (3) Unable to prepare at home.

The three most important factors that customers in Bangkok considered when making their decisions to dine at selected restaurants.

From a list of 15 factors that are characteristic of the dining experience at a restaurant, participants were asked to choose the three most important characteristics when they dined at a restaurant. The question, 'How important are each of the following characteristics to you when you decide to dine at a restaurant (in general)?' required the respondents to rate the level of importance of each of the characteristics, when they decided to dine at a restaurant, on a scale of:

1 = Unimportant; 2 = Somewhat important; 3 = Important;
4 = More/very important; and 5 = Extremely important.

The 15 characteristics were as follows: (1) Speed & attentiveness of service, (2) efficient service, (3) employee friendliness, (4) hygiene and cleanliness, (5) quality of food, (6) menu variety offered, (7) availability of new items, (8) vegetarian choices, (9) portion size, (10) value of money, (11) atmosphere/ ambiance, (12) décor, (13) unable to prepare at home, (14) convenience of location, and (15) reputation/ word-of-mouth. They are presented in Table 9 and are also summarized as shown:

Restaurant Characteristics:

Choice 1: Quality of the food (46 respondents; 30.7%)

Choice 2: Quality of the food (39 respondents; 26.4%)

Choice 3: Value for the money (26 respondents; 17.6%)

Quality of the food was ranked as most important, with 46 respondents (30.7%) rating it as the most important factor in the dining out experience. Quality of the food was also ranked as the most important characteristic in Choice 2 with 39 respondents (26.4%). Value for the money had the highest score in the third position with 26 respondents (17.6%) listing it as important.

Table 9

Top Three Characteristics when Dining at a Restaurant

Characteristic	Choice 1		Choice 2		Choice 3	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Speed & attentiveness of service	18	12	12	8.1	21	14.2
Efficient service	7	4.7	9	6.1	15	10.1
Employee friendliness	2	1.3	3	2	2	1.4
Hygiene and cleanliness	45	30	37	25	12	8.1
Quality of the food	46	30.7	39	26.4	24	16.2
Menu variety offered	2	1.3	2	1.4	5	3.4
Availability of new items	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Vegetarian choices	0	0	1	0.7	0	0
Portion size	0	0	2	1.4	1	0.7
Value for the money	8	5.3	17	11.5	26	17.6
Atmosphere/Ambiance	16	10.7	14	9.5	21	14.2
Décor	0	0	3	2	2	1.4
Unable to prepare at home	1	0.7	1	0.7	3	2
Convenient location	3	2	5	3.4	9	6.1
Reputation/Word-of-mouth	2	1.3	3	2	6	4.1

The question, 'When you decide to dine at a restaurant (in general), to what extent does the following influence your decision?' also required the respondents to list the three most important influences, when they decided to dine at a restaurant, on a scale of:

1 = Unimportant; 2 = Somewhat important; 3 = Important;

4 = More/very important; and 5 = Extremely important.

These influences included: Taste of the food, spiciness of the food, appearance of the food, aroma/smell of the food, freshness of the ingredients, and price. The results are shown in Table 10 and also summarized below:

Most important influences:

Choice 1 :Taste of the food (116 respondents; 77.3%)

Choice 2: Freshness of the ingredients (85 respondents; 57.4%)

Choice 3: Price (89 respondents; 60.5%)

Taste of the food was ranked as most important, with 116 respondents (77.3%) listing it as the most important influence in the dining out experience. Freshness of the ingredients was ranked as the most important influence in the Choice 2 position by 85 respondents (57.4%). For Choice 3, price had the highest number of respondents at 89 (60.5 %) selecting it as important.

Table 10

Top Three Influences when Dining at a Restaurant

Influence	Choice 1		Choice 2		Choice 3	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Taste of the food	116	77.3	20	13.5	7
Spiciness of the food	1	0.7	4	2.7	2	1.4
Appearance of the food	3	2	8	5.4	15	10.2
Aroma/smell of the food	3	2	4	2.7	7	4.8
Freshness of the ingredients	22	14.7	85	57.4	27	18.4
Price	5	3.3	27	18.2	89	60.5

Summary

The top three factors influencing the decisions to dine at a restaurant for the sample were: taste of the food, quality of the food, and freshness of the ingredients.

Analysis of responses to the six open-ended questions

The six open-ended questions are stated below:

- o What I really like most about a restaurant
- o What I dislike most about a restaurant
- o I would eat more often at a restaurant if;
- o Other comments about your experiences in a restaurant
- o What do you think a restaurant owner should know
- o What other questions have been omitted but would be important to this study

The next Table, which is Table 11, presented the major characteristics or factors that were important to the customers when they decided to dine at a restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand.

The data was obtained by performing a word count for each of the questions. The number of times the participants used the words 'cleanliness', 'service', 'taste of food', etc. to explain their dining experience at a restaurant was recorded under the frequency column. The percent column is a percentage calculated from the total number of respondents who answered on any of the open-ended questions. The researcher categorized the results into three categories, which included restaurant characteristics, food attributes, and restaurant operations issues.

Restaurant characteristics

More than half of the participants felt that restaurant atmosphere was important. Most of the respondents stated that they preferred a friendly and relaxing atmosphere. However, some of the participants complained about unpleasant smells in the restaurants, for example the smell of cigarettes or the smell from food due to the poor ventilation. Another characteristic that the participants mentioned was location. Almost one-fifth of the customers preferred a convenient location. Eighteen respondents indicated that they would visit the restaurant more often if it was easier to access or if there was less traffic in Bangkok, Thailand. Decoration was the third most important characteristic for the customers. The participants stated that they preferred well-decorated or upscale style restaurants.

Food attributes

Almost ninety-four percent of the participants indicated that taste of the food was important to them (140 respondents). It was a factor that determined whether or not they would revisit the restaurant again. In the food attributes, quality of the food was the second most important factor, with 19 respondents, or 12.6 percent. Twelve respondents mentioned that the restaurant owners should control the standard of their food quality strictly. Freshness of the ingredients and variety of food received 12 and 10 responses respectively. Furthermore, the MSG levels in food and nutrition of the dishes received the same attention. Both of them were mentioned 8 times.

Table 11

Important Characteristics when Dining at the Restaurants

Characteristics	N	%
<i>Restaurant characteristics</i>		
Atmosphere	88	58.7
Location	26	17.3
Decoration	14	9.3
<i>Food attributes</i>		
Taste of the food	140	93.3
Quality of the food	19	12.6
Freshness of the ingredients	12	8
Variety of food	10	6.7
MSG level	8	5.3
Nutrition	8	5.3
<i>Restaurant operations</i>		
Service	92	61.3
Cleanliness	67	44.7
Price	56	37.3

Restaurant operations

The most important characteristic that the participants rated in the restaurant operations issue was service. More than half of the respondents agreed that the quality of service could affect one's restaurant business. Around one-third of the respondents (64 respondents) reported that they received a negative experience in a restaurant before. The causes of the unpleasant experience ranged from slow, unfriendly, too assertive, and unequal treatment between customers. Almost one-third of the customers (49 respondents) mentioned that the restaurant operators should pay careful attention to their service quality. Cleanliness or hygiene of the restaurant was the second most important in this category, with 67 responses, or 44.7 percent. The cleanliness or hygiene that the customers were concerned about included the cleanliness of the restaurant area, restroom, utensils, dishes, and restaurant employees. However, price was not mentioned as often as other factors. Only one-third of the participants (56 respondents) were concerned about price. Forty-one customers reported that they would consider revisiting the restaurant more often if the price was lower. In addition, fifteen respondents indicated that they would visit the restaurant more frequently if they had higher income or more money.

Summary

This chapter presented the factors that influenced the decisions of patrons who dined out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand. This chapter also identified the most important factors that customers considered when making a dining-out decision. The most important factors for the entire sample were listed as hygiene and cleanliness, quality of the food, taste of the food, and freshness of the ingredients respectively. The least important factors that customers were concerned about included vegetarian food choices, spiciness of the food, and the inability to prepare food at home.

Three factors that influenced the decisions to dine at a restaurant for this population sample the most were: taste of the food, quality of the food, and freshness of the ingredients.

There were some interesting findings in the analysis of the open-ended questions section. The customers who participated in this study were concerned about the following: (1) The MSG level used in a restaurant, (2) Parking spaces, and (3) Photos of food shown in the menus.

The following chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of this research study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the research objectives, the significant findings of the study, and the conclusions of the study. In addition, recommendations related to this study and future research regarding the issues were addressed as well.

Re-statement of research objectives

The objectives of the study were to identify the determinant factors that influenced the decisions of patrons who dined out at selected family restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand and to identify the most important factors that the customers considered when making a dining-out decision.

Conclusions

The number of females and males who participated in the study was almost equal. From the entire sample, there were 76 females and 62 males. The average respondent was 25-34 years old. According to Robert Ebbin (2001), the number of consumers who eat-out has increased considerably from past years. The group of males between 25-34 years of age eat-out most frequently. This is because they had to keep up with their busy lifestyles. Most of the respondents held Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees or higher. The occupation most frequently selected by participants was service or clerical, student,

business owner, professional, and others respectively.

The two occupations with the lowest responses were with managerial and homemaker. Total household income was in two group ranges which were between 300,000-699,999 Baht or \$6,976.74-16,279.05 and 700,000 Baht (\$16,279.07) or higher. In addition, most of customers usually dine-out 2 to 4 times a week.

It was very crucial for restaurant owners to know and to understand their customer markets. One of the more effective ways to achieve that understanding was to study their customers' demographic profiles. Lundberg and Walker (1993) also mentioned that the owners should ask themselves whether the location of the restaurant was convenient and accessible for the potential clients or the target markets. In this research study, the majority of the patrons were in the younger generation between 25-34 years old. What they expected from the restaurants the most were cleanliness and quality of the food, friendly and relaxed atmosphere, good decoration, and efficient service. Restaurant owners should be aware of this fact and try to provide the service that meets the expectations of this major group of consumers.

As mentioned earlier, the most important factors for the patrons' decisions to select a particular restaurant was hygiene or cleanliness, followed by quality of the food, taste of the

food, and freshness of the ingredients respectively.

Featsent (1998) suggested that restaurant owners should not only train their employees in food-safety, but also pay attention to and respond to new food-handling recommendations made in public. This can assure the safety of the food served in restaurants and help restaurant operators to respond to their customers' concerns. Featsent (1998) also mentioned that food-safety and cleanliness practices have to become part of the culture of a restaurant. In addition, restaurant owners should also pay attention to their restroom areas. From the results, five respondents expressed negative feelings about the restaurant because of dirty restrooms. They indicated that they lost confidence in the cleanliness and hygiene levels of the restaurants because of this. Although this issue seemed to be a small part of the findings in this study, it could cause a bad reputation on behalf of the restaurants. The customers could easily assume that since the restroom area was messy and dirty, the kitchen may be the same also.

The results shown in the study generally concurred with the National Restaurant Association's research about consumer expectations with regard to dining at family restaurants (1983). Also, according to that research, restaurant patrons had the highest expectations regarding the cleanliness of the restaurant. Patrons also had high expectations concerning

quality and taste of the food. Quality of the food was the most important factor in people's evaluation of any type of restaurants (Lundberg & Walker, 1993, p.242). Furthermore, the National Restaurant Association found that the three most annoying factors for patrons were poor food quality, poor service, and excessive cost (Lundberg & Walker, 1993). In addition, the taste of the food was also one of the most important factors for the patrons. This is common because the taste of the food is an important part in judging quality of the food. As mentioned earlier, quality of the food is the most important factor in people's evaluation of any type of restaurant (Lundberg & Walker, 1993, p.242). Freshness of the ingredients was also mentioned in the study. More than half of the patrons who participated in this particular study indicated that freshness of the ingredients was important to them. This may be due to the nature of some Thai food, which is a combination of fresh herbs and seafood. From a freshness perspective, Zaccarelli (1990) also suggested some more efficient ways to store ingredients; for example, all items in storage should be marked with date of receipt, and foods should be kept below 40F for refrigerated items and kept between 0F and -10F for frozen items.

Furthermore, around half of the patrons indicated that atmosphere was very important for them. They mentioned that they

preferred a friendly, calm, and relaxing atmosphere.

Lundberg & Walker (1993) suggested that restaurant owners should consider space as their major issue; although space can cost a lot of money, it is vital to maintain a space balance in the restaurant. However, the most important factor that can directly affect the restaurant's atmosphere is the staff. To many customers, the waiters and waitresses are the business. If the wait-staff is good, the restaurant is good. In contrast, if the wait-staff is bad, so is the restaurant (Bernstein, 1991).

According to the National Restaurant Association (1983), restaurant clients want and expect to be greeted with a smile, asked what they want, and to have the food delivered promptly. Ursin (1996) mentioned that in a 1994 survey conducted by the National Restaurant Association, 25 percent of the operators surveyed said that service was the most important factor in the dining experience for their customers. It was more important than the quality of the restaurant's food. Ursin also suggested a simple formula for improving service quality, which is the combination of friendliness, warmth, and personal attention. Operators give it to employees, employees give it to guests, and guests pleased with the service they receive return to the restaurant by becoming loyal customers (1996, n.p.).

Moreover, value for the money and price were important factors that customers concerned also. Lundberg and Walker (1993, p. 272) stated that:

The price-value relationship is extremely important especially in difficult economic times. Customers pay more attention to the value they receive for their dollar. If a customer is charged \$6.95 for a soup, pasta, and salad bar with no service, he or she may think twice about returning if the restaurant across the street is offering a cooked entrée with a soup or salad starter with full table service, for the same price.

One of the strategies to increase guest loyalty and repeat business is to lower the price. However, restaurant owners should consider other factors too since dropping the prices may lead to serious difficulties including losing profits (Lundberg & Walker, 1993).

Almost forty percent of the participants stated that price was an important factor that influenced them when they made a decision to dine out. Forty-one of the customers indicated that they would eat out more often if the price was decreased. Bojanic and Reid (2001) suggested that restaurant owners should be concerned about the price sensitivity of customers and how they react to changes in price. It is a very important factor in the process of setting the price.

Approximately 26 responses were concerned about the location of a restaurant. Eighteen of the clients mentioned that they would visit the restaurant more often if it was easier to access and had less traffic. One of the major concerns that the respondents also had was a parking space. Due to the limited area in a busy city like Bangkok, parking area became one of the factors that patrons were aware of. Some of the participants mentioned that they would visit the restaurants more frequently if there was more convenient parking. By having good customer information, accessibility, trade area, and competition present, it greatly enhances the opportunity for success. It is crucial for restaurant operators to clearly assess the market and location conditions (Melaniphy, 1992).

Another important factor for the patrons who participated in this study was the variety of items in the menu. According to the survey, the patrons expected restaurants to provide a variety of food. Some of the guests mentioned that they liked to try new items that the restaurant offered, and they would visit the restaurants more frequently if there were more choices of food. Appearance of the food, including aroma and smell of the food, were also important for customers. Sometimes customers decided to choose the items by looking at the sample of the dish from the tables nearby. The researcher found that menus which provided the photos of the food would attract the customers

more. The menus with photos also helped patrons who were not familiar with the restaurants or who were new customers to that particular restaurant. Therefore, it is important to decorate the dish attractively and present it well-garnished.

Moreover, restaurant operators should be highly concerned about the restaurants' reputation. Word-of-mouth is one of the most powerful tools. When patrons received good service and were satisfied with their dining experiences at the restaurants, there was a possibility that they would talk to their family or friends about it. This is one of the most efficient ways to promote the restaurants to the new customer market. Therefore, it is crucial for the restaurant operators to maintain their standards. In addition, portion size of the dish and incapability to prepare the dish at home were not factors that customers were strongly concerned about. This may be due to the fact that Thai food is quite simple to prepare.

In addition, spiciness of food and vegetarian choices were the least important factors to customers in this research study. Restaurant operators should be aware of this matter. Thus, some of the menu options that provide a variety of vegetarian choices and strong spiciness in the flavor of the dish can be decreased.

Recommendations for family restaurant operators

Customer satisfaction depends on the product and service performance. In a highly competitive industry like the restaurant business, the biggest concern of restaurant owners is to win customer loyalty. The results of this research showed that restaurant operators needed to be aware of the following:

1. Restaurant operators should be highly concerned about the cleanliness and hygiene of the restaurant both in the dining area and kitchen area, and also the restroom areas.
2. The quality of the food, taste of the food, freshness of the ingredients, nutrition, level of MSG used in the food, etc. should also be brought to the serious attention of restaurant owners. In addition, restaurant owners should be able to assure the patrons of the standards and quality of each dish.
3. Price should be set reasonably.
4. Promotion and discounts might be an option to promote the restaurant to a new group of customers while also reinforcing the loyalty of current customers.
5. The restaurants should provide an orientation training to every staff member in order to set standards and to be able to provide an efficient, friendly, and warm service to the guests.
6. The restaurants should provide a welcoming, friendly, and relaxed atmosphere.

7. Restaurant owners may improve the décor in the restaurant areas in order to provide a better environment and atmosphere to guests with the help of professional interior designers.
8. Restaurant operators should continuously conduct a survey to determine the needs and expectations of the customers.
9. The restaurants should be able to provide enough parking spaces for customers. Also, parking spaces should be easier to access.

Recommendations for further study

Based upon the data analysis and the review of literature, the following suggestions are presented for possible further study.

1. This research can be conducted with other family restaurants in different provinces of Thailand.
2. This research can be conducted at a different time of the year to compare the differences that may occur due to seasonality.
3. Similar studies can be investigated with other types of restaurants (E.g. Fast-food, buffet, fine dining restaurants).
4. The comparison between different groups of persons according to gender, age, level of education, occupation, and income could be conducted in order to find any differences that may exist there.

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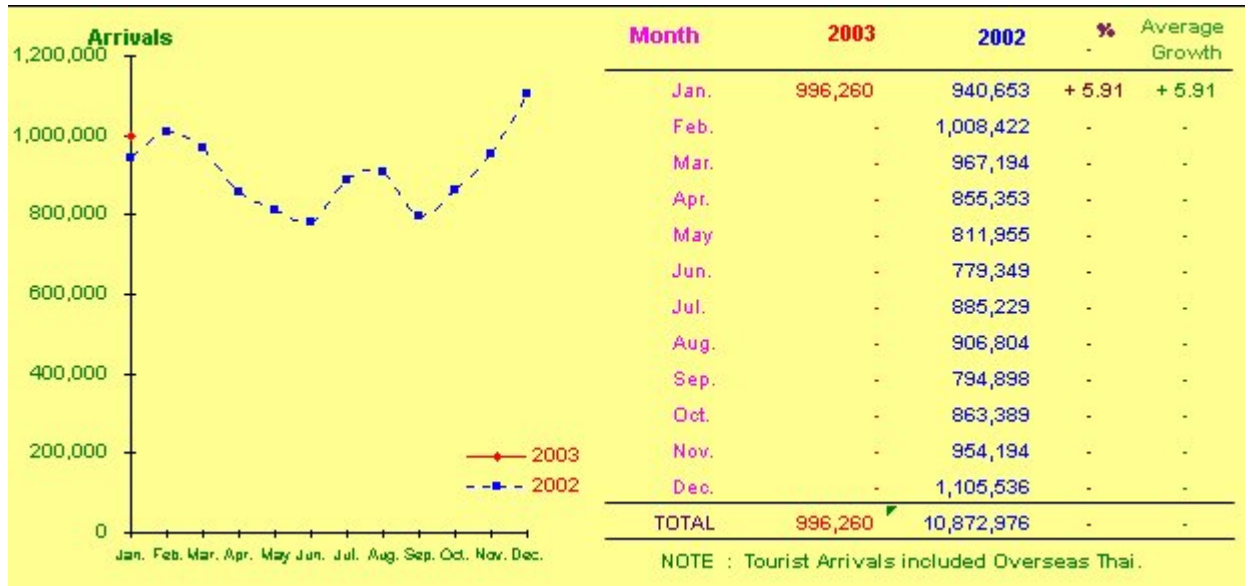
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APPENDIX A

Thailand tourism statistic 2003 (Tourist Authority of Thailand, 2003)



APPENDIX B

Thailand tourism statistic 2003 (Tourist Authority of Thailand, 2003)

Profile							
	Number	D (%)	% Share		Number	D (%)	% Share
<u>Sex</u>				<u>Age</u>			
Male	594,073	+ 4.46	60.00	Under 15	40,014	+ 3.49	4.04
Female	396,046	+ 8.18	40.00	15 - 24	69,606	- 13.65	7.03
				25 - 34	237,319	+ 1.01	23.97
				35 - 44	244,594	+ 8.16	24.70
<u>Frequency of Visit</u>				45 - 54	201,660	+ 10.98	20.37
First visit	442,671	- 6.22	44.71	55 - 64	138,626	+ 14.54	14.00
Revisit	547,448	+ 18.30	55.29	65 and Over	58,300	+ 12.73	5.89
				<u>Occupation</u>			
<u>Travel Arrangement</u>				Professionals	175,058	+22.17	17.68
Group Tour	402,189	- 2.08	40.62	Admin. & Managerial	132,149	+ 21.64	13.35
Non Group Tour	587,930	+12.19	59.38	Commercial Personnel	179,507	+ 15.84	18.13
				Labourers/Production	209,856	+39.77	21.20
				Agricultural Workers	4,366	+ 84.30	0.44
<u>Purpose of Visit</u>				Government Official	5,660	- 36.11	0.57
Holiday	880,113	+ 6.23	88.89	Housewife/Unpaid Workers	74,653	+ 44.51	7.54
Business	77,350	- 1.47	7.81	Students & Children	100,715	+ 4.84	10.17
Convention	9,029	+ 8.30	0.91	Retired & Unemployed	34,652	+ 53.11	3.50
Official	2,796	- 28.56	0.28	Other	13,201	- 28.14	1.33
Others	20,831	+ 34.10	2.10	Not Stated	60,302	- 66.09	6.09

APPENDIX C
Survey instrument

Questionnaire

Factors that influence the decisions of customers to dine at selected restaurants in Bangkok, Thailand

This research is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis at the University of Wisconsin- Stout. The purpose of this survey is to determine the factors that influence the decisions of customers to dine at selected restaurants. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time (approximately 5-7 minutes) to complete this questionnaire. All responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. Thank you so much.

I understand that by return back this survey; I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of this study and understand that there are no risks to me personally. I also understand that there are no benefits to the participants. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice. NOTE: Questions or concerns about participation in research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher, Sarinee Threewitaya, phone (715) 233-6210 or to my research advisor, Dr. Sharon Giroux, phone (715) 232-2089 and secondly to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW- Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-2477.

Part 1

Please circle the number that corresponds to your response:

1. How often do you dine out at sit-down restaurants in the price range of approximately 70-150 Baht/ person per meal?

1 Never	2 Once in a few months	3 Once a month	4 Once in 2-3 weeks	5 Once a week	6 2-4 times per week
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2. How important are each of the following characteristics to you when you decide to dine at a restaurant (in general)?

1 Unimportant	2 Somewhat important	3 Important	4 More/very important	5 Extremely important
------------------	-------------------------	----------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speed & attentiveness of service..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient Service..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employee friendliness..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hygiene and cleanliness..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quality of food..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Menu variety offered..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Availability of new items..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian choices..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Portion size..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Value on money..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atmosphere/Ambiance..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Décor..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to prepare at home..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Convenience of location..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation/Word-of-mouth..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. Please list your 3 most important characteristics when you decide to dine at a restaurant from the 15 listed above in question number 2:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. When you decide to dine at a restaurant (in general), to what extent does the following influence your decision?

1 Unimportant	2 Somewhat important	3 Important	4 More/very important	5 Extremely important
------------------	-------------------------	----------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Taste of food..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Spicy of food..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Appearance of food..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Aroma/ smell of food..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Freshness of ingredients..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Price..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. Please list your 3 most important influences when you decide to dine at a restaurant from the 6 listed above in question number 4:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

6. Please rate your primary reasons for dining out:

1 Unimportant	2 Somewhat important	3 Important	4 More/very important	5 Extremely important
------------------	-------------------------	----------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Special occasion..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. No time to cook..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Close to your residence..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Like the taste of food..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Change of taste..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Value of money spent..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Friends' and others' suggestion..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Entertainment..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. What is your total average restaurant check for lunch per person per meal?

- 1) Up to 70 Baht
- 2) 71-100 Baht
- 3) 101-130 Baht
- 4) 131 Baht and up

8. What is your total average restaurant check for dinner per person per meal?
- 1) Up to 70 Baht
 - 2) 71-100 Baht
 - 3) 101-130 Baht
 - 4) 131 Baht and up
9. When you dine out, how many people do you usually dine out with?
- 1) By myself
 - 2) 1-2 persons
 - 3) 3-4 persons
 - 4) 5 persons or above

If you would like, please comment on the following questions.

10. What I really like most about a restaurant:

11. What I dislike most about a restaurant:

12. I would eat more often at a restaurant if;

13. Other comments about your experiences in a restaurant:

14. What do you think a restaurant owner should know?

15. What other questions have been omitted but would be important to this study?

The following section is completely optional, but it will be greatly appreciated if you would spend only a few moments to fill this out. Thank you for your consideration.

16. Your gender

- Female
- Male

17. Your age:

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and above

18. Level of education:

- Up to high school
- Associate degree/ vocational technical training
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree or higher

19. Occupation:

- Own business
- Professional
- Managerial
- Service/ Clerical
- Homemaker
- Student
- Other _____

20. Total annual household income (Baht):

- Up to 149,999
- 150,000-299,999
- 300,000-499,999
- 500,000-699,999
- 700,000-899,999
- 900,000 or more

“Again, Thank you for your time and cooperation”

Sincerely yours,
Sarinee Threemitaya